

# **NOMINATIONS**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

U.S. SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:35 a.m., in Room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. James E. Risch presiding.

Present: Senators Risch [presiding], Ricketts, McCormick, Daines, Hagerty, Barrasso, Lee, Paul, Cruz, Scott, Curtis, Cornyn, Shaheen, Coons, Murphy, Kaine, Merkley, Booker, Schatz, Van Hollen, Duckworth, and Rosen.

Also Present: Senators Kelly, Boozman, and Cotton.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO**

**The Chairman:** The committee will come to order. Thank you all for being here today.

As usual, I want to welcome everyone in the audience, our guests. For those of you this may sound a little strange but we have guests that interrupt us sometimes.

So any of those that may show up -- does not look like there is any here today -- we have a zero tolerance. Any type of communication or attempt to communicate with the committee or witnesses will be dealt with severely. You will be arrested and banned from the committee for a year.

So with that, on the more -- on a happier note, we are glad to see all of you here today who have agreed to be with us and to take on these difficult positions that you have been nominated for.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

And we are going to consider the nominations of Mr. Warren Stephens to be United States Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Mr. Tom Barrack to be Ambassador to Turkey, and Mr. Tilman Fertitta to be Ambassador to Italy.

Before we -- ordinarily, we make opening statements. However, we have committee members -- Senate members who would like to introduce some of our nominees.

So let us start. Senator Hagerty, you have the floor.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BILL HAGERTY,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM TENNESSEE**

**Senator Hagerty:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I want to congratulate all of our nominees today.

It is an incredible honor to represent the greatest nation in the world and it is an incredible honor for me to introduce one of my good friends, someone I have known for more than a decade, and that is Tom Barrack, who is our nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Turkey.

Tom is an international business leader and he is a true patriot whose nomination comes at a very important time for relations between the United States and Turkey.

When you consider Tom's background and his qualifications you can see why President Trump wants him as our nation's chief diplomat in Ankara.

Over a century ago, Tom's grandparents immigrated to the United States from a place that we now call Lebanon, but back then it was part of the Ottoman Empire. While his family settled here they did not forget their ties to a region where Tom is now being called to serve.

Tom himself had humble beginnings, growing up working in the grocery store that his parents owned in southern California. By the time Tom went to college he had a deep appreciation from his family for the significance of culture, service, and commerce.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

So after graduating from law school it is no surprise that Tom began his professional career helping to promote business ties between the United States and the Middle East.

Tom has built on this foundation in the decades since, showing he is an incredible leader with an exceptional ability to work across differences in culture and politics to both solve problems and to create value.

In fact, French President Nicolas Sarkozy recognized Tom with the rare Legion d'Honneur award in 2010 for Tom's contributions. Tom's proven success in bridging interest across the United States, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East make him uniquely qualified to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, a country that has long been at the crossroads of international relations.

But Tom's qualities do not stop there. He is also -- he also served as under secretary of Interior for President Reagan and he is an avid philanthropist. In other words, Tom has the heart of a public servant intent on making our nation and our world a better place.

As a former ambassador myself I believe strongly that America needs diplomatic leaders abroad who know how to make deals and how to stand firm in support of American interests.

If confirmed, Tom will make exactly that type of Ambassador.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the chance to introduce Tom Barrack. I look forward to our hearing this morning and I encourage all of my colleagues to support his nomination.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Senator.

We will now hear from Senator Cornyn. You have the floor.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**  
*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

**STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN CORNYN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM TEXAS**

**Senator Cornyn:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Shaheen.

Thank you for holding this hearing on the nomination of my friend and fellow Texan Tilman Fertitta to be the next Ambassador to Italy and San Marino. And, Tilman, I learned something this morning. San Marino's population is 33,860 so congratulations on your nomination.

I have had the pleasure of knowing Tilman for quite some time. We all know him as a successful entrepreneur and who was well on his way to expanding his first two seafood restaurants in greater Houston into what would later become one of the largest dining and hospitality enterprises in the country.

But what I later learned is that Tilman is not only one of the nation's most prominent businessmen, he is also a visionary and a philanthropist who has dedicated much of his time and resources to bettering the community.

Over the years, I have witnessed Tilman make an incredible impact on the city of Houston and the entire state of Texas. He was born in Galveston, Texas, where his family had settled after immigrating from Sicily in the late 1800s.

His father owned a seafood restaurant on the island, which is how Tilman got his start in the business. After school he helped his father peel shrimp. Years down the road he would use the profits from that small family business to secure a small loan to acquire what would later become an empire.

That is one of the things you learned about Tilman, as I have. The man keeps striving and challenging himself. Tilman's realization of the American dream will serve him well as a voice for our nation's interest and as an advocate for a strong relationship between the United States and Italy.

His credentials extend beyond his prominent business career, though. He was first chosen by former Governor Rick Perry to serve on the Board of Regents for the University of Houston system in 2009 and the impact he has had on that system during his first six years was so positive that our current governor, Governor Abbott, has reappointed him now to two additional terms.

After identifying an opportunity for the university's flagship campus to further Houston as one of the leading cities in the country and the world for medicine, he poured time and treasure into helping -- to help strengthening its relatively new school of medicine in 2022.

He has also invested in the growth of other facilities on the flagship university campus to raise the school's profile, including its basketball stadium.

Those of you who are following the March Madness will tell you that the Cougars are in the finals and we are very proud of them and I know Tilman is as well.

He has also served as the chair of the Houston Police Department Foundation where he helped ensure our men and women in uniform have the support that they need, and following the COVID-19 pandemic he used his unique experience and background to advise Governor Abbott on how to effectively and safely reopen businesses across the Lone Star State.

But these are just a few of the things that Tilman has done to better his community and our state. In short, Tilman will bring a wealth of experience to his service to the nation as Ambassador to Italy and San Marino.

He will have an opportunity to work not only with members of this committee but with the entire Senate to help shape our partnership with this critical ally and I have no doubt he will do a stellar job as ambassador.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

So it is my honor to support his nomination and I hope others will do the same. So thank you, Chairman Risch, thank you Ranking Member Shaheen and other members of the committee for allowing me the opportunity to introduce this exceptional Houstonian and Texan, and thank you, Tilman, you and your family for your willingness to serve.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Senator Cornyn.

Senator Kelly, welcome to the committee.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MARK KELLY,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM ARIZONA**

**Senator Kelly:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Shaheen.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to appear here today to introduce my friend -- longtime friend, Tilman Fertitta.

The United States' relationship with Italy is an important one. It is grounded in centuries of diplomacy and exchange between our countries, including the millions of Americans who are tied to their Italian heritage.

Italy is a critical security partner and it is critical to our national security. They are a founding member of NATO and host several U.S. military installations that are important to our interests in the region, and they are a key trading partner, buying machinery, military hardware and technology from U.S. companies.

I was glad to see Tilman nominated for this job. He is the right person for this job. Tilman and I have known each other for a long time, almost 25 years.

We became friends when I was living in Houston, Texas, assigned to the Johnson Space Center, and I think the best way for me to introduce Tilman is to tell a story of about how he was there for me and my family and my wife, Gabby, on the worst day of our lives.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

On the morning of January 8, 2011, I got a call from Gabby's chief of staff and she told me that while meeting with her constituents at what she called the Congress on your corner, a gunman had opened fire on her. It was at a Safeway store and that Gabby had been shot.

We hung up from this call and I was in shock. Thought to myself did this phone call just happen, and I called Gabby's chief of staff back and she told me that this was real and that Gabby had not just been shot but she was shot in the head.

My next phone call was to Tilman because I needed to figure out a way to get from Tucson -- from Houston to Tucson as fast as possible and I knew that Tilman would be there to help me.

Well, it was not just my next phone call, it was my next five or six phone calls was to him, and he was in a meeting and when I when he first looked down and saw a missed call and saw that I called back he knew it must be something serious, and he called me back immediately and he dropped everything, and within minutes he had a plan for me to get to Tucson.

It was a couple hours later during that flight that cable news reported that Gabby had died, and that was one of the darkest moments of my life.

But Tilman refused to believe it and he refused to let me believe it, and he said to me on that trip -- he said, Mark, there is no way that she is dead, and he kept saying it over and over again.

Of course, as we all know, he was right. Cable news was wrong. And thanks to him I arrived at Tucson Medical Center before she was even out of surgery.

Tilman's friendship meant everything to me and my family that day, and when I think of the worst moment of our lives and the impossible days and weeks and months

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

that followed, Tilman is one of those people that got us through it and that I relied on -- significantly relied on.

Tilman is a problem solver, he is a leader, and he is the right person for this job, and I am glad that all of you on this committee will have the opportunity to get to know him through this process and to get to know how he will serve our country.

So thank you again for having me.

**The Chairman:** Thank you very much, Senator. Certainly an impressive introduction and attribution for the nominee.

We know you are busy. You are welcome to stay, of course, if you would like, but understand the pressure we are all under.

Let us see. We will move to Senator Boozman. You know, you have got a really wide circle of friends. I do not know how many introductions you have made to this committee so far this year. You may as well take a seat up here with us, you know.

In any event you are always welcome here and the floor is yours.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN BOOZMAN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM ARKANSAS**

**Senator Boozman:** It is good to be back here with you, Chairman Risch and membership -- Ranking Member Shaheen, and good morning to my colleagues.

It is an honor to be here today with my friend and colleague Senator Cotton to introduce my friend and fellow Arkansan Warren Stephens, President Trump's nominee for United States Ambassador to the United Kingdom.

I would also like to say hi to his family and friends that are here in attendance to support him. We are more than happy to have you.

For nearly four decades Warren Stephens has been part of the company he founded in 1933 on a handshake by his father and uncle. Since his humble beginnings, Stephens



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

Inc. has become one of the our nation's largest investment banks not based on Wall Street and we are proud that his home is still in Arkansas.

Under his leadership the business grew from employing 100 people at one location in Little Rock to now boasting over 1,000 employees in 28 locations domestically as well as in offices in London and Frankfurt.

