



**Testimony prepared for delivery to the
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
Wednesday, February 9, 2011**

**Recent Developments in Egypt and Lebanon:
Implications for U.S. Policy and Allies in the Broader Middle East**

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Madame Chairman,

Events of the past two weeks have constituted an earthquake in terms of Arab political dynamics, the pursuit of security and peace in the Arab-Israeli arena, and the campaign to promote democratic reform in the broader Middle East. As an American, one could not but be moved by the courage and determination of the thousands of protestors yearning for peaceful, democratic change. And as an American, one could not but be concerned that this hopeful moment may—as has been the case with previous hopeful moments in Lebanon and Iran—give way to a darker era. I am grateful for the opportunity to offer some brief comments on the Egyptian and wider Middle Eastern situations.

As the situation in Egypt continues to unfold, U.S. policy has evolved with breathtaking speed, from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's statement that the Mubarak regime was "stable" to President Obama's statement that Egypt's transition needs to begin "now." This is not only the most serious foreign policy challenge to this U.S. administration, but one that was almost surely not foreseen, in any operational sense. The swift demise of Hosni Mubarak's presidency, along with the virtual disappearance of the ruling National Democratic Party and the potential fall of a regime that has been a pillar of U.S. standing in the Middle East for thirty-five years, was not on the list of "likely surprises" just days ago.

To note the obvious, the events in Egypt have enormous implications for America's interests and role in the Middle East. Even before this week's events, the United States was on a losing streak: Lebanon went from Hariri to Hizballah, Syria broke out from years of U.S.-imposed isolation, Muqtada al-Sadr returned to political prominence in Iraq, and the Arab-Israeli "peace process"—which President Obama proclaimed a top priority—has remained dismally stuck in neutral for two years. The administration's few victories, such as lining up relatively broad support for sanctions on Iran to compel a change in its nuclear program, do not stack up against this string of setbacks; however successful that effort has been, it has been only a tactical success, as there so far seems to have been little strategic progress in convincing Iran to change its behavior on the nuclear file. While the

crisis in Egypt may eventually redound to the advantage of U.S. interests, the near-term impact is surely to exacerbate the series of body blows to U.S. influence in the broader Middle East.

For now, a sober assessment of the Egypt situation leads one to conclude that it is neither the disaster some fear nor the dawn of a new day that some hope. That story is not yet written; both outcomes are possible. On the plus side, the protests have been largely anti-Mubarak but not anti-America nor anti-peace. Of course, that could change. And on the negative side, the absence of opposition leadership could open avenues for more radical elements to fill the void.

In its handling of the specifics of the Egypt crisis, my assessment is that President Obama and his advisors have generally adopted a sound approach. This is an evolving situation, the course of which the United States is able to affect only on the margins. Still, the administration has adopted a policy that can only be described as bold—and risky. The administration recognized early on that it was neither wise nor possible for the United States to back regime suppression of the democracy protestors and that it did not serve U.S. interests to have its relationship with Egypt personalized by identification with and unflagging support for President Mubarak. Instead, the administration has correctly supported the idea of change and the democratic spirit at the heart of the protests, while operating on the basis of the not unreasonable assessment that the Egyptian military was (and perhaps remains) the key to resolving a national crisis that pit millions of pro-democracy protesters against an increasingly isolated and stubborn president. Hence, the administration's belief—rational but still unproven by events on the ground—that the military could be the agent for positive change.

Should Mubarak Stay or Go?

At times, the administration appears to have answered this question with thundering clarity: yes, President Mubarak needs to vacate his office. At other times, the administration has projected ambiguity: no, President Mubarak is essential for a peaceful and orderly transition. While it seems clear that the administration harbors no illusions that President Mubarak can survive the current protests and that transition has both personal as well as constitutional aspects to it, this ambiguity has not advanced U.S. interests. For Middle Easterners, the imagery of Presidents Mubarak and Obama appearing on television just moments after each other on February 1—one of them saying "September" and the other saying "now"—projected a clear message. The result is that every day Mubarak stays in office is a rebuke to Obama. Indeed, Mubarak may decide to stay a bit longer just to make the point that Obama could not push him out.

