

REMARKS FOR THE RECORD
AMBASSADOR JEFFREY D. FELTMAN
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE
MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA
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Chairman Ackerman, Ranking Member Burton, Distinguished Members of the
Committee:

Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today. My colleagues in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and I appreciate the Committee's abiding interest in and attention to our nation's priorities and goals in the region. I am pleased to present the Committee with an overview of the Administration's policies and our relations with the countries of the Middle East.

Events in the Middle East and U.S. involvement there often have significant policy and security implications that reach far beyond the region. International peace and stability, nuclear proliferation, energy security, economic growth, and human rights all are affected greatly by developments in the region. President Obama and Secretary Clinton are implementing a foreign policy that best enables us to respond to the clear imperatives, seize new opportunities, and address the serious challenges that we face in the Middle East and around the world.

Partnership has been a watchword of this Administration's foreign policy. President Obama's call for greater openness and partnership in our relations with other nations reflects a belief deeply held by this Administration: to face the complicated challenges confronting us today, we need to work together with others more than ever before.

And just as that holds for our foreign relations – reaching out to traditional and non-traditional partners in our diplomatic efforts – it could not be truer within our own government: teamwork, across our departments, agencies, offices, and branches of government, is essential. The State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs collaborates intensively with other regional and functional bureaus in the Department, with distinguished Special Envoys, Representatives and Advisors appointed by the President and the Secretary of State, with USAID and other civilian agencies and the Department of Defense, and with the Congress,

particularly with members of this Subcommittee, to ensure a comprehensive, coordinated approach to fulfilling our strategic goals.

Strategic Imperatives in the Region and Middle East Peace

Chief among our goals in the Middle East is to bring about peace in a region that has faced decades of conflict. While cognizant of the challenges ahead, this Administration believes that comprehensive peace – peace not only between Israel and the Palestinians, but also between Israel and Syria, and Israel and Lebanon, and the full normalization of relations between Israel and its neighbors – is not only in the interests of the parties to these conflicts; it is in America’s interest, and it is in the world’s interest. Achievement of this goal will require collective action and we are working closely with countries across the region to create an environment that supports peaceful resolution. At the same time, we are addressing the security needs of our friends and allies.

The resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the two-state solution is central to our goal of comprehensive peace: two states living side by side in peace and security – a strong, Jewish state of Israel, with true security for all Israelis; and an independent, viable, and contiguous Palestinian state that ends the occupation that began in 1967 and unleashes the full potential of the Palestinian people. President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton are deeply and personally committed to realizing this goal. On behalf of the President and Secretary of State, Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell has been working closely with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, regional leaders and allies, our partners in the Quartet, and others.

This is a challenging issue with a tangled history. We all know that no one high-level meeting will resolve this conflict. But progress is steadily and quietly being made, and the President and his team will continue to approach this effort with perseverance and determination.

Both in public and in private, President Obama has made clear that the negotiations should cover all permanent status issues – borders, security, Jerusalem, and refugees – and result in the establishment of an independent, viable, and contiguous Palestinian state, alongside a secure Israel.

While there are differences in the parties’ positions on the core issues, that is true of every negotiation. If we accepted that such differences would remain

unbridgeable, no conflict would ever be resolved. And there is a firm basis for discussions to resume based on the terms of reference of earlier negotiations and the parties' previous agreements.

We seek to create a dialogue that facilitates the compromises necessary to ensure the long-term interests of both sides. While it is critical that neither side hold out for the perfect formula, it is also important that both sides have a stake in the framework for the negotiations. The issues at hand can only be resolved through direct talks.

We remain steadfast in our commitment to the U.S.-Israel relationship, which is based not only on our common interests in the region, but on our common values. The Administration's commitment to Israel's security and well being is unshakable. We continue to consult closely with Israel to ensure its continued Qualitative Military Edge throughout the region. In FY09, with your help and leadership, the Administration disbursed \$2.55 billion in FMF to Israel and our FY10 commitment stands at \$2.775 billion. Additionally, our assistance and our diplomatic engagement region-wide help ensure Israel's security. We have also consistently worked to ensure that Israel is treated fairly at the UN and other international organizations.

