

**The White House**

Office of the Press Secretary

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**FACT SHEET: "A Moment of Opportunity" in the Middle East and North Africa**

*"So we face an historic opportunity. We have embraced the chance to show that America values the dignity of the street vendor in Tunisia more than the raw power of the dictator. There must be no doubt that the United States of America welcomes change that advances self-determination and opportunity. Yes, there will be perils that accompany this moment of promise. But after decades of accepting the world as it is in the region, we have a chance to pursue the world as it should be."*

President Barack Obama  
May 19, 2011 Washington, DC

Today, recognizing the irreversible changes that have taken place in the Middle East and North Africa in recent months, President Obama announced a new approach to promoting democratic reform, economic development, and peace and security across the region.

**Aligning Our Interests and Our Values:** The President reaffirmed his commitment to a set of core principles that have guided the U.S. response to events in the Middle East and North Africa for the past six months. First, the United States opposes the use of violence and repression against the people of the region. Second, we support a set of universal rights including free speech; the freedom of peaceful assembly and association; equality for men and women under the rule of law; the right to practice your religion without fear of violence or discrimination; and the right to choose your own leaders through democratic elections. Third, we support political and economic change in the Middle East and North Africa that can meet the legitimate aspirations of the people throughout the region.

Our support for these principles is a top priority and central to the pursuit of other interests in the region. The U.S. will marshal all our diplomatic, economic, and strategic tools to support these principles. The status quo is not fair, nor stable. And it can no longer secure the core interests of the United States. Ultimately, our values and our interests will be better advanced by a region that is more democratic and prosperous.

**Promoting Democratic Reform:** It will be the policy of the United States to promote reform across the region and to support transitions to democracy. Real and durable democratic change in Tunisia and Egypt could have a transformative effect on the region and beyond. We will support free and fair elections, a vibrant civil society, basic rights to speak your mind and access information, and strong democratic institutions in both nations. We will empower women as drivers of peace and prosperity, supporting their right to run for office and meaningfully participate in decision-making because, around the world, history shows that countries are more prosperous and peaceful when women are more empowered. And we will deliver an economic program that reinforces our strong support for the transitions that are now underway.

The United States will also stand up for human rights and democracy in those countries where transitions have yet to take place. We will make the case to our partners that reform is in our shared interest. We will be a strong voice for democratic reform - a message we will deliver consistently, at high-levels, and across the U.S. government. We will strengthen and protect advocates for reform. Our message to governments in the region will be simple and clear: if you take the risks that reform entails, you will have the support and partnership of the United States.

**A New Chapter of American Diplomacy:** As the U.S. continues to work with governments, we will broaden and elevate our engagement with the people of the region. Building on our efforts since Cairo, our engagement will reach beyond elites and extend beyond capitals, cultivating reformist voices both inside and outside government. We will engage with and listen to those that will shape the future, particularly young people and women. Across the region, we will provide assistance to legitimate and independent groups, including some not officially recognized by governments. And we will expand and deepen our ties with entrepreneurs, and our cooperation on science and technology. We will engage, too, with all groups that reject violence, support democratic practices, and respect the rights of minorities, even if we don't agree with them. Using the same connective technologies that helped power the protests, we will connect and listen to the people of the region and factor the concerns of all these individuals and groups into our policy choices.

Making this strategic shift in our own approach will not always be easy. It demands that we renew and reshape our partnerships with governments in the region, and forge a deeper connection to a new generation that is desperate for a new beginning. President Obama will issue a Presidential Directive in the coming weeks to direct his Cabinet and national security team to put this new approach into action.

The United States is already putting this approach into practice across the region:

- **Bahrain:** The United States is committed to Bahrain's security. However, we believe that reform is the only path to enduring stability in Bahrain and that both sides must compromise to forge a just future for all

Bahrainis. The only way forward is for the government and opposition to engage in a dialogue. The government must create the conditions for dialogue, and the opposition must participate to forge a just future for all Bahrainis.