What Is the Military's Role?

This is the key variable in the equation. At the moment, the military is undergoing a tug-of-war for its soul. On the one hand, Mubarak has named a triumvirate of leaders from various services—intelligence, army, air force—to bring these services and the armed forces closer to him as full partners in the effort to extend his rule. On the other hand, the military has generally refused to fire on citizens, a fact reflected in Obama's heady compliments on [their restraint] last week. In effect, Mubarak and Obama are each appealing to the military, one asking them "to stay the course" and the other effectively urging them "to do the right thing" by sidelining the president and beginning the transition. Military leaders found themselves in a bind, which was reflected in the fact that they sometimes took actions that signaled firm support of Mubarak while at other times taking actions that reflected a distancing from the president. In this tug of war, the forces arrayed against change are showing resourcefulness, stamina, and creativity. Every day that passes in which the military does not definitively break from Mubarak

implicates them with the regime. And every day that passes without that definitive break further erodes an already weakened U.S. regional image.

Should the United States Suspend Aid?

Some have argued for suspending all U.S. aid to Egypt immediately. Although their objective is understandable, their prescription is incorrect. Again, the most likely agent of peaceful change at the moment—the institution most likely to trigger transition—is the military. The United States should therefore remain in contact with this institution in order to influence it to the extent possible. The idea that Washington gains influence by cutting off assistance simply does not translate into Arabic. The administration is correct to maintain its current posture of continuing economic and military assistance to Egypt until it has greater clarity on the ground. A time may come, if the military decides to side fully with Mubarak or shoot protesters, when Washington can decide whether to suspend aid, but for now it should maintain the limited leverage and influence it has. At the same time, it is important for the Egyptian military leaders to hear directly from their U.S. counterparts, as well as from U.S. diplomatic representatives and political leaders, precisely how their actions (and their inaction) could affect U.S. security assistance.

What Does Transition Mean in Practice?

Transition surely means something different to new Egyptian vice president Omar Suleiman than it does to opposition figures such as Mohamed ElBaradei or the head of the Muslim Brotherhood. In my view, it is difficult to envision a nonregime figure—that is, someone who is neither a member of the national security establishment nor a proregime public figure (e.g., Arab League secretary-general Amr Mousa)—emerging as a transitional leader. Most likely, such a leader will come from the triumvirate of military figures Mubarak has named. Once a decision is finally made, many oppositionists may in fact breathe a sigh of relief after so much attention has been focused on the question of whether Mubarak will step down. If the new leadership shows itself to be serious about lifting the emergency law, releasing political prisoners, and implementing constitutional, legal, and administrative changes to permit free and fair elections, it may suffice to launch Egypt on a path of orderly, peaceful, democratic reform.

As we approach the transitional period, I believe deep concern about the Muslim Brotherhood's potential emergence as a major player and even power broker is warranted. The Brotherhood is not, as some suggest, simply an Egyptian version of the March of Dimes—that is, a social welfare organization whose goals are fundamentally humanitarian. On the contrary, the Brotherhood is a fundamentally political organization that seeks to reorder Egyptian (and broader Muslim) society in an Islamist fashion. Tactically, the organization will exploit whatever opportunities it is offered; it has renounced its most ambitious goals and violent means only as a result of regime compulsion, not by free choice. Extreme caution in advocating for reforms that could advantage the Brotherhood at the expense of non-Islamist political parties, groups, and movements is warranted. At the same time, the United States should not operate under the assumption that the Brotherhood's ascension to power is inevitable, given the country's broad range of political alternatives. In fact, such an assumption is very dangerous and could itself lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

U.S. Interests and U.S. policy

Broadly speaking, U.S. interests are best served by supporting a transition to an Egyptian government that

