

Nomination Hearing for Anne Patterson and Gregory Starr
Remarks of Chairman Robert Menendez
Senate Foreign Relations Committee – September 19, 2013

Our second panel this morning brings us two of this nation's most experienced career Foreign Service officers.

I'm pleased to welcome Anne Patterson as the nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs and Gregory Starr, no stranger to this Committee, as Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security.

Anne Patterson has spent the last two years serving as Ambassador to Egypt at a tumultuous and transitional time in Egypt's history and we extend our thanks and appreciation for her service. She was in the eye of the storm as the winds of the Arab Spring began to blow across the region and her expertise and experience served her well.

She has a long record of service, since the time she left her home in Arkansas and went to Wellesley. Her experience is exemplary of our career Foreign Service officers, who put their lives at risk, often in places where an American presence is necessary but not always welcome.

I look forward to supporting her nomination, but let me express several ongoing concerns in the region. Ambassador Patterson, as you know, the impact of sanctions on Iran has been significant. And while I support a diplomatic solution to the crisis and hope that we find such an opening with the newly elected government in Iran, at the end of the day need a partner who comes to the table in good faith and with a real offer in hand. Until then, it is my view that we must maintain and increase pressure on the regime and that the threat of force must remain on the table. I look forward to hearing your views on the situation in Iran.

I also would like to know your views on the next steps moving forward in Egypt to realize the promise we had hoped for from the event in Tahrir Square in 2011 that has given way to an increasingly undemocratic and insecure environment for all Egyptians.

In Iraq, I have several concerns about our diplomatic relations following the drawdown of U.S. troops. It seems that, after many years of American sacrifice and investment, the democratic trajectory of the country is uncertain at best. I'm also disturbed by Iraq's failure to protect the MEK community at Camp Ashraf and Camp Liberty, which most recently resulted in 52 deaths and the kidnapping of seven individuals who remain hostages. I expect the Iraqis to hold the guilty parties responsible for their actions.

Finally, on the peace process, I support Secretary Kerry's efforts and believe that we must continue to keep the Palestinians at the table, engaged in face to face negotiations with the Israelis. I applaud Israel's courage in agreeing to the release of prisoners at the outset of

negotiations, and hope the Palestinians will publicly commit to remain at the negotiating table and not pursue statehood or enhanced status through any international bodies. It is only through the hard work of direct negotiations that we will be able to realize a durable and realistic peace.

Anne Patterson is no stranger to these complex issues in the region, having served for the past two years in Egypt and earlier in her career in Saudi Arabia. She is a decorated Foreign Service officer and will no doubt serve in this new position with distinction. We will look to her leadership in promoting U.S. regional interests in the years to come.

Gregory Starr, the nominee for Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security, appeared before this committee this summer to testify on a bill cosponsored by Senator Corker and I – the Chris Stevens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods, and Glen Doherty Embassy Security, Threat Mitigation, and Personnel Protection Act. He provided us with insights and the benefit of his many years in Diplomatic Security; first as a Special Agent in the Foreign Service serving in Tunisia, Senegal, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He later served in the Secretary of State's security detail in technical security operations as Chief of the Division for Worldwide Local Guard and Residential Security Programs and as Senior Regional Security Officer at our embassy in Tel Aviv. And now he is returning, coming out of retirement, to be considered for Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security at a time when we sorely need his experience and expertise.

As I've said in the past, and will say again, the lessons we've learned from the tragedies in Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, and Benghazi are emblematic of the broader issue we will increasingly face in the 21st century and it will require our full, unequivocal, unwavering commitment to fully protecting our embassies and those who serve this nation abroad. This will be his charge as Assistant Secretary: To help strike the proper balance between sealing off vulnerabilities in high threat areas and continuing to conduct vigorous and effective diplomacy that serves the national interest.

The fact is we can never have absolute security in an increasingly dangerous world, but security alone is not our objective. At the end of the day, we need to address both the construction of new embassies that meet security needs and we need to do what we can to secure existing high risk posts where we need our people to represent our interests and where new construction is not an option. That is what Senator Corker's and my Embassy Security bill seeks to do, and my hope is that it will forward through the legislative process soon.

Mr. Starr, I look forward to hearing what you have to say about the progress we have made in making sure our diplomats are safe.

Thank you both for being here and for your many years of service to the nation.

With that, let me turn to Senator Corker for his opening remarks.