

Statement of Jonathan G. Pratt
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to Djibouti
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
August 5, 2020

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, I am honored to come before you as the President's nominee to be the next United States Ambassador to the Republic of Djibouti. I am grateful to the President and the Secretary of State for their confidence in me. If confirmed, I will work with this Committee and the Congress to advance our country's interests in Djibouti.

Mr. Chairman, my experience in Africa began as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Guinea-Bissau over twenty-five years ago. In the course of my Foreign Service career, I have participated in American efforts to resolve conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in the Sudan. I know that leading an embassy is a tremendous responsibility. If confirmed, I carry with me my experience as Deputy Chief of Mission at our embassy in Pakistan, where I helped lead one of our largest overseas interagency teams, including colleagues from the armed services.

Throughout my career, helping develop the strength and effectiveness of the State Department and the Foreign Service has been a priority of mine. Please know that, if confirmed, I am committed to supporting the development of my institution and my colleagues, including the growth of a more diverse corps of professionals and leaders that truly reflects the strength and diversity of our great nation.

Mr. Chairman, the Administration's Africa Strategy, signed by the President, focuses on three core objectives: 1) advancing trade and commercial ties with key African states to increase American and African prosperity; 2) protecting the United States from cross-border health and security threats; and 3) supporting key African states' progress toward stability, citizen-responsive governance, and self-reliance.

Over the last five years Djibouti's economy has grown more than five percent per year and the country is making sizable investments in its shipping, energy, and information technology sectors. If confirmed, I will work to build on the success of the current ambassador and country team to expand access for American companies in these sectors and to ensure that they are able to compete on a level playing field with other global companies. China has financed many of Djibouti's recent infrastructure projects and now holds more than 70 percent of Djibouti's external debt. Promoting and protecting American access and influence in Djibouti, in spite of growing Chinese influence, is paramount to our national security. If confirmed, I will make it a top priority to ensure that American companies that want to do business in Djibouti are able to do so, with the knowledge that American products and services are still the gold standard.

Since 2002 Djibouti has hosted the only enduring U.S. military installation in Africa, at

Camp Lemonnier. Along with Chabelly Airfield, Camp Lemonnier is a crucial platform for our armed forces, who are working to promote security throughout the region. They are now on the frontlines of our great power competition with China, which in 2017 opened its first foreign military base in Djibouti. Ensuring the long-term viability of American military installations in Djibouti is a national security priority, and if confirmed, I commit to extending my full support to our esteemed military colleagues who are based there.

We have a broad-based security partnership with the Government of Djibouti. The United States has helped train and equip Djiboutian peacekeeping troops deployed with the African Union Mission to Somalia. The United States has also supported President Omar Guelleh's effort to facilitate reconciliation between Somalia and Somaliland. If confirmed, I will continue to support these joint initiatives, which are vital to security of the Djiboutian and American people.

In order to sustain Djibouti's economic and security gains, we must also support the development of Djibouti's democratic institutions. To that end, the United States has assisted Djibouti and its people to improve governance. Next year's presidential election provides an opportunity to encourage further progress.

Mr. Chairman, it is a great honor to sit before you here today. My maternal grandparents were Italian immigrants and my mother was the first in her family to attend university here, later becoming a public school teacher and psychologist. My paternal grandfather contributed to our success in World War II as an engineer building aircraft engines. My father served in the U.S. Navy while studying nuclear medicine at the Bethesda Naval Hospital. It has been an honor to walk in their footsteps and dedicate my own life to public service. My wife Bridget Lines, here with me today, is also a Foreign Service Officer.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I welcome any questions you may have. Thank you for considering my nomination.