- shows, through action, its commitment to the universal freedoms of speech, assembly, thought, and religion, and to a free press; that encourages religious liberty, and both practices and enforces religious tolerance for all minorities; that supports the rights of people to communicate freely without interference, including through the internet; and that combats extremism in all its forms, including those based on religion;
- represents, through democratic norms and practices (including free and fair elections for president and parliament), the legitimate political, economic, and social aspirations of its people, and that endeavors, in all practicable ways, to meet them;
- respects the rule of law and the institutions of justice, recognizes the vital importance of an independent judiciary, and fights corruption at all levels of government;
- is committed to fulfill its international obligations, including (but not limited to) freedom of navigation through the Suez Canal, peace with Israel and the expansion of peace throughout the region, the fight against extremism and terrorism, peaceful resolution of the Sudan conflict (including recognition of partition), and all other treaty obligations and duties incumbent upon a peace-loving member of the United Nations;
- affirms its bilateral partnership with the United States to advance security and peace in the Middle East, Africa, and the Mediterranean.

This is the Egypt that merits full U.S. political support and financial assistance, including both economic and military aid. Washington should send to the Egyptian leadership and people a clear message that it stands ready to provide such aid to a government that can endorse these principles and work toward their implementation in practice.

At the same time, it is important for Egyptians to know the sort of government that would not merit U.S. support: a government that suppresses popular protest or resorts to violence against its citizens; a government that rejects the legitimate calls of its people for redress of grievances; a government whose promises of political reform consistently prove hollow; a government that presides over a regime of state-sponsored religious intolerance or state-complicit violence against religious minorities; a government that flouts Egypt's international commitments.

These principles should serve as the foundation of Washington's policy toward the uncertain situation in Egypt. They reflect core U.S. interests in the bilateral relationship and employ "positive conditionality" by linking assistance to a timetable for political reform and leadership transition. This approach is the best way to use American assets to affect the decisionmaking of those wielding authority in Cairo and facilitate a successful, orderly, and peaceful transition.

In this context, the United States should consult with the leadership in Cairo on ways to chart a transition to a government that would meet these goals and objectives. The willingness of Egypt's current leaders to endorse these principles and to outline a timetable for their implementation should determine whether the United States is able to continue providing economic and military support to Egypt. This includes a schedule for the constitutional, legal, and administrative changes needed to ensure free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections, including a transition to new leadership.

In this regard, it would run counter to U.S. interests for the United States to advocate in favor of a constitutional amendment to lift the prohibition on parties based on religion; should Egyptians opt for such a change, this is their right, but the U.S. has no interest in advancing the prospects of the Muslim Brotherhood at the expense of liberal and democratic parties who are our natural partners. And during that process of transition, the

administration should continuously monitor the Egyptian leadership's commitment to the rule of law, respect for universal freedoms, and protection of religious minorities as critical tests of its sincerity and responsibility.

In the meantime, the Obama administration should consider, with Congressional approval, redirecting an appropriate sum to humanitarian and medical assistance to aid the thousands of Egyptians wounded in the recent protests and to assist Egypt in cushioning the human cost of the protests on the Egyptian people. Such aid and assistance should be funneled through nongovernmental organizations, many of which have solid track records in providing and distributing aid.

In addition, the administration should immediately engage with the relevant democracy promotion organizations, including NDI and IRI, to assist Egyptians with their transition to democracy. This includes providing technical assistance to the government, the independent election commission, as well as likely election monitors (including Egypt's respected judiciary), and providing campaign and election training and support to all those Egyptian candidates and parties willing to affirm the main elements of the statement of policy noted above.

