

# FISCAL YEAR 2025 BUDGET REQUEST FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

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## HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EAST,  
SOUTH ASIA, CENTRAL ASIA,  
AND COUNTERTERRORISM

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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## **FISCAL YEAR 2025 BUDGET REQUEST FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA**

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**TUESDAY, JUNE 18, 2024**

U.S. SENATE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EAST, SOUTH ASIA,  
CENTRAL ASIA, AND COUNTERTERRORISM,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:36 p.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Christopher Murphy presiding.

Present: Senators Murphy [presiding], Kaine, Van Hollen, Young, Cruz, and Hagerty.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, U.S. SENATOR FROM CONNECTICUT**

Senator MURPHY. We are going to convene the subcommittee today to discuss the fiscal year 2025 budget request for the Middle East and North Africa.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here. We are going to start with some opening statements for myself and the ranking member and then we will get to statements from witnesses and questions.

From the unconscionable terrorist attacks of October 7 to increasing threats to traffic in the Red Sea to the spiraling humanitarian disaster inside Gaza to rising tensions on the Israel-Lebanon border to the unforeseen transition of power in Iran, the Middle East has been in an unusual amount of tumult and violence since this subcommittee last met to review the State Department's regional budget.

Amidst this chaos I have one thought that dominates all others. Thank goodness at this moment that we have Joe Biden's steady hand on the wheel.

Since October 7 President Biden and his team, including our witnesses, in particular, Secretary Leaf, have been tirelessly working the phones and crisscrossing the region to secure a comprehensive deal that ends the conflict in Gaza and releases the hostages.

And let me underscore how critical it is that this conflict come to a close. I want Hamas's ability to launch another terrorist attack destroyed.

I want our sacred ally Israel to live without the threat of violence or attack. And it is important to note that this conflict could end tomorrow if Hamas surrenders.

But they will not, because they do not give a damn about the Palestinian people.

But I do not understand how Israel's current military strategy in Gaza or their current lack of a strategy for what to do once the military campaign ends effectuates either of those goals.

Right now, to me, it appears that Israel's Gaza policy is guaranteeing that the threats to Israel continue, not that they are eliminated.

Leveling Gaza to the ground and unnecessarily killing thousands of innocent civilians in the process has a short term moral cost, but it has a long term strategic cost. The long term strategic cost is that the carnage can become a boon to terrorist recruiting.

That is what we saw in the aftermath of our invasions to Iraq and Afghanistan, and I do not understand why we are not learning those lessons.

But just as important as bringing the violence to an end is planning for the day after because without a plan for how to rebuild and secure Gaza under viable new political leadership, terrorist groups like Hamas are just going to fill the vacuum, feeding on the despair of the Palestinian people and posing a continued threat to Israel.

It is no secret that right now there is not a viable plan for the day after in Gaza. I am glad that the Administration is prioritizing planning with regional partners and like minded allies in the EU and the G-7. I would like to hear more about that today.

Part of this day after plan has to include the creation of an independent Palestinian state, not just vague promises of a pathway to a state that never really come to fruition but a concrete, irreversible timeline that culminates in statehood for the Palestinian people.

Connected to a Palestinian state are recent discussions between Israel and Saudi Arabia to normalize relations. Normalized relations would be a very good thing.

Reports suggest, though, that the price the Saudis are seeking for such an agreement is a NATO-like security guarantee from the United States as well as control over the cycle of nuclear enrichment.

That is an extraordinarily high price to command, and I am skeptical that such commitments would ultimately benefit the United States.

We only give those commitments to our most trusted allies and over and over again, most recently just last week when the Saudis refused to sign the Ukraine peace statement, we watch as Saudi Arabia plays us off against our adversaries.

Pulling back to look at the region more broadly, there are other key questions this committee needs to ask today about how we allocate funding.

For instance, does it make sense to habitually renew Egypt's military aid package of \$1.3 billion, the exact same amount we have provided every year to Egypt since 1987?

Does it make sense to provide just \$6.5 million to civil society in Tunisia when those organizations are striving to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms in an increasingly forbidding environment?

What crisis will we create in Jordan or Syria or Lebanon if we go another year without U.S. funding to UNRWA?

Now, of course, our assistance dollars can have real impact, and there is no shortage of success stories that we should talk about as well.

Support to our Arab partners and to Israel's Iron Dome system were critical in repelling Iran's unprecedented missile and drone attack on April 13.

In Lebanon, our support for the Lebanese Armed Forces has been instrumental in maintaining stability as political and economic elites push that country to the brink of collapse.

And while there is always room to do more, our humanitarian aid has saved tens of thousands of lives in Gaza, Syria, and Yemen over the last decade.

So we convene the subcommittee to review the State Department and USAID's budget in the region at a critical moment, and I look forward to our discussion today.

With that, I will turn it over to the ranking member.

**STATEMENT OF HON. TODD YOUNG,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM INDIANA**

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Last week's nominations hearing was a good opportunity to look at some of the challenges in the Middle East and North Africa.

I am very much looking forward to going deeper into these issues today with our witnesses who lead State and USAID's current policies and realities of what is perhaps the hottest of spots in a world full of them, and I hope that this deeper examination in it we can have a frank discussion about what is working and what is not working.

The reality is that a nearly nuclear Iran is as bellicose as ever. Russia and China are ascendant in the region. In Europe there are growing voices urging disengagement.

Maritime security challenges in the Red Sea are constraining global commerce. Nascent alliances of our partners are at risk of crumbling while those of our adversaries are being strengthened.

Humanitarian assistance principles of neutrality and access are at their lowest post-World War II levels. Terrorist organizations are on the rebound, and smuggling of drugs, arms, and people is rampant, among other challenges.

That is the bad news. Fortunately, there is some good news as well, and perhaps, even more, opportunity. Gulf countries have been eager to normalize relations with each other and Israel.

Energy diplomacy managed properly is a generational opportunity to drive out Russian influence. Iraq is on stronger footing. In the recent potent and impotent displays of Israeli and Iranian respectively missile and anti-missile capabilities are among those positives.

State and USAID's joint regional strategy for the MENA region is now 2 years old. A lot has happened in that time, and we do not need to dwell on how goals like enhanced prospects for a viable two state solution for Israel-Palestine look in hindsight.

But we do want to hear how this budget request reflects an updated view of that strategy's viability. I would also like to get the Administration's take on the relative priority areas in the region in

terms of stability, countering violent extremism, supporting civil society, bolstering democracy, economic growth, et cetera.

Obviously, the preferred answer is always all of the above everywhere. We hear that a lot. But that is an aspiration—an aspiration, not a strategy.

To the extent you can provide some specifics today we are eager to hear them. We will have specific questions for each of you, and I look forward to turning to that in a moment.

Mr. Chairman.

Senator MURPHY. It is now my pleasure to introduce Barbara Leaf, Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs.

Assistant Secretary Leaf, well known to this committee, previously served as U.S. Ambassador to the UAE and senior director for the Middle East and North Africa at the National Security Council.

Also joining us today is Ms. Jeanne Pryor, Deputy Assistant Administrator of the Bureau for the Middle East at USAID.

Ms. Pryor previously served as director for the Office of Afghanistan Affairs and deputy director for the Office of Iraq Reconstruction.

I will hand the floor to both of you for 5 minutes of opening comments, and then we will engage in discussion.

Ambassador Leaf.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BARBARA LEAF, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Ms. LEAF. Thank you.

Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify on the President's fiscal year 2025 budget request for the Middle East and North Africa, a region that remains of vital importance to U.S. interests.

While the Israel-Hamas conflict and escalation by Iran and its proxies complicate our work substantially, the Administration is fully committed to leading the collective action necessary for a secure and stable region responsive to the needs of its people.

Diplomacy is the best means to address the issues at hand, and your support will undergird our vigorous diplomatic engagements to advance U.S. interests and contest strategic competitors seeking to exploit post-October 7 instability.

On May 31 President Biden presented a comprehensive ceasefire and hostage deal accepted by Israel that can end the conflict in Gaza.

This deal would bring all the hostages home, ensure Israel's security, lead to a complete ceasefire, facilitate a surge of humanitarian assistance into Gaza, begin the refurbishment of essential services, and set the stage for the long term recovery of Gaza.

I just returned from a trip to the region with Secretary Blinken where we announced new humanitarian assistance response to the conflict and pressed key partners to do what they can to get Hamas to accept the deal. We are currently reviewing Hamas's response.



We are pursuing an end to the conflict that must be built on conditions of enduring security for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Our fiscal year 2025 request includes crucial lifesaving aid for Palestinians in Gaza as well as for millions of refugees and internally displaced persons in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Yemen.

Our unrivaled network of partnerships, including those forged through the Abraham Accords, bolsters integrated defense and deterrence to counter malign actors.

Israel, with the help of the U.S. and our allies, was able to defend itself from Iran's unprecedented missile and drone attack in April.

To hold Iran accountable we engage with EU partners to secure expansion of sanctions authorities and work jointly with the G-7 and others to impose sanctions.

Our regional partners play a critical role ensuring regional stability and security. Egypt remains a vital partner for addressing the Israel-Hamas conflict and preventing regional spillover. It serves as a key staging ground and entry point for humanitarian aid and as a throughput for those evacuating Gaza.

Qatar is indispensable to our efforts to secure the release of hostages. Jordan too has played a leading role in promoting peace and security in the region, and that cooperation remains critical to our regional security priorities.

In 2022 we signed the 7 year MOU on assistance. Jordan is making good progress toward its benchmarks, and we will be with them every step of the way to implement them.

We are concerned with the escalating hostilities along the Blue Line in Lebanon. Diplomacy is the only path for Lebanese and Israeli citizens on both sides of the Blue Line to return home, and it is the way that we can support the Lebanese Armed Forces in its role of providing security there.

We were grateful for the role the LAF played in protecting our embassy perimeter in Beirut during violent protests last October and in responding most recently to a terrorist attack on our embassy.

Our request also calibrates support for the Tunisian people to address their needs in, as you said, Senator Murphy, an increasingly forbidding environment.

Targeted U.S. investments in the Tunisian Armed Forces have promoted professionalism and accountability there, and counter strategic competitors attempting to gain influence by exploiting Tunisia's security challenges.

Your support for the department's plan to establish an interim diplomatic facility in Libya allows us to scale up our diplomacy amid an intensification of Russia's destabilizing influence.

Libya's funding under the Global Fragility Act and our \$19.25 million in bilateral assistance request supports our work to move Libya to an eventual transition to a democratic, stable, and unified state.

We seek a durable resolution to the conflict in Yemen through an inclusive peace process under U.N. auspices. Houthi attacks in the Red Sea threaten the regional and global economy and undermine prospects for that peace.

The \$41.6 million Yemen request advances our priorities of lasting peace in Yemen and economic security for the Yemeni people. Our commitment to greater regional stability includes the enduring defeat of ISIS, which continues to pose a significant threat.

With funds raised through the coalition and the continued support of Congress, we can improve security and reduce the populations in al-Hol and Roj camps.

