

Statement for the Record
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Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to testify on the President's FY 2024 Budget Request and how it supports our priorities in the Middle East and North Africa. I welcome the opportunity to testify with my USAID colleague Jeanne Pryor, Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Middle East Bureau. To advance the President's regional agenda, the FY 2024 President's Budget Request includes \$7.57 billion in foreign assistance for the Middle East and North Africa with the goal of continuing the work to build a more stable, integrated, and prosperous region.

President Biden has articulated a forward-looking approach to the region based on five elements: Partnership, Deterrence, Diplomacy, Regional Integration, and Values. Through this framework, we have made real progress de-escalating tensions and building a more stable, secure, and prosperous region. Our Budget Request allows us to carry this work forward, shoring up our successes and bolstering our efforts to address the challenges that remain.

Our approach to the region is anchored in two realities that shape our request and our commitment.

The first reality is that First, the Middle East and North Africa is vital to U.S. interests. The region is replete with strategic natural resources, is home to critical transit points in global shipping and trade, and our regional partners remain essential to our ability to achieve our broader foreign policy priorities. The region is also a vital theater for strategic competition with Russia and the PRC, and it is ever more important to demonstrate that we are committed to remaining deeply engaged. As the President has said, "we are not going to leave a vacuum in the

Middle East for Russia or China to fill.” While Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine poses an immediate threat to international stability, as the Secretary has emphasized, “China represents the most consequential geopolitical challenge we face today: a country with the intent and, increasingly, the capability to challenge our vision for a free, open, secure, and prosperous international order.”

Which brings us to our second reality – our assiduous diplomacy has repaired regional rifts, and we now benefit from a region that, while still fragile, can itself undertake the work of stabilization and repair. Today, we are as diplomatically engaged and committed to the region as we’ve ever been, doing the hard work to demonstrate why our vision for the region’s peace and prosperity can deliver a more compelling future for our partners. Your support for this request will undergird the vigorous diplomatic engagement that drives current and future efforts to cement U.S. success across the region.

And we’ve had important successes over the past year. Our sustained efforts through the D-ISIS coalition and working with partners has eliminated key ISIS leaders and diminished ISIS’s capacity to a level where it is not currently able to pose a significant threat to the United States, our allies, our partners, and our interests. In Yemen, we propelled a UN-facilitated truce that has resulted in the longest period of calm – well over a year – since the conflict began more than nine years ago. Our sustained engagement with Saudi Arabia, Oman, the UAE, and other regional partners has supported the work to bring the war in Yemen to a close. We facilitated a historic agreement between Israel and Lebanon to establish a permanent maritime boundary opening the door for greater peace and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. We’ve launched the Negev Forum and I2U2, building on the historic Abraham Accords and normalization agreements, to deliver tangible benefits from regional integration. Our participation in the Aqaba-Sharm process has helped our partners make important strides to deescalate Israeli-Palestinian tensions. I recently returned from Iraq, where we conducted intensive, hands-on work to mediate tensions between Baghdad and Erbil, and between our Kurdish partners. Their ability to work productively together across a myriad of economic, security, energy and social issues will contribute to – or detract from – Iraq’s larger stability and security. In addition, our sustained engagement has resulted in steps toward Iraq’s energy reform and interconnection with the region. We’ve helped maintain international unity behind UN Special Representative Bathily to push Libya towards national

elections. At COP in Egypt this past year and in Dubai later this year, we are building the global consensus to fight climate change. And we've helped secure major wins for U.S. companies, including a nearly \$37 billion agreement for the largest ever purchase of Boeing planes by Saudi Arabia earlier this year.

Partnership

Our regional engagement begins with partnership. Building on our decades-long track record of commitment to the region, our partnerships focus on solving shared problems and building shared prosperity and security. We supported Israel, Jordan, and the UAE to launch Project Prosperity, opening the door to regional cooperation on clean energy and water security. We are working with Saudi Arabia to develop the next generation of 5G, 6G, and OpenRAN technology. We are helping Egypt to build 10 gigawatts of renewable power. And our partners have offered overwhelming support within the United Nations on key votes condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine and to elect strong U.S. leaders at the International Telecommunications Union and the International Organization for Migration. In an era of strategic competition, these partnerships are what set us apart.

