

Statement of William Roebuck
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs
Before the Helsinki Commission

July 9, 2014

Thank you, Chairman Cardin and Co-Chairman Smith, for inviting me to testify before you today on North Africa. It is a particular honor for me to do so before the U.S. Helsinki Commission. Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Egypt, of course, all participate in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation forum, which provides an avenue for engagement with the OSCE, its institutions, and its 57 participating States in promoting a vision of comprehensive security that includes political/military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions. We welcome initiatives, such as this one, that make important contributions to promoting democratic transitions and bolstering regional stability.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, North Africa – Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt – is a region of tremendous potential. The birthplace of the Arab Awakening, it is currently undergoing a difficult but critical transformation, the likes of which it has not experienced since the beginning of decolonization. Tunisia has achieved much success already and continues to realize the democratic promise of its 2011 revolution, even as it faces significant security and economic challenges. Libya faces many difficulties and we must take the long view in assessing its progress toward democracy. However, Libyans are committed to making progress. For the second time since its revolution, Libyans across the country went to the polls in June and voted in free and fair parliamentary elections, selecting members for a new Council of Representatives. Morocco and Algeria are also undergoing reform processes that will benefit their economies and societies at home and increase stability in the region as a whole. Finally, our longstanding relationship with Egypt and its centrality to the region as a whole, require our commitment to democratic development in that country. These are historic times in North Africa and the U.S. government is working with our partners to assist and support during this transition.

Tunisia

Tunisia remains one of the Middle East and North Africa's best hopes for a successful transition to democracy and has made positive strides in the past few months – with the ratification of a new constitution and swearing in of an independent government to lead the country to elections in 2014. On January 26 of this year, the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) ratified the constitution by a landslide vote of 200 for, 12 against, and four abstentions. The new constitution enshrines democratic principles such as rule of law, pluralism, gender equality, and freedom of belief.

As with all transitions, of course, there are also challenges. Tunisia's economy has struggled since the 2011 revolution in the face of political uncertainty and security incidents. The Tunisian government has an ongoing commitment to reform its economy, aided by an IMF Stand-By Arrangement. Through this reform program, Tunisia is taking steps to address the vulnerabilities in its banking sector, reorient its budget toward a more pro-growth composition, and implement a comprehensive structural reform agenda to promote private sector development. As announced by President Obama in April, the United States and Tunisia signed a loan guarantee agreement in June allowing Tunisia to borrow up to \$500 million at concessionary rates to support this reform agenda.

Security remains vital to the success of the transition. However, violent extremists pose an ongoing threat as they seek to counter the democratic transition, thwart the government's authority, and impose their extremist understanding of Islam through harassment, incitement of violence, and attacks. Yet over the past year the Tunisian government has shown an increasingly strong resolve to manage the extremist threat. The Tunisian military and security forces require additional training and equipment to counter the newly-evolving terrorist threat. To do so, we have bolstered our assistance to help Tunisia reform its criminal justice sector to improve its ability to protect Tunisians and foreigners alike, as well as confront domestic and regional security challenges. We are also working with Tunisia to explore ways to provide at-risk groups with alternatives and prevent further marginalization or disconnection of these groups.

We continue to provide assistance through a number of mechanisms to support Tunisia's transition to a prosperous democratic country, to spur job creation, to provide entrepreneurship training, and to enhance access to finance for small and medium enterprises, and support the democratic transition. We are also working with Tunisian civil society to ensure a transparent electoral process by supporting domestic election monitoring, and we will be supporting international election observation of the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections.

Libya

Since the 2011 revolution, Libya has faced significant political and security challenges. Yet it remains in our national security interest to ensure Libya becomes a stable and democratic partner capable of addressing regional security challenges and advancing our shared interests.

Despite the challenges, the Libyan people are committed to making progress. On June 25, Libya successfully held nationwide elections for the Council of Representatives (COR), a 200-member legislative body that will replace the General National Congress. Although turnout was lower than in 2012, COR elections represent for many Libyans a new beginning and important milestone for the country as it transitions to democracy. We expect the official results of these elections by July 20 and are ready to assist the new parliamentarians as they assume their duties, as requested. Furthermore, the Constitutional Drafting Assembly (CDA), a 60-member body tasked with drafting a permanent constitution, has begun its work in Bayda in eastern Libya after being elected in February.

