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CONGRESSWOMAN KAY GRANGER OPENING STATEMENT: STATE AND FOREIGN OPERATIONS APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON DEPARTMENT OF STATE AND FOREIGN ASSISTANCE BUDGET

The Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs will come to order.

Mr. Secretary, I want to welcome you back to the Subcommittee. We look forward to your testimony.

You recently noted that while funding for international programs represents just one percent of the total federal budget, it may well define the majority of the history written about our era. Members of this Subcommittee certainly understand the importance of these programs.

The United States continues to show leadership in areas such as reducing poverty, fighting the AIDS virus, and stopping preventable deaths of mothers and children. However, there are countless security challenges around the world that grab the headlines every day.

At the top of the list is the crisis in Syria and the surrounding region, which is being fueled by the Assad regime, ISIL, and other terrorist groups. This situation has grown more complicated due to Russia's increased involvement. We want to hear your thoughts about the situation on the ground.

We are also concerned that our allies and partners in the fight against terrorism - such as Egypt, Jordan, and the Kurds in Iraq - are not receiving the assistance they need. While there has been some improvement since I raised this issue with you last year, I want to reiterate that there is no excuse for bureaucratic delays.

It is also critical that our policies promote our national security interests and not undermine them. I question why the Administration plans to phase out the cash-flow financing arrangement for military sales with Egypt, which is one of our most reliable partners in the Middle East.

We also must demonstrate our steadfast support to help Israel address the threats posed by Iran and its proxies. Now that a nuclear agreement is in place, we are all closely watching Iran's actions.

You have said that some of the funds freed up from sanctions relief could end up in the hands of terrorists. The threat to Israel is very serious. As you negotiate another long-term memorandum of understanding, it must be made clear that U.S. support for Israel's security is unequivocal.

Another troubling development is the increased violence in Israel and the Palestinian territories over the last several months. We want to hear your thoughts about the prospects for getting the parties

back to the negotiating table. We also want to hear what the United States can do to help stop harmful rhetoric and incitement.

I want to turn next to Russia's aggressive actions against its neighbors. Many of us do not understand why Ukraine has not received lethal military aid or why the state department budget proposes to reduce assistance to Ukraine by 55 percent from last year's level.

We also see China asserting itself against the United States and our friends and allies in the Asia-Pacific region. We want to hear how this budget supports countries willing to stand up to China when their territory is threatened.

We also watch with great concern as North Korea continues to defy international sanctions. We want to hear your thoughts on what more can be done to stop this rogue nation from its nuclear pursuits.

In Afghanistan, a resurgent Taliban and a growing number of foreign fighters continue to threaten the country's security. We question how the \$1.2 billion of foreign assistance requested can be effectively programmed in this environment.

In the Americas, we see drug and gang violence, human trafficking, and lack of economic opportunity continuing to drive migration to the United States. The Subcommittee held a hearing two weeks ago on assistance to Central America where we looked at these issues. We must see results before new funds will be considered.

We are also monitoring the new public health threat from the Zika virus spreading in this hemisphere and received the supplemental request on Monday. This Committee has provided significant funding and the flexibility to address global health threats, and we want to hear how the administration will immediately address the Zika outbreak.

We have additional questions about the Administration's budget request for the State Department and Foreign Assistance Programs. The total funding requested is roughly last year's level, but you propose to cut programs that have bipartisan support, such as security assistance and humanitarian programs.

At the same time, we see an increase is requested for Administration priorities, such as funding to combat climate change.

One area that we all agree is a priority is preserving the safety and security of our nation's diplomats and development officers. This Subcommittee must be sure that funds provided will keep our people safe.

In closing, I want to thank you and the men and women of the State Department and USAID for your work to promote American interests abroad.

We may not always agree on the policy or the means to achieve our goals, but the members of this Subcommittee understand the need to engage with all of the tools we have available.

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