Throughout his career, Warren has been devoted to the ethic instilled in him by his father and uncle to practice responsible debt management and be prudent and resilient enough to be still in business the next day.

That stewardship helped Stephens Inc. weather the height of the Great Recession and actually add talent rather than lay off employees.

In his professional and personal capacities Warren has been a truly tireless crusader for capitalism, championing its ability to expand opportunity and help others realize the American dream.

Over three decades in the financial sector, he has rightfully earned a reputation as a thoughtful, respected leader in the U.S. and abroad.

He and his family have also distinguished themselves as pillars of central Arkansas community through a long history of civic and philanthropic engagement.

Their efforts have been a driving force for programs that support education and the arts, as well as working to revitalize our state's capital city and enrich the lives of others.

I have had the privilege of knowing Warren for many years and I am confident he will bring as many talents, skills and relationships to bear as our Ambassador to the United Kingdom, and I am thankful to President Trump for choosing him to fill this very crucial diplomatic role.

His extensive experience and expertise in the private sector and dedication to enhancing the relationship between our two nations will serve him well as he represents

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

America's interest in this critical post. It is clear he is not only qualified but is extremely well suited to the role.

I strongly support his nomination and urge my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Senator Boozman, and we know all of us have other commitments. You are welcome to stay but if you cannot we will understand.

So with that, Senator Cotton?

**STATEMENT OF HON. TOM COTTON,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM ARKANSAS**

**Senator Cotton:** Thank you, Chairman Risch, Senator Shaheen, and members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Good morning.

I am honored to introduce today a remarkable family man, businessman, philanthropist, patriot, not least my friend and fellow Arkansan Warren Stephens. I have known Warren and his family for many years.

I would like to acknowledge his wife Harriet and his children Miles, John, and Laura and their spouses for their support during his confirmation process.

Along with his family and many other Arkansans who have the privilege to know Warren I am pleased to offer my full support for his nomination to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom.

For centuries, the United States and the United Kingdom have enjoyed what Prime Minister Winston Churchill originally termed a special relationship.

This friendship, forged on the front lines of two world wars and on the side of freedom during the Cold War, is rooted in our two nations' shared history, culture and democratic ethos.

Our 240-year diplomatic relationship is a bastion for freedom and peace worldwide. Warren is very well suited to deepen and strengthen the bonds with one of our best and oldest allies.

Inspired by the example of his father, who graduated from the Naval Academy, Warren has long aspired to serve his country full time. I am pleased that President Trump nominated him and that Warren was able to answer the call.

This commitment to service has guided Warren throughout his life and his career. At 29 he became president and CEO of Stephens Inc., a relationship-based family-owned financial firm that started with a handshake between his father Jack and his uncle Witt.

Since succeeding his father in 1986, Warren dedicated himself to building up Stephens in the United States and abroad including in London, where he has spent considerable time.

As the head of Stephens Warren has dedicated nearly four decades to strengthening business relationships throughout the United States and across the Atlantic while simultaneously forging relationships through service to his community.

In recent years, for instance, Warren and Harriet spearheaded a massive multiyear fundraising campaign to transform the Arkansas Art Center into the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts.

The museum now hosts a 14,000-piece permanent collection, and features artists from Arkansas and across the United States. Thanks to Warren and Harriet's vision the museum has become the heart of its community, a place where children and students come to learn, where neighbors and friends gather, and where all those who love art can explore their creativity.

Warren is also the chairman and founder of the Jackson T. Stephens Cup named in honor of his late father. Launched in 2021 the JTS Cup showcases collegiate golfers from

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

NCAA Division I schools, historically black colleges and universities, and the United States service academies on the nation's preeminent golf courses.

In addition to student athletes Warren actively supports numerous universities including his alma mater, Washington and Lee.

His dedication to and support for education also extends to the Episcopal Collegiate School in Little Rock where he serves as chair of the school's foundation board.

Time and time again Warren has answered the call to serve others, and now he has answered the call to serve his country in a critical role at a critical time.

Warren has spent a lifetime building and fostering strong relationships with his family, his clients, and his community.

I think he is exactly the person America needs to lead our strong special relationship with the United Kingdom as our next ambassador of the United States to the court of St. James.

Thank you all, and I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting Warren's nomination.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Senator Cotton.

What we are going to do now is I am going to make a few remarks and Senator Shaheen, and then we will go to a round of five-minute questions from the senators.

Actually, what we will do first is hear from the nominees and then I will make a few remarks. But, Senators, we you are welcome to stay, of course, but we understand everybody has got overlapping meetings and what have you. So thank you for coming.

So with that, we will hear from the nominees and, Mr. Stephens, we will start with you, please. So please keep your remarks to about five minutes. Anything you have to say, obviously, beyond that we will include within the record.

But the floor is yours.

**STATEMENT OF WARREN STEPHENS, OF ARKANSAS, TO BE AMBASSADOR  
EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
TO THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND**

**Mr. Stephens:** Well, thank you, Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, members of the committee. It is an honor to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to be the Ambassador to the court of St. James.

I am truly grateful to President Trump for placing his confidence in me to fulfill the important duties and responsibilities of this position.

I commend President Trump's plan and taking decisive and purposeful action as he wastes no time in implementing his agenda. This will require all of us to not only work hard but thoughtfully as well.

If confirmed, I promise to advance the America First agenda throughout the United Kingdom and to build upon the special relationship that is so critical to both of our countries.

I want to thank my good friends Senator Boozman and Senator Cotton for their kind introductions. My home state of Arkansas is fortunate to have them represent us in the U.S. Senate because their subject matter expertise and their personalities are formidable complements.

As my senators referenced in their introductions, I count my family as my greatest blessing in life. I want to thank my family for their steadfast support and love throughout this process.

I would like to introduce them to the committee. My wife Harriet and I have been married for 43 years, throughout which is -- throughout which she has given me her unwavering support. She is the backbone of our family and I love her dearly.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

I am grateful that she is with me today and every day. Harriet and I have three adult children, Miles, John and Laura. All three of our children are married to wonderful people that Harriet and I consider to be our own -- Katie, Mary Olive, and Cliff.

Our children have blessed us with six grandchildren: Harvey, Rollins, Lillian, Parker, Caroline, and Warren. I am delighted that our son John, our daughter Laura and her husband Cliff Brookshire are also here with me today.

My father Jack and my uncle Witt instilled in me the value of hard work. These two brothers grew up on a farm in Prattville, Arkansas, and eventually established an investment banking firm during the Great Depression, buying bonds in default at 10 cents on the dollar.

My dad and Uncle Witt instilled in all with whom they worked the effort required to achieve success.

When I was 29 my father named me the CEO of Stephens Inc. For nearly 40 years I worked to grow the family business into a global financial institution. It gives me great pride that our children are now managing the firm.

I am confident they will continue to grow the business while maintaining the important principle of focusing on relationships and not just transactions.

That same commitment to building and maintaining relationships has been a cornerstone of my career and will be a guiding principle if I am confirmed to serve as the Ambassador to the U.K.

The United Kingdom is one of our closest allies. Our special relationship is built on shared interests and values, mutual respect, and a commitment to global security and prosperity.

Our collaboration spans every area, from defense to trade to cultural exchanges. The U.K. is a strong partner in tackling the toughest challenges throughout the world as the U.K. is a top contributor to NATO.

If confirmed, I will encourage the U.K. to lead on advancing plans for viable, long-term peace in Ukraine, which should be structured and paid for by Europe.

With regards to our friends in Northern Ireland, I will work closely with the U.K. government and all stakeholders as we abide by our promise to ensure Northern Ireland remains peaceful and stable to build upon the Good Friday Agreement.

Our partnership is clearly demonstrated by our deep economic relationship. The U.K. is a major bilateral economic partner with the United States.

However, it is critical that the American people receive the full benefit of this partnership. As ambassador, I will work to make this relationship fair, our ties even stronger, and ensure the Americans continue to be the people the U.K. depends upon as trusted business partners.

For decades I have been a proponent for a trade agreement with the United Kingdom and post-Brexit I believe it is even more critical that we arrive at such an agreement.

Any agreement should include public and private methods of raising capital. Our depth of capital markets and legal frameworks are very real assets and a great advantage we both have over the rest of the world and we should take advantage of it.

Our partnership with the U.K. is ripe with opportunities to make Americans safer and more prosperous, and I am eager to strengthen those connections.

I am deeply humbled by this nomination. I recognize the incredible legacy of the Americans who have been ambassadors to the court of St. James, five of whom later became U.S. presidents.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

So let me close with the words of the first of those appointees, John Adams, who said, quote, "Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives."

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, thank you again for this opportunity to appear before your committee, and I welcome your questions.

**[The prepared statement of Mr. Stephens follows:]**

**[COMMITTEE INSERT]**

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Mr. Stephens.

Mr. Fertitta?

**STATEMENT OF TILMAN FERTITTA, OF TEXAS, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC, AND TO SERVE CONCURRENTLY AND WITHOUT ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION AS AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF SAN MARINO**

**Mr. Fertitta:** Thank you so much.

Thank you so much, Senator Cornyn, Mark Kelly. Thank you for those kind words. Senator Cruz, always thank you for your guidance and leadership and advice even as late as 8:00 o'clock last -- 11:00 o'clock last night. So I very much appreciate it.

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, it is an honor to be with you today. I am President Trump's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to Italy and San Marino.

For this opportunity I am eternally grateful to President Trump and I am honored, if confirmed, to represent all Americans in such an important role.

I am joined today by my wife Lauren and family and so appreciate the support of my five children.

When my ancestors immigrated to the United States from Italy at the turn of the last century, there is no way they could have envisioned the opportunities that would come to our family as a result of hard work and determination.



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

From my very first restaurant I continued to grow, becoming a national leader in the industry with more than 60 award-winning concepts such as Catch, Mastro's, Martin's, Del Frisco's, The Palm, Oceanaire, and many more that I hope you all dine at, some of them here in Washington, D.C.

