

# TRANSITION AT A CROSSROADS: TUNISIA THREE YEARS AFTER THE REVOLUTION

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## HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS FIRST SESSION

DECEMBER 4, 2013

**Serial No. 113-92**

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/> or  
<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

85-790PDF

WASHINGTON : 2014

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## **TRANSITION AT A CROSSROADS: TUNISIA THREE YEARS AFTER THE REVOLUTION**

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2013**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2 o'clock p.m., in room 2167 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. The subcommittee will come to order. After recognizing myself, my good friend, the ranking member Ted Deutch of Florida for 5 minutes each for our opening statements, we will then break for votes and when we come back, I will recognize members of our subcommittee for 1-minute opening statements each. And then, we will hear from our panelists. And without objection, the witnesses' prepared statements will be made a part of the record and members may have 5 legislative days to insert statements and questions for the record, subject to the length limitation of the rules. The chair now recognizes herself for 5 minutes.

Three years ago this month, the self-immolation of a Tunisian street vendor would set in motion a series of events that would fundamentally change the political landscape of the entire Middle East and North Africa region—a period we now call the Arab Spring. Finally fed up with autocratic rule, with corruption, with a lack of basic freedoms, thousands of Tunisians took to the streets calling for democratic and social reforms and an end to the maligned 23-year rule of their leader.

But though there has been some significant progress made since his ouster, there is still so much that needs to be done to meet the goals and the aspirations of the Tunisian people who began this process, as I said, 3 years ago. By most accounts, the Tunisians had a successful National Constituent Assembly election in October 2011, which brought a party into power together with the Tunisian two leading secularist parties.

However, the newly formed government quickly ran into obstacles that it could not overcome and Tunisia's transition came to a grinding halt this summer when a prominent secular party member was assassinated. The assassination eventually led to the formation of a National Dialogue process to jump start the reconciliation process, to select a caretaker government, and get Tunisia back on track for a new round of elections. But the National Dia-

logue has been met with its own set of obstacles and the negotiations over who will be the caretaker Prime Minister have caused an impasse.

Now, as the political process has paused and the future of the Constitution and elections are in question, Tunisia finds itself at a crossroads as frustrations begin to set in and the rift between the secular and the Islamist ideologues continues to grow as both sides battle for legitimacy. Compounding these political problems are the economic and security challenges facing Tunisia as all three are undeniably linked and all three face an uphill battle.

However, one of the most pressing issues from a U.S. perspective is the threat of Islamic extremism in Tunisia. Foreign fighters and home grown extremists have challenged the stability of Tunisia, and while the Tunisian security forces have thus far been able to combat al-Qaeda, AQIM, and its affiliates, these terrorist networks continue to pose a threat to Tunisia and to the region.

Tunisia's border with Algeria is known to be a training area for the terrorist groups, and the insecure border with Libya is a major area for concern as it is vulnerable to smugglers and others who wish to cross into Tunisia undetected. Terrorist attacks like the one on the U.S. Embassy in September 2012 as well as the assassination of two prominent secular politicians threaten to derail the political process.

With Tunisia being the birthplace of the Arab Spring, we must continue to support the democratic aspirations in the hope that it can come through this transition successfully. For better or worse, the fate of Tunisia is tied to the reform movements throughout the rest of the region as it is viewed as the test-case for the democratic transitions in the Arab world.

It is in the vital national security interests of the United States to see a secure, a stable and a democratic Tunisia, and I hope the administration does not overlook the importance of this strategic country. We must remain engaged throughout the National Dialogue process and beyond to ensure a successful transition to democracy in Tunisia and we must not allow the terrorist groups to derail the political transition nor gain any more influence in an already susceptible region. And we must work to find effective ways to assist Tunisia as it struggles to fight this rising threat of terrorism.

This is a critical juncture for Tunisia, for the region and for United States strategic interests. We must support the people of Tunisia as they struggle to achieve real reforms and we must also support groups like IRI, NDI, IFES who are on the ground day after day promoting democracy in this vitally important region and working to find a consensus among all parties on a new Constitution and new electoral process.

With that, I yield to my ranking member, my friend, Ted Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thanks to our witnesses for testifying today on the state of Tunisia's transition. Thanks as well for your patience as we prepare to head off to vote.

It has been 3 years since a Tunisian street vendor changed the course of Tunisia in the Middle East. As we all remember, Mohamed Bouazizi, an unlicensed vendor was being harassed by police and accused by local authorities of evading an arbitrary fine.

The police confiscated six crates of his fruits and his electronic scale and denied him any appeal. In debt, tired of being harassed, without recourse and without economic opportunities, Bouazizi set himself on fire. His act became a catalyst for the Jasmine Revolution and the wider Arab Spring and it incited demonstrations and riots throughout Tunisia and the region in protest of social, political, and economic issues.

In the months that followed, the world had great hopes about what Tunisia might become. In early 2011, Tunisia ended the authoritarian regime of then President Ben Ali and in October 2011, Tunisia held elections that were praised as free and fair. Political and civil liberties were expanded and it appeared that Tunisia would become a model for the rest of the Middle East. Unfortunately, Tunisia has fallen short of the lofty and perhaps unrealistic expectations that were set in 2011. Political squabbling is limited to structural reforms needed to guarantee democratic institutions and the summer's assassination of a prominent secular leader has left many Tunisians not only disillusioned with their country's growing political polarization, but also increasingly worried about their own safety.

Under former President Ben Ali, the Tunisian people were used to the stability of a police state. However, violent extremist groups have exploited the region's poorest borders with terrorist attacks on the U.S. Embassy and a popular tourist resort. Tunisians are increasingly frightened and seeking stability. Furthermore, many of the same economic challenges that contributed to the Jasmine Revolution still exist today. Youth unemployment among college graduates is over 30 percent. Tunisia's international credit rating is poor and the increasingly unstable security situation has been particularly damaging for a country that employs 400,000 people in the tourism industry.

Furthermore, according to press reports, not a single project from the 2012 budget has been fully implemented yet. In short, it's not clear that the everyday life of Tunisians has improved since the ouster of Ben Ali. A young Tunisian protester was recently quoted as saying, "We live in desperate conditions because of unemployment, poverty, and misery. We are only asking to live in dignity."

My worry is that continued the political stalemate and instability that are plaguing Tunisia may make the country increasingly vulnerable to political actors who could set the country on a path back toward an authoritarian state. We all know that establishing a democracy is not easy, that political squabbling is by no means limited to Tunisia. This political conflict while damaging is not being fought with bullets. The Tunisian political parties have seen the devastating conflict in Syria. They have seen the errors or Morsi in Egypt. The parties have all publicly agreed that widespread violence and exclusionary governance that has plagued the region is not what they want for Tunisia's future. The ruling Ennahda Party has shown that it can compromise on key issues and reign in those hard liners demanding conservative amendments to the Constitution.

The party eventually agreed to step down to make way for a caretaker administration which is why the constituent assembly which is drafting the Constitution will remain in place and will

hopefully produce a Constitution that establishes the structures and institutions that are necessary for a democratic Tunisia.

The United States has made a pledge to the people of Tunisia in support of their transition to a democracy and although success has not been immediate, in many ways, Tunisia still has the best chance of turning into a consolidated democracy. And that is why despite the challenges, the success of Tunisia is key to our interests and our ideals.

I want to thank NDI, IRI, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems for your contributions in Tunisia, not only doing key work in strengthening political parties, civil society, and providing election support, but in many ways it is your organizations that are representing the American ideals of equal opportunity and dignity for all and we are grateful for that. Although the attention that Congress and the American people are paying to Tunisia is probably insufficient, I hope that today will provide an opportunity to remember how great the consequences are of Tunisia's quest for democracy.

As we saw in 2011, the future of Tunisia will be decided by the Tunisian people, but if democracy fails, there are no good alternatives. Therefore, I believe that the United States has a vital role to play in helping to assist the democratic, free, and stable Tunisia and I look to our witnesses to provide your perspectives on what is happening inside the country, your reactions to U.S. response so far and your recommendations for Congress and the United States Government. I thank you, Madam Chairman, and I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Deutch. Thank you for your excellent statement. I now would like to grant 1-minute opening statements to Mr. Schneider, followed by Ms. Meng, and then Mr. Vargas. Mr. Schneider is recognized.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. In the interest of time as votes have been called, I will yield my time back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. But we have got plenty of time. Don't worry. Ms. Meng?

Ms. MENG. I yield my time, too.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. Mr. Vargas.

Mr. VARGAS. I also yield my time back, but I do thank the people that we have here today and look forward to their testimony.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much and with that, I am going to introduce the panelists and then we will come back and hear from you.

First, we welcome Mr. Scott Mastic, the Regional Director for Middle East and North Africa at the International Republican Institute. In this capacity, he has helped grow this division into the Institute's largest regional division. Mr. Mastic has led various democracy assistance efforts in the region and served as an election observer in many countries, including Tunisia, Egypt, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Next, we welcome Mr. Leslie Campbell, Senior Associate and Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa at the National Democratic Institute where he has directed programs in this region since '96. Mr. Campbell has 25 years of experience in international development and parliamentary governance. Thank you, sir.



And third, we welcome Mr. William Sweeney, who is the President of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. Prior to this position, Mr. Sweeney served on the Board of Directors and is chairman of IFIS. Mr. Sweeney has observed elections in the Philippines, Russia, Nicaragua and Jamaica. We thank all of you for being here and when we come back, if there are any members who would like to make an opening statement, I will recognize them first and then we will hear from you, gentlemen. And with that the subcommittee is temporarily on vacation.

[Off the record.]

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. The subcommittee has reconvened. Thank you so much. Mr. Mastic, we will begin with you for your remarks and as I said, all of your written statements will be made a part of the record. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF MR. SCOTT MASTIC, REGIONAL DIRECTOR,  
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA, INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE**

Mr. MASTIC. Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the important topic of Tunisia, a country that I remain guardedly optimistic about despite a number of challenges that continue to confront its transition.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. If you could put the microphone a little bit closer.

