

Dr. Celeste Ann Wallander
Nominee for Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs
Senate Armed Services Committee

Good morning Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and distinguished members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as you consider my nomination to serve as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

I am grateful to President Biden, Secretary Austin, and Under Secretary Kahl for their trust in my ability to serve in this role. It is also a privilege to appear on this panel with esteemed colleagues who have also been nominated for Assistant Secretary roles. If confirmed, it would be my honor to work alongside them and ensure coordination between the regional and functional policy offices within the Department.

I would like to take a moment to thank my Dad, who served in the U.S. Navy and is a retired Chicago police officer, and my Mom, who immigrated to the United States as a little girl from Europe after World War II. They taught me the gift of American citizenship, and the duty to serve our country. I also thank my husband Jeff and our children Nathaniel, Joseph, and Genevieve for their unshakeable love and support.

I am humbled by the prospect of returning to public service and rejoining OSD Policy. I previously served at the Pentagon as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia from 2009 to 2012, and then on the National Security Council staff as the Senior Director for Russia and Central Asia from 2013 to 2017. These roles equipped me with the skills to manage critical defense relationships, navigate the interagency policy formation process, and develop national security policy in response to complex geopolitical contexts.

I have dedicated my career to both studying and working policy on European and Eurasian security, with a focus on Russian foreign, military, and security affairs. If confirmed, I would work to utilize my scholarly and government experiences in the service of U.S. national security.

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs covers a broad regional portfolio that includes well over 100 countries and develops security policy, manages defense and military relations, and stewards Department resources to develop military capabilities, support security cooperation programs, conduct foreign military sales, and perform other key activities in those regions. I would be honored to lead the talented professionals supporting this vast portfolio should I be confirmed—working closely with Joint Staff and Combatant Command colleagues, and representing the Department of Defense within the interagency.

This regional portfolio presents some of the most difficult defense challenges facing the United States. I appreciate that members of this committee are closely tracking Russian threats against Ukraine. As a private citizen, I too have been deeply concerned about public reports regarding Russian military concentrations. If confirmed, I would develop policy and strategic options for the Secretary to consider to deter Russia, ensure appropriate response to Russian aggression, and safeguard U.S. and Transatlantic security.

I support the Biden Administration's work to unite NATO on deterrence and diplomacy, as well as provide continued defensive lethal assistance to Ukraine. I also support the Administration's close consultations with European allies and partners on options for deterrence, as well as serious consequences for Russia in the event of escalation. If confirmed, I will be ready and able to advance the Department's preparations for all contingencies. This will be my top priority, if confirmed, and, I would immediately focus on being briefed in-detail about the current state-of-play.

I share the goals and commitments advanced in the Global Posture Review, including an effective counterterrorism posture in the Middle East and robust deterrence against Iran. Our force protection mission is also essential, particularly in the face of attacks by Iranian proxies in Iraq. If confirmed, I will also advance our strategy in Africa to build partner capacity, strengthen African security institutions, and counter violent extremist organizations.

This portfolio also contains some of the greatest opportunities for American national security and our key defense interests. I share Secretary Austin's view that China is the pacing challenge for the Department. I also share his view that the strength of our alliances and partnerships is one of our

greatest assets—in that challenge, and all others. If confirmed, I will prioritize these critical defense partnerships in order to strengthen our security and deter our adversaries.

The responsibilities of International Security Affairs require thoughtful and sustained military diplomacy with our allies and partners across the globe. I know that members of this committee recognize the importance of this mission, and I am personally invested in engaging with Congress to address these shared challenges and opportunities. I appreciate your longstanding bipartisan approach to national security issues and would look forward to working in partnership with this committee and consulting regularly with Congress, if confirmed.

Thank you for considering my nomination and I look forward to your questions.