

**Statement for the Record**  
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**House Foreign Affairs Committee**  
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**Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia**

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Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Phillips, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to testify on the President's FY 2024 Budget Request and how it supports our priorities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). I welcome the opportunity to testify with my USAID colleague Jeanne Pryor, Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Middle East Bureau. To advance the President's regional agenda, the FY 2024 President's Budget Request includes \$7.57 billion in foreign assistance for MENA with the goal of continuing the work to build a more stable, integrated, and prosperous region.

President Biden has articulated a forward-looking approach to the region based on five elements: Partnership, Deterrence, Diplomacy, Regional Integration, and Values. Through this framework, we have made real progress de-escalating tensions and building a more stable, secure, and prosperous region, while using the full strength of our diplomacy to promote respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all. Our Budget Request allows us to carry this work forward, shoring up our successes and bolstering our efforts to address the challenges that remain.

Our approach to the region is anchored in two realities that shape our request and our commitment.

The first reality is that the Middle East and North Africa is vital to U.S. interests. The region is replete with strategic natural resources, is home to critical transit points in global shipping and trade, and our regional partners remain essential to our ability to achieve our broader foreign policy priorities. In this era of strategic competition, it is ever more important to demonstrate that we are committed to our deep engagement in the region. As the President has said, "we are not going

to leave a vacuum in the Middle East for Russia or China to fill.” While Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine poses an immediate threat to international stability, the Secretary has emphasized “China represents the most consequential geopolitical challenge we face today: a country with the intent and, increasingly, the capability to challenge our vision for a free, open, secure, and prosperous international order.”

Which brings us to our second reality – our assiduous diplomacy has repaired regional rifts, and we now benefit from a region that, while still fragile, can itself undertake the work of stabilization and repair. Today, we are as diplomatically engaged and committed to the region as we have ever been, doing the hard work to demonstrate why our vision for the region’s peace and prosperity can deliver a more compelling future for our partners. Your support for this request will undergird the vigorous diplomatic engagement that drives current and future efforts to cement U.S. success across the region.

And we have had important successes over the past year. Our efforts through the D-ISIS coalition and working with partners have eliminated key ISIS leaders and diminished ISIS’s capacity to threaten the United States, our allies, our partners, and our interests. In Yemen, despite our UN-facilitated truce lapsing, the terms continue to hold, resulting in the longest period of calm – since the conflict began more than eight years ago. Our sustained engagement with the Yemeni parties and regional partners has helped secure this unprecedented progress and enabled discussions around a comprehensive peace process. We facilitated a historic agreement between Israel and Lebanon to establish a permanent maritime boundary, opening the door for greater peace and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean.

We have launched the Negev Forum and I2U2, building on the historic Abraham Accords and normalization agreements, to deliver tangible benefits from regional integration. Our participation in the Aqaba-Sharm process helped our partners make important strides to deescalate Israeli-Palestinian tensions ahead of the confluence of religious holidays in April. I recently returned from Iraq, where we conducted intensive, hands-on work to mediate tensions between Baghdad and Erbil, and between our Kurdish partners. Their ability to work productively together across a myriad of economic, security, energy, and social issues will contribute to – or detract from – Iraq’s larger stability and security. In addition,

our diplomacy has resulted in steps toward Iraq's energy reform and interconnection with the region.

We have helped maintain international unity behind UN Special Representative Bathily's efforts to support the Libyan people's call for national elections. At COP in Egypt this past year and in Dubai later this year, we are building the global consensus to fight climate change, including by helping civil society voices from the region engage and advance citizens' priorities. And we have helped secure major wins for U.S. companies, including a nearly \$37 billion agreement for the largest ever purchase of Boeing planes by Saudi Arabia earlier this year.

## **Partnership**

Our regional engagement begins with partnership. Last week, Secretary Blinken visited Saudi Arabia. He attended a Ministerial with our GCC partners and co-led a Ministerial with our partners in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. His visit reflected our commitment to working with a broad range of partners as we address our shared regional concerns.

Building on our decades-long track record of commitment to the region, our partnerships focus on solving shared problems and building shared prosperity and security. We supported Israel, Jordan, and the UAE to launch Project Prosperity, opening the door to regional cooperation on clean energy and water security. We are working with Saudi Arabia to develop the next generation of 5G, 6G, and OpenRAN technology. We are helping Egypt to build 10 gigawatts of renewable power. And our partners have offered overwhelming support within the United Nations on key votes condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine and to elect strong U.S. leaders at the International Telecommunications Union and the International Organization for Migration. In an era of strategic competition, these partnerships are what set us apart.

Last June, President Biden and other G7 leaders launched the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, or PGII, to address enormous infrastructure needs in low- and middle-income countries and to meet the challenge of securing and diversifying global supply chains. Many of our Middle East partners, pledged millions of dollars in investments to PGII. Those investments will advance

strategic projects from ports, to rail, electricity lines, and essential minerals across Africa, to Asia, and to the Middle East region.

