



PROJECT on Middle East Democracy

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**“Assessing U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities and Needs Amidst Economic Challenges”
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs
Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2172
March 1, 2011, 10:00 A.M**

On Tuesday, the **House Committee on Foreign Affairs** held an open [hearing](#) to assess U.S. foreign policy priorities in light of the country’s current economic challenges. The Committee — chaired by Congresswoman **Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R-FL) and with Congressman **Howard L. Berman** (D-CA) in attendance — requested the testimony of U.S. Secretary of State **Hillary Clinton**.

Rep. Ros-Lehtinen opened by stating that we must maintain firm ties with our allies and enemies must be clearly identified. She criticized past U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East stating that we should have never supported a government in Lebanon that included Hezbollah, that we should have sponsored broader civil society in Egypt instead of supporting groups aligned with Mubarak, and that the U.S. should not have normalized relations with Libya. **“Oppressors should not be coddled or engaged,” she said.** She also noted that the situations in Bahrain and Jordan should not be confused with those in Tripoli, Cairo and Beirut and criticized the United Nations, and especially the Human Rights Council for failing to hold Libya accountable, prior to the revolution. She questioned what the return on our investment in foreign aid is and why we have not supported countries that share our values, arguing that the State Department and USAID have misplaced their priorities. **Ros-Lehtinen also noted the 42 percent increase in the Foreign Affairs budget from the fiscal year 2008 budget and asked whether it is justified to borrow money to pay for it at the expense of our own economy.**

In opening remarks, ranking member **Rep. Howard Berman** stated that we have an obligation to make the most of tax-payer dollars and stated that the international affairs budget makes up one percent of the overall budget but addresses some of the most important issues facing the country. He stated that the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR), which reviews the foreign affairs budget and makes recommendations for effective spending, stands in stark contrast to the Republican appropriations budget, which cuts aid to reach a reduction amount which was arbitrarily decided. He claims that **the proposed Republican budget undermines national security and fails to address the need for aid in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. He argued that national security depends not only on the army, but also on diplomats and development officers** and claimed that “civilian efforts are more cost effective than military aid.” He also stated that he was inspired by the people in the Middle East who are standing up and fighting for the rights we hold dear.

Secretary of State **Hillary Clinton** began her [testimony](#) by discussing her meetings in Geneva stating that the U.S. has joined the Libyan people in demanding that Gadhafi step down and is **“working to translate the world’s outrage into action and results.”** She stated that USAID has mobilized humanitarian teams to help refugees fleeing to Tunisia and Egypt and that the combatant troops are preparing to support the humanitarian missions and that “we are taking no options off the table” in Libya. Clinton went on to say that **the “entire region is changing, and a strong and strategic American response is essential” and that “stakes are high.”**

She stated that the situation in the region and in Libya is an example the three-pronged strategy of diplomacy, development, and defense, which is only successful with “a budget that supports all the tools in our national security arsenal.” Clinton also stated that Americans are seeing returns on their investments in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Sudan and across the Middle East where we have been working to “open up political systems, economies, and societies,” and are supporting democratic transitions in Egypt and Tunisia. She stated that **we saw the return of our investment in Egypt, where the military, which we trained and have strong ties to, refused to fire on its**

people preventing a situation, similar to that in Libya, from taking place there. She emphasized the importance of these missions to national security and stated “now would be the wrong time to pull back.”

Clinton discussed the QDDR and the cuts they have already made and the restructuring of the FY2012 budget which is now divided into two parts: the Overseas Contingency Operations and the core budget. She noted the importance of the civilian surge in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq and stated that elsewhere—like Yemen and Sudan—development and diplomacy is helping prevent conflict as well. She discussed investments in human security and stated that “**across the board, we are working to ensure that all who share the benefits of our spending also share the burdens of addressing common challenges.**”

Clinton argued that the 16 percent cut for State and USAID that passed in the House last month would be devastating to our national security and stated that in the past “each time we have shrunk from global leadership, events have summoned us back, often cruelly, to reality.” And while we saved money in the short term, those savings came at an unspeakable cost. She stated that through her travels she has seen that “**the world has never been in greater need of the qualities that distinguish us... [and] people [are] looking to us for leadership.**” She stated that this is an achievement, not a birthright and requires resolve and resources.

Rep. Ros-Lehtinen asked the secretary about the institution of a no-fly zone over Libya, about humanitarian assistance efforts in the region, the freezing of Libyan leaders’ assets and the implementation of sanctions on companies working with Iran’s security sector. Clinton responded by stating that the U.S. has led the way in imposing sanctions and freezing Libyan assets going to the Gadhafi family and is working closely with our European counterparts, especially in light of the strong Security Council resolution. She also discussed the Libyan opposition forces attempts to create a military presence not only for their own defense but also to launch an offensive against Gadhafi’s forces in Tripoli. Clinton noted that while the opposition groups do not want foreign intervention, she is talking with NATO and the Pentagon who are preparing themselves in case the need for assistance arises. They are discussing the implementation of a no-fly zone along with all other options, she said. On Iran, Clinton stated that the U.S. is working hard to implement sanctions on Iran, but that their efforts are ineffectual without the support of the international community.

