

Testimony of  
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## **U.S. Policy Toward a Turbulent Middle East**

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished Senators, I am honored to be able to appear before you to discuss U.S. policy toward the Middle East.

I came to Washington and began work on the Middle East in the U.S. government at the end of the Iran-Iraq War. During that period, the Middle East has rarely ever seemed “good” and only briefly ever hopeful, but I have never seen its problems as bad as they are now. The region’s current dreadful, dangerous situation demands that we reassess American policy toward the Middle East to ask how best we can secure our interests today, and perhaps help guide the region—or key parts of it—toward a better future.

The United States continues to have vital interests in the Middle East, and our actions (and inactions) have been an important contribution to its present dismal state. The United States was not wholly culpable for the current situation in the region, but we were also hardly blameless. Many of its problems might have been averted or mitigated by different American policies at various points over the past 30-40 years. Had we wanted to move the region in a better direction, we had many chances to do so. Unfortunately, successive American administrations have prioritized short-term expediency over long-term strategic benefit, and we missed those opportunities time and again.

To my mind, a concomitant point is that the problems of the region did not happen overnight, even if some of their symptoms caught us by surprise over the past five years. All of them were long in the making, and thus none of them lend themselves to quick fixes. Again, it has been the American predilection for quick fixes—for slapping a figurative Band-Aid on the latest Middle East conflagration and then trying to ignore it—that has brought us to the current state of affairs. The problems of the Middle East have become too deep and too wide to be treated in such fashion.

### **Some Historical Perspective**

Mr. Chairman, it is of critical importance that we recognize the historical forces at work that have brought us to the current circumstances in the region. Not as an excuse for an inaction, but rather to understand how we got to where we are so that we can better understand what will likely be necessary to reach a better future.

At root, what is going on in the Middle East is the break down of the post-World War II order. That, not the borders drawn after World War I, is the real source of the problems. After the Second World War, the colonial powers of France and Britain were slowly forced to give up their control over the states of the region. They were replaced, across the Arab world and Iran,

by autocracies of two kinds: monarchies or secular dictatorships (which we euphemistically referred to as “republics”). None of these governments had much legitimacy, even the monarchies which generally took power during the inter-war period and so had little claim to tradition or longevity.

Nevertheless, they proved more or less functional for the first several decades after the war. All of them developed modest economies fueled largely by oil, either directly from their own oilfields or indirectly via remittances and aid transfers. All of them featured top-heavy and deeply corrupt bureaucracies responsible for employing a disproportionate share of their workforces. All of them indulged highly dysfunctional educational systems that eventually failed to produce the kind of innovative labor pool necessary for information-age economies. All of them built repressive security institutions that instilled fear in their populations and convinced all but the most desperate or reckless from protesting against the systems. From the 1940s through the 1990s, these regimes clunked along, providing the bare minimum of goods and services to their population, often excusing their performance by blaming external conspiracies focused on Israel, the United States or the West more broadly.

Beginning in the 1990s, these systems began to come under pressure and to fail. Out of control demographics begat workforces too big to be employed by the public sector. For a great many Arabs (and Iranians), the corruption, incompetence and callousness of the regimes that had seemed like bearable problems when times were better, suddenly became unbearable as times got harder. The rapid advance of information technology enabled economies in East Asia and Latin America to surge ahead of the Muslim states, while the proliferation of that technology brought home to more and more people in the Muslim Middle East the revelation that they were falling behind. In the vast majority of cases, the regimes responded by becoming more repressive, crushing any who proposed an alternative way of organizing their societies. The regimes clung to power, but the repression only intensified the unhappiness of their citizens.

An “expectations gap” opened up across the Arab world and Iran, between the circumstances that the people found themselves and where they believed they ought to be. As it has everywhere else around the world and across time, that expectations gap created large-scale internal unrest. By the late 1990s, it had already produced attempted (but failed) revolutions, insurgencies and terrorism. In the region and in the West, many began to call for political, economic and social reform in the Muslim Middle East—reform as the only realistic alternative to revolution or repression. But those calls were not heeded and in 2009 in Iran and 2011 across the Arab world, these problems finally exploded in what we call the Green Revolution and the Arab Spring.

Those revolts produced two very different, but equally dangerous outcomes. In Libya, Syria and Yemen, the unrest was adequate to destroy the control of the old regime. However, because the regimes had successfully prevented any alternative conceptions of organization from emerging, there was nothing to take their place. They became failed states, enabling power vacuums to emerge, which in turn produced civil wars among various sub-state identity groups who fought for power, to avenge past wrongs, and out of fear that failure to do so would bring about their destruction by extremists among the other groups.

