

U.S. POLICY CHALLENGES IN NORTH AFRICA

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U.S. POLICY CHALLENGES IN NORTH AFRICA

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 6, 2007

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:03 a.m. in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Tom Lantos, (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Chairman LANTOS. The committee will come to order.

For a generation, a frustrating stalemate has stymied peace between Morocco and the Sahrawi population of Western Sahara. For a generation, the people of Morocco and the Western Sahara have lived with the specter of violence hovering over the desert. And for a generation, peace has been summarily rejected by the rebel Polisario Front in favor of arid refugee camps and guerilla ambushes.

But the next generation of Western Saharans will enjoy a peaceful life, without having to eye one another suspiciously in busy markets and town squares. The next generation will grow up mercifully free of an armed conflict that stains their daily existence and limits their future.

This will all happen if the Polisario is wise enough to accept the reasonable and realistic offer currently on the table.

The Moroccans have proposed far-reaching autonomy for the people of the Western Sahara region. They would elect their own leaders, run their own affairs, levy taxes and establish budgets, maintain their own police forces, and control the education of their children. Only external security and foreign affairs would be conducted and controlled by the central Moroccan Government.

Many have greeted the Moroccan proposal as a promising new day. One hundred and seventy-three Members of the House of Representatives, with many members of this committee, including myself, joining the list, sent a letter to the President urging him to back the Moroccan plan. And in the letter to be released today by a bipartisan group of prominent foreign policy thinkers, led by our former Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, they strongly praise the Moroccan initiative.

The United States has a major stake in the stability of North Africa. Al-Qaeda and other terror groups are expanding rapidly their presence in the region. It is imperative that we settle the Western Saharan issue as part of the effort to assure that the region does not become a major terrorism breeding ground.

As the Moroccan Government and the Polisario come to the table later this month for the first time in an entire generation, I call

on both sides to negotiate the details in good faith. I urge the leadership of the Polisario to realize that they will never again get such a good deal for the population they purport to represent.

This includes more than 100,000 refugees languishing in Algeria without adequate supplies or any real prospects for the future. The Polisario must encourage vigorous and free discussion of the Moroccan proposal among the Sahrawi refugees in Algeria. I also expect that Morocco will do nothing to stifle debate among the people of Western Sahara.

While the Polisario matter is pressing and timely, other important issues in North Africa deserve our attention today. Muammar Qaddafi of Libya, a leader I have visited half a dozen times in the last 3 years, wisely turned his country on a more reasonable path in its external relations just a few years ago. The Qaddafi of this century is a more sensible reincarnation of the terrorist revolutionary of the past.

I was the first high-ranking United States public official to visit Libya after Qaddafi announced his intention to abandon Libya's nuclear weapons program. I have also helped foster a student exchange program between our two nations. I am very proud of America's success in convincing Qaddafi to become a decent citizen of the global community.

Our relations with Libya today are in a much better place than they were just 5 years ago. Our engagement with Qaddafi and the prosperity it has brought Libya serves as a model to countries currently sponsoring terrorism or striving for weapons of mass destruction. They should know that they too can come in from the cold.

Despite the progress, our relationship appears to have come to a standstill. I will be interested to hear from our distinguished witness today what plans the Department of State has to address the absence of both a fully accredited Libyan ambassador here, and a fully accredited American one in Tripoli, 1 year after the establishment of diplomatic ties. We need to allow Libyans to get visas to the United States without having to travel to Tunisia, and we need to broaden the Libyan Study Abroad program here beyond the small number of students currently participating.

There are a few other discordant notes. Libya has moved all too slowly to resolve the bombing cases of Pan Am Flight 103 and the LaBelle Discotheque, even though it has agreed to pay compensation to victims of families in both cases. The country sentenced to death five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian medic accused of infecting 426 Libyan children with HIV, even after it became clear that such a plot was absurd, and the charges were drummed up.

While our progress with Qaddafi over the past 3 years has been outstanding, his rhetoric sometimes strikes a shrill note that is reminiscent of the past. So I would only submit that if Qaddafi is going to embrace the West fully, and if we are to accept him fully, both his actions and his words must consistently reflect this new attitude.

I hope to address today, other developments surrounding our fervent efforts to cultivate democracy and freedom in North Africa. Tunisia's spotty human rights record, the prospects for moderation and toleration in Algeria, where the ruling party is slipping and al-

Qaeda has made a disturbing home, and overall regional cooperation in our efforts against terrorism.

Mauritania, a member of the Arab League, held its first free and fair Presidential election in 47 years this past March and should stand as a beacon in that regard to both Africa and to the Arab world. It is also a beacon of moderation as the only Arab state with fully normalized relations with the State of Israel, other than Egypt and Jordan.

The United States will continue to help these nations chart courses of progress so that, rather than slipping into reverse, they move forward toward creating peace and stability that will deepen in the generations that lie ahead.

I now turn to my good friend and distinguished colleague, the ranking member of the committee, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, for any remarks she might care to make.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for calling this important and timely hearing, and thank you to our excellent witness for being here today.

In this post-9/11 world, we simply cannot afford to turn a blind eye toward the very real and expanding threat of Islamic extremism and militancy emanating from North Africa. In Algeria alone, between 150,000 to 200,000 people have been killed by terrorism and related violence since 1992. Still, until recently, terrorism in Algeria was largely considered a localized problem. Recent successes by the Algerian Security Forces in disrupting terrorist cells are thought to have forced it to operate outside of Algerian territory. That was demonstrated by the April 10 attacks in Casablanca.

We have seen a significant shift in the sophistication and the reach of these attacks. In response to this growing threat, the administration initiated the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership. We are anxious to learn more about this initiative from our witness, including how our partner countries perceive the program, how many training exercises have been conducted, and how its success is being measured.

While we must focus significant attention on the growing menace of radical Islam and terrorism in North Africa, we must not sacrifice other worthy objectives in the region. According to the U.N. Developmental Program and the Arab Development Report, the Arab world continues to face fundamental deficits in freedom, education, and human rights. In Morocco, some progress has been made in the area of economic reform and women's empowerment; however, the reforms are directed from the palace, and the development of truly democratic institutions has been limited.

In Algeria, Islamic groups continue to be radical after years of civil strife. It has hampered economic development, and very little democratic reform. Women continue to face significant discrimination in society.

I am eager to learn what we, our Government, is doing to help all the countries of North Africa to realize their full potential in terms of democracy, economic development.

Another goal that must be pursued is that of regional integration, because success in this area will prove essential to the advancement of all of our other objectives.

But I want to talk, Mr. Chairman, about an issue that is very important to me, and you stressed it in your opening statement. And that is the future of United States relations with Libya.

And while the dismantling of Libya's WMD program serves as a major accomplishment for this administration, with the chairman's leadership role being highlighted, as well it should, I believe that Libya has a long way to go before fully shedding its pariah status. Libya remains one of the most repressive regimes in the world, ranking on freedom houses worst-of-the-worst list, along with Cuba, Burma, North Korea, Sudan, among others.

Libya has yet to fully reconcile its past support for acts of international terrorism. Fifty-eight of 90 passengers were killed during the hijacking of Egypt Air Flight 648 in 1985, including one American. Three people were killed, including two American servicemen, and 229 others were wounded, including 60 United States citizens, as the chairman pointed out, when a bomb exploded in the LaBelle Discotheque in Berlin in 1986. Two hundred and 70 people were killed in the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988. The Libyan Government was responsible for these attacks.

Though a number of victims' families from Pan Am 103 have received compensation through a group settlement, they have yet to receive a final payment, because Libya linked this payment to an arbitrary deadline for removal from the United States state sponsors of terrorism list. Some Pan Am families have received nothing to date, even after having received separate judgments in U.S. courts. One such individual is here with us today: My good friend, my constituent, Victoria Cummock. Victoria, if you could stand. Ms. Cummock lost her husband, the father of her children, in Pan Am 103. And she is one in that category who has yet to receive anything.

But it is not about money. It is about justice and having the Libya Government make good on their promises.

The American victims of Egypt Air 648 and the LaBelle Discotheque bombing also have received nothing, despite Libyan assurances that these cases would be resolved in good faith. It is difficult for these victims, and for me personally, to accept the notion that Libya has become a so-called partner in the war on terrorism, when it has yet to resolve these cases. It is difficult to support plans to upgrade diplomatic relations with Libya by building a new United States Embassy and appointing an ambassador to serve in Tripoli when the Libyan Government has so callously disregarded the suffering it has bestowed upon our own citizens.

