

Testimony for the Record
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Chairman McKeon, Ranking Member Smith, and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today to offer an overview of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East region – and I look forward to answering your questions. [With your permission, I request that my full statement be submitted for the record]

Mr. Chairman, I am glad to appear before you here today with my colleagues Vice Admiral Pandolfe and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Defense and International Security Affairs, Elissa Slotkin. Together with the intelligence community, the Department of State and the Department of Defense work closely together to protect our country from terrorist attacks and to promote American national security objectives in this region.

The region today is undergoing a massive and historic change – and the United States is deeply engaged. Although a generation of American political leaders from both political parties had been urging the region’s people to seek a democratic transformation, we were impressed at the speed with which the desire for change we had observed in so many countries finally surfaced.

There are many difficult challenges underlying the instability in the region today. It is a region where as many as 60 percent of the people are under age 30 – and where nearly a quarter of those people are unemployed. These young people are empowered by new communications technologies to see events across the world and to communicate with each other as never before. They are angered by rigid and corrupt governments that frustrate their desire for change, yet they have no experience with pluralist governance. And they are frustrated by national economies that are lagging – providing few jobs and little economic opportunity.

This broad discontent feeds instability and helps set the conditions for extremism. Our concern for peace and stability in the region requires that the United States remain firmly engaged. Our national security requires it; our ability to promote important values, such as universal rights, the rights of women, and religious

freedoms require it; and our and the region's aspirations for broader trade and investment in what could be a surging regional economy requires it.

Mr. Chairman, in this very complex region, our best chance to resolve some of the world's most difficult foreign policy challenges and to do so without having to resort to force, requires vigorous diplomacy. With your support, our people will continue our engagement in the Middle East, knowing that there is no absolute guarantee of safety, to protect our country and pursue the national security interests of the United States.

Secretary of State John Kerry has underscored our belief that America's global leadership can be demonstrated through diplomatic efforts – and he has taken extraordinary personal efforts to address the region's most pressing challenges: preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, ending the civil war in Syria, and reaching a final status agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians.

It is in our interest to use diplomacy and engagement in order to resolve conflict and build the capacity of our partners, which is exactly what we are doing. With elections coming up in key countries this spring – Iraq, Egypt, and others – supporting inclusive, free, fair and open political processes transitioning towards democracy is critical to bolstering moderate political actors and isolating extremists in the region.

Iran

I know this committee shares our deep concern about Iran's nuclear program and its intentions. I want to reassure you that the United States government is firmly committed to preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. On January 20, we and our P5+1 partners, and the European Union, began to implement the Joint Plan of Action with Iran. For the first time in nearly a decade, Iran has agreed to halt progress on its nuclear program and roll it back in key respects.

Secretary Kerry met with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif at the recent Munich security conference, where he reiterated the importance of both sides negotiating in good faith and called on Iran to abide by its commitments under the Joint Plan of Action. He also reaffirmed that if Iran does not keep its commitments during this period, we will halt the limited, temporary and reversible relief envisioned in the Joint Plan of Action.

We are now focused on pursuing a comprehensive solution – discussions will begin in Vienna on February 18. We plan to build our initial steps to obtain

verifiable assurances that Iran's nuclear program is peaceful and that Iran will not acquire a nuclear weapon. During this period, we will continue to enforce vigorously the existing sanctions put in place by the United States and many of our partners in the international community.

We are well aware that Iran continues to promote regional instability and uses both Iranian and proxy fighters to pursue foreign policy objectives. Iranian money, training, and equipment are playing a significant role in keeping the Assad regime in power, exacerbating a conflict that has wide-reaching regional security implications. And of course, Iran's support for Hezbollah in Lebanon has done much to destabilize the country and assure tensions continue along its U.N.-recognized border with Israel. Iran's efforts to undermine Yemen's stability and peaceful political transition were revealed when Yemeni forces intercepted a shipment of Iranian weapons being smuggled into Yemen last year. Iran has provided aid to extremist elements seeking to undermine Bahrain's stability and security. Our efforts to reach a diplomatic solution to the nuclear issue will not stop us from taking decisive steps with our partners to prevent this interference.

