

**Remarks as Prepared for Delivery**  
**Deputy National Security Advisor Denis McDonough Remarks**  
**U.S.-Islamic World Forum**  
**Doha, Qatar**  
**May 30, 2012**

Thank you, Martin, for that kind introduction. And Tamara, it is good to see you, although I much preferred seeing you more regularly in the White House Situation Room, where we miss you dearly. And no one misses you more than Secretary Clinton and President Obama, who relied on your expertise and good judgment to help us navigate the first year of the Arab Spring.

A special thanks to Steve Grand, Shadi Hamid, Salman Sheikh, and everyone from the Brookings Center.

I also want to mention a few distinguished guests in the audience. Rashad Hussein, we are grateful for all your incredible work to strengthen the ties between the United States and the Islamic world.

I would also like to acknowledge Imam Magid, a fine scholar and a great advocate for tolerance and ecumenism, as is another attendee and good friend, His Eminence Cardinal McCarrick.

Finally, I want to extend the President Obama's gratitude to His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani and His Excellency the Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabor al-Thani, for hosting this important dialogue. First, on behalf of the President, I would like to convey our deepest sympathies to the families of those that lost their lives Monday in the tragic mall fire.

When the Amir visited President Obama last spring in Washington, the President was impressed with his leadership on regional issues like Syria and Libya and on global issues like food security and climate. It is fitting that you gather again in Doha this year, after coming to Washington last year. Doha is at the geographic crossroads of the Islamic world, which stretches from Marrakesh to Kuala Lumpur. In the United States, we're proud to be home to more than 3 million Muslim – so perhaps I should say that the Muslim world stretches from Minneapolis, in my home state of Minnesota, which is represented in the U.S. Congress by a Muslim American Congressman, to Kuala Lumpur.

The theme of this year's Forum is timely: across the Middle East and North Africa, a new generation is rising, raising its voice and seeking a new direction.

The challenges and opportunities of this change are things that President Obama understands well. In fact, bringing about change has been central to his life in public service and it shapes his approach to American foreign policy, especially in this region.

Consider that in 2009, many of our relationships across this region were either frayed or stagnant. We were weighed down by two wars, Osama bin Laden was still on the run, Iran believed itself ascendant, and the prospect of real democratic reform in the region seemed to be a distant dream.

What a difference three years makes. Today, let me focus on three areas in particular where the relationship between the United States and this region is changing particularly.

First, President Obama is fulfilling his promise to move the United States beyond a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, even as we continue to meet the very real threat from Al-Qaeda.

In his speech in Cairo, President Obama said that he would “remove all of our troops from Iraq by 2012.” This like so many of his other accomplishments is what the United States did. The last American troops left Iraq in December. For the first time in nine years, there are no Americans fighting in Iraq. Now, instead, we’re building an enduring partnership to advance the security and prosperity of the Iraqi people.

In Afghanistan, we are also winding down a war. As a result of the good work of coalition troops and Afghan Security Forces, President Karzai recently announced that 75 percent of all Afghans now live in areas that are in the process of transitioning to Afghan security forces lead. At the NATO Summit last week in Chicago, our allies and partners—a group of 50 nations—unified behind the plan to begin to bring the war to responsible close. Afghan forces will be in the lead for combat operations across the country by next year—and by the end of 2014 will be fully responsible for security across the country.

As we responsibly end the war in Afghanistan, we have also learned the lessons of 1989 in that country. We have signaled our long-term commitment to Afghanistan through the Strategic Partnership Agreement that Presidents Obama and Karzai signed in Kabul earlier this month in Kabul. In that partnership, we committed to support Afghanistan’s social and economic development, security, institutions and regional cooperation. In return, the Afghan government committed to strengthen accountability, transparency, oversight, and to protect the human rights of all Afghans – men and women, boys and girls.

This progress in Iraq and Afghanistan is changing America’s military footprint in this region. Four years ago, the United States had 180,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. We’ve already cut that number by more than half. And as more Afghans step up, more of our forces will come home. In words and deeds, we are turning the page on a decade of war, and bringing about a new chapter of engagement with Iraq, Afghanistan, and, as you have all discussed, Muslim communities around the globe.

We are under no illusions about how hard these wars have been, both for our own troops and for the citizens who have lived through them. What cannot be denied, however, is that positive change that can be seen in Afghanistan and Iraq. Both countries now have the opportunity to affirm their own sovereignty and shape their own future.

In Iraq, if the country’s leaders choose to govern for all Iraqis rather than themselves, there is remarkable potential to create new wealth and opportunity. For the first time in decades, a democratically elected partnership government brings together all the major blocs, and the multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian military answers to the civilians. To be sure, the partnership government is unwieldy and fraught with tension, and success will require difficult compromise. But the fact

is that politics has supplanted violence as the means by which each group seeks to protect and advance its own interests.