We must send the Libyans a strong signal, a clear one, that all is not yet forgiven, all is not forgotten. Nothing will be forgiven or forgotten. They must resolve these cases before United States-Libya relations can reach the next level. And my set of questions, Mr. Chairman, has to deal specifically with Libya honoring the commitments that it has made in order to remove itself from the state-sponsored terrorism. And I will be delving on the Pan Am 103 case specifically.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LANTOS. Thank you very much. If any other colleague wants to be recognized, I would be pleased to do so. If not, we now

turn to Ambassador David Welch, who is Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs.

Ambassador Welch is one of our most accomplished Foreign Service officers, who served as United States Ambassador in Egypt from 2001 to 2005. He represented our country well in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, and Pakistan, and he has helped develop and shape United States policy toward Iran, Iraq, Libya, and a number of other nations.

Given his wealth of experience in the Middle East and North Africa, we look forward to his thoughts today.

Ambassador Welch, the floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE C. DAVID WELCH, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Mr. WELCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My apologies for being a little late. You have a considerable number of visitors to Congress today, and there is a very long line outside.

Chairman LANTOS. We are a very popular institution. [Laughter.]

Mr. WELCH. And this committee is a warm and welcoming place for us, sir. But I had to choose between irritating those in line or irritating you, and—

Chairman LANTOS. You chose well. [Laughter.]

Mr. WELCH. Sir, thank you for calling this hearing. I am happy to address a number of the points that you made, and to discuss our strategy toward the countries of North Africa, which include a number in my area of responsibility in the State Department, particularly Algeria, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia.

Our relationships with these places have undergone a tremendous expansion in recent years. We have a long and traditional bilateral relationship with Tunisia and Morocco. In contrast, we are laying the foundation with Libya and Algeria for important changes in the coming years.

Our overall policy approach to the Maghreb is to seek a more secure, moderate, and unified group of countries. We promote reform, economic growth, and partnership in the area of counterterrorism.

Counterterrorism, as both of you have reflected in your opening remarks, continues to be an immediate national interest because there is terrorist activity, and even attacks, in the region, which regrettably become more frequent; and, unfortunately and dangerously, are connected to global terror networks.

Our counterterrorism cooperation with each of the countries in the Maghreb, four in particular that we are scrutinizing today, has been very good, and on specific threats, quite effective. We use technical assistance to help these governments of the Maghreb track and block terror financing. Through the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership, we are also building capacity on this problem within the Maghreb states and between them, as well as with sub-Saharan Africa.

The TSCTP serves a longer-term objective: To enhance this regional and sub-regional cooperation and, as a collateral benefit, to deepen the integration between the countries of the region.

The Western Sahara issue, which spans the past 30 years, continues to be a destabilizing element. It thwarts regional ties, which

are necessary for economic expansion, and it has had an effect on government-to-government cooperation within the Maghreb.

We have welcomed, Mr. Chairman, Morocco's recent initiative to resolve this dispute. We are encouraged that it has spurred discussion, and we believe that it has created a new opportunity for both sides to come to an agreement. We consider the Moroccan proposal to provide real autonomy for the Western Sahara to be serious and credible.

The Security Council of the United Nations recently approved a 6-month extension of the mandate for the MINURSO mission, and that approval took note of serious and credible Moroccan efforts to move the process toward resolution.

The MINURSO resolution also noted a proposal submitted by the Polisario Front. We have been in touch with the U.N. to raise our view that direct negotiations without preconditions should proceed forthrightly and expeditiously, as called for in the resolution. We have urged that these begin later this month and that they make real progress.

Any settlement of the Western Sahara must also take into account the concerns of the Sahrawi people and be consistent with their right of self-determination. Morocco has said its proposal would be subject to a vote by the Sahrawi people.

Morocco has led the way in commitment and progress toward overall reform, but it is hindered by an economy that is not very well diversified and by quite rapid population growth. We seek to build upon the Moroccan reform agenda, and make the government there more responsive to citizen concerns, and to enable Moroccans to benefit from the global economy.

Very few bilateral relationships have changed as quickly as ours with Libya. We have made significant progress, as you mentioned, in eliminating Libya's WMD and MTCR-class missile programs. The Libyan nuclear program has been dismantled.

In response to Libya's renunciation of terrorism, we rescinded its designation as a state sponsor of terrorism on June 30 of last year.

Resolution of the claims pending against Libya, such as those of the LaBelle claimants and of the Pan Am 103 Lockerbie claimants, remains our most important objective. Libya continues to reaffirm its commitment to respect any court judgments against it, even as it pursues out-of-court settlements for some of these cases.

Our other pressing activities include assisting in the ongoing dismantlement of WMD programs in Libya, cooperation on counterterrorism, seeking an end to the crisis in Darfur, and encouraging greater protection of human rights, including the release of the Bulgarian medics and the Palestinian doctor.

In Algeria we are working with the government to advance its political and economic reform agenda through technical assistance programs funded by our Middle East Partnership Initiative. We seek to help Algeria fulfill its goal of building a work force more adept to the 21st century through better education.

Algeria has come far in the past decade. It has made significant progress on human rights, though it has more work to do. It has paid down its debt and registered considerable economic growth. Trade with the United States has boomed. Algeria is now one of our largest trading partners across the Arab world.

Tunisia has been a regional leader in social and economic reforms, with the strongest non-petroleum economy in the Middle East and North Africa, including rates of growth that have averaged 5% or better for the last 10 years. It also has the highest GNP per capita in the region, while boasting North Africa's lowest poverty and unemployment rates.

This progress has contrasted, however, with a very slow pace of political reform and poor performance on human rights. The Tunisian leadership has not been very forthcoming in addressing these issues.

Our bilateral security relationship with Tunisia is very good, also with close cooperation in counterterrorism, and we seek to maintain this through robust assistance programs.

I realize that already in your opening remarks, Mr. Chairman, you and Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen have introduced a number of other subjects which I am happy to answer in questions and answers. We have submitted a fuller statement for the record.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Welch follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE C. DAVID WELCH, ASSISTANT SECRETARY,
BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Chairman Lantos, Representative Ros-Lehtinen, and members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the status of our relationships with the countries of North Africa.

Over the past few years, our relationship with the four North African countries—Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco—has undergone an enormous expansion. With two of these countries—Tunisia and Morocco—our friendship and cooperation go back centuries. In Algeria and Libya, however, we are working to build the foundation for relationships that we expect to grow in importance in the coming years as they continue to emerge from war and isolation, respectively. Altogether, these countries are home to around 80 million people, which is a significant portion of the Arab world's population. While North Africa is unquestionably connected in tradition, culture, and religion to the Middle East, it is also unique in its strong ties to Africa, the Mediterranean, and Europe. This distinctive regional identity offers challenges and opportunities unique unto itself.

The countries of the Maghreb have traditionally been regional leaders in social, economic, and political reform. That history has been undermined, however, by poor governance, regional tensions, economic difficulties, and instability resulting from internal conflicts and terrorism. Therefore, the goal of U.S. policy is a secure, moderate, and more unified Maghreb by promoting political and social reform, economic growth, and counterterrorism partnership.

Terrorism is perhaps the most pressing of the issues that the Maghreb faces. The merger in September 2006 between Al-Qaida and Algeria's primary homegrown terrorist group, the GSPC, marked the beginning of a troubling trend that we have since seen across the Maghreb. The number of spectacular terrorist attacks in the region has risen, terrorist groups are using tactics and attacking targets that they had previously avoided, and terror cells have been discovered in places where they had not been seen before. We also are seeing evidence that the region's terrorist groups are increasingly attempting to build ties with each other and with the global jihadist network. These groups pose a threat to the governments of the countries in which they are operating, but they also pose a strong threat to foreign—and particularly U.S.—interests. Since December, we have seen attacks launched at American interests in both Algeria and Morocco, and a plot to attack U.S. interests foiled in Tunisia. The large diaspora communities from the Maghreb living in Europe provide for the possibility that these groups could launch attacks there as well.

The good news is that our counterterrorism cooperation with each of the countries of the Maghreb has been excellent, and, on specific threats, very effective. The North African security forces all have considerable experience in battling a domestic terrorism threat, and have been able to stop many plots before they could be launched. Our interlocutors continue to be responsive to our concerns and together we have achieved numerous successes in the fight against extremism. For example,

since 2002 in Tunisia and 2003 in Morocco, there have been no successful mass-casualty attacks. Though terrorists were able to launch a major attack on the Prime Minister's office in Algiers on April 11 of this year, the overall situation on the ground is far better than it was ten years ago, when the country was in the midst of a civil war.