As Secretary Blinken has said, we are not forcing countries to choose, but giving them a choice. Our partnership and our values – underwritten by your support for this request – can show why we remain a better choice.

The Request reaffirms our enduring commitment to partners like Israel, Jordan, Egypt, as well as Iraq, and creates the conditions that sustain our cooperation. Most importantly, the FY 2024 request demonstrates our sustained engagement in and commitment to the region.

## **Deterrence**

Working with our partners, we remain committed to ensuring that malign actors – in particular Iran and the groups it backs – are deterred from aggressive actions that undermine global security or threaten strategic lines of trade and communication. Our approach to regional security relies on leveraging our unrivaled network of partnerships creating integrated deterrence, through which, as Secretary Austin has emphasized, “multilateral efforts tackle shared threats, and operations are more integrated, and defense relationships grow deeper.”

Iran remains the pre-eminent regional threat as it continues to advance its nuclear program; support terrorist groups and destabilizing partners and proxies; support Russia in its war of aggression in Ukraine; and, as the world has seen, crack down on peaceful protests and forcefully suppress the rights of Iranians.

President Biden has been clear that he is committed to ensuring that Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon. Diplomacy is the best means to address that issue, but we are also deterring Iran’s adventurism by building a deep coalition of partners with integrated defense capabilities and the willingness to hold Iran to account.

The United States employs a wide range of tools to counter destabilizing Iranian activities across the region. We have hardened our defenses, conducted dynamic force deployments to the region, including long-range bomber overflights, deepened our intelligence cooperation, boosted the capacity of our partners,

interdicted Iranian weapons and financial flows, and conducted defensive strikes to restore deterrence with Iran and its partners and proxies.

One of our most substantial tools to enhance deterrence remains our support for our partners through Foreign Military Financing (FMF). The FY 2024 President's Budget Request for the region includes \$5.3 billion in FMF, maintaining our enduring commitments to Israel, Jordan, and Egypt, and advancing U.S. priorities in countries like Iraq, Lebanon, and Tunisia.

Our commitment to Israel's security is ironclad. Consistent with our MOU with Israel, the request includes \$3.3 billion in FMF to support Israel's security.

U.S. security cooperation with Egypt is a central tool of our overall foreign policy. As we work to advance U.S. interests in regional de-escalation and stability, investment in the Egyptian Armed Forces is a generational investment in a self-reliant, capable, and accountable partner, and a reflection of Egypt's crucial voice as the most populous Arab country. In Jordan, \$400 million in FMF will support F-16 aircraft procurement and modernization, sustainment of existing programs, and support other bilateral security priorities such as countering illicit drug trafficking.

Our request of \$75.5 million in FMF for Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) will support Iraqi and Peshmerga security efforts to pursue the enduring defeat of ISIS and ensure that Iraq is able to effectively exercise its own sovereignty independent of foreign influence. Our continued commitment to Iraqi security services ensures the U.S. remains Iraq's security partner of choice.

In Lebanon, a spiraling economic and political crisis threatens to spill over into security threats to our closest partners in the region. The request includes \$150 million in FMF to continue U.S. support for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), a vital national security institution which enjoys broad support across sectarian lines and is the true defender of Lebanon and the Lebanese people.

Our request of \$45 million in FMF for Tunisia is targeted to U.S. interests. A guiding principle remains engaging on the vital national interests of protecting U.S. diplomatic personnel and facilities, the welfare of American citizens in Tunisia, and neutralizing the continuing threat of terrorism, while promoting

accountability and respect for the rule of law. We are continuously reviewing all aspects of U.S. diplomacy in Tunisia, as well as all foreign assistance programs, to ensure alignment with U.S. policy goals in the changing landscape in Tunisia.

## **Diplomacy**

To build sustainable regional security, we must rely on diplomacy to build coalitions that de-escalate conflict and work collectively. We are making vital progress toward this end, and this request seeks funding for sustained support for our efforts.

The Biden Administration has fully recommitted to the United Nations and its efforts in support of peace. We support UN-facilitated political and peace building processes in Yemen, Syria, and Libya.

Our efforts in Yemen helped lead to the UN-brokered April 2022 truce, which has provided Yemen with the longest period of calm since the war began in 2014 and enabled discussions around a comprehensive peace process. This profound decrease in hostilities continues to bring tangible relief to Yemenis, including a significant reduction in civilian casualties and greater freedom of movement for goods and people. But we realize much more is needed – that is why intensive U.S. diplomatic efforts continue to help secure a more comprehensive agreement. The requested \$42.55 million for Yemen will help sustain this effort while seeking to mitigate the dire economic crisis facing the country.