The U.S. government continues to be concerned about the Iranian government's violations of its own citizens' human rights. We will continue to advocate for greater Iranian government accountability in international fora and imposing sanctions on Iranian officials and institutions that violate Iranians' human rights.

Iraq

Iraq has, regrettably, been experiencing escalating levels of violence. The two-way flow of Sunni extremists between Syria and Iraq has had a direct bearing on high-profile attacks in Iraq. In 2011 and 2012, about 4,400 Iraqis civilians and members of the security forces were killed each year – many in attacks led by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), formerly known as al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Last year, ISIL began shifting resources from Syria to Iraq in search of new opportunities consistent with their broader ambitions. By the summer of 2013, the number of suicide attacks in Iraq had climbed from an average of 5-10 per month to approximately 30-40 per month. These attacks were calculated, coordinated and unfortunately, increasingly effective and were directed not only at Shia civilian targets but also Sunni and Kurdish targets. On January 1, ISIL launched its most brazen attack yet, and occupied portions of the Anbar cities of Ramadi and Fallujah. The Iraqi government, working together with local leaders in Anbar and with important U.S. support has pushed back; Ramadi now faces isolated pockets of resistance from anti-government fighters, and the government hopes to clear

terrorists from Fallujah predominately by using local tribal forces. But this violence has had a devastating effect on the people of Iraq. The United Nations reports at least 8,800 civilians and members of the security forces were killed in violent attacks across Iraq in 2013. The need for political leaders to overcome mistrust and reach compromises on essential political reforms is urgent.

We continue to press upon Iraq's government the importance of working with local Sunni leaders to draw the nation together in the fight against ISIL. The United States will continue to support the people of Iraq and their government to secure the city of Fallujah.

We also continue to work closely with Iraq's leaders to help them build a long-term political, economic and security strategy and to support the national election scheduled for April 30, 2014. I would like to thank the Congress for its support for the much-needed military equipment we have been able to provide to Iraq. To combat the very real extremist threats, Iraq needs a professional and well-equipped army that can provide the capability for the government to engage extremist groups proactively long before they enter the cities.

Syria

We have a team on the ground in Geneva, working with U.N. Joint Special Representative for Syria Lakhdar Brahimi, our London 11 partners and the Syrian opposition as it sits across the table from the Syrian regime for a second round of negotiations. Their goal is to push for traction on discussions regarding a transition process and confidence building measures. A primary focus for the United States during this round will be to ensure humanitarian access to civilians in Syria caught in the middle of the conflict.

The scope of the catastrophe in Syria is enormous – it is estimated that more than 136,000 people have been killed; more than 2.4 million people affected by the conflict have fled to neighboring countries while, inside Syria, an additional 6.5 million people are internally displaced and 9.3 million people are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. The United States has responded to this crisis by providing more than \$1.7 billion in humanitarian assistance, the largest of any nation. These resources support international and non-governmental organizations assisting those affected by the conflict inside Syria and across the region.

Outrageously, the Syrian regime has responded to international humanitarian efforts with an apparent policy to obstruct or delay access at every point, denying

aid to more than 250,000 civilians trapped in besieged areas, including cities in East Ghouta and the city of Mouadhamiyah as well as Homs.

For nearly three years, the Syrian regime has chosen to tighten its grip on power, tar all opposition as “terrorists” and plunge Syria into civil war, rather than accede to the will and aspiration of its people.

As the fighting has dragged on, the conflict has attracted extremists seeking to take advantage of the loss of state authority. This includes terrorist groups, such as the Nusra Front and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), that openly compete for territory with the moderate Syrian opposition, with the regime and, until recently, with each other. ISIL has used its foothold in Syria as a base for expanded attacks in Iraq. The extremists have played directly into the hands of the Asad regime by attempting to force the Syrian people and the world into a false choice between Asad’s continued oppression or a new form of oppression under extremists.

The expanded presence of these extremist elements in Syria has weakened the ability of Syria’s moderate opposition to unite Syrians behind its leadership in the civil war. We see no military solution for this terrible conflict – only greater humanitarian suffering and growing extremist participation as the conflict continues. Instead, the United States has worked to build international consensus for bringing this conflict to a close.