In virtually all of the other Arab states and Iran, the regimes were able to stamp out the unrest before it could snowball into revolution, but only at the price of even greater repression. In so doing, they capitalized on widespread fears that unrest would produce chaos and civil war as in Libya, Syria and Yemen. Tolerance for repression has some other sources as well. In Morocco and Jordan, the monarchs have promised far-reaching (and popular) reforms but have

so far under-delivered on those promises, while in Lebanon and Algeria, the memory of their own previous civil wars has dampened enthusiasm for protest.

But renewed repression inevitably has its price. In places like Bahrain and Egypt, it has produced festering discontent and terrorism. Many of the other states of the region remain fragile to say the least. In Algeria and Jordan, public unhappiness lurks just below the surface of public discourse. In Saudi Arabia, the new king, Salman, felt it necessary to disburse cash to buy acceptance for his accession in a manner reminiscent of Caligula and Nero. Ultimately, repression and fear of civil war can only produce a (false) stability for so long. If there is not reform, there will eventually be more revolutions, failed states, civil wars, insurgencies and terrorism.

### **American Disengagement**

There is one last piece of the historical puzzle that needs to be put on the table before we can begin to discuss how the United States might begin to help the Middle East dig its way out of its current situation. That is the role of the United States itself.

Even after the British finally surrendered their colonies in the 1940s and '50s, London continued to serve as the great power guarantor and mediator across the Middle East. In the Persian Gulf, Britain protected Saudi Arabia and the small Emirates as they grew into important oil producers. London backed the Jordanian monarchy and checked the designs of radical regimes from Egypt's efforts in Yemen to Iraq's designs on Kuwait.

Americans did not always like the way that the British oversaw the Middle East. The Truman Administration prevented Great Britain from overthrowing the Mossadeq government. While the Eisenhower Administration turned around and embraced that project, it later blocked Britain and France from ousting Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser in 1956. In part for that reason, when the British announced that they were withdrawing from "East of Suez" in 1971, the United States was reluctant to their place.

Nevertheless, circumstances forced us to do so. Initially, we tried to empower regional proxies—first Israel, then Iran, and then Saudi Arabia—to protect American (and Western) interests in the region instead. But the Israelis were hated by the Arabs, the Saudis lacked the will or the capacity to act decisively, and then the Shah of Iran was overthrown in 1979. Indeed, the Iranian revolution proved to be a watershed. Our strongest regional ally was replaced by our most strident and charismatic foe, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The threat his revolutionary Iranian state posed to American allies across the region forced the United States to become militarily involved in the Persian Gulf for the first time, a commitment expanded when Iran's defeat (with American assistance) in the Iran-Iraq War created the opportunity for Saddam Husayn to invade Kuwait and pose a different, but equally dangerous threat to the region's vital oil exports.

And so Washington, finally shouldered the burden once borne by London. The United States became the ultimate guardian of the region's oil flows, the mediator of many of its disputes, the deterrent to its worst threats. The true hegemon of the Middle East. As part of that evolution, American policy-makers increasingly were forced to accept that the region's internal politics were important to American interests because internal problems could affect regional stability and its oil exports.

Of course, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the Bush '43 Administration attempted to eradicate some of the region's problems permanently by military force. Their invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan may have been well-intentioned (or not, as historians will ultimately decide) but

they could not have been more poorly executed. The result was two long and painful wars that created a public desire to diminish America's role in the Middle East, if not end it altogether.

The Obama Administration took office determined to make that wish reality to the maximum extent possible. The United States disengaged from Iraq pell-mell, quickly undoing much of the progress painstakingly achieved in 2007-2009. Elsewhere across the region, the United States absented itself from myriad other events. Washington stopped pressing for political and economic reform among the Arab states, turned its back on the Arab-Israeli peace process, and allowed civil wars to erupt and spread unchecked. When the Green Revolution broke out in Tehran and the Arab Spring spread across the region, Washington offered thin rhetorical support but nothing of substance.

Ultimately, however, the Da'ish (or ISIS or ISIL or Islamic State) offensive of June 2014 that overran Mosul and much of northern Iraq forced the United States to recognize that it had swung the pendulum of American involvement with the Middle East too far in the opposite direction from the militarized interventions of the Bush '43 era, toward an equally dangerous isolation from the region. President Obama's decision to re-intervene militarily in August and his shift in strategy declared in September 2014 were critically important steps in the right direction, although there is still a great deal to be done to turn his statements into concrete programs in both Iraq and Syria.

