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on the occasion of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing:

The U.S. Role and Strategy in North Africa

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cardin, distinguished Members of the Committee,

Five years ago next month, the Arab spring erupted across North Africa and into our collective conscious, like a shot heard 'round the world, upsetting long held notions about what was possible, and likely, in the Middle East and North Africa region. One young Tunisian's self-immolation lit a torch of change across that region, and Tunisia, as evidenced by the recent Nobel Peace Prize, is considered the one last flame of hope in a region now on fire. But beneath the raging fire and billowing smoke, the profound tectonic shifts that caused the Arab spring continue to move, producing both new challenges and new opportunities for the United States. As others have testified before you in recent weeks, powerful, destructive forces are at work, but this is by no means the whole story.

As I testified before this committee in November 2013, we are still living in the North African region in the wake of a world historical

moment, where accelerated change continues in profound but cacophonous ways. So much is happening that we often miss much of it, happening all at once, in so many places. We then find great difficulty in adapting our strategies to moving targets, oscillating between the risk averse isolationist reflex to disengage and “let them fight it out,” or, with the considerable resources of our powerful military at our disposal, a wishful desire to work with authoritarian friends to deliver sledgehammer death blows, coups de grace, to our mortal enemies and anyone allied with them, and be done with it. Generally speaking, neither approach will work. We do, however, have to think big and bold, and at times venture outside of our comfort zone, but like a cancer surgeon, we need a holistic, comprehensive and aggressive approaches, delivered with microscopic precision, to achieve healthy macro level effects.

Many things remained unchanged from my 2013 testimony before the Near East, South Asia, and Central Asia subcommittee, including that:

- 1) *Syria remains the biggest problem in North Africa.* (Syria has radicalizing effects and blowback effects. Thousands of North Africans are fighting there, thousands have died there, and many hundreds have returned, when they manage to escape the clutches of the so-called Islamic State or al-Nusra, only to fall usually into the same miserable contexts that propelled them to seek escape.)
- 2) *The main drivers of these profound changes are economic,* more than political or security-oriented. (As a result, we have to be creative and aggressive economically—as well as with regards to security and politics. Economic growth strategies should not

be limited to the oft-mentioned area of entrepreneurship and foreign direct investment, but should also address deep-seated issues economic justice and economic opportunity. There have been over 400 self-immolations across the region since since Mohamed Bouazizi, including more self-immolation suicide in Tunisia just last month. Roughly half of the economic activity and over half of the labor force in all of these countries are in the informal sector. However, governments and traditional civil society still rail against the informal economy—the survival economy—as if it was the the problem and not part of the solution. Building on the work of Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto, we should re-envision the informal sector as an engine of growth, rather than a problem to be eradicated. Excluding the informal sector and its actors is not the answer, and that very exclusionary approach is what started the Arab spring in the first place, with the crackdown on a street vendor.)

3) *North African young people made these revolutions and continue to have high, dashed expectations.* (And they will continue to seek to force change. They are also not just “kids over there in the North Africa.” They are products of U.S. policy and generosity. It was our investments in vaccinations, our investments in mother-child health care, our investments in education and exchange programs, our investments in any number of areas that created the youth bulge in the first place. The youth bulge was not created by high fertility. It is created by dropping mortality rates, which dropped twice as quickly as fertility rates across the region in recent decades, due to modern medicine, modern nutrition, and modern sanitation,

also influenced by American know-how and development largesse. Many of these kids, many of the revolutionaries, studied in American universities. They were our classmates, our students, and as things continue to unfold they are wondering why we are not more present in their time of need. They are plugged into U.S. technology, economics, politics and culture. But now the chickens of successful developmental policy and engagement have come home to roost, and we have not sufficiently adjusted our assistance policies to take account these new realities. Big investments in health and education and on training of women and youth are the old model that has helped create a new set of problems, largely by increasing lifespans, creating the youth bulge, and providing a workforce for often non-existent jobs. Now, ten million jobs need to be created in the coming years across the MENA region to absorb a dramatic surplus in vibrant, trained human capital, a surplus that our largesse and goodwill helped create in the first place.

4) *Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Egypt still have a youth bulge, but Tunisia does not. Tunisia has already turned the demographic corner with low mortality and low fertility and a median age of 31. Tunisia's problem, rather, is unemployed university graduates—unemployed at several times the rate of those with much less education—and unemployment among marginal populations, especially in impoverished areas of the interior, and among women. (Following the two 2015 terrorist attacks, which caused a well-documented crisis in tourism, the attacks also caused foreign direct investment and local private investment to dry up. This has led to a situation of zero or*

negative growth; Tunisia may well suffer in 2015 its second year of recession since the revolution.)

