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The Road Ahead: U.S. Interests, Values, and the American People

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Madeleine K. Albright
Former Secretary of State
United States of America
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Stephen J. Hadley
Former National Security Advisor
United States of America
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**“The Road Ahead: U.S. Interests, Values, and the American People”
Submitted Statement of Madeleine K. Albright and Stephen J. Hadley
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
Thursday, March 30, 2017**

Thank you Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and other distinguished members of the committee.

We are grateful for the opportunity to testify before you this morning on the road ahead for U.S. interests, values, and the American people. In our testimony, we would like to offer our perspective on the current challenges to the international system, share some insights relevant to this topic from our *Middle East Strategy Task Force*, and suggest some ways in which Congress might be able to help forge a new bipartisan consensus on American foreign policy.

America’s Role in the World

This hearing comes at a time of deep political divisions at home and heightened instability abroad. At this pivotal moment, we believe there needs to be a national debate about how and why America engages in the world. We also believe that Congress has a vital role to play in convening this debate, given its representative nature and the responsibilities given to it by the Constitution.

Over the past seventy years, Democratic and Republican administrations alike have understood that American security and prosperity at home are linked to economic and political health abroad, and that America does better when other countries have the incentive and the capacity to work alongside us in tackling global challenges. This is why we constructed a system of international institutions and security alliances after World War II. They provided a framework for advancing economic openness and political freedom in the years that followed.

The international order America built and led has not been perfect, but it has coincided with a period of security and prosperity unmatched in human history. And while many nations benefited from the investments America made in global security and prosperity, none benefited more than the United States.

Yet today, the value of America’s global engagement is under question. A substantial number of Americans feel that their lives and livelihoods have been threatened rather than enhanced by it. They view international trade as having shuttered the factories at which they worked, immigrants as threatening their standard of living or safety, and globalization as undermining American culture.

This popular dissatisfaction needs to be understood and acknowledged. Washington needs to ensure that the benefits of America’s international engagement are shared by all of our citizens. But we also need to be clear about the consequences of disengagement. For while it is comforting to believe that we can wall ourselves off from the ailments of the world, history teaches us that whenever problems abroad are allowed to fester and grow, sooner or later, they come home to America.

Isolationism and retreat do not work; we know because we have tried them before.

We also know, from recent experience, that if America recedes from the global stage, people in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East will increasingly look elsewhere for inspiration and guidance – whether to authoritarianism or extremist ideology.

In our opinion, such a shift would be harmful to the interests of those populations, but it would be harmful above all to the interests of the United States, because our security and our prosperity depend on having friends abroad that share our values – including our belief in the rule of law, freedom of movement, and access to markets.

Neither Russia nor China proclaim the same loyalty to those principles as we do. Were they to fill a vacuum left by the United States, it could very well mark a return to a balance of power system, where the world's major powers competed militarily for territory and spheres of influence at great human and financial cost. This is a world to which none of us should want to return.

America's continued global leadership cannot be taken for granted, but a retreat into isolationism is not preordained. We have an opportunity – and, in our view, an obligation – to defend those aspects of the international system that work in the twenty-first century, and to adapt those that do not.

In doing so, we should acknowledge that the existing order is in need of revision and refurbishment. The international system was designed for a different era, and it requires a renewal of purpose and a reform of its structures. Its mission should more clearly extend beyond preventing war in Europe to include stabilizing other strategic regions that affect our well-being. Its approach should reflect the fact that long-term stability depends on well-governed states whose leaders are seen as legitimate by their people. And its structure must be adapted to the realities of a world in which power is more diffuse, so other countries can take on a greater role commensurate with the contributions they make and the responsibilities they assume.

China, Russia, and other countries should understand that there is a larger place for them at the decision-making table, provided they are constructive and respect the interests of other nations. And they need to understand that there will be costs if they do not.

For this and other reasons, U.S. military power will remain vital in a renewed international order. We appreciate efforts to ensure that our military remains the best-trained, best-equipped, and best-led force on earth. Given the variety of threats facing our country, it makes sense to continue upgrading and enhancing our country's military capabilities and deterrent power. But we strongly believe that it would be a mistake to increase defense spending at the expense of other critical investments in national security – especially those in diplomacy, development, democracy, and peacebuilding.

We know from experience that force, and the credible possibility of its use, are essential to defend our vital interests and keep America safe. But as one of us has said in the past, force alone can be a blunt instrument, and there are many problems it cannot solve. Our military leaders would be the first to tell you that they cannot succeed in their missions without the vital capabilities that our civilian agencies bring to the table. Gutting these capabilities will put an unacceptable burden on our men and women in uniform, and would make America less safe. We

need to fund these other civilian elements of American power as robustly as we do the military element.