And in Afghanistan, we are hopeful that as we complete the security transition I just talked about, a political process can reconcile Afghans with one another, and allow the Afghan people to live in the peace that has eluded them for too long, while protecting the gains – for women and girls, especially – of the last decade.

At the same time, we are winning the war against Al-Qaeda. Since the beginning of this Administration, we have made it clear that we are not at war with Islam, which is a great world religion; nor are we at war with terrorism, which is a tactic. We are at war with Al-Qaeda – an organization whose only aim is to destroy, not build. An organization whose attacks have resulted in the deaths of innocent men, women, and children—the vast majority of whom have been Muslim. What some have dubbed the “long war, we have instead made a much more focused war. The death of bin Laden was our most strategic blow yet against Al-Qaeda, and has enabled us to put Al-Qaeda on a pathway to defeat.

In Pakistan, Al-Qaeda’s leadership has continued to suffer heavy losses. We’ve put the leadership core in the tribal regions on the path to defeat. In other areas, we will continue to work with our partners to deliver blows against Al-Qaeda affiliates, like Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. But more importantly we believe that the changes that are sweeping across this region—where a new generation is peacefully affecting the change that Al-Qaeda’s senseless violence could never bring – will continue driving Al-Qaeda and its tired narrative further into irrelevance.

Last week, at our Air Force Academy, President Obama described how – even as we’ve done the work of ending these wars, we’ve laid the foundation for a new era of American leadership—an era where we work with other nations using all the elements of our power – diplomatic, economic, development, and the power of our ideals. You see this new, broader engagement around the world. And you see it particularly in this region.

Of course, this shift away from war comes at a time when this region is undergoing profound change. President Obama views this intersection as a tremendous opportunity for the United States and our partners in the region to focus on a new, affirmative agenda.

With the end of these wars and broader American engagement, we have an unprecedented opportunity to focus more closely on the challenges that matter most to millions of people in their daily lives: how to provide a bright future for all of our children, how to confront and end global poverty, how to fight corruption, promote good governance, enhance political reform, human rights, and economic growth.

What’s clear about the events of the past year and a half is that change has now come to the region and, importantly, there is no going back. There are now four countries undergoing democratic transitions – Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. For the first time, the Egyptian people went to the polls just last week to vote in an election for President where they had a very real choice. This election marks an important milestone in Egypt’s transition to democracy, and we look forward to working with whomever the Egyptian people elect as their president in the

runoff next month. The Libyan people are preparing for their first democratic election in the history of their country. And Tunisians are drafting a new constitution.

There are of course risks in the Arab Spring. Change is difficult, and it is never linear. The transitions underway face enormous challenges. It will take decades – not years, decades – for the change unleashed in the streets of Tunis and Tahrir Square to play out. New governments will be tested by their circumstances and will be judged by their actions. There are high expectations among the people to deliver swiftly on the promises of the revolutions in these new times.

So let me speak candidly about the role of the United States.

First, history will show that we stood on the side of change from the beginning of these events. We embraced the transformation in Tunisia. We sided with the aspirations of citizens on the streets in Egypt, even though the United States knew very well the leader that was overthrown, because we believe Egypt is made stronger by electing a government that is responsive to its people. We led an intervention to protect the Libyan people. We worked diligently, for months – literally months – to support the transition of power that has taken place in Yemen. And in countries like Bahrain, which I just visited, Morocco and Jordan, we have been advocates for reform. And in Syria, we stand for the dignity of the Syrian people, who deserve a new government that represents its citizens instead of killing them.

As the President made clear last May, the United States has a long-standing core national interest in the region that endures and on which we will continue to aggressively engage, including preserving the peace treaty with Israel, maintaining the free flow of commerce, preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, and disrupting terrorist threats. But we also affirm, as the President did last May, our interest in the success of the change that is sweeping the region. There should be no doubt: the United States has a vital national interest in the consolidation of democratic change, and the emergence of governments that are more responsive to their people.

The theory that repressive rule was a recipe for stability has fundamentally been proven wrong; it was, in fact, as we've seen, a path to instability. Unless the foundations of rule of law, accountability, transparency and justice are strengthened, the region risks falling behind the rest of the world. Until reforms are made to advance inclusive economic growth, attract private investment, increase trade, and cultivate entrepreneurship, the next generation will find it increasingly difficult to compete in a global economy. Indeed we have seen in other regions how these processes are interdependent: freedom, dignity, transparency and accountability are the necessary components for sustainable growth and stability.

