

Testimony of Gentry O. Smith
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July, 13, 2021

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and Members of the Committee. I am honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the Department of State's Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Diplomatic Security. I am grateful for the confidence that the President and Secretary Blinken have placed in me, and I am humbled by the opportunity to lead such an outstanding organization. In the 105-year history of Diplomatic Security, I am just the third DS agent to be nominated to serve as Assistant Secretary.

In my 30-year career with the Foreign Service, I am proud to have served as a DS Agent for 27 years prior to my appointment as Director of the Office of Foreign Missions -- a position I held until my retirement in 2017. I would like to thank you for your continued unwavering support for both the Department and Diplomatic Security. I am very proud to be associated with the outstanding women and men who labor tirelessly to protect America's diplomatic facilities, critical information, and, most importantly, American lives. They also conduct extensive, important law enforcement investigations necessary to keep our country safe.

I want to thank my wife Georgette, our adult children and their spouses, and our six adorable grandchildren for their love and support, and for allowing me to rejoin an institution that I love. It is indeed an honor to lead the dedicated Special Agents, Security Engineers, Diplomatic Couriers, Security Technicians, and other specialized personnel in providing a secure environment in which to conduct U.S. foreign policy.

I first joined Diplomatic Security in 1987, after proudly serving as a Police Officer in Raleigh, North Carolina. These were the early days of building the Diplomatic Security Service. I grew up in the organization as it grew to meet increasing global security challenges, as well as domestic challenges to U.S. national security interests. Having served in Cairo during both Gulf Wars and in Rangoon during a period of unrest and uncertainty that rivals the current situation, I am familiar with the importance of strong leadership and requisite security operations. Upon returning to the U. S. and serving in senior positions in Diplomatic Security, I am proud to have collaborated closely with other

Department colleagues, the Intelligence Community, DoD and Members of Congress to construct and improve diplomatic facilities here and abroad while enabling our personnel to project U.S. government interests around the world. I am also proud and honored to have received Senate approval to lead the Office of Foreign Missions during my last tenure with the Department.

My body of work within the Department, and subsequent experience as an independent consultant in the private sector, is what has prepared me to assume leadership as the Assistant Secretary for Diplomatic Security. I am aware that there will always be challenges as we seek to advance U.S. interests around the world.

With support and continued guidance from members of this Committee and Congress as a whole, my top priority, if confirmed, will be to help ensure the Department effectively protects its physical assets, information, and, most importantly, lives. At the same time, however, I recognize that effective diplomacy is virtually impossible without the ability to take considered risks in service of strategic goals and objectives. It will be my responsibility to evaluate various threat mitigation strategies and help the Department make the best possible calculations in support of American diplomacy. Risk management is particularly critical in high threat countries, most notably at the moment in Afghanistan as American troop levels are drawn down.

Closer to home, we need to do more to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility within our ranks while empowering Diplomatic Security agents to conduct more effective investigations in support of protective details, as well as passport and visa fraud.

The recent SolarWinds intrusion has underlined the importance of DS's role in maintaining a 24/7 watch on the Department's global cyber infrastructure – a challenge which promises to intensify in the years to come.

I also look forward to overseeing further improvements in our law enforcement and other security training at the Department's new Foreign Affairs Security Training Center in Blackstone, Virginia.

Finally, if confirmed, I look forward to working closely with this body to ensure your interests and concerns are properly addressed, and that we work together to protect our personnel, facilities, and national interests abroad and domestically.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.