

THE FISCAL YEAR 2025 BUDGET REQUEST FOR NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH
AFRICA, AND CENTRAL ASIA

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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THE FISCAL YEAR 2025 BUDGET REQUEST FOR NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

Thursday, May 23, 2024

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:37 a.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Joe Wilson (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. WILSON. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome and good morning. The subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia of the Foreign Affairs Committee will come to order. The audience is reminded that any disruptions will result upon a gavel of the suspension of anyone who disrupts the meeting, and the Capitol Police will remove anyone who disrupts the meeting.

With that in mind, the purpose of the hearing is to discuss the President's Fiscal Year 2025 budget request for this State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and USAID which we all appreciate both bipartisan. With this in mind, I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SUBCOMMITTEE CHAIRMAN JOE WILSON

The last few years have seen monumental events and shifts in the Middle East and North Africa. The historic Abraham Accords were a tremendous accomplishment by the Trump administration toward a stable and prosperous Middle East. With our allies and partners, there was tremendous progress toward normalization and extraordinary prosperity. Those partnerships have never been more critical.

On October 7th, 2023, the world watched as Iranian terrorist puppet Hamas murderously slaughtered Israeli citizens. Hamas perpetrated the largest single attack on the Jewish people since the Holocaust. War Criminal Putin, the Chinese Communist Party, and the terrorist regime in Tehran have escalated their common goals, the destruction of democracy around the world.

This new axis of evil has worked to undermine global security by stealing critical natural resources, disrupting global supply chains. And as we've seen by the Houthi attacks of shipping lanes, they face sadly minimal consequences. Yet this administration has not shown the necessary leadership to get the world through the crisis,

much less reestablish deterrence which is so critical of our adversaries.

Sadly, the President pausing at least one and threatening to delay more critical weapons shipments to Israel is a sad example. Instead of insuring Israel has the tools it needs to eliminate the threat of the Hamas terrorist, this administration prioritized the construction of an unnecessary pier in Gaza that according to the Department of Defense isn't even helping aid the people in need. America needs a clear and consistent policy from the United States to counter the Iranian backed terrorist puppets in their proliferation of missiles and weaponized drones.

This policy must include strengthening regional air and maritime defense cooperation and fulfilling arms sales with related security agreements without delay to ensure our partners' and allies' security needs are fully met. The intentions of Hamas are extremely clear. They made it very clear in the goals of their charter of August 18, 1988.

And I quote Article 7, "The day of judgment will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews, killing the Jews. Then the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will result into the last Jew behind a rock. Come and kill him," end of quote.

This administration has led countries across the region to question America's longtime commitments to the region. The United States leadership vacuum was publicly underscored by the recent murder of three American troops, Sergeant William Jerome Rivers, Specialist Kennedy Ladon Sanders, and Specialist Riona Alexandra Moffet. When the Iranian puppet Hezbollah killed American citizens, sadly the administration chose to halfheartedly, if at all, to respond.

And I particularly identify these were Army Reservists from my neighboring State of Georgia. And I served in the Reserve myself. It's just horrifying to think that three persons were killed by Hezbollah and 40 others were injured.

The American people deserve better than this when we continue the pattern of the administration. And just this week, I was grateful to have a phone call with a very dedicated and dynamic family of the late Dr. Majd Kamalmaz. Dr. Kamalmaz was an American psychologist who was murdered by the criminal Assad regime in Syria after being kidnaped by the regime in 2017.

This administration has not made any statement of condolence or condemnation of the criminal Assad regime for killing a Syrian American citizen. But sadly, the administration did issue condolences for Abraham Raisi, the Butcher of Tehran who was single-handedly responsible for the murder of tens of thousands of Iranian civilians. This juxtaposition clearly shows where the administration has chosen to side unfortunately with dictators.

It's time to reevaluate the U.S. relationship with Iraq. The Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces are working against the best interest to the United States and democracy. I am grateful to have had an amendment to the NDAA yesterday on this topic, designating a report on the malign influence of the PMF and their collaboration with the regime in Tehran.

I am grateful that my two oldest sons, Allen and Addison, have served in Iraq to liberate the people of Iraq. And so I have, again,

a special interest for the people of Iraq that they have a bright future. And it can't be with the Iranian influence. Finally, the United States continues to be the most generous nation in the world with regard to international aid.

However, the weaponization of international aid through diversion by dictators and terrorists is a widespread problem that must be confronted. Steps must be taken to ensure aid is not diverted to dictators and reaches organizations such as the White Helmets which actually work to help the people of Syria. I'm grateful that my amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act yesterday passed unanimously to prevent normalization of the mass murder Assad.

The world is currently engaged in a global conflict that we did not choose. Dictators with rule of gun on one side beginning with the invasion, February 24, 2022, by war criminal Putin and democracy and rule of law on the other. Today, all eyes are on the Middle East, and we look forward to hearing from you how you plan to promote peace through strength and budget for the year.

Thank you, witnesses, for your time. And now I'm so grateful. We have with us today back in his rightful place, the ranking member, the gentleman from Minnesota, Mr. Dean Phillips for his opening statements.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SUBCOMMITTEE RANKING MEMBER DEAN PHILLIPS

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the kind words and your leadership. And just a reminder to all of us and all of you and anybody who might be watching that this is a committee dedicated to diplomacy and to peace, not to war. We are here to identify tactics, provide resources, inspiration, and strategies to end bloodshed.

And I know I speak for every single one of my colleagues, Democrats and Republicans, when I say that any child, any child in this world, Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Agnostic who loses a life in war is one child too many. I want to thank Assistant Secretary Leaf and Deputy Assistant Administrator Pryor for being with us today. And clearly, the world has changed considerably since our last hearing less than a year ago.

Discussion about strengthening U.S. engagement in the Middle East, countering Russian and Chinese influence in the region, and promoting regional integration and economic growth have been supplanted by the appalling bloodshed in both Israel and Gaza. The Hamas terror attack of October 7th claimed 1,200 Israeli lives and 253 hostages, including Americans. I want to reiterate that.

Americans continue to be held hostage in Gaza by a terror organization with approximately 134 remaining in captivity today. And many of the women and girls killed or held captive have been subject to the most incomprehensible, disgusting sexual violence imaginable at the hands of Hamas terrorists. There's not a single nation in the entire world that would not have responded by aggressively targeting the elimination of Hamas along with its key sponsor, the Iranian regime, are the most destructive and destabilizing elements in the entire Middle East.

Israel has justifiably declared war on Hamas, not the Palestinian people. Hamas has sworn to the destruction of Israel. They are coward who use women and children as human shields.

They are coward who hide in tunnels, thousands of miles of tunnels, under dense population centers. And they are coward who operate and headquarter in hospitals and schools. In the 8 months since October 7th, the United Nations estimates that over 35,000 human beings have been killed in Gaza.

While many thousands are clearly Hamas terrorists, there is no denying the loss of thousands, thousands of innocent lives in Gaza and near famine conditions that are currently ravaging the population. Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Israeli government have a responsibility to ensure increased humanitarian aid reaches Palestinian civilians unimpeded and that all operations to eliminate Hamas terrorists are conducted in accordance with international humanitarian law. And when violations and tragedies occur such as the strike on the World Central Kitchen employees, it is Israeli's responsibility to fully and comprehensively investigate such incidents and hold individuals accountable.

Let me be clear. I am deeply, deeply concerned about the Israeli government's failure to present a credible and actionable strategy to ensure the durable elimination of Hamas, the return of all hostages, and to enable finally Palestinian self-governance and security. It has become clear that Prime Minister Netanyahu seems to be more focused on preserving his own position of power and short-term political advantages over the long-term security and prosperity of both Palestinians and Israelis alike.

So we find ourselves at yet another critical juncture. During last year's hearing, we spoke about the extraordinary possibility of a Saudi-Israeli normalization agreement which despite this crisis still remains a possibility contingent, and I repeat, contingent on Israel and the Arab world taking the courageous steps necessary to realize it. And while Gaza remains front and center, we mustn't forget Hezbollah continuing to violate U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701 by launching thousands of missiles and rockets toward Israel's population centers.

We mustn't forget the Houthis in Yemen who continue to attack commercial and military vessels in the Red Sea, having done so over 68 times while preventing assistance from reaching Yemeni civilians, half of whom desperately need humanitarian aid. And we mustn't forget the millions of displaced people and refugees desperate for the same thing that every single one of us in this room take for granted, a roof over our heads, food on the table for our children, and a future of possibility. The Near East Affairs budget must reflect the acute needs of the region while affording your agencies the ability and the flexibility to effectively respond to these challenges.

I am pleased that Congress finally came together to pass the National Security Supplemental Bill which including 8.7 billion in military aid and defense assistance to Israel and 9 billion in global humanitarian aid, much of which will be deployed to Gaza.

I also urge your continued focus on repatriation and reintegration efforts for ISIS families in refugee camps like al-Hol and Roj in northeast Syria and your commitment to working to address the

humanitarian and security conditions inside those camps. We also must address Democratic backsliding in Tunisia and pushback against President Saied's authoritarian rule and his continued destruction of institutional checks and balances, arrests, and targeting of political adversaries and silencing of the media and civil society.

And, finally, we must continue to encourage the selection of a Lebanese president, long overdue, who can unite the country, promote transparency and accountability and finally put the interests of the Lebanese people above individual enrichment and outside influence. Lebanon is facing a horrific economic crisis, a refugee crisis, and a Hezbollah crisis. We cannot address these things without a legitimate government in place.

Most of all, thank you to both of you, our witnesses, to your teams for all the extraordinary work that you do every day on behalf of the United States of America and humanity. With that, I yield back, Mr. Chair.

Mr. WILSON. And indeed, thank you, Congressman Dean Phillips. And it's somewhat sad. We're in the final months of Congressman Phillips serving in Congress. He's going on to bigger and better things in the future. But he shall be missed. But you can tell his passion and his background is so appreciated in a bipartisan way.

We are pleased to have as distinguished witnesses today Hon. Barbara A. Leaf, the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the Department of State, and Ms. Jeanne Pryor, the Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Bureau of the Middle East at USAID. Thank you for being here today, and your full statements will be made for the record. And we will keep the spoken remarks to 5 minutes so that we have time for members to ask questions. And I now recognize Assistant Secretary Leaf for the opening statement.

STATEMENT OF BARBARA LEAF

Ms. LEAF. Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Phillips, members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on the President's Fiscal Year 202025 budget request for the Middle East and North Africa which remains—a region which remains of vital importance to U.S. interests. While the Israel-Hamas conflict and escalation by Iran and its proxies complicate our work, the administration is fully committed to leading the collective action necessary for a secure and stable region responsive to the needs of its people. Diplomacy is the best means to address the issues at hand, and your support will undergird our vigorous diplomatic engagements to advance U.S. interests and contests strategic competitors seeking to exploit post-October 7th instability.

A regional engagement is anchored by a resolute effort to reinforce our partnerships as they are tested by conflict. We're committed to building enduring peace and security for and between Israelis and Palestinians, including through eventual steps to establish a Palestinian State existing side by side with Israel. Our Fiscal Year 202025 request includes crucial lifesaving aid for Palestinians in Gaza, as well as millions of refugees and internally displaced persons in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Yemen.

Our unrivaled network of partnerships, including those forged through the Abraham Accords, creates integrated defense and deterrence to counter malign actors. Israel with the help of the United States and a network of our allies was able to defend itself from Iran's unprecedented missile and drone attack. To hold Iran accountable, we engage with EU partners to secure expansion of sanction authorities and work jointly with the G-7 and others to impose sanctions.

Our regional partners play an important role in ensuring regional stability and security. Egypt remains a critical partner for addressing the Israel-Hamas conflict and preventing regional spill-over. It serves as a key staging ground, an entry point for humanitarian aid, and as a throughput for those evacuating Gaza.

With Qatar, Egypt is indispensable to our efforts to secure the release of hostages. Jordan has also played a leading role in promoting peace and security in the region. And that cooperation remains critical to our own security priorities.