As for concerns about Egypt's regional posture, some changes are surely in order. America's Egyptian pillar is going through profound shock, the outcome of which is decidedly uncertain. Other Arab states have played an important role in support of U.S. regional interests—the role Jordan and the United Arab Emirates have played in Afghanistan and Iraq come to mind—but neither compares with the image of partnership with the United States projected more or less consistently by Egypt for more than three decades. While it is true that Egypt's regional influence has waned in recent years, and while it is true that there are important issues on which Egyptian partnership was found wanting, the swift demise of a longtime ally cannot but exacerbate the already tarnished image of U.S. regional influence. This situation can be salvaged through the establishment of a new government in Egypt that has popular support and sees value in continued strategic partnership with the United States—a difficult but not impossible configuration. But we should recognize that it will take considerable time.

In the meantime, the winds of change that first began to blow in Tunis and turned into a tornado in Cairo will have an impact elsewhere in the region. It is a mistake, however, to view the Middle East as a series of dominoes waiting to fall. The domestic context in each country is the dominant factor determining the stability or instability of a particular regime, and each country's situation is quite different from the next.

Without entering into a detailed discussion of each country, I offer a series of thematic prescriptions for U.S. regional policy:

- **Strengthen partnerships:** The demise of America's Egyptian pillar, at least for the foreseeable future, underscores the importance of strengthening our other partnerships.
 - The U.S.-Israel relationship is at the top of the list, because of the shock to Israel's national security structure that just occurred and because of the critical role that U.S.-Israel relations play in the advance of U.S. security interests throughout the region. Leaders of our two countries should commence immediate consultations on ways to strengthen the strategic partnership between these two democratic allies, both in substance and in perception.
 - U.S.-Gulf partnerships are also critical. The United States should find various ways to project its continuing commitment to the security and stability of the Gulf and to the Arab states of the region, including Iraq. This includes (but is not limited to) projection of military power, high-level visits, and bilateral and regional discussions on security issues.
 - Washington should also find ways, perhaps in concert with Arab oil producers, to strengthen the Jordanian government, which—through King Abdullah's appointment of a new

government—has renewed its commitment to the Jordanian people to advance the pace of political reform and ease the economic dislocations from which Jordan is currently suffering.

- **Promote a sustained and substantive process of reform:** However courageous the people of Egypt have shown themselves to be in the face of a government that rejected repeated pleas for political reform, incremental and orderly change remains the preferred path to political change. In that regard, the Egyptian and Tunisian cases now provide Washington with a new opportunity to engage Arab leaders and Arab peoples on ways to build more democratic, representative, responsive, and legitimate political systems, free of corruption and with respect for individual political rights. High-level officials should urgently take these two messages—a desire to strengthen partnerships and a desire to work cooperatively now on reform—to regional capitals. Especially vulnerable in this regard are several of the region’s republics that, unlike the monarchies, have actually promised democracy and failed to deliver. (The monarchies have set the bar lower in terms of political commitments and, while they fall short, can generally rely on other forms of legitimacy and authenticity than can the republics.) On the reform agenda, Washington should give high priority to Tunisia, where it is in U.S. interests to see a model of secular democratic reform succeed, and to the Palestinian Authority (PA)-ruled West Bank, where the current circumstances may make possible a local election that could be an important legitimizing tool for the current PA leadership.

- **Direct winds of change toward repressive regimes:** The contrast in the Obama administration’s approach to the pro-democracy movement in June 2009 Iran and in January 2011 Egypt is striking. As we move forward, U.S. policy should be at least as supportive of proponents of peaceful democratic change in states whose governments have adopted policies inimical to our interests as we have been in states whose governments have aligned themselves with our interests. In practice, this means the use of U.S. strategic communications, public diplomacy, and other tangible assets to assist and support the idea of democratic change in Iran and Syria and the courageous people willing to fight for that goal.

- **Don’t let Iran benefit from our distraction:** The simple fact that senior U.S. officials, from the president on down, were fixated on Egypt over the past two weeks meant that they were not focused on the urgent need to compel Iran to change policy on its nuclear program. When this reality is combined with statements by various U.S. and allied officials that the timeline for Iran’s nuclear progress has been pushed back, it would not be surprising for Iran to conclude that the United States is either distracted or complacent in its campaign to force a change in Iran’s nuclear policy. That is a dangerous situation. Vigilance is in order. We should not rule out the idea that Iran may misread the situation and opt to seek a speedier breakout, or to expand its capabilities in new and dangerous ways, or attempt to exert its influence elsewhere in the region by pursuing some new form of provocative behavior. There may even be some in Tehran who believe the moment ripe for deploying fifth-columnists and political saboteurs with the goal of toppling regimes they may consider weak and unstable.

