

Statement of Anne W. Patterson
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Corker and Members of the Committee. It is an honor to appear before you as the President's nominee for the Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs.

I am grateful for the confidence shown by President Obama in nominating me for this position. If confirmed, I pledge to work with you to protect and advance U.S. interests across an exceedingly important and complex region, facing historic upheaval.

I am also pleased to appear before you today with Greg Starr, whom the President has nominated to be Assistant Secretary for Diplomatic Security. I have known Mr. Starr for some time and look forward to working closely with him on the important task of protecting U.S. personnel, facilities and interests in the region.

A Long Transformation Underway

Mr. Chairman, despite the tremendous challenges it faces, I believe that the historic political and social transformations taking place across the region carry the promise of a more democratic, more tolerant, and more vibrant political order that ultimately will benefit both the region and the United States. However, I anticipate that the region will remain volatile, unpredictable and often violent for some time to come. We face complex and difficult challenges, but our extensive security, economic and humanitarian interests demand our continued involvement and active engagement.

There are some fundamental trends underway that will set the context for U.S. diplomacy. Sixty percent of the population in this region is under 25 and nearly 45 percent of young people in the Arab world are unemployed. The three most populous Arab countries, Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco, have median ages of 20, 20, and 21, respectively. The region's rapidly growing, youthful populations lack confidence in rigid and unresponsive leaders who are unwilling or unable to address their aspirations for a better life and a greater say in their own decision making.

Shockingly, across the region, statistics indicate that unemployment levels rise with the level of education, leading to deep frustration with educational systems that fail to prepare its graduates for the modern labor force. National economies are hobbled by inefficiency and corruption, unable to provide jobs. In many countries, young people and their families invest enormous resources in what turn out to be poor university educations, and are deeply disappointed when they cannot find jobs or are not properly trained for the labor market. The situation is even more dire for young women.

At the same time, in addition to more traditional forms of street protest, these young people have been empowered by new technologies to communicate and share information in unprecedented ways – and they are not shy about expressing their anger and frustration. They reject the tired and transparent excuses and efforts by authorities to avoid responsibility for their poor performances – and they thirst for leadership and solutions, even as they watch the wintering of state institutions meant to protect citizens’ personal and economic security.

What will come next is uncertain, but the region’s political and social trajectory has been broadly and irrevocably changed by the events of the last two and a half years. Mr. Chairman, as one of your colleagues pointed out to me in Cairo, we Americans can never go back to looking at the region in the same way as we did before.

These inherent uncertainties will also pose security, diplomatic and economic challenges to the United States, to our allies, and to the people of the region. With both our important national security interests and our values in mind, we have much work to do to protect our interests and to help the people of the region build peace and economic prosperity.

Our Priorities

If confirmed, Mr. Chairman, my top priority will be to protect our country and our allies. This will require a vigorous effort under international auspices to identify and disable Syria’s chemical weapons capability. It will also mean continuing to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

The United States must continue to do everything we can to combat terrorism and confront violent extremism. Currently, we are seeing renewed efforts by al-Qaeda in Iraq to undermine that country and an influx of foreign fighters to the Syrian civil war from other countries in the region. Such breakdowns in security in the

region have allowed the growth of regional militias, threatening legitimate governments and becoming breeding grounds for extremism. The United States needs to work with the region's leaders and its national military forces to extend counterterrorism cooperation and training for law enforcement charged with providing security for their citizens.

Second, we need to continue to promote sustainable democratic transitions in the region. Let me stress again how hard this is going to be: the results of elections may not be to our liking and transitions are often plagued by false starts and reverses. Islamist and populist political parties that do not share our values can be effective in mobilizing voters. In the face of such challenges, we need to remain patient and firmly engaged in our efforts to promote democracy. Free and fair elections based on inclusive politics, effective governance, and respect for universal human rights, including freedom of expression and freedom of association, are key elements of any country's long-term stability. And we will need to stand up for the rights of women, and ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians. The broadening of political participation is a key demand of people in these changing societies; it is also a prerequisite for successful democratic governance.

I reject the view expressed by some in the region that their countries are "not ready" for democracy, that the low levels of education and high levels of poverty assure that voters will be easily led astray, or that only a traditional strongman can control these fragmented societies. If this were true, future generations in the region would be doomed to live under autocrats and dictators. Our role, and the role of the international community, will be to assist these countries in building more democratic and tolerant societies.