Nonetheless, the new challenges posed by the recent shifts in terrorist activities in the region require that we confront the threat in new ways. We are increasingly using technical assistance to help the governments of the Maghreb track and block terror financing streams and are engaging them to enforce UN Security Council resolutions against terrorist financing. Another tool that has been increasingly effective is the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, through which we are building counterterrorism capacity both in the Maghreb and in sub-Saharan African states affected by the spillover of these terrorist groups. This partnership also serves a longer-term objective: enhanced regional and sub-regional cooperation and the deepening of integration between the countries of the region. We believe that this goal is critical, as Al-Qaida's increasingly regional and local focus in North Africa must be countered by increased cooperation between governments of the region and between the region and the U.S.

In this regard, I am pleased to report the first serious movement in the Western Sahara conflict, which has been stalled since James Baker resigned as UN Special Envoy in 2004. The dispute over the Western Sahara remains an obstacle to increased regional integration and this impedes U.S. policy interests. Settlement of the crisis would offer real hope in strengthening political, economic, commercial, and counter-terrorism cooperation for the Maghreb and Sahel. Unresolved, the crisis leaves approximately 90,000 Sahrawi people languishing in refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria and the territory a potentially attractive safehaven for terrorist planning or activity.

Over the past several months, the United States has engaged in intensive efforts with all parties involved to find a realistic and workable solution in the UN context. In this regard, we welcomed Morocco's recent initiative to resolve this dispute, are encouraged that it has spurred discussion, and believe that it has created an opportunity for Morocco and the Polisario to come to an agreement on this long simmering problem. We consider the Moroccan proposal to provide real autonomy for the Western Sahara serious and credible. It is the result of months of work and preparation by Morocco.

The United Nations Security Council recently approved a six-month extension of the MINURSO mandate. The resolution took note of "serious and credible Moroccan efforts to move the process forward towards resolution" and calls on the parties to enter into negotiations without preconditions, and also notes a proposal submitted by the Polisario Front. A unanimous vote on the mandate reflects international resolve that the dispute is long overdue for settlement. We have raised with the UN our support for direct negotiations without preconditions, as called for in the resolution, and hope that they will begin in earnest later this month so that Morocco and the Polisario are able to set aside differences and create a better future for the Sahrawi people.

Any settlement of the Western Sahara must take into account the concerns of the Sahrawi people and be consistent with their right of self-determination. Both Morocco and the Polisario have agreed to negotiations, and Morocco has affirmed to United Nations that its proposal would be subject to a vote by the people affected.

I hope that by the next time I speak with this committee, a dialogue led by UN Envoy Van Walsum will have made real progress. Direct talks between Morocco and the Polisario will not be easy. The parties will need the support of the international community and Congress to find common ground and look at new ideas. While we understand that initial disagreement between the Polisario and Morocco is likely, we expect both parties to engage constructively and work through differences. We also hope that other countries in the Maghreb will encourage the sacrifice needed to reach an agreement that would have positive consequences for the stability of the Maghreb and foster further growth and reform.

Morocco has led the way in commitment and progress towards overall reform, yet remains hindered by a non-diversified economy and rapid population growth. We seek to build upon the Moroccan reform agenda and make the government more responsive to citizen concerns and to enable Moroccans to benefit from the global economy. The recently signed U.S. Morocco—Free Trade Agreement and Morocco's Millennium Challenge Account eligibility will strengthen the country against a dangerous terrorist trend reflected in the increased number of terrorist cells identified and disrupted since the summer of 2006.

Our expanding relationship with Libya presents its own set of possibilities. Very few bilateral relationships in recent memory have changed as quickly as the Libya-

U.S. relationship has over the past three years. Libya's renunciation of WMD and MTCR-class missile programs was historic and Libya has worked closely with the U.S., UK and international organizations to implement that commitment. All items of concern have either already been destroyed or are planned for destruction under specific trilateral agreements or Libya's international obligations. We have made significant progress in the elimination effort and, to date, the Libyan nuclear program has been completely dismantled; over 3000 chemical munitions have been destroyed; chemical agents are awaiting destruction; and Scud-C missiles have been removed.

In response to Libya's renunciation of terrorism, we rescinded its designation as a state sponsor of terrorism on June 30, 2006. In the year since that decision, the State Department and our Embassy in Tripoli have continued to pursue a diplomatic agenda with Libya which is critical to our national interests. Resolution of the claims pending against Libya remains our most important objective. In addition to protecting the interests of the American citizens who were victims of Libya's past terrorist activities, our other pressing activities include assisting in the ongoing dismantlement of Libya's WMD programs, cooperation on counterterrorism, seeking an end to the crisis in Darfur, and encouraging greater protection of human rights, including by encouraging the release of five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor imprisoned on charges of deliberately infecting over 400 Libyan children with HIV.

With regard to the pending claims, those such as LaBelle and Pan Am 103 have been at the top of our bilateral agenda both before and since the reestablishment of direct relations. Although the U.S. Government is not a party to any of the cases pending against Libya, we have played an active role in ensuring Libya lives up to its commitment to act in good faith with regard to their resolution. Deputy Secretary of State Negroponte recently traveled to Libya to discuss how best to work with the Libyan government to end the crisis in Darfur. While there, however, he raised the claims in every meeting in which he participated.

Our commitment to our citizens is unwavering and we remain optimistic that resolution of these cases will eventually be reached. Libya continues to reaffirm its commitment to respect any court judgments against it, even as it pursues out of court settlements for many of the cases. The U.S. government will continue to pursue its diplomatic agenda with Libya to implement its 2003 terrorism and WMD commitments and to work toward increased respect for international human rights and democratic norms.

In closing, I want to mention briefly the importance of the relationships we have in Algeria and Tunisia. In Algeria, a country still transitioning away from a socialist, one-party past, we are working with the government to help advance its political and economic reform agenda. We do this in part through a large group of technical assistance programs funded by our Middle East Partnership Initiative. We retain our focus on helping Algeria fulfill its goal of building a work force for the 21st century through education programs. While progress has sometimes been uneven, Algeria has clearly come a long way over the past ten years. It has made significant progress on human rights, though it has more work to do. It has paid down its debt and registered considerable economic growth. Trade between our two countries has ballooned, and Algeria is now one of the largest trading partners of the United States in the Arab World. Our challenge is to continue to build on this progress.

Tunisia has been a regional leader in social and economic reforms with the strongest non-petroleum economy in the Middle East and North Africa, including rates of growth averaging five percent for the last ten years and the highest GNP per capita in the region. Tunisia also boasts North Africa's lowest poverty and unemployment rates. U.S. assistance over the past three decades has helped Tunisia create this ripe environment for economic growth. Our pressing issues remain the slow pace of political reform and poor performance on human rights. The Tunisian leadership has shown considerable reluctance to address these issues, but we will continue to press them, including through our Middle East Partnership Initiative and sustained bilateral engagement. Our bilateral security relationship with Tunisia is strong, with close cooperation in counterterrorism and counterproliferation which we will seek to maintain through robust security assistance programs.

Chairman LANTOS. Thank you very much, Ambassador Welch.

Let me deal with the issue of terrorism in and emanating from North Africa. North Africa has become a major hub for exporting Islamist terrorism. Moroccan terrorists were involved in planning and carrying out the attacks on 9/11, and they have been charged by Spanish authorities in the 2004 Madrid train bombings.

Thousands of Algerians have trained in al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. They have also carried out suicide bombings in Iraq.

Tunisian expatriates with suspected links to al-Qaeda have been arrested in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Western Europe, and here in the United States. A former supporter of terrorism, Libya now fears attacks from its own Islamic opposition, which has ties to al-Qaeda.

For its part, the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat has renamed itself al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, mirroring the name of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, indicating its plans to expand its mission throughout the entire region and beyond. The group claimed responsibility, as you know, Mr. Ambassador, for three near-simultaneous suicide bombings in Algiers in April, which killed 33 people.

The growing threat of terrorism in North Africa, and specifically al-Qaeda, is a very serious one. I have several questions.

How would you assess the overall threat from al-Qaeda and other jihadi groups in North Africa? How much of a threat does this terrorism pose for regime stability in the region? What has the United States done on its own, and through cooperation with European and North African countries, to put a stop to terrorist activity emanating from the Maghreb? What type of cooperation exists among North African countries for combating terrorism?

This is a particularly serious issue, because given the tensions among the countries of North Africa, my impression is that the cooperation is minimal, and in some cases barely existing.

How do you assess the value of U.S./Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Initiative? And are all of North African states fully participating in it?

Ambassador Welch.