- **Egypt:** The United States supports an orderly, peaceful, and legitimate transition to a representative and responsive government committed to democratic principles in Egypt. It is important to empower positive models, and Egypt is critical as the largest Arab country and an enduring partner of the United States. We are encouraged by some of the steps that the interim government has taken on the political front, and we support a fully transparent and inclusive process moving forward. The U.S. is working with the international community to identify ways to stabilize Egypt's economy in the short-term and promote economic policies for the medium and long-term that will help ensure economic prosperity accompanies the transition.
- **Jordan:** The United States is committed to our long-standing partnership with Jordan – a regional leader on political and economic reform. We recognize the government's efforts to respond to the legitimate demands of citizens through the National Dialogue Committee, and urge Jordan's leadership to seize this opportunity to advance meaningful reforms. U.S. economic assistance supports Jordan's economic growth and development and promotes political, economic, and social reforms through programs in judicial reform, education, public health, job creation, and youth empowerment. We are also working with non-governmental partners in Jordan to cultivate a vibrant civil society. The United States also remains committed to Jordan's security and continues to provide security assistance aimed at, among other things, modernizing the Jordanian military and enhancing border security.
- **Libya:** The United States led an international effort to intervene in Libya to stop a massacre – joining with our allies at the UN Security Council to pass a historic resolution that authorized a no-fly zone and further authorized all necessary measures to protect the Libyan people. At the start of the air campaign, the President pledged to the American people that U.S. military action would be limited in duration and scope and that we would ultimately transition from a U.S. to a coalition lead. The President has made good on that pledge. Now that we have transitioned to a NATO lead, we will continue to play an important role in the international community's effort to put pressure on Col. Qaddafi and to protect innocent civilians that his regime continues to attack. The President has made clear, Qaddafi has lost the confidence of the Libyan people and he must go. At the same time, the United States is engaging and assisting the Transitional National Council, a legitimate and credible interlocutor, which is committed to an inclusive, democratic political transition in Libya. We are also working to address humanitarian needs in Libya and along its borders.
- **Morocco:** The United States supports Morocco's efforts to promote ongoing democratic development through constitutional, judicial, and political reforms. We recognize the Moroccan government's efforts to respond to the demands of its citizens and we urge the government to implement these crucial reforms. We are working with the people and the government of Morocco to support their efforts to consolidate the rule of law, protect human rights, improve governance, empower youth, and work towards meaningful constitutional reform. This includes a robust dialogue on human rights and political freedom.
- **Syria:** The United States condemns the Syrian government's murder and mass arrests of its people. We have imposed additional sanctions on the regime, including on President Assad and his inner circle. We stand by the Syrian people who have shown their courage in demanding dignity and a transition to democracy. President Assad now has a choice: he can lead that transition, or get out of the way.
- **Tunisia:** The United States is committed to supporting the Tunisian people as they build the stronger democratic foundations needed for long-term stability and broad-based economic growth. We welcome the significant steps that have been taken to advance the democratic transition, and will support Tunisians inside and outside of government as they hold democratic elections, craft a new constitution, and implement a broad-based reform agenda. We will support a new partnership between Tunisian civil society groups and technology companies in order to get more information, communications capacity available broadly throughout society.
- **Yemen:** The United States supports the aspirations of the Yemeni people for a more stable, unified, and prosperous nation, and we are committed to assisting them in this courageous pursuit. We are also committed to assisting Yemen to eradicate the security threat from al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula. President Saleh needs to follow through on his commitment to transfer power. We support a peaceful and orderly transfer of power that begins immediately.

**Supporting Economic Development:** To ensure that democratic change is reinforced by increasing economic opportunity, the President laid out a new economic vision for the region to support nations that commit to transition to democracy. We will also focus on rooting out corruption and other barriers to progress. Our efforts will create incentives for nations to pursue a path to democracy and modern economies and will also help tap the enormous potential of the region's young people. Our approach is based around four key pillars – support for economic policy formulation, support for economic stability, support for economic modernization, and the development of a framework for trade integration and investment.

- **Support for Better Economic Management:** We will offer concrete support to foster improved economic policy formulation and management alongside our democratization efforts. We will focus not only on promoting economic fundamentals, but also transparency and the prevention of corruption. We will use our bilateral programs to support economic reform preparations, including outreach and technical assistance from our governments, universities, and think tanks to regional governments that have embraced reform, individuals, and NGOs. We will mobilize the knowledge and expertise of international financial institutions to support home grown reforms that increase accountability.

- **Support for Economic Stability:** Egypt and Tunisia have begun their transitions. Their economic outlooks

were positive before recent events, but they are now facing a series of economic dislocations.

- **Galvanizing Financial Support:** We are galvanizing financial support from international financial institutions and Egypt and Tunisia's regional partners to help meet near term financial needs.
- **Turning the Debts of the Past Into Investments in the Future:** The United States will relieve Egypt of up to \$1 billion in debt by designing a debt swap arrangement, and swap it in a way that allows Egypt to invest these resources in creating jobs and fostering entrepreneurship.
- **Support for Economic Modernization:** We realize that the modernization of the economies in Middle East and North Africa will require a stronger private sector. To address that, we are committed to working with our international counterparts to support a reorientation of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to support countries in the region. The Bank played a crucial role in supporting democratization and economic transition in Central and Eastern Europe and can make a great contribution in Middle East and North Africa as well. We also seek to establish Egyptian-American and Tunisian-American Enterprise Funds to stimulate private sector investment, to promote projects and procedures that support competitive markets, and to encourage public/private partnerships. And as Secretary Clinton announced in Cairo, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) will provide up to \$2 billion dollars in financial support for private sectors throughout the MENA region.
- **Develop a Framework for Trade Integration and Investment:** The United States will launch a comprehensive Trade and Investment Partnership Initiative in the Middle East and North Africa. We will work with the European Union as we launch step-by-step initiatives that will facilitate more robust trade within the region, build on existing agreements to promote greater integration with U.S. and European markets, and open the door for those countries who adopt high standards of reform and trade liberalization to construct a regional trade arrangement.