Third, we need to support the private sector and governments in the region to help create economic opportunities. The region needs to create as many as 80 million new jobs by 2020 just to meet the needs of its growing population, a staggering number since the Arab world's current labor force stands at about 100 million people. The United States is uniquely positioned to help the region address its economic challenges. Many countries in the region need to fight corruption and undertake economic reforms to end subsidies that constrain investment and growth. In my view, U.S. economic assistance is only one facet of our influence. Assistance does provide tools for the United States to encourage and support reforms in needed areas, like higher education, economic growth or the reform of security forces. But our global economic leadership and the power of our economy are equally important. We also need to work with governments to assure open

business and trade environments that promote sustainable growth and enable American businesses to have fair access to growing markets. Everyone will benefit because American businesses are respected in the region for training their people in global business skills and promoting employees on the basis of merit -- and because much of our own business growth is projected to come from growth in overseas markets. A few months ago, Mr. Chairman, your Subcommittee on African Affairs issued a report outlining concrete steps the United States could take to both improve standards of living in Sub-Saharan Africa and to lock American businesses into primary roles in these fast growing markets. I hope we can collaborate on a similar study for the Middle East.

And fourth, Mr. Chairman, mindful that our country has lost 6,757 service men and women in Iraq and Afghanistan, I also would focus on coping with the enormous sacrifices that my colleagues in the State Department, in the intelligence community and in other civilian agencies must make and are making -- and supporting these professionals and their families as we continue to ask more of them. People in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs have been deeply and disproportionately affected by evacuations, lengthy separations from families, and just the sheer workload of living in or working with posts that are understaffed and always on the critical front lines of America diplomacy. A large number of our personnel have served tours of duty without their families at high security threat posts -- some of them several times -- as the number of such posts has expanded beyond Iraq and Afghanistan to Libya, Yemen, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Egypt.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will be asking our people to serve in these and other countries, continuing the hard work of outreach and engagement on behalf of the United States. Protecting our country requires us to practice diplomacy in dangerous places. Our people understand this -- accepting calculated risks is part of what it means to be an American diplomat today. Our Bureau will work together closely with our Ambassadors and with our Diplomatic Security colleagues to do everything we can to protect Americans overseas. We will maintain open channels of communication on security matters within the Department, with the intelligence community and with the Defense Department.

I would like to review with you the broad scope of American interests that involve the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. We cannot cover them all here, but I hope it will inform our discussions in the months ahead.

Syria, Lebanon and Jordan

The current crisis in Syria underscores the challenges we face. The authoritarianism and brutality of the Asad family towards the Syrian people has been unrelenting; the regime has maintained itself in power through fear and the pitting of one group against the other. It has also systematically manipulated and destabilized Lebanon through its partnership with Iran and its support for Hizballah. As change swept the region over the past two and a half years, the Syrian regime has tried to maintain its power by waging war on its own people. The U.N. estimates that over 100,000 Syrians have been killed, 2 million people have become refugees and millions more have been displaced internally due to the conflict.

The prolonged Syrian crisis has attracted extremists from across the region. The regime has recruited Hizballah fighters from Lebanon to support them in battle. Meanwhile, terrorist groups linked to al-Qaeda have worked to gain a foothold in Syria and expand their influence among elements of the Syrian opposition. The regime has violated Lebanon's sovereignty with shelling and airstrikes. On August 21, the Syrian regime again brutally and indiscriminately used chemical weapons in attacks against its own people that killed more than 1,400 civilians. The recent framework whereby we would work with Russia to transfer the regime's chemical weapons program to international control and implement its rapid elimination will require Syria to promptly declare their holdings and cooperate in steps to eliminate them. The world will now expect Russia to hold the Asad regime accountable for its public commitments. There can be no room for anything less than full compliance with international efforts to dismantle the Syrian chemical weapons (CW) program. Clearly, the threat of unilateral use of force by the United States played a key role in propelling the Asad regime to finally acknowledge its CW program and declare its willingness to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). If these efforts fail, the President has made clear that he remains willing to act.