Ultimately then, the problems of the Middle East can be traced back to a combination of the breakdown of the internal order of the region as the semi-functional autocracies established after World War II have slowly grown ever more dysfunctional, coupled with the withdrawal of its traditional great power hegemon. Stabilizing the region will mean dealing with both of these problems, although neither lends itself to a simple turning back of the clock. However, even before these major tasks can be contemplated, there is a more immediate priority: dealing with the failed states/civil wars that have become the key drivers of instability in the Middle East.

### **Dealing with the Civil Wars of the Region**

Today, the principal source of the turbulence and violence threatening the Middle East are the four civil wars currently raging in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya. Before the United States can start to address the deeper problems of the failure of the Muslim Middle Eastern state system, it first needs to help mitigate or eliminate these engines of instability.

Some of these civil wars threaten U.S. interests directly. In particular, Iraq and Libya are important oil producers. All of them threaten U.S. interests indirectly, by breeding vicious terrorist groups, generating millions of refugees that threaten to overwhelm neighboring states, radicalizing regional populations and potentially sucking their neighbors into interventions they cannot win. Indeed, historically, civil wars have had a bad habit of causing civil wars in neighboring states as well as metastasizing into regional conflicts.

Moreover, civil wars have proven historically difficult to contain. I think it worth noting that the Obama Administration, despite all its rhetoric to the contrary, pursued a determined policy of containment toward the Syrian civil war until spillover from that civil war (in the form of Da'ish) helped push Iraq back into civil war. At that point, the Administration rightly recognized that containment of the Syrian civil war had failed and the United States would have to adopt a more pro-active policy to try to bring about an end to the conflict—and to the renewed civil war in Iraq it helped rekindle.

It is an unfortunate reality that it is widely believed that it is impossible to do anything about "somebody else's civil war." A well-developed body of historical scholarship on civil

wars demonstrates that while it is not simple or straightforward for a third party to end a civil war peacefully, it is hardly impossible. Indeed, the policies articulated by President Obama on Iraq and Syria in September 2014 conform nicely to the lessons of this history, and therefore should give us some confidence that they are feasible, if properly resourced and executed.

***Iraq.*** In Iraq, as I and others have reported, the narrow military effort to defeat Da'ish is going quite well. The real problems, including with the military piece, are largely political. As is well understood at this point, Iranian-backed Shi'a militias are playing an outsized role in Iraq's military victory, frightening the Sunni populace they are meant to liberate with the specter of ethnic cleansing. The militias need to be corralled by Iraqi Army formations, preferably guided by American advisors accompanying them in the field. That will require further development of Iraq's security forces and additional American advisors.

Of equal or greater importance is to forge a new power-sharing arrangement between the Sunni and Shi'a Arab communities as the United States did in 2007-2008. Too often, the Obama Administration has dismissed this as a luxury, an academic nicety rather than a practical necessity. They are wrong. Without such a new power-sharing arrangement, Iraq's Sunni Arabs will have no sense of the Iraq they are being asked to fight for. They have no intention of going back to 2011, when a Shi'a prime minister manipulated Iraq's existing political structure to repress their community. Without such a power-sharing agreement, Iraq's Sunnis are likely to resist the central government by force, and in doing so will open the door once again to Da'ish.

Although I could make many additional points about what is needed to translate battlefield victories into meaningful political achievements in Iraq, I will add just one more. This is the need for a thoroughgoing reform of the Iraqi Security Forces to turn them back into the apolitical and largely professional force they had become by 2009—before former Prime Minister Maliki politicized the officer corps and turned the army into an incompetent, sectarian tool for his own narrow political agenda. Doing so will require retaining an American training and advisory presence—along with all of their support forces—for a decade or more. But it is absolutely critical to ensure that Iraq has a reasonably strong and independent military that can be counted to protect all of its minorities and see that the terms of the new power-sharing arrangement is honored by all sides.

***Syria.*** Addressing the problems of the Syrian civil war is even harder. Unlike in Iraq, the Asad regime is deeply unpopular with the majority of the population but the opposition is badly fragmented and dominated by Sunni extremists. In these circumstances, the Obama Administration's stated policy is arguably the only course of action that makes sense given the unique history of Syria and the general history of civil wars. The United States should not want to see either the Asad regime or the Sunni extremists prevail because they can only do so by mass slaughter and the victory of either would then create new threats to U.S. allies. However, the current moderate Syrian opposition is too weak, too fractious and too vilified to serve as the foundation for a viable third force. Consequently, the United States will have to build a new Syrian opposition army—something we have done with success elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, we will have to provide it with extensive training, a full panoply of weaponry (including some armor and

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<sup>1</sup> For a more extensive explanation of this strategy and why it could succeed in accomplishing American objectives in Syria, see Kenneth M. Pollack, "An Army to Defeat Assad: How to Turn Syria's Opposition Into a Real Fighting Force," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 5 (September/October 2014), pp. 110-124.

artillery), and the backing of a major U.S. air campaign as we did for other indigenous opposition armies in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Libya.

