

SHIFTING SANDS: POLITICAL TRANSITIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, PART 2

HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS FIRST SESSION

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THURSDAY, MAY 5, 2011

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST
AND SOUTH ASIA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:14 p.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Steve Chabot (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. CHABOT. The subcommittee will come to order.

I apologize for the delay here. We had our last vote prior to this hearing, and Members of Congress traditionally head out like scalded dogs, quite frankly, after last votes. The votes were supposed to be after this hearing when it was originally set up, so I apologize for the few members on both sides. But we appreciate the gentleman from Kentucky, Mr. Chandler, for being here so that we can get started. We have to have two members present before you can start a meeting, so that is what I was waiting for. I would have started right away.

The subcommittee, as I say, has now come to order. I want to wish everyone a good afternoon. I also want to welcome Mr. Chandler especially for being here this afternoon for this hearing.

This is the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia. This hearing was called to assess the current trajectory of the political transitions in the Middle East and to examine U.S. policy toward the region as it stands today.

For the past 4 months, the world has witnessed unprecedented changes throughout the Middle East and North Africa. The peaceful protests that began at the end of last year continue to shake the region to its core. The power structures that have defined the region for decades continue to crumble as protesters take to the streets by the thousands. Unlike in the past, however, they were not protesting against the United States nor were they protesting against Israel. Instead, they were protesting for their own God-given human and universal rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

This unrest, however, has not been without its challenges. Across the region, from Libya to Yemen, entrenched regimes have sought to maintain their stranglehold on power by any means necessary. In Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh supported and then rejected an agreement to step down from power. In Syria, Bashar al-Assad's ongoing and ruthless murder of peaceful protesters has already

claimed the lives of hundreds of Syrian citizens. In Bahrain, the government's targeted crackdown has resulted in the indiscriminate imprisonment of swaths of the country's Shiite population. Most recently, a Bahraini military court in a closed-door trial sentenced four protesters to be executed.

Syria is particularly a cause for concern. To date, the Obama administration's response to the brutal crackdown in Syria has been, in many people's view, tepid and disappointing. The few messages that have been sent have been mixed at best, and it does not appear that the administration has any Syria policy beyond engagement. The administration has implemented symbolic but largely ineffective sanctions, including against several members of the regime, not including Bashar al-Assad himself. Indeed, the best description the administration has proposed to date was actually made by one of President Obama's advisors who said of Libya that the President is "leading from behind."

It is unclear why the administration has not taken a stronger stance against a regime that, if it were to fall, could significantly alter the strategic landscape of the region. Although many questions remain about what government would follow the Assad regime were it to fall, there are many steps that the U.S. could be taking at this time to influence that outcome. The half-committed approach that the administration has taken to date, however, does not make sense in any circumstance and risks squandering a huge strategic opportunity for the U.S., not to mention helping to end the bloodshed that intensifies every day.

Another recent development should give all of us reason for concern. I returned earlier this week from a visit to Israel, Jordan, and Egypt and, while in Israel, the news broke that Hamas had signed a reconciliation deal with Fatah. I was, in fact, discussing with Palestinian Prime Minister Fayyad his tremendously important state-building efforts when the deal was likely signed. Shortly thereafter, I had the opportunity to meet with Israel Prime Minister Netanyahu who expressed grave concern both for Israel's security as well as for the prospects for peace. How, he asked us, could the Palestinians be serious partners for peace if they welcomed into their ranks vicious terrorists who continue to deny the very right of the State of Israel to exist? His concern is more than justified.

I was deeply disturbed to learn just this morning that at a meeting in Rome on the situation in Libya, Secretary Clinton did not rule out the prospect of negotiations with an entity which may include Hamas. I find this shocking, especially in light of what she said on the same subject as a Senator, and I quote:

"We are withholding money from the Hamas government, which I think is absolutely appropriate, and we are trying to ensure that no country gives any funding to Hamas government unless and until they renounce violence and accept Israel's right to exist."

I sincerely hope that the Obama administration is not even considering negotiating with Hamas or with any government in which it is a partner until or unless it meets the principles laid out by the Quartet in 2006. We must insist that it meet these principles before their role, however small, is legitimized. I look forward to

hearing the witnesses clarify U.S. policy toward Palestinian reconciliation.

While the details of the Hamas Fatah agreement have yet to emerge, I hope that, in contrast to what I fear, the Palestinian leadership will proceed on a path to responsible state building and forgo the tired path of rejectionism.

And that concludes my statement.

Since the ranking member is in New York today with the President and therefore unavailable to be here, I don't know if the gentlelady might like to make a statement or not. I don't want to put you on the spot.

Ms. SCHWARTZ. That is fine.

I just want to say that, having run into the hotel and we were both in Israel—we were in Jerusalem. Obviously, both of us have keen interests in the future security and safety of the State of Israel and were there at a particularly interesting moment when the Palestinian Authority, Fatah did reach this agreement, again without much detail, with Hamas; and we then were able to meet with both the Israeli leadership and some of the Palestinian leadership.

But, of course, we are very interested to see how this plays out and are interested in your comments and background as you see it today, which we know could change tomorrow. But our understanding is that we heard when we were there is that we might get Hamas—the Palestinian Authority thought they would get Hamas to agree on some level of nonviolence but not on recognition of Israel, not on any of the other principles of the Quartet. So that seems to us inadequate, in spite of the fact that so many Israelis live every day with the fear of violence, of rockets, and suicide bombers. So I look forward to the comments.

My expectation is that there will be other hearings as we follow this through. But know that our relationships with Israel are strong, and we are determined for a two-state solution that actually does create real safety and security in what, if anything, has gotten to be a more volatile part of the world.

So I look forward to your comments and will stay as long as I am able to. Sorry, the afternoon probably got away from the chairman here in how many members are attending. But I look forward to your comments.

Mr. CHABOT. Would the gentlelady yield for just a moment?

Ms. SCHWARTZ. Sure.

Mr. CHABOT. On what you had said about some level of nonviolence, just to clarify, you said I think you thought it would be inadequate, correct?

Ms. SCHWARTZ. I don't have any information about the specifics. What we did hear is that there would be some understanding about whether—about incitement or whether actually commitment to nonviolence. Now what that means, I said I am suggesting that, without any details, we don't know what that really means and whether there is a commitment.

Mr. CHABOT. I didn't know if you said adequate or inadequate, and I was trying to clarify that.

Ms. SCHWARTZ. I said probably not adequate. I am suggesting that it is not adequate.

And, honestly, my own feeling is that, unless there is an agreement to at least at some point recognize the State of Israel, the whole deal is inadequate. But that is not for us to decide, except for the point of view of aid, but it is certainly—those are decisions to make. But the point of view, it is going to have to be Israel's decision to whether they consider that worthy of any kind of further discussion.

I think my feeling when I was there was that this did not help enhance the opportunity for negotiations and settlement talks.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much.

The gentleman from Virginia is recognized to make a short opening statement, if he would like to.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have a prepared opening statement, and I would ask without objection to be entered into the record.

Mr. CHABOT. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And I simply want to note—and thank you for holding this hearing—we are looking at a transformative moment, obviously, in the region; and it remains to be seen where this all leads. I have to admit I am troubled by the recent reconciliation agreement between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority because of its implications both for our concern about terrorism in the region, for the recognition of the State of Israel, and for the peace process itself; and it remains to be seen whether this is really a workable agreement in terms of logistics on the ground.

So I am very interested, obviously, in that set of questions but also on the post-bin Laden world with the events—dramatic events of this last week. What does that mean as we move forward? And what is the long-term staying power of any kind of indigenous democratic movement in North Africa and in the Middle East that certainly has started with a lot of hope? And we have to stay vigilant in terms of where it all leads, Mr. Chairman. So I think this is a timely hearing, and I am certainly interested in the views of our two witnesses, and I want to thank you for holding it.

And, with that, I yield back.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. The gentleman yields back.

I would like to introduce our two distinguished witnesses here this afternoon. I will begin with Mr. Michael H. Posner.

Mr. Posner was sworn in as Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor on September 23, 2009. Prior to joining the State Department, Mr. Posner was the Executive Director and then President of Human Rights First. He played a key role in proposing and campaigning for the first U.S. law providing for political asylum which became part of the Refugee Act of 1980 and was a member of the White House Apparel Industry Partnership Task Force.

Before joining Human Rights First, Mr. Posner was a lawyer in Chicago. He received his J.D. From the University of California Berkley Law School and a B.A. With distinction and honors in history from the University of Michigan.

And we welcome you here this afternoon, Mr. Posner. I will go ahead and make the other introduction first, and we will hear from you.