Rep. Ros-Lehtinen and **Rep. Anne Marie Buerkle** (D-NY) what the administration is doing to gather evidence that Libyan leader **Muammar Gadhafi** played a role in the Lockerbie bombing which Clinton said is being investigated in light of defected Libyan officials stating Gadhafi ordered the attack.

Rep. Berman asked whether the emergence of protest movements in the Arab World altered the peace process and how vital the role of Egypt was. He also asked how the U.S. can support the democratic transitions in the region and if restrictions that prevent USAID from aiding NGOs not registered under Egyptian law are being kept in place. **Clinton** responded by stating that continuing the efforts towards a two-state solution is in Israel’s interest and that Israeli leader **Benjamin Netanyahu** recognizes that Israel is falling out of favor in the international community and that now is the time to act. She also said that both Israel and Palestine enjoyed Egypt’s role in the peace process and that the Supreme Military Council in Egypt has stated that they will support the process and stand by the Camp David Accords. Addressing how we can support transition in the region, Clinton stated that each country is different and want different types of aid. She stated that she is on-going discussions with her European counterparts to ensure that the international community can help them in all aspects and the Undersecretary **William Burns** is currently traveling in the region to assess where and how we can help. She also noted the reprogramming of \$150 million to Egypt.

Rep. Eni Faleomavaega (D-American Samoa), **Rep. Gregory Meeks** (D-NY) and **Rep. Donald Payne** (D-NJ) questioned how the State Department will be able to function with the proposed cuts. **Clinton stated that the cuts will have a dramatic impact on the department’s ability to wield policy as it will be weakened and be hindered in its ability to form vital relationships with countries and institutions.** She noted that this will endanger the country as we have competition out there in the form of Iran and China who are looking to fill that influential void that will be left if we are forced to pull back. And in response to a question by **Rep. Mike Pence** (R-IN) she said that “what happens in critical states is either going to save the game or change the game in

coming years.” Clinton also expressed her surprise to learn that amidst budget cuts in the United Kingdom, conservative leaders actually increased their foreign aid budget noting its critical importance. Rep. Payne also asked about how the cuts will affect our efforts in Sudan to which Clinton replied that we are a crucial player in the country and that Sudan needs aid and may be a case where we will pay a big price for pulling back. Rep. Meeks also questioned how cuts will affect refugee assistance. Clinton expressed hopes that the U.S. will continue to be a leader in this field as it brings the U.S. good will from others.

Rep. Ben Chandler (D-KY) stated that we are seeing Tunisia undergo one of the most important moments in history and yet the budget request asks for a reduction of aid to Tunisia, and questioned what kind of message does that send. He also asked about whether the department has seen any signs that Syria is improving its behavior now that we have normalized diplomatic relations. Clinton responded by saying, “I think Tunisia has to work... We should not cut aid to Tunisia as it would be penny wise and pound foolish.” She stated that given its size and middle class population she is optimistic for successful transition and that the Tunisians, who remember how the U.S. stood for its independence in the 1960s, want our help. **“We could make Tunisia a model,” she said.** On the situation in Syria, Clinton stated that we sent an ambassador because we believe it is better to be on the ground to gather information and convey messages.

Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-NY) stated that amazing things have happened since the self-immolation of **Mohammad Bouazizi** in Tunisia that was not anticipated. He noted, with optimism, that protesters across the Middle East are not holding up signs with anti-Western slogans but rather holding up signs in English calling for the West to take note. He asked Clinton how the State department is addressing these changes, stating that we need a plan that is creative and “out of the box,” as we are being presented with an opportunity we’ve never had before. **Rep. Russ Carnahan** (D-MO) also noted the need to reevaluate our diplomacy tools and taken into account the cost effectiveness of citizen to citizen diplomacy. Clinton responded by stating that we do have a plan and hopes to implement with greater force programs such as entrepreneurial training, outreach and exchange programs that encourage person to person diplomacy through the Middle East Partnership Initiative and the Near East Regional Democracy fund, and social networking program through the State Department.

In response to statements by **Rep. Carnahan** and **Rep. Brian Higgins** (D-NY) on the youth and new media, Clinton said that technology has totally changed how we are communicating. And that while we should incorporate new media like Twitter and Facebook, we should forget old media as the majority of people around the world still rely on TV broadcastings for their news. She stated that we should invest in creating better global sources so that we can become as influential as channels like Al-Jazeera. She stated that during the Cold War we did a great job in spreading information of democracy and freedom everywhere and that we should be doing the same thing now and **need to make sure that we infuse this moment of transition with American values and traditions by spreading our message through all mediums.** **Rep. Edward Royce’s** (R-CA) recommended that we broadcast interviews by Egyptian soldiers on why they didn’t shoot protesters in Libya to which Clinton said that it was an idea being considered by her team.

