

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
OF GORDON GRAY
AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO THE
REPUBLIC OF TUNISIA
SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS**

JULY 7, 2009

Mr. Chairman, distinguished Members of the Committee, it is a pleasure and an honor to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be Ambassador to the Republic of Tunisia. I want to thank President Obama and Secretary Clinton for their confidence in me.

Before I start, I would also like to thank my wife, Connie, and our children Alex, Angela, and Christopher for their support and understanding throughout my career, and especially during this past year when I volunteered to serve at our Embassy in Iraq.

If confirmed by the Senate, I look forward to working hard every day to fulfill the duty of each and every Ambassador to protect American citizens, advance the interests of the United States, and promote our values.

I have a particular interest in North Africa, which began with my two years of service as a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco. More recently, I served for three years as the Deputy Chief of Mission at our Embassy in Egypt before returning to Washington for a three year assignment as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the region. If confirmed, I will work closely with this Committee and with Congress to advance America's interests in Tunisia and throughout North Africa.

The United States has a strong and continuous friendship with Tunisia, which extends back over two hundred years. This friendship began with the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, first signed in Tunis in 1797. Upon President Lincoln's assassination in 1865, the Bey of Tunis was the first head of state to offer his condolences. In World War II, Tunisian support was essential for the success of Allied troops against the Third Reich's forces in North Africa.

The friendship between the United States and Tunisia strengthened upon Tunisia's independence from France in 1956. We were the first major power to recognize Tunisia as an independent state, and American taxpayers provided millions of dollars of assistance to help Tunisia become one of the most economically and socially advanced countries in the region. Peace Corps volunteers and Agency for International Development experts further cultivated the spirit of partnership and good will between the Tunisian and American peoples. To this day, we appreciate Tunisia's continuing support for the North Africa American Cemetery and Memorial in Tunis, which is the resting place for three thousand U.S. troops who died in the line of duty in the Second World War.

In addition to our historic ties, the people of Tunisia and the United States have many common interests. These include advancing regional peace, combating terrorism, building prosperity, and promoting democratic values. I'd like to address each in turn.

- On regional peace, the United States and Tunisia share many common goals. We both want to strengthen the Arab Maghreb Union, whose Secretary General is a former Tunisian Foreign Minister. Tunisia sustains a solid commitment to United Nations peacekeeping missions in Africa and deploys medical and scientific experts to assist countries throughout the continent. Tunisia, like the United States, supports the reintegration of Iraq into the Middle East and – in marked contrast to many other countries – has maintained a continuous presence in Baghdad. Foreign Minister Abdullah represented Tunisia at the Annapolis Conference in November 2007, and – if confirmed by the Senate – I will work to encourage Tunisia to more vigorously promote its moderate perspective on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- Tunisia has been attacked by Al Qaeda, and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb constitutes a true threat to Tunisia. In late 2007, for example, two Austrian tourists were kidnapped by this terrorist group along the border region of Algeria and Tunisia. Tunisia has demonstrated its commitment to combating terrorism, both domestically and throughout the region, through its membership in the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership. If confirmed, I will draw on my service in the State Department's counterterrorism office and on the experience developed in subsequent assignments to promote even stronger U.S.-Tunisian cooperation.

- Regarding trade, each Ambassador has a responsibility to the American people to make the United States a more prosperous nation. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the Government of Tunisia to continue progress to reduce trade and investment barriers. The Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, signed in 2002, is a solid starting point for our economic engagement with Tunisia, and acts to support a Tunisian economy that is open and integrated into the world economy and its institutions, through the development of laws and policies that foster private sector-driven economic growth and economic freedom, increased U.S. trade and investment, and sustainable development.
- Finally, Tunisia is indeed a valued partner in the fight against terrorism and a moderate voice on regional issues, but progress in the political sphere is essential if Tunisia is to secure its future. Tunisia is ready for more progress in the areas of freedom of association, freedom of expression, and enhanced debate. In his June 4 speech in Cairo, President Obama affirmed, “Governments that protect these rights are ultimately more stable, successful, and secure. Suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away.” If confirmed, I shall work with the people and the Government of Tunisia to promote these freedoms, with respect for Tunisian sovereignty and with an understanding of the unique challenges Tunisia faces. The upcoming Presidential and Parliamentary elections in October provide an important opportunity for the United States to engage the Government of Tunisia to encourage electoral transparency.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed I intend to take every opportunity to speak directly with the Tunisian people about the United States, our foreign policy, and our ideals. I will listen to what they have to say. And I will encourage all members of our Embassy to do the same. American values, including informed citizenship, political freedom, and socioeconomic opportunity, resonate with Tunisians and others across the region. We should continue to reach out to them to strengthen our dialogue on these important issues. In addition, we should work to build on the many educational exchanges and business contacts between Americans and Tunisians to foster greater understanding and cooperation. There is a great hunger, in particular, for English language programs and scientific and technical exchanges. If confirmed, I will work diligently to promote the friendship between our two

peoples by increasing the quality, diversity, and number of cultural and educational exchanges.

Tunisians were riveted by the U.S. elections, and President Obama's Cairo speech last month resonated strongly and positively. Simply put, he has captured their imagination by signaling his desire to engage with Muslims around the world. If confirmed, I will seek to put the President's words into action in Tunisia.

Thank you again for this opportunity, Mr. Chairman. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you, with the rest of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and with both houses of Congress to continue the excellent work of Ambassador Godec and his team in advancing our interests in Tunisia. I encourage you and your colleagues to visit Tunisia, and I welcome your questions.

