



PROJECT *on* Middle East Democracy

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**"Recent Developments in Egypt and Lebanon:
Implications for U.S. Policy and Allies in the Broader Middle East, Part 2"
United States Congress
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515
Thursday, February 10, 10:30 am-12:30pm**

The House Committee on Foreign Affairs hosted Part 2 of a hearing on recent political developments in Egypt and Lebanon and their implications on U.S. policy in the region. The hearing was moderated by committee chair Congresswoman **Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** with comments and questions from House Representatives **Howard L. Berman** (D-CA), **Steve Chabot** (R-OH), **Gary L. Ackerman** (D-NY), **Ann Marie Buerkle** (R-NY), **Chris Smith** (D-NJ), **Gregory W. Meeks** (D-NY), **David Rivera** (R-FL), **Theodore E. Deutch** (D-FL), **Dana Rohrabacher** (R-CA), **William Keating** (D-MA), **Dan Burton** (R-IN), **David Ciciline** (D-RI), **Edward R. Royce** (R-CA), **Eliot L. Engel** (D-NY), **Donald A. Manzullo** (R-IL), **Jeff Duncan** (R-SC), **Christopher S. Murphy** (D-CT), and **Mike Pence** (R-IN). Deputy Secretary of the State Department **James B. Steinberg** testified before the committee.

Committee Chair Congresswoman **Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** called the hearing to order and made opening remarks recounting the testimony and commentary from the previous day's hearing. She stated that there was general agreement for the U.S. to send a strong message of support for "non-violent freedom loving Egyptians" and that the U.S. role was to facilitate a post-Mubarak transition and guard against the "nefarious" Muslim Brotherhood. Ros-Lehtinen remarked that the administration had no contingency plan for possible upheaval in Egypt even though experts had been warning about such for some time and that even administration officials had complained that the White House policy was "changing every 12 hours." She also said that White House staffers had not ruled out engagement with the Muslim Brotherhood and that such an option "must not be on the table." Regarding development in Lebanon, the Congresswoman posed the questions as to whether a Hezbollah dominated government would qualify Lebanon as a state sponsor of terrorism and what the administration's stance on aid to Lebanon was along with the administration's stance on the Muslim Brotherhood. She accused the Obama administration of actually cutting democracy promotion aid in Egypt saying that USAID only worked with NGOs "pre-approved" by the Mubarak regime.

Rep. **Howard Berman** told the committee that NBC news was, at the time, reporting comments made by Egyptian Prime Minister **Ahmed Shafiq** that **Hosni Mubarak** would announce his resignation later in the evening after meeting with Egypt's military council. He reiterated his support for Obama's comments calling for a meaningful, peaceful transfer of power to begin immediately that included a new constitution, free and fair elections, freedom of the press and assembly, and the presence of elections observers and monitors. He said a delay in transition would force Congress to act and said he believed the Egyptian military could still play a constructive role.

Rep. **Steve Chabot** noted that the events in Egypt surprised many but that experts had been warning about discontent amongst the population for quite some time. He stated that the Muslim Brotherhood

has openly declared its desire to impose Shar'ia in Egypt and cancel the country's peace treaty with Israel. Chabot said that the U.S. must ensure Egypt upholds its treaty obligations and the rights of women as well as work to prevent the Muslim Brotherhood from taking power.

On Lebanon, Rep. **Gary Ackerman** stated that was once a democratically elected government is now in the hands of the "unaccountable few" and that Hezbollah was actively engaged in a campaign of assassinations against Lebanese politicians and journalists. This has weakened Lebanon's government and the people of Lebanon are now "hostages" he said. The Hezbollah dominated government has 40,000 rockets aimed at Israel and "colludes with a foreign power" he remarked, largely insinuating Hezbollah's close ties to Iran. Ackerman said that the restoration of legitimate government must support the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and all relevant U.N. Security Council resolutions. Until clear evidence that Beirut is free of foreign influence all assistance programs to Lebanon should be suspended.

Assistant Secretary **James Steinberg** testified to the technological and demographic changes in the Middle East underlying events in Egypt and stated that the U.S. works with both peoples and governments to further democratization. Such a policy, although idealistic, is a strategic necessary he claimed. He recognized that transitions can lead to intolerance and chaos but that an orderly transition would help maintain vigilance against extremist elements that could attempt to hijack the situation as well as support Israel's security interests. He reiterated the U.S. commitment to Israel's security and the fundamental need for all parties to honor the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. Steinberg also said that the U.S. has made clear its support for human rights and that the Egyptian military must remain a force for stability. He also said that the U.S. supports principles and processes, not personalities and would continue to support civil society in Egypt. On Lebanon, he reiterated that the U.S. calls on the new government to honor the Special Tribunal and refrain from reprisals. The U.S. would judge the new Lebanese government based on its actions, mindful of the circumstance that brought it to power.