Mr. WELCH. I will do my best to cover that list, Mr. Chairman.

First, these countries of Northern Africa, as you know, sir, comprise a very significant proportion of the population of the Arab Muslim world. Morocco and Algeria are quite large countries, so the population pool that might be attracted to extremist movements is potentially also quite large.

Sometimes they don't get as much notice, except for when there are spectacular actions maybe in their immediate neighborhood. But it has long been a concern of ours to improve our counterterrorism cooperation with these countries individually, among them, and between them and others.

I assess the threat, in response to your first question, sir, from al-Qaeda and its extensions into this neighborhood as significant, very dangerous, and potentially growing in a couple of cases. I don't believe, sir, that it represents a danger to regime stability in any of the instances, but that doesn't comfort me a great deal because of the nature of these movements and their indiscriminate use of violence against civilians.

What have we done? First, I think it deserves recognition that in the space of a few short years, we have altered the discussion between the United States, other friendly nations, and these countries, and to some degree among them. We have tried not only to have the traditional bilateral counterterrorism programs with which you are familiar, Mr. Chairman, from our intelligence or law

enforcement agencies, but also to supplement those with other programs to bring people together to look at different tools of combating the terrorist menace.

The counterterrorism partnership initiative that has been mentioned earlier is one of those. And thanks to the support of Congress, it does have some significant funding available to it.

The partner nations in this initiative go beyond some of these countries in Northern Africa to include Mali, Chad, Nigeria, Senegal, Mauritania, which was mentioned, and Niger. We have discussed this initiative with Libya, but so far they have not indicated an interest in participating. We have different sorts of bilateral counterterrorism cooperation with Libya, and we are exploring other ways to broaden the dialogue with them on this matter.

A more challenging issue has been how to encourage the cooperation between them as well. And partly, initiatives such as that one provide a forum in which these countries can get together, where they rarely did so in the past.

But a lot of that other work goes on more quietly, Mr. Chairman, where we would get together with some of our friends there and invite others into the discussion for specific topics. And in this forum I can say that some of the bilateral work that we have done on specific and effective counterterrorism measures has been most interesting in the area of cooperation between the countries.

As you know, the Northern African area has been a source of those who seek to pursue what they call the jihad elsewhere. And the countries of this area have been, thankfully, quite willing to work against that problem because I think they realize it poses a danger to themselves also.

You asked how I would assess the value of the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership. I don't work directly on it, so I think probably a better answer might come from some of our counterterrorism folks. But my sense is that this is a growing and more successful enterprise and provides us a tool, where we didn't have one in our arsenal before, to do more cooperative work. And that is in the public domain as well.

Second, I would say that my experience on the bilateral measures, and broaden those to some degree to cooperation on specific targets, has also been extraordinarily beneficial to our national interests. And when I look at this incredibly diverse and populated area of North Africa, in some ways it is, well, part of my region where we are actually quietly moving things forward, I mean, the list of things that we want to cover in this hearing indicates that there are a lot of topics. There are some moving more quickly than others, I admit. But this is one subject where we have done really quite well in the last 6 to 8 years.

Chairman LANTOS. Ms. Ros-Lehtinen.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you as always, Mr. Chairman. It is good to see you again, Mr. Ambassador. Always welcome to have you appear before our committee.

As I said in my opening remarks, I wanted to focus on Libya and whether Libya has fully complied with all that has been requested and required of it.

The State Department officials and many spokesmen, including high-ranking officials such as John Negroponte, have touted the

idea that full normalization with Libya is on the horizon, with the construction of a new Embassy in Tripoli and the installment of a permanent ambassador.

I wanted to ask if you believe that Libya's continued failure to fully compensate American victims of terrorist attacks perpetrated by Libya and its agents over the past three decades have any impact on this decision to move forward with normalization efforts.

And further, what steps are being taken by our State Department to enforce Libya's policy and practice of carrying out agreed settlements, and responding in good faith to legal cases brought against it, including court judgments and awards? And those are the exact words from the State Department's memorandum of justification when we removed Libya as a state sponsor of terrorism designation.

Has the State Department monitored Libya's good-faith response to the myriad of legal cases currently pending against it, based on its prior acts of promoting and carrying out international terrorism against American citizens?

And lastly, should normalization of diplomatic relations, full diplomatic relations with Libya be premised upon Libya's complete fulfillment of settlement obligations that it has undertaken with American victims of Libyan terrorism?

Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WELCH. Thank you, Congresswoman. As this committee knows, I am a believer in purposeful diplomacy, and I have had some responsibility for the relationship with Libya now in the 2 years that I have been Assistant Secretary, and some experience with dealing with this issue of Libyan terrorism over the course of my career.

I think you can be confident, Congresswoman, that your representatives here at the State Department and abroad, in our Embassy in Tripoli, are diligently pursuing all these cases.

Normalization is a big word. In the full scope of its meaning, and given the pain that Libya's past involvement in terrorism has caused to so many people, Americans foremost among them, since that is my legal responsibility, I don't know that one easily, maybe even ever, normalizes a relationship of this sort.

I believe that it is very important to have the most capable diplomatic representation possible in Tripoli to discharge our national interests, among which are resolving these terrorism issues of the past. But we also have other things that we need to do with the Libyan Government too.

I am a supporter of having a fully functioning Embassy there, in premises that can be secure, and with the United States represented at the level of an ambassador. I don't believe that is any gift to anyone. I believe that is a way of discharging our national interests.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. If I could interrupt. I wanted to just focus on whether Libya has made good on its pledges on what it has agreed to, and to what extent are we holding them accountable and pushing them to make good on what they have said that they would do.

Mr. WELCH. The answer to the latter is we are pushing them to resolve all these cases, whatever their status in the judicial system

here, or in discussions between Libyan officials or representatives of Libya and representatives of the claimants concerned.

Libya has agreed to act in good faith with respect to any court judgments against it, if there are such judgments. And we have also told them that they should work it out directly with representatives of the families concerned if they are of a mood and disposed to do so. That has been our consistent position.

These cases comprise, it is quite a body of them, and there are differences among them. But our position on this is we represent the interests of Americans, and we want to see that faithfully discharged.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much. And I hope we do continue to monitor each case, and make sure that Libya doesn't just say they are going to comply and sign any document that actually fulfills the obligation, before we move on and reward it unnecessarily.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LANTOS. Thank you very much. Mr. Ackerman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good to see you again, Mr. Secretary.

Mr. Secretary, with the issue of Morocco and the Western Sahara, could you give us an idea of why this issue is of such critical importance to Morocco?

We have done so much in furthering our relationship and our ties with Morocco—the Free Trade Agreement, major non-NATO ally status, the Millennium Challenge Account, foreign assistance, et cetera. But this seems to be the single most important issue in the long term. Why is that?

Mr. WELCH. Well, you are right, we have a friendly and, I think, productive relationship with the Kingdom of Morocco. And historically, it is one of the oldest friends of the United States.

This problem is a major national security concern for the Moroccan Government, and I think they take it enormously seriously. They have looked at a variety of ways to solve it over the years, and regrettably, those have not borne fruit. It is one of the most vexing disputes in the area, because, despite the level of international attention applied to it over the years, until recently there did not seem to be a productive avenue to address it.

We have encouraged the Moroccans to come up with some ideas for how they move forward out of this, what we consider to be, uneasy status quo. We thought that that would be important, Congressman Ackerman, because unless something more is done to address this problem, it will remain a thorn in the side of two of the most important countries in North Africa, Morocco and Algeria. And it presents, as the chairman indicated, some significant concerns with respect to the population of this region of Western Sahara, including some human rights problems.

The Moroccan proposal, I know from having worked with them on it, represents some serious effort, hard work on their part. The Polisario proposal, which came in rather late in the formulation of the last resolution, does not seem, in our judgment, to contain new ideas, by comparison.

Therefore, in the resolution we suggested language that would welcome the Moroccan initiative as serious and credible, and to try to use that to move the diplomacy forward.

I believe the U.N. has invited representatives of the parties to talks that will occur in just a few days. We have urged them to expedite that, to get it going. And we have talked to our friends, the Moroccans, to encourage them to be flexible, have an open mind with respect to possible compromises that might be made with respect to its proposal to try and advance this.

Mr. ACKERMAN. It has been reported that the Algerians have bought some billions of dollars worth of arms of late. I am just curious as to whether we have discussed that with them, and why do they need these arms?

The proposal by the Moroccans which has received wide acclaim across the board, for the most part, seems to be their bottom line, with very little room to maneuver and negotiate. What do we do to bring them together? Is there anything else we can do to bring them together?

