

Opening Statement of Julianne Smith
Nominee for Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
September 11, 2024

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished Senators, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am deeply grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for nominating me to serve as the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. If confirmed, it would be a high honor to serve as the third woman in this role since it was created in 1959.

I want to start by thanking my husband David and our two sons, Liam and Dylan. I would not be here today without their love, support, and sacrifice. I also want to thank my parents (who are watching from the beautiful woods of northern Michigan) and my sister (who is here today) for their guidance and encouragement.

As we all know, today marks 23 years since the September 11th terrorist attacks, and I want to begin by honoring the nearly 3,000 innocent people who were killed on that tragic day. We must never forget the victims of Al-Qaeda's horrific attacks, their families, and the first responders who risked their lives to save others. The 9/11 attacks profoundly changed American foreign policy, ushering in more than two decades of focus on the threat of violent extremism and dangerous non-state actors.

Today, terrorism remains a major national security challenge, and we must remain vigilant. But over my decades of work on national security, I have seen the rise of other threats and challenges.

From Russia's flagrant war of aggression in Ukraine to China's attempts to dismantle and rewrite the rules of the international system to Iran and North Korea's malign and destabilizing actions, the United States is tackling a complex set of national security challenges. That demands a strong, bipartisan, innovative, and deeply American foreign policy that advances our interests, upholds our values, and protects our people.

Our alliances and partnerships around the world are the envy of our rivals. Our ability to mobilize like-minded countries in institutions like the United Nations, in Alliances like NATO, or in smaller coalitions is an extraordinary strategic advantage. But that doesn't just happen on its own. If confirmed, it will be one of my highest priorities to expand and sharpen this unique strategic edge.

We are working tirelessly with our counterparts in the Middle East to swiftly reach a ceasefire to bring the hostages home and move to end the tragic Israel-Gaza conflict. We have underscored

our ironclad commitment to Israel's security by helping ward off Iran's massive barrage in April and are working with partners to avoid an all-out regional war.

We are working with our partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific to deter PRC malign activity, resist bullying, improve maritime security, and promote global economic growth.

We are partnering with African nations to bring greater economic prosperity, stability, health security, and development to the region.

We are working by, with, and through our neighbors in the Western Hemisphere to stop irregular migration and enhance security and prosperity for all.

And we are working across the entire globe to combat climate change to ensure that our kids inherit a sustainable world.

As U.S. Ambassador to NATO, I have seen firsthand the value of U.S. leadership and the power of alliances. Today NATO is stronger, bigger, and more united than ever. Our Allies are spending more on defense and have stepped up to support Ukraine, isolate Russia, and enhance deterrence on the Eastern Flank. NATO has strengthened its toolkit on cybersecurity, protecting critical infrastructure, and emerging and disruptive technology, and it has deepened its work with its four Indo-Pacific partners. In fact, I was proud to be the first U.S. Ambassador to take a delegation of NATO Ambassadors to Tokyo and Seoul last year.

If I earn your support, I will bring principled and tough-minded U.S. leadership to the role of Under Secretary for Political Affairs. I will invest deeply in key relationships with allies and partners to share the burden of our common security and to tackle the most pressing challenges we face around the world.

I have great admiration for my colleagues at the Department of State. I am grateful every day for their commitment to service, and I would relish the opportunity to work closely with them to do even more for the American people. If confirmed, I will continue the Department's work to draw on the full talents of the American people, including advancing diversity and inclusion across the Department. And I will join colleagues in the important task of modernizing the Department.

And I commit to you that if confirmed, I will continue to consult, cooperate, and work with Congress toward our common goals. Your support and partnership are central to our foreign policy success, and I will do my part to continue the bipartisan tradition of working together to advance American leadership..

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.