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**GRANGER OPENING STATEMENT: HEARING ON STATE
DEPARTMENT FISCAL YEAR 2015 BUDGET REQUEST**

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

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

During our time with you today, there are many new issues that Members will want to address.

In Ukraine, the situation continues with no resolution in sight in spite of your personal engagement to try to bring this crisis to an end.

In Afghanistan, even after intense negotiations, the government refuses to sign a bilateral security agreement with the United States, putting our troop presence and diplomatic footprint in doubt and increasing the risk that extremists will return.

In Africa, new conflicts have broken out, deepening human suffering in areas that have struggled for so many years.

All of these troubling developments must be addressed, yet most of the topics we discussed last year are still relevant today.

The Members of this subcommittee, like you, continue to watch the situation in Egypt. Even while the country is tackling significant security and economic challenges, we know Egypt is moving toward elections later this year. During this critical time, the United States must continue to work with the government of Egypt and support the Egyptian people.

The Syria crisis continues, even though, through your intense efforts last year, there was hope that the regime would give up its chemical weapons. In spite of all the work of the U.S. government and our international partners, the effort to remove chemical weapons has stalled, extremists are taking the upper-hand, and more lives are lost every day because of the violence and blocking of humanitarian aid.

The Syria crisis is affecting the whole region. Its neighbors are now bearing the burden of two-and-a-half million refugees. These neighboring countries continue to do all they can to help the Syrians pouring over their borders, and we must do all we can to help them. Because of the flow of refugees from Syria, Jordan's population has increased by nearly 10 percent, and Lebanon's population has increased by an estimated 20 percent.

Over the last year, you have worked with your international partners to put in place an interim agreement with Iran that allows for some sanctions relief if Iran takes steps to dismantle its nuclear program. There is no doubt that sanctions brought Iran to the table, and the United States must keep the pressure on as a final deal is negotiated. We know all too well that the security of the United States and the security of our steadfast ally, Israel, is at stake here.

In addition to these policy issues, we have questions about the Administration's budget request.

The base funding level requested for State and USAID is roughly the same as last year, but you have sacrificed some of the priorities of the Members of this committee to make room for the Administration's initiatives. Many programs that we support in a bipartisan way have been reduced below last year's level – such as global health and democracy funding. We will be seeking additional information so we understand your proposals.

Another difficult budget issue we need to address together is embassy security. We need assurance that the proposed funding level is adequate to address the recommendations in the Benghazi accountability review board report.

Next, I want to mention an issue that I know is a priority for you -- Middle East peace. You have made countless visits to the region to try to move the Israelis and Palestinians toward peace. I want to be clear – achieving peace is our priority too, and this Congress is unwavering in our bipartisan support for Israel. You and the President have recently made some strong statements about Israel's role in the peace process.

You raised the issue of boycotts if a peace agreement is not reached, and the President has said that Israel needs to “articulate an alternative approach” if an agreement is not possible. I hope you will give us an update on peace talks during your testimony today and explain those comments to the committee.

I also want to mention an issue that is a priority for me -- in our own back yard. Mexico is our neighbor, and we want our neighbor to be prosperous and safe. But this can only be achieved if we have a true partnership. I hope you can comment on the current relationship between our countries so the subcommittee knows if the funding provided is making a difference.

Finally, I want to raise a concern I know I share with you, Mr. Secretary. We must stop the international crisis of wildlife poaching and trafficking. Criminal networks are destroying species and using the funds for illegal activities around the world. I thank you for what you have done in this area since we talked about it last year, and I hope the funds in the fiscal year 2014 bill will be used to bring an end to this crisis.

However, the budget materials the committee has received so far do not reflect fiscal year 2015 funding for wildlife poaching and trafficking, and the committee expects that level of detail as soon as possible.

In closing, I want to thank you and the thousands of diplomats, development officers, and implementing partners for what you do every day to promote U.S. interests abroad.

As you've said, "in an increasingly interconnected world, global leadership is not a favor we do for other countries, it's a strategic imperative for the United States of America".

I agree with you on this point and want to continue to work with you.

I'll now turn to my ranking member, Mrs. Lowey, for her opening remarks.

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