Our \$118.5 million request in ESF for Syria supports vulnerable populations who might be vulnerable to ISIS recruitment and works against ISIS's ability to reconstitute and threaten the U.S.

Our goal is a stable and sovereign Iraq integrated regionally and within the global economic system. Our work with Iraq to diversify and grow its economy helps the Sudani government deliver better opportunities for the Iraqi people.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the President's fiscal year 2025 budget request and I want to close by thanking the subcommittee for your continued support for our efforts in the region.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Leaf follows:]

#### **Prepared Statement of Ms. Barbara Leaf**

Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify on the President's fiscal year budget request for the Middle East and North Africa and our priorities in the region, which remains of vital importance to U.S. interests. While the Israel-Hamas conflict and escalation by Iran and its proxies complicate our work, the Administration is fully committed to leading the collective action necessary for a secure and stable region responsive to the needs of its people.

Diplomacy is the best means to address the issues at hand, and your support for this request will undergird our vigorous diplomatic engagements to advance U.S. goals and interests in the Middle East and North Africa and contest strategic competitors seeking to exploit post-October 7 instability.

#### **ENDING AND MITIGATING CONFLICT**

Our regional engagement is anchored by a resolute effort to reinforce our partnerships as they are tested by conflict. The Secretary has worked tirelessly, engaging regional partners to reach a ceasefire and the release of all of the hostages held in Gaza. On May 31, President Biden presented the comprehensive ceasefire and hostage deal that is now on the table. The deal offers a roadmap for ending the conflict in Gaza. This deal would bring all the hostages home, ensure Israel's security, open a way to a complete ceasefire, facilitate a surge of humanitarian assistance into Gaza, begin the refurbishment of essential services, and set the stage for the long-term reconstruction of Gaza. We have engaged Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Jordan, Turkey, Qatar, and others to continue putting pressure on Hamas to accept this deal.

We are pursuing an end to the conflict that must be built on conditions of enduring security—for Israelis, who otherwise fear a repeat of October 7, and for the Palestinians of Gaza, who need and deserve to rebuild their lives free from fear and insecurity. We are committed to building a broader enduring peace and security for and between Israelis and Palestinians—including through practical, timebound, and irreversible steps to establish a Palestinian state existing side-by-side with Israel. As Secretary Blinken has said, "it's time to stop all of this haggling and back and forth and start a ceasefire."

On the humanitarian front, we are working to address the humanitarian access issues. It is critical that border crossings are open for humanitarian aid to enter Gaza, especially as we risk imminent famine for affected civilian populations. Even prior to the start of the Rafah operation and the closure of the Rafah border crossing that had served as one important hub for humanitarian aid, more assistance was needed inside Gaza and humanitarian actors needed to be able to reach civilians wherever they are. This is why it is so critical that Hamas agree to the Israeli proposal to end the fighting in Rafah and throughout Gaza, and allow a surge of humanitarian aid.

President Biden's and the Secretary's direct engagement with Prime Minister Netanyahu in April resulted in Israel's pledge to take specific, concrete steps to surge aid and address civilian harm. We have seen some positive steps, but we continue to urge Israel to do more to improve deconfliction and take tangible steps to allow the entry of more aid and facilitate distribution throughout Gaza. We are pushing to accelerate delivery of assistance on all fronts: by air, land, and sea. Israel has opened a northern crossing and the Ashdod port, and critical crossings, including Kerem Shalom, must remain open. We are also working urgently with both Israel and Egypt to establish arrangements for re-opening the Rafah crossing. The U.S. Government and international partners have engaged in air drops, and we have opened a humanitarian maritime corridor, fulfilling the President's directive for the U.S. military to construct a temporary pier to facilitate exclusively the delivery of humanitarian aid directly into Gaza.

As the President and the Secretary have noted, these efforts are not enough. Deconfliction remains a major challenge for humanitarian workers and experts alike—exemplified by the more than 190 U.N. staff and the more than 270 aid workers who have been killed since the beginning of this conflict. We will closely monitor the implementation of Israeli commitments in the immediate term, seeking impact soonest. President Biden has been very clear with Israel: We want to see a plan that speaks to how Israel is going to ensure innocent civilian lives are protected. Our fiscal year Request includes crucial life-saving aid for Palestinians in Gaza, as well as for millions of refugees and internally displaced persons in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Türkiye, and Yemen. While we support refugees around the region, we have made clear that we oppose any forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza.

These efforts are no substitute for a negotiated settlement between Israelis and Palestinians. A two-state solution is the best way to ensure Israel's future as a Jewish, democratic state, living in peace alongside a viable, sovereign, and democratic Palestinian state. We are engaging the new Palestinian Authority (PA) leadership to press for credible reform. The international community, including the EU, G7, and others are working on all aspects of Gaza post-conflict planning, including security, governance, and early recovery. And we are engaging key partners to mobilize the political support and resources needed to enable recovery.

Our unrivaled network of partnerships bolsters integrated defense and deterrence to counter malign actors. Israel, with the help of the United States and our allies and partners in the region and in Europe, was able to defend itself from Iran's unprecedented missile and drone attack on April 13. To hold Iran to account for this reckless attack, the Administration spearheaded an international diplomatic response in close coordination with our European and G7 partners. We identified and sanctioned additional individuals and entities connected to Iran's problematic and dangerous behavior, adding to the over 700 Iran-related individuals and entities the United States has sanctioned during the Biden-Harris Administration. We actively engaged with our EU partners to expand EU sanctions authorities to include Iran's drone and missile proliferation to Russia and regional proxies and partners, and worked with G7 and other partners to undertake joint sanctions actions. The United States continues to conduct diplomacy, training, and other engagements to advance multilateral security approaches to shared air and maritime threats across the region. These steps are part and parcel of the broader U.S. effort to disrupt Iran's destabilizing activities and dismantle its financial and logistics networks.

Our regional partners also play an important role in ensuring regional stability and security. Egypt remains a critical partner for addressing the Israel-Hamas conflict and preventing regional spillover, including by playing a key role to help negotiate the release of hostages held by Hamas. Egypt has served as a key staging ground and entry point for humanitarian aid into Gaza, and also served as a throughput for over 1,900 American citizens, legal permanent residents (LPRs), their families, and others as they evacuated Gaza. Despite its own economic challenges, Egypt hosts more than 500,000 refugees from Sudan. Our request reflects Egypt's important regional role and our longstanding security partnership, including on border and maritime security and counterterrorism.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of U.S.-Jordan bilateral relations. Jordan has been a leader in delivering and coordinating life-saving humanitarian aid into Gaza, and we continue to work together to support Jordan as a humanitarian hub to deliver overland aid. Jordan has also played a leading role in promoting peace and security in the region, and countering terrorism, including in our efforts to defeat ISIS. Our security cooperation reaches back more than 50 years, and that cooperation remains critical to our regional security priorities in the Middle East today.

At the same time, Jordan is not shying away from its ambitious political and economic reform agenda. In 2022, we signed the 7-year U.S.-Jordanian Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on assistance. Jordan is making progress toward benchmarks on water and public sector reforms. We will be with Jordan every step of the way as they increase civic engagement, promote good governance, advance gender equality, and support political reform and participation.

#### ADVANCING DIPLOMATIC SOLUTIONS

We are working continuously to prevent Iran and its proxies in Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen from exploiting the crisis in Gaza and seeking to expand conflict. Diplomatic engagement and solutions that build resilient institutions are the only viable path toward restoring and maintaining stability.

We are concerned with the escalating hostilities along the Blue Line and continue to make clear a diplomatic resolution is the only path to allow Lebanese and Israeli civilians on both sides of the Blue Line to return home and to live in peace and security. U.S. security assistance allows the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to maintain joint patrols and coordinate with the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and support the implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1559, 1680, and 1701. Our support enables the LAF's expanded role providing stability and security for those living on both sides of the Blue Line and we were grateful for the role the LAF played in protecting our Embassy perimeter in Beirut during violent protests in October and during the attack in June.

We have long-standing concerns about Lebanon's domestic political and economic crises. Lebanon's political elite have the agency and indeed the responsibility for taking steps to elect a president empowered to form a government and implement reforms, including those proposed by the IMF. While difficult, reforms are the only way out of the country's economic collapse. The Lebanese people deserve better than this. The time for action is now.

Our request calibrates support for the Tunisian people to address the needs of the economically vulnerable and to support those contributing to an inclusive political future in an increasingly forbidding environment. We are rigorously reviewing U.S. efforts and programs in Tunisia to ensure they are fit to purpose for the Tunisian people—targeting the needs of the economically vulnerable and contributing to an inclusive future. Following the events of July 2021, reduced security assistance has re-focused on our vital national interests of protecting U.S. diplomatic personnel and facilities, promoting the welfare of American citizens in Tunisia, and sustaining effective counterterrorism pressure, while promoting accountability and respect for the rule of law. We remain intensively engaged with the Tunisian government at all levels in support of human rights and freedom of expression—universal rights that are explicitly guaranteed in Tunisia's own constitution. Targeted U.S. investments through Foreign Military Financing have promoted professionalism and accountability within the Tunisian Armed Forces and counter strategic competitors attempting to gain influence by exploiting Tunisia's security challenges.

Your support for the Department's plan to establish an interim diplomatic facility in Libya allows us to scale up our diplomacy amid an intensification of Russia's destabilizing influence. Resuming more regular diplomatic activities inside Libya will improve our ability to protect the safety and security of U.S. citizens, promote Libyan economic stability and contributions to global energy security, and support Libyan aspirations for national elections. Over 2 years of extensive internal planning reinforce our goal of ensuring these diplomatic operations are undertaken prudently and safely.

Amid the ongoing political impasse in Libya, political and security leaders from all regions support the principle of safeguarding the country's sovereignty and recognize the importance of practical steps to prevent Libya's further enmeshment in regional conflict. Libya's funding under the Global Fragility Act and our \$19.25 million bilateral assistance request supports Libya's eventual transition to a democratic, stable, and unified state as well as stability in Libya's long-marginalized south where malign actors take advantage of fragile local governance systems.

#### SECURITY AND STABILITY

We seek a durable resolution to the conflict in Yemen secured through an inclusive peace process under U.N. auspices. The recent Houthi detention of United Nations, diplomatic, and NGO staff in Yemen, including U.S. embassy personnel, jeopardizes both progress toward reaching a comprehensive settlement to the conflict and the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance to the Yemeni people. In addition, Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and surrounding waterways, enabled by Iran's technical and material support, threaten the regional and global economy and un-

dermine prospects for peace. Intensive regional and multilateral diplomacy with Saudi Arabia, Oman, the UAE, and other partners can de-escalate conflict. Simultaneously, we work in coalition with dozens of countries, including Bahrain, to defend the freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and surrounding waters. Reckless Houthis attacks cause delivery delays and price increases for badly needed food and medicine for populations across the Middle East, including in Yemen itself. The \$41.6 million Yemen request advances our twin priorities of lasting peace in Yemen and stability and economic security for the Yemeni people.

