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MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA SUBCOMMITTEE
MAY 5, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ackerman, distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting us to testify before this committee on the subject of political transitions in the Middle East. You rightly recognize that this is a pivotal moment in the Middle East and North Africa. National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon said recently that the Arab Spring is an event comparable to the fall of the Ottoman Empire or the decolonization of the Middle East following the Second World War. And historians will long be debating these momentous developments. President Obama has often said that the future of the Middle East will be written by its own people, not by any foreign power. This administration stands with those in the region who call for peaceful, democratic transitions, for tolerance and pluralism. Our policy approach is both pragmatic and in keeping with American principles, values and interests.

We view this as a moment of great challenge and great opportunity – and the two are inexorably linked. Last month, Secretary Clinton noted that uprisings across the region have exposed a number of myths: The “myth that governments can hold on to power without responding to their people’s aspirations or respecting their rights; the myth that the only way to produce change in the region is through violence and conflict; and, most pernicious of all, the myth that Arabs do not share universal human aspirations for freedom, dignity, and opportunity.”

The protests and upheaval we have witnessed in so many countries has the potential to bring about a region that is more democratic, more economically dynamic, and more responsive to the needs and aspirations of its citizens. As Secretary Clinton has said, the status quo in the Middle East is unsustainable, and genuine democratic changes in that region will make countries both more stable and, in the long run, likely to be more in sync with the interests of the United States and our closest allies. But she also has warned of the danger that democratic transitions can be hijacked by undemocratic forces, giving rise to new autocracies. We need to shape our policies in the region to encourage peaceful democratic transitions and to help prevent the rise of such new autocracies.

The Obama administration believes that democratic transitions must be home grown. The challenge falls to the people and the leaders of the region to achieve the brighter future they desire – a future in which governments respond to the aspirations of their people and view it as their duty to protect human rights, fundamental freedoms and the dignity that all people desire and deserve. But the United States has a keen interest in their success, and we can play a key

supporting role. We have done and will do this by acknowledging, supporting and empowering the democratic and reformist voices from the region. And we will continue to do this by speaking honestly about the need to respect human rights and shun violence. We continue to tell all governments, friendly or not, that the use of violence to suppress peaceful expression is wrong and destabilizing, both to the governments that resort to violence and to the region as a whole.

Much has been said about the alleged conflict between our democratic values and our desire for stability in the Middle East. This is a false dichotomy. The United States has a profound interest in regional stability, and we believe that respect for universal human rights and the principle that governments are accountable to their people are in fact key components of long-term stability.

As popular movements for political change take on the immense challenges facing their respective countries, political outcomes will have a significant impact on stability in the region. If the region's movements for greater democracy, opportunity, dignity, and accountability fail to produce successful transitions to more inclusive and transparent democratic systems, the Middle East will be unable to overcome its mounting economic and social challenges. These challenges are well established, from stagnant economies saddled by corruption, inequality, and unemployment, to resource depletion, to the marginalization of women and minorities, and they add up to an unsustainable status quo.

The United States remains steadfast in our commitment to advancing our core interests in the region and defending the security of our allies. And we are explicit about our interests: We seek a comprehensive peace between Israel and its neighbors. We seek to combat terrorism and the dark ideologies of extremist groups. We seek to stop Iran's illicit nuclear activity and curb its destabilizing influence in the region. We seek to cement a long-term partnership with an Iraq that is peaceful, sovereign, self-reliant, and reintegrated into the Arab world. We seek to maintain the continued flow of critical energy resources to the global economy. And we seek broad-based prosperity. Regional stability has always been a key factor in our ability to channel energies and marshal coordination in service of all these goals.

In light of the role of stability in promoting U.S. interests, we have an enormous stake in the outcome of the Arab Spring. Going forward, the regional stability we seek to advance our interests can only be sustained if the processes of democratic reform advance. As Secretary Clinton noted, when there is a gap between the government and the needs and ambitions of the people, states grow more brittle and less stable. In the long run, governments that are responsive to their people are the best guarantors of stability, and the best partners for the United States.

Furthermore, the peaceful, homegrown, non-ideological movements that have put Egypt and Tunisia on the path of democratic transition offer a powerful repudiation of the false narrative espoused by al-Qaeda and other extremist elements that violence is the only way to effect change. Thus, events in the region today present an opportunity not only for the advancement of universal values and human rights but also a strategic opportunity for the United States and our allies.

Our response to the upheaval in the Middle East has been rooted in a consistent set of principles: We have opposed the use of violence against peaceful protesters and supported the universal

rights of free expression, assembly, and association and the right to participate in the affairs of the state. We have strongly condemned, including in multilateral fora, the killing, torture, and abuse of peaceful protestors. We have made clear our view that people's legitimate demands and aspirations must be met by positive engagement from governments, in the form of meaningful political and economic reforms.