In 2022, we signed the 7-year MOU on assistance. Jordan is making progress toward its benchmarks, and we will be with them every step of the way to implement them. Diplomatic engagement and solutions that build resilient institutions are the only viable paths toward restoring and maintaining stability in the region.

Diplomacy can allow Lebanese and Israeli civilians on both sides of the Blue Line to return home. Our support enables Lebanese armed forces to provide stability and security for those living on both sides of the Blue Line. We were grateful for the role they played protecting our embassy perimeter in Beirut during violent protests last October.

Our request also calibrates support for the Tunisian people and to address their needs in an increasingly forbidding environment. Targeted U.S. investments have promoted professionalism and accountability within the Tunisian armed forces and counters strategic competitors attempting to gain influence by exploiting Tunisia's current security challenges. Your support for the Department's plans to establish an interim diplomatic facility in Libya allows us to scale up our diplomacy amid an intensification of Russia's destabilizing influence.

Libya's funding under the Global Fragility Act and our \$19.25 million in bilateral assistance request supports Libya's eventual transition to a democratic, stable, and unified states. We seek a durable resolution to the conflict in Yemen through an inclusive peace process under U.N. auspices. Reckless Houthi attacks in the Red Sea threaten the regional and global economy and undermine those prospects.

The \$41.6 million in Yemen request advances our priorities of lasting peace in Yemen and economic security for the Yemeni people. Our commitment to greater regional stability includes the enduring defeat of ISIS which continues to pose a resilient threat. With funds raised through the coalition and continued support of Congress, we can address and resettle families from al-Hol and Roj camps and provide stabilization to foster resilience in local communities.

A key U.S. priority is fostering a stable and sovereign Iraq integrated regionally and with the global economic system. Our work

with Iraq to diversify and grow its economy and develop real energy independence helps the Sudani government deliver better opportunities for the Iraqi people. And that includes an inclusive State for Iraq's religious and ethnic minorities.

While events in the last year have injected dramatic dynamics into the Middle East and North Africa, our commitment to the region remains steadfast. The Department is committed to supporting our partners working together to address shared challenges. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the President's budget request, and I want to close by thanking the subcommittee for your continued support for our efforts in the regions. And I want to give a shout out to my staff in the field and the staff in the NEA Bureau who helped me prepare for this today.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Leaf follows:]

Statement for the Record
Barbara A. Leaf
Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee
Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia
May 23, 2024

Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Phillips, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify on the President's FY 2025 budget request for the Middle East and North Africa and our priorities in the region, which remains of vital importance to U.S. interests. While the Israel-Hamas conflict and escalation by Iran and its proxies complicate our work, the Administration is fully committed to leading the collective action necessary for a secure and stable region responsive to the needs of its people.

Diplomacy is the best means to address the issues at hand, and your support for this Request will undergird our vigorous diplomatic engagements to advance U.S. goals and interests in the Middle East and North Africa and contest strategic competitors seeking to exploit post-October 7 instability.

Ending and Mitigating Conflict

Our regional engagement is anchored by a resolute effort to reinforce our partnerships as they are tested by conflict. The Secretary has worked tirelessly, engaging regional partners to reach a ceasefire in **Gaza** that secures the release of hostages, guarantees the flow of humanitarian assistance, promotes protection for civilians, and points us toward a political process that can bring stability. We are pursuing an end to the conflict that must be built on conditions of enduring security – for Israelis, who otherwise fear a replay of October 7, and for the Palestinians of Gaza who need and deserve to rebuild their lives free from fear and insecurity. We are committed to building a broader enduring peace and security for and between Israelis and Palestinians – including through practical, timebound, and irreversible steps to establish a Palestinian state existing side-by-side with Israel.

On the humanitarian front, we are very concerned that an expanded operation in Rafah will worsen the humanitarian crisis. Rafah is the hub of all humanitarian

work and a full-scale military operation would strain the struggling humanitarian community and impede delivery. It is critical these crossings are open for humanitarian aid to enter southern Gaza. Even prior to the start of the Rafah operation, more assistance was needed inside Gaza and humanitarian actors needed to be able to reach civilians wherever they are.

President Biden's and the Secretary's direct engagement last month produced Israel's pledge to take specific, concrete steps to surge aid and address civilian harm. We continue to urge Israel to improve deconfliction and take tangible steps to allow the entry of more aid and facilitate distribution throughout Gaza. We are pushing to accelerate delivery of assistance on all fronts: by air, land, and sea. Israel has opened a northern crossing and the Ashdod port and critical crossings, including Kerem Shalom and Rafah, must remain open. The U.S. government and international partners have engaged in air drops, and we have opened a maritime humanitarian corridor, fulfilling the President's directive for the U.S. military to construct a temporary pier to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid directly into Gaza.

As the President and the Secretary have noted, these efforts are not enough. Deconfliction remains a major challenge for humanitarian workers and experts alike – exemplified by the more than 190 UN staff and the more than 200 aid workers who have been killed since the beginning of this conflict. We will closely monitor the speedy implementation of Israeli commitments in the immediate term. President Biden has been very clear with Israel. There are 1.4 million innocent civilians, and we want to see a plan that speaks to how Israel is going to ensure their lives are protected. Our FY 2025 Request includes crucial life-saving aid for Palestinians in Gaza, as well as millions of refugees and internally displaced persons in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Türkiye, and Yemen. While we support refugees around the region, we have made clear that we oppose any displacement of Palestinians from Gaza.

These efforts are no substitute for a negotiated settlement between Israelis and Palestinians. A two-state solution is the best way to ensure Israel's future as a Jewish, democratic state, living in peace alongside a viable, sovereign, and democratic Palestinian state. We are engaging the new Palestinian Authority (PA) leadership to press for credible reform. The international community, including the EU, G7, and others are working on all aspects of Gaza post-conflict planning,

including security, governance, and early recovery. And, we are engaging key partners to mobilize the political support and resources needed to enable recovery.

Our unrivaled network of partnerships creates integrated defense and deterrence to counter malign actors. Israel, with the help of the United States and our allies and partners in the region and Europe, was able to defend itself from **Iran's** unprecedented missile and drone attack. To hold Iran to account for this reckless attack, the Administration spearheaded an international diplomatic response, in close coordination with our European and G7 partners. We identified and sanctioned additional individuals and entities connected to Iran's problematic and dangerous behavior, adding to the over 600 Iran-related individuals and entities the United States has sanctioned in the last three years. We also engaged heavily with our EU partners to secure the expansion of EU sanctions authorities to include Iran's drone and missile proliferation to Russia and regional proxies and partners and worked jointly with G7 and other partners to undertake joint sanctions actions. These steps are part and parcel of the broader U.S. effort to disrupt Iran's destabilizing activities and dismantle its financial and logistics networks.

Our regional partners also play an important role ensuring regional stability and security. **Egypt** remains a critical partner for addressing the Israel-Hamas conflict and preventing regional spillover, including by playing a key role to help negotiate a release of Israeli hostages. Egypt serves as a key staging ground and entry point for humanitarian aid into Gaza, and also served as a throughput for American citizens, LPRs, their families, and others as they evacuated Gaza. Despite its own economic challenges, Egypt hosts more than 500,000 refugees from Sudan. Our request reflects Egypt's important regional role and our longstanding security partnership, including on border and maritime security and counterterrorism.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of U.S.-**Jordan** bilateral relations. Jordan has been a leader in delivering and coordinating life-saving humanitarian aid into Gaza, and we continue to work together to support Jordan as a humanitarian hub to deliver overland aid. Jordan has also played a leading role in promoting peace and security in the region, and countering terrorism, including in our efforts to defeat ISIS. In addition to supporting efforts to fight terrorism Syria, Jordan has been a key leader in countering Iran's malign role in the region and promoting a

vision for a more peace, integrated, and prosperous Middle East. Our security cooperation reaches back more than 50 years, and that cooperation remains critical to our regional security priorities in the Middle East today.

At the same time, Jordan is not shying away from its ambitious political and economic reform agenda. In 2022, we signed the seven-year U.S.-Jordanian Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on assistance. Jordan is making progress toward benchmarks on water and public sector reforms. We will be with Jordan every step along the way as they increase civic engagement, promote good governance, advance gender equality, and support political reform and participation.

Advancing Diplomatic Solutions

We are working continuously to prevent Iran and its proxies in Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen, from expanding the crisis in Gaza. Diplomatic engagement and solutions that build resilient institutions are the only viable path toward restoring and maintaining calm.

Diplomacy can allow **Lebanese** and Israeli civilians on both sides of the Blue Line to return home. U.S. security assistance allows the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to maintain joint patrols and coordinate with the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and support the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1559, 1680, and 1701. Our support enables the LAF's expanded role providing stability and security for those living on both sides of the Blue Line and we were grateful for the role the LAF played in protecting our Embassy perimeter in Beirut during violent protests in October.

We have long-standing concerns about Lebanon's domestic political and economic crisis. Lebanon's political elite has the agency and indeed the responsibility for taking steps to elect a president empowered to form a government and implement reforms, including those proposed by the IMF. While difficult, reforms are the only way out of the country's economic collapse. The Lebanese people deserve better than this. The time for action is now.

Our request calibrates support for the **Tunisian** people to address the needs of the economically vulnerable and those contributing to an inclusive political future in an increasingly forbidding environment. We are rigorously reviewing U.S.

efforts and programs in Tunisia to ensure they are fit to purpose for the Tunisian people – targeting the needs of the economically vulnerable and contributing to an inclusive future. Security assistance, which has been cut by nearly half following the events of July 2021, remains focused on our vital national interests of protecting U.S. diplomatic personnel and facilities, promoting the welfare of American citizens in Tunisia, and sustaining effective counterterrorism pressure, while promoting accountability and respect for the rule of law. We remain intensively engaged with the Tunisian government at all levels in support of human rights and freedom of expression – universal rights that are explicitly guaranteed in Tunisia’s own constitution. Targeted U.S. investments through Foreign Military Financing have promoted professionalism and accountability within the Tunisian Armed Forces and counter strategic competitors attempting to gain influence by exploiting Tunisia’s security challenges.

Your support for the Department’s plan to establish an interim diplomatic facility in **Libya** allows us to scale up our diplomacy amid an intensification of Russia’s destabilizing influence. Resuming more regular diplomatic activities inside Libya will improve our ability to protect the safety and security of U.S. citizens, promote Libyan economic stability and contributions to global energy security, and support Libyan aspirations for national elections. Over two years of extensive internal planning reinforce our goal of ensuring these diplomatic operations are undertaken prudently and safely.

Amid the ongoing political impasse in Libya, political and security leaders from all regions support the principle of safeguarding the country’s sovereignty and recognize the importance of practical steps to prevent Libya’s further enmeshment in regional conflict. Libya’s funding under the Global Fragility Act and our \$19.25 million bilateral assistance request supports Libya’s eventual transition to a democratic, stable, and unified state as well as stability in Libya’s long-marginalized south where malign actors take advantage of fragile local governance systems.

Security and Stability

We seek a durable resolution to the conflict in **Yemen** secured through an inclusive peace process under UN auspices. Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and surrounding waterways, enabled by Iran’s technical and materiel support,

threaten the regional and global economy and undermine prospects for peace. Intensive regional and multilateral diplomacy with **Saudi Arabia, Oman, the UAE**, and other partners can de-escalate conflict. Simultaneously, we work in coalition with dozens of countries, including **Bahrain**, to defend the freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and surrounding waters. Reckless Houthi attacks cause delivery delays and price increases for badly needed food and medicine for populations across the Middle East, including in Yemen itself. The \$41.6 million Yemen request advances our twin priorities of lasting peace in Yemen and stability and economic security for the Yemeni people.