This Administration is also vigorously pursuing comprehensive peace in the region, which we fundamentally believe is in our interests, as well as Israel's long-term interest. As the President said, the United States does Israel no favors when we fail to couple an unwavering commitment to its security and well-being with an insistence that Israel respect the legitimate claims and rights of Palestinians.

Resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict will not automatically resolve other challenges in the region, such as those posed by Iran, just as neutralizing those concerns will not automatically resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But efforts on these fronts and others are mutually reinforcing.

Making peace between Israelis and Palestinians – and between Israel and its Arab neighbors – strengthens the U.S. in responding to other foreign policy imperatives in the region. It serves U.S. national security interests and strengthens regional security and stability.

Among the other vital issues we must address in the region, nuclear non-proliferation is key to our long-term security and the stability of the region. We

continue to advance our non-proliferation aims internationally by seeking to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and their means of delivery, as well as weapon-usable nuclear and radiological materials and expertise, while ensuring that states that do seek civil nuclear power are able to exercise that right while they uphold their commitment to exclusively peaceful applications.

We are actively engaged in countering extremism by working with our partners to pursue terrorists and by discrediting extremist ideologies through promotion of social and economic development, good governance, rule of law, and resolution of regional conflicts.

We are also building constructive partnerships between the people of the United States and the Middle East that support entrepreneurship, science, education, health, and other shared goals.

While we must continue to strive for energy security by developing renewable sources and alternatives to fossil fuel use at home, we also must ensure international markets have access to affordable energy resources. Air and sea lanes must be protected and lines of communication to and from the region kept open.

The United States must be ready to support and work with the governments and people in the region, promoting reform and liberalization to increase representativeness, inclusiveness, and respect for the rights of all people, including women and religious minorities.

Regional Challenges and Threats

A range of serious challenges confront the Middle East and North Africa – among them, acute demographic challenges, notably a youth bulge that will necessitate the creation of millions of new jobs over the next decade. Conflicts, including continued attacks in Iraq and violence and separatism in Yemen, among others, continue to destabilize the region and detract resources from other priorities. Human trafficking, inadequate human rights protections, and absent or weak democratic institutions persist across much of the Near East. Other cross-border threats – from public health epidemics to terrorist organizations, including Al-Qaeda affiliates – are aggravated by emerging demographic trends that undermine human security and progress in the region.

These issues not only confront the people and governments of the region, but also affect our own policies and national security interests. Development and government capacity deficits can contribute to radicalization, inhibit the emergence of a robust civil society, and hinder opportunities for economic growth and trade. Conflicts fuel extremism and interfere with our ability to crystallize positive changes in the way the United States is viewed in the region. We will continue to bolster our strategic relationships in the region and the capacity of stakeholders at all levels to work together to overcome these challenges.

New Opportunities

President Obama has created a genuine opening and opportunity for a new beginning to our relationship with Muslims in the Middle East and around the world.

The President said, in both Ankara and in Cairo, that, where in the past we may have focused in this region more narrowly, through a lens of defeating extremists or securing oil and gas supplies, we now seek a broader engagement, on the basis of common interests and mutual respect. The President's vision includes new and reinvigorated partnerships in the fields of business, science and technology, education, public health, and with civil society across the region.

Following the President's speech, we initiated hundreds of conversations with community, civil society, and political leaders around the world. We have listened carefully. The expectations in the region are very high for U.S. action to follow up on the speech. With heightened expectations come certain risks, but also important opportunities.

The Department of State and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs play an important role in helping to fulfill that vision and ensure the President's words are backed by deeds. We will continue important ongoing public diplomacy efforts, including educational and cultural exchanges, which in FY 2008 totaled over \$100 million and involved thousands of youth and professionals. We remain active in our outreach efforts to regional news outlets, encompassing traditional and new media. Since 2007, the U.S. has issued more than 71,400 student and exchange visitor visas to applicants from the Middle East. We are particularly interested in supporting employment-focused approaches to education and partnerships with the private sector to tackle comprehensively the obstacles that hinder economic growth and development in the region. Coordination through international fora, such as

the G8's Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA), enhances our reach and effectiveness in these and other areas. Secretary Clinton will be leading the U.S. delegation, of which I will be a part, to the annual BMENA Forum for the Future in order to demonstrate our enduring commitment to creating sustainable partnerships that lead to reform, progress, and prosperity in the region.