Ms. Tamara Wittes was sworn in as a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs on November 9, 2009. She coordinates democracy and human rights policy for the Bureau and supervises the Middle East Partnership Initiative and the broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative.

Before joining the State Department, Wittes was a Senior Fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. Before that, she served as Middle East Specialist at the U.S. Institute of Peace and previously as the Director of Programs at the Middle East Institute in Washington. She also taught at Georgetown University and was one of the first recipients of the Rabin-Peres Peace Award established by President Bill Clinton in 1997.

She holds a B.A. in Judaic and Near Eastern studies from Oberlin College and an M.A. and Ph.D. in government from Georgetown University, and we welcome you here this afternoon as well.

As I am sure the witnesses know, we operate under the 5-minute rule, and we ask that you please try to keep your testimony to that 5 minutes, and your entire statements can be entered in for the record. So, even if you have more than 5 minutes we will definitely get that.

So, without further ado, Mr. Posner, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MICHAEL H. POSNER, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Mr. POSNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this hearing. We have a longer written statement which we will submit for the record.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. Without objection.

Mr. POSNER. I want to, first of all, thank you for inviting us to testify on this important subject at this important moment. You rightly recognize that this is a pivotal moment in the Middle East and North Africa.

President Obama has said often that the future of the Middle East will be written by its own people, not a foreign power. But we have a huge stake in the outcome. So this administration is playing a critical role in supporting the forces of democratic reform, and we are standing with those in the region who are calling for a peaceful democratic transition for tolerance, for pluralism. As you said, Mr. Chairman, people in the region are demanding life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Our policy is pragmatic, and it is in keeping with American principles, values, and interests. We believe that when people talk about a conflict between our democratic values and our desire for stability, that is a false dichotomy. The United States has a profound interest in regional stability, including the well-being of Israel, which several of you have mentioned and which remains our close critical ally; and we believe that respect for human rights and principles of accountability are actually key components in long-term stability.

My colleague, Tamara, is going to talk more about some of the U.S. interests, but our strategy is one of empowerment. We support and empower those in the region who are committed, as we are, to peaceful and democratic transitions.

Secretary Clinton has spoken a number of times about the need to build sustainable democracies; and some of the elements are rule of law, transparency, accountability, the existence of civil society, representative political parties, women's empowerment, and a healthy relationship between government and the private sector. These are essential building blocks. In places like Egypt and Tunisia, we are hard at work in trying to help people in those countries build those essential ingredients.

We also believe that Internet freedom is an essential ingredient; and we are actively involved at the State Department in both diplomatically advancing notions of an open Internet platform—it played such an important role both in Tunisia and Egypt. We are also spending money that Congress has appropriated to develop both new technologies to circumvent firewalls but also to protect activists. We have trained 5,000 democracy activists in the Middle East and all regions of the world, and we are about to allocate new funds for that.

We also believe that there is a relationship between building institutions of democracy that are accountable and supporting economic policies that deliver growth.

And, finally, when violations occur, as they have in Syria and other places, we are committed to and are speaking out about the human rights abuses as we see them.

You mentioned, Mr. Chairman, the situation in Syria; and I want to just take a few sentences and say something about that.

President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and many of us have spoken out about the killing, torture, detention, and abuse of peaceful protesters in Syria. The situation in that country has gone from bad to worse, and we are committed to challenging that in every way that we can.

We led an effort 10 days ago at the United Nations to have a special session called and have a resolution condemning the violations of human rights in Syria—first time that has ever happened—and there is now a U.N. investigation and report of what is happening. We have unilaterally issued an executive order with specific targeting of individuals and entities responsible for human rights violations, and we continue to monitor the situation, which is increasingly unstable. Our Ambassador there, Robert Ford, has conveyed our grave concerns to the Syrian Government at the highest levels virtually on a daily basis.

So we share your concern. We are very mindful of the severity of the situation. Peaceful protesters, people who are challenging the government there, are being gunned down; and that is totally unacceptable. We have said that. We will continue to say it, and we will continue to find allies in Europe and elsewhere to help reinforce that message.

Thank you.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much, and we will now hear from Ms. Wittes for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF MS. TAMARA WITTES, DEPUTY ASSISTANT
SECRETARY, BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DE-
PARTMENT OF STATE**

Ms. WITTES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I also want to express my appreciation for the invitation to testify on this crucial subject.

Secretary Clinton has noted that when there is a gap between a government and the needs and the aspirations of its people that state will become more brittle rather than more stable. And in the Middle East that gap has been widening in many places for some time. The Arab Spring, therefore, carries the potential for citizens in the region to build societies on a more stable foundation, more democratic, more economically dynamic, and more capable of tackling their own challenges.

The task of achieving that brighter future rests in the hands of the people and leaders of the region, but the United States has a strategic interest in their success, and we can play a key role.

Now, the United States remains steadfast in our commitment to advancing our core interests in the region and defending the security of our allies. Those interests, including countering violent extremism and achieving a negotiated Middle East peace, are widely shared by citizens across the region seeking peace, prosperity, and freedom.

Regional stability, of course, has always been a key factor in our ability to pursue those goals, and today it is crystal clear that stability in this region demands democratic reform. The changes under way in the region were driven by a rising generation unwilling to accept a status quo that denied them the opportunities they deserved and a status quo that they knew was unsustainable. That is a situation characterized by corruption, inequality, unemployment, resource depletion, and political marginalization.

The success of these new movements for greater democracy, opportunity, dignity, and accountability will be a sine qua non for the region's ability to overcome its longstanding political, economic, and social challenges; and in this way the outcome of the Arab Spring will have a powerful and lasting impact on regional stability for years to come.

But events in the region today also present a tremendous strategic opportunity for the United States and all those who advance a positive agenda for the future of this region. The peaceful, home-grown movements that put Egypt and Tunisia on the path to democratic transition offer a powerful repudiation of the extremists' false narrative that violence and conflict are the only ways to effect change. And since we wholeheartedly embrace the positive potential of this region, we likewise embrace those who seek to realize that potential through peaceful democratic reform.

Our response to the upheaval in the region is rooted in a consistent set of principles, as my colleague said. We oppose the use of violence against peaceful protesters and support the universal rights of free expression, assembly, and association. We strongly condemn killing, torture, and abuse of peaceful protesters; and we make clear our view that people's legitimate demands and aspirations must be met by positive engagement from governments in the form of meaningful political and economic reform.

Certainly there will be great challenges ahead in countries undergoing democratic transition. We are encouraged to see governments elsewhere in the region taking affirmative steps to address their citizens' concerns, but there are more challenging scenarios where calls for democratic reform are held back or met with violence and there is the risk of backsliding or the derailment of progress.

And, Mr. Chairman, you mentioned Palestinian reconciliation. Let me be very clear. We certainly understand the concerns you have raised. There has been a deal signed, but there are many steps left to implement that agreement, and we are monitoring it closely. But, from our perspective, it is absolutely clear that, in order to play any constructive role in achieving peace, any Palestinian Government must accept the Quartet principles. They must reject violence, accept Israel's right to exist, and agree to abide by previous agreements.

We will continue to stand up firmly for our principles and our interests in this region. As citizens and leaders in the Middle East move toward democratic change, we will support their efforts. We believe in their potential, and we look forward to a day when all the citizens of the region are able to have their voices heard, their rights respected, and their aspirations met. We believe that that will be a brighter future and a more stable future, one that works for them and for us. We look forward to continuing to work with this committee and with the Congress to make that future a reality.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Posner and Ms. Wittes follows:]

TESTIMONY OF
MICHAEL H. POSNER
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR
AND
TAMARA C. WITTES
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS
HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA SUBCOMMITTEE
MAY 5, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ackerman, distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting us to testify before this committee on the subject of political transitions in the Middle East. You rightly recognize that this is a pivotal moment in the Middle East and North Africa. National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon said recently that the Arab Spring is an event comparable to the fall of the Ottoman Empire or the decolonization of the Middle East following the Second World War. And historians will long be debating these momentous developments. President Obama has often said that the future of the Middle East will be written by its own people, not by any foreign power. This administration stands with those in the region who call for peaceful, democratic transitions, for tolerance and pluralism. Our policy approach is both pragmatic and in keeping with American principles, values and interests.

We view this as a moment of great challenge and great opportunity – and the two are inexorably linked. Last month, Secretary Clinton noted that uprisings across the region have exposed a number of myths: The “myth that governments can hold on to power without responding to their people’s aspirations or respecting their rights; the myth that the only way to produce change in the region is through violence and conflict; and, most pernicious of all, the myth that Arabs do not share universal human aspirations for freedom, dignity, and opportunity.”