Our commitment to greater regional stability includes the enduring defeat of ISIS. Despite the great successes of the Global Coalition, ISIS continues to pose a real threat in **Syria, Iraq**, and the wider region. Last year, the Coalition's Stabilization Working Group raised \$599 million for stabilization in areas liberated from ISIS in Iraq and Syria. With the funds raised from partners and continued support of Congress, the Administration will continue crucial stabilization activities, including to address challenges emanating from al-Hol and Roj camps. The FY25 Request of \$118.5 million in ESF for Syria – particularly efforts related to al-Hol – ensures ISIS cannot leverage instability in Syria or recruit vulnerable populations to reconstitute and threaten the United States.

A more integrated Middle East and North Africa – in economic, security and diplomatic terms – would benefit everyone in the region. Whether that is connecting Iraq to the Gulf's energy grid to bolster its sovereignty and independence of action, or promoting better trade connectivity within North Africa, the Department is committed to supporting our partners working together to address shared challenges. Through our Iran assistance program, we maintain active and unprecedented support for Internet freedom in Iran as a central pillar of our efforts to support human rights in Iran. During the height of the protests in 2022 and 2023, as many as one in three Iranians used U.S.-supported anti-censorship and digital security tools, such as VPNs, to stay connected. Millions in Iran continue to use U.S.-supported tools every day.

Our goal is a stable and sovereign **Iraq** integrated regionally and with the global economic system. U.S. support to strengthen Iraq's security, provide economic opportunities for its people, and support Iraq's energy independence all bolster Iraq's sovereignty and counter Iranian influence.

We work with Iraq on financial reforms, strengthening its democracy, respect for human rights, and rule of law, and improving services for the Iraqi people. Our investments are tailored to ensure Iraq is an inclusive state for all the country's religious and ethnic minorities, including those who suffered at the hands of ISIS.

The United States remains the largest provider of humanitarian and development assistance to Iraq. Our work with Iraq to diversify and grow its economy helps the Sudanese government deliver better opportunities for the Iraqi people.

Morocco remains a critical partner on security, stability, and regional integration. The FY25 request maintains and deepens our partnership with Morocco through bilateral assistance supporting shared priorities in education, health, and climate, as well as an additional \$11 million to support Morocco's earthquake reconstruction plan.

Our strong relationship with **Algeria** is crucial to producing significant contributions to European energy security and regional stability. In the UN Security Council, we work together on the toughest global challenges, including the crisis in Gaza and urgent need to end the fighting in Sudan. Our programs in Algeria support our growing collaboration by focusing on climate objectives, economic diversification, and good governance.

Successful regional integration also demands the inclusion of women. The region loses hundreds of millions of dollars every year due to the gender gap in labor force participation. Through the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), we invest in women's economic inclusion through regional programs that empower women in the workforce, enhance economic growth, and develop future leaders through training, scholarships, and fellowships. These programs focus on entrepreneurship in emerging markets such as cybersecurity and digital economies. Women across the Middle East and North Africa are highly educated, and we encourage our partners to energize this largely untapped labor market.

While events over the last year have dramatically changed the Middle East and North Africa, our commitment to the region remains steadfast. We will continue to build sustainable and integrated partnerships and develop shared solutions to

the region's most pressing challenges in search of the better future that we and our partners seek.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the President's FY 2025 Budget Request. I want to close by thanking this Subcommittee for your continued support for our efforts in the region. I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Assistant Secretary Leaf. And we now recognize Department Assistant Administrator Pryor for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF JEANNE PRYOR

Ms. PRYOR. Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Phillips, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here to testify today at this incredibly difficult time in our region. We all know that the Middle East and North Africa are at a critical inflection point. Hamas' abhorrent attack on Israel and the ongoing conflict in Gaza have taken center stage across the globe.

The challenges of the moment offering opportunity in which the relatively modest amounts in our Fiscal Year 2025 request might play an outsized role in shaping a peaceful and prosperous future for the region. While we remain focused on the immediate response, we must also examine the entire scope of the region's challenges in order to envision a path forward. Water and food insecurity, high numbers of displaced persons from conflicts and natural disasters, corruption and economic mismanagement already strained the region's resources prior to October 7th.

The region's fragile economies have been further set behind by the ongoing violence. Palestinian gross domestic product in 2023 declined by 1 billion compared with 2022, all of that in the fourth quarter. And earlier this year, the International Monetary Fund lowered its growth forecast for the region to 2 percent, significantly below the 5.6 percent gross seen in 2022.

Despite the difficulties of this moment, Hamas' horrific attack makes clear the high cost of yielding the competition for the region's future, not only for the United States but also for our regional allies. Our Fiscal Year 2025 request proposes critical investments to address the region's needs. In response to the conflict, we have requested an increase of 10.3 million to mitigate post-conflict needs in Gaza and the West Bank and five million for Lebanon. We've also requested an 11 million increase in funding to support Morocco's recovery from last year's earthquake and an additional 22 million in Syria to reintegrate returnees from al-Hol into their communities.

We will use these increases and other requested investments to build on previous accomplishments. For example, just this month, USAID supported the departure of 66 families from al-Hol camp to Deir ez-Zor Governorate where we are supporting them in their communities with legal assistance, transitional shelter, psychosocial support, and job opportunities. And just this week in Morocco, Administrator Samantha Power announced our partnership with the government of Morocco and an NGO to give direct cash grants to 180 cooperatives whose livelihoods were compromised by the earthquake.

Our peacebuilding work deserves particular attention given the growing divisions in the region. Although tensions remain high, we continue to see signs of hope in the dedicated peacebuilders in the region. Our partners through the Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act remain committed to their work.

And our Middle East Regional Cooperation program has likewise seen positive signals for continued cross border collaboration from its participants. Proposals for collaboration between Palestinian and Israeli researchers remain among the top proposed MERC partnerships. Our Fiscal Year 2025 request continues funding for these critical activities to continue the work of building enduring peaceful ties between Israel and its neighbors.

Despite the numerous regional challenges, space remains to influence the trajectory of the region. The region's young population will play a critical role in shaping their future. We must invest in helping these young people develop a Middle East and North African region that is integrated into the global economy. With the funds requested, we will not only empower the people of the Middle East in North Africa to forge a more promising and prosperous future but also ensure security for America and its allies. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Pryor follows:]

Written Testimony

**Jeanne Pryor, Deputy Assistant Administrator, Bureau for the Middle East, USAID
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Middle East, North Asia, and Central Asia
“Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request for Near Eastern Affairs”
May 23, 2024**

Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Phillips, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here to testify today at this incredibly difficult time in our region. Prospects for peace and stability in the region feel farther away than when we last met, but these current challenges only increase the urgency of our work.

We all know that the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are at a critical inflection point. Hamas’ abhorrent October 7 attack on Israel and the ongoing conflict in Gaza in which more than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed, nearly 80,000 injured and over 1.7 million displaced have taken center stage across the globe.

The dynamics of the current moment may shape the next several decades in the region. Our efforts should lay the foundation for a road to lasting peace and stability and offer viable alternatives to the narratives presented by malign actors seeking to radicalize the impressionable and vulnerable. The challenges of the moment offer an opportunity in which the relatively modest amounts requested in our Fiscal Year 2025 Request might play an outsized role in shaping a peaceful, prosperous, and interconnected future for the region.

Pre-Existing Regional Pressures

It is difficult to look beyond the current conflict in Gaza, particularly as Hamas still holds innocents hostage and more than two million Palestinians face grave humanitarian conditions. However, while we remain focused on the immediate response, we must also examine the entire scope of the region’s challenges in order to envision a path forward. Water and food insecurity, high numbers of displaced persons from conflicts and natural disasters, corruption, and economic mismanagement already strained the region’s resources prior to October 7. The conflict has exacerbated many of these elements further. In addition, the malign influences of regional and global competitors—whether Iran, Russia, or the People’s Republic of China—promulgate misinformation and challenge our efforts to tackle these difficulties head on.

Sufficient water for consumption, agriculture, and sanitation remains out of reach in many areas of this most water-scarce region in the world. The increasing frequency of droughts combined with shrinking water resources results in lower domestic crop yields, adding to the problems of high food and agricultural input prices, which had already risen as imports became more expensive due to Russia's war on Ukraine.

The frequency and severity of droughts also increase the severity of floods as Libyans experienced this past year when floods breached dams, resulting in more than 6,000 deaths and displacing more than 44,000 people from their homes. Unfortunately, 2023 also saw natural disasters strike Türkiye, Syria, and Morocco, as earthquakes destroyed entire cities and claimed more than 60,000 lives. USAID was able to rush lifesaving assistance to the most vulnerable, but for those in northwest Syria already suffering from assaults from Bashar al-Assad's brutal regime, true recovery will remain out of reach while the regime's violence continues with support from Russia.

While USAID continues to help countries conserve limited water resources through improved irrigation technology, water management, and infrastructure, rising regional tensions increase the difficulty of addressing shared issues across borders. Conflicts throughout the region are expected to displace nearly 11.7 million people within their own countries in 2024. The impacts of this violence will inevitably drive more refugees across borders and into partner countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt, which are struggling to support their current refugee populations.

Across these countries and many others of the region, corruption, economic mismanagement, and democratic backsliding aggravate the situation. Governments in Lebanon and Tunisia have not fully embraced essential reforms aimed at stabilizing their economies, and a bloated public sector in Iraq drains crucial resources.

Countering Malign Actors

As the world witnessed in Hamas' horrifying attacks, malign organizations in the region can exploit the region's income and population to dire ends if left unchallenged. The current conflict in the Levant didn't begin on October 7. For years, Hamas, Hezbollah, and other malign actors have exploited the region's challenges and tensions to gain economic and political influence and wield power at the expense of the people they claim to serve.

In addition to Hamas and the region's other Iranian-aligned affiliates, actors such as Russia and strategic competitors such as the People's Republic of China (PRC), have sought to increase their engagements to take advantage of the unpopularity of U.S. policy in the region. Russia

continues its campaigns of meddling in Libya and support for Assad's brutality in Syria. The PRC has attempted to capitalize on the relative unpopularity of the United States to make inroads through predatory loans and investments in Chinese-aligned technological infrastructure across the region and to paint the PRC as the Middle East's benevolent political benefactor.

Despite the difficulty of engaging at this moment, Hamas' audacious attack makes clear the high costs of yielding the competition for the region's future, not only for the United States, but also for our regional allies. At the same time, the dynamics around the conflict in Gaza mean that the U.S. image in MENA is on the decline. However, the interest in engagement with the United States, particularly for economic partnerships, remains.

Positioning for the Future

The region's already fragile economies have been set further behind by the ongoing violence. Palestinian gross domestic product in 2023 declined by \$1 billion compared with 2022, all of that in the fourth quarter, and is projected to decline \$7 billion in 2024 from pre-conflict levels. Tourism revenue in Jordan and Egypt has declined. And earlier this year the International Monetary Fund lowered its growth forecast for the region to two percent, significantly below the 5.6 percent growth seen in 2022.

The rapidly growing population of young people in the MENA region adds a complicating dimension across these challenges. Youth under the age of 24 make up nearly half the region's population, but the youth unemployment rate in the MENA region has long been the highest in the world, particularly among women. Addressing the needs of this sizable population offers fertile ground where modest U.S. investments may make outsized impacts.

Our fiscal year (FY) 2025 Request proposes critical investments to address these needs. In response to the conflict, we have requested an increase of \$10.3 million to mitigate post-conflict needs in Gaza and the West Bank and \$5 million in Lebanon. This will help the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank rebuild their lives in the aftermath of the conflict, and address agriculture and basic education needs in southern Lebanon where the conflict has caused school closures, shuttered businesses, and damaged crops, increasing communities' vulnerability to Hezbollah's influence. This request sustains our commitment to a two-state solution and prioritizes and leverages the value of long-term strategic partnerships.

We have requested an \$11 million increase in funding to support Morocco's recovery from last year's earthquake. In Morocco, USAID is working with a non-governmental organization partner GiveDirectly and Morocco's National Initiative for Human Development to provide direct cash grants to 180 cooperatives whose livelihoods were compromised by the earthquake. This is in

addition to more than 1,400 grants previously awarded to support cooperatives devastated by COVID-19, drought, and inflation.

