

Secretary of State Designate Rex Tillerson
Senate Confirmation Hearing Opening Statement
January 11, 2017

Good morning.

I am honored to have the backing of Senator Cornyn and Senator Cruz from my home state of Texas. I also want to thank Senator Nunn for his commitment to nuclear non-proliferation, and Secretary Gates for his service to eight presidents and his own leadership as President of the Boy Scouts of America.

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as President-elect Trump's nominee for Secretary of State and to seek the approval of this Committee and the full Senate for my confirmation.

I would like to first introduce members of my family who are here today. These are the most important people in my life, and I want to express my gratitude to them for all their love and support over the years. First, my wife of over thirty years, Renda, who has always kept the home fires burning during my many trips abroad. My sisters Jo Lynn Peters and Rae Ann Hamilton and my brother-in-law Lee Hamilton. I am grateful and proud they are with me today.

I come before you at a pivotal time in both the history of our nation and our world.

Nearly everywhere we look, people and nations are deeply unsettled. Old ideas and international norms which were well-understood and

governed behaviors in the past may no longer be effective in our time.

We face considerable threats in this evolving new environment. China has emerged as an economic power in global trade, and our interactions have been both friendly and adversarial. While Russia seeks respect and relevance on the global stage, its recent activities have disregarded American interests. Radical Islam is not a new ideology, but it is hateful, deadly, and an illegitimate expression of the Islamic faith. Adversaries like Iran and North Korea pose grave threats to the world because of their refusal to conform to international norms.

As we confront these realities, how should America respond?

My answer is simple. To achieve the stability that is foundational to peace and security in the 21st century, American leadership must not only be renewed, it must be asserted.

We have many advantages on which to build. Our alliances are durable and our allies are looking for a return of our leadership. Our men and women in uniform are the world's finest fighting force, and we possess the world's largest economy. America is still the destination of choice for people the world over because of our track record of benevolence and hope for our fellow man. America has been indispensable in providing the stability to prevent another world war, increase global prosperity, and encourage the expansion of liberty.

Our role in the world has also historically entailed a place of moral leadership. In the scope of international affairs, America's level of goodwill toward the world is unique, and we must continue to display a

commitment to personal liberty, human dignity, and principled action in our foreign policy.

Quite simply, we are the only global superpower with the means and the moral compass capable of shaping the world for good.

If we do not lead, we risk plunging the world deeper into confusion and danger.

But we've stumbled.

In recent decades, we have cast American leadership into doubt. In some instances, we have withdrawn from the world. In others, we have intervened with good intentions but did not achieve the stability and global security we sought. Instead, we triggered a host of unintended consequences and created a void of uncertainty. Today, our friends still want to help us, but they don't know how. Meanwhile, our adversaries have been emboldened to take advantage of this absence of American leadership.

In this campaign, President-elect Trump proposed a bold new commitment to advancing American interests in our foreign policy. I hope to explain what this approach means and how I would implement that policy if confirmed as Secretary of State.

Americans welcome this rededication to American security, liberty, and prosperity. But new leadership is incomplete without accountability. If accountability does not start with ourselves, we cannot credibly extend it to our friends or our adversaries.

We must hold ourselves accountable to upholding the promises we make to others. An America that can be trusted in good faith is essential to supporting our partners, achieving our goals, and assuring our security.

We must hold our allies accountable to commitments they make. We cannot look the other way at allies who do not meet their obligations; this is an injustice not only to us, but to longstanding friends who honor their promises and bolster our own national security.

And we must hold those who are not our friends accountable to the agreements they make. Our failure to do this over recent decades has diminished our standing and encouraged bad actors around the world to break their word. We cannot afford to ignore violations of international accords, as we have done with Iran. We cannot continue to accept empty promises like the ones China has made to pressure North Korea to reform, only to shy away from enforcement. Looking the other way when trust is broken only encourages more bad behavior. And it must end.

We cannot be accountable if we are not truthful and honest in our dealings. Some of you are aware of my longstanding involvement with the Boy Scouts of America. One of our bedrock ideals is honesty. Indeed, the phrase “on my honor” begins the Boy Scout Oath, and it must undergird our foreign policy.

In particular, we need to be honest about radical Islam. It is with good reason that our fellow citizens have a growing concern about radical Islam and murderous acts committed in its name against Americans and our friends.

Radical Islam poses a grave risk to the stability of nations and the well-being of their citizens. Powerful digital media platforms now allow ISIS, al-Qaeda, and other terror groups to spread a poisonous ideology that runs completely counter to the values of the American people and all people around the world who value human life. These groups are often enabled and emboldened by nations, organizations, and individuals sympathetic to their cause. These actors must face consequences for aiding and abetting what can only be called evil.