The protests and upheaval we have witnessed in so many countries has the potential to bring about a region that is more democratic, more economically dynamic, and more responsive to the needs and aspirations of its citizens. As Secretary Clinton has said, the status quo in the Middle East is unsustainable, and genuine democratic changes in that region will make countries both more stable and, in the long run, likely to be more in sync with the interests of the United States and our closest allies. But she also has warned of the danger that democratic transitions can be hijacked by undemocratic forces, giving rise to new autocracies. We need to shape our policies in the region to encourage peaceful democratic transitions and to help prevent the rise of such new autocracies.

The Obama administration believes that democratic transitions must be home grown. The challenge falls to the people and the leaders of the region to achieve the brighter future they desire – a future in which governments respond to the aspirations of their people and view it as their duty to protect human rights, fundamental freedoms and the dignity that all people desire and deserve. But the United States has a keen interest in their success, and we can play a key

supporting role. We have done and will do this by acknowledging, supporting and empowering the democratic and reformist voices from the region. And we will continue to do this by speaking honestly about the need to respect human rights and shun violence. We continue to tell all governments, friendly or not, that the use of violence to suppress peaceful expression is wrong and destabilizing, both to the governments that resort to violence and to the region as a whole.

Much has been said about the alleged conflict between our democratic values and our desire for stability in the Middle East. This is a false dichotomy. The United States has a profound interest in regional stability, and we believe that respect for universal human rights and the principle that governments are accountable to their people are in fact key components of long-term stability.

As popular movements for political change take on the immense challenges facing their respective countries, political outcomes will have a significant impact on stability in the region. If the region's movements for greater democracy, opportunity, dignity, and accountability fail to produce successful transitions to more inclusive and transparent democratic systems, the Middle East will be unable to overcome its mounting economic and social challenges. These challenges are well established, from stagnant economies saddled by corruption, inequality, and unemployment, to resource depletion, to the marginalization of women and minorities, and they add up to an unsustainable status quo.

The United States remains steadfast in our commitment to advancing our core interests in the region and defending the security of our allies. And we are explicit about our interests: We seek a comprehensive peace between Israel and its neighbors. We seek to combat terrorism and the dark ideologies of extremist groups. We seek to stop Iran's illicit nuclear activity and curb its destabilizing influence in the region. We seek to cement a long-term partnership with an Iraq that is peaceful, sovereign, self-reliant, and reintegrated into the Arab world. We seek to maintain the continued flow of critical energy resources to the global economy. And we seek broad-based prosperity. Regional stability has always been a key factor in our ability to channel energies and marshal coordination in service of all these goals.

In light of the role of stability in promoting U.S. interests, we have an enormous stake in the outcome of the Arab Spring. Going forward, the regional stability we seek to advance our interests can only be sustained if the processes of democratic reform advance. As Secretary Clinton noted, when there is a gap between the government and the needs and ambitions of the people, states grow more brittle and less stable. In the long run, governments that are responsive to their people are the best guarantors of stability, and the best partners for the United States.

Furthermore, the peaceful, homegrown, non-ideological movements that have put Egypt and Tunisia on the path of democratic transition offer a powerful repudiation of the false narrative espoused by al-Qaeda and other extremist elements that violence is the only way to effect change. Thus, events in the region today present an opportunity not only for the advancement of universal values and human rights but also a strategic opportunity for the United States and our allies.

Our response to the upheaval in the Middle East has been rooted in a consistent set of principles: We have opposed the use of violence against peaceful protesters and supported the universal

rights of free expression, assembly, and association and the right to participate in the affairs of the state. We have strongly condemned, including in multilateral fora, the killing, torture, and abuse of peaceful protestors. We have made clear our view that people's legitimate demands and aspirations must be met by positive engagement from governments, in the form of meaningful political and economic reforms.

Our policy responses also take into account the interrelationship between political and economic change, because we know that people have not put themselves in harm's way so that they could vote in one single election; rather, they seek to transform the relationship between themselves and their government – they seek a system of democratic governance that delivers results for them and their families. As we offer support and encouragement to governments and people pursuing political change, we are also looking to bolster the economic progress that can help make that change sustainable over time. And we have mobilized the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) to provide up to \$2 billion in financial support for private-sector investments in the Middle East and North Africa.

We are keeping a close eye on religious minorities, who are often even more vulnerable to violence and abuse during such tumultuous times, and who rightly view religious freedom as part and parcel of the universal rights democracy promises. We are also concerned with ensuring that democratic change, where it comes, is inclusive – that means that women have an equal voice at the bargaining table and minorities are fairly represented.

Iran provides a powerful cautionary tale for the transitions underway. Iranians' democratic aspirations in 1979 and 2009 were subverted by a brutal dictatorship. Throughout Iran, security forces have beaten, detained, and in several recent cases killed peaceful protesters, even as Iran's president has made a show of denouncing the violence against civilians in Libya and other places. But we are holding Iranians who are responsible for human rights abuses to account. The United States and the European Union have sanctioned serious human rights abusers and joined a broad coalition of nations at the UN Human Rights Council to create a Special Rapporteur position for human rights in Iran. We will not remain silent as the Iranian government seeks to squelch the voices of its own people.

The path ahead will look different in each country of the region, and so too will our support for each unique process. But the trends that produced this dramatic moment in the Middle East have been building for many years, and they are not likely to fade soon. No part of the region has been untouched, and already we can say that the Middle East will never be the same again.

Tunisia and Egypt have begun the process of democratic transition and, if successful, are poised to offer a promising example to their neighbors for the power of peaceful movements to bring about meaningful change. Other states, including Jordan, Morocco, and Oman, have taken some initial positive steps toward political and economic reform, but all have more to do. In others, including Yemen and Bahrain, for example, much more work remains to reverse disturbing trends, hold security forces accountable for abuses, and initiate democratic reforms that improve equality and participation.

In Egypt, the military council deserves credit for responding to the aspirations of the Egyptian people for democracy and taking steps to meet many of their immediate demands. They have supervised a process for initial constitutional amendments, which were overwhelmingly passed in a referendum last month and which set the stage for democratic elections and the end of the emergency law. They issued a vastly improved political parties law; have taken early steps toward reorganizing the state security apparatus; publicly committed to lifting the emergency law before holding free, fair, and transparent democratic elections; recognized independent unions; and oversaw the successful constitutional referendum. The Egyptian Armed Forces also rebuilt a church in the village of Sol, which had been destroyed by mob violence on March 4.

We will be closely tracking the military's implementation of all of its commitments, especially the lifting of the emergency law before elections take place. Moreover, we remain concerned about continued detentions by the military and quick trials of civilian protestors in military courts in a process that does not provide essential procedural safeguards.

We have received reports that dozens of people are in prison after being arrested at or near the site of peaceful protests. Military courts have tried protestors in proceedings that have sometimes taken less than an hour, with limited or no access to counsel. For example, on February 28, Amr al-Beheiry was sentenced to five years in prison after a one-day military trial following his participation in a peaceful protest on February 26. He was not allowed legal representation.

On April 14, the Supreme Military Council committed to "review the detentions of all the youth...tried in the recent period." We are continuing to engage with the Supreme Military Council to encourage them to fulfill this commitment.

On a broader scale we also are concerned about sectarian violence and legal discrimination of religious minorities, and the limited participation by women in all aspects of the transitional process.

Egypt's long-standing economic troubles contributed to the revolution, and the recent upheaval has made the country's economic distress acute. The state of the economy, including unemployment rates, will of course affect the prospects for successful transition to democracy. We are consulting with our international partners and international financial institutions on ways to help. We have made available \$165 million in bilateral funds toward meeting immediate needs for economic recovery and democracy and governance programming, and we are looking at avenues to potentially increase these commitments. We are working closely with Congress to increase access to capital available to the private sector, particularly for small and medium enterprises, taking the lessons learned from Eastern Europe to structure a successful Enterprise Fund for Egypt. We are exploring possible expansion of the Qualifying Industrial Zone program, which stimulates growth and deepens the U.S.-Egyptian partnership, as well as evaluating several other options for broader economic support to be responsive and demonstrate clear support of Egypt and its people.

The U.S. Government's support for democracy and good governance in Egypt is a coordinated effort involving offices at the State Department and USAID. The State Department's Bureau of

Human Rights, Labor and Democracy (DRL) is focusing on political party development, with an emphasis on women, and on technical assistance for the upcoming parliamentary and presidential election, including training poll-watchers and helping nascent parties develop, maintain and represent their constituents. DRL is also working to strengthen independent labor unions because they are key actors in the larger political dialogue. It also supports programs to bolster independent media, including the training of bloggers, women and youth in multimedia journalism, and teaching the nuts and bolts of election coverage. And it helps train civil society groups that will be critical to building the institutions of sustainable democracy and monitoring and protecting human rights. DRL will use a portion of the reprogrammed and repositioned \$165 million in Economic Support Funds for Egypt for these activities, and will collaborate with USAID and other relevant offices at State to ensure complementary roles.