Mr. WELCH. It is my understanding that the Algerian Government is pursuing a significant military deal with outside suppliers—in this case, I believe, Russia. I am not certain that we would share the Algerian Government's understanding of what the requirements are for such purchases. Given their defense needs, we probably would see their requirements as more modest. But we don't see any indication that they intend to use these weapons if they purchase them in any offensive manner against any of their neighbors, on the other hand.

I don't think that the Moroccan proposal is meant as a take-it-or-leave-it enterprise. We have encouraged them to speak to anybody, all concerned, about it, and they have indicated that they are willing to hear any reasonable ideas that might address elements of this proposal. Some of those issues I am confident will come out in the course of these talks.

What have we done to encourage this? Partly, sir, it is to work through this track of getting the Moroccans to come up with a proposal that might advance the negotiations. Partly it is to work in supporting the U.N. mechanism and framework for such talks.

We have also encouraged the parties to address themselves directly to one another, and we have offered in the past to provide the auspices for that. By that, I mean that there should be direct Morocco-Polisario negotiations. It now seems that that will occur within the U.N. framework, so we don't see a reason now to compliment that. But you can be sure that our diplomacy will be devoted to try to move it forward.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Lastly, and very briefly, if I may, Mr. Chairman. With regard to Pan Am 103 and the LaBelle Disco, you have stated that it has been at the top of our bilateral agenda with Libya. And for that, we are all very, very grateful, and we are appreciative of the fact that we are pushing to resolve the final payment by the Libyans issue.

But it is also my understanding that there are additional lawsuits. And one involves the parents and siblings of victims. Could you tell me whether these particular lawsuits have been included in the administration's discussions with the Libyans?

Mr. WELCH. I am not familiar with that particular suit, Congressman. But it sounds to me as if it would fall in the envelope that I described earlier. That is, the undertaking Libya has to the United States is that it will act in good faith to satisfy the results of any court judgments against it, if those are arrived at.

In addition to that, we are pursuing with the Libyans the question of engaging in direct conversations with any of the claimants or potential claimants about these issues.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I would appreciate it if you would take a look at that specific sibling-and-parents lawsuit.

Mr. WELCH. I will.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LANTOS. Mr. Royce.

Mr. ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to go over some facts here. According to the CRS report, at Morocco's initiative, the U.N. General Assembly referred the question to the International Court of Justice. And this was back in 1975.

In response, on November 6, King Hassan II of Morocco launched a green march of 350,000 unarmed civilians to the Western Sahara to claim the territory. He did that in response to the ruling in favor of self-determination for the Sahrawi people.

In the 1970s, about 160,000 Sahrawis left the Western Sahara for refugee camps in Algeria and Mauritania, and Mauritania could not sustain a defense against the Polisario and signed a peace treaty with it. As a consequence, Morocco then took that territory and occupied it, and in 1981 began to build a berm or a sand wall to separate the 80% of Western Sahara that it occupied from the Polisario and from the Sahrawi refugees. Now, that is the CRS report.

This is an issue that I worked with James Baker on for a number of years. We are to a point where today, you have testified that the Moroccan proposal for regional autonomy is serious and credible. There have been a number of Moroccan proposals in the past. Is this more serious and credible than those proposals, in your opinion?

Mr. WELCH. Yes, sir.

Mr. ROYCE. All right, that is good enough for me. You state that the recent U.N. resolution calls on parties to enter into negotiations without preconditions. Once the U.N. and U.S. position was, frankly, to back a free and fair referendum on independence. Our position is now to back an autonomy plan.

Mr. WELCH. The position we have taken in the discussions with the United Nations is that the proposal is, as I said, serious and credible. It offers a potential path forward. We want it resolved in direct negotiations between the parties. We think this is a chance to put something new on the table and address it. And the Moroccans have informed us that whatever conclusion is reached, they see the Sahrawi people participating in deciding on it.

Mr. ROYCE. Okay. Then let us go down the road. If the focus here is to bring the parties together and to focus on an autonomy plan, what is the model for the autonomy plan? Clearly there has got to be some brokering of the differences here.

So in what other regions have we seen this work? What is the model for the autonomy plan that we envision?

Mr. WELCH. Well, I think, we didn't inform our judgment that it was serious and credible by applying it against any particular model, sir.

We looked at the content of it: Would it address certain central questions about the distribution of authority, control of resources, rights of the people in the area, how the judicial system would operate. And it seemed to be expansive, in that sense.

Second, we had some outside experts take a look at it. Again, not to pass judgment as to whether it would be our proposal, or was it like any other, but just to see whether or not this could be deemed to be credible.

Finally, that does not take away from what the ultimate destination here is, which is a negotiated outcome that all parties can accept.

Mr. ROYCE. And one that works. Because our exercise here shouldn't be some ivory tower exercise. It should be something that is thought through. And my hope is that your staff is working on that and thinking that through. Because there is clearly an imbalance of forces here. We have got a sovereign state, and all the economic and political resources it has to muster here, versus about 100,000 refugees in the desert, whose biggest asset, frankly, is moral support.

So you could see why the Polisario would be a little leery of trusting Morocco in negotiations. And again, that is why, if you are going to get this thing—you know, James Baker spent an enormous amount of time, our former Secretary of State, on just this issue. So there is a tremendous responsibility here that you have now.

I would like to know if we are providing the Polisario with any support, such as advice, what guarantees would they have that an autonomy arrangement wouldn't be quickly violated and the world wouldn't care. On that issue I would like your views related to human rights abuses in Western Sahara undertaken by the authorities in Morocco. These are critical if we are to get the parties together, and get a fair negotiated settlement that will work.

And I commend you for doing that, but I really think it needs to be thought through. And so I would like your responses.

Mr. WELCH. Well, I agree with you, Congressman Royce. Each one of the points you make is valid.

Having worked for Secretary Baker, I can appreciate the energy and seriousness with which he treated this issue. It really is a very hard problem in that a diplomat of his skill wrestled with it, and didn't, frankly, come up with a solution, which attests to the difficulty of the issue.

We are not disinterested observers here. We have a concern for the population in the area. There have been abuses, and we are vigilant about those. And we would be vigilant about them even if there were no negotiation process underway. That is not a trade-off that we are making here.

I expect we will participate in some manner. Now, this process has actually not yet started. The U.N. will have these talks on the 18th or 19th of this month, and you can be sure that our folks will be there to keep an eye on it. And just as we made a judgment one

time that a proposal was serious and credible, if it works out to be in the course of that negotiation that we have some reason to question that judgment, I don't think you need worry about our honesty in saying that.

Mr. ROYCE. Well, I am worried about, you know, the Polisario is being asked to take a great leap of faith here, based on past experience. It is clearly the next step, but they need support in that. And so I asked where this has worked. You need to find out where it has worked, and how it is going to work. The staff needs to work on that and show them how, and help create a framework here that is going to be durable.

Mr. WELCH. I understand the suggestion, sir, and thank you for making it. And as you know, we do meet with the Polisario, and we discuss these issues with them. As we get their observations, we take what they say seriously.

Mr. ROYCE. Again, find a case where this has worked in this framework, and show me that, show them that, and then we can move forward. Thank you.

Chairman LANTOS. Mr. Tanner.

Mr. TANNER. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here.

I just returned from Tunisia and Morocco, and I had long talks with both Ambassador Godec in Tunisia and Ambassador Riley in Morocco, as well as meetings with, in Tunisia's case, the Parliament leaders and the President, and in the case of Morocco, the Speaker of the Parliament and some Ministers.

I think the question of the Western Sahara has been pretty well covered thus far. May I just ask one question? What, if anything, are we doing to encourage Algeria to make a positive or constructive contribution to the talks that are slated? Number one.

Number two, to the extent that you can in this forum, can you comment on why there is a feeling that the trend line of anti-Americanism, although not at critical mass, is growing in this part of the world?

Mr. WELCH. We have spent quite a bit of time talking to the Algerian Government about the issue of Western Sahara. And particularly as we understood the Government of Morocco was developing a new proposal, we did engage again with the government in Algiers at a number of different levels to open up this conversation with them and encouraged their support for the process that we hope will start productively later this month.

The Algerians have their views on these issues, and I can't report to you that they agree with our approach here, but they have assented to this process. And I don't see them trying to veto it in any manner.

We have encouraged them in particular to, as Congressman Royce suggested, work with the Polisario to try and make this a productive negotiation if at all possible. This point has been made by myself, others in the administration, Ambassador Ford in Algiers, but also by the Secretary of State and others in touch with the Algerians at that level.