Our commitment to greater regional stability includes the enduring defeat of ISIS. Despite the great successes of the Global Coalition, ISIS continues to pose a real threat in Syria, Iraq, and the wider region. Last year, the Coalition's Stabilization Working Group raised \$599 million for stabilization in areas liberated from ISIS in Iraq and Syria. With the funds raised from partners and continued support of Congress, the Administration will continue crucial stabilization activities, including to address challenges emanating from al-Hol and Roj camps. The fiscal year Request of \$118.5 million in ESF for Syria—particularly efforts related to al-Hol—helps ensure ISIS cannot leverage instability in Syria or recruit vulnerable populations to reconstitute and threaten the United States.

A more integrated Middle East and North Africa—in economic, security, and diplomatic terms—would benefit everyone in the region. Whether that is connecting Iraq to the Gulf's energy grid to bolster its sovereignty and independence of action, or promoting better trade connectivity within North Africa, the Department is committed to supporting our partners working together to address shared challenges. Through our Iran assistance program, we maintain active and unprecedented support for Internet freedom in Iran as a central pillar of our efforts to support human rights in Iran. During the height of the protests in 2022 and 2023, as many as one in three Iranians used U.S.-supported anti-censorship and digital security tools, such as VPNs, to stay connected. Millions in Iran continue to use U.S.-supported tools every day.

Our goal is a stable and sovereign Iraq integrated regionally and with the global economic system. U.S. support to strengthen Iraq's security, provide economic opportunities for its people, and support Iraq's energy independence all bolster Iraq's sovereignty and counter Iranian influence.

We work with Iraq on financial reforms, strengthening its democracy, respect for human rights, and rule of law, and improving services for the Iraqi people. Our investments are tailored to ensure Iraq is an inclusive state for all the country's religious and ethnic minorities, including those who suffered at the hands of ISIS.

The United States remains the largest provider of humanitarian and development assistance to Iraq. Our work with Iraq to diversify and grow its economy helps the Sudanese government deliver better opportunities for the Iraqi people.

Morocco remains a critical partner on security, stability, and regional integration. The fiscal year request maintains and deepens our partnership with Morocco through bilateral assistance supporting shared priorities in education, health, and climate, as well as an additional \$11 million to support Morocco's earthquake reconstruction plan.

Our strong relationship with Algeria is crucial to producing significant contributions to European energy security and regional stability. In the U.N. Security Council, we work together on the toughest global challenges, including the crisis in Gaza and urgent need to end the fighting in Sudan. Our programs in Algeria support our growing collaboration by focusing on climate objectives, economic diversification, and good governance.

Successful regional integration also demands the inclusion of women. The region loses hundreds of millions of dollars every year due to the gender gap in labor force participation. Through the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), we invest in women's economic inclusion through regional programs that empower women in the workforce, enhance economic growth, and develop future leaders through training, scholarships, and fellowships. These programs focus on entrepreneurship in emerging markets such as cybersecurity and digital economies. Women across the Middle East and North Africa are highly educated, and we encourage our partners to energize this largely untapped labor market.

While events over the last year have dramatically changed the Middle East and North Africa, our commitment to the region remains steadfast. We will continue to build sustainable and integrated partnerships and develop shared solutions to the region's most pressing challenges in search of the better future that we and our partners seek.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the President's fiscal year Budget Request. I want to close by thanking this Subcommittee for your continued support for our efforts in the region. I look forward to answering your questions.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much.  
Ms. Pryor.

**STATEMENT OF JEANNE PRYOR, DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR OF THE BUREAU FOR THE MIDDLE EAST, UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, WASHINGTON, DC**

Ms. PRYOR. Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today at this incredibly difficult time in our region.

We all know that the Middle East and North Africa are at a critical inflection point. Hamas's abhorrent attack on Israel and the ongoing conflict in Gaza have taken center stage across the globe.

The challenges of the moment offer an opportunity in which the relatively modest amounts in our fiscal year 2025 request might play an outsized role in shaping a peaceful and prosperous future for the region.

While we remain focused on the immediate response, we must also examine the entire scope of the region's challenges in order to envision a path forward.

Water and food insecurity, high numbers of displaced persons from conflicts and national disasters, corruption and economic mismanagement already strained the region's resources prior to October 7.

The region's fragile economies have been further set behind by the ongoing violence. Palestinian gross domestic product in 2023 declined by \$1 billion compared with 2022, all of that in the fourth quarter. And earlier this year the International Monetary Fund lowered its growth forecast for the region to 2 percent, significantly below the 5.6 percent growth rate seen in 2022.

Our fiscal year 2025 request proposes critical investments to address the region's needs. In response to the conflict we have requested an increase of \$10.3 million to mitigate post-conflict needs in Gaza and the West Bank and \$5 million for Lebanon.

We have also requested an \$11 million increase in funding to support Morocco's recovery from last year's earthquake and an additional \$22 million to reintegrate returnees from al-Hol into their communities.

We will use these increases and our other requested investments to build on our previous accomplishments. More recently, USAID supported the departure of 66 families from al-Hol camp to Deir ez-Zour governate where we are supporting them and their communities with legal assistance, transitional shelter, psychosocial support, and job opportunities.

And a few weeks ago in Morocco, Administrator Samantha Power announced our partnership with the government of Morocco and an NGO to give direct cash grants to 180 cooperatives whose livelihoods were compromised by the earthquake.

Our peacebuilding work deserves particular attention given the growing divisions in the region. Although tensions remain high, we continue to see signs of hope in the dedicated peace builders in the region.

Our partners through the Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act remain committed to their work, and our Middle

East regional cooperation program has likewise seen positive signals for continued cross-border collaboration from its participants.

Proposals for collaboration between Palestinian and Israeli researchers remain among the top proposed MERC partnerships. Our fiscal year 2025 request continues funding for these critical activities to continue the work of building enduring peaceful ties between Israel and its neighbors. Despite the numerous regional challenges, space remains to influence the trajectory of the region.

The region's young population will play a critical role in shaping their future. We must invest in helping these young people develop a Middle East and North Africa region that is integrated into the global economy.

With the funds requested we will not only empower the people of the Middle East and North Africa to forge a more promising and prosperous future, but also ensure security for America and its allies.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Pryor follows:]

#### **Prepared Statement of Ms. Jeanne Pryor**

Chairman Murphy, Ranking Member Young, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here to testify today at this incredibly difficult time in our region. Prospects for peace and stability in the region feel farther away than when we last met, but these current challenges only increase the urgency of our work.

We all know that the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are at a critical inflection point. Hamas' abhorrent October 7 attack on Israel and the ongoing conflict in Gaza have taken center stage across the globe.

The dynamics of the current moment may shape the next several decades in the region. Our efforts should lay the foundation for a road to lasting peace and stability and offer viable alternatives to the narratives presented by malign actors seeking to radicalize the impressionable and vulnerable. The challenges of the moment offer an opportunity in which the relatively modest amounts requested in our Fiscal Year 2025 Request might play an outsized role in shaping a peaceful, prosperous, and interconnected future for the region.

#### **PRE-EXISTING REGIONAL PRESSURES**

It is difficult to look beyond the current conflict in Gaza as Hamas still holds innocents hostage and more than two million Palestinians face grave humanitarian conditions. While we remain focused on the immediate response, we must also examine the entire scope of the region's challenges in order to envision a path forward. Water and food insecurity, high numbers of displaced persons from conflicts and natural disasters, corruption, and economic mismanagement already strained the region's resources prior to October 7. The conflict has exacerbated many of these elements further. In addition, the malign influences of regional and global adversaries and competitors—whether Iran and its proxies, Russia, or the People's Republic of China (PRC)—promulgate misinformation and challenge our efforts to tackle these difficulties head on.

Sufficient water for consumption, agriculture, and sanitation remains out of reach in many areas of this most water-scarce region in the world. The increasing frequency of droughts combined with shrinking water resources results in lower domestic crop yields, adding to the problems of high food and agricultural input prices, which had already risen as imports became more expensive due to Russia's war on Ukraine.

The frequency and severity of droughts also increase the severity of floods as Libyans experienced this past year when floods breached dams, resulting in more than 6,000 deaths and displacing more than 44,000 people from their homes. Unfortunately, 2023 also saw natural disasters strike Türkiye, Syria, and Morocco, as earthquakes destroyed entire cities and claimed more than 60,000 lives. USAID was able to rush lifesaving assistance to the most vulnerable, but for those in northwest Syria already suffering from assaults from Bashar al-Assad's brutal regime, true re-

covery will remain out of reach while the regime's violence continues with support from Russia.

While USAID continues to help countries conserve limited water resources through improved irrigation technology, water management, and infrastructure, rising regional tensions increase the difficulty of addressing shared issues across borders. Conflicts throughout the region are expected to displace nearly 11.7 million people within their own countries in 2024. The impacts of this violence will inevitably drive more refugees across borders and into U.S. partner countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt, which are already struggling to support their current refugee populations.

Across these countries and many others of the region, corruption, economic mismanagement, and democratic backsliding aggravate the situation. Governments in Lebanon and Tunisia have not fully embraced essential reforms aimed at stabilizing their economies, and a bloated public sector in Iraq drains crucial resources.

#### COUNTERING MALIGN ACTORS

As the world witnessed in Hamas' horrifying attacks, malign organizations in the region can exploit the region's population to dire ends if left unchallenged. The current conflict between Israel and Hamas and tensions between Israel and Lebanese Hizballah didn't begin on October 7. For years, the terrorist organizations Hamas and Hizballah, along with other malign actors, have exploited the region's challenges and tensions to gain economic and political influence and wield power at the expense of the people they claim to serve. Russia continues its campaigns of meddling in Libya and support for Assad's brutality in Syria.

In addition, strategic competitors such as the PRC, have sought to increase their engagements and to distort U.S. policy in the region. The PRC has attempted to capitalize on the perceived unpopularity of the United States to make inroads through predatory loans and investments in Chinese-aligned technological infrastructure across the region and to paint the PRC as the Middle East's benevolent political benefactor.

#### POSITIONING FOR THE FUTURE

The region's already fragile economies have been set further behind by the ongoing violence. Palestinian gross domestic product in 2023 declined by \$1 billion compared with 2022, all of that in the fourth quarter, and is projected to decline \$7 billion in 2024 from pre-conflict levels. Tourism revenue in Jordan and Egypt has declined. And earlier this year the International Monetary Fund lowered its growth forecast for the region to 2 percent, significantly below the 5.6 percent growth seen in 2022.

The rapidly growing population of young people in the MENA region adds a complicating dimension across these challenges. Youth under the age of 24 make up nearly half the region's population, but the youth unemployment rate in the MENA region has long been the highest in the world, particularly among women. Addressing the needs of this sizable population offers fertile ground where modest U.S. investments may make outsized impacts.

Our fiscal year (FY) 2025 Request proposes critical investments to address these needs. In response to the conflict, we have requested an increase in economic assistance of \$10.3 million to mitigate post-conflict needs in Gaza and the West Bank and \$5 million in Lebanon to address agriculture and basic education needs in southern Lebanon where the conflict has caused school closures, shuttered businesses, and damaged crops, increasing communities' vulnerability to Hizballah's influence. This Request sustains our commitment to a two-state solution and prioritizes and leverages the value of long-term strategic partnerships.