In Tunisia, preparations are underway for the election this summer of a constituent assembly that will rewrite the constitution and chart the next steps in the country's democratic transition. We applaud a number of steps already taken, including the interim Government of Tunisia's efforts to improve human rights protections and its endorsement of the country's personal status code protecting the rights of women. Tunisia has prepared a new elections law, and dozens of new political parties are organizing to compete. The United States is committed to helping secure a democratic transition that delivers results and sustainable economic development for all the people of Tunisia. Thus far, the Administration has identified nearly \$30 million to help Tunisians build the capacity of civil society, political parties and media, to conduct free and fair elections, to promote transparency and accountability, to support youth employability, and to advance private sector development.

Of the nearly \$30 million in assistance targeted to Tunisia, the Department of State's Office of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) is providing \$20 million to support Tunisian efforts during their democratic transition. These funds are being channeled through Tunisian and international NGOs to shape an independent, professional, and pluralistic media sector; build a vibrant civil society; strengthen democratic political parties; develop a sound framework for free elections; enact economic reforms and expand entrepreneurship. MEPI has already awarded initial grants to both Tunisian and international NGOs and continues to seek innovative proposals through a year-long open competition. USAID is providing approximately \$10 million in support for the political process. As with Egypt, relevant offices, including in the bureaus of Near East Affairs and Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and USAID are working closely together.

Finally, because trade will be critical to building a more robust Tunisian economy, we are encouraging legal and economic reforms that would facilitate more open trade and private sector investment.

In Yemen, the United States supports a peaceful and orderly transfer of power in accordance with the Yemeni people's demand for better governance that is more responsive to their needs and aspirations. A solution to Yemen's problems will not be found through security measures, but through political dialogue, free elections, and more transparent and accountable governance. We urge the participation of all sides, including youth, in a dialogue to reach a solution that will be supported by the Yemeni people. Yemeni citizens, like people everywhere, have the right to

demonstrate peacefully, to assemble, and to express themselves without fear of violence, arrest or death. We strongly urge all sides to refrain from violence.

The United States has welcomed the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) initiative for supporting political transition in Yemen. As the situation unfolds, it will be critical to maintain active U.S. support on security, governance, and development to help the government of Yemen to preserve rule of law, maintain and improve service delivery, prepare for presidential elections, and draft a new constitution.

U.S. assistance policy on Yemen is two-pronged: we provide security and counterterrorism support to combat the immediate threat of terrorism, while delivering economic and technical support directly to local communities to help counter long-term drivers of instability, such as unemployment, poverty, and ineffective governance. The current political crisis in Yemen has rendered this work more difficult in the short-term, but has reaffirmed and emphasized its importance over the long-term.

We will continue to closely coordinate our assistance efforts with those of other donor countries. Through the Friends of Yemen process, for example, the United States harmonizes political and economic assistance efforts with partners including the IMF and the UN.

We are deeply concerned by what we are seeing in Bahrain. The operation to clear the streets of protests in March may at this point have restored superficial law-and-order, but now has given way to a campaign of retribution against elements of the political opposition, civil society, professional groups including medical practitioners, and Shi'a community leaders. Close to 600 people have been detained since March 17, including journalists, bloggers, teachers, human rights activists, medical staff, and political activists.

We have repeatedly raised our concerns with the Government of Bahrain, and made clear that security operations will not resolve the challenges Bahrain faces. Only a credible, peaceful, productive political process that addresses the legitimate aspirations of the Bahraini people will resolve the crisis. Targeting opposition figures for arrest, including political moderates, undermines any attempt by the Government of Bahrain to engage in a national dialogue. We have also expressed our concerns to the other Gulf Cooperation Council members and remain actively engaged with Bahrain and its neighbors, as well as with civil society and political societies inside Bahrain, in efforts to help rebuild trust and to create a climate where a productive political dialogue is possible.

The Administration has consistently spoken out against the Syrian government's killing, torture, detention, and abuse of peaceful protestors, with President Obama condemning these actions "in the strongest possible terms." He continued, "This outrageous use of violence to quell protests must come to an end now...We strongly oppose the Syrian government's treatment of its citizens and we continue to oppose its continued destabilizing behavior more generally, including support for terrorism and terrorist groups."

As the Syrian government's abuses of human rights escalated, the Administration responded by leading the international community in calling a special session at UN Human Rights Council in

Geneva that produced a strong resolution unequivocally condemning the Syrian government's use of lethal violence against its citizens. The UN resolution also created an independent UN investigation into the recent violence, and called on the Syrian authorities to release prisoners of conscience and those arbitrarily detained, including lawyers, human rights defenders, and journalists, and to lift restrictions on internet access, telecommunication, and international journalists. We have also taken additional, unilateral steps. President Obama issued a new Executive Order specifically targeting individuals and entities responsible for human rights abuses in Syria with financial sanctions, as we recently did in the case of Iran. We coordinated this action with the European Union, and we expect the EU's imposition of targeted sanctions will greatly amplify the impact of our efforts. We are closely monitoring the status of religious minorities in Syria who are increasingly worried for their safety as the situation destabilizes the country.

Since the protests in Syria began, U.S. Ambassador Robert Ford has conveyed our grave concerns directly to the Syrian government at the highest levels, and has played a vital role behind the scenes in obtaining the release of American citizens who were arrested by the Syrian security services. Ambassador Ford has also provided invaluable insights for our policy decisions, giving us a window into the thinking of senior regime figures, human rights and democracy activists, and other non-governmental contacts. His ongoing work is particularly important because the Syrian government has banned international media from reporting inside Syria, creating a dearth of credible information about events on the ground.

In Libya, the United States continues to play a critical role in the international coalition seeking to protect Libyan civilians and enforce UN Resolutions 1970 and 1973. Secretary Clinton and Undersecretary Burns have joined foreign officials in an international contact group on Libya. The united voice of the international community has made clear that there must be a transition in Libya that reflects the will of the Libyan people and the departure of Qadhafi from power.

We are assessing options for the types of assistance we could provide to the Libyan people, and are consulting directly with the Libyan opposition and our international partners about these matters, including delivery of critical humanitarian assistance. The United States alone is providing \$53.5 million to meet humanitarian needs within Libya and to evacuate and assist those fleeing the violence in Libya. USAID deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team to the region March 1, initially based in Tunisia and Egypt. Humanitarian assistance experts reached Benghazi, Libya, in early April to determine relief needs, advise and shape the U.S. response, and work with other donors and non-governmental organizations in getting assistance to people in need. Furthermore, the President has agreed to send up to \$25 million in non-lethal assistance to the Transitional National Council (TNC) for use by their security forces. The items we are providing will include medical supplies, boots, tents, rations, and personal protective gear. We are continuing to work with the TNC to determine whether there is other assistance we can provide.

Even in Libya, where Colonel Qadhafi responded to his people's protests with extreme violence and threats of worse, we can see reasons for optimism. Not only in the international community's success in preventing the imminent slaughter of tens of thousands in the city of Benghazi and mounting international pressure on Qadhafi to end his brutal attacks, but also in

the swift and unified international action that enabled this response. As Secretary Clinton noted in her address to the U.S.-Islamic World Forum last month:

In the past, when confronted with such a crisis, all too often the leaders of North Africa and the Middle East averted their eyes or closed ranks. But not this time. Not in this new era. The OIC, the GCC issued strong statements. The Arab League convened in Cairo, in the midst of all of the commotion of Egypt's democratic transition, to condemn the violence and suspend Libya from the organization, even though Colonel Qadhafi held the League's rotating presidency. The Arab League went on to call for a no-fly zone... But that's not all. The Arab League affirmed – and again I quote – “the right of the Libyan people to fulfill their demands and build their own future and institutions in a democratic framework.” That is a remarkable statement. And that is a reason to hope.

The peoples of the Middle East and North Africa have never been immune to the universal yearnings of human beings for freedom, dignity, and opportunity. But now, for the first time, citizens across the region are raising their voices to demand democratic change, and governments are beginning to respond. But all the signs of progress in recent months, and all the potential we see today for a more democratic, stable, and prosperous region will only be realized if more leaders in more places move faster and further to embrace their citizens' aspirations for freedom, dignity and opportunity. If leaders engage positively with their people to answer the region's most pressing challenges – to open their political systems, curb corruption, and respect the rights of all of their citizens – then this inspiring moment will truly be a turning point for the Middle East.