Our policy responses also take into account the interrelationship between political and economic change, because we know that people have not put themselves in harm's way so that they could vote in one single election; rather, they seek to transform the relationship between themselves and their government – they seek a system of democratic governance that delivers results for them and their families. As we offer support and encouragement to governments and people pursuing political change, we are also looking to bolster the economic progress that can help make that change sustainable over time. And we have mobilized the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) to provide up to \$2 billion in financial support for private-sector investments in the Middle East and North Africa.

We are keeping a close eye on religious minorities, who are often even more vulnerable to violence and abuse during such tumultuous times, and who rightly view religious freedom as part and parcel of the universal rights democracy promises. We are also concerned with ensuring that democratic change, where it comes, is inclusive – that means that women have an equal voice at the bargaining table and minorities are fairly represented.

Iran provides a powerful cautionary tale for the transitions underway. Iranians' democratic aspirations in 1979 and 2009 were subverted by a brutal dictatorship. Throughout Iran, security forces have beaten, detained, and in several recent cases killed peaceful protestors, even as Iran's president has made a show of denouncing the violence against civilians in Libya and other places. But we are holding Iranians who are responsible for human rights abuses to account. The United States and the European Union have sanctioned serious human rights abusers and joined a broad coalition of nations at the UN Human Rights Council to create a Special Rapporteur position for human rights in Iran. We will not remain silent as the Iranian government seeks to squelch the voices of its own people.

The path ahead will look different in each country of the region, and so too will our support for each unique process. But the trends that produced this dramatic moment in the Middle East have been building for many years, and they are not likely to fade soon. No part of the region has been untouched, and already we can say that the Middle East will never be the same again.

Tunisia and Egypt have begun the process of democratic transition and, if successful, are poised to offer a promising example to their neighbors for the power of peaceful movements to bring about meaningful change. Other states, including Jordan, Morocco, and Oman, have taken some initial positive steps toward political and economic reform, but all have more to do. In others, including Yemen and Bahrain, for example, much more work remains to reverse disturbing trends, hold security forces accountable for abuses, and initiate democratic reforms that improve equality and participation.

In Egypt, the military council deserves credit for responding to the aspirations of the Egyptian people for democracy and taking steps to meet many of their immediate demands. They have supervised a process for initial constitutional amendments, which were overwhelmingly passed in a referendum last month and which set the stage for democratic elections and the end of the emergency law. They issued a vastly improved political parties law; have taken early steps toward reorganizing the state security apparatus; publicly committed to lifting the emergency law before holding free, fair, and transparent democratic elections; recognized independent unions; and oversaw the successful constitutional referendum. The Egyptian Armed Forces also rebuilt a church in the village of Sol, which had been destroyed by mob violence on March 4.

We will be closely tracking the military's implementation of all of its commitments, especially the lifting of the emergency law before elections take place. Moreover, we remain concerned about continued detentions by the military and quick trials of civilian protestors in military courts in a process that does not provide essential procedural safeguards.

We have received reports that dozens of people are in prison after being arrested at or near the site of peaceful protests. Military courts have tried protestors in proceedings that have sometimes taken less than an hour, with limited or no access to counsel. For example, on February 28, Amr al-Beheiry was sentenced to five years in prison after a one-day military trial following his participation in a peaceful protest on February 26. He was not allowed legal representation.

On April 14, the Supreme Military Council committed to "review the detentions of all the youth...tried in the recent period." We are continuing to engage with the Supreme Military Council to encourage them to fulfill this commitment.

On a broader scale we also are concerned about sectarian violence and legal discrimination of religious minorities, and the limited participation by women in all aspects of the transitional process.

Egypt's long-standing economic troubles contributed to the revolution, and the recent upheaval has made the country's economic distress acute. The state of the economy, including unemployment rates, will of course affect the prospects for successful transition to democracy. We are consulting with our international partners and international financial institutions on ways to help. We have made available \$165 million in bilateral funds toward meeting immediate needs for economic recovery and democracy and governance programming, and we are looking at avenues to potentially increase these commitments. We are working closely with Congress to increase access to capital available to the private sector, particularly for small and medium enterprises, taking the lessons learned from Eastern Europe to structure a successful Enterprise Fund for Egypt. We are exploring possible expansion of the Qualifying Industrial Zone program, which stimulates growth and deepens the U.S.-Egyptian partnership, as well as evaluating several other options for broader economic support to be responsive and demonstrate clear support of Egypt and its people.