The Request also includes an \$11 million increase for Morocco to support their recovery from last year's earthquake. In Morocco, USAID is working with a non-governmental organization partner GiveDirectly and Morocco's National Initiative for Human Development to provide direct cash grants to 180 cooperatives whose livelihoods were compromised by the earthquake. This is in addition to more than 1,400 grants previously awarded to support cooperatives devastated by COVID-19, drought, and inflation.

The Request includes an additional \$22 million in Syria to further a core objective of the al-Hol Action Plan: reintegrating people to their communities and decreasing their vulnerability to radicalization. USAID programs in this space are already delivering results. In Syria, when 87 Syrian families returned from al-Hol camp to Raqqa this past September, more than 1,350 total referrals were made for economic and social services through the Case Management System, such as legal support, transitional shelter, and psychosocial support services thanks to USAID's assist-



ance. As recently as May 8, USAID supported the departure of 66 families from al-Hol camp to Deir ez-Zour Governorate. USAID will support the same referral services for these families in the coming weeks. This comes in addition to the support USAID has provided for the communities to which they are returning, such as increasing job opportunities and revitalizing agriculture for all residents.

In addition to these increases, this Request continues critical investments to build on previous advances in stability and security across the region. In Iraq, to drive economic growth, USAID supported more than 10,000 entrepreneurs and leveraged \$42 million in investments and \$80 million in new loans to small and medium enterprises (SME), creating over 5,000 new jobs and an 80 percent growth in SMEs revenues. In Tunisia, USAID helped 49,000 small businesses in underserved regions increase sales by \$610 million and create 56,000 jobs. We also continue other critical investments in the private sector and Tunisian civil society, although we have decreased our assistance given the government's continued democratic backsliding.

USAID supported Libya's electric company to develop improved systems resulting in the first full year of uninterrupted electricity production since the fall of the Gaddafi regime. This aims to diminish the influence of exploitative actors and mitigate the impacts of conflict on the private sector. USAID continues to support the internationally recognized Republic of Yemen Government based in Aden in south Yemen which opposes the Houthis. USAID created the ongoing Yemeni Foreign Exchange auction to stabilize the currency and is supporting the Republic of Yemen Government in Aden's Central Bank, the Ministry of Finance, the Customs Authority, and the Tax Authority implement more than 11 monetary and fiscal reforms that are vital to the Government's ability to govern, raise revenues, and provide essential services to its struggling people.

Thanks to Congress' support, USAID has allocated over \$200 million to award full undergraduate scholarships to more than 1,900 deserving yet disadvantaged Lebanese and refugee students. More than 68 percent of these students graduate with honors. In Jordan, which is also home to large numbers of regional refugees, USAID supported the construction of the Zara Ma'in Water Treatment Plant, which provides drinking water to an estimated 1.7 million residents in Amman and the As Samra Wastewater Treatment Plant, which treats almost 70 percent of Jordan's wastewater.

Our fiscal year Request will allow us to continue these and other such vital efforts to stimulate the private sector, reinvigorate civil society, invest in youth, and improve basic services for millions.

#### REGIONAL PEACEBUILDING

Our peacebuilding work deserves particular attention given the growing divisions in the region. Although tensions remain high, we continue to see signs of hope in the dedicated peacebuilders in the region. Our partners through the Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act (MEPPA) remain committed to their work connecting Israelis and Palestinians across borders. Despite the logistical difficulties posed by security constraints, they continue to seek ways to advance their work and maintain connections.

For example, in April MEPPA's Interfaith Peacebuilding Initiative brought together about 80 Muslims, Jews, and Christians from throughout Israel and the West Bank for an interfaith iftar in Jerusalem. For most partners, in-person events have been difficult to sustain due to security constraints and travel restrictions, but all of our partners are looking for ways to adapt. The Palestinian-Israeli Specialist Nursing Hub activity with Project Rozana initially paused its work bringing together 450 Palestinian and Israeli nurses for training, but they have since resumed work in the West Bank. Additionally, in response to the participants' requests, they are continuing to provide language training in Hebrew and Arabic, so Palestinian and Israeli nurses can better understand each other.

Our Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) program has likewise seen positive signals for continued cross border collaboration from its participants where proposals for collaboration between Palestinian and Israeli researchers remain among the top proposed partnerships. Likewise, Moroccan, Jordanian, and Egyptian researchers' interest in collaboration also remained strong. Among our ongoing research activities, our team continues to see scientists in both Israel and Arab nations committed to supporting each other through continued professional and collegial collaboration. For example, MERC-supported researchers recently hosted a virtual workshop on agrivoltaics which attracted over 60 Israeli, Emirati, Jordanian, and Palestinian participants.

Our fiscal year Request maintains funding for these critical activities to continue the work of building enduring peaceful ties between Israel and its neighbors.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the numerous regional challenges, space remains to influence the trajectory of the region. The region's young population will play a critical role in shaping their future.

Investing in these young people will develop a Middle East and North African region that is integrated into the global economy. Education and training will empower them to create meaningful industries and careers to start and support their own families. Through our assistance, we can ensure they have access to the full range of ideas in an increasingly interconnected world.

The investments in our fiscal year budget request are critical to underwrite a more transparent, stable, hopeful, and peaceful future for the people of the region. With the funds requested, we will be able to offer the region's youth opportunities and alternatives that counter the false promises of actors who would exploit the region and its people. We will not only further empower the people of the Middle East and North Africa to forge a more promising and prosperous future, but also ensure security for America and its allies.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, both, for your testimony. We will now undergo a round of 5 minute questions.

Ambassador Leaf, let me first talk to you about day after planning in Gaza. The fiscal year 2025 request, largely maintains recent funding levels for the West Bank and Gaza despite the fact that we know we have a huge bill ahead of us.

But we cannot spend money effectively in Gaza if we do not have a governance structure that keeps Israel safe and understands political realities on the ground in Gaza. My understanding is that Prime Minister Netanyahu has essentially refused to start post-war planning in Gaza, not because he does not believe it is important to do so but because he has pressure from his far right coalition partners who want to reoccupy Gaza with Jewish settlements.

So can you just talk for a moment about the status of planning for what the governance structure looks like once this conflict comes to a close?

Because we are keeping our fingers crossed that with or without an agreement, we are potentially weeks, maybe a month or two, away from the formal military operations coming to a close, and it is just extraordinary that we have no viable plan from the Israeli government as to what comes next.

Ms. LEAF. Senator, this question of what comes next, what comes after this conflict, is one that we have discussed extensively with our Arab partners, with the Palestinians, with the Israeli government, over the course of the last 4 or 5 months, and you are right, there is still insufficient planning, to say the least, on the part of the Israeli government.

I would say, however, that that has not kept us from doing the work on our side in consulting extensively and also drawing up some concepts that, as Secretary Blinken said last week, we will be prepared to share with partners here shortly.

I just got back on Thursday from the trip that the Secretary took to Cairo, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Amman, and Doha, and I will probably leave again this weekend to continue those discussions and to drill in deeper.

But suffice to say there are some essential points of agreement notwithstanding, and that is that everyone is joined by the resolve to see Hamas removed from a governance role, and a governance role in particular at the point of a gun.

Now, how we get there is going to be exceptionally difficult, and in no small part because of the conditions that prevail now in Gaza. But we are discussing this with our partners and looking at a variety of different concepts.

I do not really want to go into those details in this public setting because as you can imagine it is all pretty sensitive. These get to the heart of politics for every one of these governments, and for the Palestinians and the Israelis as well.

But I think reality has a way of pushing even those who cannot imagine a concept such as the PA returning to Gaza. Reality has a way of intruding, and I think, as the Secretary frequently says, you cannot beat something without something as an alternative for Palestinians.

Senator MURPHY. I understand the sensitivity about discussing particular plans. Let me just share a skepticism with you.

There are lots of smart people in the foreign policy consensus in this town who believe that there is going to be an Arab force—an Arab-funded force. I worry that that greatly misunderstands the risk tolerance of our Arab friends.

That, certainly, in your head or on paper makes all sorts of sense for the Saudis and the Emiratis, others, to either populate or front a governance structure or a security force.

They have never been willing to take a chance that big and it probably overestimates how much they care about the future of the Palestinian people.

Ms. LEAF. I would just say we are intimately acquainted with their thinking on all of this, and so I would say there is no magical thinking on the part of this Administration.

We are well aware of how tough a piece this is, because we have to remind ourselves this has been a piece of territory run, ruled, governed, if you will, at the point of a gun for 17 years by a foreign terrorist organization.

That is not easy to deconstruct and we have, obviously, made the point publicly and privately that you cannot do it all by military means alone. There will have to be a political alternative, and that is what we are in the process of putting together—these concepts.

Senator MURPHY. Ms. Pryor, I am at the end of questions but just say a word about the consequences of another year of prohibition on U.S. funding for UNRWA.

Most or all countries almost without exception that had temporarily turned off funding for UNRWA as the investigation was ongoing have started that funding again, and I just do not understand how these fragile places like Jordan and Lebanon and Syria survive if UNRWA has only 2 months of funding at any given time without the United States playing a role, and without, frankly, a lot of our Gulf allies stepping up and filling the vacuum.

Ms. PRYOR. Thank you for that question.

USAID does not fund UNRWA. However, we are looking especially in places like Jordan or Lebanon in which you do have refugee populations dependent upon UNRWA on how we can better use our own assistance to help mitigate that impact.

In both Jordan and Lebanon we do a lot of work with host communities, which also has the added benefit of helping refugee populations as well.

So we will take a look and see what is it that we can do from our side given that we do not fund UNRWA to help soften the blow of the loss of our funding.

Senator MURPHY. Right. But you are partners with all sorts of organizations that do work with UNRWA. You are in the same business. You must have a view as to the seriousness about UNRWA working on a budget right now that does not have enough cash flow to last more than 60 days.

Ms. PRYOR. Yes, it is very concerning because this is not something we were able to budget for to be able to compensate for that.

Senator MURPHY. But you cannot fill in. USAID cannot fill in for the gap that has been created.

Ms. PRYOR. It would be extremely difficult for us to do that with the resources that we have.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you.

Senator Young.

Senator YOUNG. Assistant Secretary Leaf, you referenced this concept of the Palestinian Authority returning to Gaza, something some senior Administration officials including the President of the United States has mentioned, discussing a revitalized Palestinian Authority.

Assistant Secretary, what specific parameters will meet the threshold for a revitalized Palestinian Authority?

Ms. LEAF. So the PA government, the new government that was established in April, has a reform agenda of its own and one that we are pressing them to implement, and that goes to accountability, transparency, rooting out corruption, enabling services to the public, basically the kind of thing—bread and butter things that any government owes its people and also owes its donors.

The problems it is facing right now is a severe financial crisis. That is one that has been in part the product of October 7 and the closure of the West Bank in large part to traffic to—and a shrinking of the economy.

It is also the withholding of clearance revenues by the Israeli government at this point. The reform it needs to undertake is to make it fit and proper for governance where it is now, let alone the ability to govern a larger portion of the public.

