

Statement of Donald Lu
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 28, 2021

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, Distinguished Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear here today as President Biden's nominee to be the next Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs. I am grateful to the President and to Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have placed in me.

As the son of an immigrant to the United States, I am particularly proud to have served my country in the U.S. Foreign Service and the Peace Corps. During my 30 years in the State Department, I have worked in India, Pakistan, and Central Asia advancing our agenda on counterterrorism, democracy, and anti-corruption. And as someone who believes that the Foreign Service and the Civil Service should look like the face of America, I am committed to implementing the President's vision on diversity, equity and inclusion.

Mr. Chairman, with the President's decision to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan by September 11, we are faced with new risks and new opportunities. In particular, we have an historic opportunity to rebalance our relations with the countries in the region to better reflect our long-term strategic priorities.

First, it is in our national interest to continue to strengthen our fast-growing strategic, economic, and people-to-people ties with India, while also speaking forthrightly about human rights and our democratic-values. As two great Indo-Pacific powers, we must strive to ensure that our Asian partners remain sovereign and free, and not dominated by a single power. As two great democracies, we should demonstrate through our example why democracy promotes peace, stability, and personal freedoms. And as two great free-market economies, we can build a more stable and inclusive global economy. As the producer of 60 percent of the world's vaccines, India is critical to the global fight against COVID-19, and if confirmed, I would work with India to end this devastating pandemic. And I commit to working with India and our partners to tackle the climate crisis.

Second, on Pakistan, we have for more than 20 years defined our relations with this important partner primarily through the prism of counterterrorism and security. If confirmed, I will build on our long history of friendship with Pakistan to

advance human rights, religious freedom, counterterrorism cooperation, and an improved business environment for American investors.

Third, on Afghanistan, I started my career working on the Afghan border in the Pakistani city of Peshawar and saw first-hand the desperate plight of Afghan refugees. I have a deep commitment to encouraging peace, security, human rights, and the rights of women and girls. If confirmed, I will work to advance our objectives in Afghanistan.

Finally, in the other countries of South and Central Asia—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives—we face competition from China and Russia like never before. We must recommit ourselves to robust engagement with these countries to support their sovereignty and independence in the face of many challenges. Critical new tools have been authorized in that effort, from the creation of the Development Finance Corporation, to this Committee’s important work on the Strategic Competition Act. If confirmed, I will work to make the United States a reliable international partner to the governments and peoples of these countries, one who is willing to call out malign influence and stand up for human rights and democracy.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will take seriously my role as a steward of the public trust. I will safeguard our precious resources – our people, our embassies, and the strong reputation of the United States. I believe in the importance of our voice in support of human rights, religious freedom, and democracy. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Congress to build robust relations between the United States and the nations of South and Central Asia.