The U.S. Government's support for democracy and good governance in Egypt is a coordinated effort involving offices at the State Department and USAID. The State Department's Bureau of

Human Rights, Labor and Democracy (DRL) is focusing on political party development, with an emphasis on women, and on technical assistance for the upcoming parliamentary and presidential election, including training poll-watchers and helping nascent parties develop, maintain and represent their constituents. DRL is also working to strengthen independent labor unions because they are key actors in the larger political dialogue. It also supports programs to bolster independent media, including the training of bloggers, women and youth in multimedia journalism, and teaching the nuts and bolts of election coverage. And it helps train civil society groups that will be critical to building the institutions of sustainable democracy and monitoring and protecting human rights. DRL will use a portion of the reprogrammed and repositioned \$165 million in Economic Support Funds for Egypt for these activities, and will collaborate with USAID and other relevant offices at State to ensure complementary roles.

In Tunisia, preparations are underway for the election this summer of a constituent assembly that will rewrite the constitution and chart the next steps in the country's democratic transition. We applaud a number of steps already taken, including the interim Government of Tunisia's efforts to improve human rights protections and its endorsement of the country's personal status code protecting the rights of women. Tunisia has prepared a new elections law, and dozens of new political parties are organizing to compete. The United States is committed to helping secure a democratic transition that delivers results and sustainable economic development for all the people of Tunisia. Thus far, the Administration has identified nearly \$30 million to help Tunisians build the capacity of civil society, political parties and media, to conduct free and fair elections, to promote transparency and accountability, to support youth employability, and to advance private sector development.

Of the nearly \$30 million in assistance targeted to Tunisia, the Department of State's Office of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) is providing \$20 million to support Tunisian efforts during their democratic transition. These funds are being channeled through Tunisian and international NGOs to shape an independent, professional, and pluralistic media sector; build a vibrant civil society; strengthen democratic political parties; develop a sound framework for free elections; enact economic reforms and expand entrepreneurship. MEPI has already awarded initial grants to both Tunisian and international NGOs and continues to seek innovative proposals through a year-long open competition. USAID is providing approximately \$10 million in support for the political process. As with Egypt, relevant offices, including in the bureaus of Near East Affairs and Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and USAID are working closely together.

Finally, because trade will be critical to building a more robust Tunisian economy, we are encouraging legal and economic reforms that would facilitate more open trade and private sector investment,

In Yemen, the United States supports a peaceful and orderly transfer of power in accordance with the Yemeni people's demand for better governance that is more responsive to their needs and aspirations. A solution to Yemen's problems will not be found through security measures, but through political dialogue, free elections, and more transparent and accountable governance. We urge the participation of all sides, including youth, in a dialogue to reach a solution that will be supported by the Yemeni people. Yemeni citizens, like people everywhere, have the right to

demonstrate peacefully, to assemble, and to express themselves without fear of violence, arrest or death. We strongly urge all sides to refrain from violence.

The United States has welcomed the Gulf Coordination Council's (GCC) initiative for supporting political transition in Yemen. As the situation unfolds, it will be critical to maintain active U.S. support on security, governance, and development to help the government of Yemen to preserve rule of law, maintain and improve service delivery, prepare for presidential elections, and draft a new constitution.

U.S. assistance policy on Yemen is two-pronged: we provide security and counterterrorism support to combat the immediate threat of terrorism, while delivering economic and technical support directly to local communities to help counter long-term drivers of instability, such as unemployment, poverty, and ineffective governance. The current political crisis in Yemen has rendered this work more difficult in the short-term, but has reaffirmed and emphasized its importance over the long-term.

We will continue to closely coordinate our assistance efforts with those of other donor countries. Through the Friends of Yemen process, for example, the United States harmonizes political and economic assistance efforts with partners including the IMF and the UN.

We are deeply concerned by what we are seeing in Bahrain. The operation to clear the streets of protests in March may at this point have restored superficial law-and-order, but now has given way to a campaign of retribution against elements of the political opposition, civil society, professional groups including medical practitioners, and Shi'a community leaders. Close to 600 people have been detained since March 17, including journalists, bloggers, teachers, human rights activists, medical staff, and political activists.

We have repeatedly raised our concerns with the Government of Bahrain, and made clear that security operations will not resolve the challenges Bahrain faces. Only a credible, peaceful, productive political process that addresses the legitimate aspirations of the Bahraini people will resolve the crisis. Targeting opposition figures for arrest, including political moderates, undermines any attempt by the Government of Bahrain to engage in a national dialogue. We have also expressed our concerns to the other Gulf Cooperation Council members and remain actively engaged with Bahrain and its neighbors, as well as with civil society and political societies inside Bahrain, in efforts to help rebuild trust and to create a climate where a productive political dialogue is possible.

The Administration has consistently spoken out against the Syrian government's killing, torture, detention, and abuse of peaceful protestors, with President Obama condemning these actions "in the strongest possible terms." He continued, "This outrageous use of violence to quell protests must come to an end now...We strongly oppose the Syrian government's treatment of its citizens and we continue to oppose its continued destabilizing behavior more generally, including support for terrorism and terrorist groups."

