

Statement of A. Wess Mitchell
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
September 19, 2017

Thank you for your kind introduction, Senator Cornyn. I am honored to have the backing of the Senator from my home state of Texas.

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Committee, it is a privilege to appear before you today as nominee for the position of Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs. I am thankful to President Trump and Secretary Tillerson for the confidence they have placed in me to undertake this important role.

I am proud to have sitting behind me today my wife Elizabeth Mitchell, my mother Dessa Mitchell, my aunt Cindy Harris, and my father- and mother-in-law Ed and Linda Leon.

I am a sixth-generation Texan – the first person in my family in more than 150 years to leave the state of Texas and pursue a career north of the Red River. Like my wife, who is a 13-year veteran of the Department of Defense, I came to Washington for one reason: to serve my country.

My experience in Europe goes back two decades. I have lived in Europe, studied its languages, history and geopolitics, and completed my doctorate at a German university. Twelve years ago, I co-founded the Center for European Policy Analysis, a leading think-tank widely recognized for the quality and breadth of its research on Central Europe. As President and CEO, I have overseen CEPA's growth into a truly transatlantic organization, with offices in Washington and Warsaw and personnel in several European countries. In this role, I have built close and effective relationships with senior leaders across the NATO Alliance. I have had the honor of working with three previous Assistant Secretaries and seeing the skill, dedication and patriotism of the men and women of the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs in action, both here and in our embassies abroad. And I have worked closely with many of you and your staffs on this Committee on some of the most important recent pieces of legislation affecting America's relations with Europe and Russia.

What animates my work is the belief that America's alliances are the backbone of our strength and influence as a Great Power. Seventy years ago, Americans helped

to create a new Western order, grounded in Atlantic cooperation. They did so not out of charity, but because they understood that America has an enduring strategic interest in removing what an earlier generation of U.S. policymakers called the “firetrap” of geopolitics in the western rimlands of Eurasia. This region was the birthplace of three global wars in the 20th Century—two hot and one cold. The alliance that we built together after 1945 and expanded after 1989 has been a guarantee against the return of that old cycle of bloodshed. It has laid the foundation for unprecedented freedom, stability and prosperity in much of the world. As President Trump said in Warsaw, “there is nothing like this community of nations. The world has never known anything like it... [and] we must have the courage and desire to preserve” it.

If confirmed, I will do exactly that. I will view as my central task the preservation and strengthening of the Western alliance to ensure that my young children are able to enjoy the benefits of peace and abundance that we have known in our lifetimes.

Succeeding in that task will require us to confront the pressures bearing down upon Europe from the east and south, as well as the crisis of confidence inside Western societies.

If confirmed, my first priority will be to give weight and substance to the statements that the President, Vice President and Secretaries of State and Defense have made affirming America’s commitment to NATO Article 5. Our allies, especially frontline states between the Baltic and Black Seas, must know that the defense of the West rests on an unwavering covenant. To be credible, it requires a strong forward posture. And a willingness by all allies, including the largest and wealthiest European states, to bear their full share in defense spending.

The fight against ISIS must also be an urgent priority for U.S. diplomacy in Europe. Since 2014, there have been more than 150 attacks plotted or carried out on European soil. We must do more to stop this insidious threat. We need all allies to assist robustly in defeating ISIS, share information on terrorist threats, and address the sources of migration and extremism in North Africa. We must maintain a common approach with the European Union as a global partner, work closely with allies on Syria, Iran and North Korea, and rally support for the new U.S. strategy for Afghanistan. And we must work to keep Turkey, long the linchpin of NATO’s southern flank, firmly anchored in the transatlantic community.

In both the east and south, we must be sober-minded about Russia. It is in the interests of the American and Russian peoples to lower tensions between the world's two largest nuclear powers. At the same time, the Russian government must understand that a return to normal relations will be impossible as long as it attacks its neighbors, abuses its people and attempts to undermine confidence in America's institutions and those of our allies. If confirmed, I will urge Moscow to cease its destabilizing activities in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and the Balkans and to end its support for hostile regimes in Syria and Iran. I will also support efforts to reduce the vulnerabilities of our allies and partners to corruption, disinformation, and other forms of malign influence that Russia uses to weaken their institutions and civil societies.

America is greatest when our alliances are strong and our trade is vibrant. If confirmed, I will work to strengthen the trillion-dollar transatlantic economy that gives jobs to millions of Americans. I will build on the Administration's efforts to help Europe enhance its energy security through diversification of energy sources and routes. And I will highlight the viability of American LNG as an option for these diversification efforts.

In all of these areas, we must be clear about what we stand for as an alliance. The glue that holds us together is greater than a treaty or set of institutional "rules." It is the glue of a common civilization—the West—grounded in freedom, democracy, and rule-of-law, and united by bonds of memory, culture and shared sacrifice. As Secretary Tillerson has said, "American leadership requires moral clarity." We are open and free societies, and we welcome those who wish to join our alliance. We are strongest when our values and those of our allies are aligned, and when we hold our rivals accountable for human rights abuses at home.

Whatever America seeks to do in the world, we are more apt to succeed when the West acts together. If confirmed, I will use the relationships I have forged over the past decade throughout Europe, among the talented staff of the State Department and here on the Hill to advance U.S. interests, values and prosperity in Europe. And I will use the executive leadership skills I have gained at CEPA to help realize Secretary Tillerson's vision of making every State Department dollar count for the American taxpayer.

I am humbled to be considered for this position. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I welcome your comments and questions.