We are also seeking an additional \$22 million in Syria to further a core objective of the al-Hol Action Plan, reintegrating people to their communities and decreasing their vulnerability to radicalization. USAID programs in this space are already delivering results. In Syria, when 87 Syrian families returned from al-Hol camp to Raqqa this past September, more than 1,350 total referrals were made for economic and social services through the Case Management System, such as legal support, transitional shelter, and psychosocial support services thanks to USAID's assistance. As recently as May 8, USAID supported the departure of 66 families from al-Hol camp to Deir ez-Zour governorate—USAID will support the same referral services for these families in the coming weeks. This comes in addition to the support USAID has provided for the communities to which they are returning, such as increasing job opportunities and revitalizing agriculture for all residents.

In addition to these increases, this request continues critical investments to build on previous advances in stability and security across the region. In Iraq, to drive economic growth, USAID supported more than 10,000 entrepreneurs and leveraged \$42 million in investments and \$80 million in new loans to small and medium enterprises (SME), creating over 5,000 new jobs and an 80 percent growth in SMEs revenues. In Tunisia, USAID helped 49,000 small businesses in underserved regions increase sales by \$610 million and create 56,000 jobs. We also continue other critical investments in the private sector and Tunisian civil society, although we have decreased our funding given the government's continued democratic backsliding.

USAID supported Libya's electric company to develop improved systems resulting in the first full year of uninterrupted electricity production since the fall of the Gaddafi regime. In Lebanon, USAID programs actively concentrate on boosting electricity generation, enhancing the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of municipal power supply, and fostering a favorable environment for renewable energy-based power generation at the local level. This aims to diminish the influence of exploitative actors and mitigate the impacts of conflict on the private sector. USAID continues to support the internationally recognized Republic of Yemen Government based in Aden in south Yemen which opposes the Houthis. USAID created the ongoing Yemeni Foreign Exchange auction to stabilize the currency and is supporting the Republic of Yemen Government in Aden's Central Bank, the Ministry of Finance, the Customs Authority, and the Tax Authority implement more than 11 monetary and fiscal reforms that are vital to the Government's ability to govern, raise revenues, and provide essential services to its struggling people.

Thanks to Congress' support, USAID has allocated over \$200 million to award full undergraduate scholarships to more than 1,900 deserving yet disadvantaged Lebanese and refugee students. More than 68 percent of these students graduate with honors. In Jordan, which is also home to large numbers of regional refugees, USAID supported the construction of the Zara Ma'in Water Treatment Plant, which provides drinking water to an estimated 1.7 million residents in Amman and the As Samra Wastewater Treatment Plant, which treats almost 70 percent of Jordan's wastewater.

The funds included in our FY 2025 Request will allow us to continue these and other such vital efforts to stimulate the private sector, reinvigorate civil society, invest in youth, and improve basic services for millions.

Regional Peacebuilding

Our peacebuilding work deserves particular attention given the growing divisions in the region. Although tensions remain high, we continue to see signs of hope in the dedicated peacebuilders in the region. Our partners through the Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act (MEPPA) remain committed to their work connecting Israelis and Palestinians across borders. Despite the logistical difficulties posed by security constraints, they continue to seek ways to advance their work and maintain connections.

For example, last month MEPPA's Interfaith Peacebuilding Initiative brought together about 80 Muslims, Jews, and Christians from throughout Israel and the West Bank for an interfaith iftar in Jerusalem. For most partners, in-person events have been difficult to sustain due to security constraints and travel restrictions, but all of our partners are looking for ways to adapt. The Palestinian-Israeli Specialist Nursing Hub activity with Project Rozana initially paused its work bringing together 450 Palestinian and Israeli nurses for training, but they have since resumed work in the West Bank. Additionally, in response to the participants' requests, they are continuing to provide language training in Hebrew and Arabic, so Palestinian and Israeli nurses can better understand each other.

Our Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) program has likewise seen positive signals for continued cross border collaboration from its participants where proposals for collaboration between Palestinian and Israeli researchers remain among the top proposed partnerships. Likewise, Moroccan, Jordanian, and Egyptian researchers' interest in collaboration also remained strong. Among our ongoing research activities, our team continues to see scientists in both Israel and Arab nations committed to supporting each other through continued professional and collegial collaboration. For example, MERC-supported researchers recently

hosted a virtual workshop on agrivoltaics which attracted over 60 Israeli, Emirati, Jordanian, and Palestinian participants.

Our FY 2025 Request continues funding for these critical activities to continue the work of building enduring peaceful ties between Israel and its neighbors.

Conclusion

Despite the numerous regional challenges, space remains to influence the trajectory of the region. The region's young population will play a critical role in shaping their future.

We must invest in helping these young people develop a Middle East and North African region that is integrated into the global economy. We must help them obtain education and training that will empower them to create meaningful industries and careers to start and support their own families. Through our assistance, we can ensure they have access to the full range of ideas in an increasingly interconnected world.

The investments in our FY 2025 budget request are critical to underwrite a more transparent, stable, hopeful, and peaceful future for the people of the region. With the funds requested, we will be able to offer the region's youth opportunities and alternatives that counter the false promises of actors who would exploit the region and its people. We will not only empower the people of the Middle East and North Africa to forge a more promising and prosperous future, but also ensure security for America and its allies.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Ms. Pryor. And I now recognize Congressman Brian Mast. And I want to thank him. At our last hearing, he showed his resolve. He stated hour after hour after hour and then was the person to be able to ask a question. So today, the last shall go first. Congressman Brian Mast.

Mr. MAST. I'll take your word on that, Chairman. Thank you. Thank you both for your testimony today. I've reviewed your testimonies prior to your attendance today.

Secretary Leaf, my questions are primarily for you. Having reviewed your testimony, your request for budget, the discussion of post-conflict needs in Gaza, what you're requesting there, and specifically your statement in your written testimony about a two-State solution is the best way to ensure Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic State living in peace alongside a viable, sovereign, and democratic Palestinian State as part of your testimony.

It's fair to say you're the chief diplomat for America over the Mid East, the top dog as they say. That would be a fair categorization of yourself? Yes, ma'am. Turn your microphone on so everybody can hear you.

Ms. LEAF. Yes.

Mr. MAST. Very good. So my first question, I've asked this of others before. Have you objectively assessed your pursuit of a Palestinian state?

Ms. LEAF. So Congressman, when have I objectively assessed it, meaning are the conditions there right now. They're not there.

Mr. MAST. Did you objectively—did you just decide, hey, I think there should be a Palestinian state? Or did you objectively look at this?

Ms. LEAF. Longstanding policy and it's certainly been the stated policy of this administration.

Mr. MAST. But did you personally as the top dog over the Middle East objectively assess whether we should make a State out of a group that currently holds five Americans hostage—roughly five Americans hostage—

Ms. LEAF. We—

Mr. MAST [continuing]. Killed 35 Americans in the last couple months? Did you objectively assess?

Ms. LEAF. So Congressman, we have no intention of working with Hamas in that endeavor. What we're talking about is something entirely different.

Mr. MAST. I would hope you don't.

Ms. LEAF. Yes.

Mr. MAST. So let me ask a question related to that. But you did objectively assess this?

Ms. LEAF. Yes.

Mr. MAST. Okay. Who did you objectively assess would become the leader of the Palestinian State that you wish to create?

Ms. LEAF. It's not for us to designate a leader.

Mr. MAST. But if you are objectively assessing whether the United States of America should put resources into creating a Palestinian State as the top diplomat over the Middle East, we would expect that you objectively assessed who would become the leader of this State.

Ms. LEAF. No, it is not for us to determine that.

Mr. MAST. I didn't say you were going to determine it. I said who do you objectively assess will be the leader of that?

Ms. LEAF. I don't have—I don't have an objective assessment as to who will be the leader of that.

Mr. MAST. So you did not objectively assess who——

Ms. LEAF. That's not part of the——

Mr. MAST [continuing]. Would become the leader of the State that you wish to make?

Ms. LEAF. No.

Mr. MAST. So you don't assess—well, maybe you can do it right now. Would you assess that Hamas would be the leader of that state?

Ms. LEAF. Absolutely not.

Mr. MAST. Palestinian Islamic Jihad?

Ms. LEAF. Absolutely not.

Mr. MAST. Fatah?

Ms. LEAF. Fatah is not the leader of anything right now. It is——

Mr. MAST. I'm asking you if you assess.

Ms. LEAF. Fatah is an organization. It's a political organization.

Mr. MAST. Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade.

Ms. LEAF. It's one of the number—no, absolutely——

Mr. MAST. Lion's Den.

Ms. LEAF. Any of the—any of the FTOs, any of the organizations we have designated as foreign terrorist organizations are exactly that. That is not what we're talking about.

Mr. MAST. But certainly as you being our top diplomat in the area, you should be able to understand that we should have every expectation that if you're pursuing, creating a Palestinian State that you would've objectively assessed who you think would be the leader of that. Now let me ask you something else. Do you objectively assess that if they were made a State today that they would have to be labeled a State sponsor of terror?

Ms. LEAF. Who is the they in that question?

Mr. MAST. A Palestinian State. Would it—a Palestinian State created prior to October 7, would it be a State sponsor of terror today?

Ms. LEAF. It's a theoretical question I can't answer.

Mr. MAST. Would you label them a State sponsor of terror today?

Ms. LEAF. It's a theoretical question.

Mr. MAST. Now you're just acting——

Ms. LEAF. Actually, one in the past.

Mr. MAST [continuing]. Like people do in D.C. Would you label them a State sponsored—do they meet the requirements?

Ms. LEAF. Who's they?

Mr. MAST. Well, their government is Hamas.

Ms. LEAF. No. If you're talking about Hamas, I've already answered that question.

Mr. MAST. But that is their government?

Ms. LEAF. No, but we're not talking about Gaza. We're talking about a Palestinian State. And that's a larger question. And it would be a negotiated process.

Mr. MAST. Who would negotiate that?

Ms. LEAF. The U.S. would offer its good offices to negotiate between the parties.

Mr. MAST. So we would negotiate it. But it's not up to us to think about who would be the leader of that Palestinian state?

Ms. LEAF. Ever in the past——

Mr. MAST. You should not objective assess that?

Ms. LEAF. We have never in the past designated leaders in the guise of such negotiations.

Mr. MAST. So I don't think what you're saying exactly adds up here, that you wouldn't assess who would be the leader of this Palestinian State.

Ms. LEAF. For the Palestinians to determine.

Mr. MAST. But the Palestinians——

Ms. LEAF. But we're not talking——

Mr. MAST [continuing]. Determined this in the past. And they determined Hamas would be their leadership. Polling after polling shows they would choose Hamas as their leadership.

Ms. LEAF. The PLO is the recognized representative of the Palestinian people. Hamas is an FTO and lies outside of the PLO.

Mr. MAST. You think the PLO——

Ms. LEAF. The PLO is——

Mr. MAST [continuing]. Is recognized as the leadership by the Palestinian people?

Ms. LEAF. The Palestinian authority governs. The PLO is the representative.

Mr. MAST. You think that's what the Palestinian people believe?

Ms. LEAF. I haven't done polling on this recently.

Mr. MAST. But as the top diplomat over the Middle East, I would expect that you've reviewed this.

Ms. LEAF. But the PLO is the entity that did the Oslo Agreement with Israel, and——

Mr. MAST. It appears to be that my time is expired. I thank you for trying to answer. You have not objectively assessed whether it is wise for America to pursue making a State out of Palestinians. And I suggest you do as the top diplomat over the Middle East.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congressman Brian Mast. We now proceed to ranking member Dean Phillips for 5 minutes.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary Leaf, I want to thank you again for your emphasis on—and the State Department's emphasis on the repatriation and reintegration efforts of the ISIS families. I spoke about that in my opening remarks.

My bill, the Syrian Detainee and Displaced Persons Act renewed the position of the ISIS detainee coordinator and directed the development of a strategy on how to address these camps. It became law in the 2024 NDAA and even in Minnesota. Two half-brothers were reunited with their grandparents and repatriated another family of ten back to the United States.