Moving forward, we continue to believe that there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis, which should be resolved via negotiations based on the framework outlined in the June 2012 Geneva Communiqué. The United States remains in close contact with the moderate Syrian opposition about next steps. Along with our international partners, we continue to support the moderate Syrian opposition as they work toward a democratic and unified Syria that respects the universal human rights of all its citizens. Mr. Chairman, I know that Members of this committee are not satisfied with the speed of delivery of equipment to the Syrian

opposition or with the level and speed of humanitarian assistance to neighboring countries. Many of you have visited Syrian refugee camps in Turkey and Jordan. The United States is providing over \$1 billion in humanitarian assistance to respond to the crisis within Syria and in neighboring countries. We are also providing \$250 million in nonlethal transition assistance to the Syrian opposition, including items requested by the Syrian Military Council. Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I will work closely with your committee on these issues.

From its base in Lebanon, Hizballah has fully entered the Syrian civil war on the side of the Asad regime, which has long provided it with support and a reliable connection to its Iranian financial and military support. Hizballah seeks to involve the Lebanese people in a foreign war against their will, with no concern for the destabilizing effects on Lebanon.

The United States supports Lebanon's sovereignty, independence, national unity and territorial integrity. We support efforts by responsible Lebanese leaders to promote democratic practices and institutions that foster Lebanon's true national interests. That is why we will continue to support the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces with whom we work to confront the threats of terrorism and instability. We appreciate Congress' support for these important programs. We will also continue to support Lebanon and its people as they cope with the burden of assisting the nearly 730,000 Syrians and 45,000 Palestinians from Syria who have sought refuge there.

The Syrian civil war has also created severe challenges for Jordan, a key ally and partner with whom we work on important U.S. interests in the region, including Middle East peace, helping reintegrate Iraq into the Arab world, countering violent extremism and managing the Syrian refugee crisis. Politically, economically, and on humanitarian grounds, the United States must continue to demonstrate a strong commitment to Jordan and its long-term stability.

King Abdullah II's efforts to implement political reforms in Jordan underscore his leadership in seeking a better future for the Jordanian people. Moving forward with these reforms is vital to Jordan's security, stability, democratic development and economic prosperity. The U.S. continues to support Jordan with bilateral assistance – as well as loan guarantees and IMF loans – that place special emphasis on reform and growth. In the past two years, we have provided Jordan with significant additional assistance to ease the burden of hosting over 520,000 refugees from Syria. We appreciate the support Congress has shown for this key ally.

Egypt

I have just completed two years as Ambassador in Egypt, the most populous Arab country and a bellwether for trends across the region. Simply put: what happens in Egypt matters far beyond its borders. I remain convinced that Egypt is an extraordinarily important country for the national security interests of the United States – it is a country that deserves our continued partnership and support.

Mohamed Morsy was elected as President of Egypt in elections that were free and fair, even though the complex constitutional and legal process that produced those elections managed to confuse and upset nearly everyone. The Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party and Salafist and other Islamist parties won widespread support across Egypt, in part, because Egyptians hoped to see an end to the corruption and mismanagement of the Mubarak regime and also because other political parties were poorly organized.

During his one year in office, President Morsy, who entered office promising to be a president for all Egyptians, managed to anger and disappoint many people. His removal on July 3 followed a series of political miscalculations and an inability to sustain national consensus. Demands for his removal regrettably were not tested by an electoral process, yet in the end Egyptians will be the ones to determine whether that action was correct. The United States stands for democracy. And we have made our concerns about this method of government change and about the violence used against unarmed protesters abundantly clear. But it is also clear that many Egyptians seek security and stability after the recent tumultuous period.

The interim government has announced a roadmap to seat a democratically-elected civilian government. The roadmap includes a constitutional amendment process culminating in a national referendum. The failure of the Morsy government to create an inclusive democratic process in Egypt was a mistake that other governments – including the current interim Egyptian government – must avoid. The guarantee of universal rights for all citizens, the inclusion of ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians, and the empowerment of women is the government's duty. Egypt needs inclusive processes to amend the constitution and to conduct parliamentary elections if it is to stabilize the situation and place the country on a sound political and economic footing.

The United States believes that only Egyptians can decide the future direction for their nation. As long-time friends and partners of the Egyptian people we will do

our best to support them as they seek to stabilize their nation and reignite their economy. Since July 3, the President, Secretary Kerry and Secretary Hagel have all clearly affirmed our support for Egypt's transition to that stable, democratic and prosperous future. Members of this Committee have also helped to reinforce this message. Senators McCain and Graham, well-known friends of Egypt, provided the Egyptian leadership with frank advice about America's expectations for the future.