Fundamentally, this moment of profound transformation was generated by the peoples of the Middle East, and they are the ones who will shape their future. But the United States has a stake in their success, and we stand with those across the region who are working for peaceful democratic change. We are committed to the future of this region where we have so many key interests, and we believe in the potential of its people. As citizens and leaders in the Middle East and North Africa move down the path of democratic change, we will support their efforts. And we look forward to the day when all the citizens of the region, men and women of all faiths, are able to have their voices heard, their rights respected, and their aspirations met. We look forward to continuing to work with this Committee and the Congress to help make that future a reality.

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Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much.

It is my understanding that the gentlelady from New York has a codel to catch, and so I am going to defer my questions so she can get them in before she has to leave.

So the gentlelady is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. BUERKLE. Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman; and thank you for holding this very relevant hearing today and thank you to our guests.

My question—and I will get right to the point—is with regard to the Muslim Brotherhood. I would like you to please explain to me what you see their role is in the Middle East. We are hearing concerns from Egypt, from Israel, and from Jordan as to they are gaining power. And I would like to hear what the administration, what your thoughts are about the Muslim Brotherhood.

Ms. WITTES. Well, thank you, for the question. I think it is a very important issue to raise, and it is one that we are follow closely.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt abandoned violence in the 1970s. Since then, they have played a role in politics, but their views have not always been clear. And what we are looking to see emerge in Egypt is a diverse political marketplace where people will face a real choice and where organizations like the Brotherhood and other political parties are challenged to make their views clear, including on core democratic principles: Rejection of violence, the embrace of democratic values and rules, both before and after the election, and a commitment to equality for all under the law, including women and minorities. Those are the requisites to play a constructive role in the democratic process.

Ms. BUERKLE. As a follow-up to that, does the administration—are they opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood, their power, and them expanding their power in Jordan?

Ms. WITTES. Well, in Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood is not itself politically competitive. There is a political party, the Islamic Action Front, which has some links to the Brotherhood which is a recognized political party and competes in Jordanian elections. They have been a part of the political scene there for some time.

Ms. BUERKLE. And I think, as a follow-up, we have heard from many of their concerns regarding the Muslim Brotherhood, and I would like to know if the administration sees them as a moderate group or as a group that is really a threat as what we have heard from—testimony we have heard from folks from Israel and the like.

Ms. WITTES. I think from our perspective what is important is that we see a diversity of views and voices and that we see all of those who want to participate in the democratic process embracing democratic principles. It is a concern for the process and a concern for the integrity of the democratic process. It is not for us to choose the winners of those political competitions. That, obviously, is for the people in the region to make that choice, but we want to see them make that choice within a free and fair and competitive context.

Ms. BUERKLE. So as a follow-up to that, do you see the Muslim Brotherhood as an organization that would allow that process to play out or what be a threat to the freedom, to the very thing that these people are fighting for?

Well, I will let you comment on that, and I will follow up.

Ms. WITTES. Thank you. I think as the situation in Egypt continues to evolve and as the Egyptian people start to prepare for their elections, there are already a number of new political parties forming and organizing, there are a lot of debates swirling around the role of religion and politics, and I think that we are already seeing the Egyptian people engage robustly in this discussion. So that process is going to continue to play itself out; and, of course, we will be watching it closely. But, ultimately, it is up to the Egyptian people to determine their future.

Ms. BUERKLE. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentlelady yields back.

The gentlelady, Ms. Schwartz, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. SCHWARTZ. Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity for questions.

I wonder if you could speak a little bit more following up on the previous questions about the situation in Egypt, and I would say a couple questions, if I may. One is on how prepared they are for elections in September. There is some sense that some of the points you are making in terms of new and emerging parties, how quickly can they be organized, how substantial they can be, how competitive they can be?

Of course, I agree with you this is up to the people of Egypt to make these decisions for their future, but, as we encourage democratic reforms, we don't want them to be unprepared for those reforms. We know that that is not going to bode well for good decision making for them, and so I don't want us to push too hard to lead in that direction.

And, secondly, the word is to—we originally had heard that Egypt was going on abide by previous treaties. Have you heard otherwise? There is obviously deep concern in Israel about the border with Gaza, whether, in fact, that will be open, whether that would then lead to weapons, munitions, other supplies coming into Gaza that would potentially enhance the opportunity for violence and destruction?

So let me start there, and then if there is an opportunity for a follow-up I would be pleased to be able to.

Mr. POSNER. Thank you. Let me answer the first set of questions first.

I think what we have seen over at least 30 years in Egypt is an ossification of all institutions, including political institutions. And so as transition now is under way, one of the challenges Egyptians face, particularly young people and others who took to the streets, is that they don't have experience with political parties. They don't—they haven't had the ability to do political polling or to organize to do electioneering. And so we are very much involved. Congress has and we have made available as part of our bilateral funds to Egypt to go to groups like NDI and IRI to begin that building process, building the foundation for sustainable democracy in Egypt. It is not going to happen overnight, but it is critically important.

There is an important segment of Egyptian society, secular, reform-minded, democratic, concerned about the future of their own

country; and they want and are eager to build the skills to play a vital role in a political process that will lead to a democratic Egypt.

Ms. SCHWARTZ. Will that happen in 6 months?

Mr. POSNER. I think it is going to be a real challenge. I think we are in a transitional phase. I think realistically to have elections in 6 months, both for Parliament and the President, strains a system that is in a very embryonic state. And so I think we need to be quick and resolute in trying to help right now, but we also need to be mindful that, over time, we have got to stay the course and this is going to happen over a period of years.

I am optimistic in the long term we can get there, but I think we shouldn't delude ourselves into thinking that it is going to look like the United States or Western Europe in a matter of months. And so I think we are committed to helping those Egyptians that share our democratic aspirations, and we know that it is going to be a process for them to learn, to build their capacity, to build their constituencies, and over time to have the role they deserve in Egypt.

Ms. SCHWARTZ. Just related to those points, do you have some sense of how much Iran is trying to play into influencing parties that could evolve, that would be more sympathetic to their position and anti-West and anti-democratic, ultimately?

Mr. POSNER. We are always mindful and wary of the intentions of Iranian Government.

Ms. SCHWARTZ. As we should be.

Mr. POSNER. And that is certainly an aspect, it is a feature in many of these countries.

I think our primary focus, though, right now, is the need to be in building that capacity, that democratic capacity that Egyptians themselves want. They want the same kinds of opportunities people have in this country, economic and political opportunities. We can help reinforce their own aspirations and desires.

Ms. SCHWARTZ. I have 1 minute left, but maybe we could answer the question about the treaties, the treaty with Israel and the border on Gaza.

Ms. WITTES. Absolutely. Thank you. This, obviously, is an issue of core concern for us as well as for our Israeli allies.

The interim government announced almost immediately that they would continue to respect their international commitments. That was an announcement that we welcome, and we expect them to hold to, and I think that is going to be an important element for us to see in any future Egyptian Government as well.

During this interim period, we have seen the Government of Egypt continue to uphold those commitments, engage with Israel on important issues, including security, and also continue to work to stop arms smuggling through Egyptian territory.

Ms. SCHWARTZ. Thank you. I believe my time is up. I yield back.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentlelady yields back.

The gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Manzullo, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MANZULLO. Thank you.

The President and the rest of the people in the State Department in various positions wasted no time in condemning Mubarak, asking him to step down. The same with Qadhafi, made statements

hinting at the peaceful removal of the leader of Yemen, and yet the Arab country that suffered perhaps the most casualties, at least recorded, is Syria. And aside from condemning the violence, which is easy, because no one likes violence, the President has made no overtures to ask Bashar to step down.

Only a couple days ago, the Obama administration issued an executive order freezing the assets of three top Syrian officials, most notably Maher al-Assad, who is President Assad's brother. I realize in this crazy world you have to pick and choose your friends. But I am a little bit miffed as to why the United States is apparently not taking harsher action or asking Bashar to leave office.

Do either of you two have any comments on that?

Mr. POSNER. Congressman, one of the things that the President said—I want to quote his words. He said, “This outrageous use of violence to quell protest must come to an end now. We strongly oppose the Syrian Government's treatment of its citizens. We continue to oppose its continuing destabilizing behavior more generally, including support for terrorism and terrorist groups.”

Those are statements that aren't made lightly or easily.

Mr. MANZULLO. I understand that. But he didn't ask him to step down.