So I just want to compliment you on that effort. I know some might question why would we do that for ISIS families. But perhaps you could speak to the why. Why is it important, the work that your team is doing is critical for U.S. national security?

Ms. LEAF. So with regard to this effort on repatriation, and I will say it's an all hands effort because my colleagues in the Bureau for Counterterrorism also work assiduously on this effort, as does the Bureau for——PRM, the Bureau for Population and Migration. So what I would say is the following. Those encampments of al-Hol

and Roj are both filled with families, children. More than half of the population is children.

And they are the—sort of the human leftovers of ISIS. And they suffer as much as anyone at this point. The quest to resettle them in their home countries, whether it's largely Iraq or in Syria, goes precisely to the effort of trying to integrate people back into communities to make those communities resilient and to be resilient against a resurgent ISIS. And that goes directly to our national security interests.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you for that affirmation. Ms. Pryor, you spoke of MEPPA's people-to-people Partnership for Peace fund. Try to say that five times fast.

Tell me how you're looking at that since October 7th. Has anything changed? And how has the peacebuilding community in general responded to these events since?

Ms. PRYOR. Thank you for your question. So we were concerned with the conflict. What would happen to MEPPA? But as we've worked with the peacebuilding community, we have been inspired by their reaction.

What they see in this, in all their trauma, in all their grief and anguish on both sides, Israelis and Palestinians, they have redoubled their commitment to peace. And that's hard in their larger communities. So it is really incumbent upon us to continue our support to them while they try to bring back the idea of peaceful coexistence and rebuild those frayed ties between the two communities.

I was very pleased that when we put out our most recent solicitation that we had nearly 100 applications. And so there's clearly still a commitment and a desire now more than ever to find ways for peaceful coexistence. Thank you.

Mr. PHILLIPS. I hope so. Thank you. Back to you, Secretary Leaf. Many of us are concerned about settler violence in the West Bank. It works against our aspirations for peace.

I was encouraged by President Biden's EO imposing sanctions I think on 12 individuals. Can you discuss that? Has there been any change whatsoever in that activity? And if so, if you could articulate it.

Ms. LEAF. So this has been a longstanding effort over the last I would say at least 2 years. And it culminated after October 7th with what we saw as a very sharp increase in violence on the ground in an effort to really just push communities off their land over and over again. And obviously, destabilizing clearly harmful for the interest of civility and for the lives of Palestinians in the West Bank.

But frankly, it ultimately can be a spark and a flashpoint and therefore a security issue for Israel. We took action to really go after those who were leading this. And this is an ongoing process. We also engaged forthrightly with senior levels, military and civilian, in the Israeli government to cease the practice of Army units escorting settlers which they were doing at that time.

That is largely but not entirely stopped. But we really asked the Israelis to redouble their effort to bring this down. We've seen a decrease but it is by no means over. And lately we've seen organized efforts to obstruct critical humanitarian aid going into Gaza.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Last quick question. I listened to my colleague, Mr. Mast's comments about the myriad of terrorist organizations ostensibly trying to represent Palestinians. Based on your experience in the region and even recent visits, do you get a sense of aspiration amongst the Palestinian people to select—given the opportunity to select a government that would want to make peace?

Ms. LEAF. So what we have found and what polling indicated on the eve of October 7th was that those who had to live under Hamas' predations by and large rejected Hamas. But they didn't have a vote. Hamas rules by dint of the gun, by force. It is fair to say Palestinians long for State.

Our stance is simple. It's a negotiated State. It's a State that shares the land in a sense with Israel, recognizes Israel as the PLO did more than 30 years ago.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you. And with that, my time is expired and I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you much, Ranking Member Dean Phillips. And now I recognize myself. And indeed I want to thank you for being here. And what a time in history.

We need a bipartisan manner to achieve as much as we can. That's why I express concern again about Dr. Majd Kamalmaz in that he was a Syrian American. And we have so many people in our country who have family.

They can be Yemeni. They can be Lebanese. We know Iraq, Iran, and Syria, Assad, to kill, murder an American citizen. There must be a response so that Americans can visit with their families safely.

And of course, dictatorships have a history of doing this with the murder of Alexei Navalny, the kidnaping of Vladimir Kara-Murza by war criminal Putin over and over again. People should have freedom of travel without being kidnaped and murdered. With that in mind, I'm also so concerned about the regime in Tehran, the dictatorships, oil exports to finance their terrorist puppets, Hamas, Houthi, Hezbollah.

Additionally, they use that money to oppress the people of Iran. We know that the vast majority of the people of Iran would want to live in a modern civilization. The Iranian American community diaspora, the Iranian diaspora around the world just dream 1 day for freedom and liberty for the people of Iran. With that in mind, to what extent is the administration working with the European allies to ensure a snapback of all U.N. sanctions on Iran to be triggered at the Security Council for the remaining restrictions on Iran's nuclear program lapse in 2025?

Ms. LEAF. Congressman, thank you for that lay down of all the issues that, in fact, consume this administration. What I would say about snapback is this is an issue that is discussed diplomatically with our partners. I would default to discussing this in a classified setting as to the various aspects of the nuclear program and how that is affected by snapback or not.

But I want to address some of the concerns that you just laid out about Iran's freewheeling efforts to destabilize the region. You're right. It is at a cost as much to the Iranian people as it is to the people of the region.

And therefore, we have really bolstered our efforts both across economic, diplomatic military efforts to drive pressures on that end.

As we saw on April 13th and 14th, we had an extraordinary opportunity that was quite successful to bring together regional and European partners to bolster and defend against proxy attacks and attacks directly from Iran against Israel. I think that is—however terrifying that night was for all of us, for Israelis most of all, it was a ready demonstration of an appetite for common action that we didn't see 10 years ago.

Mr. WILSON. Additionally, back to Syria, it really concerns me the Arab League, much to all of our disappointment has recognized the Assad dictatorship. I'm hoping that every effort is made for the United States not to reach out to the dictatorship particularly in light of their use of chemical weapons. And then their use of chemical weapons, now we find out today that war criminal Putin is using chemical weapons against the civilian population of Ukraine.

And the parallels keep going. And Putin helped lead the effort of the total destruction of Aleppo, then the total destruction of Mariupol, and now the planned destruction of the second largest city of Ukraine, 1.4 million people in Kharkiv and using chemical weapons against the defenders there. With that in mind, what effort is being made to prevent normalization with Assad?

Ms. LEAF. So I'll just remind for the record this administration has no intentions of normalizing relations with Assad. It is one of the most heavily sanctioned countries in the world right after Iran. And we continue to look for ways to use new sanction opportunities to increase that pressure.

We've been very clear with our Arab and other partners that we see no value in the act of giving Assad reentry to the Arab League. It has looked like it's pretty formulated. He does not look like he has garnered the dividends that he had hoped to. But we make it very clear with our partners that there is no room for flouting our sanctions and that pressure ought to be applied by them in addition to us and our European partners on this account.

Mr. WILSON. Well, every effort should be made. It's just so important to have peace through strength and to sanction the dictatorships around the world so they cannot be unlimited in their conduct of mass murder and slaughter. With that in mind, we now proceed to Congressman Brad Schneider of California—Sherman, Sherman not of Illinois.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you. Thank you for being here. We saw the death of Ebrahim Raisi. Unfortunately, the Security Council decided for a moment of silence in mourning his death. And while we feel for the families of every human being, few have murdered as many thousands of people.

I want to talk about some brave Iranians who now face the death penalty for speaking out for Women, Life, and Freedom Movement and for democracy in Iran. That includes rapper Toomaj Salehi who became an outspoken voice of protest. On April 30th, he was sentenced to death by two judges, neither of whom have been sanctioned by the United States.

And so I hope you'll jot down as one of your items to do to see whether these two judges should be sanctioned. Since then, two more dissidents, Fawdar—sorry for the pronunciation—and Danielle Moghadam have been reportedly arrested for their own

protests. Can you commit that the State Department will use all appropriate forums to call for the release of these individuals?

Ms. LEAF. Absolutely.

Mr. SHERMAN. And I would hope that you would suggest to Linda Thomas Greenfield that at an appropriate time in the Security Council there be a moment of silence for the families of those who—Ebrahim Raisi sentenced to death, 30,000 of them in 1988, the 1,500 murdered in 2019 in Bloody November, and the many others who are victims of his bloodstained hands. As to the Houthi, they have killed men for being gay. They have murdered and put their bodies hanging.

They have murdered thousands. They are an illegal terrorist group. But what is also not recognized is that there is a real genocide that has happened in Ethiopia. And there are now the 600,000 people are dead.

And now food in the horn of Africa is more costly as a direct result of the Houthi who are probably killing more today through their actions in driving up the price of food to the point where people can't afford it than events in Gaza. We have occasionally bombed the Houthi to stop them or retaliate for them hitting ships. But bombing isn't precise.

Saudi bombing is so imprecise that we get a little angry at it now and then. There's a legitimate government of Yemen. They're asking for defense articles.

They're willing to do on the ground what needs to be done to save thousands of lives and Yemen—hundreds of thousands of lives. And Yemen, hundreds of thousands of lives for those dependent upon food shipments to the Red Sea. Why are we not providing those defense articles?

Ms. LEAF. Thank you for that set of questions, Congressman. So when the administration came into office, one of the first acts of the President on foreign policy terms was to establish to set up a—ask that we set up an envoy in an effort to drive the ongoing war at that time to a close, to a peaceful close, to a truce. That is what we did over the course of 2 years.

And we have a de facto truce. However, in the meantime, this—and a roadmap to peace to Yemeni-Yemeni negotiations under U.N. auspices. Quite frankly, we think the food insecurity would only grow vaster, greater. The situation would become more parlous if that war were to resume.

Mr. SHERMAN. I'm not suggesting you resume—resumption of the war. But if a legitimate government doesn't have defense articles, that will resume the war as we know that Marib is under possible Houthi attack. So if you're going to prevent the Houthis from expanding this war, peace through strength rather than the idea that because you're for peace, you're against defense articles.

Ms. LEAF. No, I understand what you mean.

Mr. SHERMAN. I'll point out that we had Blinken, of course, yesterday. He committed that within 30 days he'd get back to us as to whether the Popular Resistance Committees in Gaza should be designated as either a foreign terrorist organization or specially designated terrorist organization. And I bring that to your attention because you're the one that's actually going to have to do the work.

But, as you know, Hamas does not act alone. It has sister, cousin organizations, Islamic Jihad. Palestinian Islamic Jihad is the best known of those. Second on that list is the Popular Resistance Committees, who are responsible for participating in the massacres of October 7th, but have also killed both American and Israeli civilians.

So I hope that you'll get that work done and that we will see them designated. I'll leave it to you as to which of those two designations most apply. And finally, as I pointed out to Secretary Blinken, we cannot—we want a rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and Israel but not at the cost of a successful Saudi nuclear program.

Saudi has occasionally said they want what Iran has. Well, Iran has the enmity and hostility of the United States. Saudi Arabia, remember that any weapon that was in the Shah's hands, supposedly our friend in 1978, was in the hands of the Ayatollahs in 1979. So I hope that any 123 Agreement with Saudi Arabia has the additional protocol for more inspection, prohibits reprocessing, prohibits refinement, and otherwise meets the gold standard. And that gold standard is already exemplified in our agreement with the UAE—our nuclear cooperation agreement with the UAE.

Mr. WILSON. And thank you, Congressman Brad Sherman of California. And we now proceed to Congressman Mike Lawler of New York.

Mr. LAWLER. Yesterday, I asked Secretary Blinken if the administration was implementing the SHIP Act and the Iran China Energy Sanctions Act which were signed into law as part of the supplemental last month. He said that they have been sanctioning oil tankers involved in the Iranian oil trade but that's not exactly what the bills do. So Mr. Leaf, do you plan to implement the SHIP Act's sanctions against ports and refineries that process Iranian oil?

Ms. LEAF. Yes.

Mr. LAWLER. Have you started that process?

