

Opening Statement
Nominee for Libya Richard B. Norland
SFRC Confirmation Hearing
June 20, 2019

Chairman, Ranking Member, Senators:

This hearing will be the subject of immediate attention by the people of Libya as they look for signs of hope that the persistent violence in Tripoli will come to an end and a more secure and prosperous future for all Libyans will be realized. The interests of the American people are also at stake, with respect to ending innocent suffering, countering terrorism, stabilizing oil markets, stemming the human misery and political de-stabilization of large-scale migration, and forging closer economic cooperation as Libya looks beyond decades of instability and isolation. I am honored by the confidence shown in me by President Trump and Secretary Pompeo in nominating me to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to Libya. If confirmed, I pledge to you that I will do my utmost to bring U.S. diplomacy to bear on stabilizing the situation and promoting these U.S. interests.

The principal task at hand is bringing the latest round of fighting, which started in early April, to an end through an immediate ceasefire in Tripoli. Lasting peace and stability in Libya can only come through a political solution, and halting the current violence is a critical step to create the conditions for a return to political negotiations. De-escalating the conflict requires engagement with a broad range of Libyan stakeholders, including not only Tripoli and Benghazi but also key constituencies like Misrata, Zawiya, and Zintan. Equally critical is frank U.S. engagement with outside parties that have influence in Libya, many of whom have a presence on the ground, in an effort to ensure that foreign involvement serves to reduce rather than promote violence.

Stabilizing the situation also requires re-launching a political process that will result in a government that enjoys legitimacy in the eyes of the people of Libya. We are committed to working with a wide array of Libyan and international partners, under the effective leadership of UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ghassan Salamé, to reestablish such a UN mediation process. This effort should build on the constructive talks between Prime Minister al-Sarraj and General Haftar in Abu Dhabi in February. Achieving a long overdue political solution will not be quick, and ongoing violence has hardened positions on all sides. If confirmed, I would work with the key parties to the conflict in an effort to advance this Libyan-led, UN facilitated process and help the Libyans move toward credible and secure elections.

Any political progress will be fleeting without attention to the economic and security dimensions of this conflict. Increasing oil production is a necessary investment in Libya's own future, and if confirmed, I would further support Libyan efforts to develop their country's energy potential and promote greater transparency and accountability in the distribution of Libya's considerable wealth. I would also advocate strongly for the U.S. private sector as we seek to expand trade and investment for the mutual benefit of Libyans and Americans. Reaching the full potential of our economic relationship will require greater security. To this end, if confirmed, I would reinforce our partnerships with a range of Libyan actors to ensure terrorist groups find no

safe haven in Libya. We are fortunate to build on an effective counterterrorism partnership with the Government of National Accord and its aligned forces, which were instrumental to defeating ISIS in Sirte in 2016, as well as the important contributions of the "Libyan National Army" to the fight against ISIS and al-Qa'ida elements in Libya.

The United States does not see Libya as the plaything of foreign interests. Libya emerged from colonial rule in 1951, and a strong sense of independence and self-sufficiency still fuels the people of this young and fragile country. We respect this. The U.S. approach to Libya is pragmatic and rooted in the clear vision of reinforcing a unified Libyan state that can stand on its own as a force for stability and deliver prosperity to all Libyans, from Ajdabiya to Zwara and Awbari to Tobruk. Our only goal is thus to help Libya establish a stable government with popular legitimacy, enabling the country to counter real threats from ISIS-Libya and Al-Qa'ida, to control its borders and the flow of desperate migrants, to enjoy economic growth for all its citizens, and to respect fundamental human rights.

I have no illusion that this task will be easy, but, if confirmed, I will lead my team to build upon the work done by my immediate predecessor, Ambassador Peter Bodde, and the hard-working staff of the Libya External Office temporarily based at U.S. Embassy Tunis and capably led by interim Chargé d'Affaires Natalie Baker. I am very conscious that, if confirmed, I would be carrying forward the work of Ambassador Chris Stevens, who gave his life trying to bring peace to the people of Libya. I would be determined to ensure that Chris Stevens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods and Glen Doherty did not die in vain.

I would like to thank my wife, Mary Hartnett, for her unfailing support throughout my career, and our children, Daniel and Kate, for their service to our nation growing up as Foreign Service kids. They and their spouses Jen and Phil, and our four grandchildren, Ellie, Cam, Mary and Owen, bring great joy to our lives.

Chairman, Ranking Member, Senators – in closing, it is perhaps fitting to note that I was born in North Africa – in Rabat, my father's first Foreign Service post. His last posting, as Ambassador to Chad, was cut short when rebels based in Libya advanced on Chad's capital, toppled the government, and forced our diplomats to flee on French military transports after being pinned down for three days. So, in my lifetime, I have seen North Africa begin its remarkable transformation. I have also seen it experience the vagaries of self-serving political leadership, and the predatory behavior of external forces, including those employing terrorism in their distorted view of Islam. I have seen how instability in Libya can spill over into neighboring countries. In my own Foreign Service career, I have had the opportunity to serve in majority Muslim countries, to work on conflict resolution, and to address the challenges of Great Power competition.

Taken together, I hope that, if confirmed, serving as Ambassador to Libya will enable me to bring a lifetime of experience to bear in a way that will advance our interests and promote lasting peace and friendship for the United States and Libya. Thank you, and I stand ready to respond to your questions.