Mr. MASTIC. How is that? There. I offer this sense of optimism based on what we have seen during the past 3 years and especially as a result of the interactions among Tunisia's many political stakeholders. Unlike Egypt with a troubling authoritarian behavior of the country's Muslim Brotherhood, irrevocably polarized relations between the political forces, or like Libya where we see an absence of security making a successful transition incredibly fragile or like the horrific effects we see from Syria's civil war, what we see today in Tunisia is a continued effort from political stakeholders to reach agreement through negotiation.

This is not to say we can take for granted Tunisia will be successful and to the contrary, the country has reached its most pivotal make or break point yet and currently stands in an impasse.

Today, I would like to briefly elaborate on what I see as three key factors to the transition either moving forward successfully or going in a different, less optimal, direction. First is the political track of national dialogue agreed to by the current government and opposition parties and moderated by the so-called quartet of civil society entities. Key actions related to the ultimate passage of a Constitution and electoral law and appointment of an electoral commission extend from the dialogue's success, but ultimately these important benchmarks will not be achieved unless the political parties agree on a caretaker prime minister and government that can shepherd the country to elections.

Recent public comments from UGTT, Tunisian trade union leaders which are mediating the dialogue, suggest the primary political parties remain committed to the process and that it may resume even this week or next. In the current state of negotiation, the key factor appears to be neither side believing it can leverage too much

advantage or dig in for a better deal. The willingness of the main parties to reach agreement at the negotiating table is of paramount importance.

Second is security, specifically the threat posed by Islamic extremists. We have seen the poisoning effect that acts of terrorism have had on Tunisia during the past 3 years. This has contributed to polarization between Islamists and secularists with the latter believing the Ennahda-led government has been too slow to recognize the threats posed by jihadists. Future acts of terror and especially at this critical moment could derail the national dialogue before a successful interim government is put into place. This would leave Tunisia in a free fall. Therefore, time is of the essence in avoiding a potential terrorist-induced crisis.

Third, and perhaps most important, is the continued patience Tunisian citizens are willing to show toward their political leaders. My sense is that the patience of ordinary Tunisians directly relates to the state of the country's economy and the belief that the transition offers at least the promise of economic betterment in the future. How long Tunisians will accept the current conditions is unclear, but Tunisia's politicians should not assume limitless good will. And the indicators at present are not that good. A public opinion poll conducted by the International Republican Institute in October found that 79 percent of Tunisians say the country is going in the wrong direction, the highest yet recorded number. The economy and specifically jobs continues to count as the most important problem as Tunisians see it. Disturbingly in the October survey, an increasing number of respondents, 29 percent, say they are having a hard time feeding themselves and their family, while 48 percent say they are making just enough to get by.

Future Tunisian Governments must prioritize economic issues. Addressing these issues, though, is not possible with the current political impasse. As with the other factors, it seems the longer this impasse continues between the major political forces, the more frustrated Tunisian citizens may become based on their desire for better life opportunity.

With respect to our programming and democracy assistance, IRI was registered by the Tunisian Government in November 2011 and has been able to pursue active programming with all political stakeholders throughout the country. My continued optimism about Tunisia is linked to what we are experiencing through those interactions. Programs from the international community are widely welcomed which is always encouraging, but from our vantage point what distinguishes Tunisia is the seriousness shown by the political parties and civil society in developing their organizations.

Tunisia's civil society is playing an important role in advancing human rights, women's rights, and transitional justice. And we see key civil society groups in a central mediation roles attempting to advance the transition. I cannot stress how important this point of wanting a democratic system to emerge is. The Arab world continues to lack a successful working model of elective democracy and when one looks across the region, we are hard pressed to see something with more promise emerging sooner elsewhere.

Even as the current dynamic is uncertain, I believe Tunisia remains the best hope for a democratic political transition in this region. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Mastic follows:]

**TESTIMONY OF SCOTT MASTIC  
REGIONAL DIRECTOR, MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA  
INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA  
DECEMBER 4, 2013**

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the important topic of Tunisia and its political transition, a country that I remain guardedly optimistic about three years following the departure of autocrat Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, despite numerous challenges that continue to confront its transition.

**TUNISIA'S TRANSITION**

I offer this sense of optimism based on what we have seen transpire during the past three years and especially as result of the interactions seen among Tunisia's many political stakeholders, ranging from Islamists to secular political opposition, to trade unionists, civil society and the Tunisian people. Unlike Egypt, where the troublingly authoritarian behavior of the country's Muslim Brotherhood so polarized relations between political forces during the short year Mohammed Morsi was in power, or like Libya where an absence of security makes a successful political transition incredibly fragile, or like the horrific effects we see from Syria's civil war, what we see today in Tunisia is a persistent and continued effort from all political stakeholders that have joined into the transition to reach agreement on the future nature of rule emerging from nearly six decades of undemocratic rule.

This is no easy feat, building an inclusive and democratic process of transition that allows all relevant actors to be engaged, especially given the abrupt fall of the Ben Ali regime – in only about six weeks – and the absence of democratic norms during the repressive decades Tunisia's police state lorded over its citizens. Yet even as moments of political crisis have challenged the transition, including two high profile political assassinations, a lumbering constitution writing process, suspension of National Constituent Assembly deliberations, and a volatile neighborhood where threats posed by Islamic extremists and political turmoil in close-by countries loom large, despite all of these problems, what we continue to see is an attempt by Tunisian political forces to solve vexing questions through negotiation and dialogue. In this Tunisia is exceptional in both form and substance from the events we see unfolding elsewhere in the region. And, in the sometimes dysfunctional and most times *ad hoc* process of deciding Tunisia's political future, we can be encouraged that Tunisia's transition reveals the raw beginnings of an emerging democratic culture, one of bare knuckles negotiation, horse trading and brinksmanship and yet, a culture made ever stronger by each moment of crisis diverted.

This is not to say we can take for granted Tunisia will be successful. To the contrary, the country has reached its most pivotal make or break point yet, and currently stands at an

impasse. Today, I will briefly elaborate on what I see as three key factors to the transition either moving forward successfully, or going a different, less-optimal direction.

#### **KEY FACTORS**

The first is the political track of National Dialogue agreed to by the current governing parties, including the Ennahda Islamist party, and the secular opposition parties, and moderated by the so-called Quartet of civil society entities, primary among them the Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT) general trade union. Key actions related to the ultimate passage of a constitution, an electoral law and appointment of an electoral commission extend from the dialogue's success but ultimately none of these important benchmarks will be achieved unless the political parties agree on a caretaker prime minister and government that can shepherd the country to elections.

The Ennahda party leading the government challenged by the Nida Tunis party, that has come to represent the largest share of more secular minded Tunisians, have been unable to agree on a prime minister in the most recent national dialogue talks. Growing polarization between Islamists and secular Tunisians especially over the course of the past year have contributed to an atmosphere of increasing mistrust between these primary political players where each is reticent to agree on personalities for the interim government they respectively believe give the other party an upper hand. Notable in the process thus far is the government's agreement to ultimately accept the opposition's demands for a caretaker government, which constitutes recognition of their own leadership failures during the past three years. Irrespective of rhetoric, the acceptance of a caretaker government is a pragmatic attempt to avoid an Egypt-like moment of popular unrest.

In the current state of negotiation, the key factor appears to be neither side believing it can leverage too much advantage or dig in for a better deal, and in this sense the continued willingness of Nida Tunis and other opposition parties to solve disagreement with the governing parties at the negotiating table is of paramount importance as opposed to some other mode like popular street actions. Directly related, is time. Tunisia has reached a critical point, and the transition is at an impasse. The longer that impasse continues, the greater the potential that other triggers I will discuss momentarily threaten the dialogue's key outcome, an interim government's composition.

Second is security, specifically the threat posed by Islamic extremists. We have seen the poisoning effect acts of terrorism have had on Tunisia during the past three years. First was the assassination of secular politician Choukri Belaid in February 2013. This was followed by the July 25, 2013 assassination of Mohamed Brahmi which brought the country to a critical point of crisis and triggered the need for the dialogue process we see now. As well, the recent killing of six Tunisian security officials in Sidi Bouzid and most recently, and disturbingly, an attempt by terrorists to target hotels frequented by westerners. These acts of terror have produced a growing sense of unease among Tunisians and perhaps most damaging have contributed to polarization between Islamists

and secularists with the latter believing the Ennahda-led government has been too slow to recognize the threats posed by jihadists.

While Ennahda was slow in reacting to the threat posed by Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb and by locally grown salafists, they ultimately have done the right thing in attempting to eliminate jihadists in the Chambi Mountains along the Algerian border and in declaring Ansar al-Sharia a terrorist organization. The threat now is that future acts of terror along the lines seen with last month's attempted hotel bombings, or another assassination of a high profile politician or public personality could derail the national dialogue before a successful government is put into place. This would leave Tunisia in a free fall. As with the successful naming of a government, time is again of the essence with respect to avoiding a terrorist induced crisis. The longer the impasse, the greater the potential an unforeseen security crisis undermines a successful outcome to the dialogue.

Third, and perhaps most important, is the continued patience Tunisian citizens are willing to show towards their political leaders and the transition path they have led the country down. The patience of ordinary Tunisians directly relates to the state of the country's economy and the sense that the transition offers at least the promise of economic betterment in the near term, which was a key driving force behind popular unrest seen in multiple Arab countries during the past three years. Tunisia's International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan secured this summer offers some help but in a recent visit IMF officials expressed concern over the country's budget deficit and delays in drafting and adopting a new investment law as part of the loan package. As well, some economic growth forecasts for the coming year have been scaled down to as low as 3 percent. The current government's most recent economic policy approach has failed to produce either the new enterprise or jobs desired by Tunisians, especially in the country's interior regions. This certainly does not meet public expectations in the areas where we now know dissatisfaction was highest pre-revolution. Failures in the economic sphere also do not give much hope to the young Tunisian university graduates unable to find a job, estimated by some to be at least 30 percent.