And today my company, through its hotels, entertainment and gaming divisions, I own approximately 600 properties in 36 states and 15 countries.

I am one of the largest employers in the nation with more than 50,000 employees and today I am fortunate to be the sole shareholder of one of the largest privately held companies in America.

I am also the proud owner of the Houston Rockets NBA basketball team which is currently second in the Western Conference.

During my lifetime in business I have taken two companies public, acquired six other public companies, and done over 40 major M&A transactions, as well as starring in the CNBC show "Billion Dollar Buyer," and also appearing regularly as a financial expert on many networks.

Along the way I have been guided by a pair of important life lessons. First, know your numbers. Numbers do not lie. This is particularly relevant when addressing the United States' \$44 billion trade deficit with Italy, which I will work closely with businesses in both countries to help close this gap.

And second, I do not ever think that your position is too high to teach others. I still teach every single day and perhaps even more important I learn as much, if not more, from others every day.

I am currently serving my twelfth year as chairman of the Board of Regents at the University of Houston system, where I have been so fortunate enough to give nearly \$90 million to create the Fertitta College of Medicine and the Fertitta Center where the men's

and women basketball teams play and where we get to watch the Houston Cougars in the Final Four this weekend.

We have been blessed to visit Italy numerous times over the years and I have long been an admirer of the country's culture, food, fashion, and true patriotic spirit, and no description of Italy would be complete without acknowledging the country's important role in the history of Western civilization, which has made it one of the most visited places in the world to this day.

The bond between our two countries is as strong as ever. The country is led by a phenomenal prime minister in Giorgia Meloni, who I have had the pleasure of meeting.

More than 2,500 American companies do business in Italy, making Italy a key economic ally, and the military and defense support we have received from the Italians over the decades has made Italy a key strategic ally.

Italy has provided robust support for Ukraine throughout the war and will host the Ukraine recovery conference in July.

If confirmed, one of my top priorities is to continue to encourage Italy to be fully engaged and aligned in the President's efforts to end the bloodshed in Ukraine and to build a sustainable peace.

Italy is a major investor in the Western Balkans with over \$10 billion in regional investments and is a key contributor to the European peacekeeping mission along with sending many troops.

If confirmed, I will encourage the government of Italy to continue its robust engagement in the Western Balkans to ensure regional stability.

Distinguished members of this committee and the full Senate, if confirmed I take the responsibility of being an ambassador at this crucial moment in history as the most important job of my life.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

You have my commitment and America has my commitment to always represent the United States and President Trump with dignity, pride, friendship, and strength, and I hope I can earn your support today.

Thank you all so very much.

**[The prepared statement of Mr. Fertitta follows:]**

**[COMMITTEE INSERT]**

**The Chairman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Fertitta.

I assure you that my colleagues work hard every day to keep your businesses open here in Washington.

[Laughter.]

**Mr. Fertitta:** Thank you, sir.

**The Chairman:** Mr. Barrack?

**STATEMENT OF THOMAS BARRACK, OF COLORADO, TO BE AMBASSADOR  
EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
TO THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY**

**Mr. Barrack:** Thank you, Senator Hagerty. First of all, thank you for that gracious introduction, for an amazing friendship, and for the inspiration you provide to all of us every day.

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. It is an honor to be nominated the United States Ambassador to Türkiye.

I am grateful to President Trump for the confidence and trust he has placed in me at this sensitive and challenging moment in a critically complex and globally important region that all of you deal with every day.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

I would like to thank my family for their unrelenting support, love, and sacrifice which affords me the opportunity to assume these responsibilities if fortunate enough to be confirmed by this esteemed group in this very important post.

With me today are my four of my six children -- Jodi, TJ, Brett, and Nicholas -- and my two youngest, Alaia and Jayden, are cheering from afar.

The strength and purity of their character is a piercing and timeless reflection of the dedication and unrelenting values of their moms.

A brief snapshot of my own journey, which is nothing more than a tribute to the American dream, lends to a tiny modicum of success that I may have achieved but has everything to do with the selection by fate itself of the intersection of a free, democratic, and embracing America with the DNA from an ancient cultural elixir of Lebanese and amazingly Ottoman culture.

The story of my family's journey to America from the very region to which I may return, if fortunate enough to be confirmed, renders me humbled and grateful. The rest is the story of America.

My father, grandfather, and our family lived and worked together running a small neighborhood grocery store in Culver City, California. It is the story of immigrants and it is the story of America.

Watching their lifetime of sacrifice and humility instilled in my sister and myself the gift of courage, resilience, compassion, gratitude, and a blind eye towards race or religion.

After a Jesuit education in law school I began working for a major U.S. law firm representing global engineering banks and construction companies in the Middle East.

I was based in the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, probably at a time before many of you were born. Each night I would go to a majlis of elders and sheepishly participate

drinking gahwa, which is Arabian coffee, listening to men sharing stories of politics, water, access, tribal disputes in business in a dialect I could not understand.

It was in those years in the Middle East that I found my true north point, tolerance and the gift of immersion and understanding the un-understandable.

Over the ensuing years I found in my business cadence that that was the key to whatever success that I could achieve in the company and the teams that I built in Colony Capital, which was a New York Stock Exchange international private equity firm.

Along the road I was blessed to have a stint in government under the reins of President Reagan where I learned the importance of the intersection of the executive and the legislative branch and the brilliance of the people working in the bureaucracy, the civil servants and the Foreign Service officers.

Now about Turkey. Turkey itself is our valued NATO partner, sitting at the most strategic crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

Türkiye's NATO contributions are numerous: one of NATO's largest militaries and naval fleets; hosts NATO assets such as an air base in LANDCOM and Izmir; a valued partner fight against ISIS.

Turkey has supported NATO's stance in support of Ukraine and has supply Ukraine with its well-admired Bayraktar drones as well as mediated the Black Sea grain initiative.

Türkiye regulates passage through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles under the Montreal Convention. Türkiye has met or exceeded President Trump's guidance for financial contributions for NATO.

Trade between our two countries can easily reach the shared goal of President Trump and President Erdogan to reach \$100 billion.

Turkey is a place of poetry and I would like to close with a combined poem from America and Türkiye. It relates to my own round trip.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

From Türkiye's sun-warmed Taurus Mountains to America's sprawling central plains, the cradle of our upbringing weaves a quiet tapestry of home, a breeze from the Bosphorus, hazelnuts dripping from the trees, tables of simit, cheese and olives, the tangy taste of sumac, the scent of sage tea, the soft aroma of burning oud wood. Yet, we roam far from the first tender echo of our heritage, a refuge shaped by the ways we were raised, the smells that stir within us, the flavors of an ancient being that we can still savor, all because we are allowed to bask in this beautiful, unbelievable, free, prosperous and secure America.

Thank you for your time. Thank you for your attention. I will relentlessly pursue for the country, for President Trump, for all of you, the goal of peace, prosperity and security should I have the good fortune of being confirmed by this body.

Thank you.

**[The prepared statement of Mr. Barrack follows:]**

**[COMMITTEE INSERT]**

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Mr. Barrack.

What we are going to do now is -- remarks from Senator Shaheen. Then we will go to a round of questions five minutes each.

This panel today is an important panel. It is one of the most important ones that we will see collectively.

Mr. Stephens, you will work with America's closest ally, and despite a few wars between us our culture and history are shared and deep during the most pressing challenges of the 20th century and since the U.K. has been the indispensable and steadfast partner.

Going forward, we have a number of issues where we need to deepen our relationship. Better trade, as you have noted, and defense cooperation are chief among them.

Of course, the alliance between the U.S. and the United Kingdom remains special and I recognize that the U.K. takes an enormous political and military risk on behalf of our collective interests.

But friends need to be candid with one another. While the U.K. has announced goals to spend 2.5 percent of GDP, European security requires a much higher level. While the U.K. can project meaningful combat power abroad, unlike most NATO allies, the British military is still too small.

The British defense industrial base is in disrepair and its defense spending is too low. We need to improve both our spending and defense development. AUKUS pillar two is designed to help address these concerns but the Biden administration's failure to implement the laws on the books regarding AUKUS has undermined these efforts.

I expect you will help improve the situation. I hope you will.

I would also note that foreign basing is important to the U.S. and the ongoing negotiations over Diego Garcia and the U.K. surrender of sovereignty undermines deterrence, which I and many others have stressed to them. I hope you will join us.

Mr. Fertitta, like the U.K., Italy remains a close ally and important partner in Europe, and it is a special place for a lot of Americans. More U.S. college students study abroad in Italy than anywhere else.

But while there are deep cultural ties there are a number of areas where improvements are needed. On trade, U.S. producers have a hard time getting access to the Italian market in part because of EU regulations but also because of domestic industries find creative barriers to keep U.S. products out. Not good.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**  
*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

In the security space Italy remains below NATO's 2 percent spending requirement. This is hard to understand based on both the challenges that Putin has created for European security but also due to the substantial security threats Italy faces from the Mediterranean and from North Africa.

While NATO should prioritize this area a bit more in NATO's planning, Italy should be spending more to help secure NATO's southern flank.

Mr. Barrack posed before us today Turkey is going to be the most challenging, which I am sure you probably already know. Turkey is critical -- is a critical U.S. and NATO ally but has been far from lockstep with America in supporting our mutual interests, not the least of which, of course, was when we were -- this entire committee was trying to get Sweden and Finland into NATO. They were a real barrier and, believe me, we went round and round with them but finally got the job done.

While Turkey hosts NATO and American forces and has supported efforts toward peace in Ukraine it has troubling ties with Russia and Hamas.

Turkey also has a difficult track record on human rights and has repressed dissent both in and outside of its borders. The recent arrest of an opposition candidate and crackdown against protesters and journalists are particularly concerning, and Turkey's role in Syria's security remains a question.

We all know Turkey can help stabilize Syria but we must ensure its actions do not undermine U.S. counterterrorism efforts or endanger the lives of U.S. troops in the region. I am open to working with Turkey to address long-standing American concerns and find a path forward but Turkey must remove some of these irritants.