Rep. **Ann Marie Buerkle** asked if preventing the Muslim Brotherhood from stepping in and hijacking events in Egypt is a priority for the administration and what it would do to prevent such an event from occurring. Steinberg responded that the U.S. is supporting democratic institutions but that the process was for Egyptians to decide. The process would be inclusive, driven by Egyptians, and account for the full range of voices in Egypt. He said that the U.S. role was to support legitimate voices through assistance programs, democracy programs, and MEPI. He also reiterated that an orderly process would prevent any hijacking of events on the ground.

Rep. Berman asked under what circumstance the administration would be willing to review assistance to Egypt or consider export controls on tear gas canisters. Steinberg said that the U.S. always keeps assistance programs under review and will certainly further review in the Lebanese case. However, he stated that the focus was on how to influence and encourage transition and that the U.S. did not want to anticipate bad outcomes which would limit responsiveness.

Rep. **Chris Smith** asked Steinberg about reports that an American company, Narus, owned by Boeing, sold the Egyptian government IT technology that enables them to shut down the internet and harass activists. Steinberg responded that he didn't know about such reports but that the State Department would look into it.

Rep. Ackerman noted that consistency in the administration's approach to democracy promotion is important but "foolish consistency" should be avoided. He questioned whether a democratic government could be formed in which one of the parties was committed to destroying that democratic government and expect stability, insinuating that the Muslims Brotherhood in Egypt was bent on bringing down any possible democratic government in Egypt. Steinberg responded that even in the U.S. freedom of speech has limit. Speech has to support civil society and threatening acts of violence is not legitimate. He said the focus will be on what kind of government emerges and that a government that respects open society is one that can count on U.S. support. Ackerman also asked what would happen if the new Lebanese government rejects the Special Tribunal to which Steinberg responded that the U.S. expects the Lebanese government under Prime Minister **Najib Mikati** to respect international obligations and that the U.S. would keep its assistance under review.

Steinberg also responded to a question from Rep. Chabot about the Muslim Brotherhood's position on Shar'ia to which he responded that the question was better left to "analysts" but that is was clear that all parties must commit to principles that protect basic civil liberties. If Shar'ia law would not protects minority rights and civil liberties, the U.S. would not support it. Chabot then asked why Egypt and Turkey, who receive large sums of U.S. aid, have populations that are hostile to the United States. Steinberg responded that the U.S. needs to do a better job of communicating that "we share the people's aspirations."

Rep. **Gregory Meeks** posed a question about which leaders the U.S. can expect to emerge in Egypt and what participation by Islamist groups in Tunisia would mean for that country. Steinberg said that it would be difficult to predict future leaders and that the U.S. should not "anoint" individuals, although he reiterated support for the "wise men" councils that are under formation in Egypt. The U.S. would not "preselect" leaders but instead focus on institutional decisions: repealing the emergency law and allowing parties to register for elections.

Rep. **David Rivera** questioned Steinberg on what message the U.S. was delivering on Egypt's peace treaty with Israel and Egypt's commitments to peace. Steinberg responded that the peace treaty was a wider regional interest and that the U.S. expects any government to respect and honor the treaty. Conflict with Israel is not in Egypt's interest, he said. On maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge, Steinberg said that the U.S. would review military assistance to Egypt if there was a change in stance on the peace treaty.

Rep. **Theodore Deutch** asked if it was appropriate to cut foreign aid and assistance to balance the budget when it account for only one percent of the federal budget and asked if such cuts endanger the U.S. Steinberg noted that the U.S. ability to engage is critical to the national interest which allows for the building of friendships abroad and a balance of smart power with strong defense. Such cuts would affect Iraq and that cutting aid given the U.S. sacrifice in that country would be a "tragedy." He also stated that supporting civil society groups helps stem extremism abroad and that foreign aid was about considering the long term future. Cuts across the board would create the inability to fund global public health programs and food programs, particularly in Africa, a signature policy of the Bush administration. Steinberg mentioned that Defense Secretary **Robert Gates** believes foreign aid is vital to national security. He cited the Marshall Plan as an example of using American resources to advance U.S. interests abroad when the military is unable to protect such interests alone. Rep. **Dana Rohrabacher** said that borrowing a trillion dollars a year from China to give to other countries was unsustainable and on Egypt said the U.S. was throwing a valuable and stable ally in Mubarak "to the wolves."

Rep. **David Ciciline** asked whether or not the U.S. would support the retention of the Egyptian constitutional provision that prevents religious parties. Steinberg said that the U.S. supports the principle but cannot "write the constitution for Egypt." Other questions and comments included Rep. Burton asking why the State Department was not stressing the importance of the unrest in the Arab world on the stability of U.S. energy and oil supplies, Rep. **Eliot Engel** stating that Lebanese Prime Minister Mikati should be shunned by the U.S. and Rep. Edward Royce who said that activists in Egypt that he spoke to said they were "terrified" of the Muslim Brotherhood whose only goal is to institute Shar'ia law in the country and go to war with Israel. Rep. **Mike Pence** spoke about U.S. assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces which are still very much "in development." Steinberg said that the professional development assistance the U.S. provides allows it to monitor the Lebanese military and is linked to political developments.