While this strategy certainly can succeed in ending the fighting and compelling a new power-sharing agreement that would stabilize the country, it is not going to be easy. It will take a long time and will require a sustained American commitment throughout. And this is the great question mark hanging over the Administration's approach to Syria. The military program to recruit, train and equip a new Syrian opposition army has proceeded painfully slowly. The process of creating a corresponding political framework is even further behind. Indeed, it is virtually non-existent. Finally, while there is an argument to be made that progress in Syria can and should follow progress in Iraq, waiting too long there will make the Syrian effort far more difficult when the U.S. finally gets around to it, and risks the impact of spillover into Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and back into Iraq—which is unlikely to enjoy any post-Da'ish stability if Da'ish continues to have a sanctuary next door.

**Libya.** Libya will require an approach much like Syria. It too needs a new military, one that is apolitical and professional, capable of defeating all of the partisan forces and then serving as the kind of strong, institution around which a new political system could be organized and enforced. Libya will also require the same kind of power-sharing arrangement to provide an equitable distribution of power and resources among its warring factions (which are primarily geographic—Cyrenaica vs. Tripolitania, Misrata vs. Zintan—although a secular-religious divide is being overlaid on these longer-standing divisions).

Both efforts will require a great deal of external support to succeed. The challenge with Libya is that while it is strategically far more important than the attention it has so far received, it is not as important to American interests as Iraq (and by association, Syria). Given the extent of the actual or proposed American commitments to Iraq and Syria, it seems unlikely that the U.S. would make a similar effort in Libya.

That means that Libya must largely be a European undertaking. Europe is far more directly affected by the loss of Libyan oil and trade and the increase in Libyan refugees. The problem, which this Committee understands only too well, is that the Europeans have allowed their militaries to atrophy to virtual impotence, and they have shown little willingness or ability to harness their economic and diplomatic resources for difficult, protracted missions like stabilizing and rebuilding Libya. Even though the Europeans would need to furnish the bulk of the combat aircraft, trainers, advisors, weaponry, economic assistance and diplomatic muscle to stabilize Libya, it will invariably require the United States to convince them and enable them to do so. We will probably have to provide political leadership, logistical assistance, military command and control, and possibly some advisors as well if we are to move them to do what is ultimately in their own best interest as well as ours.

**Yemen.** Yemen is the hardest of all. It is the home of one of the most dangerous al-Qa'ida franchises in the Middle East and the civil war has badly disrupted the current American system of suppressing that threat. But we cannot wish away the ongoing civil war and ultimately, eliminating the threat of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) will require an end to the civil war itself. The last piece of our Yemeni dilemma is that, as dangerous as AQAP may be, it is not so dangerous that the American people will countenance an invasion and occupation of the country. Nor is Yemen so important as to justify the kind of American effort that the Obama Administration has committed to in Iraq and Syria. Indeed, given how parsimoniously the

Administration has resourced its commitments in Iraq and Syria, it seems especially unlikely that they will make a simultaneous effort in Yemen.

Given these difficult realities, America's best recourse in Yemen may be to relocate our counterterror assets across the Red Sea to the Horn of Africa and try as best we can to contain the Yemeni civil war. I recognize that I wrote above that it is very difficult to contain the spillover from a civil war, but I simply see no alternative in the case of Yemen. The only country willing to intervene in Yemen is Saudi Arabia, which probably lacks the capacity to do so effectively. Indeed, the greatest danger stemming from the Yemeni civil war may be the Kingdom's determination to intervene there to try to stave off spillover from the civil war.

For over fifty years, the Saudis have feared that internal conflict in Yemen will infect the Kingdom and spawn a civil war there as well. Despite the fact that Yemen has been wracked by internal conflict for nearly that entire period and it never has caused internal instability in the Kingdom, this has not kept the Saudis from worrying that it someday will. These fears have been exacerbated by (exaggerated) Iranian support for Yemen's Houthi rebels. Now Riyadh fears that Iran is taking over the state on its southern border, to match what the Saudis see as an Iranian "takeover" of Iraq, the country on their northern border.

