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“Reflections on the Revolution in Egypt”

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House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee,

Thank you for inviting me to testify on one of the most important issues confronting the United States in the Middle East, the transition of Egypt from autocracy to democracy. I come to this issue not as an expert on Egypt. Fortunately, you have my colleague, Michele Dunne here, who is a genuine expert. Together we founded and co-chair the bipartisan Working Group on Egypt, and it has been a great privilege for me to work with her and the other members of our group. My expertise, such as it is, is in American foreign policy and strategy, writ large, and also in the history and traditions of American foreign policy. And in that vein, let me begin by recounting a little recent history.

When Michele and I formed the working group in February 2010, our main effort was to urge the U.S. government to urge the Egyptian government to make some modest reforms leading up to the parliamentary elections in the fall of that year. We were not calling, and more importantly, the Egyptian people were not calling for revolution or the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, or

anything like that—just a more level playing field so that opposition parties could run and gain perhaps a small representation in a parliament that was utterly dominated by the president's ruling party. It was obvious to us, as to many others, that Egyptian society was growing restive. When it became clear that Mubarak was ill, and there was much speculation that he might be succeeded by his son, Gemal, tensions rose further. It seemed clear that the parliamentary elections provided an opportunity for President Mubarak to show that he was listening to his people and was prepared to give them a greater say and participation in their own governance -- even if the change was only marginal and modest.

Unfortunately, President Mubarak took the opposite tack. He not only did not institute reforms, he conducted the election in such a way as to assert even greater control of the Parliament. Two months later, with the people of Egypt in Tahrir Square, he began to talk about some of the reforms many had recommended. But by then it was far too late. Had he made the same proposals in November 2010 as he made in January 2011, it is quite possible he would still be in power today - for better or for worse.

I review this history because I fear there is a myth growing about what happened in Egypt, and what the U.S. role may have been. The U.S. did not "throw Mubarak under the bus," as many autocrats in the region, and some folks here in the United States, seem to believe. Mubarak threw himself under the bus, and the only thing the U.S. government did was not jump under the bus with him. The Obama administration was late -- very late -- reading the writing on the wall in Egypt, although thankfully it made the right decision in the end. I don't know what critics of our policy, then and now, would have recommended: that we urge the Egyptian military to kill the protestors in Tahrir Square, conduct an Egyptian version of Tiananmen Square? Because that is what it would have taken to prevent the revolution at that point, and I doubt that the Egyptian military would have carried out such a massacre--at least in part because the generals could not count on field commanders to follow orders to shoot fellow Egyptians--no matter what position the United States took.

It is important to remember this now when we are clearly faced with some difficult options and scenarios in Egypt. If there was a failure of policy that produced the present situation, it was the US policy, under successive

administrations, to treat Mubarak as if he were Egypt, to support him as he cracked down on the secular opposition and civil society, to believe him when he declared that the choice was him or the Muslim Brotherhood. It was his policies that made this a self-fulfilling prophesy, and American acquiescence to those policies.

As a result, we are left with less than ideal choices. There is an Egyptian military which, although it has presided over free and relatively fair elections, nevertheless shows constant worrying signs that it is unwilling to relinquish power and allow an open and democratic Egypt to develop. Then there is the Muslim Brotherhood, which won those elections and whose own commitment to openness remains to be tested.

Now we are also faced with the crisis regarding the NGOs. And again, we need to be clear who the source of this crisis really is. It is not the Muslim Brotherhood. It is not public opinion in Egypt. This action is not the unfortunate consequence of revolution. If anything it is the consequence of the incompleteness of the revolution. The NGOs were already targeted under Mubarak's Egypt. This latest stage in Mubarakism without Mubarak. It is being carried on by holdovers from the old regime, backed and by all evidence encouraged by the military. They are eager to discredit Egyptian and American

organizations that promote government accountability, transparency, and human rights as "agents" of foreign governments, playing into their storyline that the protests and riots against military rule are directed by foreign powers -- another old Mubarak-era trick.

Let's not keep making the same mistake over and over again. We make a mistake if we cling to the Egyptian military as the only safe harbor in Egypt. The military and other holdovers from the old regime wish to pose a choice to the West -- it's us or the Islamists. Mubarak posed the same choice. He crushed the liberals and left the Islamists to flourish. So we chose Mubarak and we are now reaping the consequences.

We need to deal with the reality of the new Egypt. That reality is that relatively free and fair elections have produced a parliament dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood. Our only rational course is to work with the Brotherhood, the liberals, the secular forces and other representative groups in Egypt to try to build a better future for the Egyptian people. I do commend the administration for reaching out to the brotherhood leadership. Because Egypt is no longer ruled by a single strong man, we have to be sensitive to and respond to popular sentiment in Egypt--even when we may not like the flavor of popular opinion.

As in our dealings with all nations, however, we have to be clear about the red lines--what we are willing to support with tax-payer money and what we are not. Egypt is the recipient of an enormous aid program. We do not provide aid out of charity--though Americans do wish the Egyptian people well and want to help where they can. We provide aid to achieve certain goals. Today those goals can be easily stated:

- 1) That any Egyptian government support an open political system, with civilian control of the military, a free media, respect for individual rights, including the right to worship freely and the rights of women, freedom from torture and arbitrary arrest, and with regular free and fair elections.
- 2) That any Egyptian government remain at peace with its neighbors and continue to abide by peace agreements, including that with Israel.
- 3) That any Egyptian government use American aid for the general well-being of all Egyptians and not just for the few.

We can and should hold to these principles, and condition our aid on these principles, regardless of who is in power in Egypt. For American interests in these goals are clear.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

**United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Foreign Affairs**

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<b>1. Name:</b>  Robert Kagan	<b>2. Organization or organizations you are representing:</b>  The Brookings Institution
<b>3. Date of Committee hearing:</b>  February 15, 2011	
<b>4. Have <u>you</u> received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?</b>	<b>5. Have any of the <u>organizations you are representing</u> received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>6. If you answered yes to either item 4 or 5, please list the source and amount of each grant or contract, and indicate whether the recipient of such grant was you or the organization(s) you are representing. You may list additional grants or contracts on additional sheets.</b>	
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