

Testimony
Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism

Statement of
David Schenker
Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs

Thank you for inviting me here to discuss the President's FY 2020 budget request for foreign assistance to the Middle East and North Africa. I welcome the opportunity to testify with my colleague, Michael Harvey, Assistant Administrator for the U.S. Agency for International Development's Bureau for the Middle East.

Stability is the Administration's imperative in the Middle East and North Africa to protect the American people and our interests abroad. That core objective, which benefits U.S. interests as well as the region's, drives our diplomatic and foreign assistance. We face three key threats to our security interests in the region: the malign influence that Iran projects throughout the Middle East and beyond; the scourge of terrorism, in particular the threat posed by ISIS and al Qaeda; and the growth of Chinese and Russian influence. Iran is a provocative, malicious actor, threatening our partners and meddling in the affairs of Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Syria to name a few. While we have defeated the so-called territorial caliphate of ISIS, its fighters are scattered across the region, posing an imminent threat to U.S. national security interests, as well as our partners'. We are working to find political solutions to the region's three active conflicts – Syria, Yemen, and Libya. Throughout the region, the specter of global power competition looms as Russia and China offer empty alternatives that threaten to undermine U.S. interests and longer-term state and regional stability. Addressing these threats requires active diplomatic engagement accompanied by strategic foreign assistance investments.

The President's FY 2020 foreign assistance budget request of \$6.6 billion for the region will support national security priorities to counter Iran's malign influence; ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS; support persecuted religious and ethnic minorities throughout the region; and maintain support to key allies and critical partnerships across the region. Our foreign assistance resources support these policy priorities by strengthening local security and ensuring security forces are more responsive to their communities; by supporting nascent democratic institutions; by advancing human rights and accountability, good governance and rule of law; and by broadening the range of economic opportunities and civil participation available to citizens of the region, including women, religious and ethnic minorities and the growing number of youth.

The request also recognizes that the United States cannot bear sole responsibility for addressing challenges in the region. The President's request places an emphasis on burden-sharing - leveraging U.S. taxpayer dollars against investments from our regional partners and the international community.

The Administration's Iran strategy focuses on neutralizing Tehran's destabilizing influence and constraining its malign activities, particularly its support of terrorism and militants. Strong

diplomatic, economic, and security measures must be bolstered by U.S. assistance programs that support key partners and seek to deny access and influence to Iran and its proxies. Resources requested in this budget will counter Iran's malign influence in Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen by working through our local partners. For example, this budget provides \$50 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to continue U.S. support for the Lebanese Armed Forces; this U.S. support seeks to counter the influence of both Hizballah and its patron, Iran. A strong and independent LAF capable of defending Lebanon is critical to undermining Hizballah's false claims of legitimacy. This request also increases support to the Iranian people and the free flow of information.

The territorial defeat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria is a major milestone that should not be underestimated. The FY 2020 request reflects significant progress in encouraging our allies to support stabilization activities in Syria. We will also hold ISIS accountable for the atrocities it committed, including genocide against members of Iraq's persecuted communities. Ensuring the survival of Iraq's minority religious and ethnic communities is a vital interest of the United States and stands in direct opposition to the extremist vision ISIS sought to impose on Iraq. The FY 2020 budget request includes \$150 million in assistance for persecuted minority religious and ethnic communities, not only in Iraq, but globally. Members of these communities have suffered genocide, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing at the hands of ISIS.

U.S. assistance will help enable Iraq to become a constructive, stabilizing influence in the region. The FY 2020 request of \$166 million supports U.S. assistance that promotes further integration of Iraq into the global economy, which will in turn create opportunities for U.S. businesses and jobs here at home. The Iraqi government will need to implement economic reforms, secure international financing and investment, sustain and diversify economic growth and fuel reconstruction. Our support to civil society, local governments and security and judicial institutions strengthens Iraqi capacity to address the needs of the population and build resiliency against threats to its sovereignty, mainly from Iran. Assistance also is directed at restoring services, improving the business environment, and attracting foreign investment. These efforts will generate economic growth, jobs and integration into the global economy, while promoting self-reliance and independence from Iranian economic and political influence.