I know there is debate – including among all of you at this conference – about what role the United States has played and should play in a part of the world where history is so complex and, in candor, so close at hand. On one hand, there are those who advocate more direct U.S. involvement to help solve problems; others do not want the United States to meddle in the affairs of these or any other countries.

So, let me be clear. When we say we are not going to determine the destiny of change, we mean what we say. It is not up to America to determine the region's leaders, or write your

Constitutions. We respect – and will continue to respect – the will of the people. We will work with whomever you elect, provided they respect universal rights.

At the same time we are prepared to be a partner. This is why the President said in May last year that “If you take the risks that reform entails, you will have the full support of the United States.” This is manifest in the political partnerships we are building with newly elected governments, and the economic support we are providing countries in transition. Over the past year, we have already mobilized \$800 million to support these transitions and lay foundations for sustained progress. Looking ahead, we will build on this, including through our proposed new Middle East and North Africa Incentive Fund, designed in part to support the efforts of those governments with the political will to commit to democratic change, build effective institutions, and take the often difficult steps needed to sustain broad-based economic growth. We are leveraging other economic tools, including loan guarantees, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and we are continuing to enlist help from the international community, especially through the G-8 Deauville Partnership, to reinforce our efforts.

President Obama has made it clear that America will lead on behalf of human dignity and freedom. We do so not just because it is at the core of who we are as Americans, but because it is also in our interests. Our closest allies and partners around the world are democracies. In this sense, in the most basic terms, the United States of America is bound fundamentally to the Arab Spring.

Earlier this month, I told another audience that the Arab Spring also plays to America’s comparative and competitive strengths – respect for the rights of the individual, freedom of expression and assembly, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

It is important to remember that America itself was born out of a revolution against an empire. We know what it means to construct a nation, to draft a constitution, to live by its mandate, to go to the polls, to build political parties.

But those are just the mechanics of democracy. The test of all democracies is ultimately whether they can hold themselves accountable. New governments emerging in the Middle East and North Africa will need to put into place their own checks and balances, protect and empower the weakest among them, ensure peaceful transfers of power between democratically elected governments, and celebrate, not fear, civil society.

Unfortunately, fear and brute force remain the currency of the Assad regime in Syria – a regime fundamentally at odds with the democratic forces sweeping the region. The violence the regime has perpetrated on the Syrian people negates any claims to legitimacy.

The most recent and appalling of the regime’s many atrocities was the Houla massacre – substantially, overwhelmingly of women and children – just this last weekend. You will hear the regime claim that local vigilantes known as *shabiha* committed over 100 murders and over 300 maimings in that town on Saturday, and that the regime itself bears no responsibility. This is a lie. We know that the regime controls the actions of the *shabiha*, and that regime insiders pay the salaries of these thugs.

President Obama has made our position on Syria imminently clear, but it bears repeating:

First, we will continue to support UN Security Council efforts to find a political solution to end the violence and lay the foundation for a democratic transition through Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan's efforts. However, it's our belief—and the evidence of this is mounting--that putting monitors into the country is not simply going to stop the violence. There needs to be a credible political transition process that gets underway.

Second, we will continue to work outside the United Nations with like-minded partners to increase pressure on the Assad regime through broad implementation of sanctions and through diplomatic isolation. The Friends of Syria group continues to work to undermine the political, military, and economic pillars that have kept the Syrian people divided against one another and the Assad regime in power.

Third, we are strangling the regime economically, and will tighten our concerted efforts to do so at a Friends of Syria meeting in Washington on June 6. Our objectives – and we are moving closer to them – are straightforward: to starve the regime of the resources it requires to pay the Army, and to deprive Assad's cronies of the money they need to buy the *shabiha*'s brutal complicity.

As part of our efforts, we will continue strengthen the Syrian people through the provision of non-lethal assistance—including communications and medical equipment – to the political opposition.

Finally, we will continue our work to lead the world in addressing the worsening humanitarian situation and provide emergency humanitarian aid to the Syrian people.

No one can know exactly when or how, but this much is certain: the Syrian people will indeed find justice. Like so many despotic regimes before it, the Assad clique will end up ultimately in the dustbin of history, and the people of Syria will have a chance to determine their own destiny.

When that happens, it will also be the most profound strategic setback that Syria's closest ally—Iran—has faced in decades. That is surely why Iran has provided material support and advice to the regime in brutalizing the Syrian people.

This weekend's admission from Tehran that, "If the Islamic Republic was not present in Syria, the massacre of the people would have happened on a much larger scale" is remarkable – though less so than the subsequent backtracking on official media sites that sought to cover up this earlier and stunning admission. The result of this cynical assistance has only further alienated Iran from the region. It is one more example of how Iran's leaders are fundamentally out of step with the region and with the world.