Moving forward, our response to the situation in Egypt will be consistent with our laws, our national interests and our values. Over the past weeks, at the President's direction, we have undertaken a major review of our economic and our military assistance programs. As Egypt changes, so too must our bilateral relationship evolve. As we consider how to best recalibrate our assistance, we must take account all of the events that have taken place in Egypt, including the last two months. The President is currently reviewing how we will proceed, consistent with the law. If confirmed, I will continue to urge the Egyptian government to move expeditiously toward an inclusive, civilian-led, democratic transition and I look forward to working with the Congress to assure that we have the flexibility to respond to and influence changing events.

The Search for Middle East Peace

The United States is fully committed to helping Israel and the Palestinians negotiate a final status resolution to their conflict. As the President and Secretary have repeatedly stated, the U.S. is fully and deeply committed to Israel's security. Israel is our close friend and the region's only stable democracy; our security cooperation has never been closer. Meanwhile, the United States continues to assist the Palestinians as they build governing institutions. This week marks 35 years since the Camp David accords between Israel and Egypt, shepherded by the United States, lifted hopes for a permanent end to the Middle East conflict. The search for Middle East peace remains a diplomatic challenge that is also at the very heart of U.S. national security interests; it affects all of our relationships in the region.

To his great credit, Secretary Kerry has devoted many hours and many trips to the region in an extraordinary effort to make possible the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. The resumption has taken courageous leadership by Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas. We all know that this is a complicated process that will require difficult choices for both Israelis and Palestinians as they work toward reasonable compromises on tough issues with our

support. Consistent with the Secretary's view that the negotiators not be restricted in their search for peace by public comment or release of details of proposals on the table, I will not go into the details of those talks in public. The Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs and our posts in the region will support Secretary Kerry in every aspect of this very important mission. Everyone knows that this will not be easy, but the goal of a two state solution, with Israelis and Palestinians living side-by-side in peace and with secure borders is at the center of American national interests in the region and beyond.

Iraq

The United States has made enormous investments and sacrifices in Iraq, including the 4,489 lives lost and 32,230 wounded during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn. The United States military departed Iraq in 2011, with Saddam Hussein gone and an elected government in his place.

Over the past decade, we have come to better understand Iraq as a country with many diverse ethnic and religious tensions and which, freed from the despotic regime of Saddam Hussein, has struggled to find its balance. The United States must support Iraq's efforts to build a unified and stable democratic nation. We are conducting a great deal of our engagement with Iraq under the Strategic Framework Agreement. The U.S. will continue to support the increased production and export of Iraq's energy resources, because they are so very important for Iraq's economy – and the global economy.

Regrettably, al-Qaida in Iraq continues to threaten the Iraqi government's efforts to establish a stable government and economy with violent acts, such as vehicle and suicide bombings. It is also seeking to rekindle a cycle of sectarian violence that in the past did so much to damage relations between Iraqis. We are urging Prime Minister Maliki and all Iraqi leaders to unite and fortify the country politically against extremist trends from any group or community. We continue to provide advice to Iraqi Forces on counterterrorism issues. I share the concern of Members of this Committee about the situation in Iraq and, if confirmed, look forward to consulting closely on this matter.

U.S. diplomacy supports Iraq as it seeks to remain independent of regional disputes and to integrate itself in the global economy, efforts in keeping with our regional interests. This work has produced important results, and we welcomed this year Iraq's renewal of relations with Kuwait after decades of war and enmity. Iraq has been conducting a series of provincial council elections – and it will face national

elections in the first quarter of 2014, elections that will be a truly pivotal moment for the future of Iraq's democracy.

Iran

The Government of Iran has for many years been the world's foremost state sponsor of international terrorism -- including in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon -- and it continues to defy the international community by pursuing nuclear activity in violation of its international obligations.

The United States will not allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. Thanks to the indispensable role played by Congress, and with international support, we have put in place an unprecedented sanctions regime against Iran to impede its progress in prohibited nuclear activities, as well as to persuade Tehran to address the international community's concerns about its nuclear program. I would like to acknowledge the efforts you have played in this effort, Mr. Chairman, as well as the efforts of other Members of the Committee. Acting both through the United Nations Security Council and regional or national authorities, the United States and our partners have put in place the strongest sanctions measures in history relating to Iran's nuclear, missile, energy, shipping, transportation, and financial sectors. Those sanctions have had a serious negative impact on Iran's economy. The people of Iran, frustrated with their government's aggressive foreign policy and straining under the effects of economic sanctions, voted for change in the recent election of President Hassan Rouhani.