And, last June, President Biden and other G7 leaders launched the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, or PGII, to address enormous infrastructure needs in low- and middle-income countries and to meet the challenge of securing and diversifying global supply chains. Many of our Middle East partners, particularly in the Gulf, pledged multibillion-dollar investments to PGII. Those investments will advance strategic projects from ports, to rail, electricity lines, and essential minerals across Africa, to Asia, to the Middle East region.

As Secretary Blinken has said, we are not forcing countries to choose, but giving them a choice. Our partnership and our values – underwritten by your support for this request – can show why we remain a better choice.

The Request reaffirms our enduring commitment to partners like Israel, Jordan, Egypt, as well as Iraq, and create the conditions that sustain our cooperation. Most importantly, the FY 2024 request demonstrates our sustained engagement in and commitment to the region.

Deterrence

Working with our partners, we remain committed to ensuring that malign actors – in particular Iran and its proxies – are deterred from aggressive actions that undermine global security or threaten strategic lines of trade and communication. Our approach to regional security relies on leveraging our unrivaled network of partnerships creating integrated deterrence, through which, as Secretary Austin has emphasized, “multilateral efforts tackle shared threats, and operations are more integrated, and defense relationships grow deeper.”

Iran remains the pre-eminent regional threat as it continues to advance its nuclear program; support terrorist groups and destabilizing partners and proxies; support Russia in its war of aggression in Ukraine; and, as the world has seen, crack down on peaceful protests and forcefully suppress the rights of Iranians.

President Biden has been clear that he is committed to ensuring that Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon. Diplomacy is the best means to address that issue, but we are also deterring Iran’s adventurism by building a deep coalition of partners with integrated defense capabilities and the willingness to hold Iran to account.

The United States employs a wide range of tools to counter destabilizing Iranian activities across the region. We have hardened our defenses, conducted dynamic force deployments to the region, including long-range bomber overflights, deepened our intelligence cooperation, boosted the capacity of our partners, interdicted Iranian weapons and financial flows, and conducted defensive strikes to restore deterrence with Iran and its partners and proxies.

One of our most substantial tools to enhance deterrence remains our support for our partners through Foreign Military Financing (FMF). The FY 2024 President’s Budget Request for the region includes \$5.3 billion in FMF, maintaining our enduring commitments to Israel, Jordan, and Egypt, and supporting countries like Iraq, Lebanon, and Tunisia.

Our commitment to Israel’s security is ironclad. Consistent with our MOU with Israel, the request includes \$3.3 billion in FMF to support Israel’s security.

Our request of \$1.3 billion in FMF for Egypt supports our enduring security interests and partnership with Egypt to include maritime security, border security, and counterterrorism.

In Jordan, \$400 million in FMF will support F-16 aircraft procurement and modernization, sustain existing programs, and support other bilateral security priorities such as countering illicit drug trafficking.

Our request of \$75.5 million in FMF for Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) will assist Iraqi and Peshmerga security forces, ensuring the enduring defeat of ISIS and that Iraq is able to effectively exercise its own sovereignty independent of foreign influence. This ensures the U.S. remains Iraq's security partner of choice in the face of Russian and Chinese competition.

In Lebanon, a spiraling economic and political crisis threatens to spill over into security threats to our closest partners in the region. The request includes \$150 million in FMF to continue U.S. support for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), a vital national security institution which enjoys broad support across sectarian lines and is the only true defender of Lebanon and the Lebanese people.

Diplomacy

To build sustainable regional security, we must rely on diplomacy to build coalitions that de-escalate conflict and work collectively. We are making vital progress toward this end, and this request seeks funding for sustained support for our efforts.

The Biden Administration has fully recommitted to the United Nations and its efforts in support of peace. We support UN-facilitated political and peace building processes in Yemen, Syria, and Libya.

Our efforts in Yemen helped lead to the April 2022 truce, of which the key elements continue to hold despite the formal end of the truce seven months ago. While negotiations on reinstatement of a broader ceasefire agreement continue and the situation is fragile, the truce continues to provide Yemen with the longest period of calm since the war began in 2014, and this profound decrease in hostilities continues to bring tangible relief to Yemenis, including a significant

reduction in civilian casualties. The requested \$42.55 million for Yemen will help sustain this effort, maintaining and expanding stabilization and development assistance objectives while continuing to support UN mechanisms.