Since taking office, President Obama has made it clear that the United States is prepared to work with Iran on both its rights and responsibilities as a member of the international community. For the past three and a half years, we've offered Iran's leaders a choice—meet your international

obligations and rejoin the community of nations, or continue to flout your responsibilities and face even greater isolation and pressure.

At every turn, Iran's leaders have rejected logical, reasonable approaches to resolving the world's concerns about its nuclear program. At every turn, they have failed to seize the multiple opportunities before them. As a result, the international community is now more unified than ever. The world has imposed the strongest sanctions on Iran to date, which we believe is why they have returned, finally, to negotiations.

We pursue this path, not only in the interest of preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, which would have grave consequences for the security of this region and the world. We do so because we support the aspirations of the Iranian people—especially its young people—who deserve a future much better than their leaders are creating for them by failing to live up to their international responsibilities.

This brings me back to one part of the theme of this year's forum – new voices – and to the most important message that I want to leave with this audience today: the United States and the Islamic world have to work together to right the ship for the generations that follow.

As you all know, over 60% of the region is under the age of 30. Several countries have 30 percent or more of the population between the ages of 15 and 29, with some median ages dipping below 20. And even where the proportion of youth is dropping, the numbers will be rising for decades to come—requiring tens of millions of new jobs to employ these young people.

On top of this demographic challenge, this new generation is more empowered, connected, and vocal than any of its predecessors. Their expectations for civic and economic opportunity are rising, and we all must find a way to fulfill these aspirations.

Having driven several of the revolutions around the region, youth have shown their ability to shape public debate and challenge traditional order, but ensuring their political participation, economic opportunity, and voices are heard is essential to addressing both political and economic issues in the region going forward.

Where youth aspire to build stable and prosperous societies, the United States will stand with those aspirations and do everything it can to support them.

As the President said in Cairo, equipping this new generation for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will require providing the necessary education and skills, unlocking the potential of the region's girls and young women, and fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation.

Since then, the United States has prioritized engaging with this group and helping to marshal the best of American higher education, innovation, and society as partners in this effort.

On education, we have brokered dozens of partnerships between leading U.S. institutions and universities throughout the Muslim world.

We have expanded scholarships to enable students to access education in their own communities as well as in the United States. In the two years after President Obama's commitment in Cairo, the number of Middle Eastern and North African students studying in the United States increased by 25 percent.

But we don't simply see this as a one way exchange. Our citizens have much to learn from institutions and young people in this region, and in the years after the Cairo address, the number of U.S. students in the Middle East and North Africa has grown by 35 percent.

We have heard the desire among youth and governments alike to expand English-teaching to ensure young people are equipped with this critical skill to succeed in the global economy; we have expanded our English teaching programs 40 percent to now directly teach 20,000 students across the Muslim world, and thousands of teachers of English.

We have launched entrepreneurship and vocational skills training programs to ensure that the skills that youth acquire enable them to find economic opportunity in the workforce, helping to build innovative businesses.

We are expanding partnerships with industry associations and the private sector to help ensure that students graduate with the skills needed by the market; we are pairing young entrepreneurs with business mentors in the United States and run business plan competitions seeking young people's best and brightest ideas.

And finally, we also recognize that youth are not merely calling for education and better job opportunities. They are calling for dignity. This demands a role in deciding the future of their societies. We all have an interest in making sure the enthusiasm and interest displayed over the past two years does not atrophy or worse, sour.

But make no mistake, the United States can only be a partner in this endeavor. It is up to leaders in this room and in Muslim communities around the world, to take seriously the opportunities and challenges presented by this new young and growing generation.

In closing, I want to go back to something I said at the beginning. President Obama views the intersection of events in the region as an unbelievable and unprecedented opportunity for all of us. I know that for some people in this region –in fact some people in the room – for them the promise of the President's Cairo speech is yet to be fulfilled. I share that view. As President Obama has said, we knew that this vision would not be fulfilled in a single year, or even several years. But he knew we had to begin and that all of us have to take our part of the responsibility to fulfill.

So let me repeat what the President said at the end of that speech in Cairo: "We have a responsibility to join together on behalf of the world we seek – a world where extremists no longer threaten our people, and American troops have come home; a world where Israelis and Palestinians are each secure in a state of their own, and nuclear energy is used for peaceful purposes; a world where governments serve their citizens, and the rights of all God's children are respected. Those are mutual interests. That is the world we seek. But we can only achieve it together."

I can tell you today that President Obama firmly believes that those continue to be shared interests –and that, working together, in partnership, we can achieve them. So much progress has been made in the last three years, but there is much, much yet to be done. While the road we must take will be long and at times arduous, I am confident that we can achieve the world we seek if we move forward in a spirit of mutual interest, and mutual respect.

Thank you very much, and I very much look forward to the discussion.

###