

Statement of Michael Alan Ratney
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
June 16, 2022

Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Young, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I would like to thank the President and Secretary Blinken for the confidence they have shown in me with this nomination. If confirmed, I commit to working closely with this committee, and the U.S. Congress more broadly, on our country's critical national security interests in Saudi Arabia.

I have spent more than 30 years in the Foreign Service, much of that in the Middle East. I have found that Saudi Arabia represents so much of what is compelling, and at the same time challenging, about working in that region and advancing U.S. interests there. The prospect of being confirmed as U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia is very exciting, and I would like to take a moment to thank my wife, Karen Sasahara, who is also a Foreign Service Officer, as well as my father and family for all their support.

If confirmed, I am committed to a strong and sustainable U.S.-Saudi partnership that advances U.S. interests and reflects U.S. values. We have so much at stake in this relationship – encouraging the modernization project underway, including on interfaith tolerance; building on our vital counterterrorism cooperation; working to help Saudi Arabia defend its territory and deter Iran's aggressive behavior; helping to end the horrific war in Yemen; stabilizing global energy markets; deepening our engagement on human rights; and solidifying links with the many thousands of young Saudis, men and women, building their country's future.

My top priority will be the protection of U.S. citizens. The Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen launched more than 400 cross-border attacks last year on infrastructure, schools, mosques, and workplaces, endangering 70,000 resident U.S. citizens, along with the Saudi population. If confirmed, I will work to strengthen Saudi defenses through security cooperation and training, demonstrating the durable American commitment to our partners and allies and to our values.

The U.S. has a powerful interest in ending the war in Yemen, a tragic conflict that has left many lives and families destroyed, and the Yemeni population impoverished. To that end, the President ended U.S. support for offensive operations in Yemen, even as we remain committed to helping Saudi Arabia defend its people and territory. Fortunately, over the last two months the warring parties have accepted, and recently

extended, a truce, bringing a measure of relief to millions of Yemenis. This truce would not have been possible without Saudi Arabia's support. I look forward to working closely with our U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen to support UN-led efforts to transform that truce into a durable and inclusive resolution to the conflict.

Iran poses a significant threat to U.S. and Saudi interests, as well as those of our other regional allies and partners. We must work with our Saudi partners to counter Iranian threats to global energy flows, regional stability, and the lives of our fellow U.S. citizens in the region. If confirmed, I will prioritize working with Saudi leaders on mitigating and containing Iranian threats to these interests.

The President and the Secretary have rightly made human rights a key pillar of our foreign policy; this was a key aspect of the Administration's reorientation of the U.S.-Saudi bilateral relationship, and we consistently have made clear to Saudi officials that progress on human rights will help strengthen the bilateral relationship and make it more sustainable over the long term. The Saudis have made important reforms already, including concrete steps to integrate women into the workplace and economy. But these reforms are incomplete. If confirmed, I will continue to make this a priority.

The United States and Saudi Arabia have extensive economic ties, and if confirmed, my team and I will work hard to support American businesses in the Saudi market, especially as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 economic program presents new opportunities for Americans to compete. Saudi Arabia is of course a major player in global energy. Recently, the OPEC+ Ministers endorsed a recommendation to increase production quotas in July and August. This will hopefully contribute to providing relief to Americans struggling with high gas prices, though it does not necessarily address the broader factors now destabilizing global energy markets, particularly Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war against Ukraine. Energy supplies and encouraging a Saudi energy policy that aligns with U.S. priorities, will be a major focus of my discussions with the Saudi government.

The United States and Saudi Arabia established diplomatic relations back in 1931. Over the years, as our relationship has become more complex and multifaceted, it has remained key to U.S. national security. If confirmed, I will work hard to ensure that the U.S.-Saudi partnership serves U.S. interests and reflects U.S. values. I welcome your questions.