President Rouhani has demonstrated a markedly different tone than his predecessor and we note he has used conciliatory language since his election. However, we have made it clear that we need to see concrete actions to address the international community's concerns about Iran's nuclear program. The Iranian government has an opportunity to reduce its isolation by resolving these concerns. The United States and our international partners remain committed to a dual track approach of pressure and engagement to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon -- and we are prepared to meet with Iran as soon as possible on the matter through the P5+1.

Iran has a rich history and talented people -- it is a country which could be making important contributions to the global community. Should the Iranian government choose to engage substantively and seriously to meet its international obligations and find a peaceful solution to this issue, the United States will be a willing partner.

The Arabian Peninsula

Over many decades, the United States has built deep and mutually beneficial relationships with the countries of the Arabian Peninsula. Generations of students from the region have studied in the United States, including rising leaders we will see assume positions of greater authority in the near future. We share common interests in confronting regional threats, including the proliferation of nuclear and chemical weapons, and in ensuring stable world markets in finance and energy. American businesses have developed thriving partnerships in these expanding economies, which had over \$100 billion worth of trade with the United States in 2011

While we do not always see precisely eye to eye on the many challenges facing the Middle East, we have established an unprecedented counterterrorism and security cooperation. This has been a significant priority for President Obama and Secretary Kerry and will be for me, as well. Our security relationships with the Gulf countries over the past 12 years have been vital to our military operations in the region, and will continue to be strategically critical as we together confront threats from Iran and regional instability stemming from the Asad regime's oppression of its people. Qatar hosts CENTCOM Forward Headquarters and U.S. Air Force Central Command operations at Al Udeid Air Base. Bahrain is a major non-NATO ally that hosts the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet. Kuwait is a major non-NATO ally that hosts the largest presence of U.S. forces in the region. The UAE and Oman have been strong partners and made major contributions to regional peacekeeping security, and counterterrorism efforts.

Even as we work to strengthen the longstanding security and economic aspects of our relationships in the Gulf, we are facing new challenges. These societies have struggled over the past decades to cope with the rapid pace of modernization, population growth and the rising expectations of their young people. Our continued engagement with these countries, both government to government, and people to people, will be important in addressing key principles such as adherence to universal human rights, including equality for women and freedom of religion, as these processes continue to play out. While at times we have seen an impulse toward greater restrictions, there is a countervailing domestic pressure toward greater openness and to strengthen the bridges connecting these societies with the rest of the world. At least 77,000 Saudi students are pursuing higher education in the United States, even as King Abdullah has undertaken some initial steps toward social modernization such as improving the Kingdom's education and judicial

establishments, advancing an interfaith dialogue, appointing women to the Consultative Council, and passing an anti-domestic violence law.

After some early progress on reform following the Bahrain government's 2011 response to domestic protests, the pace has slowed, particularly on accountability and freedom of expression. Bahrain's leadership needs to pursue a process of meaningful dialogue with the country's peaceful opposition that results in sustainable political reforms. The U.S. will support Bahrain as it undertakes these reforms and expands its commitment to the protection of citizens' universal human rights – changes that will enhance Bahrain's long-term stability. Across the region, we will continue to express our strong concerns over restrictions on religious freedom, freedom of expression and assembly, and women's issues. Our message is clear and consistent: the only way forward in responding to the demands of a new generation is increasing openness and adherence to universal human rights.

Finally, I would note that we have seen the Gulf Cooperation Council states come together and work effectively with us and other international partners in Yemen, one of the world's poorest and least-developed countries, which continues to face serious security challenges. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula remains one of the most significant terrorist threats to the United States, and it continues to exploit Yemen's weak governance to find safe haven and to project these threats outside of Yemen's borders. Under a Gulf Cooperation Council initiative, and with the help of the United States, Yemen's government has defied enormous odds to move from the protests that brought about an end to the three decade rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh to a relatively peaceful and well-defined transition under the leadership of President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. The United States has provided significant assistance to Yemen's transition. Ultimately, Yemen's successful transition is a key underpinning of long term stability and security in the region, and the United States will continue work with the GCC and other international partners to support Yemen's ongoing transition.