Sir, you ask a very difficult and complicated question in your second one, which has been the subject of attention from this committee in the past, and I am sure will be in the future too.

There is a very disturbing trend of anti-American feeling that has grown throughout the area. And as I know you all are well informed on the subject, I don't think it is restricted to my particular area of responsibility alone. This is, in discouraging ways, a phenomenon we see around the globe, though obviously with different intensity in different places.

Anti-Americanism is a big concept. And I don't, from having lived in this part of the world for quite some period of time, believe that people are instinctively anti-American. I think generally they object to our policies or our means of pursuing our policies, but they are not objecting to us as people.

Now, there are certain things about America that they like better than others; some things they may even dislike. That is their right, and I don't think that we, in turn, need to be indiscriminating about our views toward others as well.

The problem is when these feelings translate into action. And in recent years I think we have seen the dangers, as Americans, with what that can mean. Addressing the phenomenon has to be comprised of a lot of different tools. I am not a believer that public diplomacy alone will cure this problem, but I am also not a believer that one indiscriminately or promiscuously changes policies simply because they might be unpopular.

The United States makes its policy decisions based on a variety of concerns and understanding of a variety of risks and benefits. Sometimes things that we deem it necessary to do may be very unpopular. I try in our business to help people to understand not only what the range of options might be in a particular instance, but what their benefit and cost might be, so we can make a judgment about these things.

Finally, I think we all, as Americans, should be very careful about not falling into the trap, believing that everybody out there has exactly the same opinion. It is a wonderfully diverse set of cultures that I deal with alone, and I have some respect for that. And I don't automatically believe that all the people with whom I work or have to work are evil. I do believe a certain narrow segment of them are not only evil, but dangerous, and that is the problem that we have to take on. Not whole societies.

Thank you.

Chairman LANTOS. The gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Inglis.

Mr. INGLIS. Mr. Chairman, I will pass.

Chairman LANTOS. The gentelady from California, Ms. Woolsey.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Mr. Secretary, I apologize for not being here for your testimony.

I am particularly concerned about the treatment of women in parts of Northern Africa, and in the world at large, actually. But the State Department's report on human rights gave an account of an atrocity in Algeria that related to spousal abuse, and an example of how women are treated in that area. A woman or person has to be incapacitated for 15 days or more, and present a doctor's note certifying any injuries before even filing charges of battery.

But social pressures, and you know better than I because you are much better informed, make it so that women frequently endure the process of reporting because it is just too tough.

And according to a study in 2004 by the Justice Ministry, Women's Associations, and the National Institute of Public Health, 70% of abused women refuse to lodge a complaint or follow through with their complaint.

So what is the United States doing in the region to strengthen the rights of women? How are we working to encourage better protection for women within the judicial system? And just comment on, isn't a system based on equality helpful to the entire society, not just women?

Mr. WELCH. These are important issues of concern, and should be of concern to all of us. Each of the countries that we are looking at today is different from one another, but I think they have something in common as well.

You mentioned, for example, that it is difficult for women to present a complaint. It is in some cases not merely legally difficult, it is culturally very challenging. In societies that covet privacy, particularly of their women, this can be very difficult to address, and sometimes even dangerous for the women concerned, where a question of family honor gets engaged.

This is not to exculpate the abuses that do occur, but to show that even if you had a legal system that is, on its face, fair and open, how that is translated in a particular cultural environment might be quite a bit different.

Education makes an enormous difference, and education is a feature of every one of our new lease partnership initiative programs with the countries of the area. Again, there are differences between these nations. Tunisia, for example, has a proud record of educating women, and an excellent record of how women operate in the society—a standout in the Arab world.

By contrast, there are other places—Algeria is one you mentioned, but it is not the only one—where the illiteracy rates among women are high even by regional standards, and regional standards are not impressive. I think that is one area where we have concentrated.

Another is on judicial reform. Judicial reform sometimes unfairly gets labeled as the soft side of democratization, but it is a huge and important part of it. And the legal systems in many parts of the Arab Muslim world demand modernization, and this is an area where the United States has a pretty good record of cooperation with countries and has significant programs underway; we would like to open them up in the case of Algeria as well.

Finally, there is the question of how you change the cultural mores generally. And I think, you know, our argument there is one I believe—I mean, I like to see the glass half full in all these cases—has some increasing resonance in the region. And what is that? That, you know, you can't neglect 50% of your society. Whether you want to or not, they are gradually and surely going to feel themselves increasingly empowered because they are more educated, they are more discerning of their rights, their families expect it, and they themselves want equal protection.

And I think to the extent that we can offer opportunities for women to advance those ideas, whether that is by creating the forum necessary for these kinds of conversations, or more directly

addressing them with some of our assistance programs, that we should do so.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Just a slight, short follow-up. So then if we encourage a judicial system that women could depend on if they were brave enough to go forward—and when we educate and they are educated, they will be more willing to come forward—then would our role be to give input and advice on a judicial system that would set a standard for them they could trust, depend on? Because if you have got to be that brave to come forward anyway, how awful when the judicial system falls out from underneath you.

Mr. WELCH. Yes, I would say we should do that. And given your interest, Congresswoman Woolsey, I can send you some data on what we do in the area of judicial assistance, not merely in these countries, but it is actually an important feature of our assistance programs elsewhere in the region as well. And we are spending a fair amount of money on this. It is an important question.

But I don't want to neglect that there should also be role models. It is important for us to provide a forum and show respect where that is possible. And we have a unique attribute in my department, because I work for a female Secretary of State who is uniquely capable of going out there and usually quite energetically discusses these issues.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Thank you.

Chairman LANTOS. The gentleman from California, Mr. Rohrabacher.

Mr. ROHRBACHER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I apologize for being a bit late. I have about three or four different things that I am doing at the same time, which is clearly true of all my colleagues, as well.

Just for the record, I would like to associate myself with the concerns of Ms. Woolsey on the importance that we place on demanding the rights of women in Arab countries.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that we need to speak out forcefully and just unmistakably on the rights of women in Arab countries in particular, throughout the world, not just in Arab countries. But in the Arab countries we need to let people understand that half of their population cannot be mistreated or be relegated to second-class status, and that is not acceptable to the United States of America.

If we are going to be a force for freedom and democracy in the world, that has to include equal treatment for that half of the world that are females. And so I would like to associate myself with that concern that was raised by my colleague, Ms. Woolsey.

In terms of actual freedom and democracy, other than the gender issue, I am concerned that what we do is real in other ways, as well. And I would like your analysis for me of whether or not what we have seen, has there been democratic reform in Libya? Or are we just making friends with a dictator?

Mr. WELCH. We are not on either end of that spectrum, Congressman. My job is not to make friends with authoritarians; it is to pursue what I think are national interests, and to come before you all and engage on those propositions and defend them where I am called to, or advocate them.

Libya is not a democracy by any stretch of the imagination, and I am not entirely sure that the current leadership of Libya intends to proceed in that direction with great energy.

That said, I believe our representatives there have a way of presenting these issues, and can have a way of presenting these issues, so that Libyans and their leadership can understand what it means to, as Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen mentioned, become part of the civilized world. And an aspect of that is to open up their society, including in the area of political participation.

I think in this case that you mentioned, Libya is going to be enormously difficult. That doesn't mean that there aren't Libyans who want to change their country. I believe there are. And one important aspect of—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, that is, of course, the point. The point is there are Libyans who want to change it, and I would hope that we don't get caught in the trap, which is in order to be friends of the regime, that we make enemies of the people who want democracy in that country.

And it is a very easy trap to fall into, because you have had this maniacal and somewhat unstable leader there for a long time. And it is very easy to think well, at least he won't be our enemy. Well, if we do that at the expense of basically convincing the people of Libya that we are now actually his friend, rather than just the friend of trying to promote their freedom, we have actually failed in the long run.

Mr. WELCH. I couldn't agree with you more. I don't see us making that kind of trade-off. I believe that having, as I mentioned earlier, diplomatic representation in Tripoli with a fully functioning Embassy and an accredited ambassador would be a strong instrument in the hands of the United States to advocate reform across the board.

And I think that the Libyan leadership should take a very careful look at what it is that we are suggesting here, because I don't believe it presents a danger to them.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, let me offer this. In Qatar and actually in Kuwait now, they are easing their way into an electoral system, and they are permitting women to vote, for example, and to hold office in their local things. This is really an important message that we need to make sure that the people of Libya know that we are not just making friends with Qaddafi, but we are actually trying to make sure that in the long run, their people will have that kind of freedom and participation.