Ms. LEAF. I would have to get a more detailed answer for you, Congressman. I don't know where that process lies. I know that we've sanctioned over 220 persons that are involved in the shipment—transshipment of oil.

Mr. LAWLER. Since the bill took effect?

Ms. LEAF. I don't know—

Mr. LAWLER. Or you're talking about prior to?

Ms. LEAF. Up to now, up to now.

Mr. LAWLER. Okay. Well, up to now, Iranian oil sales are up \$88 billion since Joe Biden took office. So I would say what you're doing up to now has not been effective. Do you plan to implement the Iran-China Energy Sanctions Act, sanctions against Chinese financial institutions and cooperation with other departments?

Ms. LEAF. We will carry out the law, Congressman.

Mr. LAWLER. Okay. But to your knowledge, it has not yet started?

Ms. LEAF. I will get back to you on that.

Mr. LAWLER. Okay. Last year's NDAA included my bill to create a special envoy position at the State Department to prioritize and

expand the Abraham Accords. What steps has the State Department taken thus far since that bill took effect?

Ms. LEAF. We do not have an envoy. And we were—however, that said, we had a whole set of staff working on normalization issues all the way up through October 7th. That work will continue apace when the conditions are right. As you know, we have had a specific set of normalization efforts underway as regards to Saudi Arabia. The national security advisor just reported out on those discussions between Saudi Arabia and the U.S. and then his briefings to the Israeli government.

Mr. LAWLER. Okay. So just to be clear, within the NDAA, there was a provision to create the special envoy for the Abraham Accords. And to date what has been done to enact that—

Ms. LEAF. We do not have an envoy.

Mr. LAWLER. Is there a short list? Is somebody pulling together a list?

Ms. LEAF. Not that I'm aware.

Mr. LAWLER. So the administration has no intention of filling this position?

Ms. LEAF. No, I did not say that. I said we do not have an envoy at this time.

Mr. LAWLER. So this was signed into law in December. When do you anticipate that this process will get started?

Ms. LEAF. I can't answer that today. I'll be happy to get back to you.

Mr. LAWLER. That's disturbing. Ms. Leaf, the ICC is an absolute abomination. Do you agree that the ICC has an anti-Israel bias?

Ms. LEAF. Well, I think we spoke very clearly over the last couple of days about this, that it was a shameful equivalency that was drawn between the acts of Hamas and the Israeli leadership. I think this President and the Secretary have been very clear on this point.

Mr. LAWLER. Okay. I—

Ms. LEAF. I can't answer a larger question about—

Mr. LAWLER. Do you think there's an anti-Israel bias at the ICC?

Ms. LEAF. I'm not in the position to judge that.

Mr. LAWLER. Okay. Do you agree with Senator Schumer that there should be regime change in Israel?

Ms. LEAF. The administration is not fostering regime change anywhere, including in Israel.

Mr. LAWLER. So you don't agree with Senator Schumer's—

Ms. LEAF. That is a decision—

Mr. LAWLER [continuing]. Demand that there be a regime change?

Ms. LEAF [continuing]. Totally for the Israeli people.

Mr. LAWLER. Okay. Do you agree with Nancy Pelosi when she said that Benjamin Netanyahu should resign?

Ms. LEAF. That is a decision for the Israeli people.

Mr. LAWLER. So you don't agree with Nancy Pelosi?

Ms. LEAF. I do not.

Mr. LAWLER. Okay. Is Israel committing a genocide in Gaza?

Ms. LEAF. No.

Mr. LAWLER. The fastest way for a cease-fire to occur would be for Hamas to surrender and release all the hostages, correct?

Ms. LEAF. Yes, it is.

Mr. LAWLER. Okay. If the—and you agree that Iran and Hamas' stated goal is to wipe Israel off the face of the earth, correct?

Ms. LEAF. Yes, yes, it is.

Mr. LAWLER. Okay. So knowing that, why did the administration withhold weapons to aid Israel despite Congress approving the delivery of these weapons?

Ms. LEAF. So at a time of intense discussions with the Israeli leadership—between the U.S. and Israeli leadership over the question of a major combat operation in Rafah where at the time 1.4 million IDPs were crowded into a very congested piece of Gaza where all the infrastructure for their assistance was located there. At that time, the president made a decision to hit pause on one shipment so that those discussions could continue but that those weapons would not be used in such an operation. And these discussions continued. They continued during the national security—

Mr. LAWLER. But you agree that Hamas uses innocent Palestinians as human shields, correct?

Ms. LEAF. Absolutely.

Mr. LAWLER. Okay. I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. And again, thank you so much, Congressman Mike Lawler, for your very insightful questions. And now we proceed to Congresswoman Kathy Manning of North Carolina.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to my friends, Chairman Wilson and Ranking Member Phillips. And thank you to our witnesses for joining us today. Assistant Secretary Leaf, yesterday I asked Secretary Blinken about the alarming reports that Egypt secretly changed the terms of a cease-fire proposal, a good proposal that Israel had signed off on which jeopardized the release—the deal to release the hostages. Can you tell us what exactly happened there?

Ms. LEAF. I've seen those reports. I really can't elaborate on them. And I don't really know whether there's anything at all to this.

Ms. MANNING. I hope you will followup on this because it is extremely disturbing to think that a country that we give billions of dollars to aid every year would change the terms of a cease-fire agreement and jeopardize getting the release of hostages who we are all determined to get back to their loved ones safely. Do you find that recognition of a Palestinian State by Spain and Ireland and Norway and other unilateral steps are effective to help secure the release of the hostages and forge a resolution to the conflict?

Ms. LEAF. So our stance on this is very clear. We support a negotiated solution, a negotiated creation or roadmap to a negotiated Palestinian State. Unilateral recognition doesn't advance anything.

Ms. MANNING. And can you clarify the administration's policy on the Israeli operation in Rafah? Do you believe—I mean, we've now seen what's happening in Rafah. There is the exodus of many, many people from—innocent civilians from that situation. How can Hamas be defeated in Rafah without—how can Hamas be defeated without any operation in Rafah?

Ms. LEAF. No, I think the President and the Secretary and the national security advisor, all of us who've had these discussions have been very clear. It's a question of how an operation is under-

taken, under what conditions, setting the conditions for people to safely move, ensuring that there's a humanitarian infrastructure for them to move to. And then how to go in is the subject of military to military discussion. And I think our military has given really good advice on going in a targeted way in a way that really mitigates the risk of civilian harm.

Ms. MANNING. And have the Israelis been open to that advice?

Ms. LEAF. We have seen them adjust over time. And we are watching this very closely as the national security advisor said.

Ms. MANNING. So as we discuss the day after, hopefully when this war concludes, how do you see the willingness of Arab partners to assist with the post-war security and reconstruction? And do you see hopeful signs?

Ms. LEAF. I do. I do. And look, this conflict has engendered tremendous turmoil, public anger across the region at the suffering that has been very visible to everyone, the suffering of civilians who were caught in harm's way in the conflict. But I think the governments that we have been talking to, those with relationships now with Israel and several who do not yet have relationships.

They have a deep going commitment to the same quest that we have which is an enlarging integration across the region. That means Israel integrated into the region. So I do expect that we have a lot of partners on the other side of this conflict.

Ms. MANNING. As I'm sure you have been doing, I have been following all of the reports about the horrific sexual violence, mutilation, humiliation that was used as a weapon of war by Hamas against Israeli women and girls. And we are deeply concerned about those women who are still being held hostage. And recently, a video was released from a Hamas Go Pro camera showing how horrific their treatment has been. What levers do you see for getting Sinwar to release those hostages?

Ms. LEAF. So I met with families of those five young women on one of my, I think, eight trips out to the region since October. And it was a wrenching discussion. And I for one could not bear to look at that video again.

At the end of the day, we have at the end of a phone line a guy who many people have termed a psychopath. He's certainly messianic. He certainly thinks he's achieved some place in history.

And he has dragged everyone toward a terrible place. But I will assure you that both Egypt and Qatar and a few other countries that have some level of influence. But especially those two countries, they have worked relentlessly at this effort.

So yes, there is pressure from conditions of the conflict itself. There's pressure, I think, from Gazans who want an end to this conflict. But our two partners have put unstinting pressure on Hamas.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you for your testimony. I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congresswoman Kathy Manning. Again, can you imagine, we're going to miss—we lose Dean Phillips and Kathy Manning. This is just not good. But we appreciate their service.

And then we get very talented freshmen in here too. So Congressman Gabe Amo all the way from Rhode Island.

Mr. AMO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Assistant Secretary Leaf and Ms. Pryor for being here today. As we continue to witness the devastation in Gaza and increased instability across the region, it is clear that we need an immediate and lasting cease-fire that surges humanitarian aid into Gaza and releases the hostages that continue to be held by Hamas.

As my colleague, Ms. Manning, just stated, we must be prepared for the day after. A long term plan is essential for Israelis and Palestinians alike to have security and self-determination. And I pray, personally, that it's a plan where the tragic events on and following October 7th are never repeated.

This committee, the State Department, and USAID will play an important role in the cease-fire negotiations and a long-term path to peace. Assistant Secretary Leaf, I just want to hear briefly about how you and leaders at the State Department have elevated the humanitarian imperatives as you've engaged in negotiations and your thinking as it relates to the day after.

Ms. LEAF. Thank you, Congressman. So we have out on the field right now a special envoy, Lise Grande, who has 30-plus years of working in the most dire of humanitarian conditions, places of conflict. And she is out there in Israel now leading our efforts, corraling our efforts working across the Israeli government with the Egyptian government with humanitarian actors with the Israeli military to really bring everything to bear so that we can have a true surge of humanitarian assistance.

It's not just episodic but it is sustained. The conflict is unbelievably complex. And the conditions inside Gaza really pose tremendous challenges to the humanitarian workers.

Lise Grande is working hand in glove with all of these parties to see that there are deconfliction mechanisms, that all the pieces are put in place so that the food that the critical humanitarian assistance gets to those in need. She also has plenty of experience on stabilization effort. So when you talk about the post-conflict setting, we look at it in three sort of buckets.

There is security. There is post-conflict governance. And there is the recovery and reconstruction piece. You can throw a lot of money at that last piece. But the first two pieces are really shaped first and foremost as the Secretary has said apart from the military effort to destroy Hamas' capabilities.

Giving and allowing an alternative to Hamas' ideology is critical. So you've heard the Secretary, the National Security Advisor, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs speak to the need for Israel itself to have a larger strategic political set of objectives alongside the military campaign. Military campaign will just be, as the military say, continually mowing the grass but not really achieving that settled conditions in which we will work with our partners to stand up alternatives to Hamas in security, alternatives to Hamas in terms of governance.

And to an earlier question, we think we have partners out there. We know we have partners out there. But we're going to need a lot of assistance to get those security and governance pieces elaborated in a way that works for the people of Gaza and that is framed in a larger political context.

Mr. AMO. On the point of surging humanitarian aid topic that I am concerned with, earlier this month, Ms. Pryor, USAID announced additional greater Federal funding for ready to use therapeutic foods, lifesaving treatment for children who are facing acute malnutrition. One of only two domestic producers of those ready to use therapeutic foods as in my home State of Rhode Island at a nonprofit named Edesia Nutrition which stands ready and able to offer this critical assistance to vulnerable civilians in Gaza, particularly the youngest. Ms. Pryor, how are these ready to use therapeutic foods getting into Gaza to help children facing malnutrition? And at present, are you able to effectively provide these therapeutic foods to civilians in Gaza?

Ms. PRYOR. Thank you, sir. You're right. Our RUTFs are incredibly important in an emergency response, especially for children who are suffering from severe food insecurity. The challenge right now is just getting goods in.

We've had access, open, closed, depending upon security conditions within. We're not getting nearly enough assistance in. The economic support funds that I oversee don't actually engage in this. But I'm happy to go back to my humanitarian assistance colleagues and get more information about this issue specifically. Thank you.

