



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 1”
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs
Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2172
February 9, 2011, 10:30 A.M – 1:00 P.M.**

The **House Committee on Foreign Affairs** held an open [hearing](#) on Wednesday, focused on the future of Egypt and Lebanon in light of recent political instability in Lebanon and unrest in Egypt. To discuss the issues facing these countries and the region, the committee – chaired by Congresswoman **Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R-FL) and with Congressman **Howard L. Berman** (D-CA) in attendance – requested the testimony of three individuals: **Elliott Abrams** Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations; **Lorne Craner**, president of the International Republican Institute and former Assistant Secretary of State; Dr. **Robert Satloff**, Executive Director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Representative Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) [opened](#) the hearing by addressing the recent instability in both Lebanon and Egypt stating, **“we have failed to effectively leverage U.S. assistance in support of peaceful, pro-democracy forces and to help build strong, accountable, independent, democratic institutions as a bulwark against the instability that is now spreading throughout much of the region.”** She went on to address **the shortcomings of US Foreign Policy in supporting autocratic regimes in the hopes of stability, which in light of recent events she believes has proven to be a flawed policy.**

In response to the actions taken by the Obama Administration in recent weeks, Rep. Ros-Lehtinen **concluded that the US has shown a tepid response to the protests and has failed to react quickly to the changing situation on the ground.** She went on to criticize US Foreign Policy in the region for being **“reactive”** to unfavorable regimes such as those in Syria, Iran and Lebanon, which has led to the current problems the United States faces in the region. Rep. Ros-Lehtinen concluded her statements by stating that the US must learn a lesson from our failure of supporting a flawed electoral process in Lebanon and proposed the question: **“Therefore, shouldn’t the U.S. insist that constitutional and administrative requirements concerning the electoral process in Egypt be revised to ensure that only responsible actors who meet certain basic standards participate in Egypt’s future?”**

Rep. Berman began his remarks by stating that **the events in Egypt are both exciting and daunting, and that we must both ensure that this transition proceeds and that our shared interests are not compromised.** Berman praised the mass demonstrations in Egypt and concluded that the protests had already produced tremendous results including Omar Suleiman, Gamal Mubarak and Hosni Mubarak all promising not to run in the fall. Rep. Berman went on to say that **the US cannot choose Egypt’s future but that we should support an orderly process of change that supports relations with the US, democracy, human rights, a secularly oriented government and the Egypt-Israeli Peace Treaty.** Rep. Berman stated that he also believed that military assistance should continue as long as the army remains peaceful and supportive of the transition.

Rep. **Ackerman** (D-OH) stated that after putting pressure on Mubarak and denouncing violence against protesters and journalists that **the Obama administration is wavering on what we support**. Ackerman believes that a contradiction is forming between rhetoric and policy coming out of the White House. Ackerman **called for an immediate end to restrictions on free speech, free press and the right to assemble, a repeal of the emergency law, and an end to institutional impediments to democracy promotion**. Rep. Ackerman believes that there is a level of ambiguity in US Foreign Policy towards Egypt that is unacceptable and that **“the people yearn to be free, we must plant ourselves firmly on their side”** and that **“we need to suspend our aid to Egypt, we simply cannot afford to be viewed as the bankroll of oppression.”**

Elliot Abrams based his [testimony](#) upon 6 essential points that he believed the House of Foreign Affairs Committee should heed in crafting policy. He proclaimed that the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt show that indeed the thirst for freedom is universal and that there is a freedom deficit in the Middle East and former President Bush was right in adopting a freedom agenda. Abrams said that **60 years of Western leaders accommodating leaders in the Middle East has made the region unstable while also limiting the liberty of its people**. He went on to explain that American policy should reinforce supporting democracy and that **“warming up to Syria sends exactly the wrong message,”** the message being that we don’t care about democracy and human rights. He went on to state, **“we must actively press for democracy not only in Egypt and Tunisia but in Iran and Syria.”**

Abrams believes that the recent events in the region make a clear statement to the rest of the world, stating that the belief **“that every problem in the region is really tied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—is false.”** Abrams went on to state that: **“We should make it clear to Egypt’s military right now that the billion dollars a year they get is not owed to them,”** and thus our aid should be conditional. Abrams stated that if Lebanon is fighting terrorism and guarding the border with Syria, then they should indeed continue to receive US funding, but if not, then this aid should be revoked. Finally, Abrams called for scrutiny of the funding for foreign operations, specifically to look into how effectively US money is being spent on democracy promotion.