I would especially highlight its ownership of Russian S-400 missiles that remain in Turkey's arsenal.



Mr. Barrack, I look forward to hearing your perspective on how to work with the Turkish government and encourage it to enhance cooperation with our NATO allies. The world faces enormous security challenges as Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran work together to undermine the United States and our alliances.

We need all our allies including the United Kingdom, Italy and, Turkey rowing in the same direction to counter the threats we face.

Working alongside President Trump's administration I hope our witnesses today will work to rebuild a credible deterrence and further strengthen our alliances.

Thank you.

Senator Shaheen?

**STATEMENT OF HON. JEANNE SHAHEEN,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE**

**Senator Shaheen:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to our nominees today and we are delighted to have your families here as well.

If confirmed, you will be representing the United States in Türkiye, Italy, and the United Kingdom -- three countries that are important NATO allies, strong supporters of Ukraine, and key to advancing American interests.

As you know, one of our greatest security assets is our alliances and I agree that we need to have our allies pay their fair share of defense spending.

To their credit, our allies have listened, at least most of them. More than 23 of 32 NATO allies are now meeting the 2 percent defense spending targets.

But U.S. support for these alliances is not charity. It is strategic investment in our own security.

Mr. Stephens, as you know, the U.S. and the U.K. share a historic and very special relationship, as you said in your opening statement. Today that alliance matters more than ever.

The U.K. is one of our biggest trading partners and last year we had a trade surplus of nearly \$12 billion. The U.K. also plays a critical role in the AUKUS agreement with Australia, helping to build our submarine base, which means high-quality American jobs and a strategic edge over China in the Indo-Pacific.

The U.K.'s role in NATO is also critical. It serves as a bridge between the U.S. and Europe.

And so, Mr. Stephens, if confirmed I hope you will continue to build on the U.S.-U.K. alliance.

Mr. Fertitta, you have been nominated to Italy, which plays an important role in shaping Europe and the broader region. Italy backed sanctions against Russia after Putin invaded Ukraine.

It supported efforts to stabilize the Western Balkans, and from managing migration across the Mediterranean to confronting Russia's influence in Africa Italy plays a critical role in securing NATO's southern flank.

As you pointed out, Prime Minister Meloni has a good relationship with the Trump administration. She was the only European leader to attend President Trump's inauguration.

And so if confirmed I hope you will continue to strengthen the ties between the United States and Italy.

Finally, Mr. Barrack, your nomination to lead our mission in Türkiye comes at a very delicate time, as we discussed when we met.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**  
*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

Many of us are concerned by the Turkish government's arrest of the mayor of Istanbul, who is a presidential candidate. We must continue raising issues like the detention of journalists and the violent crackdown on protesters.

You will also need to be attentive to Türkiye's interest in Syria. The Syria that emerges from the rubble of the Assad regime must be stable and inclusive. It cannot be allowed to become a launching ground for terrorist attacks against the U.S. and our allies.

And whether confronting Putin's aggression or managing the conflict in the Middle East, Türkiye is a critical ally. It controls access to the Black Sea and it has been vital in helping Ukraine such as facilitating the first Black Sea grain deal.

Mr. Barrack, if confirmed you certainly will have your work cut out for you. I look forward to hearing the thoughts and insights from all our nominees today.

Thank you.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Senator Shaheen. We will do a round of five-minute questions now.

I want to start, Mr. Stephens, with you. I do not know how familiar you are with the AUKUS agreement but it has been kicking around here for a while and there is a lot of us who worked hard to get where we are with it.

It has really breathed some life into our relationship with the Aussies and certainly underscored the importance of our relationship with Great Britain.

Can you give me your thoughts on AUKUS? I really think that in decades to come people will look back at AUKUS because I really think it has the potential of becoming a NATO like agreement for the Indo-Pacific.

Your thoughts?

**Mr. Stephens:** Senator Risch, thank you for that question.

I would agree with you. I think AUKUS has great potential. Now, what I have read is -- I have read about it is unclassified.

I know in my preparation for this hearing I have learned a lot of acronyms, one of them being -- I believe it is ITAR, the transfer of technology, and that seems to be, let us say, a roadblock to helping that AUKUS really get going.

I know there is very sensitive things involved in it and if I am confirmed I look forward to learning more about that and helping find ways that we can address those issues.

But I agree with you. I think AUKUS has great, great potential not only for the U.S.-U.K. shipbuilding industry and the Australian shipbuilding industry but as a deterrent in the Pacific.

**The Chairman:** You are right about ITAR. It is caused some difficulty that it should not be causing. It is a rub between what we believe -- we, the first branch of government -- believes ITAR is and what the previous second branch of government -- previous administration thought it should be.

There is a lot of classified information you will get after you are confirmed in that regard and I hope you will put it to good use and get those barriers out of the way so we can continue to move AUKUS forward.

Mr. Barrack, that -- Turkey is the most challenging ally, and I use that word cautiously when talking about Turkey. They are doing some things that are just awful.

I have gone round and round with Erdogan head to head on things that he has done, not the least of which is putting the S-400s in his country. I personally held up the F-35s that he purchased. They are still sitting here in the United States. They have been paid for.

But I have told him they are not moving until those S-400s are gone from Turkey. He has -- when we have given him a couple of off ramps which he has not taken. They are a real problem, and they are a member of NATO and we have to deal with them.

I wish you well as you go forward with them. We have had a number of ambassadors that have been interesting from Turkey as we have gone along.

Have you had any contact with the Turkish government over your career or in recent times as you are getting ready for this?

**Mr. Barrack:** Thank you, Senator Risch.

Yes, I have had contact dealing as a businessman within Türkiye where I gained great respect, by the way, for the entrepreneurs, for the business, for our trade opportunities. It is the Spice Road. It has a history of dealing with other cultures.

I think the key to all of this is for us to once and for all look at the opportunity as a one-government process, not an event picking away at various issues.

My goal would be that we create what our priorities are, what the message is. Understand from the Türkiye government what their priorities and message is, and we create a firm and structured process to actually get those things done.

I think the President's message of peace, prosperity, and security is also a message for the Türkiye population. We have lots of wood to cut and my hope is that a combined executive-legislative basis will allow our teams -- our mission on the ground -- to do what they do best in diplomacy.

**The Chairman:** I do not think the Turkish population is the problem, to be honest with you. I think the problems and the issues there go to a lot higher level than what the population is.

But I wish you well. You have quite a challenge.

Senator Shaheen?

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**  
*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

**Senator Shaheen:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Stephens, I understand and the committee understands that there are some pending issues regarding your taxes. I appreciate your willingness to cooperate and provide additional details prior to confirmation.

Do I have your commitment to continue to work with the committee on that?

**Mr. Stephens:** Well, thank you, Senator for that question, and absolutely you have my commitment to continue to work with that or any other issue that comes to your office or to this committee.

**Senator Shaheen:** Thank you.

Mr. Fertitta, you mentioned in your opening statement the Western Balkans, an issue near and dear to my heart. As you pointed out, Italy has been an important U.S. partner in dealing with issues in the Western Balkans and they are a member of the Quint -- the U.S., U.K., France, Germany and Italy.

The Quint often plays a pivotal role in aligning U.S. and European approaches to crises in the Western Balkans.

Now, understanding that the administration is somewhat skeptical of multilateral diplomacy, if confirmed will you commit to doing your part to maintain this important informal mechanism for diplomatic coordination?

**Mr. Fertitta:** Thank you for that question, Senator.

Absolutely. For sure we know how important the Western Balkans is to Italy but it is also important to the United States of America, and I will for sure continue to make sure that America supports the Western Balkans along with the Republic of Italy.

**Senator Shaheen:** And given the tensions that are heightened right now between Serbia and Kosovo and also in Bosnia-Herzegovina, having as much diplomacy and interest and focus on what is happening there as possible is important. Would you agree?

**Mr. Fertitta:** Totally agree, and America appreciates Italy's stepping up because when other countries step up sometimes it makes it where we do not have to step up everywhere like America so often has to do. So we are very thankful for them stepping up like they have in this situation.

**Senator Shaheen:** I agree.

Mr. Barrack, as I said, we had a very helpful meeting yesterday and I found out that your story and your family's story is very much like my husband's family's story. So I certainly appreciated the connection to Türkiye and the story about the journey to America and the ability to build on the American dream.

I also raised an issue that we have been paying attention to in New England because it involves a Tufts student from Turkey who is a graduate student at Tufts who was arrested in the middle of the day by two ICE agents who were masked. They took her into custody and whisked her off to a prison in Louisiana.

Now, if you are confirmed as ambassador and you are in Türkiye and the Turkish authorities arrest an American student living legally in Türkiye, in that way what would be your response as ambassador?

**Mr. Barrack:** Senator, first of all, thank you for being so generous with your time and your staff's time. It was informative, illustrative, and inspirational. I really appreciate it.

Hypothetical questions are very difficult. My emotional and compassionate response to everybody who is in the midst of what we are finding in these very difficult immigration issues everywhere is that personal consequence is something that that I cannot opine over because I do not have access to all the facts.

But I can tell you that if an American is violated in any aspect with any of their rights, duties, and freedoms in any country, especially if I have the great opportunity to represent America, it is just unacceptable.

**Senator Shaheen:** Well, let me ask you, though, Mr. Barrack, because I and some other members of this committee worked on a case of Pastor Brunson who was a North Carolina pastor -- I think he was a Presbyterian pastor -- who had been living legally in Türkiye for over 20 years. Had been practicing his faith with the church and he was arrested by Türkiye, I believe, unlawfully.

He was held for, I think, almost years in a prison in Türkiye and I and a lot of people on this committee and throughout the Senate and the government of the United States worked very hard to get him released because he was inappropriately being held.

Do you not agree that that it is important for us to ensure that American citizens are protected when they are in other countries and that if they are unlawfully detained that they should be -- that we should advocate for their release?

**Mr. Barrack:** Senator, absolutely, and I think in that particular instance you and President Trump did a fantastic job of drawing a very hard line to the Türkiye government and the result was fantastic.