We recognize that government can always be made more efficient and effective, but the best way to accomplish that goal is to build a budget based on a sound strategy. This administration first needs to take the time to staff the Departments and agencies, and to develop a national security strategy. As members of the legislative branch, it is your responsibility to ensure that every dollar is spent wisely, but it also your responsibility to protect our national security institutions from arbitrary and senseless cuts.

The Middle East Strategy Task Force

No region has seen more death and suffering or presented more challenges to the international order than the Middle East, with outcomes that have frustrated both Democratic and Republican administrations. The Middle East is likely to be an important test case in the coming years – the region in which the international order gets rejuvenated for a new era or ceases to function entirely.

From 2015 to 2016, we served as Co-Chairs of the Atlantic Council’s *Middle East Strategy Task Force*, which sought to understand better the underlying challenges in the region and to articulate a long-term strategy for meeting them. Our goal was not to develop a new U.S. strategy, but to understand the role that the U.S. can play in supporting a larger international effort led by the region itself.

One of our initial insights was that we face not just a crisis *in* the Middle East, but *from* the Middle East having global impact. The roots of this crisis lie in a long history of poor governance in many states in the region. The Arab Spring was a consequence of the dissatisfaction of increasingly connected and empowered citizens with a number of political leaders who ruled ineptly and often corruptly. Where leaders sought to quash these popular protests by force, the result in most cases was civil war.

The four civil wars raging in the Middle East – in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen – have had destabilizing consequences for the region and beyond. They have produced the ungoverned spaces and grievances that have allowed terrorist groups to direct or inspire attacks in the West. They have also created the greatest worldwide refugee crisis since the Second World War, the devastating human cost of which has been coupled with profound effects on our own domestic politics and those of Europe.

The challenges we face in the Middle East bear some resemblance to those of post-war Europe. Countries torn apart by war will need to determine the new shape of their governments, and how those governments interact with their people. The entire state system will need to be shored up so that countries are less prone to subversion, supported by effective regional institutions to mediate conflicts and prevent them from spiraling into all-out war.

But there are also important differences between the modern Middle East and post-war Europe. There is no magnanimous victor in the mold of the Allies, with the will and capability to reshape the region from the outside. New global and political realities mean that no Marshall Plan is in the offing for the rebuilding of the Middle East. The American people have no appetite

for this, and the people of the region, too, are tired of being beholden to outside powers. The Middle East must chart its own vision for the future.

There is reason for hope. The fact is that now, more than any time in the Middle East's modern history, the region has significant capabilities and resources of its own to define and work toward this vision and secure better opportunities for its people. And more than ever, there are also indications that people and some governments in the Middle East have the will to take on the region's hard challenges.

Although not always evident at first glance, there are promising developments happening in the Middle East, even in the most unexpected places. In Saudi Arabia, female entrepreneurs are founding startup companies at a rate three times that of women in Silicon Valley, as they begin to claim their rightful place in Saudi civic life. In Egypt, the social enterprise Nafham is using technological solutions to address the problem of overcrowding in Egyptian schools. And in Jordan, Syrian refugees are using innovative 3D printing technology to help develop more affordable prosthetic limb components for friends and neighbors who bear the physical scars of Bashar Assad's war on his own people. The region's vast population of educated youth, commonly understood to be a liability, can in fact be a tremendous asset.

Some governments are beginning to understand that their future depends on promoting these efforts and partnering with their people to build a common future. Tunisia is showing that revolution need not result in either chaos or authoritarianism, but can begin a transition to an inclusive, democratic future. The UAE has led the way for positive economic and social reforms and Saudi Arabia has now adopted its own vision for the future. Jordan is making its own efforts. These can be examples for other countries in the region.

Renewed and enhanced American leadership is needed in the Middle East. But not to impose our will militarily or otherwise. Instead, America has a clear interest in supporting and accelerating the positive changes that are already happening. The goal of our strategy in the region should be to help the Middle East move from the current vicious cycle in which it finds itself to a more virtuous one -- one in which the Middle East no longer spawns violence and refugees, is not a drain on international resources, and does not through its instability and political vacuums aggravate great power competition.

With this goal in mind, US foreign policy toward the Middle East should be informed by a set of guiding principles that represent the new reality of the region since 2011.

First, the old order is gone and is not coming back. Stability will not be achieved until a new regional order takes shape. The region should assume the principal responsibility for defining this new order, which should offer the people of the region the prospect of a stable and prosperous future free from both terrorist violence and government oppression.