Senator YOUNG. Right. So if you could briefly speak to what specific actions are needed to meet the criteria of a reformed PA. Political and financial reforms? Would it be a total abolition, I would hope, of pay for slay programs? What else?

Ms. LEAF. Yes, that is exactly right. It is a mix of administrative reforms, administrative reforms that go to the issue of accountability of the money that it has, and where it is going, and how it is being spent.

But you are right, prisoner payment—pay for slay—that is a key piece of a discussion that we have been having for some time, and I think we are very near a conclusion to that.

Senator YOUNG. What steps, if any, do we know that regional partners may be willing to take in furtherance of this reformed PA?

Ms. LEAF. All of them want to see the same thing. All of them recognize the declining legitimacy and credibility of that governing structure in the West Bank. They all, every one of them, want to

see the PA assume its responsibilities in Gaza, but they are very aware of the weaknesses of the organization.

Senator YOUNG. OK.

Moving to Hamas, Secretary Blinken confirmed last week that Hamas rejected the most recent ceasefire and hostage exchange proposal. So trying to get a sense of where that leaves us.

What steps is the U.S. prepared to take to increase pressure in Hamas and if necessary its external enablers?

Ms. LEAF. So I think what you heard the Secretary say was something short of reject. It was a yes but, with a lot of buts to it—the response that we saw on Tuesday night when we were out in the region.

So some of those changes to the text were things that you could manage. Others were less apparently so, and we are in intensive discussions right now with the mediators and Israel about the way forward.

We do believe, ultimately, this proposal is the best roadway to get an end to the conflict now that would enable a multitude of things and that would ultimately be offered the prospect for an end to the conflict altogether, ensuring Israel's security, of course, and ensuring the security, frankly, of the people of Gaza who have labored under this terrible regime.

Senator YOUNG. Last, Assistant Secretary Leaf, I am asking when the U.S. withholds arms from Israel or seeks to enact arbitrary red lines on Israel, how does this not embolden Hamas and lead to them thinking they can outlast the war without releasing hostages?

Ms. LEAF. Senator, let me be really clear on this point.

Senator YOUNG. Please.

Ms. LEAF. There is exactly one case that the President asked us to hit pause on. There is no larger pause or cessation of security assistance to Israel, and the President, the Secretary, have been absolutely clear—

Senator YOUNG. He is taking that off the table?

Ms. LEAF. Sorry?

Senator YOUNG. He is taking that off the table?

Ms. LEAF. There is one. There is one case. There is one case right now, and that—

Senator YOUNG. And is he taking it off the table?

Ms. LEAF. I am sorry?

Senator YOUNG. He is taking that prospect off the table?

Ms. LEAF. Of that case? I mean, it is under review, but it is only one case.

Senator YOUNG. Prospectively. Then I will ask you if the U.S. were to withhold arms from Israel how would that not embolden Hamas and lead to them thinking—finish the question, yes.

Ms. LEAF. So, Senator, I do not want to deal in a hypothetical, but what this President has been clear about is we absolutely have Israel's back.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you.

Senator MURPHY. Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Thank you to the chair and ranking member, and thank you to our witnesses for being here. I am going to continue on Israel.

Gaza—Israel has a right to defend itself, and the U.S. needs to be a partner with Israel in defending itself against those who would annihilate it: Hamas, Iranian backed militias, Hezbollah, Houthis, Iran itself.

I celebrated on April 14 when the U.S. helped Israel, together with other nations, knock down drones and missiles fired from Iran into Israel.

Palestinians have a right to live. Palestinians have a right to live and not to be collectively treated as if they are part of a terrorist group when they are not. Most in Gaza are not Hamas.

The vast majority in the West Bank are not Hamas, and while I support the U.S. effort to give Israel tools to defend itself against those who would annihilate it, I have been disappointed and expressed it publicly that the Israeli effort to support humanitarian aid to civilians, Israeli discussion about a future for Palestine, the slow pace of allowance of aid, the commission of violence against Palestinians on the West Bank, in some instances escorted by IDF reservists and border patrol officials, make this look to many that it is not just a defense against Hamas, but that it is a larger effort to target Palestinians.

The Administration at Senator Van Hollen's request—and others of us joined in that request—in February announced a new policy, National Security Memorandum 20, that required recipients of U.S. military aid to meet two criteria: First, that the military aid would be used in accord with international law, and second, those receiving military—any nation receiving military aid had to cooperate with U.S. supported humanitarian efforts.

The Administration certified that Israel was meeting both of those pillars of NSM-20. The first pillar about whether military aid is being used in accord with international law is a murky one because of the way Hamas embeds in civilian populations.

But I will be blunt. I do not think the second pillar regarding humanitarian aid is that murky, and this is what I want to engage with you on.

If Israel was engaged in sufficient effort to provide humanitarian aid, the U.S. would not have to be building a jerryrigged pier off the coast of Gaza, deploying Virginians from Fort Eustis and elsewhere to do it.

You would see a higher pace of humanitarian aid being delivered through border crossings in Israel into Gaza. You would not see Cindy McCain, the widow of a former Senate Foreign Relations Committee member, executive director of the World Food Programme, saying that there is, quote, “full blown famine” in northern Gaza.

I do not think you would see USAID Administrator Power publicly stating that it is credible to assess that there is famine in Gaza.

The news since Sunday has been that the Israeli Defense Forces want to do a strategic pause in some military operations in Gaza every day to allow humanitarian aid to get to more Palestinians, and they are being attacked by Prime Minister Netanyahu and members of the cabinet for their effort to do some pauses in Gaza to allow humanitarian aid.

So as the leaders of our State Department and USAID in this remit, how can we conclude that there is sufficient humanitarian aid being allowed by Israel into Gaza on this set of facts?

Ms. LEAF. Senator, thank you for that set of comments and questions.

I would not say there is sufficient humanitarian aid going into Gaza, by no stretch of the imagination, but it is not because Israel is trying to impede it.

There are a whole set of complex factors at work, among which is the extremely poor security conditions, for instance, on the other side of Kerem Shalom. I was on a long discussion—a phone call this morning with our embassy in Jerusalem as well as our special envoy Lise Grande, and she and we are working assiduously to help untangle some of the issues, and some of them are quite difficult to get at because as the IDF has stepped back, various violent actors have stepped in to the point that even the much diminished Hamas enforcers cannot get control of independent families and gangs and so forth.

So that is a huge piece of what is going on right now. The risk factors for humanitarian workers are at the very uppermost levels of intolerability for the U.N. and other NGOs, but we are working across the board on these issues with the Israeli government, with the IDF, with COGAT, and they are doing these pauses.

There is, obviously, a lot of politics at play around many issues related to Gaza, but the fact is we are getting partnership and cooperation. It is just a fraught situation.

Senator KAINE. I am over my time, and I do not want to belabor the point, but I do not want us to lose credibility. We cannot control the activities of other nations, but we can control our own, and when we render a conclusion that Israel is sufficiently cooperating with the United States on the delivery of humanitarian aid at the same time as we are having to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on a star crossed effort to build an unworkable pier to get humanitarian aid into Gaza, and if we render a conclusion that Israeli actions are sufficient when the Israeli government is engaged in a significant war of words against their own IDF trying to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza, I worry it makes us look like that we lose our own credibility by blessing an effort that is thus far entirely insufficient.

I yield back.

Senator MURPHY. Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank both of you for your testimony and service.

I want to begin with a question about an Egyptian man, Mahmoud Hussein, who was arbitrarily detained for wearing an anti-torture t-shirt in 2014. He was released after 2 years on arbitrary pretrial detention but then rearrested in April 2023. He is now free on bail.

We are pursuing this case because he has family in Baltimore and also because he has been unjustly detained. My question, Madam Assistant Secretary, is a very simple one on this.

Number 1, are you familiar with the case, but number 2, when do we expect the Egyptian parliament to finally pass the proposed

legislation to change the arbitrary detention rules? I am just looking for a straight factual answer here.

Ms. LEAF. I am generally familiar with his case but not in the details that you have just cited. To the second question, I cannot give you an answer, but I will be happy to come back with that answer.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. If you could. Yes, we have been in touch with Egyptian authorities, and this is something they keep saying is going to happen but it never seems to actually happen.

I am just going to read a post from—on this humanitarian situation in Gaza. I may come back to it, but I do not think anybody can question the credibility of UNICEF's global spokesman, James Elder. This was a post he put up just a few days ago when things have allegedly improved.

"This was my Wednesday in Gaza. Thirteen hour mission to go just 40 kilometers. Eight hours held at checkpoints. Despite approvals, our truck carrying UNICEF medicines and nutrition supplies for 10,000 children got turned back."

He adds to that note, "And two fishermen seeking food for their families shot dead on the beach in front of us."

So, Madam Assistant Secretary, I do not think that the humanitarian situation in Gaza has gotten better. We saw more goods coming in through the Erez crossing, and it was improving slightly. But then, of course, the Rafah operation shut off anything coming across the Rafah crossing.

In Kerem Shalom—you can cross from Kerem Shalom into Gaza, but if you cannot actually get to the people who need the help, obviously, that does not achieve the goal.

I want to associate myself with the comments of my friend Senator Kaine both in terms of Israel's clear right—in fact, I would argue duty—to defend itself but also the importance of the conduct of the war. The President has talked about this.

But I want to turn to the West Bank for a moment because the West Bank is growing more unstable by the day. You have had over 122 children die, killed in the West Bank since October 7 alone, and there are lots of people who are responsible for overseeing the West Bank, but one of them, as you know, is finance minister Smotrich who also has an important portfolio within the ministry of defense over civil affairs in the West Bank.

And there are numerous reports indicating that he has used his position to assist extremist settlers including many who have been sanctioned under the Administration's EEO, and I commend the Administration for its EEO.

In addition, as reported in a New York Times magazine piece with longtime investigative reporters, IDF officials have said that Smotrich has undermined efforts to limit construction of settlements illegal under Israeli law, quote, "to the point where it has disappeared," unquote.

He then boasted about this—he, Smotrich—saying, "We will do everything to prevent a Palestinian state that will endanger our existence here. I am proud to fight and prevent the Arab takeover of territories and help legitimize the Jewish heroes who settle the West Bank," unquote.



And I do not know if you were with Secretary Blinken back in March, but at that time Smotrich announced the largest single seizure of Palestinian lands in 1 day.

He also talked about—has been withholding funds. You, the Secretary, the President, have talked about this. You would agree that these are all destabilizing to the West Bank, would you not?

Ms. LEAF. Yes.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. And so my question is this. The EEO is very clear. What the EEO says is that any individuals or entities who have engaged in actions including directing, enacting, implementing, enforcing, or failing to enforce policies that threaten the peace, security, or stability of the West Bank are subject to this set of sanctions under the EEO.

Why has the Administration not sanctioned Smotrich, given the clear violations of the terms of the President's executive order?

Ms. LEAF. Senator, if I can quickly turn back to the HA—the humanitarian situation in Gaza. I want to be clear about one point. I am not suggesting that it has improved.

We were beginning to see an improvement, a gentle trend upwards in April. That was reversed with the Rafah operation, and so we were—we are working against that.