My attitude is that it is a process on all of these humanitarian rights that has to constantly be enforced. It is not an event.

It takes a strong hand from all of you, from President Trump, who absolutely has strong two hands, and I look forward to the opportunity of being able to be an intermediary in delivering that message.

**Senator Shaheen:** And as ambassador you will speak up for human rights in Türkiye and certainly for the rights of American citizens, I assume?



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

**Mr. Barrack:** Senator, I will speak up always for the Constitution, for peace, prosperity and security, and I will do the best that I can in whatever capacity that I am in to protect the rights of American citizens in Türkiye.

**Senator Shaheen:** Thank you. I have questions for the other -- our other nominees but I will save those for the next round. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Senator Hagerty:** [Presiding.] Thank you, Ranking Member Shaheen.

Next, I am going to call on Senator McCormick.

**Senator McCormick:** Thank you, Senator Hagerty and Ranking Member Shaheen, and congratulations to the three of you and to your families, and thank you for your willingness to serve.

Mr. Barrack, good to see you. We have known each other for a long time, and I think you are taking on a particularly challenging assignment.

And I remember more than 30 years ago traveling throughout Turkey and then traveling across the border -- after I left the Army across the border from Turkey into Syria at Antakya and what you see are these incredibly porous borders, of course, and enormous borders.

And we see that playing out today with Türkiye and proxy forces having a significant presence in Syria and those forces have aligned themselves, as you know, with the new Syrian government, which -- the governing authority in Damascus, which is led by a U.S. designated foreign terrorist organization.

So how can the United States leverage its relationship with Türkiye to address our counterterrorism concerns in Syria?

**Mr. Barrack:** Thanks, Senator McCormick, and as you know, I have been a great fan and I am honored to be here with you today.

I think out of chaos comes opportunity. What we all agree upon is that the receding of the Assad regime in Syria provides an opportunity to rid ourselves of a Shi'a crescent on Israel's behalf, on America's behalf, on Türkiye's behalf, and to eliminate an Islamic state.

But the Rubik's cube of issues that -- with which we are confronted is enormous. We have 10,000 ISIS prisoners. We have 35,000 members of their families.

We have the confusion of a YPG, which consists of a portion of the PPK, which both Türkiye and we have assigned as a terrorist group but has been instrumental in helping us in eliminating ISIS.

We have Israel and the Golan Heights who has a vested interest in making sure that that border and the protection of its Druze population is not infiltrated by Russia, by Iran, or, in fact, by Türkiye.

So I intend to try and cause a discussion amongst ourselves and others to create the architecture of a Syria policy. Quite honestly, we do not have one at the moment.

And in that regard, again, I think we have an opportunity in which all of the surrounding countries, all the vested interests in Gaza, Israel, Ukraine and Russia, present an opportunity for everybody to sit at a table and say, this is the moment, and that is my hope.

**Senator McCormick:** Thank you.

Mr. Stephens, welcome, and the Stephens family, welcome.

You are taking on an assignment here where both President Trump and the prime minister have spoken about the opportunity for further economic ties, growing the economic relationship.

You spend a lot of time in London, a lot of time in the U.K. Where do you see the most promising opportunities for deepening those economic ties?

**Mr. Stephens:** Senator McCormick, thank you for that question and I also want to thank you for the time you have given me in preparing or since this process started.

One of the things I have been told by friends and colleagues in Britain is their biomedical research is probably ahead of ours. They have been able to do some things that we have not been able to do, and I think there could be a great opportunity to explore there.

There is also a movement -- not a movement. There is an opportunity to mine tin in Cornwall, which was historically the backbone of that economy that they think with new and improved methods they can restart that industry.

They, obviously, will need investment to do that and I think that is an opportunity for U.S. companies to help provide that capital, if not provide it.

But those two come to mind. I mentioned in my opening statements the ability to raise capital both in the U.S. and in the U.K. and that we should take advantage of that. I have mentioned that to several people in the administration or incoming into the administration and they seem to think that is a great idea. So those three I think are the ones that come to my mind right away.

**Senator McCormick:** Very good.

When you are thinking -- when you are over there in your new posting and you are thinking about bio sciences, life sciences and opportunity I want you to think about Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania has an enormous life sciences industry. Southeast Pennsylvania, it is really a hotbed of innovation. There is opportunity there.

Thank you very much.

**Mr. Stephens:** Thank you, sir.

**Senator Hagerty:** Senator Rosen, please?

**Senator Rosen:** Well, thank you, Senator Hagerty.

I want to thank Chair Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, for holding the hearing today. I want to thank all of our witnesses for your willingness to serve and for being here today as well.

I want to -- Mr. Barrack, I want to start with you first. As you may know, Turkey refused to condemn Hamas for its horrific terror attack on Israel. It does not consider Hamas a terrorist organization and has provided safe haven for senior Hamas leadership.

What is more important is that Turkey's relationship with Israel has deteriorated significantly under President Erdogan, who weaponizes anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiment to advance his domestic policy interests.

So, Mr. Barrack, given all of this, how would you if confirmed work to ensure that Turkey stops being a sanctuary for Hamas and take steps to improve the security environment in the broader region including by taking steps to improve its relationship with Israel?

**Mr. Barrack:** Senator, thank you for that piercing and complex question.

If I were given the opportunity, my attitude is to provide constant dialog, constant pressure, constant consistent focus of what our desire is with the government.

The policies and practices that are set forth are to be implemented, if I am fortunate enough to be in that position, by our mission. That direction, those practices, those policies, will be governed by the President of the United States and by this esteemed body.

**Senator Rosen:** Well, let me expand on this a little bit about Turkey's role in Syria.

So according to multiple reports Turkey is continuing to assess the suitability of locations inside Syria to potentially establish a military base.

I am concerned that a more robust Turkish presence in Syria will pose significant challenges for Israel and for our Kurdish allies, and must be addressed.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**  
*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

So how will you work to address the Turkish presence in Syria?

**Mr. Barrack:** Senator, at this point I only have available to me what I read in nonclassified information, and I am not evading the question. I am trying to be responsive. I just do not have the facts yet.

**Senator Rosen:** Would you be willing to work with us on that?

**Mr. Barrack:** Absolutely, Senator.

**Senator Rosen:** Thank you.

I want to get to you now, Mr. Stephens, to talk about the Five Eyes.

I have asked a very similar question to Ambassador Hoekstra earlier this month. I would like to hear your thoughts as well.

The Five Eyes alliance is one of the most successful intelligence sharing alliances in the world. It has been key. It has been key to the success of our military responses including in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan.

And yet, the Trump administration has taken actions that have caused our allies to reconsider what information can be shared with the United States.

So, Mr. Stephens, the Five Eyes alliance is based on a high level -- a high level of mutual trust. So do you think it makes us safer, stronger, or more secure if our partners and allies decide to scale back the intelligence they share with us out of concern that they cannot trust the United States?

**Mr. Stephens:** Well, thank you, Senator, for that.

**Senator Rosen:** I will ask you the follow-up, too. How will you make sure that we are resilient and Five Eyes remains operational -- excuse me?

**Mr. Stephens:** Well, I am not aware of our allies in Five Eyes in particular scaling back any of the information they share with us but I am --

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**  
*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

**Senator Rosen:** What would you base that on? Because it appears that they have been a little nervous about sharing information with us in light of recent events.

**Mr. Stephens:** Well, I was referring to, perhaps something, that is classified that I have not been able to read.

All I have been able to read is the unclassified importance of Five Eyes and I think the Five Eyes goes back, basically starting with the U.K. and the U.S., to World War II and was critical and in the allies prevailing, and I think both the U.K. and the U.S. realize that that is one of the key components of our special relationship and I hope I can help strengthen that.

I am unaware of any reluctance to share intelligence in the Five Eyes. But if that turns out to be the case, I would certainly do what I could to not -- to assure them that that they do not need to be withholding any information or they should not.

**Senator Rosen:** Well, I think that will be something that we will have to talk about probably once you are confirmed.

I just want to talk, Mr. Fertitta, just a little bit about infrastructure in the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean Sea contains an array of underwater cables.

They connect Europe, Africa and Asia, and as the competition across the region intensifies we really have to protect this critical infrastructure from malign actors -- Russia, the PRC. It is more important than ever.

So if confirmed how will you work with the Italians, who play a critical role in the Mediterranean to strengthen their military capabilities and support of bolstering deterrence along NATO's southern flank?

**Mr. Fertitta:** Italy and the United States both realize how important this is and so much moves under water today as it does in space, and America realizes that -- not only

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**  
*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

Italy but all of the NATO countries how important it is to continue to be so supportive of this and protecting it from our enemies.

And I will truly work hard with the Italian government to assure how important it is to America and we will make sure that if there is any issues whatsoever I will be on top of it.

**Senator Rosen:** Thank you.

**Senator Hagerty:** Senator Daines?

**Senator Daines:** Chairman, thank you. I am just struck by the quality of the nominees that President Trump has put forward to be our ambassadors across the board and you -- the three of you are examples, again, of extraordinarily qualified business leaders with business experience to represent our great country around the world. So thank you. Thank you for doing this.

I will start with Mr. Barrack. One of the primary responsibilities of an ambassador is working to develop a positive trade and economic relationship between the United States and their assigned post.

If confirmed, how do you plan to work with Turkey to advance U.S. trade relations?

**Mr. Barrack:** Thank you, Senator. Thanks for the time that you spent with me to visit. I really enjoyed it and I am looking forward to visiting the Boozman stampede.

Türkiye is a great opportunity. It was the pulse beat and the heartbeat of the Spice Road and the Silk Road. It was always the center of interconnection of cultures, of religions, of races and trade that was going from East to West and vice versa and my belief is that it can once again be a new Spice Road in energy, transport, manufacturing and defense.

As Senator Risch indicated, we have lots of issues that we have to chop through in order to get there, energy being one of the key starters.

Türkiye itself is at a deficit of energy but has been a large importer of liquefied natural gas, which originally came through Russia through three specific pipelines.

