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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

There is a perception of Egypt that has guided our engagement with the country for decades. Egypt is the largest country in the Arab world; historically, it has exercised great political, cultural, and religious influence in the region as a whole. With that in mind, despite the internal turmoil Egypt has experienced in the last few years, the Obama administration, like its predecessors, tried to engage successive governments in Cairo to address regional challenges. We tried to address the internal turmoil, too, especially after the Tahrir Square revolution created what seemed like a real chance to help Egyptians build democracy. But as those hopes faded, Egypt began to look once again like a classic case of a country where our long term interest in better governance and human rights came into conflict with our immediate need to cooperate with an important country on security interests.

Looking back on our experience, I would say that the perception of Egypt as an important player in the region, and thus our weighing of the trade offs, needs revision. We should see Egypt more clearly for what it has become: a country that sucks up aid from the United States and the Gulf countries, treating our largesse as an entitlement, while contributing virtually nothing positive to regional security or prosperity. Yes, it is true that Egypt has maintained its peace treaty with Israel, but that is not a concession to us; it is something it does in its own interest. The one place in the region where Egypt has exercised independent influence is Libya, where it has made matters worse. It has played no significant role in the counter-ISIS coalition. We've given Egypt more than $70 billion over the years, yet the last time I checked, there were no Egyptian F-16s helping us fight ISIS over Raqqa or Mosul. Meanwhile, the Egyptian military has taken our aid while consistently rejecting the advice we've offered alongside it – for example, that it fight the insurgency in the Sinai by securing rather than punishing the population. As a result, that insurgency has grown, and terrorism has increased in Egypt since President Sisi took power.

Despite all this, it is often said that President Sisi is the counter-terrorism partner we need. He is a religious man committed to secular politics. He says he wants to reform Islam. He promises to protect Christians. He tells us a lot of what we want to hear. And I'm willing to believe that he believes it. But we need to ask ourselves: why would young people in the Muslim world who might be open to persuasion by extremists look instead to an army general known for imprisoning and torturing thousands of young Egyptians for moral and spiritual guidance? General Sisi is not a man who can exercise influence in such matters, whatever his intentions. What he

should do is to focus on governing Egypt well, delivering services and security and giving his people the sense that they are being treated fairly and with dignity. That would be the best thing he could do to counter the extremists.

Unfortunately, neither good governance nor counter-terrorism has been the Egyptian military's top priority in recent years. Its focus, and General Sisi's, has been preserving its dominant position in Egypt's government and economy. To that end, it has concentrated as much on persecuting political opponents, peaceful protestors and independent NGOs – the very people in the country most likely to despise jihadism -- as it has on hunting down terrorists.

Prominent dissidents like Alaa Abdel Fatah and Ahmed Maher, both leaders of the 2011 Tahrir Square movement, remain in prison after being convicted in unfair trials. Tens of thousands of others who are not as well known are also behind bars for nothing more than having attended a demonstration or membership in a political party or for reasons that security agencies do not explain, since current counter-terrorism laws basically give them carte blanche to do what they want. Many prisoners languish for years in pre-trial detention, like the recently released American citizen Aya Hijazi. Some disappear for weeks or months, their fates hidden from family and lawyers. Many are subjected to the most brutal forms of torture. Read, if you have the stomach for it, the autopsy reports on the death of the Italian student, Guilio Regeni, who was disappeared in Cairo last year, and you will have a sense of the sadistic treatment Egyptians experience at the hands their security agencies, especially when suspected of political crimes. The top officials of those agencies know perfectly well what goes on and do nothing to stop it.

One consequence of the Egyptian government's conflation of political dissent with terrorism is that in the country's overcrowded prisons, peaceful protestors are held right alongside violent jihadists. I've heard from people released from those prisons that inside, the men from ISIS taunt those who had placed their faith in political activism: "You thought you could change Egypt through elections and look at what happened to you; next time, don't be a fool and fight with us."

The Sisi government has also intensified its crackdown on NGOs. A new NGO law the parliament adopted last November essentially places civil society groups under government supervision, prohibiting work that doesn't conform with the government's priorities. Here is an example of what that means in practice: this February, the government shut down the main organization in Egypt working to rehabilitate victims of torture.

Meanwhile, the government reserves its worst persecution and vitriol for those in Egyptian society who have received support from the United States. Think about what this means: Even as the Egyptian military takes billions of dollars from us, even as the Egyptian state and its lobbyists make the rounds in Washington urging us to improve the relationship, prominent Egyptians who commit the so called crime of partnering with us are prosecuted or have their bank accounts frozen. Mr.

Chairman, two of your counterparts in the Egyptian parliament who were among the most vocal supporters of good relations with the West and peace with Israel were thrown out of the parliament last year, including Mohammed Anwar Sadat, the nephew of the late President Sadat, who was expelled for speaking to Westerners about the NGO law.

This doesn't just happen to those associated with democracy and human rights issues. Last year, the Egyptians launched a smear campaign against the US non-profit organization RTI, through which we were providing aid to Egypt's education system. The Egyptian government prevented us from spending a significant share of our economic assistance because of restrictions it imposed or outrageous accusations it made against the implementing NGOs. Eventually, we moved some of that funding elsewhere.