Lorne Craner in his [testimony](#) suggest that substantial unrest will not be found in countries with monarchies in the Middle East due to a history of reform and legitimacy which stems from tribal and family lineage. He stated that it will be important for the region’s monarchies to continue to open up the political process and increase reforms. Craner believes **that republics are the most problematic because their leaders have stalled reforms for too long**. Craner argued that the Obama administration has had no strategy to advance democracy since last June, and that the administration’s efforts to promote civil society deserve credit, but the implementation is lagging. Craner also criticized **the US’ agreement to only fund civil society organizations that the Mubarak regime approved of**. Craner stated that being so close to authoritarians does not support our interests and that **“we must plan for the day when they are no longer in power,”** so the United states is not surprised once again by a foreign revolution.

Dr. **Robert Satloff** began his [testimony](#) by stating, **“the Egypt situation leads one to conclude that it is neither the disaster some fear nor the dawn of a new day that some hope.”** Dr. Satloff commended the Obama administration for its **“sound approach”** to the crisis in Egypt. Dr. Satloff believes that the administration recognized that it is neither wise nor possible to back those who do not support democracy and instead the United States supported change and the protesters. Dr. Satloff

argued that **for all the drama of the past weeks the Mubarak regime has not made any “substantive change.”** Dr. Satloff believes that every day that passes and the military continues to support Mubarak, this will erode their ability to play a role in the democratic future of Egypt and a transition to democracy. Based upon this idea Dr. Satloff stated that **he supports the continuation of military aid to Egypt.**

Rep. Berman pushed further on the issue of aid, asking how we should move forward with US aid to Egypt. Abrams believes that **it shouldn’t be cut off now**, but the US should signal that it could be cut if off any day. Dr. Satloff argued that the US doesn’t have too many levers and that it was too soon to use this tool to create democratic change. Rep. Berman went on to ask; how loudly should the administration address Mubarak leaving office? Dr. Satloff believes that every day since Obama said “now” is the time for Mubarak to begin a transition has been a victory for Mubarak and that he hopes to see a delegation of power to then support democratic transition. Craner stated that strong calls should be made because **it is not fair to ask someone who has overseen fraudulent elections for so long to oversee a transition to free and fair elections.**

Rep. Ackerman (D-NY) stated that the US will not have a second chance to make an impression on the people in the streets of Egypt and that the US must make itself clear. Ackerman believes that one of the tools the US should use to do this is the Egyptian military, due to the large support the US gives it. He asked whether the US should attempt to urge the Egyptian military to deliver the message that Mubarak should leave. Ackerman went on to ask for thoughts on the Muslim Brotherhood.

Dr. **Satloff** believes that the military’s role is important, and that in private the Egyptian military should know what actions and inactions would trigger aid, but stated that he doesn’t know if the US is attempting to use the military to push Mubarak out. Dr. Satloff believes that the US should recognize and be vigilant about the danger of the Muslim Brotherhood, but not overreact. He urged the US: **“Don’t exaggerate and don’t be naïve.”** Craner argued that the history of the Pakistani military’s loss of support from its people should serve as impetus for the Egyptian military to act in accordance with the people of Egypt. In regards to the Brotherhood, Craner believes the US must stop presenting themselves with the choice Mubarak has presented (the Brotherhood or the NDP) and recognize that there are people in the middle, thus elections should not take place immediately.

Rep. Royce (R-CA) argued that in regards to the issue of the Muslim Brotherhood, the US should look to the events of the 1979 Revolution in Iran to show what an Islamist party is capable of. He argued that the Brotherhood is a group that does not believe in pluralism, equality for women, or for equality to non-Muslims or Muslims who deviate from their view of Islam. He asked if the witnesses believed that there should be qualifications for candidates in Egypt to support pluralism. Craner believes that **people who are against pluralism should not be allowed to stand in elections.** Dr. Satloff said that **there is a constitutional clause outlawing religious parties, but that it will be up to the Egyptians to decide how this issue will be addressed when forming a democracy.**

Rep. Engel (D-NY) asked what the witnesses believed the administration should do if the UN special tribunal indicts members of Hezbollah and what should be done about the Brotherhood in Egypt. Abrams argued that **Hezbollah’s recent actions had some of the makings of a coup.** He expressed that if the Lebanese government does not support this tribunal, US relations with Lebanon would reflect this decision. Abrams stated that **“there is no Khomeini in Egypt,”** and that there is no great opposition leader that we have to fear. Craner reiterated this claim affirming that the lack of clerical leadership was a central reason why the US should not fear an Islamic takeover in Egypt. Dr. Satloff

believes that the US should not rule out the fact that leaders will emerge to be the face of this revolution. He concurred with the sentiments of the other witnesses, that there are Security Council requirements regarding the tribunal that the government of Lebanon must maintain.