

Testimony of Dr. Denise Natali
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations
and Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
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Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Menendez, and Members of the Committee,

It is an honor to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to be Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO) and Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization. I am grateful for this opportunity, and if confirmed, I look forward to serving in the Administration and working with you and other members of the Committee, the White House, Secretary Pompeo, and the Department of State.

I would like to take a moment to thank my family, and particularly my parents and daughter, for their unconditional love and support which has shaped who I am and how I will approach this position. I grew up in an ethnic working-class neighborhood in New Jersey where my nuclear family, grandparents, aunt, uncle and cousins all lived on the same street. My parents did not go to college (although my mom got her Ph.D. in theology at 54 years old) but made sure their 5 children did. Of the numerous life lessons that my father, now 84-years old, gave me and my siblings one has stood out the most: be whatever you want to be, but just don't be content with life.

I have spent much of the past 30 years doing just that. Having worked for a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Peshawar, Pakistan, served as a USAID DART team member in support of Operation Provide Comfort II in northern Iraq, and spent years teaching and researching in post-Saddam Iraq and the neighboring region, I have gained a deep understanding of the triggers of conflict and instability, complexities local dynamics, and the interaction of these dynamics with regional, national, and inter-agency operations and interests. I have seen the human, institutional, and economic costs of conflict and its aftermath. I realize the messiness of transitions from war to peace, and the tradeoffs involved.

During the past seven and a half years while at the National Defense University, I collaborated with some of the nation's brightest strategic thinkers and regional experts and channeled my expertise into strategic level analyses for senior leaders in DOD and other US government stakeholders, to include support for the counter ISIS effort.

Looking ahead, one overarching challenge (and objective) is evident: balancing pressing demands for stabilization assistance with the need to be more judicious with our resources and realize more effective stabilization outcomes. Trends in global armed conflict are alarming. They reveal 1) an up-tick in major civil wars and high-intensity conflicts, particularly since 2010; 2) that more than one half of conflicts that have ended since the early 2000s have fallen back into violence within 7 years and; 3) by 2030, according to World Bank data, half of the world's population will live in countries affected by violence and instability

The causes and consequences of these conflicts today are no less consequential. State breakdown and failed governance have resulted in ungoverned spaces, proliferation of militias, and emergence of terrorist and violent extremist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qaeda offshoots, as well as economic loss, mass refugee flows, and atrocities against civilians – consequences that directly undermine U.S. national security interests.

Yet while the U.S. has strong national interests in reducing violent conflict and promoting stability it cannot respond to all conflicts. How should the U.S., and CSO in particular, move forward in addressing this issue?

The 2018 Stabilization Assistance Review (SAR), co-authored by CSO and the Office of Foreign Assistance Resources, USAID, and DOD, offers an important road map for future stabilization operations and policy. It lays out guidelines in how to more strategically determine where, how, and when we engage in stabilization operations and best leverage U.S. diplomatic engagement, military, and economic support to assure impact and effectiveness.

If confirmed my priorities will be to follow the guidelines and implement key recommendations of the SAR. First, I will *clarify the CSO mission and its value-added in the Department of State*. I understand that CSO does remarkable work and I would like to better integrate CSO into State Department as a functional bureau, while honing in on CSO's unique expertise in providing timely data-driven analyses that are integral to effectively planning and executing operations and influencing stabilization policy.

Second, I will *streamline stabilization*. This effort entails translating the roles for State and DOD as agreed upon in the SAR, into a practical day to day division of labor that will get the job done and assure greater collaboration and burden sharing. It starts with strengthening the ability of CSO to help State fulfil its role as the lead agency for stabilization within the U.S. government. It means CSO will do more the help State's senior leadership organize and facilitate the planning process for determining desired political outcomes that the SAR rightly points out is the essential starting point for effective stabilization.

Third, I will *institutionalize a process of 'strategic triage'* that aligns our stabilization priorities with U.S. national security interests as indicated in the 2017 White House National Security Strategy (NSS). Selectively targeting where, when, and how the U.S. engages in stabilization should also be based on where the U.S. can have an impact. In doing so, I would also implement regular assessments of projects to measure their impact (alongside monies spent) on national security and policy objectives. This effort can help re-adjust operations where needed, regularly modify assumptions and approaches when needed to determine effectiveness and policy recommendations.

By addressing these issues, I hope to ensure a more streamlined, realistic, effective, and cost-efficient stabilization operations that provide invaluable support to U.S. policy and help achieve our national strategic interests.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I welcome your comments and questions.