Yet while the government is making progress toward democracy and legitimacy, it lacks the ability to project its authority across the country or fulfill many core government functions. Further complicating efforts to achieve national consensus is retired General Khalifa Hifter's recent campaign to eradicate Islamist-leaning militants from Benghazi. Although many Libyans support his goals, they are wary of his methods and future intentions. We continue to affirm that a political agreement—and not violence—is necessary to advance the transition and enable the constitution drafting process to unfold. Accomplishing this will require buy-in from a wide range of Libyans. At the request of the Secretary, Ambassador David Satterfield is working in his personal capacity to build consensus among key

Libyan influencers around a set of 10 principles that will guide the way forward. His efforts, along with those of the international community, are essential to helping Libya move past its current challenges.

After 42 years of dictatorship, Libya suffers from instability and poor governance due to weak institutions, porous borders, huge stockpiles of loose conventional weapons, and the presence of militias. Some of these militias have extremist ties and continue to wield local and regional power, including blocking for over a year production and exports at many of Libya's onshore oil and gas facilities. However, we are beginning to see progress on this front and on July 1, Prime Minister Al Thinnai announced that militias controlling two ports in eastern Libya (Ras Lanuf and Es-Sidr) agreed to cease these disruptions, which has the potential to increase Libya's oil export potential by 560,000 barrels per day.

Libyans have grown weary of the pervasive lack of security in their country and have become impatient with their leaders' inability to restore stability. Elected officials, including the Prime Minister, have stated security is their top priority and we are working with the government to improve its ability to establish stability throughout the country. At the UK-hosted G-8 Summit in June 2013, we pledged to train a 5,000-8,000 member General Purpose Forces (GPF), prompting the UK and Italy to pledge to train 2,000 members each. The GPF assistance will be paid for by the Libyan government, and we are continuing to plan for this effort, which will take place later this year.

Border security is also a critical concern to the U.S. and our international partners in Libya. Libya's porous borders permit the flow not only of destabilizing Qadhafi-era conventional weapons, but also violent extremists throughout North Africa, the Middle East, and the Sahel. We are in the process of re-scoping a border security program in coordination with the European Union Integrated Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) to provide technical expertise, training, and limited equipment to build Libya's inter-ministerial border security capacity to address security along its western land border. We will also continue to work with international partners and allies to support a broad range of activities to help the Government of Libya in securing excess, at-risk, or easily proliferated conventional weapons.

Although Libya has great national resources, it has weak institutions, and requires targeted support now to develop the structures necessary to fund its own development. Alongside the international community, we are working with the Libyan government to build institutional public financial management capacity.

Morocco

We continue to enjoy a very strong bilateral relationship with Morocco, focused on promoting regional stability, supporting democratic reform efforts, countering violent extremism, and strengthening trade and cultural ties. Morocco – a major non-NATO ally since 2004 – is one of our closest counterterrorism partners in the region, and an active member of the Global Counterterrorism Forum. We also enjoy a strong economic relationship; a bilateral free trade agreement entered into force in 2006 that has helped triple bilateral trade, and in November 2013 we signed a Trade Facilitation Agreement.

President Obama hosted King Mohammed VI of Morocco in Washington on November 22, 2013, underscoring the long-term cooperation and friendship between our two countries. On this occasion we reaffirmed our close strategic partnership with Morocco and discussed the best means of promoting security and prosperity in the region.

Under King Mohammed VI, the Moroccan political system has gradually liberalized; the King founded the Arab world's first truth and reconciliation commission – to investigate abuses that occurred during his father's reign – and expanded women's rights. A new constitution was adopted in 2011, and Morocco's first Islamist-led government won nationwide democratic elections, but much progress remains to be made on implementing the guarantees and reforming institutions.

We will continue to support Morocco as it undertakes these important reform efforts. Our bilateral assistance focuses on promoting economic, political, democratic and social reforms; deepening our security partnership; promoting export control and countering violent extremism efforts; developing a professional criminal justice system; and encouraging broad-based economic growth. Our flagship assistance program has been Morocco's \$698 million Millennium

Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact, which closed in September 2013 and focused on agriculture, fisheries, and small business development. Morocco was selected as eligible to develop a second compact by MCC's Board of Directors in 2012 and is in the project definition phase of program development.

With regards to the Western Sahara, we support the United Nations-led process designed to bring about a peaceful, sustainable, and mutually-acceptable solution to the Western Sahara question. We also support the work of the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for the Western Sahara, Ambassador Christopher Ross, and urge the parties to work toward a resolution.

