

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
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FOR SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
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Chairman Kaine, Ranking Member Risch, Members of the Committee, I am honored to be here today as President Obama's nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs. It is a privilege to appear before this Committee again, and I'm grateful for the confidence President Obama and Secretary Kerry have placed in me. I also want to thank Representative Nita Lowey for taking time away from her important responsibilities to introduce me. Representative Lowey has been much more than a boss over the years. She is a friend and mentor. Working for her and with the dedicated staff of the House and Senate appropriations committees has been one of the highlights of my career. I also want to thank the Members and staff of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, where I cut my teeth and had the opportunity to work with some extraordinary individuals, many of whom have crossed over to this side of the Capitol. I'm grateful for their continued friendship and support.

I am joined today by many family and friends to whom I owe my success. First, my parents, Kanu and Lata Desai, who could not be here today but who changed my life when they immigrated to America, leaving behind all that they knew in pursuit of opportunity. I am joined by my brother, Pinank Desai, and my father and mother-in-law, Dr. Nilambar Biswal and Anu Biswal. And finally, as Sheryl Sandberg wrote in her book, "Lean In," the most important career decision a woman makes is in choosing her life partner. I showed profound good judgment when I married Subrat Biswal. He and our two girls, Safya and Kaya, are the light of my life.

Mr. Chairman, I am indeed honored to be the President's nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia at a time of incredible challenge as well as opportunity for the countries of the region and for U.S. interests there. A career spent in the executive and legislative branches, as well as working in the development and humanitarian community, has prepared me well for this important responsibility. There are three lessons that I have learned in my career which I carry with me into this new position. The first, which I learned as a delegate for the Red Cross working with refugees and vulnerable populations in the Caucasus after the fall of the Soviet Union, is the link between human security and national security. The second, which builds on the first, and which underpinned my work at USAID over the past three years, is that, for our diplomatic and development efforts to be successful and sustainable, our policies and programs have to speak to the hopes and aspirations of the people and not just the governments of the region. The third, which became very clear during my time on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and House Appropriations Committee, is the importance of transparency and trust in the interactions between the Executive and Legislative branches of government.

As you know well, the region is focused on the upcoming transition in Afghanistan and the implications for future security, stability, and prosperity. While my direct responsibilities, if confirmed, would not include Afghanistan or Pakistan, one of the South and Central Asia

bureau's top priorities will be to help connect Afghanistan to an increasingly stable and prosperous region. If confirmed, I look forward to working with Ambassador Dobbins, the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, to build on the progress we have made so far to foster stability and economic opportunities in South and Central Asia.

Already, we have seen strong and steady cooperation from South and Central Asian states in support of our efforts in Afghanistan. India continues to play an important role in supporting the economic development of Afghanistan with its provision of over \$2 billion in aid to Afghanistan. Kazakhstan, with its support for the Afghan Security Forces and training of Afghans in Kazakh universities as well as hosting the Istanbul process ministerial and the P5+1 talks, has demonstrated its importance as a leader in the region. In fact, Mr. Chairman, all five Central Asian states have provided vital support for our mission in Afghanistan, including through the Northern Distribution Network. That support will be all the more important in the months and years ahead.

Understandably, there is a lot of anxiety in the region. Afghanistan's neighbors are uncertain what the transition in 2014 will bring and whether we will leave behind a political and security vacuum that will destabilize the region. Many still doubt our long-term commitment and fear we will turn our attention elsewhere. And in a region that is the least economically integrated in the world, Central and South Asian states wonder how the economic transition will affect their interests and economies. I look forward, if confirmed, to promoting U.S. policies that will make regional integration a reality, knitting together all the countries through a web of economic, energy, transit, trade, and people-to-people linkages.

Mr. Chairman, while there are many players with divergent interests in this region, one unifying sentiment is that a stable and secure Afghanistan will benefit the entire neighborhood as we understand that it affects our own national security. That is why this Administration has invested significant effort and resources to find a political solution to the conflict in Afghanistan and increase economic connectivity and cooperation. The Administration's vision is for Afghanistan to be at the heart of a region with more trade and investment, more infrastructure and energy links, and more economic opportunities for its people. We are clear-eyed about the challenges of promoting greater regional cooperation, but we also see the potential and opportunities. It's telling that since former Secretary Clinton first articulated the "New Silk Road" vision in 2011, the region has adopted its own vision of greater connectivity and integration. The Administration welcomes partnership with other key players in the greater region, like China, to achieve this important goal that, in the end, will bolster peace, stability, and prosperity for all the peoples of South and Central Asia.

Important regional infrastructure linkages are already developing. Uzbekistan has built a rail line from its border to Afghanistan's key northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif and now Turkmenistan and Tajikistan have agreed to build a rail line linking their two countries via Afghanistan. Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India are making progress on the proposed TAPI gas pipeline. Pakistan recently announced its intention to sign the intergovernmental agreement on CASA-1000, which would substantially link the electrical grids of Afghanistan and Pakistan with those of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan for the very first time. And we hope that Pakistan and India will continue taking steps towards trade normalization. Perhaps most importantly, and for

the first time, all of the countries in the region are either WTO members or on a path or exploring steps towards accession. We still have many challenges ahead but, if confirmed, expanding greater regional connectivity and linking economies and markets will be one of my top priorities.