A principal vehicle for achieving our objectives is the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). Through MEPI, we are answering the President's call to intensify and deepen our engagement in the region. MEPI is directly engaging with and investing in the people of the Middle East and North Africa through programs focused on strengthening civil society and the rule of law, empowering women and youth, creating educational opportunities, and fostering economic development and entrepreneurship.

MEPI's Local Grants Program directly supports the efforts of NGOs, the private sector, and academic institutions that are working to advance educational and professional opportunities for people in the region. Through this unique, fast-delivery program, MEPI fuels initiatives and ideas developed by organizations and civil society leaders working to advance positive change and reform in the Middle East and North Africa.

MEPI's support strengthens the capacity of those who serve as the region's most dedicated and successful agents of change – the people themselves. We've seen progress in the region through our efforts. For example, MEPI funds provided for the training for more than 6,000 women candidates in preparation for Morocco's June 2009 municipal elections, in which the government had set aside 12 percent of the seats for women. Women won 13 percent of the seats, surpassing the quota and marking a dramatic increase from only 0.5 percent of seats they held previously. This type of activity responds to the President's call to employ foreign assistance to catalyze local action that will ultimately help to build sustainable democracies.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provides another key vehicle for furthering regional goals that are vital to U.S. foreign policy. Through programs in the region – that totaled more than \$2 billion in FY 2009 – USAID helps local governments to deliver services; supports private sector-led economic growth; delivers humanitarian aid; and works with governments to strengthen their capacity to respond to the needs of the people of the region.

Principled Engagement

Let me turn to our strategy of engagement, which the President first laid out in his inaugural address and has since repeated in interviews and speeches across the United States and around the world.

Through our strategy of principled engagement we are greatly strengthening our position and advancing our objectives, vis-à-vis both our friends and our adversaries. With our allies we are reinvigorating more comprehensive partnerships – reaching beyond governments to touch the lives of individuals through economic, educational, and scientific cooperation. We are demonstrating our desire to work with our allies and engage in full cooperation across a wide range of issues.

Our engagement, based on mutual respect and mutual interests, increases our power, our influence, our options, and ultimately our chances for success in achieving our objectives. Even in the cases of adversaries or nations with which we disagree, a strategy of engagement pays important dividends. When we lead with diplomacy we gain insight into others' intentions and calculations. As Secretary Clinton has said, we also gain the possibility, however remote, that governments will ultimately alter their policies on issues where we disagree.

By pursuing the option for dialogue and proving our openness to a negotiated resolution of differences, we bolster the willingness of our allies to join us in exerting pressure should those negotiations fail. Our efforts in the context of international fora are met with greater readiness and receptivity by other countries, opening new channels to mitigate conflicts and encourage international actors to adhere to their international responsibilities.

Iran

Our strategy of engagement in general takes us to the specific case of Iran.

Our primary goal is clear: to prevent Iran from achieving a nuclear weapons capability. In coordination with our friends and allies, we are using a range of diplomatic tools including direct, principled engagement and continued pressure to change Iran's strategic calculus so that it meets its international obligations on its nuclear program and can enjoy the rights that come with being a responsible member of the international community.

While we remain committed to reaching a diplomatic solution through meaningful engagement with Iran, we know that pressure plays a role in persuading Iran of the costs of its destabilizing activities. In case negotiations do not produce the necessary results, we are also developing our planning for international action to pressure Iran to change its policies. This is the rationale behind the P5+1 dual-track policy, a balance between engagement and pressure, to persuade the Iranian government that its current approach is not in its best interest.

