

**Testimony of William Roebuck
Ambassador-Designate to the Kingdom of Bahrain
September 10, 2014**

Chairman Kaine, Ranking Member Risch, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you as the President's nominee to be the U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain. It is a great honor, as well as the dream of every Foreign Service officer, to appear before you today. I am extremely grateful to President Obama and Secretary Kerry for the confidence they have shown in me. If confirmed, I look forward to representing the American people, and to working with this Committee and other interested Members of Congress to advance U.S. interests with Bahrain.

I have spent most of my career posted in the Middle East, including assignments in Jerusalem, Gaza, Damascus, Baghdad, and Tripoli, fostering political dialogue, providing support for elections, helping governments address the threats posed by terrorism and violent extremism, promoting and protecting human rights, and encouraging regional security efforts between neighbors. I believe those experiences have seasoned me as a diplomat and positioned me well to take on this challenging assignment.

Mr. Chairman, the United States and Bahrain have long shared mutual interests in regional security, demonstrated through our history of close bilateral cooperation and partnership. We deeply value this friendship, rooted in the history of our two peoples dating back to the early years of the 20th century. If confirmed, I will work to maintain, expand and deepen this partnership, while also continuing our support for King Hamad's efforts to bring reform, political dialogue, and reconciliation to Bahrain. My experience teaches me that these priorities are not mutually exclusive – in fact, I think they are inextricably linked. This approach will strengthen Bahrain's long-term security, stability, and prosperity.

Bahrain and the United States share key strategic goals, reflected by the fact that our security relationship has grown over the years. Our Navy arrived in Bahrain during the 1940s, and today more than 8,000 Americans who are attached to the Fifth Fleet or U.S. Naval Forces Central Command live there. We work closely with the Bahraini Defense Forces, in particular their Navy and Air Force, on a range of fronts, including counterterrorism and anti-piracy operations. Bahrain has pledged to help fight terrorists in Iraq and Syria; welcomed the

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appointment of Iraqi-Prime Minister designate Al-Abadi; deployed its navy and ground forces in support of Operation Enduring Freedom; commanded the coalition task force responsible for maritime security in the Gulf; and sent air, ground, and naval assets to Kuwait in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Although we took the decision to limit certain aspects of our security cooperation following the unrest in Bahrain in 2011, our military relationship with Bahrain remains fundamentally strong and mutually beneficial. If confirmed, I will look forward to collaborating with the Government of Bahrain and my colleagues at the Department of Defense to help Bahrain develop its defense capabilities to provide for its own defense, and to improve interoperability with our forces. Going forward, the US-GCC Strategic Cooperation Forum, launched jointly in 2012 by Secretary Clinton and the GCC Secretary General, will be an important mechanism by which I hope to make progress on our partnership with Bahrain, addressing air defense, maritime security, cyber-attacks, and other threats.

The State Department provides counterterrorism and critical incident response training for the Bahraini law enforcement units that provide security for U.S. naval facilities and the U.S. Embassy, and that act as Bahrain's primary internal security force. Bahrain is also a valuable partner in disrupting illicit finance flows to terrorist organizations. Bahrain hosts the Secretariat for the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, a regional body that coordinates efforts against terrorist finance. In addition, Bahrain is a member of the Egmont group, the international coordinating body for Financial Intelligence Units, which facilitates global cooperation in the fight against terrorist financing. If confirmed, I will continue to prioritize our close counterterrorism partnership with Bahrain.

While mutual concerns about regional stability motivate our close cooperation in security matters, we also have a strong foundation to build upon in the area of trade, and financial cooperation.

Bahrain is one of the most open economies in the Middle East / North Africa region and shows a continued commitment to economic diversification and reform. Bilateral trade last year reached \$1.7 billion – more than double the levels since before the free trade agreement entered into force in 2006. More American companies are setting up shop in Bahrain every year. Consistent with the President's National Export Initiative and Secretary Kerry's directive that we improve our effectiveness at economic and commercial diplomacy, if confirmed, I will ensure that all our embassy's agencies and sections understand the priority we

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place on commercial diplomacy and that they are working closely with stateside offices to vigorously promote the export of U.S. manufactured goods, services, and farm products to this important market. If confirmed as Ambassador, I would also seek to encourage more Bahraini students to study at U.S. colleges and universities.

Let me say a few words about the political situation in Bahrain: We encourage all of Bahrain's constituencies to work in good faith to develop a broad consensus on how to address underlying social and economic grievances that drove the protests of 2011. We think that a successful political compromise that allows these political societies to participate in the upcoming elections would be the surest signal of Bahrain's progress towards reform and reconciliation.

The Government of Bahrain has made some important strides in implementing the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry recommendations to advance a reform and reconciliation agenda. For instance, the government has created a victims compensation fund that has distributed about \$6 million to the families of 39 victims of the 2011 violence and appointed an ombudsman to the Ministry of Interior. It is important to acknowledge King Hamad's leadership in initiating the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, for accepting the recommendations put forward in the report, and for committing to implement reforms. The government has more to do on a range of BICI recommendations.

I believe that a country that protects and promotes human rights will ultimately be a more stable country and a more effective security partner. If confirmed, I will make a strong case both publicly and privately for why political dialogue, reform, and promoting and protecting human rights are in Bahrain's long-term interest. The recent expulsion by Bahrain of a senior American diplomat was a significant setback in this regard. 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.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, should I be confirmed as ambassador, protecting U.S. citizens in Bahrain will be one of my highest priorities. In the course of my career, I have served at a number of high-threat posts, where security for Americans was a critical priority. I served recently for six months as Charge d'Affaires at our embassy in Libya, where I worked closely with my Regional Security Officer and his team, and ensured close coordination with local law enforcement and with the American business community outside the Embassy. I understand that the safety and security of American citizens is a critical priority

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and I believe my experiences as a diplomat in the region have equipped me well to address this issue effectively.

The U.S.-Bahrain relationship has translated into economic, social, political, and cultural benefits for the people of both countries. I am committed to further building up these vital partnerships in the Kingdom and further solidifying our unique relationship that is based on mutual respect and a long history of consultation between friends. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that Bahrain can continue to rely on the United States and that we can continue to rely on Bahrain as an effective partner.

Thank you again for this opportunity and I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

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