How much longer Tunisians are willing to accept these conditions is unclear, but Tunisia's politicians should not assume limitless goodwill, and the indicators at present are not good. A public opinion poll conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in October 2013 found that 79 percent of Tunisians say the country is going in the wrong direction, the highest yet recorded number and a trend that has been on the increase since IRI's first post-revolution poll in Tunisia in March 2011. The economy and specifically jobs continues to count as the most important problem as Tunisians see it, which has been a consistent trend and makes economic factors the key driver behind public satisfaction. Disturbingly in the October survey, an increasing number of respondents (29 percent) say they are having a hard time feeding themselves and their family and buying even the most basic essentials for survival, while 48 percent say they are making just enough to get by.

It goes without saying that future Tunisian governments whether interim or those emerging after elections must prioritize economic issues. But addressing economic

issues is not possible within the current political impasse and even if and when an interim government is announced, it may be less bold in making difficult economic policy decisions with a limited time mandate than a future government that has secured a popular mandate to lead. Whether Tunisians continue to show patience with the state of negotiations and for how long is a key determinate, but as with other factors, it seems the longer the impasse between the country's political forces drags on, the more frustrated Tunisian citizens may become with the transition's perceived impact on their desire for economic betterment and life opportunity. Again, the time is now for the country's political leaders to move the process forward.

#### **DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE**

Tunisia is not unlike other Arab countries in transition where we see a multitude of assistance needs ranging from small, medium enterprise growth to security sector reform, to transitional justice.

Like other democracy organizations, IRI was prevented from working in Tunisia during the Ben Ali regime. Post-Ben Ali regime in early 2011, IRI established a presence in Tunisia and began programs with emerging political parties and civil society groups across a broad range of issues important to democratic development. We were registered by the Tunisian government in November 2011 and have been able to pursue active programming with all political stakeholders throughout the country. One reason for my continued optimism about Tunisia is what we are experiencing through interactions with the country's political stakeholders, with political parties and civil society organizations actively engaged in building a democratic future.

The political parties have already begun to prepare strategies for the next elections, as they know an outcome to the dialogue will quickly trigger the campaign calendar. IRI is regularly approached by the campaign teams of presidential aspirants and responds to those technical assistance requests. We provide messaging and communications workshops for party spokespeople, and a significant part of our ongoing efforts relate to helping the parties think strategically about establishing organization in different parts of the country and growing their membership bases. Tunisia's vibrant civil society has likewise demonstrated an incredible thirst for knowledge and skills with active participation in dialogues with elected decision-makers that have been supported by IRI. We have seen this type of enthusiasm for democracy skills building irrespective of political trend or ideology. Taken collectively, it causes us to understand Tunisians of all stripes are serious about moving their country in a democratic direction.

By this measurement, and across the various sectors of assistance provided by the United States, I cannot stress how important this point of wanting a democratic system to emerge is. This is because the Arab world continues to lack a successful working model of elective democracy and when one looks across the region we are hard pressed to see something with more promise emerging sooner, elsewhere.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the next decade, a democratic Tunisia can have an important positive effect on the North Africa region, can serve as an important partner to both the United States and our allies in Europe and can break the as of yet elusive hope for a functioning, Arab democracy. It is by no means certain that Tunisia will reach the point of consolidated democracy and we should not be naïve about the considerable challenges that lie ahead. The country is at a pivotal moment presently and must successfully meet the key goals of the current national dialogue if it is to move ahead on achieving necessary electoral and governance milestones. Yet even as the current dynamic is uncertain, Tunisia is, after all, where the Arab Spring began. I believe Tunisia remains the best hope for a democratic political transition in the Arab world. The country deserves our continued attention at this critical juncture.

Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. Mr. Campbell.

**STATEMENT OF MR. LESLIE CAMPBELL, SENIOR ASSOCIATE  
AND REGIONAL DIRECTOR, MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA,  
NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE**

Mr. CAMPBELL. Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Deutch, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today to testify in the state of Tunisia's political transition. Since the toppling of Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia has made significant progress toward establishing democratic institutions. While Tunisia's transition is today more vulnerable than at any point thus far, there's reason to hope that the country's experience can and will continue to serve as an inspiration to those beyond Tunisia's border.

Serving as part of the leadership of NDI's international observation mission in October 2011, I witnessed firsthand the hopes that many Tunisians placed in the national constituent assembly elections that they would represent a solid step toward a more democratic future. Ennahda's moderate Islamist leadership sought to form a broad coalition to share the responsibility of governing. The ruling "troika" coalition formed by Ennahda and two center left parties, took power in December 2011. In these 2 years, the coalition has struggled but remained intact, despite the often strained communication among its members and increasing pressure from opposition political parties.

If there is an early lesson in the post-Arab Spring aftermath it is that coalitions and consensus building are far preferable to winner take all politics. Egypt went the route of winner take all and paid the price. Tunisia has chosen thus far to be more inclusive. Unfortunately, the "troika" government has struggled to address the growing economic and security challenges as the Tunisian economy has generally declined or stagnated. Last week, the Tunisian currency hit an all-time low. New figures show the unemployment rate hovering just around 16 percent with university graduate unemployment closer to 34 percent. Thus, the young Tunisians who are widely credited with bringing about the revolution are those being left behind. Some Tunisians have accused Ennahda of failing to crack down on violent extremism, a perception that was fueled by the assassination of two leftist politicians, but as the assassinations caused the political standoff between Ennahda and secular opposition, there were efforts to broker a settlement which led to the signing of a national dialogue process to address four fundamental issues. First, the composition of a new apolitical technocratic government; two, reaching agreement on the final sticking points in the Constitution; three, appointing the leadership of an independent election administration; and four, agreeing on the sequence and timeline for Presidential and parliamentary elections.

Tunisian views about the dialogue are clear. To begin the process of restoring public confidence, all responsible political parties must return to the negotiation table immediately. They must work to complete the constitutional phase, making it possible to hold elections. There has finally been movement on the constitutional process and the naming of an interim prime minister. Yesterday, opposition members of the assembly returned to hash out remaining



disagreements. There are also rumors that there is finally a compromised candidate for prime minister.

Despite Tunisia's numerous challenges, reasons for optimism remain. The transition has moved forward in fits and starts, but it does remain on track. The Tunisian value of consensus over expediency remains a strength. There is a growing perception though in Tunisia that the world has lost interest in this important democratic experiment. The international community should enhance its support of the Tunisian transition emphasizing that an immediate return to national dialogue negotiations is essential to demonstrate commitment to democratic principles and fundamental freedoms. The mediation team, in my opinion, should announce a definitive date for the dialogue to recommence and stress that any party that fails to participate will forfeit its right to contribute to decisions.

Tunisian politicians must conclude their agreement to nominate a caretaker prime minister and that may happen soon. They must finalize the Constitution, appoint the election body and outline the steps, the next steps in the transitions. These steps are absolutely required to address pressing citizen priorities including salvaging the economy and ensuring safe and secure communities. While there is an urgent need for more international economic support and assistance and I hope this is addressed more in this hearing, the United States should also strongly and consistently support popular demands for transparency, accountability and freedom. This means a continued commitment to pluralism and civil society and speaking out very clearly with respect to the on-going threats to freedom of expression.

Thank you, Madam Chairman, members of the committee.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Campbell follows:]

**Statement by Leslie Campbell  
Senior Associate and Regional Director,  
Middle East and North Africa Programs  
National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)**

**U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on Middle East and North Africa**

**December 4, 2013**

**"Transition at a Crossroads: Tunisia Three Years After the Revolution"**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to testify on the state of Tunisia's political transition three years after an uprising that toppled the authoritarian regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Protests against his legacy of corruption and nepotism, which began in December 2010, quickly transformed into a citizen-led movement for dignity and liberty that resonated across the region in the days and months following.

In the three years since popular protests began, Tunisia has made significant progress toward establishing democratic institutions. This has included the successful administration of the country's first free election to seat diverse political representatives in a National Constituent Assembly that is now tasked with drafting a new constitution reflecting citizen aspirations. Initial steps toward democracy have not been easy. While Tunisia's transition today is more vulnerable than at any other point to date, there is reason to be hopeful that the country's experience can and will continue to serve as an inspiration to others beyond Tunisia's borders.

The international community should enhance its support of the Tunisian transition, making it clear to all political actors that an immediate return to the National Dialogue negotiations (more detail on the dialogue process appears below) is essential to demonstrate genuine commitment to democratic principles and fundamental freedoms. The mediation team, led by the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), should announce a definitive date for the dialogue to re-commence and stress that any party that fails to participate will forfeit its right to contribute to decisions. Tunisian politicians must seek agreement to nominate a caretaker prime minister and cabinet that can garner public trust, finalize the constitution, appoint the election management body, and outline steps to conduct presidential and parliamentary elections. These steps are essential to adequately address pressing

citizen priorities, including salvaging the economy and ensuring safe and secure communities.

Serving as part of the leadership of NDI's international observation mission in October 2011, I witnessed firsthand the hope many Tunisians placed in the National Constituent Assembly elections. This was their first opportunity to make free choices at the ballot box and to ensure that votes were counted as cast. As they enthusiastically turned out to vote, many Tunisians calculated that if election day proceeded smoothly, if competitors accepted the election results, and if the composition of the Assembly represented public will, Tunisia would have taken a solid step toward a more democratic future and away from its authoritarian past.

Election results confirmed these hopes. While the anticipated frontrunner, Ennahda, won a plurality, taking 89 of the 217 contested seats in the assembly, 26 other party, coalition and independent lists also received enough votes to win at least one seat. In keeping with Tunisia's progressive legacy on women's rights, the 2011 election law also ensured the prominence of women in the Assembly. As a result, 27 percent of Assembly seats were filled by women.

