

**A/S Paul Kapur’s Opening Statement for HFAC SCA Subcommittee Hearing
on “South Asia: U.S. Foreign Policy in the Region”**

February 11, 2026

Chairman Huizenga, Ranking Member Kamlager-Dove, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to appear today to discuss the Trump Administration’s approach to South Asia.

President Trump’s National Security Strategy makes clear that we must put America first and do so through active engagement with vital parts of the world. Under the President’s leadership, this has advanced our economic and security interests while helping our partners. I see the benefits every day in my Bureau’s work in the South Asia region.

Consisting of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives Nepal and Bhutan, South Asia is vitally important – India alone has well over one billion people and occupies a subcontinental landmass. A hostile power dominating South Asia could exert coercive leverage over the world economy. The United States must prevent this from happening and keep the region free and open.

As Secretary Rubio has said, America first, does not mean American alone. To achieve our goals, we must cooperate with likeminded partners who can share the burden. Often, this will require us to help our partners build strategic capacity, enabling them better to integrate into the world economy, preserve their autonomy, and contribute to a free and open region.

We have many tools to do this. We of course seek to expand our trade relationships with the South Asian countries; robust trade will make all of us stronger and more prosperous. Just last week, President Trump and Prime Minister Modi reached agreement on a historic trade framework. And two days ago, the Trump Administration signed a trade deal with Bangladesh, providing American exporters with access to Bangladesh’s market of 175 million people. But beyond trade, I would point to three broad approaches to strategic-capacity building that the Trump Administration is deploying: Defense cooperation, targeted investment, and diplomacy.

Defense cooperation includes military sales and transfers, co-development of systems and platforms, and bilateral and multilateral exercises. Targeted

investment combines U.S. seed funding, American technology and expertise, and private industry. And diplomacy involves institutionalized touchpoints between senior leaders, as well as more ad hoc engagements to address an emergent opportunity or challenge, and strategic messaging to support our initiatives. We employ these tools in South Asia as we help our partners build strategic capacity, increase their prosperity and protect their sovereignty – outcomes that make America safer and more prosperous as well.

India, with its size, location, and commitment to a free and open region, anchors South Asia and, more broadly, the Western half of the Indo-Pacific. The United States and India maintain high-level diplomatic touchpoints such as the 2+2 ministerial and cooperate closely in the defense, technology and energy sectors, bilaterally and through the Quad. Cooperation in these areas remained robust even as we resolved longstanding issues in our trade relationship, as evidenced by the renewed 10-year U.S.-India Defense Framework Agreement, the TRUST initiative, and Indian purchases of U.S. products ranging from drones to liquefied natural gas. Following the trade framework President Trump reached last week with Prime Minister Modi, we can now focus on other shared priorities, lowering barriers to trade with one of the largest economies in world and opening the way to even more fulsome cooperation. This will enhance our mutual prosperity and help India to defend its sovereignty, both on land and in its maritime near abroad.

Pakistan is another important partner in the region. We are working together with Pakistan to realize the potential of its critical-mineral resources, combining U.S. government seed financing with private-sector know-how to the benefit of both of our countries. Our trade in energy and agriculture is expanding as well. And our ongoing counterterrorism cooperation helps Pakistan combat internal security challenges while addressing transnational threats that could harm the U.S. or our partners.

Bangladesh, Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bhutan's strategic locations afford them outsized importance, but also can make them targets for coercion. Defense cooperation with the United States helps them protect their borders and waterways against encroaching powers. And carefully targeted investment can provide these states with high-quality, transparent, non-coercive support for critical infrastructure

like ports, telecom networks and energy portals, helping them to avoid the dangers of debt-trap diplomacy.

I have been discussing cooperation between the U.S. and South Asia, but in closing I will point to one other important form of cooperation – cooperation between the Trump Administration and Congress on these issues. We both recognize South Asia's vital importance. Let's work together to build strategic capacity in the region, helping our partners to help themselves, and making the United States safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your questions.