

Statement of Dr. Ely Ratner
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs
Senate Armed Services Committee
June 16, 2021

Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and distinguished members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you this morning as President Biden's nominee for Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs.

I want to thank President Biden for nominating me for this position, and Secretary Austin and Deputy Secretary Hicks for their confidence in me. I had the privilege of working for both Senator Biden and Vice President Biden, and am grateful now for the opportunity to serve in the Biden-Harris Administration. As a former Professional Staff Member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, it is also a distinct privilege to return to the Senate today in this capacity.

Most importantly, I want to thank my family, including my parents, Joseph and Esther, and my brother Aaron, as well as my amazing wife Jennifer and our two boys, Ian and Finn, for their incredible love and support.

If confirmed, my top priority will be positioning the Department to compete more effectively with China. I have spent the better part of the last two decades working on this challenge inside and outside of government, and strongly agree with the assessment in President Biden's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance that China is "the only competitor capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system." If confirmed, I would be honored to support Secretary Austin and Deputy Secretary Hicks in their mission to prioritize China as the Department's number one pacing challenge.

To that end, since January, I have served as the Director of the DoD China Task Force. Secretary Austin charged the Task Force with conducting an assessment of China-related activities at the Department and providing recommendations for the way forward. Based on those recommendations, the Secretary issued an internal directive on June 9 that initiated a series of efforts to better align the Department with the stated prioritization of China.

During the course of the China Task Force, I consulted regularly with Congress and was encouraged by the bipartisan commitment to renewing American

competitiveness and rising to the China challenge. I firmly believe that a strong bipartisan consensus on China is a strategic imperative for the United States. If confirmed, I would look forward to continued consultation and collaboration with members of this Committee.

Even as we prepare to prevail in future conflicts, it is critical to underscore, as Secretary Austin said recently, that “the cornerstone of America’s defense is still deterrence.” Military conflict with China is by no means inevitable. If confirmed, I would aim to support the development of new operational concepts, force posture, and emerging capabilities to prevent and deter such a conflict for future generations. In this regard, I appreciate the Committee's leadership on the Pacific Deterrence Initiative and would look forward to working with you to continue implementing this important initiative.

The Indo-Pacific region rightly serves as the Department’s priority theater. We must continue pursuing a free and open Indo-Pacific, while investing in our network of allies and partners throughout the region, including Taiwan. If confirmed, I would support the Administration’s approach to North Korea, and affirm our alliance commitments to Japan and the Republic of Korea, including to maintain peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

Our alliances with Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand, as well as our defense partnerships with India and Singapore, among others, are also critically important. So too is our commitment to ASEAN and the region’s multilateral institutions as we tackle the breadth of traditional and non-traditional security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, including extremism and climate change. Meanwhile, we should continue pursuing defense relations with China to develop crisis communications and risk reduction mechanisms.

If confirmed, I would also focus on the immediate objective of executing a safe, deliberate, and orderly retrograde from Afghanistan. We must also retain counterterrorism capabilities to disrupt any threats to the U.S. homeland, support the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa program, and protect the progress achieved for Afghan women and girls. If confirmed, I would work with this Committee to advance our shared goals for the future of Afghanistan and the region.

I want to conclude by thanking the members of this Committee for your bipartisan support for our servicemembers, their families, the civilian workforce, and our national defense. Thank you for considering my nomination and I look forward to your questions.