

Statement for the Record
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

Director of CIA Nominee William J. Burns
February 24, 2021

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice Chairman, Members of the Committee, I'm honored and humbled to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee for Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

I am deeply grateful to the President for the opportunity to return to public service and to lead the remarkable women and men of CIA. If confirmed, I will do everything in my power to justify the trust placed in me, and to earn the trust of this Committee, Congress, and the American people.

My whole life has been shaped by public service. My father, a career Army officer, fought in Vietnam in the 1960s and eventually became the director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. As my three brothers and I bounced from post to post across our remarkable country, I never had to look further than my father for the best possible model of non-partisan public service. And I never had to look further than my mother to find the best imaginable example of selflessness and commitment, and a life shaped by faith, family, and hard work.

I shared thirty-three years in the Foreign Service with my wife, Lisa, herself an exceptional public servant, and our two wonderful daughters, Lizzy and Sarah. Their love and support have made everything possible, and have enriched my life beyond measure.

Across those decades as a diplomat in the Middle East and Russia and as a senior official in Administrations of both parties, I developed enormous respect for my CIA colleagues. I served alongside them in hard places around the world. It was their skill at collection and analysis that often gave me an edge as a negotiator; their partnership that helped make me an effective ambassador; and their insights that helped me make thoughtful choices on the most difficult policy issues.

I learned that good intelligence, delivered with honesty and integrity, is America's first line of defense. I learned that intelligence professionals have to tell

policymakers what they need to hear, even if they don't want to hear it. And I learned that politics must stop where intelligence work begins.

That is exactly what President Biden expects of CIA. It was the first thing he told me when he asked me to take on this role. He said he wants the Agency to give it to him straight -- and I pledged to do just that, and to defend those who do the same.

As the President has emphasized, all of America's national security institutions will have to reimagine their roles on an international landscape that is profoundly different from the world I encountered as a young diplomat nearly forty years ago -- or even the world as it was when I left government six years ago.

Today's landscape is increasingly complicated and competitive. It's a world where familiar threats persist -- from terrorism and nuclear proliferation, to an aggressive Russia, a provocative North Korea, and a hostile Iran. But it's also a world of new challenges, in which climate change and global health insecurity are taking a heavy toll on the American people; in which cyber threats pose an ever-greater risk to our society; and in which an adversarial, predatory Chinese leadership poses our biggest geopolitical test.

If confirmed, four crucial and inter-related priorities will shape my approach to leading CIA: China, technology, people, and partnerships.

As President Biden has underscored, out-competing China will be key to our national security in the decades ahead. That will require a long-term, clear-eyed, bipartisan strategy, underpinned by domestic renewal and solid intelligence.

There will be areas in which it will be in our mutual self-interest to work with China, from climate change to nonproliferation. And I am very mindful that Xi Jinping's China is not without problems and frailties of its own. There are, however, a growing number of areas in which Xi's China is a formidable, authoritarian adversary -- methodically strengthening its capabilities to steal intellectual property, repress its own people, bully its neighbors, expand its global reach, and build influence in American society.

For CIA, that will mean intensified focus and urgency -- continually strengthening its already-impressive cadre of China specialists, expanding its language skills, aligning personnel and resource allocation for the long-haul, and employing a

whole-of-agency approach to the operational and analytical challenges of this crucial threat.

Another priority, intimately connected to competition with China, is technology. As all of you know as well as I do, the revolution in technology and rapid advances in fields like artificial intelligence are transforming the ways we live, work, fight, and compete.

CIA has a rich tradition of innovation, and nothing will matter more to our ability to remain the best intelligence service in the world. CIA will need to relentlessly sharpen its capabilities to understand how rivals use cyber and other technological tools; anticipate, detect and deter their use; and keep an edge in developing them ourselves.

If confirmed, I'll have no higher priority than reinforcing CIA's greatest asset – its people. The work of CIA's men and women is often invisible to most Americans, but I have served side by side with them, seeing firsthand their courage, their professionalism, and their sacrifices.

I was privileged to be in the White House Situation Room when CIA's brilliant work helped bring Osama Bin Laden to justice. But I also remember sadder and harder days – the sorrow and pain after the tragic attack at Khost, and quiet, personal moments spent in front of the Agency's Memorial Wall, whose stars include friends with whom I served.

Honoring the sacrifice those stars represent means strengthening a workforce worthy of the CIA seal – one that reflects the richness of our society and enables us to carry out our global mission. That means working even harder to enhance diversity, equity and inclusion, from entry-level to senior ranks. It means working even harder to retain and develop the Agency's extraordinary talent – equipping them with the language skills, technical tools, training, and tradecraft that they require. And it means ensuring the health and wellbeing of colleagues and their families, through this awful pandemic and wherever and whenever they face harm or risk.

Finally, if confirmed, I'll prioritize partnerships – within the intelligence community and across the world. I will work closely with the Director of National Intelligence, my longtime friend and colleague Avril Haines, to make sure the Agency's efforts fit seamlessly with her vision for integrating the intelligence community.

America's partnerships and alliances are what set our country apart from lonelier major powers like China and Russia. For CIA, intelligence partnerships are an increasingly important means of amplifying our understanding and influence. Investing in those liaison relationships has never been more important. It's a task for which my whole career has prepared me.

No partnership will be more important to me than the one I hope to build with all of you on this Committee. In my conversations with each of you over the last few weeks, I have been struck by your commitment to bipartisanship and sense of shared purpose. I deeply respect your crucial oversight role, which allows the American people to have confidence that the Agency is working faithfully on their behalf and living up to our values.

If confirmed, I promise to do all I can to earn your trust, and to be a strong partner. I'll seek your advice as well as your consent. And I'll be accessible and honest – qualities I've tried hard to demonstrate throughout a lifetime in public service.

I am deeply honored to be here today, and look forward to your questions. Thank you.