(For more detail, see the **Economic Support for the Middle East and North Africa Fact Sheet**, see: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/18/factsheet-economic-support-middle-east-and-north-africa>)

**Promoting Peace and Security:** Even as we change our policy approach in response to political and economic changes in region, the United States maintains its commitment to pursue peace and stability in the region. We remain committed to our non-proliferation agenda in the region and worldwide and continue to demand that Iran meets its international obligation to halt its nuclear weapons program. Our counterterrorism agenda is as robust as ever, as evidenced by the recent takedown of Osama bin Laden. We will continue to take the fight to al Qa`ida and its affiliates wherever they are.

**The Broad Outlines of Middle East Peace:** The President seeks to shape an environment in which negotiations can restart when the parties are ready. He intends to do this laying out principles on territorial borders and security.

On territory, the boundaries of Israel and the Palestinian state should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps. On security the Palestinian state must be non-militarized, and the full and phased withdrawal of Israeli forces would be geared to the ability of Palestinian security forces and other arrangements as agreed to prevent a resurgence of terrorism; stop the infiltration of weapons; and provide effective border security. The duration of this transition period must be agreed, and may vary for different areas like borders. But it must be sufficient to demonstrate the effectiveness and credibility of security arrangements. Once Palestinians can be confident in the outlines of their state, and Israelis are confident that the new Palestinian state will not imperil its security, the parties will be in a position to grapple with the core issues of refugees and Jerusalem.

Ultimately, it is up to Israelis and Palestinians to take action. No peace can be imposed upon them, nor can endless delay make the problem go away. But what America and the international community can do is state frankly what everyone knows: a lasting peace will involve two states for two peoples. Israel as a Jewish state and the homeland for the Jewish people, and the state of Palestine as the homeland for the Palestinian people; each state enjoying self-determination, mutual recognition, and peace.

**Ending the Combat Mission in Iraq, Building a Strategic Partnership:** President Obama kept his commitment to responsibly end our combat mission in Iraq, bringing home 100,000 troops and transitioning to a full Iraqi lead for security in the country. Consistent with the 2008 Security Agreement, the United States intends to withdraw our remaining troops by the end of the year, while our civilians strengthen an enduring partnership with the Iraqi people and government in economic, diplomatic, cultural, and security fields.

**Surged in Afghanistan:** The strategy in Afghanistan is working. With the addition of 30,000 U.S. forces, nearly 10,000 coalition forces, and almost 1000 civilians, the surge is achieving its intended effect. We have arrested the Taliban's momentum and placed the insurgency under significant military pressure. Increasingly, our collective efforts are focused intensely on providing trainers and funding for Afghan National Security Forces to support their assuming lead security responsibility, significantly growing the Afghan Security Forces to nearly 300,000. Even as we begin to reduce our U.S. combat forces this July, and increasingly focus on advising and assisting the Afghan security forces, we are working toward completion of a renewed partnership agreement with the Afghans that will affirm our enduring commitment to stability in Afghanistan. Finally, we are equally committed to an Afghan-led political process toward a peaceful resolution.

**Focused on Al Qa`ida:** We have applied unprecedented pressure to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qa`ida and its adherents. We have disrupted plots at home, and increased military, intelligence, and diplomatic support to

expand the capacity of our partners from Pakistan to Yemen; from Southeast Asia to Somalia. Over half of Al Qaeda's top leadership has been killed or captured, including, most recently, Al Qaeda's leader, Osama bin Laden. As the President noted in announcing Bin Laden's death to the American people, his demise does not mark the end of our effort, as al-Qa`ida remains intent on and capable of striking the United States and our partners.

**Political Change in the Middle East and North Africa:** The United States has demonstrated with its response to the political change in the Middle East and North Africa that promoting representative, responsive governance is a core tenet of U.S. foreign policy and directly contributes to our counterterrorism goals. Governments that place the will of their people first and encourage peaceful change through their policies, systems, and actions directly contradict the al-Qa`ida ideology, which at its core advocates for violent change and dismisses the right of the people to choose how they will be governed. Effective governance reduces the traction and space for al-Qa`ida, limiting its resonance and contributing to what it most fears—irrelevance.

**Standing Up for Universal Rights in Iran:** The Administration has strongly condemned Iran's violent repression at home and will continue to call on the government of Iran to allow the Iranian people the universal right to peacefully assemble and communicate. Just as we hold Iran accountable for its defiance of its international obligations on the nuclear program, we will continue to take actions to hold the Iranian government accountable for its gross human rights violations, including by designating Iranian officials and entities engaged in such violations. We will continue to provide capacity building training and new media tools to help Iranian citizens and civil society make their voices heard in calling for greater freedoms, transparency, and rule of law from their government.