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House of Representatives

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REP. STEPHEN F. LYNCH

Ranking Member

Subcommittee on National Security

“Moving the American Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem: Challenges and Opportunities”

Opening Statement

November 8, 2017 at 10:00am; 2154RHOB

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my understanding that today’s hearing will include an examination of the national security challenges related to the immediate relocation of the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. To this end, I’d like to thank our witnesses for helping this subcommittee today to help us with our work.

Our strong and enduring bilateral relationship with the state of Israel is founded on genuine bonds of friendship - and indeed, kinship - that are unshakeable. These profound and longstanding ties with our closest regional ally are reflected in our unwavering commitment to Israel’s security as well as robust U.S.-Israeli cooperation on a range of critical economic, intelligence, and defense matters. We also afford maximum respect to the historic and religious significance of Jerusalem and its holy sites to Israel.

I join the Chairman in my own experience and with many of our committee colleagues, having been to Jerusalem on many occasions, appreciate the religious freedom that is available now in Jerusalem. We’ve taken full advantage of those opportunities to spend time with our friends in Jerusalem and enjoy the wonderful benefits of that city.

The proposal to unilaterally and immediately relocate the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem instead presents the specific question of whether such action would truly protect and preserve U.S. – Israeli and regional security interests. I am strongly concerned that we must proceed with caution. That a decision unilaterally by the current Administration to simply disregard the positions of other regional partners on this matter that have been expressed by the Governments of Jordan, Egypt, and other regional Arab nation partners will prove ultimately detrimental to U.S., Israeli, and regional security interests.

In February of this year, King Abdullah of Jordan reported to members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee that moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem now unilaterally would threaten the two-state solution and could lead to a “*violent escalation*” in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Government of Jordan has also publicly warned that such action would have catastrophic ramifications on regional stability and would mark a “red line” for Jordan. I would note that Jordan is a key U.S. and coalition partner in countering the Islamic State - whose cooperation has included aircraft fly missions in support of Operation Inherent Resolve in Syria and Iraq as well as the deployment of Jordanian ground forces and special operators targeting Islamic State fighters along the Syrian-Jordanian and Iraqi-Jordanian borders. We are also working with the Jordanian government as it has accepted and continues to provide care for an influx of over 660,000 Syrian refugees to date.

In a cautionary note, Foreign Minister Samed Shoukry of Egypt, another regional security ally protecting the interests of Israel and the United States, and Democratic interests in the region, has called the proposed immediate embassy relocation a “*very inflammable issue*” and asserted that “*this is one of the final status issues that has to be addressed between the two sides...resolved through negotiations.*” Egypt is an official member of the global coalition to defeat the Islamic State. Moreover, about 700 U.S. troops are currently stationed in Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula as part of an international peacekeeping force that partners with the Egyptian military to stabilize the region against insurgents from the Islamic State-affiliated Sinai Province Group and other militant organizations.

In a statement submitted to our Subcommittee for this hearing, Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer – Ambassador to Israel under President George W. Bush and Ambassador to Egypt under President Clinton – notes that the immediate relocation of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem would not only cross a red line for the Palestinians but also “*for many Arab and Muslim states, including those with whom we share friendship and regional security interests.*” Ambassador Kurtzer additionally explains that “*if the United States were to engage in unilateral action on this central disputed issue, we would substantially undermine our ability to persuade the parties themselves, or other third parties, to avoid doing so.*”

So in essence, I’m just advising caution that we consider the regional security interests on this issue and we give respect to allies in the region. Moving forward, but proceeding with caution.

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