Mr. POSNER. Well, what we have done, as you indicated, is to impose now unilateral sanctions. We also led an effort at the United Nations to have Syria condemned by the international community for the first time, and that happened in the last 2 weeks.

Mr. MANZULLO. I understand that. But why doesn't the administration ask him to step down?

Mr. POSNER. I think we are at a point now where we are constantly reevaluating the policy. As the violence escalates, we are going to explore options; and we are going to also take our lead from what is happening in the country and what people there are saying and doing. We have made it very clear that we are utterly condemnatory of the violence.

Mr. MANZULLO. I understand that. I read the words and quoted them myself. I just think it is inconsistent.

Mubarak left and who is left but the Muslim Brotherhood? You have to sometimes wonder what you ask for. And the Middle East is ablaze right now. But I don't see that much pressure on Syria. I don't see the President asking for his removal, asking for him to step down, when he was not reticent to do that with regard to the other leaders I mentioned.

Mr. POSNER. Well, I would take exception to two things you just said. One is, I don't think the only thing that is an alternative in Egypt is the Muslim Brothers. There is a significant democratic movement in Egypt that we are supporting and need to support which seeks to have a peaceful, democratic, rights-respecting—

Mr. MANZULLO. I understand. I want to return to Syria.

Mr. POSNER. Yeah. But with respect to Syria, we are very mindful of the severity of the situation.

Mr. MANZULLO. I understand that. I am trying to get an answer as to why the President is not as forceful with Syria as he has been with other Arab countries.

Ms. Wittes, do you have a response to that?

Ms. WITTES. Congressman, thank you.

I think it is important to note that, in addition to the steps that we have taken on our own, we have been working to mobilize the international community on this issue as well. And, as you know, Syria has relationships that are in some ways more multifaceted with other international partners. So it is very important for us to work together with them.

With our own action, with the executive order on Friday, our hope is to galvanize the European Union as well.

Mr. MANZULLO. I understand that. Here is a guy that has got snipers shooting innocent people. A bullet went through the eye of a little 4-year-old. I think the message is, there is any message at all, it is very inconsistent, that America is giving Bashar a pass. And you can have all the diplomatic language you want, you can have all the—so he is a bigger shot than the other people. Apparently, he is acceptable.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired. Does the gentleman seek additional time?

Mr. MANZULLO. I do.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman gets another minute.

Mr. MANZULLO. Thank you.

Can somebody give me a better response—not a better, a more complete response? Does the United States want him out, Bashar out?

Ms. WITTES. Congressman, I think it is important that as this situation across the region has evolved, and it has evolved very quickly, that we look at each country and each environment on its own terms. The environment in Syria has been deteriorating significantly over the last couple of weeks; and I think as you look at the range of actions that we have taken—I see us escalating our activity—

Mr. MANZULLO. But how many more people have to die before the President acts? I think more people have died now in Syria than died in Libya before the President acted.

Ms. WITTES. I think what we saw in Libya was a situation in which there was the real threat of mass violence.

Mr. MANZULLO. So there is no threat of mass violence with over close to 600 people being killed in Syria?

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has once again expired.

Would the lady like to answer the question? Or you have already answered it? Thank you.

The gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Connolly, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And let me pick up where my friend from Illinois just left off, though, Ms. Wittes. How do we square the apparent inconsistency in our policy, U.S. policy, with respect to Egypt on the one hand and Libya and Syria on the other?

I think we have got some explaining to do to the American public. I mean, if the differences are self-evident to you and the administration, they are not to us or the public.

Ms. WITTES. Thank you, Congressman. I think it is an important and valuable question.

I think that in our response across the region, we have been rooted in a consistent set of principles: Number one, that peaceful pro-

testers have to be dealt with peacefully and cannot be met with violence; that people have to enjoy their fundamental human rights to free expression, free assembly, free association, and to have a right to have a say in how they are governed; and, number three, that these aspirations, these demands that are being expressed by citizens across the region have to be met by governments in the region with meaningful political and economic reform that is done through a peaceful political process, a process of dialogue, a process of inclusion. That has been our consistent approach across the region. Now—

Mr. CONNOLLY. Let me ask you a question, because my time—I know the chairman is going to give me 1 extra minute, but still we are going to run out of time, unfortunately, and I really would love to continue this. But has the administration called for regime change in Damascus?

Ms. WITTES. No, we have not.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you. And I think that is really Mr. Manzullo's point, that there seems to be a discrepancy between our approach—we even called for Hosni Mubarak to step down, and it is passingly strange that we have not done the same in Damascus.

Mr. MANZULLO. Or Bahrain.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Let's make a footnote we have got to revisit that issue at some point.

Mr. Posner, you made some talks about the atrophying of institutions that intrigued me. Because one of the things that struck me about Egypt when it was sort of hot and heavy was the eerie resemblances to Iran in this respect; that U.S. policy seemed to have been complicit or acquiesced in the lack of any political space being created in the opposition—let alone it being viable sufficient to actually govern.

And the problem is, in an autocratic regime, inevitably it will crumble, and if there has been no political space created for some kind of viable opposition into that vacuum, others can exploit opportunities. It happened in Russia in 1917. It certainly happened in the Iranian Revolution after the fall of the Shah.

I just wonder if you, given your unique portfolio, what your observation is about that moving forward? What have we learned about that as a country in terms of our diplomacy?

Mr. POSNER. Thank you, Congressman.

I think one of the things—I went to Egypt 1 year ago January to look at some of the programs that our office is supporting and some programs that the MEFI office that Tamara oversees, is supporting. We have over the years been, in fact, quite eager to support exactly those independent voices that you are describing.

And one of the reasons why, in the long term, I am optimistic about Egypt is that there is a very vital society there, a very vital civil society. There are a range of groups working on women's issues, working on human rights issues, working for children, working on environment, a range of other things; and the United States Government has been in contact with those people and supportive of their continuity.

It hasn't been an easy process, and now we are in a different place where those groups have more opportunity to grow and to

thrive. And, in addition, there is really the ability now to build political parties in a proper democratic space.

So I think that is—I think we—could we have done more? We could have. But I think we have done a lot. We are now very focused on what needs to be done going forward, and I think there are a number of Egyptians who I met 6 weeks ago there who are eager to work with us and to benefit from our assistance and our experience.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I guess I would add one more thing to your list; and that is the military. Big difference between the—even though we had close relationships with the Iranian military as well. In Egypt, in a sense, it was a force for stability but also played a cushion between uprisings or demonstrators and the police. It actually protected the civilian population.

Mr. Chairman, I would request the extra minute.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman without objection is granted an additional minute.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the chair.

Back to you, Ms. Wittes. Just real quickly, does the United States support the agreement between Hamas and the PA that was hammered out in Cairo?

Ms. WITTES. Thank you for the question, Congressman.

I think our clear position is that any Palestinian Government, if it wants to play a constructive role in the peace process, needs to accept the Quartet principles. We have yet to see what government may emerge out of this agreement, whether this agreement sticks, but it is clear what we are looking for, which is for the members of that government to agree to reject violence, accept Israel's right to exist, and embrace peace agreements.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yes. And the Israeli Government in the form of its prime minister made it very clear that they see this as disastrous for the peace process and for Israel moving forward. Do we share that view?

Ms. WITTES. We share the concerns, and we are going to be monitoring this very closely.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman yields back, and I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for questions. I might note—or 6.

And I would note, following up on the gentleman from Virginia's question, that clearly I agree with the Israeli Prime Minister. I think it is disastrous for the peace process, personally. But I will get into that later, potentially, if we have a second round.

But, as I mentioned in my opening statement, I returned earlier this week from a visit to the Middle East. While in Israel, I had an opportunity to travel to Jericho and the West Bank and toured the Joint Operations Center under the command of the U.S. Security Coordinator, General Michael Moeller. The USSC is charged with working with the Palestinian Authority to train locals to provide security in their own West Bank community.

I must say that I was very much impressed with both the leadership of General Moeller and his team and the professionalism shown by Palestinian officials at the Center. It is very encouraging to observe the building of fundamental institutions of a state that we hope will one day soon be able to live side by side with Israel

in peace. Although, as I just stated, I am very skeptical about this reconciliation with Hamas involved.

It was only a day earlier, however, that I was meeting with Daniel Ayalon, Israel Deputy Foreign Minister, when we received news of this Hamas-Fatah reconciliation. The Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act of 2006 explicitly forbids U.S. funding of a Palestinian Authority Government which includes Hamas members unless or until it fulfills numerous obligations, including the three Quartet principles, as has been mentioned here already: Recognizing Israel's right to exist, renunciation of violence, and acceptance of past agreements.

