

Testimony of Daniel Rubinstein
Nominee for Ambassador to the Republic of Tunisia
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Markey, and Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you as President Obama's nominee to be the next ambassador to the Republic of Tunisia. I would also like to thank Secretary Kerry for placing his trust in me to manage the relationship with this important partner, and recently designated Major Non-NATO Ally. Before I begin, I'd also like to take a moment to recognize and thank my family – my wife, Julie, and our children Jonah and Simon. They have provided unconditional love and constant support throughout my career.

Mr. Chairman, I have had the honor of serving as a Foreign Service Officer for the last 26 years, much of it in the Middle East, including a year in Tunisia. My previous assignments have provided me with an extensive background in economic and counter-terrorism issues that are critical to our partnership with Tunisia. While my time in Tunisia was before the 2011 revolution, I maintain an abiding respect and admiration for the country, its culture, and its people. If confirmed as U.S. Ambassador to Tunisia, I pledge to work with my colleagues in the executive and legislative branches of our government to advance our national interests and deepen this partnership.

During President Caid Essebsi's visit in May, President Obama affirmed the enduring partnership between the United States and Tunisia based on both mutual interests and shared values. Tunisia's democratic progress is an important counterpoint to those who assert that Islam and the Arab world are somehow incompatible with democracy.

Chairman Flake, let me assure you that during these challenging times, I am deeply cognizant that the number one priority of an Ambassador is the safety of Americans abroad. If confirmed, I assure you that I will carefully monitor the security environment as I seek to advance our diplomatic objectives, with no higher responsibility than ensuring the security of all U.S. citizens in Tunisia and all personnel under my charge.

In addition to keeping this commitment in mind, I will also continue to be mindful that this is a critical time in our engagement with Tunisia. Since the 2011 revolution, Tunisia has taken remarkable and inspiring steps to build an accountable and representative democracy. But despite historic legislative and presidential elections in 2014, the democratic transition and the country's security remain fragile.

In recent months, Tunisia has endured two horrific terrorist attacks that threaten the progress so many Tunisians have fought for since Mohamed Bouazizi set himself alight in Sidi Bouzid and sparked the Arab Spring. Those vile attacks on innocent tourists and Tunisian citizens underline the enormous security challenges facing Tunisia. The reasons for radicalization are many but what is clear is that high levels of youth unemployment, feelings of marginalization, and instability in Libya are exploited by those who wish to undercut Tunisia's progress in the name of radicalism and barbaric violence.

If confirmed, I will work with my colleagues across the U.S. government to direct resources to increasing the capacity of Tunisian security forces to address and degrade the threats posed by groups like AQIM, Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia, and ISIL, which has claimed responsibility for the Bardo Museum and Sousse attacks. Tunisia's security services have made commendable progress in dealing with dangerous extremists, but more needs to be done. In the wake of the attacks, the Tunisians have asked for continued support for their military and internal security forces to include increased information sharing, equipment, and training to effectively identify threats and subvert efforts of violent extremist groups. If confirmed, I will continue these endeavors and I will also support reform to Tunisia's judicial, prison, and police forces to help make them more professional institutions that are more responsive and accountable to their public.

And while security support is critical, the United States must also help strengthen Tunisia's economy in order to address some of the root causes contributing to the rise of extremist violence. If confirmed, I will work closely with the Government of Tunisia in support of its economic reform agenda. I will also support the government and private sector's efforts to increase access to economic opportunities for all, to include marginalized and economically disadvantaged populations. I will promote these efforts through expanded technical support for the government's reform efforts, through greater coordination with international partners to leverage their resources and expertise, and via continued support for workforce development and entrepreneurship initiatives. I will prioritize the strengthening of Tunisia's economic institutions and increasing public sector transparency and accountability.

I firmly believe that we cannot forget what makes Tunisia special: its democracy. Islamists, secularists, and many in between are working together daily to negotiate and seek consensus. Tunisia is the only Arab country ranked as "free" by Freedom House. The consolidation of democratic governance will take time and patience as Tunisia builds its institutions and works to ensure the freedoms guaranteed to Tunisian citizens by their constitution. Tunisia's people expect transparency in government institutions, and for government officials, security forces, and private sector leaders to behave in ways that are not corrupt and benefit the public. If confirmed, I will ensure that the United States continues to promote reforms that will address issues of transparency and accountability and prioritizes the rights of the Tunisian people.

If confirmed, I will also pay close attention to the management of the Embassy and its hard working and dedicated personnel. As our partnership with, and assistance to Tunisia grows, I can assure you I will work to ensure we have adequate staff and resources to properly manage the many facets of the relationship.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Markey, and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify before you. I can assure you today that, if confirmed, it will be my honor to further U.S. interests and strengthen our relationship with Tunisia, and I look forward to the opportunity to welcome you in Tunisia and work with you and your staffs to achieve those goals.