The most urgent step in thwarting radical Islam is defeating ISIS. The Middle East and its surrounding regions pose many challenges which require our attention, including Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. There are competing priorities in this region which must be and will be addressed, but they must not distract from our utmost mission of defeating ISIS. Because when everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. Defeating ISIS must be our foremost priority in the Middle East.

Eliminating ISIS would be the first step in disrupting the capabilities of other groups and individuals committed to striking our Homeland and our allies. The demise of ISIS would also allow us to increase our attention on other agents of radical Islam like al-Qaeda, the Muslim Brotherhood, and certain elements within Iran. But defeat will not occur on the battlefield alone; we must win the war of ideas. If confirmed, I will ensure the State Department does its part in supporting Muslims around the world who reject radical Islam in all its forms.

We should also acknowledge the realities about China. China's island-building in the South China Sea is an illegal taking of disputed areas without regard for international norms. China's economic and trade

practices have not always followed its commitments to global agreements. It steals our intellectual property, and is aggressive and expansionist in the digital realm. It has not been a reliable partner in using its full influence to curb North Korea. China has proven a willingness to act with abandon in pursuit of its own goals, which at times has put it in conflict with America's interests. We have to deal with what we see, not with what we hope.

But we need to see the positive dimensions in our relationship with China as well. The economic well-being of our two nations is deeply intertwined. China has been a valuable ally in curtailing elements of radical Islam. We should not let disagreements over other issues exclude areas for productive partnership.

We must also be clear-eyed about our relationship with Russia. Russia today poses a danger, but it is not unpredictable in advancing its own interests. It has invaded Ukraine, including the taking of Crimea, and supported Syrian forces that brutally violate the laws of war. Our NATO allies are right to be alarmed at a resurgent Russia.

But it was in the absence of American leadership that this door was left open and unintended signals were sent. We backtracked on commitments we made to allies. We sent weak or mixed signals with "red lines" that turned into green lights. We did not recognize that Russia does not think like we do.

Words alone do not sweep away an uneven and at times contentious history between our two nations. But we need an open and frank dialogue with Russia regarding its ambitions, so that we know how to chart our own course.

Where cooperation with Russia based on common interests is possible, such as reducing the global threat of terrorism, we ought to explore these options. Where important differences remain, we should be steadfast in defending the interests of America and her allies. Russia must know that we will be accountable to our commitments and those of our allies, and that Russia must be held to account for its actions.

Our approach to human rights begins by acknowledging that American leadership requires moral clarity. We do not face an “either or” choice on defending global human rights. Our values are our interests when it comes to human rights and humanitarian assistance.

It is unreasonable to expect that every foreign policy endeavor will be driven by human rights considerations alone, especially when the security of the American people is at stake.

But our leadership demands action specifically focused on improving the conditions of people the world over, utilizing both aid and economic sanctions as instruments of foreign policy when appropriate.

And we must adhere to standards of accountability. Our recent engagement with the government of Cuba was not accompanied by any significant concessions on human rights. We have not held them accountable for their conduct. Their leaders received much, while their people received little. That serves neither the interest of Cubans or Americans.

Abraham Lincoln declared that America is “the last best hope of Earth.” Our moral light must not go out if we are to remain an agent of freedom

for mankind. Supporting human rights in our foreign policy is a key component of clarifying to a watching world what America stands for.

In closing, let us also be proud about the ideals that define us and the liberties we have secured at great cost. The ingenuity, ideas, and culture of Americans who came before us made the United States the greatest nation in history. So have their sacrifices. We should never forget that we stand on the shoulders of those who have sacrificed much, and in some cases, everything. They include our fallen heroes in uniform, our Foreign Service Officers, and other government agents in the field who likewise gave all for their country.

If confirmed, in my work for the President and the American people I will seek to engender trust with foreign leaders and governments, and put in place agreements that will serve the purposes and interests of American foreign policy. The Secretary of State works for the President and seeks to implement his foreign policy objectives. To do that I must work closely with my Cabinet colleagues and all relevant departments and agencies of the administration to build consensus. Let me also stress that keeping the President's trust means keeping the public trust. And keeping the public's trust means keeping faith with their elected representatives. I want all the members of this committee to know that, should I be confirmed, I will seek to be responsive to your concerns.

I am an engineer by training. I seek to understand the facts, follow where they lead, and apply logic to our international affairs. We must see the world for what it is, have clear priorities, and understand that our power is considerable, but it is not infinite. We must, where possible, build pathways to new partnerships, and strengthen old bonds which have frayed.

If confirmed, I intend to conduct a foreign policy consistent with these ideals. We will never apologize for who we are or what we hold dear. We will see the world for what it is, be honest with ourselves and the American people, follow facts where they lead us, and hold ourselves and others accountable.

I thank you for your time and look forward to your questions.