In Syria, our steadfast opposition to normalization with the regime has not changed, nor will we lift any sanctions on the regime or those who aid it. We have also made it clear to our Arab partners, through repeated high-level diplomacy, that any engagement with the Assad regime must produce concrete actions that benefit the Syrian people. Our advocacy is shifting Arab partners' agenda with Assad toward key issues that matter to Syrians –providing unhindered humanitarian aid access through the cross-border mechanism authorized by the UN Security Council and pursuing a political resolution to the conflict as outlined in UN resolutions. Our investment in accountability efforts is also having real impact – just last year, documentation collected by our civil society partners was used in a German court to help support the first conviction of a Syrian regime official for war crimes.

We are focused on the enduring defeat of ISIS alongside our Coalition partners. In combination with our military efforts in partnership with Iraqi security forces and local forces in northeast Syria, and continued advocacy and support for repatriations of ISIS fighters and their family members from the northeast, continued stabilization support is essential to avoid an ISIS resurgence. The request of \$97 million for U.S.-funded stabilization assistance in northeast Syria would support critical community security efforts, revive economic activity and livelihoods, support youth rehabilitation, and restore essential services necessary for the reintegration of displaced Syrians to their home or host communities – including those returning from al-Hol, Roj, and other displacement camps. A key component of this request is funding to address the security concerns emanating from al-Hol, even as we work methodically to reduce the camp's population through returns of families to their home countries. This work – particularly our effort on al-Hol – is critical to ensure that ISIS cannot leverage instability in Syria or recruit vulnerable displaced populations to reconstitute and threaten the United States.

In Libya, our regional partnerships have played a central role in helping to secure a ceasefire that has now held for over two years and a political process that has shifted the focus from violent confrontation to political negotiation. Our request

includes \$16 million to support Libya's eventual transition to a democratic, stable, and unified state, complemented by targeted resources from the Prevention and Stabilization Fund. This work is driven by our 10-year Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability in Libya and the Global Fragility Act. We are actively engaged now in a multilateral effort to support UN Special Representative Bathily's work to define a roadmap for national elections, with the goal of the Libyan people finally securing a unified government and enduring stability.

Regional Integration

Through this request we will continue to promote regional integration to unlock the region's potential for sustained and wide-ranging economic growth. The World Bank has identified the MENA region as the least economically integrated region in the world, and this condition is reflected in the political and security realms. We have been proactive in building interconnections between our partners, from Iraq to Saudi Arabia to Jordan and Israel. Additionally, the ongoing effort to promote Israel's integration is at the center of our work, building on the Abraham Accords and normalization efforts more broadly between Israel and its neighbors.

Expanding upon the Abraham Accords, the Negev Forum brings the United States together with Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Morocco, and the UAE to design and deliver the tangible benefits of regional integration. This past January, we launched the Forum's six working groups in a meeting hosted by our UAE partners that was the largest multilateral Arab Israeli gathering since the 1991 Madrid conference. The working groups are developing projects in Regional Security, Clean Energy, Food Security and Water Technology, Health, Tourism, and Education and Coexistence that the Forum will discuss at its next Ministerial later this summer. This request provides ongoing support for these regional initiatives, which can also catalyze investments by our partners.

We have deepened our cooperation with the GCC to develop a regional approach to Gulf security and, along with the United States Central Command, plant the seeds of a cooperative regional security architecture. International Military and Educational Training (IMET) funds for Bahrain and Oman will improve our interoperability and build capacity for greater regional partnerships.

We can build upon the progress of regional integration to develop globally transformative partnerships like the I2U2 – connecting the United States, Israel, the UAE, and India – to work on innovative initiatives that address food security and climate change.

These fora and more would benefit from the MENA Opportunity Fund, a new \$90 million flexible funding mechanism that will allow us to take advantage of our progress or of potential breakthroughs to advance regional peace and integration. Given the velocity of change within the region, we envision this fund as ready seed money to address emerging opportunities or crises in countries such as Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen, while also allowing the U.S. government to seize on emerging regional opportunities revealed through the work of Negev Forum and the Abraham Accords relationships themselves, in order to have maximum regional impact.