Mr. AMO. Thank you, Ms. Pryor. And I think the urgency of the moment is clear. And we need to act accordingly to make sure that we address the hunger that far too many are facing. And with that, I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congressman Gabe Amo. We now proceed to Congressman Brad Schneider of Illinois.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank both witnesses for being here today. I have so many questions. I wish we could dwell on all of them. But I'll start—first of all, associate myself with the comments of those who've gone before me but start at a high end. Is U.S. committed to our leadership role in the MENA region?

Ms. LEAF. Absolutely.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. And expected to stay committed to that for the long term?

Ms. LEAF. Yes, sir.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Okay. Does the budget we're talking about and presented here reflect that priority and what we're trying to achieve?

Ms. LEAF. Yes.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Those are my easy questions. I was speaking yesterday and I tried to make the point that the best way to ultimately defeat Hamas, PG in Gaza, Hezbollah, the Houthis, the militias in Syria and Iraq and all of which center ultimately at Iran. The best way to do that, the most devastating defeat to these organizations would be to get on a path to peace for the region. Both of you somewhat expand on that.

Ms. LEAF. I'd be happy to. It's sort of the issue that's on my mind every day. So look, I think we saw rather horribly illuminated for the first time was the full range of proxies that have been stood up, created by Iran over 30-plus years. Nearly 40 years this has been a project of Iran's.

And we who follow these things, we're well aware of that. We all are. The countries, the region feel the impact of those proxies on their sovereignty, on their security, stability.

But this was a really rather ghastly illumination of the degree to which Iran has weaponized the issue of the unsuccessful quest for Palestinian statehood. You are absolutely right, Congressman. That is an abiding conviction of this administration that the best way to take the air out of the balloon if you will, to take this cause away from these terrible terrorist organizations and from Iran itself is to get the Palestinians on a pathway to a negotiated State, a State that recognizes Israel, that lives side by side with Israel and peace.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Ms. Pryor, I don't know if you want to add to that at all.

Ms. PRYOR. So I think we've made a number of investments over the years to support moderate voices throughout the region. And we can see the benefits of that, whether it's in Libya working with journalists who are calling out misinformation that is often by Russia or Tunisian Civil Society who continue to press on the need to get back to democracy. And so I think these are—it's big bang for the buck. It's modest resources that I think over time can have an outsized impact. Thank you.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you. Yesterday, Secretary Blinken was asked a question about the idea of two states. We were asked earlier about two states. But also the status of the region before October 7th versus after October 7th. And I think the question was put in a way that in September there was a sense that we were on a good path.

We were talking about normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel. Everything wasn't addressed, but we were taking steps to make big positive changes. The Abraham Accords I think are one of the biggest reflect of that.

I'm proud with my colleagues here we founded the Abraham Accords Caucus of which I'm one of the co-chairs. We continue to work on that within the Abraham Accords Caucus. We're trying to create a Gaza working group or we have created a Gaza working group to focus on the need to bring first assistance and aid and security and governance ultimately to Gaza.

But in the context of the Abraham Accords, Paul Becker talks about this idea that both Jews and Arabs belong to the same land. Abraham Accords recognizes that. I'd ask you to expand the idea objective assessment if you would of how important it is to recognize that both Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians belong to this land and that the path to peace is two states.

Ms. LEAF. So I think it's indisputable that this status quo does not work for—the status quo being five million Palestinians to the east and to the west of Israel in a State of everything ranging from unhappiness to frustration to range to despair to militancy. It's a terrible recipe for militancy for radicalization. And Israel sits squarely between these communities.

And again, it's a backdrop of a longstanding longing for a State of their own. So objectively, I can't see any other alternative. The status quo is terrible and it's been weaponized by Iran in the most malign fashion.

And it radicalizes people. On the other hand, you have a set of states, those who had longstanding relations with Israel, Jordan and Egypt, those newcomers, or those who resumed, Morocco, Bahrain, UAE. They retain the avid desire not just to keep up the relationship but to deepen it, to expand it, and to see other people join that community, other states join that community.

And that is the work that we are continuing to sort of keep the burners on and with specific regard to Saudi Arabia. As I said earlier, that is a specific opportunity that we would like to leverage. It will need to be on the other side of this conflict. But I think the other side of this conflict opens up a lot of possibilities.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Chairman. Thank you for the extended time. I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congressman Brad Schneider of Illinois. In cooperation with Ranking Member Dean Phillips, we now will proceed with the second round because what you're doing is so important. In fact, Ms. Pryor, I have always been so impressed about what the United States Agency of International Development has done.

I always cherish my visits to Afghanistan to see the clasped hands of the U.S. and Afghan flags with an arrow leading a school. And I like to point out that at that time the sign was rusty. The people liked it there because it would've been very easy to take down.

And then to see little girls going to school with white scarfs and little guys going to school with baseball caps which were are not indigenous to Afghanistan. And it's so sad now to know that so much of that is being reversed. But it was such a great effort.

And, additionally, I visited Syrian refugee camps. And, gosh, what a positive experience to see how well organized. And these were half TEUs. This was not a tent. People had actually put a real effort into creating a society to see young people going to schools, even seeing a business area being set up, small businesses, commercial enterprise, revealing how capable that people are.

But a concern I have has been the Gaza pier. Three hundred and 20 million dollars. To me, that is so irresponsible for the American taxpayers to spend that much money and then find out that the aid that's being transported is being diverted, not to the people of Gaza. And so what efforts are being made to make every effort that whatever aid there in Gaza goes to the people who need it most and not Hamas?

Ms. PRYOR. Thank you. Yes, we share that concern. The pier is intended to be another way to expand humanitarian assistance delivery. But really, it's no substitute for the land access, no substitute.

Yes, we did have a concerning incident yesterday in which some of the assistance that came off of the pier was desperate people, desperate people taking it for themselves. However, I am happy to say we have been able to confirm that two-thirds of it has managed to make it through for formal, proper distribution. We are currently working with the U.N. and the Israelis to see what it is that we can collectively do to prevent this.

I'm afraid the breakdown of social order in Gaza has been challenging. And the answer to keep desperate populations from just

taking the aid off of the trucks is to flood aid into Gaza so there's no reason to. Thank you.

Mr. WILSON. Well, whatever effort can be made. And of course, to me an overriding concern, Madam Secretary, is the potential of a nuclear Iran. I'm just so concerned that the destabilization that will occur with our great allies of the region and even more the existential threat to the people of Israel, existential to the people of the United States.

They're developing ICBMs for a single reason. It's not for weather research. It's to ultimately fulfill their dream of death to Israel, death to America. So what is being done to block in every way these stockpiling of highly enriched uranium? What's being done because this is as existential for all of us?

Ms. LEAF. I absolutely agree with you, Congressman. And I don't have to repeat. But I'll just say since 2018 when we withdrew from the JCPOA, we really lost eyes on in many ways and lost the restraints that were otherwise there on Iran.

Iran has not shown a particular appetite or seriousness about nuclear diplomacy as we call it. But we are—the President remains committed to seeing that Iran never has a nuclear weapon. So we are using all the tools at our disposal and we're working with multilaterally as well as bilaterally on sanctions and disruption activities.

And on the one hand, we've seen the steady accretion of fissile material. We have not yet but we watch very closely seeing steps taken that would move toward weaponization of that. But that is an overriding concern for the administration.

Mr. WILSON. Well, every effort must be made because a nuclear Iran to me with their view of Armageddon, it's just got to be addressed. And I wish you well. But the duplicity of the JCPOA, they had no intent. That was a delay tactic. So with that, we, again, need to be working together. And showing that we do, I now recognize Ranking Member Dean Phillips.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ms. Pryor, I want to ask about both Tunisia and Lebanon starting with Tunisia. The zeroing out of the development assistance account is troubling. Administrator Powers in her recent testimony to Congress indicated the same as it relates to investing and protecting rights and democracy in Tunisia. So I welcome your thoughts on that and how we can continue to do so if we are eliminating that budget.

Ms. PRYOR. Thank you. So the decrease in Tunisia's budget is very much a reflection of the democratic backsliding in the country and the hard choices we have to make across the region about where we invest our funds. However, we are preserving within the budget the same percentage of assistance for civil society as we have in the past. Civil society is key to holding the President of Tunisia accountable in pushing back on the democratic backsliding. And so our commitment to those organizations remains.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Can you give a little bit more detailed example of how that works and how those dollars are used to that end?

Ms. PRYOR. So, for example, we had a youth training program on leadership. And three of our—actually, six of our participants ran for the legislature and three of them were elected. So we now have

a small foothold of moderate voices going in to Tunisia's deliberative bodies.

Mr. PHILLIPS. It goes without saying. I'm sure you would concur it's a little bit of the chicken and the egg. If we withdraw resources because of the backsliding, how can we reduce the backsliding? So I still find that troublesome I have to say.

Lebanon, we're all aware of the political and economic crisis. Administrator Powers, of course, spoke about the mass displacement of civilians along the Lebanese-Israel border. Can you speak to ways that USAID is trying to address this other humanitarian issue that is not getting nearly the attention that I think it needs?

Ms. PRYOR. Yes, Lebanon has been just wracked by a terrible economic crisis that the World Bank calls one of the worst in 150 years. Just to begin with going into the current conflict in the region. But Hezbollah's attacks on Israel has now spawned another humanitarian crisis in the south of Lebanon. Approximately 93,000 Lebanese have been displaced as a result of Hezbollah's actions.

And they have lost their livelihoods. Their children are losing out on education. And so our budget request asks for a modest increase in Lebanon to help these people rebuild their lives, whether it's the opportunity to return to the communities of origin or if they have to start anew in another community.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Okay. Thank you. Ms. Leaf, relative to the livelihood support that has run out now for the LAF and the ISF, I think in December, are there ways that we can be supporting those institutions in Lebanon to provide some degree, a modicum of civility?

Ms. LEAF. Yes. And I mean, part of the way we're doing that aside from the funding streams, the FMF, we are working assiduously in a couple of directions. One is diplomatic with a set of partners putting pressure frankly on the Lebanese parliament, the Lebanese political chieftains to do their job which is to elect a new President that will set up an empowered cabinet and a Prime Minister.

And on the other hand, my colleague, Amos Hochstein, continues his work side by side with our Ambassador Lisa Johnson in Beirut to do the backdoor sort of de-escalation efforts between Israel and Hezbollah. And at the point when we move to a cease-fire, his work will begin in a proper formal way. And that will—we're looking—at that point through that process, we would look at a more bolstered effort for that but coupled with the border demarcation work.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Okay. On that subject, is there a chance do you think of a permanent border demarcation agreement?

Ms. LEAF. Hope springs eternal. That's what we're aiming for.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Good. And then last, another refugee crisis, of course, the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. And I think a scapegoat for their economic challenges and whatnot. What are we doing to support them specifically?

Ms. LEAF. Of course, we do a lot of work through our humanitarian funding across the region. We have demands in every direction. We are also redoubling our efforts with the Lebanese government not to target them, not to do anything that would look like refolement, but to allow them access to the same funds.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you. And quickly, Ms. Pryor, anything USAID on that subject of Syrian refugees quickly.

Ms. PRYOR. Yes, on our side, in addition to providing humanitarian assistance, one way which we do is using electronic vouchers. So Syrian refugees pump money into the Lebanese economy. But on the development side, what we have done is we work with the Lebanese communities that are hosting these refugees to reduce the toll on the communities.

So for example, we have helped these communities expand schools to accommodate Syrian refugee children. We have helped communities improve their water pumping stations and wastewater treatment to accommodate the extra pressures that the refugees are putting on this critical infrastructure. So that this way, the Lebanese don't also suffer along with the Syrian refugees.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you both, and I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congressman Phillips. And I want to commend you, Ms. Pryor. The voucher system really works. That's very creative. And to address again in Syria the thought that half of the population, 14 million people, due to the Assad dictatorship, they've lost their homes, businesses, their mosques, their church. But thank goodness we've got good people like Kathy Manning now who try to get things back on track.

Ms. MANNING. I assume you're turning it over to me, Mr. Chairman. Thank you. I appreciate that. Actually, well, let's stick with Syria and Lebanon for just a minute.

