

Statement by Ambassador Tom Shannon
Nominee for Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
October 29, 2015

Mr. Chairman, Senator Cardin, and members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the next Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs.

I am honored by this nomination. If confirmed, I would be the 22nd Under Secretary since this position was created in 1959. I would be the fifteenth Foreign Service Officer to hold this position. For someone such as myself, who has had the honor and privilege of serving the American people and its elected leaders for 31 years as an FSO, there could be few higher honors.

I am also humbled by this nomination. Its pedigree is distinguished. From its first occupant, Robert Murphy, to such great diplomats as Philip Habib, Walter Stoessel, Larry Eagleburger, Tom Pickering, Bill Burns, and Wendy Sherman, the position of Under Secretary has been defined by the extraordinary quality, ability, and dedication of its occupants.

These sentiments, however, are matched by a quickening of the blood as I contemplate the challenges and opportunities facing our foreign policy as the United States navigates through an increasingly complex and dangerous world.

Throughout my career, I have sought to serve in challenging and complicated places where the power and influence of our great Republic could be brought to bear in pursuit of our interests and the promotion of our values. Today that place is the entire globe. Not since the end of the First World War and the collapse of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman Empires has the world seen such effervescence. While many of the dangers and challenges of the world have been thrown into sharp relief, I believe they are outnumbered by the opportunities that lie before us. I hope to be able to pursue these opportunities.

As you consider my nomination, I can offer you the following:

First, I have dedicated my life to public service. My Foreign Service career began in 1984 and has spanned five Administrations, two Democratic and three Republican. Everything important that has happened to me as an adult has happened within the Foreign Service. I began my professional life in the Foreign Service, I married in the Foreign Service, my wife and I brought forth and raised two sons in the Foreign Service, and I have matured and come of age in the Foreign Service. In other words, my life and my public service are so entwined that they define each other. My desire is to continue to serve.

Second, I understand the efficacy of American power and purpose. I have worked in countries and regions in transition and transformation. From Latin America to Africa, I have seen the important and positive influence of the United States in helping countries move from authoritarian to democratic governments, from closed to open economies, from autarkic or

import substitution models of development to development based on regional integration, and from isolation to globalization. In the process, I have seen and understood the attraction we hold for many, and the unique role we play in shaping world order and events.

Third, I believe that diplomacy is an act of advocacy. Our great diplomats, from John Jay to John Kerry, have had a deep understanding of power politics and its global dimensions. They have used this understanding to protect and advance American interests. However, the vision of order and purpose they brought to American diplomacy was infused with values that reflect our democratic ideals and our conception of individual liberty. In this regard, our diplomacy has always had a human face and purpose. We are not a status quo power, but instead a nation comfortable with change and determined to advocate for the values that define us.

Fourth, I know how to get things done and what needs to be done. My professional experience has spanned assignments at the White House, the State Department, international organizations, and Embassies. I am familiar with the machinery of our foreign policy and diplomacy, and I have experience at every level. Most immediately, this means I can assume quickly the policy management role the Under Secretary plays within the State Department, and I can move with equal dispatch into the interagency process that determines our foreign policy. It also means that I know how to link the work of our Embassies and regional bureaus to the work of our functional bureaus, ensuring comprehensive policy development and execution.

Finally, I understand the importance of consultation with the Congress. I entered the Foreign Service during the Central American wars. This was a time of sharp partisan and institutional divide on our policy in that region. This divide limited our ability to successfully implement our policy. It was only when broad consensus was formed around an agenda based on democracy, human rights, and economic development that we were able to form a bipartisan approach to Central America. This experience shaped how both the Executive and Legislative branches faced foreign policy challenges in Colombia. The broad bipartisan support enjoyed by Plan Colombia, and its successful implementation, led to further bipartisan cooperation on hemispheric trade policy, reconstruction and development in Haiti, and the Merida Initiative in Mexico. These experiences taught me that engagement with Congress is an essential part of our foreign policy making process, and it's only long term guarantee of success.

As I reflect on my experience in American diplomacy, I am struck by the tremendous changes I have seen in three decades. When I entered the Foreign Service in 1984, our major adversary was the Soviet Union and the Cold War was in full swing. Over time, I watched the collapse of the Soviet Union and its East European client states, the decline of communism as a viable economic and political ideology, the emergence of the United States as the world's sole super power, the democratization of the Western Hemisphere, the fraying of the new world order with the emergence of regional warfare in the Balkans, the rise of global terrorism, the attacks of September 11, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and now the emergence of ISIL and the upheaval it has caused in Syria and Iraq.