- 5) *As we slip back into familiar geopolitical analysis and comfortable pre-Arab-spring geopolitical positions, we have to keep in mind that the revolutionary forces that will continue to cause unrest are fed up with both our geopolitical foes and our geopolitical friends and are looking for new management.* (The comparison I made in 2013 to the 1848 Springtime of the Peoples in Europe, building on Dr. John Owen's work at University of Virginia, still applies. In 1848, only one monarchy was overturned, but the process to overturn all of Europe's monarchy's was set in motion, and we risk now siding again too closely with the monarchs and violent authoritarian leaders against the people who seek rights, dignity, and wellbeing.)
- 6) *North Africa is different. Of the 18 countries rocked by the wave of protest in the winter of 2011, the North African nations played a much larger role than Middle Eastern nations. North Africa incubated this change over a long period, and it provided much of the political culture, the slogans, the songs, the rap lyrics, and the hybridic ideologies that challenged the status quo across the region.* (North Africa continues to be the place where most of the positive change is taking place in the wake of the Arab Spring and where the greatest post-Arab-spring potential exists, in *every one* of its countries. It is also worth noting that in part because of common experiences and aspects of political culture, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco have produced the most cogent and reliable analyses and strategies to influence

positive outcomes for Libya; to date, they have played a very positive role, and we should continue to follow their lead on Libya. This cannot be said for the countries east of Libya, all of which tend to choose sides, projecting on North Africa their own Middle Eastern conflicts and rivalries, which polarizes Libya further and prolongs Libya's second civil war.)

7) *Major events go unreported or underreported in the Western press.* (Two years ago it was the tragic Bloody Friday massacre in Tripoli. Now, it is major unreported and under-reported developments, including a leadership crisis within Tunisia's ruling party Nidaa Tunis which has caused 35 top members to "freeze" their participation in the party and could cause it to splinter, a scandal among Libyans regarding the UN envoy and emails sent to the UAE, the aftermath of the sacking of Algeria's intelligence chief—Bouteflika's longtime *raison d'être*, and worsening crackdowns on civil society across the region.)

8) *We still suffer from various ways in which the information from the region gets filtered, with terrible distorting effects. One of these distorting filters, I have long called the Egypt effect, which posits (wrongly) that when Egypt is going well, the region is going well, and that when Egypt is doing badly, everyone else is suffering from whatever malady Egypt has.* (Tunisia in particular and North Africa in general are very much on their own trajectory and should not be viewed through that Egyptian lens.)

9) *That said, we do ourselves a disservice when focusing too much on nation-state level changes and dynamics and ignoring the*

subnational and the transnational. (Cross regional effects are complex and interwoven. For example, the ways in which regimes and protesters learn in real time from the experiences in neighboring countries significantly impacts what happens in the learning country. This is not a case of just Egypt influencing the region, but every country influencing every country in the region in complex ways.)

- 10) *We increasingly have devolved into a situation of regime-managed violence rather than positive change.* (Restive populations with higher expectations because the Arab Spring and states creates a situation which forces regimes, in the words of leading expert Yahia Zoubir, to become “managers of violence.” To whatever degree each of these states are to blame for that violence, or are simply victims of anti-regime violence, varies from state to state. But there is no question that all five states need help quelling the post-Arab-spring increase in turbulence and violence, some of it in the name of democratization and rights, some of it in the name of jobs and benefits—such as price subsidies—and some of it fomented by the more nefarious forces including dangerous hooligans and full-blown terrorists. But while helping these states manage violence, let us not get on the wrong side of the democratic change, as we did in some of the cases of the Arab Spring more than others, and always ask in our assistance and in our partnerships: how does this policy affect the majority of young people that are trying to emulate our democratic system of government, and with their efforts to make political change?)

11) *I continue to be very concerned about our light footprint not just vis a vis Libya, to which we should have many more resources devoted, but in Tunisia and Algeria.*

To be sure, some things have changed since my 2013 testimony. *The primary one that the situation in Libya worsened.* With the launch of the second Libya civil war in May 2014 in response to and a string of political assassinations in Benghazi and gains by radical militias in a couple of communities, General Heftar has attempted, with limited success, to turn dozens of small Libyan communal conflicts into one large winnable one. Now this new large conflict pitting the Dignity coalition against the Dawn coalition has to be resolved, along with myriad communal conflicts that already blighted the Libya landscape.