As the President has said, the P5+1 meeting with Iran on October 1 was a constructive beginning, but determination of whether Iran is serious about addressing international concerns will depend on Iran's follow-through on its commitments. The recent revelation of a previously-undisclosed enrichment facility at Qom contributed to the deep concerns and unity of the international community. Tangible steps by Iran are needed to demonstrate that its nuclear program is exclusively peaceful. In Vienna last week, the IAEA, Russia, the U.S., France, and Iran met to finalize the implementation terms of the IAEA's proposal, based on the Geneva agreement in principle, to respond to Iran's request to acquire fuel for its IAEA-safe-guarded Tehran Research Reactor. Russia, France and the United States have accepted the draft IAEA agreement, which if implemented by Iran, would be an important step to build confidence. We hope that Iran will respond positively to the agreement developed by the IAEA as a confidence building measure. Turning to the IAEA investigation of the Iranian nuclear program, IAEA inspectors have inspected the Qom facility this week and we expect Iran to provide the IAEA with full and unfettered access for its investigation and we await the IAEA's report.

The Tehran Research Reactor project and the IAEA's inspection of the Qom facility occur in the context of the international community's broader concerns about Iran's nuclear program, which will remain the focus of the P5+1 process.

International concerns about Iran are also broader than the nuclear file. Iran remains the most active state sponsor of terrorism. Its support for groups such as Hamas, Hizballah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, members of the Taliban, and insurgents in Iraq continue to destabilize the region. Iran's support for terrorist groups has a direct impact on international efforts to promote peace and threatens regional economic stability. Moreover, it undermines the trust of the international

community and weakens its confidence in Iran's ability to play a positive role in the region.

We encourage Iran to maintain constructive and peaceful relations with its neighbors. We also continue to appeal to countries in the region, whose territory and air space Iran has used to re-supply terrorist groups, to help stop the flow of materiel and other support to terrorist groups.

When we talk about Iran meeting its international responsibilities, we are not just talking about its nuclear program or support for terrorism; we are also talking about human rights. Much like Iran's failure to adhere to its international obligations on the nuclear front, Iran has failed to adhere to its international obligations to protect and advance human rights and universal principles and freedoms - freedoms provided for in its own constitution, reflected in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and codified in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a party.

We remain deeply concerned about the brutal manner in which the Iranian government handled peaceful post-election protests. We call on Iran to live up to its international obligations to advance universal principles, including freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of worship, and the right to due process for all those seeking justice. The Iranian government's flagrant disregard of its international human rights commitments has never been clearer than in the weeks and months following the June 12th election.

Of particular concern is the Iranian government's use of public show trials to deal with the aftermath of the June elections and designed to extract forced confessions from hundreds of its citizens. Iran's sentencing of Iranian-American scholar, Kian Tajbakhsh to 15 years in prison is just one recent example of Iran's failure to ensure due process safeguards as guaranteed in its own constitution, as well as in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In discussing Iran today, I must reiterate our concern about the fate of American citizens currently detained or missing there. We continue to urge the Iranian government to release Mr. Tajbakhsh, and the three American hikers, Shane Bauer, Sarah Shourd, and Josh Fattal, who have been held without charges for more than 80 days. We also continue to call for the immediate release of Reza Taghavi, a 71 years-old Iranian American who has been held in detention without charges since May 2008 despite his failing health. We also continue to press Iran

to use all means to determine the whereabouts and ensure the safe return of Robert Levinson. Our goal is to ensure the safe return of all these individuals to the United States as quickly as possible so that they can be reunited with their families.

Iraq

The United States remains committed to bolstering Iraq as a sovereign nation and supporting its progress on a path to self-reliance, peace, and prosperity. Iraqis themselves are making efforts to promote domestic peace, national unity, and regional integration. We continue to support those efforts of our Iraqi partners.

