

Opening Statement of the Honorable Donald Blome
Nominee for Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 16, 2026

Chairman McCormick, Ranking Member Rosen, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the privilege of coming before you today as the President's nominee to serve as Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs at the U.S. Department of State. I have spent more than 30 years in the Foreign Service, much of that in the countries covered by this bureau, and I am honored that President Trump nominated me for this position. I appreciate the confidence he and Secretary Rubio have shown in me, and if confirmed, I commit to working closely with this committee, and the U.S. Congress more broadly, on our country's national security interests in the Near East region.

I have with me today, my wife, Debbie, and children, Sarah, Nicholas and Carl. They have shared with me the honor of representing our country abroad, through wars, evacuations, a pandemic, and some interesting adventures. I want to thank them for their constant support.

The Administration's goals for the Middle East and North Africa are clear: First, to seek real solutions to the regions enduring conflicts including preventing Iran from developing or otherwise obtaining a nuclear weapon and bringing sustainable peace to end conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon.

Second, promoting U.S. economic prosperity, expanding markets for American exports, and creating jobs and investment opportunities for American workers around the region. Our relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, in particular, are critical in this regard. Several have already made major investment commitments in the United States that will expand opportunities for high-paying American jobs, strengthen critical supply chains, increase U.S. manufacturing and technological leadership, and reinforce regional stability while putting the American people, industry, and security first. Iraqi Prime Minister al-Zaidi just met with President Trump where he affirmed that he is inviting partnering with U.S. companies to expand their business in Iraq, and I understand multiple U.S. companies are lined up to sign major deals with Iraq later this week.

Likewise in North Africa, we are driving energy, infrastructure, and commercial deals for U.S. companies that benefit the American economy, support American workers and exporters, while encouraging regional stability and prosperity.

A common thread running through many challenges the region faces is **Iran**. Operation Epic Fury achieved a significant degradation of the regime's defense industrial base, missile and UAV programs, and navy. Now, through the ongoing U.S. blockade of Iranian ports and coastline, Iran is losing hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue a day.

At the same time, Iran's illegitimate efforts to institute a regulatory regime in the Strait of Hormuz remain a real concern, one that the world cannot afford to normalize.

Absent an agreement, if confirmed, I will continue to advance this Administration's efforts to impose maximum international pressure on Iran, deny the regime resources to fund terrorism and regional aggression, and coordinate with partners to isolate Tehran diplomatically and economically.

The President has been clear in his preference for peace. Last fall, the President brokered a ceasefire in **Gaza** that gained strong support from the region's key leaders. By continuing to implement the President's 20-Point Peace Plan including the demilitarization of Hamas, we will create the conditions of enduring security for Israel, the Palestinian people, and our partners and allies in the region.

The President has also been clear that Hamas cannot continue as a military or governing force. He wants a better future for the Palestinian people.

This Administration has prioritized a process to enable **Lebanon** to be a fully sovereign state for the first time in decades, which will benefit the security of both Lebanon and Israel. The United States has worked diligently with both governments to find a path to peace after decades of Hizballah-driven Iran-supported violence that has robbed the people of Lebanon and Israel of the stability they deserve, and if confirmed, I will continue to support this effort. It is critical the Government of Lebanon make further progress to disarm Hizballah and implement economic reforms that are necessary to unlock a more promising future.

In the midst of these conflicts, we also see opportunities.

It was encouraging to hear Iraq's new Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi say from the White House this week that he is holding firm to a September 30 deadline for Iran-aligned terrorist militias to surrender their weapons to the Iraqi government. The success of this Iraq-led initiative is critical. To dismantle and ultimately eliminate

Iran-enabled terrorist proxies. Iran's malign influence in Iraq not only threatens our interests, but also those of our partners and Allies in the region.

I also support the Administration's commitment to building on the Abraham Accords and normalization agreements, strengthening the partnerships between Israel and **Bahrain, Morocco**, and the **UAE**, and building upon historic agreements between Israel and **Jordan** and **Egypt**. Promoting normalization between Israel and **Saudi Arabia** and other Arab states is imperative for regional security and economic integration.

We must also increase U.S. competitiveness in the region and provide opportunities for U.S. companies to drive regional integration. Every major commercial, technology, infrastructure, and energy project secured by an American company strengthens U.S. influence while denying strategic opportunities to our competitors. Our enduring relationships in the region and strong position as the partner of choice are a bulwark against efforts by China to extend its influence. We must continue to engage partners in the public and private sectors on the dangers of employing Chinese origin technology and why joining the trusted technology ecosystem is beneficial. The United States will continue to advance the integration of U.S.-led technological, economic, and security ecosystems throughout the region, reduce dependence on Chinese technology and supply chains, and prevent a permanent Chinese security presence in the region.

There are also opportunities for U.S. businesses. If confirmed, I look forward to supporting efforts to implement and build on the historic investment pledges made by the Saudis, Qataris, and Emiratis during the President's visit to the region last year that totaled two trillion dollars in economic exchange, bringing new capital, jobs, and manufacturing opportunities to the United States. In **Syria**, the fall of the Assad regime and President Trump's historic decision to lift sanctions create tremendous opportunities for U.S. trade and investment. In Libya, our efforts to improve security and stability have created the conditions for ExxonMobil and Chevron to return to the country after more than a decade and sign new MOUs potentially worth billions of dollars.

While we must remain clear-eyed about the challenges of the region – conflict, terrorism, economic integration, and Iran's continuing attempts to destabilize its neighbors – we must recognize the potential for breakthroughs that advance American security, prosperity, and global leadership. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you on these issues. Thank you for your time and I look forward to your questions.