Making good on pre-election promises, Ennahda's moderate Islamist leadership sought to form a broad coalition to share the responsibility of governing. This was intended to mitigate fears of some Tunisians and the international community that the party might seek to dominate the transition, especially through the constitution drafting process. The ruling "troika" coalition formed by Ennahda and two center left parties, the Congress for the Republic (CPR) and Ettakatol, took power in December 2011. In these two years, the coalition has struggled but remained intact, despite the often strained communication among its members and increasing pressure from opposition political parties.

Soon after the election, the Assembly pledged to complete a new constitution and announce fresh elections -- all within one year. This deadline proved to be overly ambitious. The work of constitution drafting committees was often interrupted by political stand-offs and the competing business of the general legislative standing committees. Despite the disorganization that has often characterized their work, Assembly members have frequently sought to build broad consensus, reaching out to local and international experts, and engaging citizens in the drafting process. The Assembly has negotiated and refined four successive constitution drafts and while some problems still exist, the current version is cohesive and much improved. Only a few contentious points remain regarding the separation of powers.

When the one-year deadline was not met in the winter of 2012, the Assembly attempted to engage the public by having members present a draft to invitees from civil society in all 24 Tunisian governorates and key constituencies outside the country. Despite these attempts at outreach, Tunisia's Assembly has grown increasingly unpopular among average citizens. This is due in large part to its inability to communicate adequately the purpose and pace of its work, thereby failing to meet public expectations.

While the Assembly has not met the one-year self-imposed deadline, the 'troika' government has also struggled to address growing economic and security challenges. The Tunisian economy has generally declined or stagnated since the revolution. Tunisia's middle class, one of the most robust in the region, suffers growing economic pressure as the price of necessities such as milk, bread and fuel have steadily risen. Political uncertainties since 2011 have also negatively affected the country's economic driver, the tourism sector, and have stalled much-needed domestic and international investment. Two weeks ago, Tunisia's National Institute of Statistics published unemployment figures for the third quarter of 2013. The government institution stated that while the overall unemployment rate hovers just under 16 percent, university graduate unemployment is closer to 34 percent. Thus the young Tunisians, who are widely credited as bringing about the revolution, are those being left behind.

Growing frustration and disillusionment with the pace of political change is also affecting stability in the country. Public opinion research, conducted by NDI since March of 2011, shows that Tunisians are experiencing deep anxiety since swapping the stability of a police state for the uncertainty of a transitional context in which state authority is fragmented. For Tunisians concerned with transitional justice, change has been hard to see; basic institutions of day-to-day life, such as courts, police offices, and other public establishments, barely function under bureaucratic inefficiency and entrenched corruption.

Many Tunisians, the most vocal of whom have been leftists and secularists, have accused Ennahda of delegitimizing itself and the government as a whole by failing to crack down on violent Islamic extremism in its various forms. These groups have presented a dilemma for Ennahda, particularly in the context of a weak, contested security apparatus and judicial system. Though Ennahda initially accommodated Salafist groups in exchange for their support, it hardened its rhetoric in the wake of the attack on the U.S. Embassy and American School in September 2012. By the spring of 2013, Ennahda had significantly toughened its tone toward Salafists calling for violence, particularly Ansar al-Sharia, which the

Ennahda prime minister eventually declared a terrorist group. Despite Ennahda's change of tack, many Tunisians continue to see the government as ineffectual or unwilling to enforce the rule of law.

This perception has been further fueled by two assassinations of leftist politicians this year. Both men were aligned with the Popular Front, a loose coalition of parties that fared poorly in the 2011 elections but that have risen in prominence due to their vocal stance against Ennahda. The first assassination in February forced the government's hand, resulting in the resignation of Hamadi Jebali from his post as prime minister and a government reshuffle to meet the demands of opposition parties. The second murder – this time of a member of the Assembly – happened on July 25, Republic Day, an annual celebration marking Tunisia's independence from French rule and establishment of an independent republic. The second assassination came as the Assembly was on the brink of completing its work on the constitution and finalizing the selection of nine experts who would constitute an independent election administration, an oversight body responsible for planning and setting the date for the next elections.

In response to this second shock, and emboldened by what they saw unfolding in Egypt, Ennahda's opponents were quick to act. Leaders in Nidaa Tounes, the key opposition party, stepped up attempts to label Ennahda not only a failure in government, but perhaps complicit in the murders. Beji Caid Essebsi, the savvy 87-year-old leader of Nidaa Tounes, called for opposition members of parliament to boycott the Assembly until the government stepped down, and went so far as to issue calls to dissolve the Assembly entirely. Essebsi has been praised for his efforts as interim prime minister, successfully shepherding Tunisia through the first phase of its transition in 2011. Today, however, his party is associated with old regime elements, which raises concern about a return to the pre-revolutionary approach to governance.

A coalition of opposition parties led by Nidaa Tounes and the Popular Front, labelling themselves the “National Salvation Front,” organized a sit-in outside Tunisia's Assembly and held nightly rallies in the month following the July assassination. As the protests wore on, the ruling coalition attempted to make concessions to draw the lawmakers back to the table. Ettakatol's Mustapha Ben Jaafar, in his role as president of the Assembly, went so far as to temporarily suspend the work of the legislature in a move to force the two sides to sit down. While Ennahda capitulated to opposition demands for another government reshuffle, sacking the Assembly was a “red line” it was not willing to cross.

This political stand-off continued throughout August and September, with the opposition hardening its line and making attempts to enlarge the coalition to include power brokers such as the national workers union, UGTT. While these political alliances took shape in Tunis, popular support for the boycott was waning and the Salvation Front was no longer able to turn out the numbers that it had earlier in the summer. With the end of Ramadan 2013, the summer hiatus and the return to regular schedules, concerns of daily life and daily economics have led Tunisians to pressure the politicians to move away from partisanship and toward an election.

The UGTT, along with leadership of the chamber of commerce, the lawyers syndicate and the Tunisian League for Human Rights, known as the Quartet, stepped in to try and broker a negotiation process that would allow both sides to save face and begin rebuilding trust. Leaders of most parties represented in the Assembly eventually agreed to the Quartet's 'National Dialogue' process, which would address four fundamental issues: 1) composition of a new apolitical technocrat government; 2) reaching agreement on final sticking points in the draft constitution, 3) appointing leadership of an independent election administration who would be responsible for drafting the election law, and 4) agreeing on the sequence and timeline for presidential and parliamentary elections.

This 'package' of issues, which politicians agreed to in a public signing ceremony on October 25, was accompanied by an ambitious timeline that should have seen completion of the process by late November. The optimism following the signing was dampened when parties could not reach agreement on an interim prime minister. Since mid-November, the structured dialogue process has ceased, and the Quartet has gone back to shuttle diplomacy between factions. Also assisting the process, diplomatic efforts by the U.S and European Union member states have encouraged a speedy return to dialogue, while respecting Tunisia's preference for a locally-managed negotiation.

In the midst of the various rounds of political deliberations, NDI has provided Tunisia's political leadership with advice and information on comparative experiences in managing complex negotiations as a means of considering appropriate models and encouraging constructive dialogue. Through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), NDI received funding to establish programs in Tunisia within weeks of Ben Ali's departure. Since February 2011, NDI's activities have been designed to support and strengthen the democratic process by creating a space for inclusive political debate to inform citizens and

expose them to various political options. NDI has worked to keep parties focused on building lasting structures and creating platforms that resonate with voters. Parties' investment in their internal structures, recruitment of party activists and platform development also contribute to democratic stabilization. At the same time, NDI is supporting opportunities for citizen oversight and domestic election observation with the aim to increase accountability during the country's delicate transition, with a particular focus on upcoming elections.

The week after the official negotiations stalled, NDI organized focus groups to gauge citizens' perspectives on the National Dialogue process, their views on accomplishments since 2011, and priorities in their daily lives. When asked about strides made since the revolution, Tunisian participants were resolute that freedom of expression remains the only tangible accomplishment. However, fears over recent arrests of journalists and what citizens view as media bias raise concerns about even these gains. Views about the National Dialogue are clear – in order to begin the long process of restoring public confidence, all responsible political parties must return to the negotiation table immediately. They must work hard to complete the constitutional phase, making it possible to hold elections for a new president and parliament in the next six months.

The calls from the United States and the international community during the uprising of 2011 demanding that the Tunisian government listen to pleas for dignity lent important legitimacy to citizen aspirations throughout the Arab world. Despite Tunisia's numerous challenges, reason for active engagement remains. Tunisia's transition, symbolized most powerfully by its constitutional drafting process, has moved forward in fits and starts, but it remains on track -- setting Tunisia apart from stalled or reversed transitions in neighboring countries. Tunisians' value of consensus over expediency remains one of the strengths of this country's transition. To ensure the current stalemate does not encourage undemocratic intervention in the process, it is important that the U.S. government continue to support trust-building measures between the Ennahda-led governing coalition and leading opposition parties to conclude the current constitutional phase as quickly and responsibly as possible.

In addition to directing assistance to economic and security reform, the United States should strongly and consistently support popular demands for transparency, accountability and freedom. This means a continued commitment to pluralism and civil society and speaking clearly with respect to ongoing threats to freedom of expression. The Administration and U.S. Congress should be steadfast in supporting an enabling environment for political parties and civil society to build a

democratic Tunisia, and in support of the aspirations of Tunisian citizens and those around the world who continue to look to Tunisia for inspiration.

Thank you, Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee.



Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Campbell.

Mr. Sweeney. If you could push that button on the mike and hold it close to your mouth. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF MR. BILL SWEENEY, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR ELECTORAL SYSTEMS**

Mr. SWEENEY. I thank you for the opportunity to testify in this hearing on Tunisia's transition and democratic development. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems, IFES, has received grants from the U.S. Government and other international donors to conduct an on-the-ground assessment of the electoral environment and provide technical expertise to the Court of Accounts, civil society, various ministries and the country's first independent election management body, the Independent High Commission for Elections, known as the ISIE.