On the West Bank you are absolutely right that there are a whole constellation of factors and actors that are taking things to a very precarious position, and I would agree with you on all of those points that those are relevant to that picture.

You can appreciate that we do not discuss publicly who we put on our list for consideration. It is an ongoing process.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I thank you.

And just in closing, Mr. Chairman, again, I would really urge the Administration to take this action and take it immediately because the situation's getting worse, not better, and Smotrich continues to threaten more illegal outposts and withholding or some combination of those.

So if we want to send a signal that we are serious it cannot just be sanctioning some extremist settlers and some settler farms. It has to get to the root of the issue and this is one of those roots.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Senator Van Hollen.

Senator Hagerty.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you.

Deputy Assistant Administrator Pryor, I am going to start with you.

When Secretary Blinken appeared before the Appropriations Committee in October of last year I asked him a very simple question, and that was whether he could guarantee that no U.S. taxpayer funding had been, and this included in aid to Gaza, had been used to fund or support the Hamas attacks on October 7 of 2023.

I asked him repeatedly, and repeatedly he declined to make that guarantee. That week I also sent a letter both to Secretary Blinken and USAID Administrator Power asking how much in U.S. taxpayer funded foreign assistance has been sent specifically to Gaza and to list each recipient in Gaza whether at the awardee level or the subawardee level. I have that letter right here.

That was months ago. Eight months later USAID has failed to give me a complete answer. In particular, the agency has refused to disclose recipients at the subawardee level.

The responses that I received from AID have made it clear that the agency has the information about subawardees that it has not classified, but the agency is not providing it.

So, Ms. Pryor, why 8 months later, after I sent a letter with a very simple request, has the Administration refused to provide the U.S. Senate with basic transparency about who is receiving U.S. taxpayer dollars, especially at the subawardee level so we can see where it is being spent?

Ms. PRYOR. Thank you for your question, sir.

So the safety of our implementing partners' staff is our utmost paramount concern, and this is such a high risk environment where Hamas can target our implementing partners' staff.

I am not familiar with this. I believe this is on the humanitarian assistance side. So I am happy to go back to my colleagues on humanitarian assistance and see what is the status of this response and how we get you the information you are asking.

Senator HAGERTY. I certainly want the information, deserve the information. It has been 8 months. I think I know why you are hesitating.

I raised this with Administrator Power. I shared with her one of the subawardees that is doing just what we are concerned about. I think that is the reason you are not sharing this information is because this sort of activity—Hamas supporting activity—is occurring among subawardees. You all are going to be back in front of us on the Appropriations Committee where I sit next month. I expect to have this information before then.

Ms. PRYOR. Noted, sir.

Senator HAGERTY. Thank you. Thank you.

Assistant Secretary Leaf, I would like to turn to you now. The Biden administration has declined to unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state and has stated that a Palestinian state should be established through, quote, "direct negotiations between the parties involved in the conflict." Will this remain the Administration's position through January 20, 2025?

Ms. LEAF. Yes, Senator. Absolutely. That is longstanding policy and it is—it has been the President's own approach to this issue set throughout his career.

Senator HAGERTY. I am pleased to hear you say that unequivocally because here is the reason for my concern. Back in December 2016 in the lame duck Obama administration we saw the Obama administration betray Israel and allow the infamously anti-Israel U.N. Security Council Resolution No. 2334 to go in effect.

And as I fast forward to today, the Biden administration has been pushing Israel to agree to a normalization agreement with Saudi Arabia and that agreement would require Israel to agree to, quote, "a credible pathway to a Palestinian state."

And my concern would be that if Israel were to agree to this, quote, "credible pathway" that the Biden administration might turn around and do just as the Obama administration did back in 2016 and unilaterally recognize a Palestinian state with East Jeru-

saalem as its capital while falsely claiming that this is what Israel had already agreed to.

So I just want to be clear again. Is there any scenario between now and January 20 where the Biden administration would recognize a Palestinian state in the absence of Israel's official recognition of a Palestinian state?

Ms. LEAF. That would be the subject of direct negotiations, sir. Direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

Senator HAGERTY. And only then. There would be no recognition after that.

Ms. LEAF. Yes. That is right. That is right.

Senator HAGERTY. I just want to make sure and make clear.

Ms. LEAF. Yes.

Senator HAGERTY. Thanks very much. Thanks for putting that on the record for me.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much. And Senator Hagerty, I will be glad to work with you on that request you made for information. There may be some reasons why it should be done in a classified setting but be happy to work with you on that. Be happy to work with you on that.

We will open it to a second round of questions here, at the very least from myself and the ranking member.

Ambassador Leaf, Qatar has come under a lot of scrutiny for good reason since October 7. But I misunderstand a lot of the animosity.

Yes, they host Hamas, but my understanding is that that has been at our request. Yes, they have relations with the Taliban, but that has accrued to the benefit of the United States, utilized by Democratic and Republican administrations.

They have previously been the conduit that flows funds into Gaza, done at the request of the Israeli government. So just speak for a moment about how the status of the U.S.-Qatar relationship right now and what the world would look like if we did not have Qatar's ability to allow us to speak to our adversaries in the region.

Ms. LEAF. Thank you, Senator, for that really important question, and having gone to Israel I think nine times since October 7, and actually my first 2 years in office I did a lot of work with the Israelis on especially the Israeli security establishment, and I would say that there has been—even before October 7 there were very mixed feelings about the logic of using Qatar as a conduit for funds.

But after October 7, of course, there has been the just really terribly traumatic—the trauma that endures as long as hostages are kept by Hamas and other actors in Gaza.

So there has been frustration from the same folks who understand that Qatar is a really critical channel, just as you say, alongside Egypt. But it has just gifts that it brings and influence it brings to bear on this.

I would just say the following. Qatar, really, to use that somewhat tired expression really does punch above its weight, and it has a nimbleness of approach with a variety of actors that we do not have relations with, but that we need to communicate with,

and regimes as well as nonstate actors, and they have worked tirelessly on this hostage piece.

There has been very understandable frustration from the families, from the Israeli government. Can Qatar not do more? Can you not put—you, the U.S., put more pressure on Qatar to put more pressure on Hamas.

And I would just say, as I did a few weeks ago before HFAC, there is the cadre of political officials of Hamas in Doha, and boy, do they squeeze them. I can assure you they squeeze them.

But at the end of the day, there is one guy 10 stories below the ground, a psychopath, messianic in his own belief that he has established himself in history, and there is sort of a sunk cost having lost thousands of fighters and caused carnage in Gaza.

So Qatar's ability to do the indirect mediation is critical to our interests and to Israel's. But I would say they have become a very trusted partner of ours.

Senator MURPHY. There are other allies of the United States that have relations with Hamas. Qatar is the only one that seems to be willing to do the hardest work of convening these conversations.

Ms. LEAF. Yes.

Senator MURPHY. So, an imperfect ally—

Ms. LEAF. Yes.

Senator MURPHY [continuing]. And a human rights record that needs to get better. But appreciate your comments.

Let me ask you one bigger picture question. We have the outlines of a very important potential agreement in Lebanon to be able to move Hezbollah back off the border and maybe even get in a conversation about border demarcation.

We have a political standstill in Yemen with the added complication of Houthi provocations into the Red Sea. Both seem static until the Gaza conflict comes to a close.

I just think it is important for this committee to understand that the end of the conflict in Gaza is important to be able to ultimately bring about a long term security settlement with respect to Hamas's ability to hit Israel ever again.

But it is also right now standing in the way of moving forward on a Yemen political process, on a deescalation with the Houthis, and a potential breakthrough—potential breakthrough—in Lebanon. Am I right about that?

Ms. LEAF. You are absolutely right about all of that, and the diplomacy continues even while we are working to get to that ceasefire agreement.

So Amos Hochstein is out in the region. He has been out there for several days essentially working to calm things down. Things are quite volatile, alarmingly so, and we heard that in stereophonic sound last week on our trip to the region.

So he is doing his work even ahead of a formal pause. Tim Lenderking is doing his work relentlessly both in terms of the work with our partners on Red Sea security, but importantly, on the piece to get regional partners to really lean in hard on the Houthis.

So all of this continues apace, but you are right, the Gaza ceasefire will be the break point where we can do something really important in both directions.

Senator MURPHY. Let me sneak in one last question on Egypt.

The State Department waived certification requirements tied to human rights improvements on the \$235 million of Egypt's fiscal year 2022 FMF, but upon becoming chair of the full committee Senator Cardin put a hold on that funding.

My impression is that since the chairman's hold has been in place the Egyptian government has really failed to engage in any meaningful cooperation with the United States on any of our core interests and that we have, further, not seen any real progress with respect to the pretrial detention reforms or the release of significant numbers of political prisoners.

Feels like, just like the amount of funding to Egypt has been stuck in place since the mid-1980s, progress with Egypt has been stuck at least for the past 6 months.

Ms. LEAF. The one thing I would say that is really, really important in this picture is the final resolution wrapping up entirely of Case 173 and the dismissal of charges, the release of freezes and detentions, and so forth.

So this is a really significant step forward for all of the people and the organizations that were caught up in that years long case.

I asked just a couple of days ago for a status report on the pretrial detention legislation, and I plan to go back to our post and see where we stand with that.

The discussions that we had, as I recall dimly, crested in September, and of course, we had the events of October 7, which have thoroughly preoccupied our government, Egypt's government. They have been preoccupied both with the conflict right across their border with Sudan.

But I assure you we have not lost sight of that, and I will come back to you with some more comments on that.

Senator MURPHY. Great. Thank you.

Senator Young.

Senator YOUNG. Secretary, two questions—two lines of questioning. One, I am going to touch on drones and then subsea cables. So you know where I am headed with this.

So Iran's drone production—a lot has been said and written about that, but recent reports that are based on an analysis of some downed Iranian drones found multiple components originating from U.S. manufacturers—microchips, circuit boards, GPS modules, some other components.

I understand it is nearly impossible to completely cut off Iran from attaining these parts, but what if anything are we doing to try and interrupt some of these flows?

Ms. LEAF. It is a really critical issue because, of course, the drones are a threat throughout the region and now they are fully in the battlefield in Ukraine.

So we have designated dozens of entities involved in the UAV program, and we have imposed comprehensive export controls to try to restrict Iran's access to key technologies insofar as possible, and we are enlisting the help of our European and other partners in this effort.

It is, as you say, exceptionally difficult to get at everything because some of these things are just off the shelf kind of components which can be used for a multiplicity of things.

Senator YOUNG. Do you have sufficient personnel? I know this has been an issue over at Commerce with respect to the monitoring of our export controls on microprocessors, and we are looking at so many different fronts right now and so many different technologies of a dual use nature, that might be something to look into if you do not have that information at the ready.

Ms. LEAF. I would be happy to look into that.

Senator YOUNG. There are a number of members of this committee that would like to be helpful. Thank you.

So with respect to subsea cables what diplomatic efforts are underway to get some of the subsea cables, like those in the Red Sea that had been directly or indirectly damaged by Houthis—underway to get these cables repaired?