In short, until Hamas ceases to be Hamas, the United States is legally barred from assisting any entity which contains it. It would be extremely unfortunate if this reconciliation rendered the Palestinian Authority's state-building effort moribund, and yet it appears it would do just that.

Throughout all of this, however, the administration has been notably quiet. I know we have talked some today, but, other than that, quite quiet, with the exception of Secretary Clinton's unfortunate remark, with I mentioned in my opening statement.

What is the administration's policy toward this reconciliation? And we have been talking about that. Is it, as I hope, working to ensure that Hamas has no role in both the Palestinian Government as well as in the PLO? It is not, I hope, considering negotiation or asking that Israel negotiate with any bodies which include Hamas members. How can we ask Israel to make peace with an organization that continues to target its civilians with indiscriminate rocket fire?

The situation in Syria continues to spiral out of control, and we have been talking about that as well. Bashar al-Assad, far from the reformer some of us once considered him, has shown himself to be a ruthless despot willing to murder his own people in order to continue to repress them. Despite this, the administration I believe continues to take only piecemeal steps that hardly tell Assad or the broader region that they cannot mow down their own citizens who are merely peacefully protesting for their universal rights.

Just the opposite. Our, as I mentioned in my opening statement, I believe tepid response—and I think we are hearing that from both sides here today, that there are concerns about this—that response sends a signal to the world's despots that we will only respond to brutal crackdowns with symbolic but ineffective measures.

Beyond the moral dimension, Syria has for decades shown itself to be one of the most malign actors in the region. It continues to closely align with Iran, who is assisting it in its crackdown. It facilitates a free flow of weapons across its borders to Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, and for years it ushered across the Iraqi border jihadis who killed countless Iraqis and our own servicemen and women.

Damascus also hosts the headquarters of a number of international terrorist organizations, including Hamas.

Although many questions remain about what government would follow Assad should the regime fall, there are many steps that the U.S. could be taking at this time to influence that outcome.

It is also noteworthy that the administration has not yet spoken of withdrawing its recently appointed Ambassador in Damascus, Robert Ford, or of kicking out the Damascus Ambassador in Washington.

So, again, just following some of the questions of some of my colleagues, I hope the administration will take back there is considerable concern here, at least in this committee, about much tougher action with respect to Syria.

And I welcome any comment from either.

Mr. POSNER. If I can, just one comment on your last point. I don't think there is any difference between us in terms of the severity of the situation. We are mindful, we are watching it, we are monitoring it, we are reporting on it every hour of every day.

Ambassador Ford has been for us a vehicle, an individual who can reach out both to the Syrian Government at the highest levels but also to reach out to people who are on the receiving end of this violence.

I worked for many years, as you indicated in the outset, in the nongovernmental world. And one of the worst things that can happen in a situation where thousands of people are being arrested, where they are being shot, where they are disappearing, where there are all these violations going on, people want to know that governments like the United States are there, meeting with them, aware of what they are facing, and trying to help them in a day-to-day way. Ambassador Ford, that is what he is doing every day. He is spending long hours helping families, meeting with victims, meeting with human rights advocates, meeting with journalists, trying to mitigate what is a terrible situation.

So we can have a broader debate about the overall policy, but this aspect of it, I think it is right for us to have a presence there, it is right for us to have a senior diplomat whose role it is really to be our advocate-in-chief in Damascus and in Syria fighting for the very principles of human rights that you and I are talking about.

Mr. CHABOT. My time has expired; and I recognize the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Deutch, for 5 minutes.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Posner, I would like to follow up on the chairman's question and your response. Can you lay out in a little greater detail how this process works? Ambassador Ford, you said, can reach out to those who are on the receiving end of the violence and that he has the opportunity to try to mitigate this violence. Can you just describe how that works? When having these meetings and learning of—and meeting directly with the families and hearing directly of the ramifications of these actions taken by the Syrian Government and this regime, how does that then—how does he then communicate with the regime? What does he communicate with the regime? And, ultimately, what message are we sending?

Mr. POSNER. We received a report from one of the human rights organizations yesterday or today that perhaps as many as 1,000 people have been arrested since Monday in half a dozens cities in Syria. We gather that information. The Ambassador takes that information. He meets with these organizations but also family members of the people who have been detained. He and others in the

Embassy then approach the government. It is a constant process of both trying to figure out where people are, how families can get access, how they can get a lawyer, and how they can get released.

Now, do we succeed in every case in resolving the differences? No, we don't. But it is enormously helpful to the people who are feeling under horrible strain because they don't know where their loved ones are that an Ambassador from the United States is there, mindful of their story, ready to meet with them, ready to go in and talk to senior officials and say we are concerned about this.

We do this all over the world. It is not unique to Syria. I was in China last week. We have an Embassy. They are very dedicated, doing exactly the same thing. We do it in lots of countries around the world.

It is very important to people that are feeling they have no authority, no power, no ability to challenge or ask questions of their own government that there are influential diplomats, especially from the United States, ready to play their role.

Mr. DEUTCH. And just changing direction for a second, in your testimony, you talked about the human rights abuses occurring at the hands of the Iranian regime. And I would suggest that the wave of democracy sweeping the Middle East really began after the 2009 disputed elections in Iran. Yet, in more recent times, the opposition movement within Iran has not galvanized the same momentum as in other countries throughout the region. Can you discuss the state of the democracy movement in Iran and what this country is doing and what we ought to be doing to empower the opposition?

Mr. POSNER. I think your analysis is correct. Since May 2009, the Government of Iran brutally has cracked down against the opposition. And it has been—I think the hypocrisy of the Iranian Government has become all the more clear in the last few months as they are cheering on people in other societies who are challenging authority while basically brutally cracking down on their own dissenting voices.

We do things both directly and indirectly to try to lend support and solidarity to people in the opposition and people in the human rights movement, democracy movement in Iran. We led an effort at the U.N. in March to have, for the first time, a special rapporteur, a special expert on Iran. The government fought us like crazy on that. We were really in the lead, and we got the U.N. to do that.

We worked with Iranian dissidents both inside and outside the country, hugely dangerous for some of them. We don't broadcast all of those associations. But we are trying to figure out, for example, how they can get better access to information through the Internet. Congress passed the VOICE Act, which gives us some resources to begin to open up access to information and allow Iranian dissidents to speak among themselves.

There is still a vital movement in Iran, many of them young people who are desperate and frustrated beyond belief at what they see is a totally autocratic, despotic government. They will continue to push, and we will continue to help them.

Mr. DEUTCH. To that end, Mr. Posner, we yesterday introduced bipartisan legislation to impose sanctions on those who aid in the abuses of the opposition movement and further human rights

abuses within Iran. I would invite you take a look. I think it is consistent with the efforts that you have just described; and, ultimately, we would be looking to you for some additional guidance as well.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman yields back. We are going to go into a second round, so the gentleman will get another bite at the apple, if he would like.

So I recognize myself for another 5 minutes, and I am going to give a couple of quick questions first.

First of all, after the Assad regime has killed hundreds of Syrians, does the administration believe that the Assad regime holds any legitimacy? Yes or no. Or a sentence, if you need a sentence, after the yes or no.

Ms. WITTES. Mr. Chairman, I think the Syrian people are looking at the actions of this regime and drawing their own conclusions, and I think you see the effect of that in the street.

Mr. CHABOT. I didn't hear a yes or no. And I am talking about the administration, not what they think. Does the administration believe that the Assad regime holds any legitimacy.

Ms. WITTES. Mr. Chairman, I think it is the Syrian's people judgment here that is important, and I think they will draw their conclusions based on his behavior.

Mr. CHABOT. So the administration isn't taking a position at this point, at least from what you are saying?

Ms. WITTES. We are being guided—as Assistant Secretary Posner said earlier, we are being guided by the events we see on the ground, and we are reevaluating on a daily basis.

Mr. CHABOT. Okay. Next question. Does the administration still believe that Abu Mazen is committed to peace, given the fact that he just publicly embraced the leader of Hamas and said Hamas did not have to recognize Israel's right to exist?

Ms. WITTES. Mr. Chairman, I think Abu Mazen—President Abbas has over the course of his career exercised a lot of leadership on this issue as somebody who is committed to a negotiated solution with Israel. This reconciliation agreement is something that has yet to play out. We are going to be looking at it very closely; and, as I said, we are going to be looking for some very specific things before we can make any assessment as to what the impact will be on our policy. But I think President Abbas' personal commitments that he has made in office have been supportive of the process.

Mr. CHABOT. Let me go down a different road here.