While we focus on deepening, and building upon, the Abraham Accords, we also are cognizant that these efforts are no substitute for a negotiated settlement between Israelis and Palestinians.

As Secretary Blinken has said, “we all must build on these relationships and growing normalization to make tangible improvements in the lives of Palestinians, and to make progress toward the longstanding goal of advancing a negotiated peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Palestinians and Israelis deserve equal measures of freedom, security, opportunity, and dignity.”

A two-state solution is the best way to ensure Israel’s future as a Jewish, democratic state, living in peace alongside a viable, sovereign, and democratic Palestinian state. Our request includes \$309 million in economic and security assistance for the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza that will improve the lives of millions of Palestinians by addressing immediate needs on health, climate, water, and economic growth; promoting rule of law; enhancing civil society; and supporting people to people connections under the Middle East Partnership for Peace Act.

Values

And finally, we will keep our values at the center of our approach – support for human rights, respect for fundamental freedoms, the empowerment of women and girls, and protection for members of historically underrepresented communities. We will continue to encourage our partners to improve the rule of law, and we will do all that we can to bolster the strength and voices of civil society.

We do this because it is who we are as Americans, and because this also serves our interests. In an era of strategic competition, we must be steadfast in demonstrating the American value proposition. We want the people of the region to know what we stand for, see us stand up for these values, and know that what we're offering is, in the long run, more promising, more responsive to the aspirations and longings of people everywhere, including in this fragile region, and more likely to produce the shared security and prosperity we all seek.

Our request reflects our commitment to respond to changes that impact our values. The Request reduces overall support for programs that benefit the government of Tunisia to signal the United States' continued concern over the consistent weakening of democratic institutions. At the same time, the request prioritizes support for the Tunisian people and civil society as they grapple with an economic crisis exacerbated by Russia's war on Ukraine and strive for a democratic future for all. As part of our comprehensive approach to Tunisia, a portion of the funding within the MENA Opportunity Fund would also provide us with flexible resources to provide further support for the Tunisian people to address both economic stability and political openings should they emerge. It also ensures we can maintain the security cooperation critical to advancing regional security objectives and create the stability needed for a return to democratic governance.

The states that will be best equipped to meet the challenges of our changing world – whether a global pandemic or climate change – will be those with resilient, inclusive governments that treat civil society as a partner rather than a threat. It will be those who respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of their people, such as freedom of expression, including for members of the press as well as political opponents and critics. And our request includes \$65 million for Near East Regional Democracy (NERD) – a \$10 million increase from last year – to continue and expand support in the areas of Internet freedom,

including digital freedom, and human rights, using tools that are responsive to the dynamic environment on the ground to support the free flow of information to citizens.

Our diplomatic and assistance efforts empower women in the workforce and tap into the potential for economic growth to compete on a global level. The MENA region's female labor participation is under 20 percent– the lowest rate globally – pales in comparison to a global average of 50 percent. Women are a hugely untapped resource in our region. Promoting gender equity, inclusion, and women's participation in decision-making is part of our affirmative approach - recognizing that doing so is essential to addressing the region's most pressing challenges. We need women's full economic integration to effectively lead an inclusive recovery from the COVID pandemic, lead in resolving conflict, and innovation to tackle the climate crisis.

Through the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), regional programs play a critical role in changing perceptions and conditions in the public and private sector so that women *can* participate and lead in governance and the economy.

As Secretary Blinken said earlier this year, “closing the gender gap in the workforce by 2025 would add up to \$28 trillion to the global economy. Especially at a time when we are working to recover from COVID, deal with the impact of climate change, address the many conflicts that are also holding back the global economy – that contribution is more vital than ever.”

The region's future and our future engagement with the region will be shaped by these shared global trends and challenges. Our policy today is designed to build the sustainable and integrated partnerships necessary to develop shared solutions to these challenges so we can build the better future that we and our partners seek.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the President's FY2024 budget request. I want to close by thanking this Subcommittee for your continued support for our efforts in the region. I look forward to answering your questions.