In Syria, our steadfast opposition to normalization with the regime has not changed, nor will we lift any sanctions on the regime or those who provide support to it. We have also made it clear to our Arab partners, through repeated high-level diplomacy, that any engagement with the Assad regime must produce concrete actions that benefit the Syrian people. Our advocacy is shifting Arab partners' agenda with Assad toward key issues that matter to Syrians – providing unhindered humanitarian aid access through the cross-border mechanism authorized by the UN Security Council, releasing detainees, and pursuing a political resolution to the conflict as outlined in UN resolutions. Our investment in accountability efforts is also having real impact – just last year, documentation collected by our civil society partners was submitted as evidence in a German court, leading to the first conviction of a Syrian regime official for crimes against

humanity. This trial was a significant step towards accountability and established a legal precedent for continued accountability processes for Syrian and other officials. At the same time, we are using all tools at our disposal, including those under the Caesar Act, to promote accountability for those who enable the regime's abuses or have committed violations of human rights.

As the Secretary reaffirmed last week at the Defeat ISIS Ministerial in Riyadh, we are focused on the enduring defeat of ISIS alongside our Coalition partners. In combination with our military efforts in partnership with Iraqi security forces and local forces in northeast Syria, and continued advocacy and support for repatriations of ISIS fighters and their family members from the northeast, continued stabilization support is essential to avoid an ISIS resurgence. The request of \$97 million for U.S.-funded stabilization assistance in northeast Syria would continue accountability efforts and support critical community security efforts, revive economic activity and livelihoods, support youth rehabilitation, and restore essential services necessary for the reintegration of displaced Syrians to their home or host communities – including those returning from al-Hol, Roj, and other displacement camps. A key component of this request is funding to address the security concerns emanating from al-Hol, even as we work methodically to reduce the camp's population through returns of families to their home countries. This work is critical to ensure that ISIS cannot leverage instability in Syria or recruit vulnerable displaced populations to reconstitute and threaten the United States.

In Libya, our regional partnerships have played a central role in helping to sustain the Libyan ceasefire that has now held for over two years and a political process that has shifted the focus from violent confrontation to political negotiation. Our request includes \$16 million to support Libya's eventual transition to a democratic, stable, and unified state, complemented by targeted resources from the Prevention and Stabilization Fund. This work is driven by our 10-year Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability in Libya and the Global Fragility Act. We are actively engaged now in a broad-based international effort to support UN Special Representative Bathily's work to enable a Libyan roadmap for national elections, with the goal of the Libyan people finally securing a unified government and enduring stability.

## **Regional Integration**

Through this request we will continue to promote regional integration to unlock the region's potential for sustained and wide-ranging economic growth. The World Bank has identified the MENA region as the least economically integrated region in the world, and this condition is reflected in the political and security realms. We have been proactive in building interconnections between our partners, from Iraq to Saudi Arabia to Jordan and Israel. Additionally, the ongoing effort to promote Israel's regional integration is at the center of our work, building on the Abraham Accords and normalization efforts more broadly between Israel and its neighbors.

Expanding upon the Abraham Accords, the Negev Forum brings the United States together with Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Morocco, and the UAE to design and deliver the tangible benefits of regional integration. This past January, we launched the Forum's six working groups in a meeting hosted by our UAE partners that was the largest multilateral Arab-Israeli gathering since the 1991 Madrid conference. The working groups are developing projects in Regional Security, Clean Energy, Food Security and Water Technology, Health, Tourism, and Education and Coexistence that the Forum will discuss at its next Ministerial later this summer. This request provides ongoing support for these regional initiatives, which can also catalyze investments by our partners.

We have deepened our cooperation with the GCC to develop a regional approach to Gulf security and, along with the United States Central Command, plant the seeds of a cooperative regional security architecture. International Military and Educational Training (IMET) funds for Bahrain and Oman will improve our interoperability and build capacity for greater regional partnerships.

We can build upon the progress of regional integration to develop globally transformative partnerships like the I2U2 – connecting the United States, Israel, the UAE, and India – to work on innovative initiatives that address food security and climate change.

These fora and more would benefit from the MENA Opportunity Fund, a new \$90 million flexible funding mechanism that will allow us to take advantage of our progress or of potential breakthroughs to advance regional peace and integration. Given the velocity of change within the region, we envision this fund as ready



seed money to address emerging opportunities to support progress, including on democracy and human rights, or resolve crises in countries such as Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen, while also allowing the U.S. government to seize on emerging regional opportunities revealed through the work of the Negev Forum and the Abraham Accords relationships themselves in order to have maximum regional impact.

While we focus on deepening and building upon the Abraham Accords, we also are cognizant that these efforts are no substitute for a negotiated settlement between Israelis and Palestinians.