As the Syrian government's abuses of human rights escalated, the Administration responded by leading the international community in calling a special session at UN Human Rights Council in

Geneva that produced a strong resolution unequivocally condemning the Syrian government's use of lethal violence against its citizens. The UN resolution also created an independent UN investigation into the recent violence, and called on the Syrian authorities to release prisoners of conscience and those arbitrarily detained, including lawyers, human rights defenders, and journalists, and to lift restrictions on internet access, telecommunication, and international journalists. We have also taken additional, unilateral steps. President Obama issued a new Executive Order specifically targeting individuals and entities responsible for human rights abuses in Syria with financial sanctions, as we recently did in the case of Iran. We coordinated this action with the European Union, and we expect the EU's imposition of targeted sanctions will greatly amplify the impact of our efforts. We are closely monitoring the status of religious minorities in Syria who are increasingly worried for their safety as the situation destabilizes the country.

Since the protests in Syria began, U.S. Ambassador Robert Ford has conveyed our grave concerns directly to the Syrian government at the highest levels, and has played a vital role behind the scenes in obtaining the release of American citizens who were arrested by the Syrian security services. Ambassador Ford has also provided invaluable insights for our policy decisions, giving us a window into the thinking of senior regime figures, human rights and democracy activists, and other non-governmental contacts. His ongoing work is particularly important because the Syrian government has banned international media from reporting inside Syria, creating a dearth of credible information about events on the ground.

In Libya, the United States continues to play a critical role in the international coalition seeking to protect Libyan civilians and enforce UN Resolutions 1970 and 1973. Secretary Clinton and Undersecretary Burns have joined foreign officials in an international contact group on Libya. The united voice of the international community has made clear that there must be a transition in Libya that reflects the will of the Libyan people and the departure of Qadhafi from power.

We are assessing options for the types of assistance we could provide to the Libyan people, and are consulting directly with the Libyan opposition and our international partners about these matters, including delivery of critical humanitarian assistance. The United States alone is providing \$53.5 million to meet humanitarian needs within Libya and to evacuate and assist those fleeing the violence in Libya. USAID deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team to the region March 1, initially based in Tunisia and Egypt. Humanitarian assistance experts reached Benghazi, Libya, in early April to determine relief needs, advise and shape the U.S. response, and work with other donors and non-governmental organizations in getting assistance to people in need. Furthermore, the President has agreed to send up to \$25 million in non-lethal assistance to the Transitional National Council (TNC) for use by their security forces. The items we are providing will include medical supplies, boots, tents, rations, and personal protective gear. We are continuing to work with the TNC to determine whether there is other assistance we can provide.

Even in Libya, where Colonel Qadhafi responded to his people's protests with extreme violence and threats of worse, we can see reasons for optimism. Not only in the international community's success in preventing the imminent slaughter of tens of thousands in the city of Benghazi and mounting international pressure on Qadhafi to end his brutal attacks, but also in

the swift and unified international action that enabled this response. As Secretary Clinton noted in her address to the U.S.-Islamic World Forum last month:

In the past, when confronted with such a crisis, all too often the leaders of North Africa and the Middle East averted their eyes or closed ranks. But not this time. Not in this new era. The OIC, the GCC issued strong statements. The Arab League convened in Cairo, in the midst of all of the commotion of Egypt's democratic transition, to condemn the violence and suspend Libya from the organization, even though Colonel Qadhafi held the League's rotating presidency. The Arab League went on to call for a no-fly zone... But that's not all. The Arab League affirmed – and again I quote – “the right of the Libyan people to fulfill their demands and build their own future and institutions in a democratic framework.” That is a remarkable statement. And that is a reason to hope.

The peoples of the Middle East and North Africa have never been immune to the universal yearnings of human beings for freedom, dignity, and opportunity. But now, for the first time, citizens across the region are raising their voices to demand democratic change, and governments are beginning to respond. But all the signs of progress in recent months, and all the potential we see today for a more democratic, stable, and prosperous region will only be realized if more leaders in more places move faster and further to embrace their citizens' aspirations for freedom, dignity and opportunity. If leaders engage positively with their people to answer the region's most pressing challenges – to open their political systems, curb corruption, and respect the rights of all of their citizens – then this inspiring moment will truly be a turning point for the Middle East.

Fundamentally, this moment of profound transformation was generated by the peoples of the Middle East, and they are the ones who will shape their future. But the United States has a stake in their success, and we stand with those across the region who are working for peaceful democratic change. We are committed to the future of this region where we have so many key interests, and we believe in the potential of its people. As citizens and leaders in the Middle East and North Africa move down the path of democratic change, we will support their efforts. And we look forward to the day when all the citizens of the region, men and women of all faiths, are able to have their voices heard, their rights respected, and their aspirations met. We look forward to continuing to work with this Committee and the Congress to help make that future a reality.

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