There is a real risk that the Saudis will keep doubling down in Yemen and in so doing will overstrain themselves—politically, militarily and even economically. The Kingdom cannot afford to get dragged deeper into a Yemeni quagmire it cannot stabilize on its own. This is especially true given the challenges the Kingdom is likely to face from historically low oil prices and exorbitant new financial commitments in an effort to stave off the Arab Spring. The great danger is that the Kingdom could find itself bankrupted and torn apart by an endless commitment to a Yemeni quagmire, as Pakistan has been by its intervention in the Afghan civil wars.

***The Kurds.*** Although the Kurds of Iraq are not in a state of civil war themselves, they deserve a special place in our consideration of how to deal with the civil wars of the region. In a turbulent part of the world, where there are few stable regions and where the United States has few friends, the Kurds of Iraq stand out. Although their security has been compromised by the Da'ish threat, with American air power, weapons and training, they have restored their borders and are taking the fight to the enemy. Their economy remains hobbled by graft and low oil prices, but they remain relatively better off than most of their neighbors—and well ahead of either Syria or the rest of Iraq. And while their political system still has a long way to go, there is the potential for meaningful progress there and some intelligent and enlightened leaders who could show the way if given the tools to do so.

All of this should make the United States particularly well disposed to the Kurds of northern Iraq as we try to stabilize this region and prevent the chaos any farther. It would be best—for the Kurds, for Iraq and for the United States—if Iraqi Kurdistan were an independent nation, but that prospect is at least several years off. In the meantime, America's interests argue for expanding a strategic partnership with the Kurds to include additional military, diplomatic and economic aid. As long as Kurdistan remains a formal part of Iraq and as long as the Iraqi government is one that the United States will want to continue to back, doing so will require constant diplomatic balancing with the sovereign Iraqi government. However, we should think creatively and lean forward in assisting the Kurdistan Regional Government with its priorities, even as we also push them to move in the directions critical for our own interests.

## **The Twin Challenges of Da'ish and Iran**

One of the worst mistakes that the United States appears to be making in its policies toward the Middle East is to focus them on the twin threats of Da'ish and Iran. There is no question that both seek to harm American interests, and quite possibly the American people themselves. Neither has our best interests at heart and both have shown the willingness to attack Americans whenever it suits their purposes.

But it would be disastrous to make them the centerpiece of our Middle East policy. Both Da'ish and the spread of Iranian influence are symptoms of the problems of the region, NOT the problem itself. As my friend Vance Serchuk—once a staffer to this committee—recently put it, wherever the U.S. has allowed a security vacuum to open up in the Middle East, that vacuum has been filled by Iran and al-Qa'ida. That has proven true in Iraq, in Syria, in Yemen and partially in Libya (where Iran has not yet found a foothold.) That same competition is also threatening fragile states like Lebanon and Bahrain.

It is distressing to see the United States endlessly repeat the same mistakes. In 2001, the Bush Administration foolishly declared a “War on Terrorism.” After 14 years, that war has failed to eradicate terrorism and even failed to eradicate al-Qa'ida, the principal target of that effort. That is not surprising. You cannot fight terrorism simply by killing terrorists. One hundred years of history has made that abundantly clear. And yet, in 2014, the Obama Administration declared war on Da'ish (or ISIL as it prefers to call the group). The war on Da'ish is just as misguided as the Bush Administration's War on Terrorism.

Terrorist groups are nothing but violent revolutionaries. Killing terrorists, while often a necessary component of any strategy is also insufficient to eradicate the problem of terrorism. Only by eliminating the underlying grievances that feed the movement is it possible to do so. That is why the only place where the United States ever successfully “eradicated” al-Qa'ida (and then only temporarily) was in Iraq in 2007-2010. We did so by addressing the basic problems of the country: securing the populace, forging an equitable power-sharing arrangement and division of economic resources, bringing Iraq's alienated Sunni community back into the fold, and building a largely apolitical military. The group once known as al-Qa'ida in Iraq (which had already declared itself the Islamic State of Iraq, or ISI) was only saved from oblivion by the civil war breaking out in neighboring Syria.

The United States government needs to recognize that the problem of Da'ish is bigger than just the problems of Iraq and Syria, but so too the problems of Iraq and Syria are bigger than just the problem of Da'ish. The United States must fashion a policy to heal the civil wars in Iraq and Syria to drive Da'ish out of these countries. That is the ONLY way to do so. Even if we inflict a catastrophic military defeat on Da'ish in both countries, if we do not address the problems of their civil wars, Da'ish—or something just like it—will be back within a year or two. However, as we should have learned in Iraq, if we end the civil war, the terrorists will be forced out. While they will doubtless find homes in other regional civil wars, failed states and failing states, removing them from Iraq and Syria would be an important step in the right direction.