Algeria

Algeria and the United States have built a strong bilateral relationship, characterized by our shared interests to combat terrorism and facilitate greater stability in the region.

Algeria has made progress on human rights and political transparency over the past 20 years. We are encouraging the government to create space for a more vibrant civil society and inclusive democratic process through supporting small civil society initiatives, such as funding training for local election monitors. We also aim to increase educational exchanges with young Algerians, including promoting English language learning.

The wealth from Algeria's significant hydrocarbon reserves has empowered the state at the expense of overall economic development. We continue to encourage Algeria to make market oriented changes that expand job opportunities and increase its attractiveness to foreign direct investment. With that in mind, we are working to strengthen our trade relationship with Algeria, and are seeking to reactivate the 2001 Trade and Investment Framework Agreement. In 2013, General Electric signed deals worth \$3 billion to provide gas turbines to Algeria, an example of the benefits of our efforts to promote U.S. business in Algeria. This will help create or sustain 4,000 American jobs.

We have encouraged Algeria to continue to expand its regional leadership role to help stabilize neighboring states. Algeria's experience fighting an Islamist

insurgency during the 1990s resulted in a well-equipped and battle-hardened military that constitutes the strongest counterterrorism force in the region. We appreciate the work that Algeria has done with Tunisia to combat smuggling and terrorism, and we will continue to encourage Algeria to use their expertise to train and partner with less experienced militaries and law enforcement units in the region to help ensure greater stability in the Sahel and Maghreb.

Egypt

Egypt has undergone dizzying changes in the last three years. While its path forward is still being charted, its current trajectory has raised legitimate concerns about the future of democracy and human rights in Egypt. Egypt is also facing dramatic economic challenges as it moves to address unemployment, diversify and strengthen its economy, rebuild its tourist sector, and attract investment. We want Egypt to become a stable, prosperous, democratic country. While changes in Egypt have been shaped by internal dynamics, we recognize that these changes have broader implications for the region. Egypt is the most populous Arab nation – representing a quarter of the Arab world – and remains a bellwether for political and social trends across the Middle East and North Africa.

Egypt also remains a critical partner of the United States as we pursue our national security interests in the region and globally. We share several crucial interests, including countering the transnational threats of terrorism and weapons trafficking and maintaining regional stability on several fronts, foremost among them peace with Israel. Egypt is supportive of these interests and we believe a stable, prosperous, and democratic Egypt will make the strongest and most effective partner.

We remain deeply concerned about the state of human rights and political freedoms in Egypt, particularly the imprisonment of journalists and democracy activists, the lack of individualized justice and mass death sentences, and the enforcement of a harsh demonstrations law that is being used to close off space for dissent. These tactics are troubling: they reflect a profound lack of due process and complicate the achievement of political reform. Such tactics are at odds with the demands of the Egyptian people for justice; they further polarize Egyptian society and radicalize those whom they exclude from the political environment.

Secretary Kerry made these views clear during his visit last month when he emphasized our strong support for upholding the universal rights and freedoms of all Egyptians, including freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, and association. We will continue to call on President Al-Sisi and the new government to take steps to support a democratic transition in Egypt, one built on a foundation of the rule of law, civil liberties, and open political discourse.

So, in Egypt, we are pursuing dual, though by no means contradictory, policy imperatives: protecting our shared strategic interests and encouraging political and economic reform in Egypt. Through our economic assistance, we are seeking to demonstrate our commitment to achieving prosperity and improving the lives of the Egyptian people. We are striving to sharpen that commitment, by focusing on key issues such as higher education, private sector growth, and longer term establishment of democratic institutions. Through our military assistance, we are helping Egypt protect its borders and counter violent extremism that threatens Egypt, the broader region, and U.S. interests. We know that respect for human rights and a more democratic political environment are also critical to achieving those goals.

We will continue to engage diplomatically with the Egyptian government to underscore the need for political and economic reform, and work closely with Congress to ensure our assistance – military and economic – supports our broad strategic interests in Egypt and in the region.

Protecting our Interests

Chairman Cardin and Co-chairman Smith, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. Certainly, we are aware that our budgets are facing increasing pressure, but this region remains vital to protecting our national interests, as we look to maintain relationships with key allies and to nudge nascent democracies through difficult transitions, with the hope of promoting stability and countering extremist threats in the Middle East and Africa. With careful, targeted assistance, and smart diplomatic engagement, we are successfully advancing our key strategic interests.

Thank you again for your time and attention. I look forward to answering your questions.