

Statement of Martina A. Strong
Nominee for U.S. Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
March 15, 2023

Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Hagerty, distinguished Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates. I am grateful to the President and Secretary Blinken for the trust and confidence they have placed in me.

If confirmed, it will be an honor to lead our Mission as we continue to deepen our nation's strategic partnership with the United Arab Emirates. Our relationship is critical to U.S. national security at a time when our interests in the region are being challenged by conventional and asymmetric threats, complex problems like climate change, as well as aggressive competitors, particularly China. If confirmed, I pledge to consult closely with this Committee in advancing our interests and addressing these challenges.

Mr. Chairman, the safety and security of our fellow Americans and U.S. personnel will be my foremost priority, if confirmed. I will devote myself to protecting U.S. citizens and their interests, and you have my commitment that I will advocate for detained Americans, their welfare, and their well-being. If confirmed, I will press Emirati authorities to respect American citizens' rights and to meet their international obligations, including to provide regular consular access to our citizens.

By signing the historic Abraham Accords in 2020, the UAE became the first Arab country in generations to normalize ties with Israel. Leveraging this opportunity and expanding the growing cooperation between the UAE and Israel will buttress our shared goals of peace, prosperity, and greater integration in the Middle East. The UAE will host COP28 later this year, presenting another key opportunity to deepen our collaboration. If confirmed, I will work to expand our partnership in these and other areas.

Our commercial and investment ties are dynamic and drive prosperity in both our countries. The United States enjoys a healthy trade surplus with the UAE, which is

the largest market for U.S. goods and services in the Middle East. Over 1,500 American firms are successfully operating in the UAE. If confirmed, I will continue to advocate for U.S. businesses in the UAE and work to ensure that these positive trendlines continue.

Our security ties with the UAE, a capable and interoperable partner, have been central to our fight against terrorism and to countering Iran's malign activities across the region. If confirmed, I will prioritize our efforts to bolster deterrence and regional stability; de-escalate regional tensions; protect freedom of navigation, especially in critical maritime choke points; and support a political settlement of the conflict in Yemen.

If confirmed, I will also be clear with UAE leaders regarding our deep concerns pertaining to China, whose violations of international law and sovereignty of countries around the globe, including the United States, underscore that China represents our most consequential geopolitical challenge. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Administration and Congress to counter China's efforts to expand its influence in the UAE and the Gulf.

Our partnership with the UAE is built on a strong foundation of decades-long close cooperation and our mutual interest in securing a free, rules-based, and prosperous world today and for decades to come. While we do not agree on all issues, our frank and constructive diplomatic engagement has helped us deepen and modernize this vital bilateral relationship. If confirmed, I will work with the UAE to advance our shared values like interfaith tolerance, which is embodied in the recently opened Abrahamic House. Our ongoing and vital work to address trafficking-in-persons and to strengthen human rights protections will also continue. If confirmed, I will ensure that the work of our Mission to the UAE is firmly anchored in our nation's core priorities and our team continues to deliver for the American people, companies, and workers.

In closing, please allow me to take this opportunity to thank my husband Colonel John Strong and our wonderful daughter Ellie, who are joining me here today. I am deeply grateful for their boundless love, support, and patience in the face of our multiple moves and long separations during my several unaccompanied tours. While they cannot be here today, I am forever indebted to my parents, Vojtěch and Jarmila Tkadlec, whose courage and conviction helped our family escape from communist Czechoslovakia and then propelled us from a refugee camp to a successful new life in the United States. For us, the American dream became a reality in large part thanks to the generous assistance of so many. I especially want

to thank family Seviek, whose help early on launched us on the path that led me all the way to this hearing today.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Hagerty, thank you again for the privilege of appearing before you and for your consideration of my nomination. I welcome your questions.