The same logic applies to Iran's expanding influence as well. Too often, Americans portray the Middle East as a chess match between Washington and Tehran—with all of the other countries and players reduced to pieces on the board. That is a dangerously misguided analogy. Iran is not controlling events in the region and is mostly reacting to them. It has undoubtedly made very significant gains over the past 2-4 years. Today, Iran wields more influence in Iraq



than at any time since the Ottoman conquest of Mesopotamia. Its allies hold sway in Lebanon, are the strongest force in Yemen, and are making a modest come back in Syria.

However, it is absolutely critical to recognize that these Iranian gains have all come as a result of failed states and civil wars which the Iranians took advantage of exactly as al-Qaida and Da'ish have. Once again, the best way to diminish and eliminate Iranian influence in these places is to end the civil wars. Once again, Iraq furnishes the best example. In 2008-2009, it was the Iraqis who drove Iran from Iraq just as they effectively drove out AQI. Once the United States finally established security and forged a new power-sharing agreement among Sunni and Shi'a Arabs, it was the Iraqis (with considerable American assistance) that drove Iran's principal remaining ally, Muqtada as-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi militia, first from Basra, then Qurnah, Amarah, Kut and Sadr City itself. By the beginning of 2010, Iran had virtually no influence in Iraq because Iraqis felt strong and united in a new sense of nationalism. (Unfortunately, that would collapse after the 2010 elections when the United States failed to enforce the rules of the democratic system, which then allowed Iranian influence back in).

Both Da'ish (and al-Qa'ida) and the spread of Iranian influence are threats to American interests because these groups continue to define themselves as enemies of the United States. But we make two disastrous mistakes in thinking that they are the sources of our problems in the region and that the best way to address them is to attack them directly. History has demonstrated that it is possible to fight terrorism and roll back Iranian influence. But the best and only realistic way to do so is to heal the hurts of the region, rebuild its failed states and end its civil wars. Those are the open spaces that both AQ/Da'ish and Iran exploit. Protect those spaces, and neither will find the soil to grow or spread.

### **Resurrecting Reform**

Beyond ending the civil wars currently roiling the region, the United States must also push forward policies that will help avoid the creation of new failed states and new civil wars—recognizing that both the Sunni terrorists and the Iranians will be doing the opposite in hopes of creating new hosts to infect. This means embracing the cause of political, economic and social reform in the Muslim Middle East that the United States has toyed with for decades, but never made more than a half-hearted commitment.

The political, economic and social grievances that gave rise to the Green Revolution and the Arab Spring have not gone away. They have been temporarily suppressed. They will be back. We don't know when and we don't know in what form, but they will undoubtedly be back. And a critical goal of American policy moving forward must be to guard against that day heading it off as best we can by pushing the states of the region to adopt reform, not repression, as the only viable long-term solution.

The United States should not avoid the need for political reform simply because it is hard to accomplish. The Middle East is in such bad shape because it is at the beginning, not the end, of a regional movement demanding political change. The more stridently governments resist reform, the more violence there will be. We can try to put off the inevitable but ignoring the need for real change will mean that change, when it inevitably comes, will be violent, producing new revolutions, failed states, civil wars and other problems for the United States and its allies. We cannot avoid the wider set of underlying economic, political and social problems that were the ultimate cause of the Arab Spring and the civil wars it inadvertently produced. If we are to avoid worse, reform is the only path out.

That is a simple statement and unquestionably the right answer for the states of the region to avoid further civil wars and internal unrest. But it is wicked hard in practice. Having come through the searing events of 2011, many of the Arab regimes that survived have concluded that any reform would only encourage greater demands for change that could easily escalate out of control—producing the revolts, state collapse and civil war that they (and we) fear. They aren't entirely wrong. Reform that is handled badly—too fast, too slow, too narrow, too wide—can produce exactly that dynamic. No reform at all, however, is a recipe for disaster.

As a final point on the issue of the importance of reform, it is worth noting the exception to the regional rule. Alone among the states of the Muslim Middle East, Tunisia has embraced dramatic reform and begun a difficult process of real democratization. It has already survived multiple crises where it might easily have veered back toward dictatorship and repression (as Egypt unfortunately has). If its transition is successful, it could prove to be a useful example for other states to follow—the first Arab democracy.