Second, disengagement is not a practical solution for the West. Disengagement will only allow the region's problems to spread and deepen unchecked, creating further threats. Instead, it is in the interest of the United States and others to help the Middle East achieve a more peaceful vision. But their role must be different from what it has been in the past. Rather than dictating from the outside how countries should behave, they should support and facilitate the positive efforts that some people and governments in the region are beginning to take.

Third, a strategy for the region should focus on more than counterterrorism. Pernicious as they are, groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda are not the sole cause of the current crises. Even if these groups disappeared tomorrow, others would arise in their place so long as the underlying grievances that led to the Arab Spring remain unresolved.

Fourth, sectarian and ethnic rivalries are not as entrenched or inevitable in the Middle East as many assume. Instead, they wax and wane with broader tensions in the region. Achieving political solutions to the civil wars would go far in stanching these communal tensions. To this end, empowered local governance will be essential going forward, so as to allow people the freedom to shape their own communities.

Finally, the Middle East cannot build a better future without the active participation of the people of the region—including women, youth, minorities, and those displaced by conflict. If enabled and empowered, they can be the engines of job creation, help motivate the broader population, and innovate solutions to the region's economic and social problems. It is high time for all of us to bet on the people of the region, not just on the states.

With these guiding principles in mind, we have, in our Middle East Strategy Task Force report, proposed a two-pronged strategy that we think will be able, over time, to change the trajectory of the region in a more positive direction, to the benefit of people in the region and the United States.

The first prong involves outside actors helping partner countries in the region to wind down the violence, starting with the four civil wars. This means containing the spread of the current conflicts and accelerating diplomatic efforts to resolve them, while addressing the staggering humanitarian crises that they have generated.

The most immediate priorities must be 1) mitigating the current human suffering in Syria and 2) recapturing the territory that ISIS now controls. A third, longer-term priority is to contain Iran's aggressive foreign policy behavior while still exploring opportunities to engage with it. Achieving these priorities will require a limited but greater degree of American and allied engagement in the region, diplomatic as well as military. This greater engagement and the kind of concrete steps we recommend in our report, taken together, will rally and reassure America's friends and allies in the region, send a message of strength to its adversaries, and provide additional leverage for the United States to work with all internal and external players to end these destabilizing wars.

The second prong of the strategy, which must be pursued simultaneously with the first prong, seeks to support **now** those bottom-up efforts that will create the social basis for stability and prosperity. This means supporting the citizen-based entrepreneurial and civic activity occurring throughout the region. It also means encouraging regional governments to facilitate these efforts, to invest in the education and empowerment of their people, and to address the societal, economic, and governance issues that are key to future peace and success.

Ultimately, this prong seeks to unlock the significant human potential in the Middle East. Governments in the region need to create the enabling environment for individuals to deploy fully their talents, whether as innovators, entrepreneurs, or just engaged citizens. This means better and fairer legal and regulatory frameworks, but also more inclusive, effective, transparent, and accountable governance more generally.

The United States should support those governments that are trying to create such an enabling environment. The idea is to create a “more-for-more” relationship with countries in the region that are trying to do right by their people. The more ambitious the efforts for change in the region, the more support countries should expect from the United States—not as charity or aid, but because it is a good investment of resources likely to yield solid returns on our security. By the same token, where countries are not taking steps for change, they should not expect support—not because we wish to punish them, but because it would be a waste of our own limited resources.

Most importantly, the American approach toward the Middle East needs to be colored with a good deal of humility. This is the most difficult problem that either of us has seen in our careers, and it won’t be solved overnight. We all should be steeled for the long term, and prepared to weather setbacks when they come—and they will. But the good news is that our country has succeeded at long-term foreign policy challenges such as this before, not least the rebuilding of Europe after World War II and ending the Cold War. America’s efforts were strengthened by a bipartisan national consensus regarding the importance of these missions and the soundness of the principles upon which they were based. It is time to forge a similar national consensus on our approach to the Middle East and, more broadly, the world.

Conclusion: The Role of Congress

Congress, especially the U.S. Senate, has an incredibly important role to play in forging such a consensus. It is our belief that Congress should:

- 1) Help start a national debate regarding America’s role in the world;
- 2) On the basis of that debate, forge a bipartisan strategy for American leadership to build a revised and revitalized international order for the 21st century;
- 3) Insist that American efforts to defeat ISIS and al Qaeda are embedded within a larger strategy to make the Middle East over time more stable and prosperous;
- 4) Ensure that U.S. efforts at diplomacy, peacebuilding, advancing democracy and development do not get shortchanged as we increase our expenditures on defense; and
- 5) Through its legislative actions, provide reassurances to our friends and allies regarding America’s continued commitment to their defense and to a rules-based international system.

We thank you again for this opportunity to testify before you and look forward to your questions.

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