With the current war and upsets in Ukraine, it started to rely on the U.S. So 60 percent of the LNG is now coming from Cheniere, Exxon and Mobil from the U.S.

Amazingly, Türkiye as a new Spice Road can be a reshipping terminal through its free-floating gas distribution terminals as a hub for more gas to Europe, which also provides Europe with another shield to Russian intervention.

Defense, aerospace, media are all areas that in partnerships with American companies, which is also a strategic international interface to keep China and the Belt and Road Initiative away for a while, is the opportunity.

So I believe that we can reach the stated goal of President Trump and President Erdogan to try and get to \$100 billion in shared trade on a bilateral basis a year. We are at about \$40 billion today.

**Senator Daines:** Barrack, thank you.

Mr. Fertitta, Mr. Barrack brought up energy and I want to talk about that a little bit as it relates to Italy. But I will say I was very happy to see Prime Minister Meloni's recent comments dismissing the idea that Italy has to choose between President Trump and Europe.

I completely agree that Italy can cultivate a better relationship with the United States and with Europe at the same time, and I think that will be an important role that you will have as our ambassador, if confirmed.

But regarding energy, Italy has several floating storage and regasification units. Probably -- maybe it is only fitting or divine providence that a guy from Houston, arguably one of the energy capitals of the world anymore, will be our next Ambassador to Italy.

How could Italy partner with the United States to ensure energy security?



**Mr. Fertitta:** First off, thank you so much for that, Senator. Prime Minister Meloni continues to speak out and show what an ally of the United States that she is and we truly appreciate that as a country.

Next, from an energy standpoint we would love for Italy to do a lot more business with our American companies and not buy so much energy from Libya and other countries, and this is something that, you know, I have thought about tremendously and in talking to Houston oil companies.

I look forward to bringing the two together, knowing so many of the CEOs that are in the Houston area, to meet with the Italian government and their energy department to see what we can do to create more business and take that trade gap from \$45 billion to make it a lot less.

We should be doing a lot more business with the Italian government, sir.

**Senator Daines:** Thanks for that answer. You know, we have seen what has happened in Europe, certainly, since the Ukraine invasion how important energy security is and ties right to national security and the world to be a lot safer if that relation with the United States and these other countries is stronger at least to energy and trade.

My final question here for Mr. Stephens. The U.K. has long been one of the U.S.' closest defense and intelligence partners. Their partnership truly is a force multiplier for our capabilities around the world.

I am about out of time here so I will make my question short. Could you please speak to the importance of the United States fulfilling its commitments to the U.K. foreign military sales?

**Mr. Stephens:** Well, thank you, Senator Daines, and, again, I appreciate the time you have given me as this process has gone on.

The U.S. and U.K. -- and Chairman Risch mentioned it with AUKUS -- I mean, we are doing our best as a country, I think, and I think the Trump administration is, to grow closer militarily to the U.K.

I know the -- I do not know the specifics of our commitments to the -- to provide the British military with their needs.

I know just from reading what I can the British military says they are -- while they are trying to increase their defense spending to two and a half percent of GDP it should be three. I know President Trump thinks it should be more and I would not argue with that.

But I think the -- in my view, Senator, unless it involves some double secret, triple secret technology that we just do not want to share I would urge the United States to fulfill every commitment it has to provide the U.K. with the weapons and the systems that it needs.

**Senator Daines:** Thank you.

**Senator Hagerty:** I will take the next question round, Ranking Member Shaheen.

First, I just want to make a very basic point and that is the responsibilities that you all will bear if you are confirmed as our U.S. ambassadors to each of your respective countries is one of the greatest weights you will ever carry on your shoulders because you will represent the greatest nation in the world.

You will be the senior American in your host country and, again, those countries are looking to you to represent America.

First, I would like to start with you, Tom, to talk about Turkey. I think Turkey finds itself at a very interesting crossroads.

On the one hand, given their location, they find themselves deeply involved in the Ukraine-Russia conflict, and on the other hand they are also playing a major role in the Middle East.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

Specifically, we had conversations earlier about what is taking place in Syria. I think it is going to require a very deft approach, a very capable approach, and I would love to hear your comments about how you are looking forward to or how you envision managing the relationship in Turkey as you navigate these dual challenges.

**Mr. Barrack:** Thanks, Senator. I hope that if I am fortunate enough to have that job that I could do it as elegantly as you conducted the ambassadorship in Japan. The Türkiye situation in Ukraine is a great example of the push and pull of what we need to do.

Türkiye supplied Ukraine with its famous Bayraktar TB2 drones at the very beginning of the conflict. It negotiated and mediated the Ukraine grain deal and it consistently maintains the Montreux Treaty on the access of ships, warships, cargo ships up and down the Black Sea.

Syria has been a constant thorn in the entire region's side. The policy that is in front of all of us with Syria is undecided. I do not have access to any classified information as to what our policy is but I think the process has to be a total government solution, and part of my job, if I am fortunate enough to be selected, is to bring all the counterparts together and say what is our policy with regard to all of these issues?

It is impossible agency by agency for the executive branch on one hand, the legislative branch on the other hand, to be negotiating these issues for decades.

So I think we have an opportunity out of all of the plethora of crises we have around us to have everybody feel an urgency to actually getting something done.

So my attitude is to serve at the will of President Trump and this body to try and stir and create an architecture of some thoughts of viable solutions along with all of the constituencies who have been delegated that responsibility, and then to execute swiftly

and promptly with the idea that we do not have time. Diplomacy is the last stop between blood on the boots, and that would be my attitude.

**Senator Hagerty:** Thank you. I am going to move quickly to you, Warren.

First, I would like to comment on the issues that have been raised with the Five Eyes and to make a very clear and obvious statement. You have an incredible role to play in the relationship as ambassador. I would encourage you to do what I did when I was ambassador and have a regular meeting. I did it every month.

I had a breakfast every meeting with my Five Eye counterparts and worked very aggressively to make certain that we stayed united in a critical region at that time, which was the Indo-Pacific.

You will have the access to the information that you need and you will have an ability to create that type of bond.

I will also say this. The United States has an incredibly disproportionate information advantage because of the breadth and extent of our defense posture around the world.

So we will be in a place where I think every one of our allies will want to cooperate with us and I am certain that you can encourage that.

With respect to the Five Eyes piece as well, one concern I have specifically about the U.K., which I think has been addressed but it has to do with information sharing, and that has been the integrity of their communication systems.

We talked extensively about the presence of Huawei, ZTE, and other similarly situated technologies. I would encourage you to take a very hard look and make certain that the systems are clean and capable of communicating with us.

Also, foreign military sales were raised. That is a tremendous opportunity for us to tighten our bonds with our allies like the U.K.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

I would encourage you to go in as soon as possible, to get your arms around what the foreign military sales process looks like there, and look for ways to improve that in terms of collaborative efforts and activities.

And then, finally, with respect to AUKUS I understand the question from Chairman Risch that you are limited in what you can say right now, but I would encourage you to support that every way you can and if you see opportunities for us to be supportive back here on this committee I think you have got broad support here for seeing that relationship thrive and grow, particularly when it comes to procurement processes and joint R&D. To the extent we can be helpful back here to make that happen I would encourage that.

And, Tilman, I would like to come to you and just express a concern that came to me in 2019. I vividly recall the Italian Ambassador to Japan coming to me to tell me that Italy was going to enter China's Belt and Road Initiative.

I think Italy suffered tremendously through the pandemic. I think Italy has had a very challenging time dealing with China.

Yet, at the same time in 2023 even though they pulled out of the Belt and Road Initiative -- and I thought that was that was a wise move -- they have now entered into some type of bilateral initiative with President Xi Jinping to deepen economic cooperation.

My concern is that creates yet another economic lever that the CCP can utilize either against an ally like Italy or against the EU, and I would look forward to any comment you might have with respect to how you are going to treat the China challenge in your new position should you be confirmed.

**Mr. Fertitta:** Thank you so much for that comment, Senator.

You know, I was glad to see that they withdrew from the Belt and Road in 2023 and I am concerned that there is still 11 Chinese service centers set up around Italy, and they are not willing to speak too strongly against China.

But what I do feel is their number-one ally is the United States of America. It is something that I am going to monitor extremely closely.

I think all countries, for some reason, want to keep their foot in the door with China. It is something that all countries besides Italy need to monitor very closely, and as ambassador over there if confirmed it is something that I will get up every single day and worry about to make sure we remain their number-one ally.

**Senator Hagerty:** Thank you, and thanks to the entire panel for their presence here today and I wish you the very best of luck, and Godspeed should you be confirmed.

Senator Van Hollen?

**Senator Van Hollen:** Thank you, Senator.

Congratulations to all of you.

Mr. Barrack, it was good to talk to you the other day in my office and appreciate all the issues that we covered there.

One of the issues that we discussed was the fact that President Erdogan recently arrested his major political rival, the mayor of Istanbul.

He did it the very day the mayor of Istanbul declared that he was going to be a presidential candidate for the major opposition party. Thousands and thousands of people have taken to the streets, over 2,000 Turks detained there.

So I was looking to see if the Trump administration had said much of anything about this and I saw that Secretary Rubio was asked about it and, frankly, his answer made it sound like he was channeling President Erdogan.

He did not talk about democracy. He did not talk about human rights. He talked about stability. We want stability.

Well, of course, we want stability but stability is always the priority of authoritarian leaders. Stability is the priority of dictators, and what has set America apart is that we have also been full throated in our support for democracy and human rights. To see him channeling President Erdogan's sort of defense of this action I found extremely troubling but maybe not surprising.

Donald Trump has called Erdogan a hell of a leader, and it appears that this is the kind of leader that Donald Trump appreciates, those that sort of disregard the law. And I was thinking -- I know Senator Shaheen raised this -- that if you are President Erdogan and you are watching what is happening to this Turkish student at Tufts who is whisked off the street by individuals who have no identifying uniforms, some of them in masks, and literally disappeared to Louisiana because of something she said or wrote about what is happening in Gaza this is something that Erdogan will see and say -- he will be unhappy that it was a Turkish student but he will say, you see, that is what they are doing right there in America, and it is hard to argue with him.