On October 23, 2011, Tunisians held their first democratic elections and elected a national constituent assembly called the NCA. The elections were administered by the ISIE. They were seen as inclusive and competitive. Public confidence was high in the electoral process. The ISIE received high praise for its independence, commitment, honesty, and successful delivery of elections in a short time frame and under difficult circumstances. Since those elections, frustration and disappointment have dominated. Progress in adopting a new Constitution for Tunisia and the institutional legal framework for elections has been slow. Parliamentarians elected in 2011 have received most of the criticism. Opposition parties are now contesting the legitimacy of any legislation and calling for dissolution of the NCA. Two political assassinations of prominent leaders have adversely affected the potential for any political consensus.

As a result, Tunisia has yet to adopt a new Constitution and develop a new legal framework for the upcoming elections.

ISIE's 2011 mandate ended in May 2012. This means no electoral preparations, no election law, no election commission, no budget, no plan. There remain enormous challenges and risks and the country is losing valuable time in the current political stalemate. While minor difficulties with the 2011 elections were largely accepted in stride by the population, the same tolerance may not be forthcoming for the next elections. Simply put, if the administration of the next election does not meet public expectations, a lack of trust in the results is possible. Internal stability and the nation's transition will be threatened.

For the 2011 elections, IFES provided technical expertise and guidance to the ISIE, trained election management staff, established the ISIE media center to announce results and election-related communications before, during, and after election day, assisted the ISIE in design and distribution of 10,000 posters and 2 million fliers for voter education efforts throughout the country, partnered with the Ministry of Social Affairs to communicate with illiterate voters on the election and how to vote, and trained members of I Watch, a youth-led civil society organization to be the first independent organization to monitor campaign finance expenditures during the election.

After the 2011 elections, IFES focused on ISIE's performance and lessons learned. With funding from U.S. AID, IFES carried out a technical evaluation of the NCA elections and in-depth analyses of the legal framework for elections and campaign finance regulations.

Thanks to support from the U.S. Government, IFES has remained in country and continues to play a role in helping Tunisians in their democratic transition. IFES meets regularly with legislators to advise them on electoral legal reforms; trains judges in charge of monitoring campaign finance expenditures; and works closely with local civil society organizations to help them all be advocates for inclusive democracy in expectation of the next round of elections in Tunisia under a new ISIE. With support from the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme, IFES sustains the dialogue and debate among Tunisian political stakeholders on voter registration, electoral system design, election management bodies, and campaign finance, a process which has been underway all year.

Madam Chairman, the Arab Spring started in Tunisia. Tunisia is the furthest along in its transition, has the most engaged, robust, national conversation on democracy and has the greatest institutional capacity to succeed. Tunisia's success will be a model for other transitioning countries in the region and in the world. Despite setbacks, Tunisians are highly engaged in the political dialogue, not violence.

I was in Tunisia this past February. IFES conducted the largest attended forum in the region on voter registration and the value of a trusted voter registrar. The next few months are critical as Tunisia appoints a new government, selects new election commissioners, finalizes its Constitution and develops a new electoral law.

Madam Chair, thank you for putting a spotlight on Tunisia today. This is a critical time in the history of the country. It is critical that there be a focus on the opportunity for democracy in this region as well as the threats. Thank you, Madam Chair.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sweeney follows:]

**Spoken Testimony of William R. Sweeney, Jr.**  
***Political and Electoral Status of Tunisia***  
**December 4, 2013**

**Time: 5 minutes**

Mr. Chairman and Congressman Deutch, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on Tunisia's transition and democratic development.

IFES has received grants from the U.S. Government and other international donors to conduct an on-the-ground assessment of the electoral environment and provide technical expertise to the Court of Accounts, civil society, various ministries and the country's first independent election management body – the Independent High Commission for Elections – known as the ISIE (ee-zee).

#### **Introduction**

Almost two years ago, Tunisians held their first democratic elections – after the fall of President Ben Ali – and elected a National Constituent Assembly (called the NCA). The 2011 NCA elections were administered by the ISIE. They were seen as inclusive and competitive and public confidence was high in the electoral process. The ISIE received high praise for its independence, commitment, honesty, and successful delivery of elections in a short timeframe and under difficult circumstances.

Since those elections, frustration and disappointment have dominated. The NCA was granted legislative powers and mandated to draft a new constitution. However, progress in adopting a new constitutional, institutional and legal framework for elections has been slow and limited. The parliamentarians elected in 2011 have received most of the criticism and blame. Opposition parties are contesting their legitimacy and calling for dissolution. As a result, Tunisia has yet to adopt a new constitution and develop a new legal framework for the upcoming elections.

On top of this turmoil, the ISIE's 2011 mandate ended in May 2012. This means no electoral preparations have occurred since then.

Tunisia did gain valuable experience in managing the 2011 elections. However, there are still enormous challenges and risks, and the country is losing valuable time in the current political stalemate. While minor difficulties with the 2011 elections were largely accepted in stride, the same tolerance may not be forthcoming for the next elections – particularly if competition is fierce.

Simply put, if administration of the next elections does not meet public expectations, internal stability and the nation's democratic transition will be threatened.

#### **Accomplishments**

To help the transition over the last few years, IFES has:

- Provided technical expertise and guidance to the ISIE
- Trained election management staff in charge of administering the NCA elections
- Led the design, management and funding of the ISIE Media Center that served as a platform for all election-related communications before, during and after Election Day
- Assisted the ISIE in creating, printing and disseminating 10,000 posters and 2 million flyers for voter education efforts throughout the country

- Partnered with the Ministry of Social Affairs to increase the level of information received by illiterate voters on election and political processes and
- Trained members of I Watch – a youth-led civil society organization – to be the first independent organization to monitor campaign finance expenditures during the next elections

Mr. Chairman, IFES is very proud of its work in Tunisia for the 2011 NCA elections. We contributed to local efforts to increase access to information about the elections and helped create an environment where citizens had greater trust in their first, crucial step toward democracy.

After the 2011 elections, IFES focused on ISIE's performance and lessons learned. With funding from the United States Agency for International Development, IFES carried out a technical evaluation of the NCA elections and in-depth analyses of the current legal framework for elections and campaign finance regulations. These reports were first-hand records of Tunisia's historic election, and went on to help shape IFES programming.

Thanks to ongoing support from the U.S. Government, IFES has remained in country and continues to play a role in helping Tunisians in their democratic transition. IFES regularly meets with legislators to advise them on electoral legal reforms; trains judges in charge of monitoring campaign finance expenditures; and works closely with local civil society organizations to help them become advocates for an inclusive democracy. With support from the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme, IFES created a platform for sustained dialogue and debate among Tunisian stakeholders on electoral topics such as voter registration, electoral system design, election management bodies and campaign finance.

#### **Continued Support**

Mr. Chairman, although Tunisia is often forgotten among the other countries that rose up against their repressive governments during the Arab Spring; it is arguably the most important since it is key to the entire region's successful democratic transition. Not only did Tunisia initiate the Arab Spring, Tunisia is also the farthest along in its transition and has the greatest capacity to succeed. Tunisia's success will be a model for other transitioning countries in the region and around the world.

Despite setbacks, Tunisians are highly engaged. I was in Tunisia this past February. IFES held the largest-attended forum in the region on voter registration and the importance of a reliable voter register. Tunisians know an accurate voter register is a crucial pillar of democracy.

The next few months are critical, as Tunisia appoints a new government, selects new election commissioners, finalizes its constitution and develops a new electoral law.

IFES is in an ideal position to provide continued support. We believe the United States should increase its engagement in Tunisia's transition process to ensure the nation's success.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your time and this concludes my remarks.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, all three of you for excellent testimony and I will begin with a round of questions and I have many of them, so if you could jot them down and address whichever one you would like. As we have discussed, the national dialogue process has stalled, but the dialogue between opposing parties continues. No party has walked away completely from the process and they remain engaged in an attempt to reconcile their differences. One major achievement would be if the parties would come together and agree on a caretaker prime minister and cabinet. This could stabilize the country, and guide it through its next round of elections.

How far apart are the parties on deciding on a prime minister? And what are the main obstacles that have prevented them from coming to an agreement?

Mr. Mastic, I had the opportunity to review IRI's latest polling data from Tunisia from October and it states that 79 percent of Tunisians believe things are headed in the wrong direction. Only 16 believe in the right direction. And when asked how much longer the national constituent assembly should take to complete its mandate, nearly two thirds of the respondents said less than 6 months and over three fourths said less than a year. And although we can agree that placing artificial timelines on such a delicate process is not the best practice, but giving the overarching trend of dissatisfaction how much longer do you think that this political stalemate can last before the political transition in Tunisia is permanently derailed? Time is clearly an issue for the Tunisian transition. And in this case we have economic, security, and political clocks all working against each other, all moving at different speeds.

Do you gentlemen believe that the leadership can adequately address all three tracks at the same time? Or does it need more help from outside sources and if so, what does Tunisia need the most in order to ensure a successful transition? What programs do your institutions have in place to promote new elections to build local capacity? And finally, women's rights. Tunisia has been touted as a leader when it comes to women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa. Ever since Tunisia gained its independence as we discussed in '56, women have had an even more prominent role in society compared to the counterparts in neighboring countries and this was illustrated by the elections in 2011 of the National Constituent Assembly, with 27 percent of the seats won by women. But there are many reports of gender inequality, and violence against women. What would you say is the current status of women's rights in the country? Are women's concerns being evenly represented in the national dialogue and in the drafting of the Constitution?

We will begin with Mr. Mastic.

Mr. MASTIC. Thank you. With respect to the process and how far apart the parties are, I think at this point really it has come down to who the prime minister will be. And the polarization that has grown in Tunisia over the last year between the major parties and specifically Ennahda, the Islamist party, has made the selection of that individual very difficult because one does not want to be in a position of having given advantage to the other.

Based on the various iterations of governments, Tunisia has been through since the 2011 revolution, there are definitely personalities I think that both can agree to. Neither have walked away. The public statements of the mediating body right now suggests they are very close to identifying that individual. So I don't think they are far apart and I think that you could see progress on this very soon.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much. Mr. Campbell?