- **Adopt a more sober and realistic approach to Israeli-Palestinian peace:** Recent events in Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and elsewhere show that

- the absence of progress toward Israeli-Palestinian peace appears not to have been a factor in the popular unrest;
- Israeli fears about the stability and security of the parties to whom it makes irrevocable concessions are neither inflated nor based on unfathomable worst-case scenarios.

In this context, the Obama administration should explore whether these two factors have changed the political calculus on the part of the PA leadership to the extent that they are now willing to engage in substantive negotiations now. Ideas that may have been unacceptable to Palestinians in the past—ranging from Israeli demands for long-term security presence in the Jordan Valley to incrementalist or partial arrangements short of a full peace agreement—may today be ready for negotiation.

Even without a change in approach by the PA leadership, the Obama administration should focus more attention on the need for substantive investment in the institution building now underway in the West Bank. This bottom-up process is the disadvantaged stepchild of the more high profile effort to promote top-down diplomatic success. The appointment of a senior official with specific responsibility for the institution-building process would be a step in the right direction.

At the same time, U.S. officials should recognize that Israeli leaders are quite understandably shaken by the events in Cairo and are likely to await clarity on the Egyptian political scene to assess the impact of changes there on issues that affect Israeli security, for example, relations with Hamas, security in Sinai, Gaza border security, transit of natural gas to Israel, and cooperation on counterterrorism. Working with Israel to address these new concerns should be a top priority.

In this environment, it would be a mistake for the administration to believe that now is a propitious moment for grand peace plans or for made-in-America bridging proposals. Given the seismic change on Israel's southern frontier, such a U.S. approach would only confirm the worst fears of Israeli leaders and Israeli public opinion about U.S. understanding of their security predicament. However, the United States would be wise to explore the possibility of progress on the Arab-Israeli front, based on the idea that the changed regional landscape may make once "unacceptable" ideas more palatable to the Palestinians, or that building the foundation of peace in a bottom-up process may eventually make the top-down diplomacy more amenable to breakthrough.

The Situation in Lebanon

Given that this hearing has reserved special time for review of the situation in Lebanon, a few specific comments are in order:

The appointment of a Hizballah-nominated prime minister in Lebanon is a serious blow for U.S. interests. Just five years ago, after the assassination of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri, the Lebanese people led the way in popular protest in the Middle East and forced Syrian troops to end their decades-old occupation of the country. This was a great victory for U.S. interests and the cause of freedom and democracy in the Middle East. Today, the situation has been reversed. The radical Shiite organization Hizballah—backed by Iran and Syria—has turned the tables on the coalition of moderate, pro-West forces, employing intimidation and fear as its principal weapons. On Israel's northern border, as now on Israel's southern border, uncertainty reigns.

For the United States, there are near-term decisions to be made about U.S. relations with the new government in Lebanon. The wisest route would be to allow the action or inaction of the Lebanese government to guide these decisions. Lebanon has responsibilities to bear under the UN Security Council resolution that governs the 2006

war ceasefire as well as the resolution that governs the mandate and operations of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. Failure to fulfill obligations under these and other relevant resolutions should trigger consideration by the Obama administration of punitive measures, including coordination with members of the Security Council on steps against the government of Lebanon and a review of our military assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces. Through it all, Washington should keep its eye on the long-term goal of sustaining and developing indigenous forces that reject the foreign domination and external influence of Syria and Iran, that oppose Hizballah's reckless policy of holding the Lebanese population hostage to its phantom "resistance" against Israel, and that want instead to build a free, democratic, and independent Lebanon.