Although the Geneva II process has begun, we all know that this is just the beginning. The support demonstrated by the United Nations and over 40 countries and organizations for a peaceful, stable, inclusive Syria will be crucial as we move forward. We will continue to play a vigorous role in the difficult work of helping the parties move forward.

President Obama and Secretary Kerry have denounced the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime in this conflict. We are working closely with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and a number of international partners, as the UN-OPCW’s Joint Mission works to meet the ambitious June 30 target date for the total elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons program. All of its chemical weapons production and mixing equipment has been destroyed. We are currently working with the OPCW to destroy Syria’s remaining chemical weapons and precursors, but Syria has slowed delivery of these materials to the port of Latakia for removal and destruction, citing safety, logistical, and security concerns. We are concerned about the slow pace adopted by the

government of Syria, and the impact this is having on the overall chemical weapons elimination effort. The United States, along with the international community, is very closely monitoring the implementation of UNSCR 2118, and we are taking appropriate steps to urge Syria to fulfill all of its obligations.

Lebanon

The people of Lebanon have been struggling to build an independent, stable government for generations. They were frustrated for many years by the Syrian military presence, and they continue to suffer at the hands of Hezbollah, armed and supported by Iran and Syria.

The Lebanese people deserve a government that responds to their needs and protects their interests. Any new government must address Lebanon's urgent security and political problems: responding to the needs of Lebanese communities hosting nearly one million refugees from Syria; strengthening national institutions; countering extremist ideologies and redoubling counterterrorism efforts; encouraging offshore energy development; and ensuring that the business of the government – including presidential and parliamentary elections – is conducted in a timely, transparent, and fair manner.

The United States will continue to support the Lebanese Armed Forces and other state security institutions to protect Lebanese sovereignty and to provide stability and security for Lebanon. Over the past year alone, the United States is providing \$71.2 million in FY 2013 Foreign Military Financing to the LAF.

Jordan

We maintain a strong partnership with Jordan, a key partner on Middle East Peace, and President Obama is looking forward to meeting King Abdullah later this week. Jordan has been a strong and consistent partner in Middle East peacemaking and a bulwark against extremism in the region. We are committed to supporting Jordan in its efforts to secure its borders and prevent any spillover of fighting from Syria.

Jordan faces tremendous challenges coping with the influx of almost 600,000 refugees from the continuing civil war in Syria. To help Jordan manage the growing burden on its communities, infrastructure and public services, we have provided more than \$268 million in humanitarian assistance for programs to help address the needs of refugees and the communities in Jordan that host them.

We have supported Jordan's economic and political stability through five-year assistance Memorandum of Understanding, which provides annually \$360 million

in Economic Support Funds and \$300 million in Foreign Military Financing. To help Jordan mitigate the costs of hosting almost 600,000 Syrian refugees and external shocks resulting from the regional unrest, we have provided significant additional assistance in FY 2012 and FY 2013, including \$300 million in cash transfers and a \$1.25 billion loan guarantee to facilitate Jordan's access to less costly international financing. Our partnership includes the achievement of important milestones, including the establishment of a bilateral free trade agreement with Jordan, which has opened U.S. markets up to Jordanian products, and we intend to work closely with the Jordanians to support the modernization of their economy.

Israel, the Palestinians and Middle East Peace

The United States and Israel share a deep bond and close ties. Our foreign policy is rooted in the strong support of the American people for Israel's right to live in peace within secure and defensible borders. Under President Obama, the security relationship between our countries has never been stronger. We have more military, intelligence, and diplomatic exchanges with Israel than ever before. The United States is committed to ensuring that Israel maintains its qualitative military edge so it can counter and defeat any credible threat from any state, coalition, or non-state actor.

The Palestinian people also deserve to live within secure and defined borders. Like people everywhere, Palestinians seek to build their nation and better lives for themselves and their children. We continue to provide assistance to the Palestinian Authority's Security Forces to enhance stability and combat terrorism in support of our efforts to achieve a two-state solution.

Over the past year, the United States has committed a tremendous amount of effort to working with Israelis and Palestinians toward reaching a final status peace agreement. The goal is to support the parties as they reach for an agreement that would end the conflict and address all the core issues.