Mr. CAMPBELL. Well, I would agree that rumors speaking to NDI's office director in Tunisia today, there are very strong rumors on the street that a name has been put forward. I won't mention the name now because who knows if it will happen, but a name is put forward. It has not been rejected. So there is clearly talking.

I should also mention just as we were speaking, Sheikh Mourou, who is the vice president of the Ennahda Party, walked into this meeting room and I think it is significant in the sense that I met with him. He has been in Washington I think on a mission to say look, we are reasonable. We want this to work. We want this to be a model. And there is a recognition, I think, among most Tunisians that they do not want this to fail, that they want Tunisia to be seen as a democratic model. It would be the only one other than Israel and it is very important to Tunisia. So there is good will.

I think the message though of Tunisians, certainly that come to Washington, the message that I would like to leave today is that without economic help and you addressed these different tracks, without people's lives improving, all the election commissions and political parties and so on in the world won't succeed. Of course, as organizations work heavily on the political process which important governance is vitally important, but I think we would be remiss if we didn't say that politics will fail and again talking to leaders in Tunisia, they have said very clearly, the cupboard is bare. They don't have the money in the budget to cover their expenses. They don't have the prospects. The currency is at a low. The credit rating has dropped. Their borrowing costs have gone up. So I think if there is a track that is not being adequately addressed, it is the economic track. The political track, I think, will take care of itself.

The question of women, my answer would be that on the surface, Tunisia continues to lead: 27 percent of the members of the constituent assembly are women. At the top level, at the elite level you will find many, many women in leadership, women leadership positions. But I think if you scratch below the surface and especially if you get away from the capital, in the interior you see a very, very different reality, much more typical, traditional Arab world type of situation. And I think redoubling the efforts on human rights, on women's rights is absolutely important. I think we can't be—we shouldn't be too fooled by sort of the flash that you see in the capital.

The one thing I would add at the end is that some of the statistics that were put forward under the rule of Ben Ali were blatantly false. There was a sense, maybe, that women had made greater achievements than they actually had in reality. They sort of inflated the statistics, for example, of literacy. Literacy among

women is much, much higher than Ben Ali's government had ever let on. So investing in that area I think is vitally important.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. Mr. Sweeney?

Mr. SWEENEY. Madam Chairman, the problem of being the third speaker on this panel to those questions is I am in violent agreement with everything my two colleagues have said.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Nobody has said it quite as eloquently as you are about to say it.

Mr. SWEENEY. Thank you very much, I am going to give it my best shot. What I would say are two things. Number one is that if you look very closely at what happened in 2011, the decision makers seemed very, very far apart and because of the very robust engagement, when they came to agreement, they came to agreement, very, very quickly. And so they were able to conduct their election in October 2011. They were able to make decisions very quickly because much of the spade work, much of the discussions had already taken place and there was a consensus and you didn't have to revisit every decision. So I do have great hope that when they come to consensus, they can come to consensus very quickly.

Number two, the point I would make on women is in complete accord with my colleague. However, you should know that you have a colleague who is the chair of the election management process in the Parliament. And she is one of the most engaged legislators I have met over the course of the last year. She is very conservative. She is very traditional, but she also is very aware. I had a long dinner with her one night about the importance of more than 50 percent of the population having a political voice and more than 50 percent of the population in Tunisia having their rights fully exercised.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. Excellent answers. Thank you. I am pleased to yield to my friend, Mr. Deutch of Florida.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman. For the last couple of years, the administration has proposed to implement a Middle East and North Africa incentive fund. And in addition to allotting money for contingencies, the fund was going to build on a model of centers for good governance. That would result in additional foreign assistance similar to the Millennium Challenge Corporation model. Presumably, that would be a big benefit to Tunisia. I support the idea. I like the idea of allocating significant and flexible resources to the region, but like others I have some questions about the details of the fund. I am curious to know from the three of you what your opinions, since you are really implementers here, what your opinions are of this fund. Is it something that you would support? How would it be used and ultimately how could it be beneficial to Tunisia?

We will start with Mr. Sweeney, so he doesn't have to go last this time.

Mr. SWEENEY. Congressman, I am not particularly familiar with the details of the implementation of the fund. However, what I know is that if there is a reward for good governance that results in the type of institution building that the Tunisians are famous for, that the Tunisians ought to be able to meet the metrics and expectations and certainly it is a society which desperately needs

continued investment and engagement and has shown over time that they can perform economic miracles within their own country. So I would be positive of both the metrics and very confident of the ability of the Tunisians to meet those metrics and use whatever foreign assistance from the United States or the European Union or any other donor to maximum advantage to solve what Les referred to as the more serious crisis, the crisis of unemployment and investment in the society.

Mr. CAMPBELL. Thank you. Well, I would strongly support the idea of an incentive fund, but just to go backwards for a second, I should say first of all that the administration, congressional resources, congressional interest in Tunisia up until recently has been very, very strong. I think it is still strong from the funding side, certainly for what we do. None of us went into great detail of what we do, but the support has been strong for the process, for training political parties, working with the election commission, working with women, human rights organizations, domestic civil society organizations. That has been quite strong.

What is missing and I think this is germane to the incentive fund question is something in addition to that. So I think the idea that if the country, and I think there is tremendous willingness in the country, if the country is going to behave democratically, seek consensus as they have, govern itself well, as you said, Millennium Challenge style, a way of incentivizing that performance would be great.

I know in our conversations, we are often dealing with very high level political leaders in Tunisia. Their comment back is we really appreciate what you do. Over the long term this is fantastic. But if we can't provide evidence that people's lives are improving, this is all going to go backwards. So I think the incentive fund is necessary. I think U.S. diplomats often feel a little hamstrung right now. They have a lot of talk. They don't have a lot of scratch, basically, to use a colloquial term.

Mr. DEUTCH. And Mr. Mastic, before you answer, Mr. Sweeney talked about donors and Mr. Campbell talked about scratch. We often have these discussions without acknowledging that there are other countries that would like to be involved, that would like to exert influence in a country in transition like Tunisia. Am I right? Is that the case here? And who are they and what role are they playing and trying to play?

Mr. MASTIC. Definitely others are involved. So of course the IMF has given an important loan stabilization program to Tunisia, so that is a key actor right now. The European Union also is very much involved, invested in Tunisia. According to the EU's neighborhood policy, they see Tunisia as a very important country in transition in the region.

I will say though that I think from the Tunisians that we interact with, there is a perceived interest and value in an ongoing and robust U.S. engagement in their country. And as I think it holds the best promise among the transitions occurring, I think we benefit a lot from that engagement.

Quickly, just with respect to the incentive fund, I don't know that many details about the fund. I think one of the challenges with the idea of the fund is that the details about what, in fact, it would do



have been a little bit murky. So that's something to obviously take into consideration. But the idea of incentivizing good governance in Tunisia, of course, is something to be supported. I also would say that with whatever types of programming that will be supported through the fund, we have to have it be reflective of a transition process and support for democratic development as well. I will just put that in a very specific set of data.

You know, in the initial revolution, we did a poll immediately after. And 79 percent of the people at that time said the country was going in the right direction. Okay, that number was never going to stay that high. And it slowly went down in the months that followed. At two points, the downward trend reversed itself. One was shortly before the NCA election when people were essentially 50-50 on whether the country was going in the right direction. And then immediately after that election, the number shot back up in a positive response rate. And the only time it shot back up in a positive response rate. So the political process is very much tied to the other challenges Tunisia faces and needs to be part of any type of fund or incentivization of good governance and behavior in the country.

Mr. SWEENEY. Mr. Deutch, if I could add one or two specific points. Swiss foreign assistance and British foreign assistance have been part of our program in Tunisia. We have worked very closely with a variety of elements within the European Union neighborhood program and some of their democracy assistance. We have also had a terrific partnership with the United States Development Fund on all of the aspects of voter registration, election management. That was one of the meetings that I referred to in my testimony. But the U.S. Government should be commended at this point because the U.S. Government has had staying power in terms of the programs that it has been supporting in Tunisia where some of these others have been very limited projects. But there are other organizations, other governments, other interests involved.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Deutch. Thank you, gentlemen.

Mr. Cotton of Arkansas.

Mr. COTTON. Thank you and thank you all for appearing today on this matter. So I believe that one reason that America has been so great and so prosperous for so long is that we are not merely a democracy, but a constitutional democracy. Too many other countries around the world sometimes with too much support from the West reduce good government to elections which are certainly very important and they are the principal way to hold the government accountable. But they underplay the significance of constitutional forums, both the structures of government that we have in place here like the separation of powers, unitary executive, an independent judiciary and prosecutor, as well as individual rights, rights of freedom of speech and religious and assembly and immunity from arbitrary and indefinite arrests and so forth.

Mr. Sweeney, I will let you start off and then Mr. Campbell and Mr. Mastic, I will let you maybe respond.

You had said in your testimony that Tunisia still does not have a Constitution. The assembly needs to adopt one. I would just like to get your perspective on the prospects for a Constitution that has

both those kind of structurals and those individual rights, guarantees.

Mr. SWEENEY. I am very positive that the Tunisians are going to adopt a Constitution. They have a long history of institutions and regard for those institutions. When I was in Tunisia, I met with representatives of the course that were engaged in reviewing campaign finance reform issues. I met with different ministries. I met with a great number of parliamentarians. In just about every meeting, there was great regard for individual rights and the need for the Constitution and the behavior of the institutions to reflect and open democratic society. So generally, sir, I am very, very positive that they are moving in the right direction. And more importantly, from a perspective of our history, many of these institutions are in place and have a robust history and have very committed public servants who are leading them right now. So the debate is fully engaged. We are not dealing with an artificial process. We are dealing with a country which has a great, robust, strong history and great institutions.

Mr. COTTON. Would you care to venture a guess on a prospective timeline?

Mr. SWEENEY. I would concur with my colleague, Mr. Campbell, that it is possible we are going to see the first step which will be the caretaker government put in place. There has been more than enough debate and dialogue within the society and reflecting back on 2011, they move very, very quickly once they come to consensus.