North Africa

More than two years after its revolution, Libya continues to contend with the serious challenges resulting from Qadhafi's dictatorial rule, including the need to rebuild almost from scratch security forces and weak institutions, porous borders and loose weapons, and to root out militia groups and terrorists. There has been political progress: Libya held its first free and fair elections in over forty years just over a year ago and continues taking the steps necessary to draft a new

constitution. Yet recent political unrest has sharply reduced Libya's oil and gas exports, demonstrating how difficult and fragile this transition is.

There is tremendous goodwill towards the United States and a strong desire on the part of Libyans to re-engage with the West after decades of Qadhafi-imposed isolation. The United States has a strategic opportunity to forge a strong and mutually beneficial relationship with Libya. Our limited, targeted technical assistance to help Libya build the capacity to address issues of concern for our own national interests has been a welcomed part of this re-engagement. We have had a good working relationship with Prime Minister Ali Zeidan and his government, and I look forward to discussing ways in which we can work together to advance Libya's democratic reforms and help it address its security concerns.

Mr. Chairman, we understand fully the responsibilities arising from the attack on our special mission facilities in Benghazi a year ago that resulted in the murders of four of our colleagues. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Justice Department and Libyan authorities to bring the perpetrators of that attack to justice.

Tunisia and the United States share over 200 years of history, resulting in rich cultural, economic, and security ties. Tunisia's January 2011 revolution, which initiated the "Arab Awakening," marked the beginning of a new phase of cooperation between our two countries. Tunisia continues to make progress in its democratic transition and has made major progress in efforts to draft a new constitution. Over the last two years, the United States has committed more than \$350 million in assistance to Tunisia to support its democratic transition, economic stabilization and growth, as well as its efforts to enhance security in the country and along its borders. I look forward to improving and deepening our security cooperation with Tunisia, to include urging the Government of Tunisia to bring to justice the perpetrators of the September 14, 2012 attack on our Embassy and the American school.

Algeria and the United States have built a strong bilateral relationship, with a focus on our shared interest in battling terrorism and violent extremism. Algeria's experience fighting an Islamist insurgency during the 1990s resulted in a well-equipped and battle-hardened military that constitutes one of the strongest counter-terror forces in the region. We hope Algeria will continue to assume a greater regional leadership role to help stabilize neighboring states, which are also struggling with the presence of terrorists, loose weapons, and porous borders. We are working to expand our trade relationship with Algeria and will continue to

support efforts to make room for civil society and to implement other political reforms en route to Presidential elections next year.

After more than 235 years of friendship, the U.S. and Morocco continue to enjoy a strong bilateral relationship, with shared interests in promoting regional stability, countering violent extremism, and strengthening trade and cultural ties. In recent years, King Mohammed VI has initiated reforms to strengthen the role of parliament, rule of law, and human rights. Morocco remains a key partner to the United States on regional security and counterterrorism issues. Since 2006 the United States and Morocco have had a bilateral Free Trade Agreement, which has increased bilateral trade by 244 percent. During its current term on the U.N. Security Council, Morocco has played an important role in international efforts to end the Syrian civil war.

Focused on our Highest Priorities

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am well aware that we are facing a period of difficult budgets and many competing priorities. However, we have a responsibility to protect our national interests, so many of which are tied to the Middle East and North Africa. The popular ferment, reform efforts and the transitions underway across the region highlight the need for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs to have a well-resourced and flexible platform from which to conduct our diplomacy – with an up-to-date, secure infrastructure. Our diplomatic and consular posts are being asked to do more and must have the State Operations and Diplomatic Security resources to meet our diplomatic challenges. In my view, it is critical that our posts in the region be able to build new relationships now, in this time of unsettled transitions, in order to set the tone and direction for America’s partnerships in the region for decades to come. In spite of the immense challenges, now is not the time to withdraw from the region. Instead, we must refocus our efforts in support of the many American strategic interests in the region.

If confirmed, I pledge to work with you to assure that the resources and tools you provide our Bureau are being directed to our highest priorities and are supporting activities that advance our top national security and economic interests. Under the President’s leadership, I pledge to work with you to build a principled structure on which the United States can deepen our ties with the region, and to ensure that we continue to have the will, the trust and the capability to advance our shared security and prosperity and to meet our many global challenges together.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. Mr. Chairman, I look forward to answering any questions you or Members of the Committee may have.