An example of our commitment to a better future for Iraq is the U.S.-Iraq Business and Investment Conference held on October 20-21 that attracted over 1,000 participants. It was an opportunity to mark the progress that has been made and a chance for the American and international business communities to take advantage of significant business opportunities in Iraq. Secretary Clinton and Prime Minister Maliki opened the event. They highlighted the exciting potential in Iraq and the desire of Iraqis to build a more prosperous, peaceful future for themselves. Secretary Clinton commended Iraqi officials for recent steps to improve the investment climate and urged additional steps so that Iraq could compete successfully for global investment funds. She stressed that the conference was a tangible outcome of U.S. commitments under the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) to move toward the goal of a stable, sovereign, and self-reliant Iraq. We have made other commitments to Iraq as well. As you may recall, the President announced in February that we would continue to help Iraq train its Security Forces and develop its government and economy.

We have expressed our condolences to the victims of Sunday's brutal attacks in Baghdad and for the tragic loss of so many lives. The United States strongly condemns the bombings at the Iraqi Ministry of Justice and other government offices and the horrific bombings of August 19. These bombings and some of the recent attacks on the U.S. military and Iraqi civilians demonstrate that Iraq is not yet secure and there will be difficult days ahead. We stand by all Iraqis, at this crucial time leading up to national elections, and we pledge to join them in working together to combat all forms of violence and attempts at intimidation. It is worth noting that violence in Iraq remains substantially reduced from 2006-2007 levels, and the capacity of Iraq's Security Forces is improving.

Iraqis continue to make political progress. Recent provincial and regional elections were conducted peacefully and successfully. Upcoming national parliamentary elections in early 2010 are expected to be a watershed event in Iraq's young democracy. Of critical importance for Iraq's democracy is passage of an election law to govern the upcoming national elections. Iraq's political leaders are seriously working on such a law, but have already exceeded their self-imposed deadline. We are actively urging all parties to seek compromise language on the issues that divide them, so that Iraq may hold timely and democratic polls this coming January.

Progress in Iraq is significant and hopeful, but not without challenges, including Arab-Kurd disagreements that continue to cause tensions. To address those issues we are actively supporting efforts to settle boundary disputes and develop the vital oil sector. We urge all sides to abstain from violence and to work through peaceful channels to resolve differences.

The Strategic Framework Agreement serves as the basis for our relationship with Iraq as we move forward. In July, Secretary Clinton and Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki co-chaired the Higher Coordinating Committee of the SFA and reaffirmed our mutual commitment to the civilian partnership it envisions. We will direct U.S. assistance to help re-build the capacity of the Iraqi government in many critical areas, including better delivery of public services, economic reform, decreasing sectarian violence and strengthening the rule of law and respect for human rights. We will continue to work with the Iraqi government and the international community to assist displaced Iraqis and create conditions that support their voluntary and sustainable return.

U.S. combat forces withdrew from cities and villages on June 30. We will honor our commitment under the Security Agreement to remove all U.S. forces by December 31, 2011, and the President has made clear his intent to remove combat troops by August 2010. He reiterated this pledge when he met with Prime Minister Maliki in the Oval Office on October 20. The Department of State and Embassy Baghdad are actively engaged in the important transition from a military focus toward a civilian and capacity-building focus. We are working closely with General Odierno and our military colleagues and other U.S. government agencies to ensure the transition is smooth and successful. The support of Congress will be vital in the effort to obtain the resources our men and women on the ground need to do their jobs and build a strong foundation for our new relationship with Iraq.

Syria and Lebanon

The President has endorsed a sustained, principled dialogue with Syria to advance the interests of the United States and our allies. We believe that Syria and the United States share some common interests, including a comprehensive peace in the region, and that Syria can potentially play a constructive role in realizing our common goals, provided Syria addresses a number of key concerns.

As part of our policy of engagement, I have visited Syria on several occasions and Special Envoy Mitchell has twice met with Syrian President Bashar al-Asad. Our initial meetings were essential to underscore the U.S. commitment toward advancing regional peace and establishing a constructive atmosphere for dialogue. Having laid this groundwork, we now want to move beyond dialogue and toward action in the areas of cooperation and concern that we have identified. While we have made some modest headway with the Syrians in this regard and we believe that there is further potential for a positive, constructive U.S.-Syrian relationship. For that potential to be fully realized, however, we will need to see Syria address our concerns about some of its regional policies, such as support for terrorist organizations like Hizballah and Hamas.

