

Statement of Dr. Julia Nesheiwat
Nominee for U.S. Arctic Ambassador-at-Large
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
September 17, 2026

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to be the U.S. Arctic Ambassador-at-Large. I am grateful to President Trump and Secretary Rubio for their confidence in me, and I appreciate the Committee's consideration of my nomination.

I'm joined today by my husband Mike, sister Dina, stepdaughter, Anderson, former hostage Xiyue Wang, who was freed from Iran after being held prisoner for three years, and his wife Hua. I'm also joined by fellow veterans who I served with in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as a Gold Star spouse who lost her husband in Afghanistan.

I am the daughter of first-generation Jordanian Christian immigrants, Ben and Hayat Nesheiwat. They worked tirelessly, and raised five children in rural Florida, on faith, education, and service. My widowed mother—a nurse—held our family together. She taught us that America does not owe anyone an easy path, but it rewards grit, dedication, and a willingness to serve.

That lesson took me from a small Florida town into the United States Army. After September 11th, I served as a military intelligence officer deployed in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom and was awarded the Bronze Star. I later served across three administrations, beginning with helping to establish the office of the Director of National Intelligence. At the State Department, I served as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Energy Resources, and later as Deputy and Acting Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs. Later, I became Florida's first Chief Resilience Officer. I was then appointed the 10th Homeland Security Advisor to the President, where I was responsible for the Arctic—coordinating our national strategy for the region, working closely with the U.S. Coast Guard and Navy to build our Arctic fleet, and chairing National Security Council meetings on closing our icebreaker gap. I later served as a Commissioner on the U.S. Arctic Research Commission.

The Arctic has entered a new strategic era. What was once seen as remote is now where homeland defense, alliance security, economic opportunity, and strategic competition converge. Secretary Rubio has said it plainly: the United States is an Arctic nation, we will remain focused on the Arctic, and Arctic security must be a regular part of our engagements, including in NATO. Our interests extend far beyond Alaska. The region is central to the defense of the homeland, the security of the North Atlantic, trusted supply chains, energy and minerals, and the alliances that have long advanced American interests.

It is also a frontier for American innovation. The High North is not only ice and shipping lanes. It is space awareness and missile warning from northern latitudes. It is undersea cables, communications, and the data that move across them. It is whether the next generation of energy, computing, and artificial intelligence is powered and connected by trusted American and allied systems—or by infrastructure built under the influence of our competitors. Cold climates and energy potential can support advanced computing and data centers. Polar orbits and Arctic ground stations already matter for space operations. If the United States does not lead in these areas, others will treat them as openings.

A rapidly changing Arctic and longer periods of open water are changing the operating environment faster than our institutions have adapted. Longer periods of open water may create opportunities for maritime activity and American energy exports. They also stress the roads, ports, airfields, fuel systems, and networks that enable military operations, investment, commerce, and community resilience. In a region of vast distances, the failure of a single node can have strategic consequences. These are operational challenges. They affect readiness, mobility, search and rescue, disaster response, and our ability to act in a crisis.

Our competitors understand this. Russia continues to strengthen its military posture and the infrastructure behind it. China is not an Arctic nation, yet it is seeking long-term advantage through research, investment, technology, and commercial projects with dual-use potential. Secretary Rubio has warned that Beijing's pattern is to use commercial cover for facilities that could later serve military purposes. Arctic shipping lanes will matter for exports. Critical minerals, trusted digital infrastructure, and space-related access will shape competitiveness for decades. We cannot allow Moscow and Beijing to write the rules of this region by default.

America's response must be nimble and effective. Advancing the Administration's America First priorities will be the core of our approach. Military strength is indispensable, but it is not enough. Lasting leadership also depends on diplomacy, economic statecraft, strong infrastructure, innovation, and our alliances. No single agency can do this alone. Success requires coordination across government, partnership with Congress, Alaska natives, industry, academia, and our Arctic allies.

That is why this role matters. The job is to put American diplomacy to work: advance U.S. interests; engage foreign governments, the Arctic Council, and other international bodies; line up policy so our efforts pull in the same direction; and push back on influence from our adversaries. It also means keeping a steady eye on security, military activity, economic deals, resources, cyber, science, and politics, so we are not surprised.

If confirmed, I will work every day to strengthen our alliances, advance the interests of the American people, counter those who would exploit the Arctic against us, and help keep the region secure, stable, prosperous, and prepared. Thank you. I welcome your questions.