And of course, it is a good thing that Libya and this crazy man is not now looking at us as a target for doing evil things. But we can't placate him and give up the long-term objectives of democracy and equal rights.

And so I appreciate your thoughts—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. If the gentleman would yield, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Actually, my time is up, but I will be happy to yield.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. I agree with you on the issue of Libya, and on your first point about the empowerment of women. I have noticed that the gentleman from California has become an even greater spokesman for the cause of greater empowerment of

women since he has become the proud father of triplet girls. So I don't know if that has anything to do with it, but we thank you for that. [Laughter.]

Ms. WOOLSEY. And if the gentlewoman would yield, also he has a very powerful, smart wife.

Mr. ROHRBACHER. There you go, all right. Well, we know where the real power is. Thank you very much.

Chairman LANTOS. Your cup runneth over, Mr. Rohrabacher.

Before recognizing my friend from Georgia, I ask unanimous consent that a statement provided by the Government of Morocco and a letter from a bipartisan group of foreign policy experts led by our former Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, be made part of this record.

[The information referred to follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF MOROCCO

Mr. Chairman, the Government of Morocco would like to express its appreciation to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs for the 6 June 2007 hearing to examine events and developments in the Maghreb region of North Africa.

We in Morocco are persuaded that peace, stability, prosperity and development of our region is fundamentally contingent on both a much deeper level of integration of the countries of the Maghreb as well as deeper and expanded ties with our global partners.

Taken individually, the countries of the Maghreb enjoy extensive, longstanding and cooperative relations with Europe as well as the countries around the Mediterranean Basin and Sub-Sahara Africa. Additionally, the Kingdom of Morocco has a historically important, old and deep friendship with the United States of America. In the last years, Morocco and other countries in our region have invested considerable effort in trying to expand our relations in Latin America and Asia. However, despite these individually productive relationships, as a whole, our region is seriously disadvantaged in the progress it might otherwise accomplish by a lack of correspondingly cooperative partnerships among the nations of our own region.

Morocco believes that the Maghreb region possesses significant resources and qualities that can play a critical role in bridging the widening gap of tolerance and understanding between the West and the Arab-Muslim World. However, our ability to act in concert as a region to bring these qualities to bear on this increasingly serious issue is impeded by continuing divisions within our own region. In Morocco, we believe it is essential to resolve these issues without further delay so that, as a region, we can advance the interests of our own people while protecting them from extremist influences that seek to take advantage of our differences and undermine the stability of both our individual nations and our region as a whole.

We must face the terrorist activities that are threatening peace and security in our region and in Europe as well. In the Maghreb region, radical networks have undergone a significant shift during the past few years, changing from hierarchical organizations to territorial based groups with non-identifiable leadership. The recent allegiance of the GSPC with Al Qaeda demonstrates the international dimension of locally-based terrorist groups.

As a stable, democratizing, and liberalizing Arab Muslim nation, Morocco has an important role to play in the region and in the broader Middle East and North Africa region in terms of our common interests in promoting regional stability, sustaining economic development, strengthening democratic values and combating international terrorism.

Morocco has undertaken a number of initiatives to promote stable and secure development for the entire region. For example, at the conclusion of the meeting of the Ministers of Finance and Governors of the Central Banks of the Maghreb States held in Rabat the 21-22 December 2006, Morocco's efforts to establish a regional investment coordination entity in the Maghreb were approved in a unanimous resolution. The establishment of a Maghreb Bank for Investment will undoubtedly foster investment and trade growth between the Maghreb states.

The success of this project also depends on the engagement of our partners, which may give a financial and technical assistance for Maghreb integration. It goes without saying that strong political support is crucial for developing the Western Mediterranean region.

Morocco is pleased to see that the United States has over the last several years very substantially increased its engagement in the Maghreb. Morocco is a long time partner of the United States and our experience with your great nation over the last two centuries has persuaded us that there is much that we can accomplish together.

The FTA between Morocco and USA is a great opportunity for US companies to increase their market shares not only in Morocco where the American exports grew in a very significant way this last year, but also in large markets like Europe, Turkey, and the Middle East. Indeed, today, Morocco has the largest free trade network in the World and US companies producing in Morocco enjoy duty free access for their products to a market of one billion consumers.

Morocco's status of Major Non Nato Ally of the United States is another example of the strength of the US-Morocco relations.

Mr. Chairman, Morocco would also like to express its deep gratitude to you and the many other members of your Committee and the Congress for the bipartisan support for the recent letter to President Bush encouraging the American Government to help our region find a just, lasting and peaceful resolution to the 30 year-old problem in the Sahara. We recognize that fundamental compromises must be made in order to solve this problem and free our region to move forward together. Morocco's recent initiative in the United Nations Security Council, supported in the letter signed by 173 members of Congress, is intended to demonstrate our willingness to make such compromises in the interest of all the people of the Maghreb and particularly of the Sahara. In that same spirit, we appreciate the attention of your Committee in helping us move this issue forward to a successful resolution.

Morocco's willingness to solve peacefully this dispute in the Western Sahara has been clearly indicated.

Mr Chairman,

Morocco welcomes this hearing and hopes that today's discussion will provide essential points of dialogue on which the Maghreb countries can engage with the United States and our friends in Europe with a common determination to achieve the stability and prosperity that genuine economic and political integration can achieve.

June 6, 2007

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Mr. President:

We applaud the support of your Administration for the adoption of Resolution 1754 by the United Nations Security Council on April 30, 2007, which incorporates the historic initiative by Morocco to end the conflict in the Western Sahara through direct negotiations. This new direction for solving the crisis is in large part the result of your efforts and encouragement.

As the first country to officially recognize the United States in 1777, Morocco has been an historic and reliable ally to our great nation, and we encourage you to continue this cooperation in the challenging months ahead as the negotiations are inaugurated.

Recent terrorist attacks in Morocco and Algeria show that we cannot afford to continue to ignore the problems of this region. Failure to resolve this conflict jeopardizes international stability, our fight against terrorism, and economic integration efforts in the region.

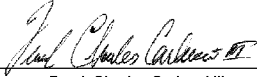
By giving the people of the Western Sahara a true voice in their future through the full benefits of autonomy as presented by Morocco, a credible political solution can be achieved. Morocco's commitment merits the support of the international community and we must ensure that its neighbors assume their responsibility for contributing to the success of these negotiations, as called for in UNSC Resolution 1754.

Mr. President, we know that with your encouragement and support Morocco has courageously shown its leadership with this initiative. Your commitment can make possible a solution to this lingering issue and reaffirm our bipartisan support to a realistic and lasting peace in North Africa.

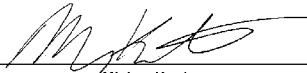
Sincerely,



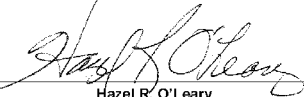
Madeleine K. Albright
Former United States Secretary of State



Frank Charles Carlucci III
Former United States Secretary of Defense



Mickey Kantor
Former United States Secretary of Commerce and
Former United States Trade Representative



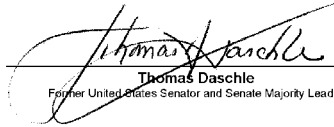
Hazel R. O'Leary
Former United States Secretary of Energy



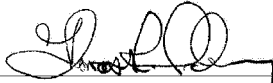
Wesley Clark
Former NATO Supreme Allied Commander




Ben Gilman
Former Member, United States House of Representatives and
Chairman, House Committee on International Relations




Thomas Daschle
Former United States Senator and Senate Majority Leader



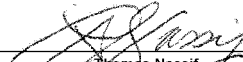
Thomas R. Pickering
Former United States Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs and
Former United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Russia, India,
Israel, El Salvador, Nigeria, and Jordan



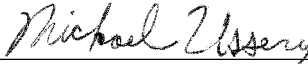
Martin Indyk
Former Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Near Eastern
Affairs and Former United States Ambassador to Israel



Edward S. Walker Jr.
Former Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Near Eastern
Affairs and Former United States Ambassador to Israel, Egypt, and the
United Arab Emirates



Thomas Nassif
Former United States Ambassador to Morocco and Deputy Assistant
Secretary of State for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and
South and Central Asian Affairs



Michael Ussery
Former United States Ambassador to Morocco and Deputy Assistant
Secretary for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and South and Central
Asian Affairs



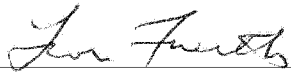
Frederick Vreeland
Former United States Ambassador to Morocco and Deputy Assistant
Secretary for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and
South and Central Asian Affairs



Dov Zakheim
Former Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) and
Chief Financial Officer for the Department of Defense



Peter W. Rodman
Former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs



Leon Fuerth
Former National Security Advisor to Vice President Albert A. Gore Jr.