Mr. COTTON. Thank you. Mr. Campbell?

Mr. CAMPBELL. Sure. Maybe I can, since you made a philosophical point, maybe I will respond with a bit of a philosophical point which is this idea of a concentration of elections. I think there is some truth to that, that in many organizations people have been guilty of that. And there are a few lessons I think of the Arab Spring thus far and one is that rushing into competitive, contested elections is a mistake. Why is that? Because as you say, in part, you don't have the structures, you don't have the bedrock to work from. But secondly, you have this big tumult in the country, an uprising. And then the first thing that happens in the case of Egypt within say a month or 2 months is that we throw political contestants with very little experience into what appears to be a winner take all process and you raise the stakes so high that the tension goes through the roof and I think that has been a big mistake.

One thing that Tunisia has done well, among others, but has done very well is it has kind of let this process play out over time and I know that we sometimes become impatient with that, delays and so on. But I actually think the delays are okay. As long as the delays are not there to the benefit of one group, one partisan group or another.

One thing that is—

Mr. COTTON. Can I take back my time for a moment?

Mr. CAMPBELL. Please.

Mr. COTTON. Just to ask you to elaborate on that point, that is a happy side effect of the delays is that you have time for mediating institutions like political parties or a free press to come about. I was a soldier in Iraq. I saw that happen there as well over the years as they were preparing for round after round of election.

Have you seen those kind of mediating institutions maturing in Tunisia in a way they didn't have a chance to in Egypt?

Mr. CAMPBELL. Much more so. So you have a very strong opposition and one of the interesting side effects of the time is that the opposition which was very weak during the election is now very strong which has actually caused the standoff. Ennahda is unable to impose its will. That is worrying for the economy because you have got this stalemate. But in the long run it may be okay. Tunisians are serious about the Constitution maybe because of the French influence. They see a document like that as very important.

I will just throw in a little comment about Egypt. Egypt has for the second time drafted a Constitution in 2 months and they are going to have a referendum 25 days later. That is not how it is done. I think Tunisia, as much as it is unsettling, probably are doing it in a much better manner, but it would be terrible if the economy in the meantime falters and fails.

Mr. COTTON. Thank you all.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Cotton.

Mr. Schneider of Illinois.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you. I want to thank the witnesses for your insights as you have highlighted as an important issue for not just the region, but for the United States.

Mr. Mastic, you enclosed in your submitted comments with a line and I will quote, "Tunisia remains the best hope for a democratic political transition in the Arab world." You touched on this sense within Tunisia of declining confidence of direction, but plateauing. This may not be a fair question, but does the hope remain for the Tunisian people and what are their aspirations? What would the outcome that they want to see that would change that curve in an upward direction?

Mr. MASTIC. Sure. Certainly, some of the economic aspirations that I think people have, expectations that they have are not achievable, not in short order. There is no question about that. However, with movement on the political track, we consistently see renewed confidence in the democratic process. And even as satisfaction with where the country is headed right now is at an all-time low. You still see a slight majority supporting a turbulent democratic system that is some other model. And so I do think that it is very much rooted in sort of a general sense of hope, but that could quickly turn when you see progress on the political track.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. The idea of hope springs eternal, but without hope, all things are lost is important. The future, and I am going to turn to Mr. Sweeney. The future depends so much on those institutions and you have mentioned a couple of times the strength of Tunisian institutions. What are some of the ones that you have the most confidence in? What are some of the institutions that we should be watching a little more closely and working to reinforce?

Mr. SWEENEY. Most confidence is sort of hard to measure right now because the country is really at a stalemate in terms of making progress on a whole series of political decisions. So it is relatively difficult to give you an answer and say A is better than B.

In our particular area of expertise, IFES, we are going to be starting all over again. Now the good news and one of the reasons why I say they will move relatively quickly is the Parliament al-

ready has all of its 36 candidates. Nine of them will be appointed to constitute the next election commission. That is part of the dialogue that is going on. However at the same time, all the investment that was made in 2011 in terms of the election commission has basically gone away. The staff that we trained has moved on to other jobs because the election commission's mandate, budget, everything expired in May 2012. So we are going to be starting over again. And I think that is part of the frustration that is expressed at the political level that is also showing up at the economic level. Great progress was made. Aspirations, dreams, hopes got to 70 percent and then all of a sudden, the process got gridlocked. And that is where we are right now. I have great hope that once they get to consensus, they will again demonstrate the ability to move very, very quickly.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Mr. Campbell?

Mr. CAMPBELL. Well, the quick part of the answer is that we know which institutions Tunisians don't trust and that don't work and that is basically the security institutions and the police. It is partly not their fault in the sense that it has been difficult to restore order, but partly the trust is not there because there were decades of experience of the security services, interior security being used for repression.

On the other hand, the military is still by far the most trusted institution. Unlike in Egypt, it has shown no inclination to get into politics. It really is genuinely above the fray. And so those are the sort of polar opposites in terms of institutions. But Tunisians do have trust in government. The ministries have traditionally operated reasonably well. There is a history actually of technocratic ministers. It is interesting that the ministers, immediately post transition, many of them were drawn from previous governments. They were seen as able figures. So I think the actual ministries are well regarded. The military is well regarded. But the security services are not, I think is the basic answer to the question.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I will close with this. I am almost out of time, but the need to reinforce those institutions to work with the military to try to establish a credible security infrastructure, what policy recommendations, and you can submit these later, what policy recommendations for us does that lead to? And what are the timelines that would be realistic? Because it is the time and space to build those institutions that I think are going to become critical going forward.

I will close with Mr. Mastic's remark to ensure that Tunisia is not just a hope for democracy, but an accomplishment of a democracy. Thank you very much.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Schneider.

Mr. COLLINS is recognized.

Mr. COLLINS. Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate it. It is a normal Wednesday around here with markups and everything else going on, so I appreciate getting in here.

I think the story in this arena is 3 years and it is amazing what has happened in these 3 years, not just in this location, but across the world.

My question is fairly brief, but you can answer how you want to. It really deals with the economic issues. What is the likely course

of Tunisia's economy and what is the appropriate role of its international partners in helping Tunisia to promote economic growth and job creation and to address regional inequalities which I think is one of the issues. And then really what steps, if any, can or should the United States take to promote bilateral trade and investment.

It started sort of as an economic in some way, and I think the future will be based on economic and how we go forward, so I would just love to hear what you think.

Mr. MASTIC. Sure, I will respond briefly to that. IMF assistance is important for macroeconomic stability in Tunisia. That is happening. I think efforts to promote regional integration, regional economic integration are an important part of the solution to both the jobs and economic growth problems in Tunisia and elsewhere in the Maghreb.

And then lastly, with respect to the United States, efforts encouraging U.S. investment by U.S. companies and to lower the barriers for U.S. companies in Tunisia are important.

Mr. COLLINS. I want to follow up, but I want to get to you as well. You mentioned the regional aspect there, especially with the instability that is inherent right there, what can be done to overcome that? What can be done to encourage it even with Europe, what can we do there? Because you mentioned that and it is an interesting concept.

Mr. MASTIC. Sure. The obvious factor here is with Libya you have a potential economic giant that can really help with respect to growth in the region, jobs creation. But the security challenges are a serious obstacle to that. So it is sort of like you can't address something simply at the economic level. There has to be a redoubled effort on the security level as well.

Mr. COLLINS. Mr. Sweeney or Mr. Campbell?

Mr. CAMPBELL. I was going to say that is a great answer because I was privileged to go shortly after the transition to Tunisia with Raj Shah from USAID and looking at economics, not normally my field. And one of the things that sort of struck me is just imagine Tunisia's human resources and youth, educated youth, highly educated youth, 34 percent unemployment rate among college graduates. Marry that to Libya's wealth, enormous wealth and Egypt's population and sort of consumer possibility. It is not going to happen soon, but you can imagine a North Africa union and there are some talks about this, a North African union being a really strong economic force with Algeria and Libya's wealth, Tunisia's people, and Egypt's population.

In the immediate term, it is tourism and agriculture. Tourism was a driver of the economy, a main driver. In touring Tunisia with Raj Shah, we saw a lot of high-tech agriculture and science, but Tunisia is very, very fertile, can feed its own people, already or did export agricultural products. So I think short term is tourism and agriculture. Long term is opening the borders between the countries in North Africa.

Mr. SWEENEY. Again, sir, I am going to concur with my colleagues. I will point out that tourism is a good 10 percent of all of the country's economies and sources of foreign exchange that you referenced. Tourism directly goes to whether or not the local popu-

lation feels that they have a government that works and provides them with a modicum of security as well as a message to tourists as to whether or not they can travel there in safety which means that you have to double down on security and you have to double down on protection of infrastructure if you're going to try and develop a regional economic framework in terms of either oil, natural gas, or any other major commodity.

Mr. COLLINS. I think what is interesting there and you just said something and my background has a lot of counseling involved. And the very thing I tell the people who have a problem is the very thing you need to fix is the very thing that is broken. And in a relationship, whether it be husband and wife or anybody else, is trust. And if that trust is broken, it is the very thing that you need to rebuild the relationship, but it is broken and it is like trying to run a marathon on a broken leg. You are just going to have that issue.

Great answers. I think maybe a time for another hearing is if there was a joining together there, that is an interesting power shift that could occur from a lot of different areas, especially from Israel on over from that side, so that's another topic for another day, but I do appreciate you being here and those are answers that I think we need to continue the panel. And Madam Chair, thank you as always.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. Mr. Vargas of California is recognized.

Mr. VARGAS. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just wanted to briefly say to Mr. Sweeney, you are very correct about being the most engaged and charismatic chair we have and certainly rival the election committee chair in Tunisia, I assure you. She does a fantastic job here.