Rep. Sherman and **Rep. Ron Paul** (R-TX) questioned the need to provide military aid to Libyan opposition forces with Sherman calling for a review of international law to make sure the U.S. can do that. Rep. Paul questioned U.S. policy to support dictators stating that we support regimes until they turn out to be the bad guys and when they fall we rapidly switch gears and say we support democracy: “What would be wrong with swearing off all support and aid for dictators? Wouldn’t Israel be better off also?” Clinton responded by saying that the U.S. has had to make some very difficult choices and that **it was in the U.S. and Israel’s best interest to support the Egyptian regime after the Camp David Accords and the fact that we had those relations with Egypt allowed us to have frank conversations with the military and Mubarak’s regime and prevented a situation like that in Libya.** Israel, she said, is interested in predictability and stability and seeks to prevent the creation of power vacuums. Additionally, our aid to Israel allows them to have a qualitative military edge over other regional powers.

Chair of the House Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, **Rep. Steve Chabot** (R-OH) stated that the U.S.’s initial response to Libya was weak and that while the administration says it was tempered in order to avoid provoking a hostage situation, other countries weren’t hindered, pointing to the use of warships by European

countries and China in their evacuation processes. Clinton stated that each country has a different history with Libya, and that the U.S. was reluctant to use military assets to evacuate citizens out of concern that many would see it as an attempt by the U.S. to invade and see the country's oil assets. Rep. Chabot also inquired about the administration's position on Iran's claim for the right to enrich uranium on its soil to which Clinton responded that under very strict conditions, Iran can – after responding to international demands to shut down weapons facilities – enrich oil on its soil under the IAEA agreement.

Clinton also outlined the U.S. sanctions on Iran in response to a question by **Rep. Theodore Deutch** (D-FL) and responded to **Rep. Jeff Fortenberry** (R-NE), **Rep. Michael McCaul** (R-TX), and **Rep. Ted Poe** (R-TX) calls for forceful support of Iranian people by stating that we need continued international condemnation for human rights abuses in Iran and that we need to continue to expose their hypocrisy and double standards. She hesitates to engage in direct involvement lest the opposition be painted as “American stooges,” but said that we continue to support the people's aspirations and will support them if they come out in a critical mass and demand their freedoms. She also noted that we will need to be ready on the ground with development and diplomacy to prevent actors like China and members of Iranian power structure from filling the vacuum.

Rep. Brad Sherman (D-CA), **Rep. Ted Poe** (R-TX) called for the removing the Iranian group MEK from the State Department saying that it was concession made to the Tehran government and Rep. Ros-Lehtinen called for protection for Camp Ashraf residents. In response, Clinton stated that the department is reviewing the case.

Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY) and **Rep. Mike Kelly** (R-PA) questioned continued aid to Palestine given their failure to enter substantive negotiations in the last two years and their resolution put forth before the Security Council. Clinton responded by saying that the Council's veto spoke loudly and that we need to continue to support Palestine to ensure peace. She pointed to the Palestinian Authority's success in the West Bank compared to Hamas' failure in Gaza as evidence of the need for continued aid and stated it's in US interests to promote the peace treaty. Responding to a question by **Rep. Gerald Connolly** (D-VA) on what steps Hamas needs to take to be recognized, Clinton stated that they must renounce violence, recognize Israel, and fulfill a series of other conditions. In response to his question about whether the Muslim Brotherhood has in fact involved into a more democratic oriented entity with a contribution to make in Egypt, Clinton stated that they are monitoring the situation closely.

Addressing a question by **Rep. Dennis Cardoza** (D-CA) on how the uprisings have affected Christian minorities in Egypt and Iraq, Clinton stated that Christians and other minority groups are scared and feeling pressure and that some have started to leave these countries. She stated that we need to speak out more against attacks and hold governments accountable. She stated that the U.S. will seek to promote the kind Christian-Muslim solidarity that we saw in Tahrir Square.

Rep. Dan Burton (R-IN) questioned how the unrest in the region will affect energy prices and also questioned what we are doing to move towards energy independence, which he believes is vitally important to our national security and that as such we should begin off-shore drilling as studies show we could reduce our dependence by 50 percent in the next decade. Clinton responded by stating that she agrees that energy independence is a national security issue and that there are multiple ways to address this. She stated that the QDDR called for the formation of a new bureau to deal with the issue of energy efficiency and oil and said we need to focus on “the right now.”