

Testimony

Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa

Statement of

David M. Satterfield

Acting Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs

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Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting us to appear before you today to discuss the President's Fiscal Year 2019 budget request. I welcome the opportunity to testify with my colleague, Hallam Ferguson, Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator for the U.S. Agency for International Development's Bureau for the Middle East.

As Members of this Subcommittee, you know well the challenges that face the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The President's FY 2019 budget request for the region addresses critical U.S. national security and economic interests with an emphasis on burden-sharing - leveraging U.S. taxpayer dollars against investments from our regional partners and the international community. It focuses U.S. funding on the enduring defeat of ISIS, strengthening democratic institutions, and broadening the range of economic opportunities and civil participation available to citizens of the region, including women, minorities and the growing number of youth in the region. Terrorists, such as ISIS and al-Qaeda, exacerbate the problems in the region. Civil conflict in Yemen and Libya make it difficult – but not impossible – for our assistance to reach those most in need. Iran's malign behaviors such as ongoing assistance to proxy militias in the region, support for terrorist organizations, and development and proliferation of ballistic missiles destabilizes the region and threatens our partners. Given these challenges, U.S. leadership and foreign assistance programs remain indispensable to delivering sustainable regional security and mitigating threats to the homeland.

The President's FY 2019 foreign assistance budget request for the region is \$7 billion. Despite the complex operating environment, U.S. interests in the region are stable and enduring, and reflect fundamental American values.

We have diligently worked to mobilize our partners and link their contributions in support of our common goals. As Secretary Pompeo stated during his recent testimony before the Full Committee, “It's time for other nations, especially those with high GDPs, to assume greater responsibilities and devote greater resources towards our common objectives.” President Trump has been clear that the United States should not bear the sole responsibility for funding regional stabilization. In this regard, our request reduces foreign assistance to Iraq and Syria, where we expect other donors to provide funding for stabilization and reconstruction activities in FY 2019. Our regional allies have heard the President and have stepped up. They are effectively multiplying our contributions. Excluding U.S. Government contributions, our partners in the Global Coalition to Defeat-ISIS have contributed more than \$3 billion in funding for explosive hazards clearance, bilateral stabilization support, and humanitarian assistance to Iraq since 2014. Additionally, Coalition donors have committed more than \$540 million to UNDP’s Funding Facility for Stabilization, which is implementing projects in liberated areas of Iraq.

Across the region, from Iraq to Syria to Yemen, Iran’s malign influence continued under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). As Secretary Pompeo stated in his speech at the Heritage Foundation, Iran must end its support to terrorist groups in the Middle East, including Lebanese Hizballah, Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Iran must also end its military support for the Houthi militia and withdraw all forces under Iranian command throughout the entirety of Syria. The JCPOA was a fundamentally flawed deal because it did not address these malign Iranian behaviors and our withdrawal benefits U.S. national security as well as international security. Following the President’s decision on the JCPOA and through execution of our comprehensive Iran strategy, we have the opportunity

to counter Iran's malign regional influence and enhance regional security by building new partnerships and deepening existing relationships. Re-imposed U.S. sanctions are powerful tools that should incentivize Iran to change its behavior. With our allies and partners, we share a common assessment that the Iranian regime poses a threat to our collective security that we must address jointly and quickly. Furthermore, Ranking Member Deutch, I know something you spoke to the Secretary about, and something you and Chairman Ros-Lehtinen are deeply concerned about, is Robert Levinson's case. I want personally to assure you this Administration remains committed to resolving this case and bringing home all Americans who are unjustly detained.

President Trump has been clear that the enduring defeat of ISIS is one of his primary national security priorities. The FY 2019 budget request for the region supports this commitment with substantial foreign assistance to support key regional and local partners through civilian-led efforts to stabilize and secure areas liberated from ISIS and other terrorist groups. With the conclusion of major combat operations against ISIS in Iraq, their impending conclusion in Syria, and our work with our partners to invigorate the Syrian political process pursuant to UNSCR 2254, our assistance will address the devastation wrought by ISIS throughout the region and generate additional needed funding from the regional and international community. We must turn our focus from the hard work of winning the war to the equally difficult task of maintaining the peace.

At the President's direction, in recent months the Administration has been reviewing all aspects of our assistance to Syria to ensure that it fully supports our priorities and national security interests and is an appropriate and justifiable use of taxpayer dollars. The FY 2019 request for Syria of \$174.5 million recognizes the

support necessary for the enduring defeat of ISIS to counter the influence of other terrorist groups. ISIS has lost nearly all the territory it once controlled in Eastern Syria, but the fight continues, as does our determination to ensure ISIS remains defeated. U.S. foreign assistance prioritizes stabilizing areas to cement military gains and facilitate the safe and voluntary return of displaced persons. It will also enable local governance actors, service institutions, and civil society organizations to respond to critical needs and stabilize communities by restoring essential services such as water, electricity, sanitation, education, and health. These efforts represent steps needed to ensure that Syrians can return to safe, productive lives.

The President has requested \$200 million to support Iraq. Iraq is at a crucial juncture: stability has improved since the military defeat of ISIS, but the group continues to pose a serious asymmetric threat. Iraq has the potential to be the center of a stable and prosperous Middle East that is a partner for the United States. To achieve this, we must continue to invest in the Government of Iraq and its people. Targeted U.S. financial investments are critical to preventing an ISIS resurgence. Economic and humanitarian conditions in Iraq, including long-term displacement of entire communities, imperil our battlefield successes. Our stabilization programming has set the conditions for more than 3.8 million Iraqis to return to their homes, but two million remain displaced. U.S. assistance promotes further integration of Iraq into the global economy, which will in turn create opportunities for U.S. businesses and jobs here at home. Funding to support the resilience of vulnerable communities, such as ethnic and religious minorities, to promote and preserve Iraq's religious pluralism is a top priority for the United States. A more stable, unified, and pluralistic Iraq with strong institutions is also a country less susceptible to Iran's malign influence. Tehran simply cannot match the quality and range of assistance that we and our partners offer Iraq.