Shifting to our bilateral relations, if I am confirmed by the Senate, advancing the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership will naturally be of paramount importance. India's growing economic power make it a vital anchor for the vision of regional economic engagement, as well as a cornerstone of our strategic rebalance to Asia. The U.S.-India relationship, founded on our shared democratic values, converging strategic interests, and strong people-to-people ties, has broadened and deepened dramatically in the last decade. Nowhere has this cooperation been stronger than in the defense sector, where we have seen defense trade increase from a cumulative \$300 million through 2008 to over \$8 billion today, and we are now engaging in robust joint training and exercises. As an example of the synergies inherent in our partnership, U.S.-made C-17s and C-130s now flying in Indian Air Force colors add a powerful new capability to India's regional security role, as well as added capacity to provide humanitarian and disaster relief, complementing U.S. efforts in these areas. India and the U.S. are already strong partners in combating terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and, if confirmed, I will endeavor to strengthen and expand these efforts.

While there is much to laud in the U.S.-India partnership, which President Obama has called a defining partnership of the 21st century, the potential for greater cooperation and opportunity remains vast. While U.S.-India trade has quintupled over the past ten years to almost \$100 billion dollars, it can and should be significantly higher. The political transition in Burma has opened the potential for long-anticipated greater economic connectivity between South and Southeast Asia. The vision of an Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor and its potential for driving global economic growth will require free, efficient, integrated, and open markets. India's economic growth can benefit greatly from removing constraints to foreign direct investment, enhancing protection of intellectual property; signaling clear tax policies for international investors; facilitating market access, easing requirements for local content, and facilitating trade links to the broader region. These are tough challenges, but, as Vice President Biden and Secretary Kerry have underscored during their visits, our two countries can and should work collaboratively to meet the significant economic potential of this vital relationship. I believe that the Indian people and their government will take the necessary steps to stimulate further economic growth for the benefit not only of the Indian people, but for many millions across the broader region who rely on India as a source of stability, prosperity, and democratic values.

By connecting the countries of South and Central Asia, we will not only unleash the flow of energy and commerce, but also the flow of ideas and innovations, of science and technology. If confirmed, I will build upon the rich science and technology collaboration with India and the nascent Science and Technology dialogue we have launched with Kazakhstan, an important regional partner, to expand collaboration between our private-sector and academic institutions with organizations across the region to address common challenges of food security, water management, climate change, and infectious diseases.

Mr. Chairman, I would be remiss if I did not also touch upon key challenges in the region with respect to democratic governance, human rights and corruption. As Sri Lanka works to rebuild

its society after a devastating civil war, we continue to stress the importance of sustainable post-conflict reconciliation, ensuring accountability for wartime atrocities, and fulfilling the government's own commitments to its people. In Uzbekistan, where we are seeing some steps toward addressing the problem of forced labor, we will remain closely engaged to press for steady progress toward ending this practice and continue to press on human rights concerns. Across Central Asia, where freedom of religion remains heavily circumscribed, we are steadfastly championing this core American and universal value. The Administration strongly supports Bangladesh as it continues to make remarkable economic and developmental progress, but we express our concerns as it grapples with challenges such as labor rights and political gridlock. As countries such as the Kyrgyz Republic, Nepal, Bhutan, and Maldives embrace democratic values, the United States is committed to supporting and strengthening their democratic institutions and helping these societies combat corruption and advance the rule of law. If confirmed by the Senate, I will continue to use our broad engagement with countries throughout the region to underscore that, while we will continue to work with them to safeguard against the threats of terrorism and extremism, we believe that progress towards democracy and human rights, so that people have peaceful avenues for expressing dissent, is essential to achieving that goal.

Finally, there is no higher priority for the Department than the security of American citizens, our personnel, and our facilities overseas. In the past year, the Bureau of Diplomatic Security and the regional bureaus have already done a great deal of work to ensure closer information sharing and coordination on security, and to make sure that our decisions about our presence abroad are informed by a thorough and ongoing review of the value of the work we conduct overseas, the threats we face, and the costs of mitigating those threats. If confirmed, I will continue to make this a top priority, working together with our colleagues in Diplomatic Security and at our overseas posts.

Mr. Chairman, let me close by again thanking you for the honor and the opportunity to testify before the Committee. I am humbled by the trust and confidence that President Obama and Secretary Kerry have placed in me by this nomination. I consider this appointment to be the highest honor and a sacred responsibility to undertake on behalf of the President and the nation. If confirmed, I will collaborate closely and consult regularly with this Committee and Congress in fulfilling my responsibilities.

Thank you. At this time I would be pleased to answer any questions you and the Committee might have.