

Reflections on the Revolution in Egypt
testimony by
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Chairman Chabot, Ranking Member Ackerman, distinguished members of Congress: thank you for inviting me to join you today for this timely and important discussion.

Egypt's revolution is a year old, and its transition to democracy will be the work of several more. While the events of the past year have unsettled many observers, Egypt's transition was never likely to be smooth or simple. The fact remains that this historic development presents the United States with a strategic opportunity to advance our interests through a stronger partnership with the Egyptian people and with a democratic Egypt. But the next six months present special challenges on which we must focus our attention if we wish to be able to seize that opportunity for a new partnership in the years to come.

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces has committed to transfer executive authority to an elected president by June 30, 2012. In the meantime, the Egyptian people are facing real and growing concerns. They face a broken and deteriorating economy in which forty percent of their people live on less than \$2 a day. They face an interim government that appears desirous to preserve as much as possible of the former regime. They face a pervasive set of police, security and intelligence services who continue to meddle in domestic politics, the media, and many other aspects of society, while failing to provide basic security for the populace. And they face a set of political elites who have yet to adjust to having real responsibilities and real accountability to the people.

Most urgently, the economic deterioration of the past year could result in an economic crisis in a matter of weeks or months. The Egyptian people need and deserve the support of the international community in facing this economic crisis and in establishing the foundations for lasting democracy and prosperity. But the behavior and choices of the current transitional government make it exceptionally challenging to support Egypt during this crucial phase.

Mr. Chairman, I am confident in the Egyptian people's determination to achieve a transparent, accountable government that respects their rights. And I am confident in the interests that Americans and Egyptians share as the basis for a renewed partnership between our two countries. But that partnership must be built with the Egyptian people and with a democratic government that answers to them. Right now, what we must do is preserve the possibilities of partnership -- to continue our outreach to the Egyptian people, to continue to support their efforts at democratic development, to respond to their urgent economic needs -- and to avoid playing into the hands of those within Egypt who do not support those efforts to portray us as enemies of the Egyptian people and of Egypt's national interests. It is simply not true.

A Strategic Opportunity

The revolution in Egypt was driven by deep, underlying trends that are evident across in Arab societies. As I wrote in my 2008 book, *Freedom's Unsteady March*, the status quo in the region was not stable. With the Arab Awakening, we have an opportunity now to advance lasting stability in the Middle East – stability that will only come through democratic and economic reforms that will write a new social contract between governments and citizens.

Egypt's democratic transition is important to us, and not only because Egypt's stability is important to us. As you know well, where democracy and democratic freedoms are valued, the world also gains in security. Democracies give people a stake in their governance and weaken the appeal of those who call for violence. A democratic Egypt will be a stronger partner for the United States in advancing our shared interests in security, stability, and prosperity for the region and the world. I will have more to say about these shared interests in a few moments.

Finally, there is a strategic opportunity in how the Egyptian revolution came about, that must not be lost in the uncertainty and confrontation that has ensued since last February. Young Egyptians did in eighteen days what Ayman al-Zawahiri could not do in eighteen years. The disciplined and determined young men and women of Egypt put forward a powerful repudiation to the narrative of extremists who preach violence and confrontation as the only means to achieve change, and who tried and failed to destabilize Egypt through terrorism in the years prior to the Arab Spring. And these young people have also put forward their own indigenously generated, positive vision for the future of their nation, a future defined by dignity, freedom and opportunity. We have a keen interest in seeing that positive vision succeed in triumphing over the dark visions of the extremists.

The Year That Was

The SCAF took power last February in an effort to preserve as much as they could of the state they knew, while seeking to respond to the demands of the people for a democratic government. But these two goals proved fundamentally incompatible. Over the past year, the SCAF came to behave, not as a caretaker, but as a power seeking to shape the political transition to accord with its own interests and preferences.

In this, the SCAF were opposed by political parties and by the young revolutionaries, as well as by Egypt's well-developed and professional civil society organizations, who have a long record of struggle on behalf of democracy and human rights and against authoritarian practices. The SCAF's preference for opaque decision making, its misjudgments of domestic politics, and its inability, or unwillingness, to restrain the police and security services in their violence against civilians have further contributed to the past year of tension and confrontation in Egypt.

Time and time again, public pressure for a genuine political transition through democratic means has compelled the SCAF to back down from decisions that would have strengthened their control and reduced the authority, transparency, and accountability of the new government. In early December they finally agreed to a date certain for the transfer of power back to civilian rule -- a much earlier date than they themselves preferred. This constant tension undermined the SCAF's

public position, as their intentions became increasingly suspect in the eyes of political elites and the public.

But the SCAF did commit to handing over power by July -- and they fulfilled one other essential commitment in shepherding Egypt to greater democracy: they enabled the freest and fairest vote in Egypt's modern history to elect a new parliament. Now, Egypt's elected parliament is acting as a further constraint on the SCAF and its appointed cabinet.