So I do not have a question on this part, Mr. Barrack, but I hope you will take that back because when we start channeling Erdogan's defense of locking up the mayor and say, this is all about stability -- we just want stability, hell, those 2,000 demonstrators let us just lock them all up that is not what United States has stood for, in my mind, and I do not think it is what we stood for in yours.

I certainly hope not, and whisking away a student -- as you know, visitors to this country, yes, they are privileges but they are protected by the First Amendment and there is no evidence that that First Amendment protection should not exist in this case.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**  
*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

So I know that the chairman, Senator Risch, asked you about the F-35s or made it very clear that it is a bipartisan position, has been, that Turkey under CAATSA should not get the F-35s because they have the S-400s. You understand that is a bipartisan view, right?

Just a simple yes or no.

**Mr. Barrack:** Senator, there -- and I am not evading the -- and thank you, by the way, for the discussion we had because I found it stimulating and a lot to think about for all of this for sure.

S-400s has been an issue that you have dealt with, this body has dealt with, that the previous administration has dealt with. It was dealt with since the acquisitions in 2016.

**Senator Van Hollen:** Mr. Barrack, I am interrupting you. I apologize. It was good to meet with you in the office so we could discuss these things at greater length but I have a very short amount of time.

So my question was whether you recognize that preventing the transfer of the F-35s pursuant to CAATSA was a bipartisan view. I will let it lay if you do not want to give a direct yes or no.

**Mr. Barrack:** No, Senator, I am aware that CAATSA 231 specifically requires very detailed legislative intervention and is not simply an executive decision.

**Senator Van Hollen:** I appreciate that, because I wanted in my remaining time to talk about Syria, and we had a good conversation with Syria.

As I said, I think the risks of not trying to seize this opportunity are great. We can always reimpose sanctions but -- and, obviously, Turkey has a major role to play, including with respect to the Syrian Kurds.



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**  
*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

So my final question to you is would you agree that our Syrian Kurdish allies have been essential partners for the United States in the fight against ISIS?

**Mr. Barrack:** Senator, quite honestly, I do not really have any information to affirm or deny any of it, and it is such a sensitive issue that I would defer to the executive branch and the policies, practices and procedures of this body, to make those determinations. It is not within my wheelhouse.

**Senator Van Hollen:** Which one? I am sorry. The Syrian --

**Mr. Barrack:** The determination -- to repeat your question, for me to render an opinion on the value of whichever Kurdish entity we are talking about if I could ask you to be --

**Senator Van Hollen:** The SDF. Syrian Democratic Forces.

**Mr. Barrack:** Yeah. It is -- I just do not have the information to take that apart.

**Senator Van Hollen:** Okay. Well, thank you, and I see my time is out. But I think, again, on a bipartisan basis it is a shared view.

Certainly, I have teamed up with Senator Graham on legislation on this, that we need to make sure that our -- we do not throw our Syrian Kurdish friends and allies and partners under the bus.

**Mr. Barrack:** Yes, sir.

**Senator Van Hollen:** Thank you.

**Senator Hagerty:** Senator Shaheen, I will turn to you.

**Senator Shaheen:** Thank you. I know we are running long but I do have a few more questions, and I would just -- to follow up on the Syrian Democratic Forces I did have a chance to visit Syria in 2018 with Senator Graham and during the first Trump administration, and we heard very strongly from our military leaders in Syria about the importance of the SDF to our mission there.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**  
*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

So I do not -- again, I think that is something that generally has bipartisan support and agreement and -- agreement from our military leaders. So I do not think we should feel uncomfortable about acknowledging that.

I had the opportunity to say that also to President Erdogan, and while he did not agree with me he listened to what I had to say.

I want to go back to you, Mr. Stephens, because if confirmed you would serve as the Ambassador to the United Kingdom. But President Trump has also appointed a special envoy, Mark Burnett, someone who is reported to also be a close personal friend of the President, to serve as a special envoy.

So, if confirmed, can you talk a little bit about how you would work with Mr. Burnett and President Trump to ensure that you are not overlapping efforts and duplicating the work that you are trying to do with the U.K.?

**Mr. Stephens:** Well, thank you, Senator. I think both Mark Burnett, the special envoy that you -- that you mentioned --

**Senator Shaheen:** Do you know Mr. Burnett?

**Mr. Stephens:** I have met him. We are not friends but I have met him briefly. He, frankly, seems very nice. We have stayed in touch as much as we can.

But the bottom line is we both -- if I am confirmed, we both will be representing the President and the United States, but I will be the ambassador.

I am nominated to be the ambassador and I am confident that I can work with, really, all of the embassy in the U.K. and Special Envoy Burnett to further the U.S. agenda and the President's agenda.

**Senator Shaheen:** Well, thank you, and I have no doubt that that is the case, given your history of running your business. I guess my concern is more how you

envision the responsibilities being delineated between those two roles so that the British are not confused about what we are doing.

**Mr. Stephens:** Well, thank you again for that, Senator. I really do not know what the envoy has -- special envoy has been doing but I do not envision divvying up of responsibilities.

I envision it to be my responsibility, and to the extent Mark has been working on things and can be helpful and useful I will certainly engage him with that. But I will also use all of the members of the staff at the embassy to do the same.

**Senator Shaheen:** Thank you.

The United Kingdom has consistently shown leadership on Ukraine since Russia's illegal invasion and I think especially true now as there is a concern about how negotiations roll out in ending that war.

Can you speak to what you believe is the importance of Ukraine's future to the U.K. and the rest of Europe?

**Mr. Stephens:** Well, Senator, I think the first order of business is to stop the killing in Ukraine, and it has been a vicious, vicious war. I think any time any country can attack another one and get away with it it sets a very bad example for the rest of the world.

And so I think finding a way to end the conflict as quickly and as equitably as we can will allow the rebuilding process in Ukraine to begin and the U.K. has been a leader not only in providing them with weapons and support -- military support -- but also humanitarian aid and others. But they have also taken the lead on these reconstruction talks that are beginning.

And so I think U.K. and all of Europe see Ukraine as a very, very important part of their future and how this ends is extremely important to them as it is to the United States.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**  
*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

**Senator Shaheen:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Senator Hagerty:** Thank you, Ranking Member Shaheen.

Next, I will call on Senator Ricketts.

**Senator Ricketts:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ranking Member, for this hearing.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit a March 20th Economist article entitled, "Europe needs to spend more on defense, not pretend to."

**Senator Hagerty:** Without objection.

**[The information follows:]**

**Senator Ricketts:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Lately, one of the things that I have heard common -- a common theme in Europe is that Europe recognizes they have to do more for their own defense.

Certainly, Poland and the Baltic states have been doing that for years, and currently countries like Germany have taken bold steps to be able to start spending more on their own defense.

However, we still have not gotten the message out to some countries. As the EU grapples with exempting member states' defense spending from fiscal restrictions, some appear more concerned by what they can reclassify as defense spending rather than actually spend on military readiness.

Spain, for example, has argued that defense spending should include broader civil defense costs such as climate change while Italy has said that measures related to economic competitiveness should count.

Last time I checked you actually need hard assets like bullets to be able to shoot. You cannot shoot climate change at anybody.

Now, I realize defense spending is not just a matter of percent of GDP. It is not the only panacea. For example, Italy hosts 30,000 military personnel and their families as well as the Navy's Sixth Fleet in Naples.

However, when countries which still have not met the 2 percent NATO target that was set over a decade ago resort to accounting tricks to weaken our collective defense it makes my position in support of the transatlantic alliance more difficult.

Mr. Fertitta, President Trump has called on our NATO allies to get to 5 percent of their GDP on defense. If confirmed, what actions will you take to ensure Italy not only meets but exceeds the 2 percent NATO -- and is committed to making serious investments in their defense capabilities?

**Mr. Fertitta:** Thank you so much for that question, Senator.

Italy, like so many of the NATO countries, are trying to use some fuzzy math to get to their 2 percent, and I hope one day we could get them all to 5 percent.

Italy has always been one that -- has been an ally that was one of the first to always send troops when we need them, to send them somewhere, and they like to count that. And I do respect that from Italy that they step up, and we should give them some credit for that.

They were at 1.5 percent. They are at 1.6 percent. They also spend a lot on migration with the issues of having Tunisia and Libya, and even having an island just 70 miles off the coast of Tunisia where they have had to set up processing centers in Albania and put so many patrol boats in that area to stop the migration, but protects all of Europe, not just Italy.

So where I understand some of their elements of saying our 1.6 percent is maybe enough it is absolutely not enough and it is something with -- I have got to sit down with

their government and work with them and understand their budget more so, especially their defense budget if they will share it with me and help them to increase their 1.6.

We have got to get it at 2 percent. It is something in my term there that is a personal goal of mine to get them from the 1.5, 1.6 to 2 percent by the time that I have served the government there for the United States.

So I just want you to know it is on my radar screen and I plan to do whatever I can do to help get us there.

**Senator Ricketts:** Great. Thank you, Mr. Fertitta. I appreciate that. I certainly agree with the other comments you made about Italy but we do need them to be giving 2 percent.

Diego Garcia is the largest island in the Chagos Archipelago. Has been home to a strategic joint U.S.-U.K. military base for decades.

Given its key location and it is in British territory the base is critical to U.S. air and naval operations in the Indo-Pacific. In fact, just last week we deployed B-2 stealth bombers from Diego Garcia to deter further Iranian malign aggression.

Despite this and with the backing of the Biden administration the U.K. struck a deal last October to transfer Chagos to Mauritius.

The deal was sold as protecting British and American interests under the guise that the U.K. would retain control of Diego Garcia for an additional 99-year period.

However, Communist China is expanding its presence in the Indian Ocean and its close relations with Mauritius means the deal could be -- would put our base under their threat.