Chairman LANTOS. Now I am pleased to recognize Mr. Scott of Georgia.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me first start off by offering my congratulations to you and the ranking Republican member for this hearing. It is very informative, and Mr. Welch certainly appreciates you coming before the committee.

I would like to ask a few questions, if I may, about the Middle East. And specifically, the country of Algeria legitimatizes the activities of foreign terrorist organizations operating within the Palestinian territories as armed resistance, and not as terrorism.

And furthermore, the country has opposed United States policies toward Iraq and Syria, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That is sort of an edgy rub there.

So what, if anything, can be done to make Algeria more supportive of United States initiatives? And how receptive has Algeria been to initiatives within Middle East countries, such as the Middle East Partnership Initiative?

Mr. WELCH. At the outset of my summary remarks today, I mentioned that we had a traditionally and historically close relationship with Morocco and Tunisia. In fact, if you look back in the history books, they are some of the earliest countries to recognize the United States.

That hasn't been the case with Algeria, and certainly not with Libya. The evolution of our relations is a much more recent one in the case of Algeria, and a very, very recent one in the case of Libya.

There are things to this day that we disagree with Algeria on, including its use of nomenclature, as you mentioned, to describe what we will consider to be violence, if not terrorism.

That said, the Algerian Government participates in Arab League decisions, and has voted affirmatively for an offer for peace from the Arab League toward Israel. Also, they, like other members of the Arab League, make contributions toward support for the Palestinian Authority, and our experience has been in the recent past that those have been done responsibly.

What would particularly trouble us is if we saw that there were more than words, that there was direct support. The chairman was asking earlier about the threat of terrorism coming out of Northern Africa, and I assessed it as growing and dangerous. And I don't think it would be restricted against us alone; it could be occurring against some of our friends too.

I don't see that in the Algerian case, though. I think the Government of Algeria is not practically supporting organizations that we would consider to be terrorist organizations.

We do have MEPI programs underway in Algeria, though our partnership in that area hasn't been as easy and dynamic as I would hope it would be. Our ambassador there is devoted to trying to increase the range of cooperation we have on these issues. And as I mentioned in response to an earlier question, I think that can be done in a way so the government can understand that our objectives may well be complementary and carry less risk than they seem to imagine that they do.

Mr. SCOTT. Let me ask you just as a follow-up, let us take the Middle East countries maybe just one at a time in terms of what is Algeria's opinion of our policies toward Syria.

Mr. WELCH. To be completely honest, in answer to your question, sir, I haven't asked them that recently. We have had quite extensive discussions with the Government of Qatar about voting on the tribunal for the Harari prosecution, because they are on the Security Council, and some within the Arab world believe that affects Syria in one way or another. But we haven't engaged directly with the Algerians on this.

I don't sense a very dynamic Syrian-Algerian partnership on things, but it may be that in a political sense their language might be similar on some things. But they are quite geographically distant from one another.

Mr. SCOTT. I know my time is edging, Mr. Chairman. May I have just 30 seconds?

I guess my concerns here are that what we find in, say, Algeria, as an example, the counter to so much of what we are facing in the Middle East is to try to build democracies. And voting rights is a very large concern certainly to all of us here in this country.

But in Algeria's last elections last month, voter turnout was 39%, and by some accounts it was as low as 14% in the capitol of Algiers.

Could you tell me what attributes to this? And the main point, the thrust of this whole question is: How may democracies best flourish in this country in general? And how do you assess the state of democratic development in Algeria and these North African countries as a counter? Especially when we see this downward slide in terms of voter participation.

Is democracy really working here? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WELCH. It is a very important question, especially in the case of Algeria. Because I think the interrupted election, the parliamentary election in 1991, led directly to the onset of civil violence and terrorism through much of the nineties in Algeria.

This recent election that you mentioned wasn't the step forward that we had hoped it would be. Even the Government of Algeria was disappointed at the turnout; 35% or so. In our judgment, they could have made some decisions that would have increased that number, and some of the decisions they made might have had an effect in depressing the number.

In particular, in any election you want to see that all political currents, if they play by the rules, can be represented. Their Elections Commission is examining some aspects of the conduct of this election, and there is a debate going on between the Commission and the Minister of Interior responsible for the election itself. There are reports of fraud.

It is a good thing that the Election Commission actually is paying attention. We would hope that they would, that these will be resolved in a manner that contributes to the growth of democracy.

Taking it a step further then, and to conclude an answer to your question, these things should go right. Because, especially in the case of Algeria, if they go bad, then you have a high risk that people will see that they have no other alternative but to pursue their

political concerns in a way that may be very unhealthy for all of them.

And we would like to see that trend broadened. The sophistication of some of the questions I received today indicates this committee and its membership are not judging one country by the standard of another, but are willing to recognize that the way it may be done in, say, Kuwait is going to be different than the way it is done in Qatar or Algeria.

But in every instance we have looked for the countries to take steps forward in a responsible way to increase political participation, and have it done in a legal manner that all citizens can enjoy.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Welch, and thank you for your generosity, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LANTOS. Thank you. Mr. Ambassador, we are deeply grateful for your insights, for your analysis, and for your candor. I think I speak for my colleagues in saying we have learned a great deal, and we appreciate your forthcoming presentation.

This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:28 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DONALD A. MANZULLO, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

Assistant Secretary Welch, welcome and thank you for coming before the Committee to testify on U.S. policy challenges in North Africa. This is a region of the world that deserves more attention than we in Congress currently give to it. Our friendship with the Kingdom of Morocco dates back to 1777 when Morocco became the first country to recognize the United States. I am proud to support Morocco's recent peace proposal for the Western Sahara, and I am delighted to hear that the United Nations Security Council recently voted unanimously to extend the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara for another six months. The vote at the UN reflects the international community's interest for a peaceful resolution of this issue.

I welcome the progress made with Libya as a result of its renunciation of terrorism. I praise the Administration for leading an effective multilateral effort to persuade the Government of Libya to come out of isolation and join the international community of responsible nations. Despite the progress made here, I caution against any premature moves that may reduce our ability to hold those accountable for past terrorist action.

North Africa is also an important export market for American goods. Last year, U.S. exports jumped a remarkable 24 percent to North Africa to \$6.9 billion with machinery and aircraft comprising the top two export categories. These statistics are encouraging, and I credit part of this progress to the U.S.-Morocco Free Trade Agreement. America's trading relationship with this part of the world is a win-win for all participants.

I look forward to hearing your testimony.

WRITTEN RESPONSES FROM THE HONORABLE C. DAVID WELCH, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE ELTON GALLEGLY, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Question:

In your testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, you stated:

"With regard to the pending claims, those such as LaBelle and Pan Am 103 have been at the top of our bilateral agenda both before and since the reestablishment of direct relations. Although the U.S. Government is not a party to any of the cases pending against Libya, we have played an active role in ensuring Libya lives up to its commitment to act in good faith with regard to their resolution. Deputy Secretary of State Negroponte recently traveled to Libya to discuss how best to work with the Libyan government to end the crisis in Darfur. While there, however, he raised the claims in every meeting in which he participated."

If Libya has in fact acted in good faith in the LaBelle matter, how would you explain that an official representative of the Libyan government, Judge Edeeb, entered into a settlement agreement on LaBelle in June 2006, reaffirmed the terms of the agreement in London, England, in September 2006 in the presence of a U.S. State Department representative, used the Gaddafi Foundation to denounce the agreement in Tripoli in December 2006, and sent Gaddafi Foundation representatives here in May 2007 with completely new and unreasonable demands?

Response:

We are working hard to help the LaBelle bombing victims obtain compensation without the burden and delay of awaiting the outcome of their court proceedings. The issue of whether a legally binding settlement was reached between the LaBelle claimants and the Libyan government is currently pending before the U.S. courts. At the same time, at the claimants' request, the State Department has been facilitating discussions to bring the case to closure outside of the judicial process and those intensive efforts continue. The Administration has repeatedly emphasized to the Libyan government the importance of resolving this matter, including during the Deputy Secretary's visit to Tripoli and in a recent letter from the President to the Libyan leader.

Question:

Now, one year after the June 2006 agreement was reached, Libya refuses to honor its commitments made as part of that agreement and the American servicemen who were victims of the LaBelle terrorist bombing have not been compensated. What plans do you plan to take to induce Libya to comply?

Response:

See answer to Question #1.