The Crackdown on Civil Society

As the military council and the members of their appointed governments have come under increasing pressure, they have resorted more and more to the habits of all autocrats in trouble -- they have blamed outside forces and hidden conspiracies, and they have manipulated the state-run media, wielded the intelligence services, and taken advantage of the hobbled justice sector to press their case. The crackdown on independent civil society groups in Egypt is a manifestation of this broader struggle. Beginning last July, the government began a press campaign against civic groups engaged in democracy and human rights work, labeling them tools of foreign agendas. The so-called "judicial investigation" was launched by a complaint filed by a minister in the military's appointed cabinet, the ridiculous charges made by her, the questions posed to the NGO workers in the investigation, and the "evidence" leaked in the press, make clear what a politicized investigation it is.

But it is important to understand what this NGO crackdown is about. The goal here is not primarily to tweak the nose of the United States. Dozens of NGOs have been caught up in this investigation, and the vast majority of them are Egyptian. The goal of this crackdown is to weaken, delegitimize, and demonize an entire sector of Egyptian society -- its independent democracy and human rights advocates -- by associating them with an alleged foreign conspiracy. This is an effort to label human rights work itself as an illegitimate foreign agenda, alien and hostile to Egypt. And, of course, the military and its appointed government also benefit politically from portraying themselves as defending the sovereignty of Egypt against foreign intervention.

Unfortunately, American-Egyptian relations have been caught up in the desperate attempts of this transitional government to retain the upper hand in Egypt's newly dynamic domestic politics. And this is precisely because we stand up globally for the universal rights these civic groups espouse. America's aid to Egyptian civil society is an expression of our support for Egyptians' aspirations for accountable government, and our desire to move beyond a US-Egyptian relationship that is largely defined by government-to-government interactions. America's transition assistance was designed explicitly to reach out to a broader range of Egyptians and build a broader partnership with the Egyptian people.

The dispute over US government funding to NGOs working in Egypt is fundamentally about resistance by some in Egypt to a shift in our relationship from one that is government-to-government, to one that encompasses and includes the Egyptian people. It is not about the law, it is not about money -- it is about control.

Although the SCAF themselves are the greatest beneficiaries of American taxpayer funds, they are apparently now willing to risk that aid in an effort to deflect or avoid criticism of themselves at home. It is a very short-sighted and self-defeating approach, to be sure, but it appears to be the one they have chosen.

What the United States Must Do

Americans can and should be outraged by the behavior of Egypt's transitional government toward our citizens -- and outraged as well by its behavior toward independent Egyptian civic groups who are advancing universal rights, and the Egyptians who are exercising those rights. Americans might also reasonably feel anxious about the newly elected parliamentarians, who are unfamiliar to us, and whose ideas and preferences we do not fully understand.

But the United States cannot afford to take a short-sighted approach to Egypt's transition. At the heart of the Egyptian revolution, the deeper trends that produced it, and the aspiration of Egyptians for democracy, is a strategic opportunity for the United States -- to advance our interests and to build a stronger, more reliable and more equitable partnership with the Egyptian people.

American interests in the region remain largely unchanged, but the Arab Awakening has radically altered the landscape in which we must pursue those interests. I have argued for years, most notably in my 2008 book, *Freedom's Unsteady March*, that the United States must work to rebuild strategic cooperation in the region based not on the personalities in power, but on a genuine partnership with the peoples of the region rooted in mutual interests and mutual respect. Now events demand that we make that shift -- one which will result in far more reliable, longstanding, and meaningful cooperation than we could have had before. And we can do so while holding firm to our principles and our interests.

We must not lose this opportunity, which may be a once-in-a-generation event. We must see beyond the current crisis and work now to preserve the prospects for that broader partnership with Egypt and then seize it when the opportunity emerges from this transitional period.

A Foundation for Renewed Partnership

Egypt remains a country of strategic importance, and one in whose future we have an important stake. Egypt remains the most significant economic, political, and cultural force in the Arab world today. It is located across one of the world's great geostrategic crossroads, an essential pathway for global commerce and for the United States's global military reach. Egypt's peace treaty with Israel is a cornerstone of regional stability that has saved three generations of Israelis and Arabs from the destruction of wars like those that came before Camp David. Egypt's majority, its young people, want to build a nation that offers them the opportunities for betterment that their parents were denied, and that leads the region once again in commerce, culture, and diplomacy. And they know that in the twenty-first century, this will require Egypt to be tightly connected to the world -- and bound to the norms of international law, free markets, moderation and stability that we share.

Given the current context, in which American citizens are charged in a trumped-up investigation for undertaking activities protected under international human rights law, and in which economic assistance provided by the American taxpayer is being simultaneously hoarded by the powers that be, and debased as the reach of a hidden hand, it is tempting to respond by terminating all financial assistance to Egypt -- military and economic. But this would be a profound strategic error. This is the time to remain engaged, to demonstrate our support for Egyptians' aspirations, and to forge the basis for mutual understanding and a new partnership with a democratic Egypt.

