

Opening Statement
The Honorable Steve Chabot, Chairman
Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia

“Assessing U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities and Needs
Amidst Economic Challenges in the Middle East”
March 10, 2011

Good afternoon. I want to welcome all of my colleagues—new and old—to the first hearing of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia. I guess I am both a new and an old Member of the subcommittee having served for a number of years under Chairmen Gilman, Ros-Lehtinen and Ackerman. And after a temporary interruption in service, I have returned.

I want to acknowledge my friend from New York, the distinguished Ranking Member, Mr. Ackerman. I have enjoyed working with him over the years and I look forward to working closely with him in the next couple of years—and, hopefully, longer. I also want to acknowledge the Vice-Chairman of the Subcommittee, my friend from Indiana, Mr. Pence. I look forward to working with him as well.

And finally, I'd like to welcome our freshman Members—Mr. Marino, Ms. Buerkle, Ms. Ellmers, and Mr. Keating. I hope you enjoy serving on the Subcommittee. I would expect that this Subcommittee will continue to work in a bipartisan manner as often as possible. We will certainly disagree on issues from time to time but we will also find many areas, I'm certain, where we can work together. I can assure you I'll try to operate the Subcommittee in a collegial manner.

This hearing was called with the intention of following up on Secretary of State Clinton's testimony that the full Committee heard last week, but with an exclusive focus on the Middle East. This will give members the opportunity to ask more specific questions both about the Fiscal Year 2012 proposed budget as well as broader U.S. strategy throughout the region.

The regional shifts happening right now in the Middle East place the United States and our allies at a precipice in history. The entire strategic framework that the United States' regional posture has been based on for decades is rapidly transforming. The precise new composition of the region remains uncertain. At a minimum it will be shifting from autocracies of varying degrees to political diversity. At this critical juncture, the Administration must seize the initiative to cement new partnerships and secure enduring U.S. strategic interests such as: countering terrorism, securing energy supplies for global markets, countering proliferation, moving forward on the Israel-Palestinian peace process, and guarding against the threats posed by Iran and Syria. These objectives can only be achieved by helping to establish the foundations and principles for a new strategic order in the region. For decades the United States has been criticized throughout the Middle East for what was perceived to be an unprincipled foreign policy. Today we have the opportunity to prove wrong those who hold this belief. But that can only be achieved with action. We must not miss this opportunity.

It is safe to say that there are many learning opportunities to be had. It is particularly thought-provoking to consider the reforms President Obama called for in his Cairo speech. Many of the measures laid out in the speech resonated with citizens throughout the region. Unfortunately many of those measures were never implemented. What if over the past two years we had more effectively lobbied our allies in the region—many of whom are large aid recipients—to implement political reforms? Could we have had liberalization without the violence and bloodshed that we see now? No one can answer these questions, but they highlight one undeniable truth: Money is no substitute for effective diplomacy.

I think we can look at the Middle East today with cautious optimism. We can certainly be inspired by the brave actions taken by pro-democracy activists who seek merely to have the same fundamental human rights that are the birthright of every individual on earth. We know now that the claims of many in the past that the Middle East is somehow not ready for democracy are fundamentally false. We're reminded that the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness do not stop at the water's edge.

With this in mind I think we can look to the future with hope—hope that we see emerge in this region true representative government that embodies key principles of a democratic society, such as the right to vote and the right to free expression, and that these principles are applied fairly across ethnic and religious lines. At the same time, we have to be concerned that the efforts of so many may be hijacked by extremists who seek to use the institutions of democracy to rise to power only to abolish that very system. Although it is the right of the people of the Middle East ultimately to self-determine their own fate, we should be ready to assist them in their effort.

As I mentioned earlier, although the circumstances in the region are changing, our core interests are not and our mission is without a doubt daunting. The budget that this Congress is considering is the means of meeting these challenges. To that end we will hear today from Ambassador Feltman and Mr. Laudato on what those plans are and how the budget allocations they've requested will enable them to achieve them. I want to thank them both for taking the time to meet with us today. I now recognize the Ranking Member, Mr. Ackerman, for his opening statement. The gentleman is recognized.