I wanted to continue to ask the questions on the issues of the economy. You mentioned Libya. Libya is about half the size and population as Tunisia, I believe, and it is smaller in GDP than Tunisia. So I was curious when you said that Libya is a powerhouse for Tunisia, could you further comment on that? It caught me off guard there.

Mr. CAMPBELL. I don't know the exact figures, but just as an example, Libya has a budget surplus, a big budget surplus even without oil being refined and pumped at its previous levels. If Libya got its current capacity, and when I say current capacity, I don't mean building new capacity, I just mean the capacity that is up to speed, it would have, and again, unfortunately I don't know the exact figures, but it has a budget surplus of many billions of U.S. dollars. Whereas Tunisia, Tunisia has a big budget deficit. I believe it is something like \$1/2 billion. I just heard this the other day so you're looking at something with billions in surplus versus \$1/2 billion in debt. And it is just oil wealth. It is that simple, small population oil wealth. But Libya had traditionally imported its labor. And they had bad relations with Tunisia. So you had the educated young people of Tunisia, highly technical. You have Libya that has always had labor shortages because of being a resource-based economy. And you have Libya with surplus cash. So there is a real potential combination there. And they are not enemies at all. But they don't

have any—right now, there is no structure of inter-country partnership.

Mr. VARGAS. Again, the curiosity for me because again, Libya's GDP is smaller than Tunisia's GDP, so it is maybe the case that the government is doing better. But I guess the reason I would say that is because it seems like the Jasmine Revolution began because of issues of unemployment, the youth, and obviously self-immolation was a trigger, but all these problems, and the problems still seem to be there. And with growing unemployment, well, I don't know if it is growing unemployment, but I saw that the growth rate did slow down this year compared to last year, so you do have the economy that is slowing down. I mean these problems are problematic. You have this tumultuous democratic system you are trying to fix, but underneath that, it is the economy. It is the old, it is the economy, stupid. So could you comment on that because I think that is the issue.

Recently, we had the opportunity, a few of us, to go to the tribal areas in Pakistan. We saw that the roads were being built, dams were being built, and people seemed to have some hope for the future because things were getting done. And here it seems like, if I was a person there, it seems like, yes, we are going the wrong way, you know? I thought this was supposed to be better. Could you comment?

Mr. SWEENEY. I will take the opening opportunity. In Tunisia, you have a real country. It is not a country that has been cobbled together in different ways over time and now that a dictator is gone in the case of Libya, different identities are coming out. You do have a country with Tunisia.

The other important thing to remember about Tunisia is that it is extraordinarily rich in agriculture. As Les said, it can feed itself. It has a population, it has an educated population, but that population has not been given opportunity in the last few years. So there is enormous opportunity there if there is investment, if there is confidence, if there is trust, if there is some stability. That is not as easy to say about Libya. That is not as easy to say about some other countries that are in transition right now. So you are hitting the central point and the central strength and the reason for optimism about Tunisia and why it needs and deserves the attention is because it really is a country. It is not just a collection of peoples that were put together in a colonial map. And it does have a Constitution. It does have strong institutions. It does have a very robust political process.

Mr. CAMPBELL. I will maybe just add that there are so many challenges in these countries, including Tunisia, but there is a real political debate about the type of economy Tunisia will have. You have got very strong leftist parties that would prefer to continue the system of subsidies and sort of a state-run or managed economy. The ruling party, Ennahda, is actually a little more free market oriented. And then you have the smaller liberal parties that are sort of radically free market. And there is a very, very strong debate. I don't think there is any consensus on which direction they are going to go with their economy so that is another issue to think about.

Mr. VARGAS. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Vargas. Mr. Connolly of Virginia is recognized.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. Welcome to our panel.

Mr. Campbell, would it be fair to describe Tunisia under the former President Ben Ali as a police state?

Mr. CAMPBELL. Yes, absolutely. I mean—

Mr. CONNOLLY. You would concur, Mr. Mastic?

Mr. MASTIC. Yes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Sweeney, in light of that, I assume you don't dispute that. How vulnerably politically is Tunisia to a backlash in terms of opening up that an authoritarian figure comes along and says yes, but the price we are paying is a lack of order, chaotic politics, and we need to restore that order. What kind of appeal might such a figure have in Tunisia in your view?

Mr. SWEENEY. I think over the course of the hearing today, each of us has highlighted the fact that there are threats to Tunisia and those threats are somewhat based on the economic situation, somewhat based on the security situation, somewhat based on the current political stalemate. While at the same time each of us, I believe, has pointed out there is great hope and optimism and there is the opportunity for the entire system to work. But would you, if you were doing a risk analysis, would you completely discount the potential of an authoritarian figure coming back into play? No. No. You couldn't discount that. But I don't believe that any of us or at least to my knowledge have that as a potential outcome. In the short term, we are all very optimistic that the current, very robust political dialogue that is under way will result in the opportunity for a new Constitution, a new election process, and the voice of the people being heard and acted upon and hopefully within the next year.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And obviously, part of the answer to what you're saying is building enduring democratic institutions.

Mr. SWEENEY. Absolutely, absolutely. And Tunisia has a history of institutions which gives us great hope.

Mr. CONNOLLY. What are the implications in terms of the Tunisian evolution for the Arab Spring, the other Arab Spring countries?

Mr. SWEENEY. I think all of us have great hope that Tunisia will become the working model of a democratic system and a working model for other countries, other judiciaries, other parliaments, other election commissions, other news media, other civil society groups to use as their model going forward.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Campbell, Mr. Mastic?

Mr. CAMPBELL. Just one point on the previous question, a great part about Tunisia is that during the last election 27 parties won at least one seat. The ruling party, Ennahda, or the plurality party I should say, won around 50 percent, but there are many, many other parties. So they didn't have the pendulum swing of Egypt where you had this kind of Mubarak to Muslim Brotherhood back to the former regime. So I am optimistic that they won't go back to a dictatorship.

I think the best hopes in the Arab world right now in terms of models are Tunisia and Yemen. And even though they are very dif-



ferent countries what brings them together is the idea of consensus and coalition building. And so both have coalition governments. Both have a dialogue process, a form of dialogue process and both are seeking consensus. I think we have to be careful not to rush them into further elections. Let them play this sort of political negotiation out a little bit, don't rush, number one. But number two, both Yemen and Tunisia need this economic help and we, of course, were discussing that a lot here. It is not sort of in the cards, it seems in Yemen and Tunisia to get the economic help, but if we don't rush them. If we allow them to play out this kind of coalition building negotiation and we support them economically, we can have two models. But Tunisia will be the more modern—it will be the one that we recognize in terms of its inclusivity, proximity to Europe, and so on. So it is probably more important.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Mastic?

Mr. MASTIC. Yes, I would concur with that for the reasons Les points out with respect to Tunisia, Tunisia's institutions and the proximity and the sort of cultural affinity that it would have with the West, more so than you would find in Yemen.

At this point, I hesitate or I would caution against the positive effects or spillover effects of a successful transition in Tunisia and other transition countries. Definitely, Tunisia was the critical country to start the Arab Spring. However, we are not where we were in 2011 anymore and unfortunately, very different processes have played out in Egypt and Libya.

Having said that and as I said in my statement, Tunisia is important because the region, the Arab world lacks a successful working model of democracy. And so for that reason I think it is incredibly important that there be strong engagement, continued engagement in Tunisia.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you both and I do think this can work in Tunisia. It at least creates another model, especially for places like Egypt.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Connolly. And thank you to our panelists, to our members, to the audience. I feel greatly encouraged after hearing from our three specialists. And with that, the subcommittee is adjourned. Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 3:39 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]



# A P P E N D I X



MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

**SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE**  
**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

**Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa**  
**Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman**

November 27, 2013

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, to be held in Room 2200 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at [www.foreignaffairs.house.gov](http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov)):

**DATE:** Wednesday, December 4, 2013

**TIME:** 2:00 p.m.

**SUBJECT:** Transition at a Crossroads: Tunisia Three Years After the Revolution

**WITNESSES:** Mr. Scott Mastic  
Regional Director  
Middle East and North Africa  
International Republican Institute

Mr. Leslie Campbell  
Senior Associate and Regional Director  
Middle East and North Africa  
National Democratic Institute

Mr. Bill Sweeney  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Middle East and North Africa HEARING

Day Wednesday Date 12/04/13 Room 2167

Starting Time 2:05 p.m. Ending Time 3:39 p.m.

Recesses 1 (2:17 to 2:41) (\_\_\_ to \_\_\_) (\_\_\_ to \_\_\_) (\_\_\_ to \_\_\_) (\_\_\_ to \_\_\_)

Presiding Member(s)

*Chairman Ros-Lehtinen (FL)*

Check all of the following that apply:

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TITLE OF HEARING:

*Transition at a Crossroads: Tunisia Three Years After the Revolution*

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

*(See attached attendance sheet)*

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: *(Mark with an \* if they are not members of full committee.)*

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TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE \_\_\_\_\_

or  
TIME ADJOURNED 3:39 p.m.

  
Subcommittee Staff Director

**Hearing Attendance****Hearing Title:** Transition at a Crossroads: Tunisia Three Years After the Revolution**Date:** 12/04/13*Noncommittee Members*

<b>Member</b>	<b>Present</b>
Ros-Lehtinen, Ileana (FL)	X
Chabot, Steve (OH)	
Wilson, Joe (SC)	
Kinzinger, Adam (IL)	
Cotton, Tom (AR)	X
Weber, Randy (TX)	
Desantis, Ron (FL)	
Radel, Trey (FL)	
Collins, Doug (GA)	X
Meadows, Mark (NC)	
Yoho, Ted (FL)	
Messer, Luke (IN)	

<b>Member</b>	<b>Present</b>
Deutch, Ted (FL)	X
Connolly, Gerald (VA)	X
Higgins, Brian (NY)	
Cicilline, David (RI)	
Grayson, Alan (FL)	
Vargas, Juan (CA)	X
Schneider, Bradley (IL)	X
Kennedy, Joseph (MA)	
Meng, Grace (NY)	X
Frankel, Lois (FL)	X