Ms. LEAF. I do not have an answer for you on that, but I will be happy to take that back.

Senator YOUNG. Well, I believe that we need to be monitoring this situation very closely. Ninety-five percent of the world's internet traffic occurs through subsea cables.

These are strategic assets obviously critical to our commerce and every bit as important as the above water goods and services that traffic every day and we take great care to secure.

So, yes, kindly report back to me on any activities underway to restore service there.

And then as the leader of a regional bureau at the department what if any additional authorities or resources would you or your counterparts in other bureaus need to prioritize security of undersea cables within your areas of responsibility?

There again, if you need to report back, I would certainly welcome that. Do you have any initial thoughts that you would like to—

Ms. LEAF. I do not. I do not, sir, but I will be happy to take that one back as well. So additional authorities, yes.

Senator YOUNG. OK.

Chairman.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Senator Young.

Senator CRUZ.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ambassador Leaf, you are the Administration's point person on the Middle East. How is that working out?

Ms. LEAF. I love my job, Senator.

Senator CRUZ. Have things in the Middle East gotten better or worse since Joe Biden became President?

Ms. LEAF. We have had a series of black swan events. So no doubt the region is in a very difficult state.

Senator CRUZ. Is your answer things have gotten worse?

Ms. LEAF. My answer is that a series of black swan events have crowded—

Senator CRUZ. Have they gotten better? You are not suggesting things have gotten better, are you?

Ms. LEAF. No, I am not.

Senator CRUZ. If fact, they have gotten a lot worse.

Ms. LEAF. That is the nature of black swan—

Senator CRUZ. So it is black swans. You guys had nothing to do with it. It is not mistakes you made. It is just something that happened externally?

Ms. LEAF. Well, I think an assessment of the events of October 7 is still to be done. I cannot speak to that.

Senator CRUZ. OK. So did you all make any mistakes that led to it?

Ms. LEAF. I am not sure.

Senator CRUZ. All right. Here is one. How about giving hundreds of millions of dollars to the Gaza Strip, much of which ended up in the hands of Hamas? Was that a mistake now that we saw what happened on October 7?

Ms. LEAF. I am going to defer to my colleague from USAID. I am not aware of hundreds of millions of dollars going to Hamas from U.S.—

Senator CRUZ. All right. How about a hundred billion dollars to Iran? Was that a mistake?

Ms. LEAF. I am not sure what you are referring to, Senator.

Senator CRUZ. You tell me. How much money has this Administration flowed to Iran?

Ms. LEAF. We have not flowed money to Iran.

Senator CRUZ. Really?

Ms. LEAF. We have money in accounts that are restricted for humanitarian use only.

Senator CRUZ. And money is not fungible?

Ms. LEAF. This regime will always spend money on these kinds of activities—the proxy activity.

Senator CRUZ. When Joe Biden became President how much was Iran selling in oil a day?

Ms. LEAF. I do not have that figure for you, Senator.

Senator CRUZ. Of course you do not. The answer is about 300,000 barrels a day. How much is Iran selling in oil a day now?

Ms. LEAF. Somewhere short of 2 million.

Senator CRUZ. So it went from 300,000 barrels a day to 2 million barrels a day. That is about \$80 billion that the Ayatollah has made because your Administration refuses to enforce oil sanctions.

Ms. LEAF. No, we do enforce oil sanctions, Senator.

Senator CRUZ. Well, you do so terribly because the number has increased almost tenfold.

Ms. LEAF. But because of the strictures that we have put on the sanctions, that we put on the targeting that we have done, 230 alone directed toward those who traffic in Iranian oil, that has imposed a heavy cost on Iran, and we estimate that it is not—

Senator CRUZ. Wait. Wait. Wait. Wait.

You are saying it is a heavy cost they went from 300,000 barrels a day to 2 million barrels a day. Where is the heavy cost? That is an extra 1.7 million barrels a day. That is \$80 billion. True or false, 90 percent of Hamas's funding comes from Iran?

Ms. LEAF. No, not 90 percent. It is a large—it is a substantial amount.

Senator CRUZ. OK. How much is it then?

Ms. LEAF. I do not know at this—of this exact—

Senator CRUZ. Of course. You are in charge of the damn region, and you do not—what do you mean you do not know?

Ms. LEAF. At this exact moment I cannot tell you because of the strictures——

Senator CRUZ. All right. How much of Hezbollah's funding comes from Iran?

Ms. LEAF. Huge—a huge amount.

Senator CRUZ. It is about 90 percent. Both of those are about 90 percent. Do you think it made the world safer or less safe to take a theocratic lunatic like the Ayatollah who chants, "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" and to flow a hundred billion dollars? Did that make us more safe or less safe?

Ms. LEAF. The U.S. is not flowing money to Iran, Senator.

Senator CRUZ. What about the \$6 billion in hostage payments?

Ms. LEAF. Not a penny has moved.

Senator CRUZ. And money is not fungible? They cannot put that up for credit facilities?

Ms. LEAF. Not a penny has moved.

Senator CRUZ. You are aware you are under oath?

Ms. LEAF. I am.

Senator CRUZ. And could they put that money up for credit facilities to use money to fund their terror activity?

Ms. LEAF. I am not sure who would be in the position of lending them money at this point. Senator, we do have plenty of sanctions. Iran is one of the most heavily sanctioned regimes.

Senator CRUZ. But you are not enforcing them. This Administration—every lunatic on Earth that wants to kill us this Administration gives money to.

All right. Let me ask you this. Israel has said it is their policy to utterly eliminate Hamas. Does this Administration—does President Biden support Israel in its commitment to utterly eliminate Hamas?

Ms. LEAF. Of course.

Senator CRUZ. Of course? Then why are you calling for an immediate ceasefire before they eliminate Hamas?

Ms. LEAF. Israel has accepted that proposal.

Senator CRUZ. No, they have not.

Ms. LEAF. They have.

Senator CRUZ. Is there a ceasefire that has happened?

Ms. LEAF. Hamas has not yet fully accepted that.

Senator CRUZ. Is there a cease—Israel most certainly has not. I am aware the Biden administration has told the press that Israel has.

Ms. LEAF. The Israeli leadership——

Senator CRUZ. So, I asked you a question. Do you support Israel's military objective of utterly eliminating Hamas? You said yes. In the next sentence you said, but they should ceasefire right now and not eliminate Hamas.

Ms. LEAF. No, I agree with the way that the President characterized it, Senator, on May 31, which is to say that we agree with the objective that Hamas never again control the Gaza Strip or threaten Israel. That will not be achieved by military means alone.

Senator CRUZ. So, it is not—we said their military objective was to defeat Hamas. So you just said it is impossible to defeat Hamas. Is that right?



Ms. LEAF. When you first posed the question, you said eliminate Hamas. Over time——

Senator CRUZ. I said utterly eliminate Hamas. I did not say over time, not over a thousand years.

Ms. LEAF. No.

Senator CRUZ. I said defeat an enemy because they are murderers who murdered 1,200 people, who raped women and little girls.

Ms. LEAF. It will not be done by military means alone.

Senator CRUZ. OK. So it is the position of this Administration it is impossible by military means to defeat Hamas?

Ms. LEAF. Yes, it is.

Senator CRUZ. Let me ask you, you also want to see essentially as a reward for October 7 a Palestinian state.

Ms. LEAF. It is not a reward.

Senator CRUZ. It is not a reward. It just achieves what they want as a benefit for these murders.

Ms. LEAF. Hamas—Hamas——

Senator CRUZ. Let me ask you something. If Hamas is governed by—if Hamas governs Gaza how is Israel safe and protected?

Ms. LEAF. Shall I—shall I——

Senator MURPHY. The gentleman's time has expired.

Senator CRUZ. It is an impressive job, Mr. Chairman. Bang bang.

Senator MURPHY. Let the witness finish answering the question.

Senator CRUZ. She should not be frightened of these questions, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MURPHY. The gentleman's time has expired.

Ms. LEAF. Hamas has never supported a two state solution. So, indeed, a Palestinian state that has negotiated with Israel that lives in peace side by side——

Senator CRUZ. And governed by Hamas.

Ms. LEAF [continuing]. Is not a reward to Hamas. Hamas does not support such a thing. Does not recognize Israel's right to exist.

Senator CRUZ. Your policy has been an utter disaster.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much to both of our witnesses for being here today. What we are going to do is keep the record open until 5 p.m. on Thursday, and we will appreciate any answers to questions that come in before then.

With that, this subcommittee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:42 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

#### ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

##### RESPONSES OF MS. BARBARA LEAF TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

*Question.* The United States and some members of the Israeli military establishment have envisioned a postwar role for an overhauled Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the West Bank. Prime Minister Netanyahu's government, however, has repeatedly rejected any role for it, and the Foreign Ministry Israel Katz recently started a social media campaign to discredit the idea. The rift between Netanyahu and the country's military leadership is becoming increasingly apparent for their civil society and the international community.

Given the clear and concerning misalignment of Netanyahu's and Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) objective on the threat and elimination of Hamas, particularly as their military operations are assumed to end soon, how is the United States engaging with Israel and our Arab allies to devise a comprehensive postwar plan in Gaza?

I welcome the opportunity to learn more about these plans in greater detail as they become accessible.

*Answer.* For months we have been engaging in conversations with Israel, the Palestinian Authority and partners throughout the region on such issues. Our goal is to turn a ceasefire into an enduring end to the conflict, but also turning an end of war into a just and durable peace and using that peace as a foundation for building a more integrated, stable, and prosperous region.

*Question.* In your view, what type of support does the United States seek in combatting Hamas and restoring regional peace and stability for Israel and our regional allies?

*Answer.* We have been engaging partners in the region about post-conflict Gaza since early on in this conflict. Many of them share our concerns and a willingness to play a constructive role when conditions allow. There will be an ongoing need for the international community to step up to support Gaza's governance, security, and humanitarian issues.

*Question.* The declining legitimacy and credibility of Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank—including the potentiality of a “re-envisioned” PA, are challenging relations between Palestinian factions and regional neighbors such as Jordan and Egypt, given the uncertainty of end of the Israeli-Hamas conflict.

In this vein, can you describe our regional strategy to mitigating the war's ramifications in the diplomatic, security, and financial Arab space?

*Answer.* We are working with regional partners on elements to get to a sustained peace, which must ultimately lead to a pathway to Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in states of their own, with equal measures of security, freedom, opportunity, and dignity. It must include Palestinian-led governance and Gaza unified with the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority, with support from the United States, the region, and partners around the globe. Even as we focus intensely on addressing these urgent challenges, we believe that the time is now to start the conversation about the future—not tomorrow, not after the war, today—because identifying the longer-term objectives and a pathway to get there will help shape our approach to addressing immediate needs.

*Question.* According to a recent survey published by the Pew Research Center, Israelis are more confident in their military than in their government. Further, Israelis were recorded to be more supportive of Defense Minister Yoav Gallant than of Netanyahu.

How do you view this growing social unrest in Israeli civil society? What do they indicate to you regarding the prospects of a re-envisioned relationship between Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip?