I had a former Arab head of state in my office just yesterday, and we talked for a good hour about a whole range of issues. He was in the Middle East, although it was in my office. And he kept coming—he must have six different times come back to the, well, if we can just solve the Israeli-Palestinian problem, everything else falls into line. And he said it over and over again. And I disputed that, and I think that has been used as an excuse for the corrupt governments that many of the Arab governments have had in the Middle East for years, but I would like to see what the administration believes about that.

Mr. POSNER. I agree with what you say. There have been a number of actions at the U.N. and elsewhere where the Israeli-Palestinian dispute has become the centerpiece and in some ways to the exclusion of so many other problems in the region. And what is interesting about events of the last several months is that people who took to Tahrir Square in Egypt or to the streets in Tunisia and all these other countries are so focused on their own future. It is striking how much the focus is on how to democratize, how to open up, how to create greater opportunities in Syria, in Egypt, in all of these other countries.

So I think we are seeing a change in the region. It is a welcome change. There is now on the merits a discussion about what governance and what democracy and what the future holds throughout the Middle East, and I think we ought to be supportive of that.

Mr. CHABOT. Let me conclude—I have only got a short period of time left here—on a couple of points, just to wrap this up. On both sides I think it is pretty clear that there is considerable concern with the administration's lack of greater emphasis on Syria, more action there, more affirmative things done, when you have the regime that essentially has killed hundreds of their own people and probably much worse than that over the years. So that is something I would strongly urge the administration to look at very closely. I know that they have spent time on Libya, considerable time and effort there, but I think Syria warrants it.

Secondly, relative to this reconciliation, I have great skepticism. The way it was explained to me by the foreign minister of Egypt, who is very excited about this, much more so than Prime Minister Netanyahu, obviously, was that you have Hamas and you have the Palestinian Authority, and they come together and have elections and form some independent entity of some sort, and then that is the independent entity that Israel is going to negotiate.

Well, as far as I am concerned, it is a nonstarter. Because everybody knows that Hamas is right behind this independent entity, and they still haven't met the Quartet's requirements, principles, as we know. So, whereas I always hope that peace will break out there, I don't really believe it is real.

And then, finally, relative to Egypt, we met with a lot of the young leaders, the people that were on Tahrir Square, we met with the generals, we met with a whole range of people, and one of the things of considerable concern to me is, first of all, Israel's role—or, excuse me, Egypt's role in this reconciliation and that they bought into it, but even more so their change in engagement with Iran. They seem to be much more willing to engage Iran.

And we all know that Ahmadinejad has essentially said that his intention is to wipe Israel off the map. And we also know that he seems to be bound and determined to move forward on this nuclear program, despite the fact that our allies and the United States have been attempting to do this non-militarily through sanctions through years now.

But Iran and Egypt's sidling up to them is of considerable concern, I believe. Could you comment on that element, Egypt getting closer to Iran and what the administration's attitude would be toward that and what we ought to do about it?

Ms. WITTES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that is a crucial question, and it is one that we are spending a lot of time focusing on ourselves.

We remain deeply concerned about Iran's role in the region, its sponsorship of terrorism, its illicit nuclear program, and its failure to comply with its own international obligations in that regard. And what we see is that, as these events have taken place across the region, the Iranians have been seeking to exploit them in order to distract from that regional agenda. But they have been doing that in a way that I would say has exposed their tremendous hypocrisy in claiming to support popular movements elsewhere in the region that they think will work to their advantage while engaging in brutal repression at home and now, as we see, are complicit in Syrian repression as well.

So, from our perspective, the developments in the region and the work that we can do to support democratic transition in this region will work to Iran's disadvantage. This is part of the strategic opportunity that we are presented with here, and it is one that we want to pursue.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you.

Just let me conclude with one other thing I just want to mention on Iran. One of the mistakes I think that the United States made was when there was at least a chance it looked like the people were rising up that we didn't give them additional support. And I know that there was the thinking that if the United States gets in they will use the United States and say, well, these people are all just—it is the U.S., it is the great Satan, it is Israel and all that kind—they are going to say that stuff anyway, and they said it then.

But I think we should have been much more engaged probably behind the scenes. But I think we should have given more encouragement to those people.

But the information that we gather is that there is a significant, essentially, wiping out of all of the leaders. They had cameras, and they are killing people on a regular basis over there, and that is something I think we need to do, and I know it is somewhat limited what we can do.

But these people are out there trying to speak out and trying to enjoy the same freedoms, maybe not the United States to this level, but at least free from this type of regime that they have been under for decades now, and the people are one after another being wiped out. And that is one of the reasons that I think we haven't seen, you know, sweep and fear. If there is any country in that region you would like to see this happen, it would be Iran. I think they were ahead of everybody else, unfortunately; and maybe if it had happened now, maybe it would have been different.

But anyway, you don't have to respond, but to the extent that the administration can think about that, I would, as chair of this committee, appreciate it.

And without anything else coming before the committee, members will have 5 days to supplement their statements or questions.

If there is nothing further to come before the committee, we are adjourned. Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 3:23 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia
Steve Chabot (R-OH), Chairman

April 28, 2011

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live, via the WEBCAST link on the Committee website at <http://www.hcfa.house.gov>):

DATE: Thursday, May 5, 2011

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: Shifting Sands: Political Transitions in the Middle East, Part 2

WITNESSES: The Honorable Michael H. Posner
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.
U.S. Department of State

Ms. Tamara Wittes
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
U.S. Department of State

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON _____ HEARING

Day THU Date MAY 5 Room 2172Starting Time 2:10 Ending Time 3:20Recesses ☐ (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____)Presiding Member(s) CHABOT

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒
Executive (closed) Session ☐
Televised ☐Electronically Recorded (taped) ☐
Stenographic Record ☐

TITLE OF HEARING:

Shifting Sands: Part II

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chabot, Manzello, Buente
Chandler, Schwartz, Connolly, Deutscher

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED _____Ku Ah
Subcommittee Staff Director

Committee Members (Updated 1/25/2011)

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Ackerman, Gary L. | ☐ Keating, William |
| ☐ Bass, Karen | ☐ Kelly, Mike |
| ☐ Berman, Howard L. | ☐ Mack, Connie |
| ☐ Bilirakis, Gus | ☒ Manzullo, Donald A. |
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| ☒ Deutch, Ted | ☐ Rivera, David |
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| | ☐ Wilson, Joe |

The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)

Shifting Sands: Political Transitions in the Middle East, Part 2
Thursday, May 5, 2011
2pm

It is notable that Osama bin Laden's end coincided with the pro-democracy revolutions across the Middle East. The end of bin Laden interrupted neither the rebel fighting in Libya nor the transition in Egypt. Observers theorized that the "Arab awakening" showed the people of the Middle East the efficacy of directed protests. It is as if bin Laden's end was a blip on the radar of men and women who had more important matters to attend to—namely permanently shifting the political paradigm in their countries. But the future of another key issue—the Middle East peace process—is unclear. While the world was processing the news about the operation in Abbottabad, Hamas and Fatah were planning on a reconciliation deal which they signed earlier this week.

The reaction of various Palestinian factions to bin Laden's death was mixed. The Palestinian Authority (PA) spokesperson Ghassan Khatib said, "Getting rid of Bin Laden is good for [world peace] but what counts is [overcoming] the discourse and the methods -- the violent methods - that were created and encouraged by Bin Laden..." In an unfortunate but predictable manner for a terrorist group, Hamas condemned the death of Osama bin Laden. The group's leader, Ismail Haniyeh, called bin Laden a "holy warrior" and "ask[ed] God to offer him mercy with the true believers and the martyrs."¹ There were mixed reports of Fatah's military arm's reaction, which only demonstrates the often equivocal tendencies of certain factions within the peace process.

It is troubling that Fatah and Hamas have decided to reconcile, and in the process, an aide to PA President and Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas said the Quartet should drop demands that Hamas recognize Israel. This completely contradicts the United States' long-standing conditions on Hamas, namely that: Hamas must recognize Israel's right to exist, renounce violence, and abide by past peace deals. It is unclear how the PA will alter its negotiation strategy with Israel in the face of this new development.

In any post bin Laden analysis, one ought not to mischaracterize the effect of bin Laden's death on the movements in the Middle East. In fact, a recent poll by the Pew Research Center concluded, "In the months leading up to Osama bin Laden's death, a survey of Muslim publics around the world found little support for the al Qaeda leader."² But the effect on radical elements in the Middle East is unknown. I look forward to exploring these and other issues at today's hearing. Thank you Mr. Chairman.

¹ According to multiple news outlets, such as Salon.com and Haaretz.

² Pew Research Center (May 2, 2011) <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1977/poll-osama-bin-laden-death-confidence-muslim-publics-at-qaeda-favorability>.