The Arab spring was about a lot of things: dignity, fighting corruption, creating jobs, development of less favored areas, and empathy and compassion for others across countries and across borders fighting for the same things. *But as much as anything else it was about inclusivity.* Young crowds were not just fighting for their own interests, they were fighting for the rights of every self-respecting and respectful citizen to have a seat at the democratic table, with no ideological or identitarian litmus tests. This included women, Islamists, secularists, ethnic groups such as Amazigh or Tebu, the marginalized poor and other subaltern groups, and a wide ideological spectrum, including everything from Muslim feminists to democratic Salafists, from democratic socialists to populist nationalists, and from local Trotskyist and Maoist labor leaders to free market liberals.

The new counter-revolutionary anti-inclusion politics—which had been previously justified for decades on security grounds—has returned and has devastated politics in Egypt and Libya, and threaten gains in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. Exclusionary politics is also why 90% of Egyptians stayed away from the recent parliamentary polls and over 80% of young Tunisians away from the 2014 elections.

What does this mean for U.S. policy? It means not backing zero-sum politics and zero-sum outcomes. It means the U.S. must support an inclusive political outcome for Libya with a full role for civil society and both the Tripoli and Tobruk governments, and in particular, the Warfalla, Zintan, and the Misratans. It means the UN needs to refrain from declaring again and again the achievement of a new political deal, and then tweeting at everyone that they need to sign on. The UN needs to honestly broker a full comprehensive solution that represents the largest possible number of Libyans, excludes none of the major players, and does not triangulate and maneuver around key factions.

It means in Tunisia that we need to support continued political reconciliation, economic reconciliation, transitional justice, and reform in every sector, starting with security sector reform. Security reform needs to be baked into security assistance to the largest extent possible. To achieve a wide variety of goals in Tunisia, we need to increase our assistance to \$800 million annually, as a part of a \$5 billion package of grants and loans. The stakes in Tunisia are enormous for the region, and the Tunisian democratic transition, which is at a tipping point due in large part to terrorist attacks, must succeed. To reach this goal of \$5 billion in annual global assistance,

we need to help organize a democracy donor conference for Tunisia, designed to raise \$25 billion over the next five years to make up Tunisia's budget shortfalls and extraordinary transitional needs. The Senate must also restore the \$50 million in mostly security assistance passed by the U.S. House of Representatives.

While admiration of the U.S. continues to rank much higher in North African states than in Middle Eastern states, a telling 2014 Zogby poll flagged a sharp decline in confidence that the U.S. is committed to democracy across the Middle East. Given the geopolitics of the Middle East, broadening and deepening support for Tunisian democracy sends a profound message not just to Tunisians, but to tens of millions of youth waiting for the U.S. to match its encouraging rhetoric in favor of democracy with concrete action.

Supporting inclusive politics also means we must continue to deepen our engagements with Algeria, particularly in the economic and cultural realms, while encouraging efforts within the *Pouvoir* to work with the opposition and introduce political and constitutional reforms. Supporting inclusive politics means working with Morocco to improve its human rights performance both in the north and in the Western Sahara, beginning by curtailing its current crackdown on civil society and working with Morocco on reform and on re-opening spaces for healthy political contestation.

Pursuing inclusive politics for Egypt is probably the toughest nut to crack. We have to use every diplomatic and Track Two lever at our disposal, while maintaining Camp David-linked assistance, to facilitate eventual negotiations with hundreds of thousands of exiled and jailed revolutionary opposition leaders and rank and file, when

the time is right, which may be sooner than we think. President Sisi did mention today en route to meetings in London that he is open to allowing the Muslim Brotherhood to play a role in Egypt, and this type of concession is to be encouraged. In the near future, Egypt must release 177 elected parliamentarians and release hundreds on death row for political reasons for crimes they did not commit. Releasing these two groups of several hundred individuals could set the stage for eventual political reconciliation with the forces that won the 2011-2 elections.

Zero sum politics gets us a nothing in Egypt, nothing in Libya, nothing in Tunisia, nothing in Algeria, nothing in Morocco, and nothing in Western Sahara, whether zero sum warfare, zero sum elections, or zero sum negotiations. The solution in every case is power sharing—a concept advanced by Jacob Mundy—and we should be advocating this at every turn, endearing ourselves to majoritarian, democratic youth across the region. This is what North African democrats and young citizens expect from us, and this is what we need to do to help empower citizens to work with us in favor of the same goal, a stable, prosperous North Africa with strong relations with the United States.