*Answer.* The U.S.-Israel relationship has remained strong across administrations in both of our countries—and this continues today. Israel is a vibrant democracy, and the question of who is best to serve as the leadership of Israel—and what policies they should adopt to ensure Israel's security—is for the Israeli people to decide. The United States also supports the freedom of speech, the freedom of assembly, and the right to peaceful protest.

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RESPONSES OF MS. BARBARA LEAF TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TODD YOUNG

*Question.* I'm concerned about reports that the Moroccan royal family is attempting to criminalize a civil dispute which stems from the management of the Royal Mansour Hotel in Casablanca. During his confirmation hearing in July 2022, Ambassador Talwar told me that he would advocate for the U.S. business community directly with the Moroccan government. Can you tell me what the State Department has done to address this issue since the Ambassador committed to me that he would work to improve the business climate in the country?

*Answer.* The U.S. Government—including through the tireless diplomacy led by Ambassador Talwar and U.S. Mission Morocco—is continuing at all levels to advocate with the Moroccan government on behalf of U.S. businesses while supporting efforts to improve the trade and investment climate in Morocco. U.S. Mission Morocco leverages a range of programs, including the Department of Commerce's Commercial Law Development Program, to strengthen the judiciary, increase transparency, and contribute to a more open commercial environment.

On the specific litigation involving the Royal Mansour Hotel in Casablanca, U.S. officials continue to closely follow this dispute, remain in regular contact with rep-

representatives for the U.S. firm involved, and will continue to utilize all avenues to advocate for a favorable resolution.

*Question.* As we near the 2-year anniversary of Ryan Corbett's detention in Afghanistan, it is becoming increasingly important that we secure his release. What is the status of the Department's effort to bring him home?

*Answer.* U.S. officials have continuously pressed, including in meetings with Taliban representatives, for the immediate and unconditional release of Americans detained in Afghanistan, noting that these detentions are a significant obstacle to positive engagement. We continue to press both in public and in private with Taliban representatives that their relationship with the international community depends entirely on their actions.

*Question.* With the State and USAID's Joint Regional Strategy for the MENA region now being 2 years old, please give an update on implementation and any plans you have going forward.

*Answer.* Interagency country-specific reviews that assess progress toward achieving the five JRS Goals were conducted just after the outbreak of the Israel/Hamas conflict. The review included the recommendation that we must position ourselves throughout the region for day-after planning, reaffirm our partnerships, restore U.S. credibility, and emphasize what the U.S. brings to the region.

It also recommended that, despite consistent, long-term funding to advance women's livelihoods, and high rates of education among women and girls, women's workforce participation in the region is only 18 percent, the lowest globally. As a next step, we agreed to conduct a comprehensive assessment of gender programming, particularly in places like Jordan and Egypt, where there are large, long-standing gender programs.

We continue to tailor our approaches to address the current regional context. Since the strategy will expire in early 2026, work to develop a new JRS is expected to begin mid to late 2025.

*Question.* Will this Administration enter into a 123 Agreement with Saudi Arabia and submit it to Congress for consultation?

*Answer.* As Secretary Blinken has made clear, any nuclear cooperation agreement that we conclude with Saudi Arabia will need to be consistent with advancing our nonproliferation goals. The United States has long stressed its support for the responsible development of civil nuclear power in a manner consistent with the highest standards of safety, security, and nonproliferation.

*Question.* Given recent reports of increased cooperation between the Houthis and al-Shabaab, how is State working to isolate the Houthis now to ensure that this increased terrorist cooperation doesn't continue to spread?

*Answer.* We are tracking reports of increased cooperation, and we are engaged in ongoing discussions with our regional partners in the Middle East and Africa in relation to this issue. We are utilizing multiple channels to press the Houthis to avoid this dangerous escalation and to cease such contacts immediately.

*Question.* While we have been working with our allies in the region to push for peace and stability, the U.S. continues to play an outsized role, especially in foreign assistance. Have GCC, Turkish, and French partners agreed to increase their humanitarian and development assistance in Lebanon?

*Answer.* Our team at Embassy Beirut works closely with international partners, including GCC countries and France, to address humanitarian needs in Lebanon and to promote economic development as well as security and stability.

The State Department continues to press allies and partners at senior-most levels to increase their assistance to Lebanon, both to support for the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces as well as to provide for humanitarian needs and economic development. We continue to urge the Government of Lebanon to make much needed economic reforms, as outlined by the IMF, to bring Lebanon out of its ongoing economic crisis.

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RESPONSES OF MS. BARBARA LEAF TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CHRIS VAN HOLLEN

*Question.* Has the State Department heard similar reports of doctors being denied the ability to bring medical equipment and medicine into Gaza?

*Answer.* As of May 7, the Israeli Defense Forces control the Gaza side of the Rafah Crossing and, since then, the Rafah Crossing between Egypt and Gaza has

remained closed. Before and after the closing of the Rafah Crossing, the Department heard from NGO's and doctors returning from Gaza regarding the difficulties they have faced in bringing medical supplies into Gaza.

In the interim, new entry-exit arrangements have been agreed upon by the Government of Israel and the Government of Egypt. These involve a UN-led rotation mechanism through the Kerem Shalom crossing with transit across the Allenby Bridge into Jordan. Under these arrangements, we understand the Government of Israel has imposed additional restrictions on personal items. Amidst these challenges, we continue to raise our concerns with the Government of Israel.

*Question.* To your knowledge, does the Israeli government have an existing list of medical supplies and medicines that it considers "dual use"? If so, does the State Department or USAID have access to this list?

Answer. The Department is aware of and has access to the existing 2008 list of medical supplies and medicines that the Government of Israel considers "dual use." The Department continues to engage Israeli officials at the highest levels to ensure greater and quicker access to necessary medical resources for civilians in dire need.

*Question.* Does the State Department have access to a list of items Israeli authorities will not allow foreign medical professionals to bring into Gaza?

Answer. The Department has the existing 2008 list of "dual-use" items, as do humanitarian actors. However, the Government of Israel has made commitments to lift restrictions on certain items critical for life-saving assistance and to take measures to further clarify guidelines for partners.

Relief organizations continue to encounter some issues at points of entry, and efforts are being made to open more land routes to further surge the flow of humanitarian assistance into Gaza. This issue is raised in every conversation with our Israeli counterparts.

*Question.* Has the United States government engaged with Israeli authorities on increasing access to medical supplies that medical professionals can bring with them when treating patients in Gaza? If so, please describe your efforts and results, if any.

Answer. The United States government regularly engages with the Government of Israel—and when relevant the governments of Egypt and Jordan—on all issues related to the safe rotation of humanitarian staff in and out of Gaza, including medical personnel and supplies. This includes engagement by senior officials from the State Department, the National Security Council, and USAID. The United States continues to engage the GOI on restrictions that impact the flow of medical supplies into and out of Gaza.

*Question.* Is the State Department aware of any cases in which American medical professionals with Palestinian ancestry (individuals whose fathers or grandfathers were born in the Palestinian territories) have been denied entry into Gaza to treat Palestinians by COGAT as part of WHO-approved medical missions, such as with the Palestinian American Medical Association (PAMA)? If so, what is the stated justification for this policy change?

Answer. While the Department is aware of reports of some American medical professionals with Palestinian ancestry who have been denied entry into Gaza, our embassy has not been contacted about specific cases. At this time, we refer you to the Government of Israel for specifics pertaining to particular cases and the policy as it currently stands.

We continue to remind U.S. citizens of our Level 4 Travel Advisory to not travel to Gaza. As a result of the armed conflict, the security environment within Gaza and on its borders is extremely dangerous and volatile.

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RESPONSE OF MS. JEANNE PRYOR TO A QUESTION  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

*Question.* The debate over the future of the Israeli operation in Gaza comes as aid agencies report a worsening humanitarian situation after the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) incursion into the southern city of Rafah that started in May, severely disrupting humanitarian activities.

Amid the growing disruption of humanitarian operations in Gaza, how do you view our humanitarian programs in Gaza, particularly through our maritime humanitarian corridor? I welcome the opportunity to learn more about the efficiencies and or inefficiencies of our current strategy and efforts, including those conducted alongside our regional allies.

Answer. Our continued support is critical now more than ever following over 8 months of sustained hostilities. The protracted closure of Rafah Crossing, the increase in fighting, large-scale displacement and the collapse of law and order mean that humanitarian partners continue to operate in an extremely challenging environment hindering the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Since October 7, the USG has announced over \$674 million to Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, with \$265 million from USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. We are prioritizing life-saving assistance, including food; health; shelter; protection; and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) assistance as part of a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach in this response.

USAID, in close coordination with the Department of State and other interagency partners, continues to advocate for the Government of Israel to ensure a predictable and needs-based supply of assistance from all routes, particularly through all existing land crossings. Multiple routes—from inside Gaza, neighboring countries, and through the maritime corridor—are required so our partners are not relying on just one route that can easily become too congested and turn into a single point of failure.

Through the humanitarian maritime corridor, USAID has facilitated the delivery of 978 metric tons of life-saving aid, including nutrient rich food to support thousands of Gaza's most vulnerable children and adults and critical supplies such as plastic sheeting for shelter, jerry cans to hold clean water, and hygiene kits. An additional 5,228 metric tons have been delivered to shore and are pending improvements in security conditions before the U.N. resumes distribution. Assistance includes not only commodities from the United States, but also the UAE, EU, UK, Cyprus, IOM, and WFP. The humanitarian maritime corridor augments—not replaces—land crossings into Gaza, every one of which needs to operate at maximum capacity and efficiency.

We are encouraged by the continued support of our partners for the maritime corridor. It is our view that we must capitalize on all avenues possible to deliver aid into Gaza and into the hands of the Palestinians. We also continue to advocate for regular, safe facilitated movement for humanitarian actors and increased access throughout Gaza, to ensure humanitarian assistance not only crosses into Gaza but also is able to move once inside, to reach the most vulnerable in need of critical assistance.

The ability of humanitarian actors to safely deliver and distribute humanitarian assistance is essential in this and every humanitarian response.

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RESPONSE OF MS. JEANNE PRYOR TO A QUESTION  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR TODD YOUNG

*Question.* With the State and USAID's Joint Regional Strategy for the MENA region now being 2 years old, please give an update on implementation and any plans you have going forward.

Answer. Interagency country-specific reviews that assess progress toward achieving the five JRS Goals were conducted after the outbreak of the Israel/Hamas conflict in October 2023. The review concluded the following recommendations:

- We must position ourselves throughout the region for day-after planning, reaffirm our partnerships, and emphasize what the U.S. brings to the region.
- Despite consistent, long-term funding to advance gender equity, and high rates of education among women and girls, women's workforce participation in the region is only 18 percent, the lowest in the world. As a next step, we agreed on a comprehensive assessment of gender programming, particularly in places like Jordan and Egypt, where there are large, long-standing gender programs.

Although the ongoing conflict has changed priorities and created additional challenges across the region that are not reflected in the current regional strategy, no formal updates have been made to the JRS at this point. Since the strategy will expire in early 2026, work to develop a new JRS is expected to begin in mid to late 2025.