America's interests lie in a positive, cooperative relationship with Egypt. We have long shared core interests in peace, stability, and moderation -- not only with Hosni Mubarak, but with the Egyptian people. Going forward, though, US-Egyptian cooperation on common interests must be built on a more mature, broader-based degree of mutual understanding between Americans and Egyptians -- including American respect for an Egyptian government that is rooted in the consent of the Egyptian people and is accountable to them. There is a sound foundation on which to build that mature bilateral partnership:

- Egyptians have suffered greatly from Islamist terrorism, and they reject violence against civilians at a higher rate than any country in the world. So we have a strong shared interest in countering terrorism.
- Egyptians have suffered greatly from war -- Arab-Israeli wars, but also other conflicts in their neighborhood. They want to build up their own society and its future, and they know that their security requires that their neighbors in Libya, in Syria, and in the West Bank and Gaza, enjoy peace and stability as well. So we have a strong shared interest in regional stability and in Arab-Israeli peace.
- Egypt has been a stalwart opponent of nuclear proliferation. Egyptians are proud of their country's leadership in international efforts to control weapons of mass destruction. As the region and the world continue to confront the dangers of Iran's nuclear program, we have a strong shared interest in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, and countering Iran's efforts to undermine regional stability.
- Finally, Egypt's newly elected leaders will need a dynamic economy to care for and advance the prospects of their 85 million citizens, and they need close links to the preeminent education, scientific research, and technological innovation offered in the United States. Likewise, the United States has an interest in seeing other nations join the global economy and contribute their knowledge and creativity to solving global problems. So we have a strong shared interest in seeing Egypt move toward a more open economy and greater trade with the world, which will provide wider opportunity and greater prosperity for the Egyptian people.

Based on all this, I am confident that Americans and Egyptians have a great deal of work we can usefully do together, to advance our shared goals in the Middle East and beyond.

Continued Outreach, Consistent Engagement

To effect that broader partnership, we must stay engaged in Egypt during its difficult transition. We must support the Egyptian people as they continue to demand, and to exercise, their universal human rights to free expression, to free association, to vote and to protest. We must also support the Egyptian economy to prevent further suffering, and to help lay the groundwork for a new, democratic government to be able to deliver for its citizens. And we must continue to reach out to and engage with new political actors and with a wider range of Egyptian society -- from cities and villages, from secular parties and Islamist parties, from new parliamentarians and from the civil society groups who will keep those new parliamentarians honest.

Over the past year, the United States government has worked assiduously to reach out to new political actors and to more and more areas of Egyptian society. We have found an interest in engagement, a desire for dialogue, and some foundations for cooperation. It is imperative that we build on this foundation to establish the elements of constructive cooperation to advance our goals in the region.

This is particularly true with respect to the newly elected parliament. The Muslim Brotherhood's electoral coalition now holds nearly half of the lower house of parliament. They are beginning to question the decisions and policy direction of the military-appointed government, and they are -- quite rationally -- very focused on the economic suffering in Egypt and the need to prevent a wider economic crisis. They have engaged in talks with the IMF and with others in the international community about the economic crisis, and they appear to be looking for pragmatic solutions. They are interested in trade and investment -- in fact, because the Brothers were largely excluded from civil service jobs under Mubarak, the movement as a whole has a general bias toward the private sector, free trade, and entrepreneurship. This is another foundation for cooperative relations. Finally, it's clear that the Brotherhood's priority is domestic affairs -- especially economics -- and they are not interested in bellicose rhetoric or provocative actions that would threaten regional stability or hamper the return of tourists and investors to Egypt. So far, they have made appropriate assurances about Egypt's fidelity to all its international agreements, including the Camp David treaty.

There are questions to ask about the new parliamentarians' commitments to core democratic principles, such as equality under the law for all citizens, including women and minorities. We can and should raise these issues in our diplomatic engagement, but these are questions that should primarily be asked and answered by Egyptians. We will see some important indicators on these issues emerging during the constitution-drafting process in the coming months. From an American perspective, we should judge the Brotherhood and others in the new parliament by what they do, and so far there appears to be a basis for dialogue and a potential for constructive partnership. There are, no doubt, issues on which we disagree. But we work with political actors around the world with whom we are not in complete agreement. We work around the world with parties, leaders, and governments that bring a religious perspective to their governing philosophy. We cannot make congruence on all issues a prerequisite for diplomatic engagement or pragmatic cooperation.

It's quite clear from the genesis and progress of events over the past year that the United States did not create the Arab Awakening, and will not determine its outcome. The citizens of Egypt,

and of the region, are writing their own story, and their self-determination is what they are struggling now to realize.

But while the United States cannot determine the outcome of the Arab Awakening, we have a keen interest in that outcome -- and nowhere is that more true than in Egypt. Egyptian citizens' yearnings, and their sacrifice, for dignity, freedom, and opportunity are reflective of universal human aspirations, and they deserve our unreserved support. Their failure to achieve these goals will diminish the prospects for the success of liberty elsewhere in the region and indeed around the world. Their success will advance our interests, and if we are respectful of their progress, and consistent and transparent in our continued outreach, I believe that we will find the basis for a stronger partnership moving forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views with you today, and I look forward to your questions.

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs

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3. Date of Committee hearing: <i>15 February 2012</i>	
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? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	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? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
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