As dramatic as these changes have been, however, they will not compare to what awaits us deeper in this century. The factors that are driving change – political, economic, social, and

technological – are accelerating due to globalization. This, in turn, will increase the velocity of change and challenge our ability to understand and respond to events in the world.

During the past two years, as Counselor of the Department, I have worked at Secretary Kerry's direction on issues that are emblematic of these changes. Some of these were:

First, I worked with our partners in Africa to help fight the jihadist ideology that had spread from the Middle East into Somalia, Nigeria, and Mali along an historic line of conflict that divides northern Africa and the Sahel. Working with the United Nations, the African Union, sub-regional organizations, and our bilateral partners, we fashioned an approach that combined diplomacy, security, and economic development to enhance the ability of states and civil societies to protect themselves from the violence of such groups as al-Shabab and Boko Haram.

Second, I worked with our Special Envoy to South Sudan on the long, complicated, and on-going effort to bring peace to South Sudan. I participated in the talks sponsored by the Inter-governmental Development Authority (IGAD) that led to cessation of hostilities agreements and the recent peace accord. Our efforts have been central to addressing the humanitarian consequences of the fighting in South Sudan, and to shaping a diplomatic approach that attempts to harness South Sudan's neighbors, regional organizations, the donor community, and the United Nations to address the complex array of ethnic, geographic, personal, and political rivalries that shattered South Sudan in December of 2013.

Third, I worked in Southeast Asia on the Lower Mekong Initiative, a sustainable development effort designed to improve coordination and cooperation among the countries of the Lower Mekong River Basin to ensure the long term viability of the river as a source of food, energy, and water. This involved building technical capacity among our partners, bringing to bear global resources from other major river basins – such as the Mississippi and the Danube, developing civil society ability to articulate community views within the authoritarian political systems that still exist in many of these countries, and deepening engagement and confidence in the United States.

Fourth, I worked on maritime security, counter-piracy, and trade issues within the Indo-Pacific region through the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Working with Australia, the European Union, and India we enhanced the IORA's profile as an organization and diplomatic space to address issues that profoundly affect global food and energy security, freedom of navigation, commerce, migration, and the well-being of one of the fastest growing regions of the world.

Finally, I worked to develop a response to the crisis of unaccompanied Central American child migrants who appeared in large numbers across our southwest border in the summer of 2014. The result was the Alliance for Prosperity, a plan and program designed by Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador (with the help of the Inter-American Development Bank) to address the root causes of migration in the communities of origin of these children. Combined with law enforcement, anti-smuggling, public messaging, and multilateral cooperation efforts, we were able to significantly reduce the migration of unaccompanied children while we built our larger strategy. Our success in implementing this strategy will have a long-term impact on Central

America, Mexico, and the United States, with important consequences and lessons for other parts of the world facing similar migration crises.

If confirmed, it will be my assignment to ensure that the Department of State, under the direction and guidance of the President and the Secretary of State, can meet the challenges and seize the opportunities that confront us. As Under Secretary, I would sit atop the engine room of the Department of State: the six geographic bureaus and the Bureau of International Organizations that oversee our 275 diplomatic missions, the nearly 10,000 Foreign Service and Civil Service employees assigned to these missions, and the 47,000 Locally Employed Staff at these missions.

It would be my job to ensure that our bureaus and missions, and the remarkable individuals who serve there, have the policy and programmatic guidance to be successful, and the high level access, assistance, and support to shape and implement our foreign policy. This responsibility is institutional. While we must be prepared to meet the challenges presented to us each and every day, we also need to understand the long term needs of the Foreign Service and the Department of State. Currently, the Department of State is experiencing a quiet but profound generational change. Nearly 60 percent of our Foreign Service Officers and our Civil Service have served ten years or less. These ten years have been shaped by our war fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, and many of our Officers have served in combat theaters. Not since the Vietnam War have we had so many Officers shaped by conflict. The lessons these Officers have learned will be carried with them throughout their careers. It is incumbent upon us to ensure that they have the mentors, training, and assistance they need to grasp the nature of the challenges and opportunities they will face in the future, and to advance successfully the interests and values of the United States.

Secretary of State Dean Acheson, surveying the international landscape in the aftermath of World War II, said the task that lay before the United States was as big as Genesis: “to create a world out of chaos.” Today, our task is the reverse: to prevent the world from collapsing into chaos. This task, like that facing Acheson, requires us not to be distracted from “the effort to affect the world around us.” It also requires us to remember that our diplomacy is about responding to the great changes that modernity has unleashed in the world and finding a means to shape and affect those changes in ways that benefit our interests and are consonant with our values.

Thank you for your time today. I look forward to your questions.