You have described a really terrible situation in Lebanon which we are all aware of. And it's because of Hezbollah. It's because of Iran. It's because of all the refugees that have been forced out of their homes in Syria because of Assad. What, if anything, can be done with regard to Lebanon? Is there any chance of pushing Hezbollah out?

Ms. LEAF. Honestly, not at this time. There's no institution. There's no element of society that can come up against Hezbollah. But I think one thing that was—may have been missing from your litany, Congresswoman, is the responsibility of Lebanon's own politicians to put their house in order, that's where the work begins.

To put a fully empowered government in place that will undertake critical economic reforms that will raise the country from its dire State. They're in a gridlock of their devising. And so yes, they lose control over anything, including the degree to which Hezbollah drags Lebanon into a war.

Ms. MANNING. Well, that makes me think about the innocent Palestinian people in Gaza who have not been able to create any kind of a responsible government. When you think about all of the 400 miles of underground tunnels, sophisticated tunnels and all the building equipment that went into those tunnels to be used for a war rather than that equipment could've been used to build houses and schools and businesses. Why have the people in Gaza been unable to get rid of Hamas?

Ms. LEAF. I think it's—if you look at footage of the events back in 2006, 2007, people were being thrown off rooftops—

Ms. MANNING. By Hamas?

Ms. LEAF [continuing]. By Hamas. And those were other Palestinian political elements, Fatah and others. It's been a reign of ter-

ror, and it's been a very closed off piece of territory. So it's not surprising in a sense.

I want to see at the end of this conflict on the other side of it the opportunity for Palestinians of Gaza really to enjoy the fruits of selecting their own leadership and running their own affairs.

Ms. MANNING. So let me ask you about UNRWA because I question whether the underlying mandate of UNRWA which has been only to assist the refugees, not to help them build new lives, not to resettle them, whether that underlying mandate has been a fundamental problem that has perhaps prolonged the conflict. As we know, the mandate of the U.N. Commission—High Commission on Refugees has a much broader mandate. That mandate is actually not just to care for the refugees but to help them build new lives. And we also know not only has UNRWA become—in UNRWA probably the largest employer in Gaza but UNRWA employees participated in the horrendous and grotesque October 7th attack. What should happen with UNRWA when this conflict is over?

Ms. LEAF. So look, I think there are a number of important investigations that will lay out the course of reform that UNRWA should undertake, that the U.N. should ensure that it undertake. The question of the mandate I think obviously is something for the U.N. General Assembly. It's not something that's going to be solved by member states at this point. I think the functions that UNRWA has had, the core functions it's had in Gaza in particular, there simply hasn't been another organization that has done those—taken up those functions.

Ms. MANNING. But has the notion that UNRWA is to provide not only food but schooling for the Palestinians, removed that fundamental governmental obligation from Hamas?

Ms. LEAF. No, I think—well, I think what occurred in the events of 2007 and what's been the reality since is you've had a terrorist organization running that strip of land. And nobody could contest that, not the people, not an organization. On the other hand, to your question about where do we go from here, we have to remember also that UNRWA has these critical functions in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and on the West Bank.

And again, we don't have another organization that can do that. And government of Jordan cannot take on all of those obligations, nor Syria, nor Lebanon. In any case, I think the question of settling the larger question of refugees and in every country it really comes back to a political process. And that's the answer.

Ms. MANNING. Well, I want to thank you both for all of your hard work and your service. And let me close by saying I sure wish we were seeing protests against Hamas. Thank you.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congresswoman Kathy Manning. We'll now proceed for our final but very distinguished member, Congressman Brad Schneider of Illinois.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Chairman. And just to get some things on the record in talking about Gaza, since President Biden spoke to Congress 2 months ago, has Israel sought to surge aid into Gaza?

Ms. LEAF. I'm sorry. Did you say have they—

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Has Israel sought to surge more aid into Gaza since President Biden spoke to Congress 2 months ago?

Ms. LEAF. Yes, yes.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. And is Israel working with U.S. and others to deconflict distribution of aid within the Gaza strip?

Ms. LEAF. I'm going to let Jeanne add to my answer. But the deconfliction mechanism is inadequate at this time.

Ms. PRYOR. Yes, we continue to work with the Israeli government on improving deconfliction and trying to introduce best practices from other conflict environments. But a lot of work remains to be done.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you. Is Hamas intentionally seeking to disrupt aid coming into Gaza and getting throughout Gaza?

Ms. LEAF. It's seeking to control it where it can. And that is—there's also a high degree of lawlessness. But Hamas is an actor in that.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Okay. Let me shift gears and talk to—I like the term you used, the other side of the conflict. Is any progress being made on an ensuring Hamas isn't able to return to control of Gaza after the conflict?

Ms. LEAF. It's an ongoing effort.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. And in discussing—there's been talk about a multinational force in Gaza, countries in the region calling on the U.S. to actually put boots on the ground. Is there discussion of U.S. troops on the ground in Gaza?

Ms. LEAF. The President has made clear he has no intention of having U.S. forces in Gaza.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Okay. And again, for you, Ambassador Leaf. Can you talk about your bureau, the NEA's role in planning for the day after Gaza and a better future for all people in the Middle East?

Ms. LEAF. So in addition to the terrific staff that I am privileged to lead in the bureau, I have a set of staff dedicated to this proposition and drawn from different sectors with different experience. I also rely on several of our chiefs-of-mission in the field now who have extensive experience on Israel-Palestinian matters. So we work on this on a daily basis. And it is—that team helps provide thinking and direction for the Secretary's own engagements.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you. Within the context of looking to the future for the region, I asked earlier in my first round about U.S. leadership in the region and that commitment. But China is also seeking to play a role—a competitive role. Can you talk about how you're advocating within State and whether SMP or other forums to make sure that we have a comprehensive long-term strategy for the broader MENA region vis-a-vis what's going on in the world with China and Russia?

Ms. LEAF. A couple of things about process. Of course we're very fortunate to have the expertise at the top of our leadership and the Deputy Secretary Kirk Campbell. We also have China House.

We have personnel overseas including in my region who are dedicated to the work of looking at China's engagements, activities, whether it's in the information space, economic, military, what have you. So we have a rich sort of architecture for working on these issues. But let me just draw a contrast if I could in how the U.S. leads in the region versus what China is doing.

On the fundamental existential issues that confront the region, Gaza, Red Sea security, attacks by Iran and its proxies, you will

see the U.S. leading in all of those domains. Whether on the hostage negotiations, on the relief effort for Gazan civilians, whether it's on questions that relate to the Palestinians in general, you see the U.S. leading on that. China has large and growing economic relations.

China has been missing in action on Red Sea security, absolutely missing in action. And it's been missing in action on all the other fundamental critical pieces that relate to the security and stability of this region, whether it's—and it has relations with Iran. But it does not appear to use that relationship to any purpose when it comes to constraining Iran and its use of its proxies, whether against Israel or against anyone else. And by the way, I'm not aware that the PRC has ever condemned October 7th.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you. And last as we finish where we began, the hostages, there are 128 hostages still in Gaza including eight Americans. We know that more than 30 are deceased. We assume five of the Americans are still alive.

We've already mentioned it, but I want to emphasize the urgency of rescuing these hostages and doing everything we can to rescue all the hostages, including the American eight. There's reports of ongoing sexual violence. There was a video released yesterday that showed the capture of five of these women. And with permission of the chairman, I'd like to be able to show that video now.

Mr. WILSON. Absolutely. Without objection.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you. I don't know if we can get the volume.

[Video shown.]

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Since there's no volume, I will narrate. But this is a video of Hamas terrorists on October 7th. This is video taken from the cameras of Hamas found in Gaza by the IDF as they were operating in Gaza.

These are five women soldiers. The video has been edited because they're not showing the many dead bodies that are included in this film. It's taken over a period of 2 hours.

And what's heard or being shown in the words is the terrorist talking to these women. At one point, it's overheard one of the terrorist saying these are prisoners we can impregnate. These women are still being held in Gaza.

I think you can imagine the importance of bringing them home. You see in this video horrific images of blood, bloody prisoners clearly who have been beaten by their attackers. You see him saying, you are so beautiful, to one of the women. The terrorist is saying that.

So the video shows the capture of hostages, an absolute war crime, crime against humanity. These women are still being held. We assume they are being physically abused, sexually abused.

I had the privilege of seeing Sheryl Sandberg's movie *Silence After Screams*. Sexual violence should be condemned anywhere. It is unfortunate in this case not only is it being ignored, it is being denied. I think you can see from these pictures. I hope we do everything we can to get all these hostages home as soon as possible, including the American eight. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congressman Schneider. And it just can't be understated the horror, the barbarism, the inhumanity of persons on amphetamines who actually videoed what they were doing of the mass slaughter and the sexual attacks on women on October 7th. And truly, Madam Secretary, we're talking about people in general but also American citizens. Thirty-five were murdered and another six I believe have identified as being captive.

With that in mind, I want to thank the witnesses for their valuable testimony. I want to thank the dedicated staff of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the members for their questions.

The members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions for the witnesses, and we will ask you to respond to those in writing. Pursuant to the committee rules, all members have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous materials for the record subject to length limitations. Without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:18 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia
Joe Wilson (R-SC), Chairman**

May 16, 2024

Revised

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held at 10:30 a.m. in room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

DATE: Thursday, May 23, 2024

TIME: 10:30 a.m.

LOCATION: ~~2200 Rayburn~~
2172 Rayburn

SUBJECT: Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request for Near Eastern Affairs

WITNESSES: The Honorable Barbara A. Leaf
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
U.S. Department of State

Ms. Jeanne Pryor
Deputy Assistant Administrator
Middle East Bureau
United States Agency for International Development

*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chairs

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 -226-8467 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 FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day Thursday Date May 23, 2024 Room RHOB 2172

Starting Time 10:37am Ending Time 12:19pm

Recesses (to) (to) (to) (to) (to) (to)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Joe Wilson

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☐

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request for Near Eastern Affairs

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Rep. Wilson, Rep. Mast, Rep. Lawler, Rep. Phillips, Rep. Sherman, Rep. Manning, Rep. Amo, Rep. Schneider

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

N/A

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 12:19pm

Meg Wagner
Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia

118th Congress

ATTENDANCE

Meeting on: Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request for Near Eastern Affairs

Date: 5/23/24

Convened: 10:37 am

Adjourned: 12:19 pm

Representative	Present	Absent	Representative	Present	Absent
Mr. Wilson (SC-02)	X		Mr. Phillips (MN-03)	X	
Mr. Mast (FL-18)	X		Mr. Sherman (CA-30)	X	
Mr. Burchett (TN-02)		X	Mr. Connolly (VA-11)		X
Mr. Jackson (TX-13)		X	Mrs. Manning (NC-06)	X	
Mr. Baird (IN-04)		X	Mr. Amo (RI-01)	X	
Mr. Lawler (NY-17)	X		Mr. Schneider (IL-10)	X	
Mr. McCormick (GA-6)		X			



This combination of photos provided by Shawn Sanders, left, and the U.S. Army, center and right, show from left to right, Spc. Kennedy Sanders, Sgt. William Jerome Rivers and Spc. Breonna Alexsondria Moffett. The three U.S. Army Reserve soldiers from Georgia were killed by a drone strike Sunday on their base in Jordan near the Syrian Border.

U.S. Soldiers killed by drone attack conducted by Iranian puppet Kata'ib Hezbollah

The U.S. intelligence community attributes responsibility for the January 28, 2024 attack on the U.S. military outpost, Tower 22, that killed 3 Americans and wounded over 40 more to the Foreign Terror Organization, Kata'ib Hezbollah. A puppet for the Iranian regime, KH is part of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq and seeks an Iran-aligned government in Iraq, to expel U.S. and coalition forces from the country, and advance Iranian interests throughout the Middle East. The attack on Tower 22 in Jordan was carried out by a type of Shahed drone, a weapon developed by Iran.

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