Security has been a critical focus thus far, and we have put the full range of resources of the U.S. Government behind this effort in an unprecedented way. For the past nine months, a team led by General John Allen has been engaged in a comprehensive security dialogue with our Israeli and Palestinian counterparts.

In the end, this agreement must be accepted and embraced by the parties. The United States continues to oppose attempts to impose solutions in international fora and efforts to delegitimize the State of Israel. We oppose efforts to impose

economic, political or academic sanctions or boycotts against Israel – a clear and longstanding policy reinforced by Secretary Kerry.

Peace can bring enormous benefits to both sides. Palestinians stand to gain, above all else, an independent, viable, contiguous state, their own place among the community of nations. And for Israel, the benefits of peace are enormous as well, perhaps even more significant. No nation on earth stands to gain so many new economic partners so quickly as Israel does, because 20 additional members – nations of the Arab League and 35 Muslim countries stand ready under the Arab Peace Initiative to recognize Israel and normalize relations the moment a peace agreement is reached. Together, the Jewish state of Israel and the Arab state of Palestine can develop into an international hub for technology, for trade, and tourism that could invigorate the entire region.

Egypt

The situation in Egypt, the largest Arab country, is deeply worrisome. Egypt has been a close strategic partner for decades. We continue to support the Egyptian people's aspiration to establish a democratic government that respects universal rights, helps address their economic challenges, and promotes employment and investment opportunities.

In the months ahead, the Egyptian people will have an opportunity to choose a new President and parliament, as set forth in the interim government's roadmap. While the constitutional referendum in January was an important step in Egypt's transition, it did not bring any resolution to Egypt's very deep political polarization. We hope that the upcoming elections will produce a government that is respected and broadly accepted by the Egyptian people – and that improves the stability and economic prospects of the country.

We now look to the Egyptian government to implement the rights guaranteed under Egypt's new constitution. We have strong concerns with regard to the actions they have taken to limit dissent, curtail freedom of expression -- including for members of the press-- freedom of peaceful assembly, and to stifle political and civil society opposition.

At the same time, we remain concerned about the serious security threats that Egypt faces. Drawn by the political unrest in Egypt over the past two years and seeking new opportunities, extremist groups continue to conduct violent attacks against the Egyptian government and attempt to launch attacks from Egyptian territory against Israel.

We appreciate Congress' willingness to work with us to continue our assistance to Egypt. Thanks to your support, we have the necessary flexibility to further our strategic interests in Egypt and the region as events unfold. We are working with other donors to Egypt – particularly those in the Gulf – to coordinate future assistance to the Egyptian government in a manner that more effectively encourages credible and sustainable reforms of Egypt's economy.

Gulf Security

As you know, the White House has announced that President Obama will travel to Saudi Arabia next month to personally engage King Abdullah and the Saudi leadership and move forward our important dialogue on regional security matters.

Our friends in the Gulf have not been immune from some of the economic challenges and social unrest that have affected other countries in the region. They are also deeply concerned about security matters in their very important and economically sensitive neighborhood.

We remain committed to the security of the Gulf region and have enjoyed strong cooperation with our Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) partners on regional foreign policy and security issues while maintaining a sizeable security presence in the region. Through the U.S.-GCC Strategic Cooperation Forum, we have enhanced our cooperation on regional security matters and seen real advances in cooperation on issues including ballistic missile defense. This strong relationship allows us to work closely with our Gulf allies to address issues of mutual concern. They have been deeply supportive of the Secretary's efforts to achieve Middle East Peace and of efforts to bring stability to Lebanon.

Our strong relationships also allow us to have frank conversations about areas where our approaches may differ, permitting us to work together and develop solutions to regional problems. Secretary Kerry and other senior U.S. officials will continue our discussions with our friends in the Gulf in the lead up to the President's upcoming trip to Saudi Arabia.

Yemen

Yemen's President Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi and the Yemeni people recently concluded the country's historic National Dialogue, a critical milestone in the implementation of the GCC initiative, which guides Yemen's peaceful political transition. We, in partnership with the international community, are encouraging

and supporting Yemen in implementing the recommendations of the Dialogue and subsequent stages in the nation's transition and stand ready to assist them.