As we have seen over the last few weeks, stabilization in Syria will require more resources than one country alone should provide, which is why we must work together. The President has been clear that the United States expects our allies and partners to increase contributions to stabilize Syria and ensure that ISIS cannot return. This budget does not request bilateral foreign assistance specifically for Syria; however, the Administration's budget, as with any global contingency need in our national security interest, includes resources that could be made available for Syria, for example if there is significant progress in the political process called for by UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

In Yemen, we are working with international donors to address critical humanitarian needs that will help create a foundation for durable peace. In addition, the FY 2020 budget request includes \$41 million in economic assistance 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 is confronting the devastating humanitarian toll of the conflict, particularly cholera and food security crises. In December 2018, the UN estimated that

more than 24 million Yemenis – 80 percent of the population – were in need of humanitarian assistance. The United States remains one of the largest donors of humanitarian assistance to Yemen, providing over \$2 billion since October 2015, and we urge all parties to allow unfettered humanitarian access to populations in need. The funding we request, in tandem with international efforts, will bolster stabilization activities, invigorate economic activity, and provide basic services while the United States and our partners press for a comprehensive political settlement. However, no amount of humanitarian or development assistance will end this conflict and suffering of millions. Our support for an inclusive political settlement in Yemen counters Iranian efforts to use Yemen as a pawn in its power struggle with the Gulf states, and supports a comprehensive political solution that will enable the people of Yemen to determine a secure and prosperous future.

The FY 2020 budget request reflects our commitment to comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, which hinges on a safe and secure Israel. The 2019-2028 \$38 billion Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on military assistance between the United States and Israel is the cornerstone of our regional policy. Consistent with the MOU's disbursement schedule, the President's budget requests \$3.3 billion in FMF for Israel, the single largest foreign assistance investment in the region. The Administration continues to work toward a comprehensive and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians. In support of these efforts, the President's FY 2020 budget request includes \$35 million in security assistance for the Palestinian Authority security forces, and includes funding in the Diplomatic Progress Fund that could also be used for assistance for the West Bank and Gaza. Normalizing political and economic relations between Israel and the Arab League States is also a crucial step towards peace and prosperity in the Middle East. Encouraging deeper partnerships between Israel and its neighbors will reduce Israel's international isolation and improve regional security.

The FY 2020 request includes \$1.275 billion for Jordan, consistent with the 2018 bilateral MOU. I would like to thank the Subcommittee for sharing the State Department's staunch support for the U.S.-Jordan relationship. Jordan is an invaluable partner for the United States and ensuring Jordan's security and internal stability is a key U.S. national security imperative. Jordan continues to be a close partner in our counterterrorism efforts and has been a leading member of the coalition to defeat the ISIS. We appreciate Jordan's hospitality in hosting 655,000 registered Syrian refugees and the many more who have sought shelter there. U.S. assistance has helped Jordan weather the impact of the Syrian crisis and supports the long standing U.S.-Jordanian relationship.

Egypt, the region's most populous country, is also important to U.S. interests. The FY 2020 request includes \$1.3 billion in FMF to support the Egyptian Armed Forces' capacity to counter terrorism in the Sinai and secure the country's land and maritime borders, including the Suez Canal.

U.S. assistance seeks to support unified, inclusive, and accountable Libyan governance capable of providing security, denying safe haven to ISIS and other terrorist groups, and building prosperity for all Libyans. The FY 2020 request of \$21.8 million will strengthen Libya's ability to address security, economic, and political needs that drive the current conflict and threaten U.S. interests. The United States remains committed to supporting UN-led efforts to achieve a ceasefire, restore international unity and respect for the arms embargo, and facilitate

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reunification of Libyan institutions and a return to an inclusive political process. Libya presents a challenging environment in which to implement assistance. Although modest, U.S. assistance is key to our ability to play an influential role in the country's progress.

The Administration is requesting \$86.4 million to support our partnership with Tunisia, a partnership that has lasted over 200 years. Tunisia is consolidating its democratic institutions, developing its economy, and strengthening its security. Tunisia is a capable security partner and shares common objectives with the United States. This assistance will bolster Tunisia's security sector and civil society as the Government undertakes economic and political reform.

In Morocco with \$16.0 million, U.S. assistance will support the kingdom's efforts to counter terrorism and the long-term drivers of instability, such as social and economic marginalization, by improving education and local governance and increasing livelihood opportunities.

In closing, the President's FY 2020 request contributes to achievement of our national priorities in the region and supports investments to advance our interests. Economic assistance can reinforce stability in the region by providing opportunities for disaffected populations that would otherwise be susceptible to violent extremism. But the benefits are more than just security. We seek a prosperous Middle East with open markets and investment opportunities for U.S. firms. Programs like the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) foster partnerships between the private sector, civil society, and governments, to encourage innovation and introduce measures that advance stability and prosperity in the region. Elsewhere in the Middle East, we support responsive governance, if not full-fledged democracy, which reinforces our imperative for security and stability. We foster democratic organizations and strengthen the rule of law and respect for human rights across the region from Morocco to Iran. By matching diplomatic advocacy with support for regional partner capacities, we promote the development of responsive institutions, investment and market opportunities, respect for the rule of law, and protection of human rights.

Thank you for your enduring support to our diplomacy in the region and our foreign assistance investments. Our ability to respond quickly to needs in the region and allocate funding effectively requires your continued support. I look forward to answering your questions.

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