If the deal is ratified it could allow communist China to be able to maneuver ships and planes near Diego Garcia for intelligence gathering or even potentially allow Beijing to

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**  
*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

acquire militarized nearby items like -- in the Chagos like it has done in the South China Sea.

Mr. Stephens, the U.K. Foreign -- U.K. Foreign Minister Lammy said, "If President Trump does not like the deal, the deal will not go forward." While negotiations are still ongoing do you believe the pending U.K.-Mauritius deal is in our best interest?

**Mr. Stephens:** Well, thank you, Senator.

What I know is what I read in the press about the negotiations there. Just as a person who can obviously read a map that is a very key base for the United States. I know we have -- the military has used it for many missions for many years and I would think -- I know the administration is considering it and I am confident that they will come to the right decision on whether to approve that deal or not.

But, you know, just it is a very -- it is a critical little piece of land for both the U.K. and the U.S. and -- but I have to -- you know, I have to believe that the administration will come to the proper conclusion, and we will go forward from there.

**Senator Ricketts:** Okay. And do you share my concern about communist China and the threats around there, that they are --

**Mr. Stephens:** I share your concerns about China not only around there but everywhere. So that is very much at the forefront of, I think, all of our minds.

**Senator Ricketts:** Well, I do think that, again, this is a bad deal for us and that the administration should work with the U.K. to make sure that we retain that possession there.

And I just hearken back to President Trump seems to be very unhappy with the Panama Canal treaty and this seems like another version of that.

So thank you, Mr. Chairman, for indulging me to let me go longer.

**Senator Hagerty:** Thank you, Senator Ricketts.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**  
*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

Next I will call on Senator Cruz.

**Senator Cruz:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome to all three of you. I will say the three of you all have had exceptionally successful business careers and I appreciate your willingness to serve.

I appreciate your willingness to go and represent the United States of America in three critically important countries and I appreciate your service to the country.

Mr. Barrack, I want to start with you. As you know, the International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants against Israeli officials including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to punish Israel for its campaign against Hamas.

Those warrants are disgraceful, they are illegitimate, and they are breathtakingly dangerous to America's national security interests.

The warrants are disgraceful because Israel's war against Hamas is a legitimate campaign of self-defense in response to the October 7th terrorist attack, and I believe that our Israeli allies should not stop until they have utterly eradicated Hamas.

They are illegitimate because Israel is not a member of the ICC and the ICC has no jurisdiction over Israel, and they pose an acute threat to the safety and security of Americans because the precedent being set would allow the ICC to prosecute American officials and American troops who are likewise outside the court's jurisdiction.

In response to this threat President Trump issued an executive order. It reads, quote, "The United States expects our allies to oppose any ICC actions against the United States, Israel, or any other ally of the United States that has not consented to ICC jurisdiction."

However, Turkey and Erdogan in particular have been active in boosting the ICC's campaign. Erdogan said, quote, "We support the arrest warrant."



Erdogan met with the ICC prosecutor responsible for the warrants, Karim Khan, and expressed support for the ICC's attack against Israel. Erdogan's position puts both him and Turkey on a collision course with President Trump and with the United States.

Please talk a little bit about how if confirmed you intend to approach this challenge.

**Mr. Barrack:** Thank you, Senator.

My first advice would not be the welcome wagon to Senator Erdogan but it would be please do not get on a collision course with President Trump. That would not be a wise direction.

My attitude and intention is simple. The practices and policies of the United States, of President Trump, of this body, are my GPS.

I am not a policy maker. I am an executor of policy and I would intend to within the bounds of whatever diplomatic tools I have available enforce that and make it clear that that is our position.

**Senator Cruz:** I think the executive order is an extremely important first step in countering the threats posed by the ICC.

It allows the President to impose powerful sanctions against anyone who directly engages in the effort by the ICC to detain Americans or our allies who are not subject to ICC jurisdiction.

Those sanctions were long overdue and it is vital that they be enforced and widened. The prosecutor with whom Erdogan met has already been sanctioned.

Last year Turkish officials and lawyers sought to provide evidence to the ICC against Israel. One of those officials was a former Turkish lawmaker from Erdogan's party.

Are you concerned that officials linked to Erdogan and the Turkish government are directly boosting the ICC's attack against Israel?

**Mr. Barrack:** Senator, thanks for the rendition of facts that that I am actually not aware of in any classified format.

My intent is trying to get prepared to look forward on issues that are impending and that I will have some ability to actually dissect and understand.

So I cannot really render an opinion on facts I do not have in front of me.

**Senator Cruz:** Well, I will follow up with you in writing and ask for more views.

Mr. Fertitta, you talked in your opening statement about the economic opportunities between the United States and Italy and expanding those opportunities.

Share your thoughts on the best opportunities for growth, for more trade and commerce between America and Italy.

**Mr. Fertitta:** Well, there is a -- thank you, Senator, so much. There is 2,500 companies doing America -- doing business in Italy from America and we need to bring more companies over there and we need to sell more goods to Italy.

It is not only Italy that has wonderful products but the United States of America does, too, and so one of my huge goals is going to be to get even more companies over there and at the same time find a way for the companies that are doing business there to do even more business with the Italian government and the citizens of Italy.

**Senator Cruz:** Well, and I can personally attest that last night you were already doing your part with Senator Kelly and me and providing us both with some very fine Italian wine.

[Laughter.]

**Senator Cruz:** So, for the record, that they do an excellent job of that.

**Senator Hagerty:** Thank you, Senator Cruz.

**Mr. Fertitta:** Thank you, sir.

**Senator Cruz:** Thank you.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**  
*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

**Senator Hagerty:** Senator Scott?

**Senator Scott of Florida:** Thank you, Chairman.

First off, congratulations to each of you. Congratulations. You are going to have a big opportunity to improve relations with the United States in each of your roles.

So, first off, Mr. Stephens -- first off, congratulations. The U.S.-U.K. alliance is I think probably one of our most important alliances. It has been disappointing the Labour government's treatment of one of our best allies, the state of Israel, our most important ally in the Middle East.

In England, the Labour Party treats Israel as a problem and not a solution even after October 7th. So as the ambassador how are you going to go about trying to work with the British government to try to educate them or help them understand the importance of Israel?

**Mr. Stephens:** Well, thank you, Senator, and thank you for spending the time with me in your office before.

I have -- what I have read about that with the U.K. halting some of their shipments to Israel is certainly concerning and I would do my part to encourage them to reinstate those permits and to try to get them, you know, what they need to continue the fight.

I am a little perplexed by why they did that but I look forward to trying to help present our position, meaning the United States' position, and why they should be more supportive.

**Senator Scott of Florida:** Thank you.

Mr. Fertitta, congratulations on getting the nomination.

So you have done a lot of deals in your life. What do you think it is going to take for Italy to be more receptive to U.S. companies in a variety of areas? I assume there is opportunities in defense, there is opportunities in energy and other areas.

So, you know, with your background in doing transactions what is it going to take, do you think, for Italy to make it a better opportunity for American companies to do business in Italy?

**Mr. Fertitta:** I do know this, Senator. The feedback that I have received from Italy is that they are very excited about having an American true entrepreneur come over there and work with them.

And when you look at the trade between the two of us there is so much more that can be done, and that -- since we do not have some of the issues that my friend Mr. Barrack has, we should be able to concentrate more and concentrating on more trade between the two, and I truly believe that they are very, very receptive of doing a lot more business with the United States of America.

They recognize us as their number-one ally, and I truly look forward to sitting down with them, if confirmed, and coming up with so many different ways and doing deals which, fortunately, I have had a lot of experience with that and finding ways through energy, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals -- so many different ways -- chemicals to -- and food and beverage to do so much more business together.

Even something that I know is important to some of you all, even getting more American beef over there from different parts of the United States.

Our products are very, very good in America and more of the NATO nations need to enjoy more of them.

**Senator Scott of Florida:** Thank you.

Mr. Barrack, the relationship with Turkey has been pretty strained, whether the S-400, the role in Syria, Erdogan publicly threatening to invade the state of Israel, warm offers to host Hamas leadership. That is a negative but they are a NATO ally.

So do you think you are going to be able to navigate to bring them back in to what we would perceive to be a great NATO ally or do you think it is going to be impossible?

**Mr. Barrack:** Senator, firstly, thanks for spending the time with me. I really enjoyed our conversation and our Texas roots.

I absolutely think that I can be a small hammer in chipping away at a consistent theme of letting them know that the best thing for them long term is to adhere to being a great NATO ally and then all of the other interferences over time need to evaporate, and I think this is just part of what we are dealing in the Middle East.

It is a very complicated zip code and a Rubik's cube of complexity that needs to be taken as a whole. But I would not ever think of taking this very, very difficult position if I did not think with your help, with President Trump, with a very strong hand with the government of Turkey including President Erdogan and everybody searching for a solution at a very delicate moment between Israel, Palestinians, Ukraine, Russia, China, Syria, the Gulf, that everybody has got to step back and say maybe this is the moment for sanity. If I could be some litmus test in supplying some clarity to that I would be elated.

I just want to say I am so grateful to Tilman, though, for being the greatest foreign direct investment in Turkey by taking the best basketball player that Turkey, a number that I thought was buying a submarine.

**Senator Scott of Florida:** Thank you. Thank you, Chairman.

**Senator Hagerty:** Thank you, Senator Scott.

And I want to say thank you to these three nominees today for your testimony, for answering our questions. I am looking behind you now to thank your families because you all will play an incredibly supportive role, particularly your spouses who play an incredibly important role in your effectiveness, and I just want to express my appreciation for all of them right now.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

**Nominations: Stephens, Fertitta, Barrack**

*Tuesday, April 1, 2025*

Before closing I would like to ask unanimous consent to add any letters of support the committee has received to the record.

**[The information follows:]**

**Senator Hagerty:** I will also note for the information of members that the record will remain open until close of business tomorrow, Wednesday, April the 2nd, including for members to submit questions for the record.

And with thanks of the committee this hearing is now adjourned.

**[Whereupon, at 12:35 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]**