That is a potentially transformative role, one that the United States should nurture. The opposite is also true: were Tunisia to fail, it would be taken by many as a sign that political pluralism and free-market economics are impossible in the Muslim Middle East, thus generating renewed support for repression as the only alternative. For both of these reasons, the United States, and the West more broadly, have a huge stake in the success of Tunisia. Even in an era of shrinking foreign aid budgets, Tunisia is a wise investment and potentially our best bet.

Moreover, other small states with the potential to move further down the path of reform—like Morocco and Jordan—could be usefully persuaded to do so with the promise of more generous aid. Again, these are exactly the kind of investments in the future of the Middle East that can only pay off in the long run, but are in fact the only potential solutions for the deep-seated problems of the region that simply cannot be solved by quick fixes.

### **Reaching Out to Other Great Powers**

Although the United States can and should swing the pendulum of American involvement in the region back toward the center, as the Obama Administration has already begun to do, this cannot be the only answer to our problems. Ending the civil wars of the region and pushing the Arab states to embrace the long process of meaningful political, economic and social reform is not going to be easy. Executing and enabling such policies will require real resources, and a commitment maintained over years if not decades. While public opinion polls indicate considerable willingness on the part of the American people to commit resources to the problems of the Middle East, it seems unlikely that this nation will make another massive commitment to the Middle East, say on a par with the commitment it made to Iraq in 2003-2011, anytime soon.

If the United States is no longer able or no longer willing to bear such costs alone, we are going to need to find others to share the burden. Certainly, the Europeans can provide some assistance, especially in the economic realm. But the Europeans now punch well below their weight in all policy spheres and we should not count on too much from them. Some regional states can contribute economic resources and political clout to certain specific projects, like ending the civil war in Syria, but gone are the days when the Saudis would back any American project no matter how disconnected from their own immediate security concerns. Moreover, even though the Saudis embraced (gradual) reform at home under King Abdullah, at the same time they ardently pursued counter-revolutionary policies that stifled reform abroad. Consequently, we should not assume that the region can do this on its own, even with advice, encouragement and pressure from the United States.

For all of these reasons, the United States may have to begin to look to new players on the Middle Eastern scene to help advance these ambitious, but essential, policy objectives. The two obvious candidates are China and India.

At first blush, this idea may seem ludicrous. The Chinese often see themselves as our ultimate rival for global dominance or at least local dominance in East Asia. They often ally with odious Middle Eastern regimes out of venal self-interest. They try to avoid getting involved in the internal affairs of other countries whenever possible and are often unmoved by aggressive behavior by anyone other than the United States. For its part, India has massive internal issues of its own to sort out, has little military capacity, and is locked in a sixty-year old struggle with Muslim Pakistan.

Yet there are other factors that argue entirely in the opposite direction. China and India are two of the fastest industrializing countries in the world, and are increasingly dependent on Middle Eastern oil (far more so than the United States). Their political systems require continued economic growth and that economic growth is threatened by instability in the oil markets (or just high prices) that can be triggered by instability in the Middle East. Thus, the primary interest of both India and China in the Middle East is the same as America's primary interest there. Moreover, both are developing power projection capabilities and increasingly looking to protect their interests abroad.

The trick will be to persuade the Chinese and Indians that while they may not care about the internal affairs of the states of the Middle East today, they will in the future—and when they do, they are liable to wish that they had cared about it all along. What is required is to induce Beijing and Delhi to understand that the problems of the region are creating chronic internal instability which is ultimately the greatest threat to the oil exports of the region.

If we are able to do so, we will succeed in turning a major challenge for our grand strategy into a major asset. If the Chinese and Indians (to a lesser extent) insist on seeing the United States as an adversary and are willing to associate with states regardless of their actions—foreign or domestic—this will greatly complicate the ability of the United States to dampen the risk of interstate conflict and to press regional regimes to adopt far-reaching reforms. They will always be able to hide behind the Chinese, getting what they need from Chinese businessmen and using Beijing as a diplomatic and (eventually) military counterweight to the United States. Implementing a grand strategy of enabling reform in the Muslim Middle East will be that much more difficult under these circumstances. However, if we are able to bring the Chinese and Indians around, they would then become our *allies* in the same initiative.

Imagine the impact of these three great powers working in tandem to discourage foreign aggression and encourage internal reform? Imagine if regional reformers had alternative great power backers (one without the taints we have acquired) to turn to for aid in all its forms? Imagine if would-be troublemakers met a united front of Washington, Beijing and Delhi determined to prevent them from causing mischief? Imagine if local regimes found the champions of both East and West determined to move them down the path of reform—and willing to help them do so?