While Yemen continues to make significant progress in its path to democracy, it faces unprecedented challenges, including a dire economic situation, and violence instigated by one of the most potent Al-Qaeda affiliates in the world. With our partners in the region, we must continue to find ways to promote economic growth, including job creation and development of private enterprise, and necessary reform. Continued international support for Yemen's transition is critical as the Yemeni people create a more democratic and stable country that can meet the needs of its citizens and contribute to regional security.

Libya

The United States supports the Libyan people in their search for a stable, democratic and prosperous future after 42 years of authoritarian misrule – and since the Libyan revolution in 2011 we have been working closely with the new Libyan government.

Libya has the potential to be a strong partner, but its governmental structures are weak. The country also faces serious security and political challenges as it works to fulfill the peaceful and democratic aspirations of its revolution.

The United States has two strategic goals in Libya: supporting the development of a basic security capability in the face of domestic and regional threats and progress on Libya's democratic transition, including the establishment of a functioning national government. By fostering increased security and better governance, we also help to facilitate greater private sector engagement in Libya to begin to diversify the economy and generate jobs for Libya's youth.

At the request of the Libyan government, our recent efforts have focused on improving Libya's security. Our Defense Department colleagues plan to train 5,000-8,000 general purpose forces (GPF) as part of a larger effort with the UK, Italy, Turkey and Bulgaria over the next few years to improve security in Libya, an important step in facilitating Libya's transition. As part of this program, funded by the Libyan government, we will also conduct an unprecedented vetting and screening of trainees that participate in the program.

Looking forward, we also plan to increase focus on helping Libya's institutions govern effectively, meet the needs of the Libyan people, and advance the democratic transition.

Maghreb-Sahel Security

Instability in the region, porous borders, and the collapse of state institutions in northern Mali have increased regional threats and created new opportunities for cross border illicit flows and for violent extremist groups, such as al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), to gain ground and stage operations in both the Maghreb and the Sahel. We have established an interagency Sahel-Maghreb Working Group to address the cross-regional and multi-dimensional nature of these threats. We are also encouraging bilateral and regional partnerships among key countries by building on platforms, such as the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) and the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), in order to respond to violent extremism, improve border security, and build CT capacity in the region.

Tunisia

Tunisia remains one of the region's best hopes for a successful transition to democracy. Three years after the start of the Arab Awakening, the promise of dignity, democracy, and a better future in Tunisia took tremendous steps forward in January. Demonstrating leadership and pragmatism, political leaders in Tunisia undertook important compromises and adopted a new constitution and formed an independent interim government that will steer the country to parliamentary and presidential elections for a permanent government.

President Obama called Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa last week to congratulate him and the Tunisian people and to promise America's continued partnership as they complete Tunisia's transition to democracy. He invited the Prime Minister to visit Washington later this year.

Economic Issues and the Region's Future

As I mentioned at the outset, the region continues to face serious challenges to peace and stability. In many countries, some of the fundamentals of their economics present obstacles to the kind of economic growth that can buoy new governments and peoples' hopes for the future.

I have long felt that the United States needs to focus greater attention on the fundamentals of economic growth and trade policies in the region – beyond the traditional diplomatic challenges of managing relationships for peace and security. We need to help leaders focus on policies for jobs and growth that will benefit their people and knit their economies closer to the United States and the opportunities of the global economy. Secretary Kerry has an even more expansive view: he has appointed a special adviser with global responsibilities to bring focus to our

Department's engagement with economic and commercial affairs in a world where security, stability and prosperity are inextricably intertwined with economic power. The Secretary is calling upon all of our Embassies to show diplomatic leadership to advance U.S. economic and commercial interests as well as to support economic progress for people around the world.

So while working to resolve disputes that threaten the peace and security of this region, we are also looking at the ways in which governments and business can be partners in its economic growth and transformation. Progress in diplomatic agreements can help turn the extraordinary creativity and energy of people in this region toward the building of a better future – but it will take work, because the uphill climb from here is steep.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Smith, members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.