All this has been part of a broader campaign in Egypt's state and pro-government media against the United States. General Sisi himself often has spoken about what he sees as the threat of "fourth generation warfare" – which other Egyptian military officials have explicitly defined as an effort by the US and other Western countries to weaken Egypt through promotion of democratic values and funding of NGOs. In the last couple of years, state media have constantly pushed the message that the United States aims to destroy Egypt from within. Some of it is obviously preposterous – my favorite was a full page spread in one newspaper alleging that the Hunger Games movies contained hidden signals to Egyptians to rise up against their state. But it's not a laughing matter. This propaganda reaches a lot more people than anything ISIS puts out, and it encourages deep cynicism and hostility towards the United States. We raised this with General Sisi during the Obama administration, and he has tempered his own comments since. But the larger problem in state media continues, and we should be much less tolerant of it.

What should we do in light of all these problems?

We should start with realistic expectations. US officials have spent countless hours with their Egyptian counterparts in recent years, urging economic reforms, better military strategies, and greater respect for human rights, offering help on all counts, to almost no avail. More of that kind of positive engagement is not likely to help. Any efforts to improve the relationship will likely be subverted anyway by Egyptian actions to which we will have to respond. The video that surfaced over the weekend showing Egyptian security forces in the Sinai executing prisoners who apparently had been transported in US provided Humvees is a case in point – that kind of incident could require, under the Leahy Law, suspending assistance to forces in the Sinai unless those responsible are punished.

At the same time, I don't think that quid pro quo conditions on assistance are likely to do much good, either, at this point. The Egyptians don't believe we're capable of sticking to our guns for long when we use that weapon.

If there is any chance for fundamental change in Egypt, it's going to come from within. And it's probably going to take a long time. But there are some sensible steps we can take in the meantime.

First, though it may be hard to change the way the Egyptian government treats its own people, we can certainly demand that it change how it treats us. We should have zero tolerance for the mistreatment of American citizens (several more of whom remain unfairly imprisoned), for continued anti-American propaganda in state media, and for the persecution of individuals or NGOs for association with Americans. Call it an America First human rights policy. Swift consequences for such actions would deter them and lead over time to a healthier US-Egyptian relationship.

Second, we should avoid policies and statements that make us complicit in or legitimize the Egyptian government's abuses. This means having a correct relationship with General Sisi, without giving him undue praise or suggesting that his rhetorical commitment to fighting extremism excuses crimes that fuel extremism. It means enforcing the Leahy Law. It means keeping our distance from the Egyptian security agencies responsible for political persecution. I would encourage you, Mr. Chairman, to be especially wary of any proposals to enter into additional intelligence sharing or counter-terrorism partnerships with these agencies; this is an area were Congressional oversight is needed.

Third, we should continue to speak out publicly against human rights abuses in Egypt, ideally in concert with European and other allies. I am confident that the Egyptians care about their international image, and that it matters to them greatly, for example, when we and our allies speak with one voice, for example, at the UN Human Rights Council. Multilateral diplomacy can be effective with Egypt at least on the margins. We should it pursue it with greater vigor.

Fourth, we should avoid reinforcing the Egyptian sense that US assistance is an entitlement. The Obama administration ended cash flow financing of military aid to Egypt, and that decision should stand. It makes no sense for US taxpayers to be on the hook for subsidizing Egypt's defense budget years in advance no matter what the Egyptian government does in the interim.

That leaves one final, critical question – what to do with our military aid to Egypt? There are three basic choices here. We could simply return to providing $1.2 billion a year unconditionally. That would be a dispiriting choice, in my view – we'd just be helping Egypt buy weapons that are ill suited to meet the security threats it faces, while reinforcing its entitlement mentality, and kicking the tough issues down the road once more. Or, we could provide most of the aid package, while continuing to withhold the 15% currently withheld because of human rights abuses. That would send a modest signal of disapproval, but do little good besides.

The third option would be to step back and ask whether our investment in Egypt is appropriate given the value we get from it and the crises and opportunities we face elsewhere. My strong view is that the investment is completely out of balance. Does it really make sense for this government, which does so little for regional security, which consistently rejects our advice, which describes us to its people as a hostile enemy, to receive such a disproportionate share of US military aid?

Again, I'm not arguing here that we use aid as leverage to get something out of Egypt. I'm simply arguing for spending money sensibly. Let's provide assistance tailored to support the Egyptian military's efforts to protect its borders and its people from terrorists – assistance that might enable a true counterinsurgency campaign in the Sinai, for example -- if it is willing to use it wisely. But we should no longer subsidize the purchase of planes and tanks that Egypt wants for showing off at military parades, or for a hypothetical war with one of its neighbors.

And then we should reprogram the bulk of the $1.2 billion subsidy where we can actually achieve something and where our help is appreciated. Think of what we could do with such a sum. We could make sure every Syrian refugee child can go to school. We could provide democratic Tunisia more of the support it needs to protect itself against returning foreign fighters and to get its economy going again. We could more quickly restore governance to liberated areas of Iraq and Syria. We could do more to help the victims of famine in Yemen. With just the teensiest fraction of that sum, my former bureau at the State Department could do more to help victims of torture and persecution in Egypt and elsewhere; it could make a huge contribution to our North Korea strategy by getting more uncensored information to the North Korean people; it could ensure that everyone in Iran has access to an uncensored internet in time for their presidential elections this year. That's just my list; I'm sure, Mr. Chairman, you could come up with your own.

I think our foreign policy would benefit from a more rational allocation of foreign aid spending. I also think that our relationship with Egypt, over time, would benefit if we could break out of the straightjacket of an outdated policy and stop providing it with support for which virtually no one in the US government can provide a positive justification. Let's try to imagine a policy tailored to our interests and values, and then work over time to put it into place.