In Lebanon, we hope to see a quick resolution to the challenges that have impeded the government-formation process. This is a process for the Lebanese to carry out in accordance with their constitution and without outside interference. In their June elections, the Lebanese sent a clear message in favor of Lebanon's independence. Expectations are currently high that a cabinet could be announced within the coming days. We certainly hope this is the case. The Lebanese people have waited too long for their government to return to the work of ensuring security, economic development, and political dialogue for all Lebanese citizens. We commend Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri and President Michel Sleiman for their stewardship during the government formation process. We look forward to working with the next Lebanese government and reiterate that our support for Lebanese sovereignty will not be compromised by our engagement with any other party.

We remain extremely troubled about Hizballah's role in Lebanon, especially its maintenance of a vast arsenal of increasingly sophisticated weaponry. We are also gravely concerned by Hizballah's operations outside Lebanon, including their activities inside Egypt, and in Azerbaijan where two Hizballah operatives were recently sentenced to 15 years in prison. Hizballah's actions in Lebanon and

abroad contravene Security Council Resolution 1559 and 1701, are inconsistent with Lebanon's democratic processes, stoke sectarian tensions, and threaten to spark renewed conflict in the region. We reiterate our calls, echoed by the UN Secretary-General in his most recent report on Lebanon, for Hizballah to lay down its arms and respect the Lebanese constitution, the Taif Agreement, and relevant Security Council resolutions. All other parties in the region, particularly Syria and Lebanon, should also help ensure the implementation of relevant Security Council Resolutions.

Regional Partners

We continue to develop our strategic relationships in the Gulf and throughout the region. Through our engagement with regional partners, and with other governmental and non-governmental actors around the world, the U.S. is gaining the political and material support to deal effectively with the challenges we face.

We share a common vision of a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Middle East with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. We are committed to working with our Gulf partners to seek an end to persistent conflict in the region, in particular achieving a lasting peace between Israel and its neighbors. We continue to support military, law enforcement, and regulatory mechanisms and promote robust anti-terrorism cooperation with our Gulf partners to stem extremism and deny safe haven for terrorists throughout the broader region.

With our important allies Egypt and Jordan, the only two Arab countries that currently have peace treaties with Israel, we are working on a broad range of shared initiatives, including promoting a comprehensive Middle East peace, countering terrorism, promoting good governance, respect for human rights, and economic prosperity.

President Obama and Secretary Clinton have acknowledged the contribution of Saudi Arabia as the author of the Arab Peace Initiative. It is important, though, that Arab states recognize this initiative as an important beginning, and not an end, to their responsibilities to help create the conditions for peace.

The U.S. must also engage with our partners to address the troubling developments in Yemen and ensure that critical stabilization, development, and humanitarian assistance objectives are met. We are seriously concerned by the

violence and unrest of recent weeks and months. We will follow a two-pronged approach, involving security as well as humanitarian and stabilization assistance, to improve the government of Yemen's ability to maintain stability and prevent the country from becoming a safe haven for terrorists. A weak central government in Yemen, as well as the increased presence of Al-Qaeda, are two significant challenges that the United States must continue to address.

In conclusion, even a quick survey of the Near East region reveals the magnitude of the issues and challenges we face there: the search for peace in a region riven by decades of conflict; the security of our friends and allies; the protection of our nation's energy supply; the moral imperative to confront global climate change; the promotion of democracy, women's empowerment, human rights, and social and political progress; the fight against human trafficking; the cultivation of new markets for American commerce; and the expansion of education and economic opportunity. Our foreign policy in the Near East will affect the future security and well-being of the American people, the people of the region, and indeed, of the world. Our diplomats serving in this region, often in combat zones alongside the brave men and women in the U.S. Armed Forces, are pursuing these goals vigorously every day. As Assistant Secretary, I am deeply grateful for the support this committee has shown them.

Thank you for that support, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to lay out the pressing issues, and our vital goals in the region. I look forward to addressing any questions the Committee may have.