

Nominee for Ambassador to Yemen—Steve Fagin
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Oral Testimony – March 3, 2022

Chairman Markey, Ranking Member Cruz, distinguished members of the committee, I'm thankful for the opportunity to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to the Republic of Yemen.

I am grateful to President Biden and Secretary Blinken for this honor and their confidence in me. If confirmed, I commit to working closely with Members of this Committee and Congress on the critical U.S. foreign policy and national security interests in Yemen.

First, I would like to thank my family for their steadfast support during my 25 years in the Foreign Service, which has often taken me away from them. My sister Randi and her husband Rob are in attendance today. I am one-half of a Foreign Service tandem couple. The other half, Natasha Franceschi, is deputy chief of mission in Tunisia. We've served in some challenging places together, including Baghdad, and Natasha is watching these proceedings from Tunis.

When I was in college in the late 1980s, I participated in a student exchange program to the USSR under President Reagan's U.S.-Soviet Exchange Initiative. This was a life-changing experience that led me to pursue a career in diplomacy. I've spent much of my career working in and on conflict and post-conflict countries, and I've witnessed firsthand the human and physical devastation resulting from war, especially in Iraq and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The escalation of hostilities and dramatic increase in civilian casualties in Yemen over the last few months are deeply troubling both for the long-suffering people of Yemen and for the entire Gulf region. However, continued conflict is not inevitable, and peace in Yemen is possible. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking to support UN-led efforts to secure a durable and inclusive resolution to the conflict, which also addresses Yemen's dire economic situation.

I know we are all profoundly concerned by increasingly aggressive Houthi actions in recent months, including attacks impacting civilians and civilian infrastructure in the UAE and Saudi Arabia using missile and armed drone technology provided by Iran. There are more than 130,000 Americans living in these countries, and their safety is under threat from such attacks. I assure you that if confirmed, I will have no higher priority than ensuring the safety and security of our citizens.

The unlawful flow of weapons from Iran to the Houthis is also enabling the continued Houthi offensive in Marib, complicating efforts to get the parties to the negotiating table, and extending the suffering of civilians. Strengthening enforcement of the targeted UN arms embargo for Yemen, to cut off the flow of arms to the Houthis, must be a priority.

Mr. Chairman, the ongoing Houthi detention of current and former members of our local Yemeni staff in Sana'a is deplorable and an affront to the entire international community. The United States has communicated this to the Houthi leadership, and the UN Security Council has

condemned these Houthi actions in the strongest terms, as has the U.S. Congress. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly to ensure the safety and well-being of all current and former U.S. government employees in Yemen and a return to U.S. control of our former Embassy compound.

On February 23, the Treasury Department announced additional designations of members of an international network, led by IRGC-Qods Force and Houthi financier Sa'id al-Jamal, involved in funding the Houthis' war against the Government of Yemen. The United States will continue targeted designations of individuals and entities that seek to perpetuate the conflict and the humanitarian crisis in Yemen for their own gain.

The United States continues to lead the international community's response to the dire humanitarian and economic conditions facing the people of Yemen, and our partners must also do their share to fund this response. Ensuring implementing partners can deliver crucial assistance without interference or delay, and enacting reforms to restore the foundations of Yemen's economy, are critical.

Our Yemen policy must continue to be fully aligned with our global foreign policy priorities and principles. If confirmed, I will aim to strengthen coordination with the Government of Yemen and other partners in our shared counter-terrorism fight against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and other violent extremists.

President Biden and Secretary Blinken have been clear that human rights are central to U.S. foreign policy. If confirmed, I will ensure that this remains the case in Yemen. Without accountability and justice, there cannot be a durable and lasting peace.

Mr. Chairman, the challenges in Yemen today are undoubtedly complex as you know. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to your questions.