

Statement of Justin Siberell
Nominee to be U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
September 12, 2017

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to be the United States Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain. I am extremely grateful to the President and to Secretary Tillerson for the confidence they have shown in me through this nomination. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with the Congress and with this Committee to advance our nation's vital interests with Bahrain.

I am privileged to be joined today by my family – my wife Arnavaz, our son Samuel and daughter Emeline. Our youngest son, Benjamin, is in school today. Ours is a true Foreign Service family, with each of our children born during one of our assignments in the field – Sam in Tunisia, Emmie in Jordan, and Ben in the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Chairman, the United States and Bahrain share a long-standing partnership based on common interests in regional security and the friendship of our two peoples. Since the 1940's, Bahrain has hosted the United States Navy and is currently home to thousands of Americans attached to U.S. Navy Central Command and the U.S. Fifth Fleet. The operational and logistical support that the Kingdom provides our military is essential to the success of our campaign against ISIS and enables our Navy to lead a 31-country international coalition that counters piracy, drug trafficking, and terrorism across 2.5 million square miles of ocean and seas.

The United States works closely with the Bahrain Defence Force to ensure Bahrain has the tools and capabilities to defend against external aggression and strengthen cooperation with U.S. and other allied regional militaries. Mr. Chairman, as you are aware, the Administration recently notified the Congress of the approval of a number of possible defense sales that will address critical needs in the Bahrain Defence Force's air, land and naval capabilities, including the sale of new F-16 aircraft and upgrades to previously purchased F-16s. These new military sales will provide Bahrain with a reliable capability and increased interoperability with U.S. forces.

I look forward to close cooperation with colleagues at the Department of Defense to continue to support Bahrain's armed forces to address shared threats. In this regard, we are committed to working together with Bahrain to ensure it is able to counter persistent threats from Iran, including Iran's training and supply of lethal aid to individuals and groups targeting the government and security forces of Bahrain.

Success in confronting shared threats in the Gulf region rests in large part on the commitment of our close partners to work together towards inclusive and mutually-supportive security arrangements. It is for this reason that the United States continues to encourage a rapid

resolution to the ongoing dispute among the GCC states. If confirmed, I will work to support the efforts of Secretary Tillerson to assist the parties in resolving their differences.

Enhancing our security cooperation with Bahrain does not diminish the enduring emphasis we place on human rights issues. Indeed, our counterterrorism and military cooperation with Bahrain is paired with a clear understanding that Bahrain's own long-term stability and security depend on it achieving political reconciliation and upholding its commitments to universal human rights. We continue to be concerned with government actions against nonviolent political and human rights actors, and will continue to urge the Government of Bahrain to take steps to ensure inclusive elections in 2018 and to advance reform efforts for the benefit of Bahrain's long-term security and our mutual interests in regional stability. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that we continue to have an open and honest dialogue with Bahrain on the full range of issues affecting our bilateral relationship, including human rights.

Increasing American exports and jobs for the American people is a top priority for me. The United States and Bahrain enjoy a strong economic partnership, highlighted by the U.S. – Bahrain Free Trade Agreement. Since that agreement entered into force in 2006, bilateral U.S. – Bahrain trade has more than doubled to \$1.7 billion annually. More than 180 U.S. companies do business in Bahrain, a number I am committed to grow if given the opportunity.

Bahrain deserves praise for its efforts to end human trafficking within its borders by developing a national referral mechanism, promoting a national anti-trafficking strategy, investigating potential trafficking cases, and taking steps to amend elements of the sponsorship system that increases workers' vulnerability to forced labor and debt bondage. There is more that can be done, as indicated in the State Department's annual Trafficking in Persons Report, including proactive identification of potential forced labor victims and increased prosecutions of forced labor crimes. This issue is very important to me and to this Administration, as I know it is to this committee.

Advancing our interests in Bahrain will be facilitated by the close bonds of friendship that have been developed over many decades with the Bahraini people, beginning more than 100 years ago through the founding of the American Mission Hospital, which continues to serve patients in Bahrain today. Hundreds of Bahraini students come to the United States each year to attend U.S. colleges and universities, providing Bahrainis with a deeper understanding of American society and the American people, and more than 2,500 Bahrainis have participated in official cultural and academic exchanges over several decades, including the Fulbright Program.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, ensuring the safety of the people who serve at Embassy Manama and the American citizen community resident in Bahrain will be my foremost priority if confirmed as Ambassador to Bahrain. During my career in the Foreign Service, I have served across the Middle East, including in high threat posts under persistent threat of terrorist attack. I understand the importance of prudent and proactive security measures to protect our personnel, as well as the need for close and open communication with the American citizen community to ensure their safety and security.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. It is a singular honor to have been nominated to serve as Ambassador to Bahrain.