In Libya, U.S. foreign assistance supports the country's political transition and stabilization, with the goal of a unified government that can stand on its own against ISIS and other terrorist groups. The FY 2019 request of \$34.5 million will help Libya become capable of partnering with the international community on common security, economic, and political interests. Libya is an exceptionally challenging environment to implement assistance programs, but we have achieved success working on both national and local levels. Key Libyan leaders have committed to work through the UN political process toward credible, secure, and well-prepared elections as soon as possible and to respect the results of those elections when they occur. Under UN Special Representative Salamé's leadership, the UN is consulting with Libyan elements on adopting a constitution, which will be a pivotal moment in Libya's political transition from civil war toward fragile democracy. Support for the Government of National Accord will remain critical to its success and to defeating ISIS, stemming the flow of migrants, and interdicting human trafficking.

In Yemen, we are working with the international donor community to address critical humanitarian needs and help create an opportunity for durable peace. The FY 2019 budget request includes \$43.4 million to support the Yemeni people and their institutions to address development and security issues, particularly countering threats from ISIS and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The United States understands and is responsive to the devastating humanitarian effect of the conflict, particularly the ongoing cholera and food security crises affecting millions of Yemenis. Our assistance will advance our ability to support international efforts to bolster early stabilization activities, resumption of economic activities, and

provision of basic services while the United States and our partners press for a comprehensive political settlement.

The FY 2019 budget request, of course, includes our enduring commitments to key partners: Israel, Jordan, and Egypt. The most significant change in the request includes increases to Jordan and Israel in support of each of the new foreign assistance Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs).

This budget maintains our unwavering commitment to Israel's security and prosperity with \$3.3 billion in Foreign Military Financing (FMF). FY 2019 marks the first year under the new 10-year, MOU between the United States and Israel, which includes plans for \$33 billion in FMF over that time period.

Separately, the FY 2019 request also seeks \$251 million in development and security assistance funding for programs in the West Bank and Gaza. While U.S. assistance to the Palestinians remains under review, this request will give us the flexibility to provide assistance to the Palestinian people, consistent with the Taylor Force Act and other provisions of law, should our review determine it is in our interests to do so. I can assure you that the Administration will brief Congress on the conclusions of the review when it is complete.

The FY 2019 request includes \$1.275 billion for Jordan consistent with the new five-year MOU. Additional resources will allow the United States to continue to support the Jordanian government and people as they implement an important economic reform program designed to reduce debt levels and spur additional economic growth. We will continue to work with the new government appointed last week by King Abdullah on ways to promote prosperity and security for all

Jordanians in the future. The additional funds will also allow for the continued development of Jordan's security forces, which are on the front line in a turbulent region. Foreign assistance allows the United States to continue its strong and enduring partnership with the Kingdom of Jordan to achieve critical U.S. national security priorities.

In Egypt, our foreign assistance request includes \$1.3 billion in Foreign Military Financing (FMF), supporting the Egyptian Armed Forces' capacity to counter terrorism in the Sinai, and to secure land and maritime borders. Our longstanding partnership across a range of regional issues, specifically efforts to defeat terrorism and prevent ISIS from strengthening its presence in the Sinai, are critical to American national security interests in the region. The United States will also continue funding priorities that advance American interests by strengthening the stability of the Egyptian state and the resiliency and prosperity of its 100 million people. For example, U.S. assistance supports Egypt's stability by helping to improve the quality of education and public health programs, support responsive and accountable government institutions, and create opportunities for Egypt's youth entering the workforce.

Security assistance remains an essential tool for advancing our security cooperation with our allies and partners and provides the means for them to counter destabilizing and malign activities in the region. FMF supports U.S. objectives to build security sector institutional capacity to ensure long-term sustainability, effectiveness, professionalism, and resilience of partner and ally nations. The FY 2019 request sustains our enduring commitments, and restores requests for bilateral FMF for Lebanon and Tunisia to strengthen their armed forces' counterterrorism and border security capabilities. U.S. assistance for



Lebanon's security services, particularly the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), is the backbone of U.S. policy to reinforce Lebanon's sovereignty and assist the Lebanese government in asserting its authority throughout all of its territory. Strengthening Lebanese state institutions like the LAF undermines Hizballah and its attempts to exploit a weak Lebanese central government. U.S. security assistance to Tunisia represents a critical investment in a capable and valued partner working jointly with us to confront complex threats in North Africa. We are also maintaining robust support for Tunisian civilian counterterrorism forces through the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund.

Regional programs focus on countering terrorism and simultaneously fostering economic growth. The President's FY 2019 request includes funding for regional programs to counter terrorism and support civil society, businesses, and non-governmental organizations that advocate for political, social, and economic reform. For example, the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership fosters regional security cooperation to defeat terrorists across North Africa and the Sahel. Our commitment to fostering democratic organizations and strengthening the rule of law and respect for human rights spans across the region from Morocco to Iran. The Middle East Partnership Initiative fosters partnerships between the private sector, civil society, and governments, and encourages innovation, and introduces measures that advances stability and prosperity in the region.

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, the President's FY 2019 request supports our highest national security priorities in the region and promotes investments to further our regional interests. Our ability to react quickly to the dynamic environments in the Middle East and North Africa will require your

continued support. I want to thank this Subcommittee for your unwavering support and look forward to answering your questions.