As Secretary Blinken has said, “we all must build on these relationships and growing normalization to make tangible improvements in the lives of Palestinians, and to make progress toward the longstanding goal of advancing a negotiated peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Palestinians and Israelis deserve equal measures of freedom, security, opportunity, and dignity.”

A two-state solution is the best way to ensure Israel’s future as a Jewish, democratic state, living in peace alongside a viable, sovereign, and democratic Palestinian state. Our request includes \$309 million in economic and security assistance for the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza that will improve the lives of millions of Palestinians by addressing immediate needs on health, climate, water, and economic growth; promoting rule of law; enhancing civil society; and supporting people to people connections under the Middle East Partnership for Peace Act.

## **Values**

And finally, we will keep our values at the center of our approach – support for human rights, respect for fundamental freedoms, the empowerment of women and girls, and protection for members of historically underrepresented and marginalized communities. We will continue to encourage our partners to respect the values enshrined in the UN charter and to reinforce the rule of law. We will do all that we can to bolster the strength and voices of civil society.

Last week, while in Saudi Arabia, the Secretary again made clear to our Saudi and GCC partners that human rights are a central element of how this administration

engages with countries around the world and are essential to enabling the strongest possible bilateral relationships. At the D-ISIS Ministerial in Riyadh, he also stressed that the lasting defeat of ISIS requires a foundation of respect for human rights and inclusion of women.

Across the region, our diplomatic advocacy in support of human rights is relentless, both publicly and privately. Our teams are regularly holding difficult conversations to gain traction on human rights issues, no matter how big or small. These conversations include respecting the rights of historically underrepresented communities, including women, persons with disabilities, activists, journalists, and members of the LGBTQI+ community. These conversations support the ability for all to live free from violence and discrimination and to be fully integrated and equal participants in decision-making in all elements about the future of their countries. We continue to push for inclusive and accountable governance in the format that leads to the best outcomes for the people of the region.

We do this because it is who we are as Americans, and because this also serves our interests. In an era of strategic competition, we must be steadfast in demonstrating the American values proposition. We want the people of the region to know what we stand for, see us stand up for these values, and know that what we're offering is, in both the short and long run, more promising, more responsive to the aspirations and longings of people everywhere, including in this fragile region, and more likely to produce the shared security and prosperity we all seek.

Our request reflects our commitment to respond to changes that impact our values. The request reflects the reduction of programs that benefit the government of Tunisia to signal the United States' continued concern over the consolidation of executive power and alarming erosion of democratic norms. At the same time, the request continues targeted investments in Tunisian civil society and to support economic empowerment, as the Tunisian people grapple with an economic crisis exacerbated by Russia's war on Ukraine and strive for a democratic future for all. As part of our comprehensive approach to Tunisia, a portion of the funding within the MENA Opportunity Fund would also provide us with flexible resources to provide further support for the Tunisian people should new windows emerge.

The states that will be best equipped to meet the challenges of our changing world – whether a global pandemic or climate change – will be those with resilient, inclusive governments that treat civil society as a partner rather than a threat. It will be those that respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of their people, such as freedom of expression, including for members of the press as well as political opponents and critics. Our request includes \$65 million for Near East Regional Democracy (NERD) – a \$10 million increase from last year – to continue and expand support in the areas of Internet freedom, including digital freedom, and human rights, using tools that are responsive to the dynamic environment on the ground to support the free flow of information to citizens.

Our diplomatic and assistance efforts empower women in the workforce and tap into the potential for economic growth to compete on a global level. The MENA region’s female labor participation of less than 20 percent – the lowest rate globally – pales in comparison to the global average of 50 percent. Women are a hugely untapped resource in this region. Promoting gender equity, inclusion, and women’s participation in decision-making is part of our affirmative approach – recognizing that doing so is essential to addressing the region’s most pressing challenges. We need women’s full economic integration while addressing gender-based violence and respecting their fundamental freedoms to effectively support an inclusive recovery from the COVID pandemic, lead in resolving conflict, and promote innovation to tackle the climate crisis.

Through the Middle East Partnership Initiative, regional programs play a critical role in changing perceptions and conditions in the public and private sector so that women *can* participate and lead in governance and the economy.

As Secretary Blinken said earlier this year, “closing the gender gap in the workforce by 2025 would add up to \$28 trillion to the global economy. Especially at a time when we are working to recover from COVID, dealing with the impact of climate change, and addressing the many conflicts that are also holding back the global economy – that contribution is more vital than ever.”

The region’s future and our future engagement with the region will be shaped by these shared global trends and challenges. Our policy today is designed to build the sustainable and integrated partnerships necessary to develop shared

solutions to these challenges so we can build the better future that we and our partners seek.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the President's FY 2024 budget request. I want to close by thanking this Subcommittee for your continued support for our efforts in the region. I look forward to answering your questions.