This recognition creates a basis for mutual understanding. If China and India acknowledge their own need for greater stability in the Middle East to ensure the free flow of oil, but recognize that the region is fragile and can be a trap for foreign great powers, then Chinese and Indian policymakers may be receptive to an arrangement that minimizes great power competition in the Middle East, maximizes cooperation, and possibly even establishes a division

of labor in which the United States continues to play a leading military and political role, with economic and diplomatic support from Beijing and Delhi.

Whereas India is the world's most populous democracy, China itself has made only grudging political reforms—and certainly has not championed political pluralism abroad. Nevertheless, China's ambivalence about democracy probably won't be a serious stumbling block to cooperation in promoting internal reform and helping to make that possible across the Middle East. The Chinese have demonstrated a high degree of cynicism when it comes to systems of government elsewhere, showing few reservations about democratization in South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Indonesia, let alone farther afield in Europe, Africa and Latin America. As long as a country is doing whatever it is China wants and needs, Beijing has typically shown itself willing to tolerate political reform.

Even where China opposes efforts to promote democracy, such as in North Korea and Myanmar, its concern is principally with preserving regimes friendly to it and avoiding chaotic transitions that could affect its interests. The kind of gradual, indigenously-driven process of political reform (which may or may not produce true democracy depending on the desires of the people themselves) envisioned in this grand strategy should be acceptable to the Chinese if they come to see it as in their interests because it will ensure long-term stability even if comes at the expense of short-term dislocations.

Persuading China and India to help share the burdens of the Middle East will likely consist of more than just compelling conversation. In particular, a critical element in making China and India our partners in this enterprise will be giving them a role in the Middle East commensurate with their growing strength and aspirations. This is going to be particularly hard for the United States with regard to China, because it is going to mean accepting Beijing as our equal in the geopolitics of the Middle East. Rather than making unilateral decisions after minimal consultation with our regional allies, Washington will have to learn to negotiate common policies with Beijing—and Delhi. It will certainly mean lots of painful coordination with other governments, whose concurrence will often be vital for the sake of the wider partnership if not for cooperation on the specific matter itself. It may mean allowing the Chinese and Indians basing rights in the region, both so that they feel comfortable that they can protect their own interests, and so that they are able to exercise their influence jointly with us. It will probably mean agreeing to do some things Beijing's way and other things Delhi's.

All of this would be laborious, frustrating, time-consuming, and even enraging for America's leaders and diplomats, but the rewards would be well worth the effort. Moreover, they appear increasingly necessary given America's diminishing willingness to bear the costs of the Middle East on its own.

### **The Necessity of Long-Term Strategic Focus**

I have attempted to cover a lot of ground in this testimony, sketching out the framework of a new American grand strategy for the Middle East. There is a great deal more that would need to be said to explain how these broad approaches could be translated into concrete policies. But such a framework is a necessary starting point both in building such a program and in debating whether it is the right one for the nation. I believe it is, if only because I can think of no other that would better suit our interests in the Middle East, our circumstances, and the tools and resources we have available to us there.

The one critical requirement of this strategy that I fear we may have in inadequate supply is the commitment to see it through. We are an impatient people, especially when it comes to the

confounding problems of the Middle East. We have typically sought to fix a problem there, or just fix it-up, and then move on to something we liked more. Unfortunately, the history of our involvement in the region since 1971 has been that every time we have tried this, it has not fixed anything at all, and instead the problem has inevitably come back to bite us later, and require far more effort and resources to address it then. As I have said elsewhere, the Middle East is NOT Las Vegas: what happens there does not stay there.

Nor do its problems admit themselves of quick and easy solutions. It took a long time and a lot of disastrous mistakes (by Arabs, Iranians, Turks, Israelis, Europeans, Americans and many others) to bring the region to its current distressing state of affairs. No American strategy is going to change that quickly. While there are solutions to the problems we face in the Middle East, they require, time, patience and the determination to see them through.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Senators, our Founding Fathers explicitly created the United States Senate to be the guardians of America's long-term good. To ensure that at least some segment of the nation's leaders had the perspective and the ability to fight for what is in the country's interests beyond tomorrow or even six-months from tomorrow. For that reason, I urge you, as you contemplate U.S. policy toward the Middle East to be the voice of strategic wisdom. To consider how deep the problems of the region have become, and to press for changes in American policy that put in place the long-term shifts that will be needed to actually deal with the problems of the region, rather than merely trying to paper over them until the next, worse crisis engulfs us.