

# Near Eastern Affairs

C. David Welch



U.S. Department of State

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The responsibilities of the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) stretch from Morocco on the Atlantic Ocean to the eastern borders of Iran. In the big bureaucracy, we are highly visible but surprisingly small in personnel and resource terms. The 19 countries in our region run the gamut from small nations to populous and ancient civilizations such as Egypt and Iran. It includes two-thirds of the globe's proven oil reserves and is the cradle of the three great monotheistic religions. It is the land of Jerusalem and Mecca, of Bethlehem and Babylon, of holy wars and holy men. It is where civilization began and the alphabet was invented, where the light of classical civilization survived when it flickered during Europe's dark ages. It is the region with the most challenging and volatile of America's foreign policy issues.

It has been my great good fortune to spend a significant part of my adult life working on and living in this fascinating and frustrating, intense, and beautiful part of the world. My children, my wife Gretchen, and so many friends and colleagues share this powerful and deep interest in and respect for this region. The Middle East can inspire with its promise and disappoint with

its tragedy but can never be forgotten. From the natural beauty of Wadi Rum, the vastness of Saudi Arabia's Empty Quarter and the legendary cedars of Lebanon to the intriguing markets of old Cairo, of proud Aleppo and Isfahan to dynamic Dubai booming in the Gulf, the Near East presents a stunning physical environment. But this is surpassed by a rapidly growing mosaic of more than 350 million restless and very diverse inhabitants who are not so different from us—they too seek to secure lives of dignity, of safety from fear, and of hopes for a better future for themselves and their children. I know many of them as colleagues and as life-long friends.

## DEEP AND ENDURING CHALLENGES

The challenges of the United States in the Middle East are deep and enduring. We seek to promote cooperation against global terrorism and work to prevent attacks against us and our friends, champion aspirations for human dignity and reform, and work for a lasting peace for Israel, the Palestinians, and their neighbors.

All of our policy objectives are based on two underlying pillars. The first is promoting freedom,

justice and human dignity—working to end tyranny, to promote effective democracies, and to extend prosperity through free and fair trade and wise development policies. The second pillar of our global strategy is to confront the challenges of our time by working with a growing community of democracies on many of the problems we face—from the threat of pandemic disease to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to terrorism, to human trafficking, to natural disasters—which reach across national and regional borders.

While we seek positive change that will translate into a better life for all the people of the region, we work closely with governments, with civil society, and with others on a wide spectrum of priority issues. We deeply respect and seek to nurture important and deeply rooted relationships with Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. We welcome their steps towards reform and encourage more to be done. We support and encourage their efforts to counter extremist ideology and promote moderation and tolerance. We appreciate their constructive work on many different fronts, from regional cooperation to promoting an end to regional conflicts to fighting terrorism.



U.S. Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes shows a book about football to some young Moroccans during ceremonies marking the opening of Morocco's second "American Corner," a cultural center-cum-cyber cafe-cum-library, in Daoudiate, a district of Marrakesh.

We are working alongside Iraqis to secure a united, stable, and democratic Iraq. The process of developing a stable political system that produces a competent and strong national unity government that reflects the needs and interests of all Iraqis is an Iraqi effort, but they have our sincere and unwavering support.

We continue to work for the President's vision of a two-state solution with Israelis and Palestinians living in peace, stability, prosperity, and dignity. Far too many lives have been lost on both sides as a result of violence and terrorist action. While we recognize and fully respect the political process that brought it to power, we have serious and long-standing concerns about Hamas. Any Palestinian government that encourages or tolerates terrorism against innocents not only increases violence against the Israelis, but does great harm to the



U.S. Consul General in Jerusalem Jacob Waller (center) looks over boxes containing supplies donated to the Palestinians by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) at a warehouse in Ramallah in May 2006.



Assistant Secretary of State David Welch speaks during a press conference after a meeting with the Lebanese prime minister in Beirut, Lebanon, in January 2006.

interests of the Palestinian people, ensuring their further isolation. The United States will have no contact with such a government and we are working with many others in the region and the world to demand that it abandon its support for terror, recognize Israel's right to exist, and abide by previous agreements.

We are focused on Iran's challenge to the international community. The regime in Tehran regularly flouts international norms and its responsibilities to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), supports violence and terror in Iraq, Lebanon, and around the world, and refuses to bring to justice senior al-Qaida members it detained in 2003. It continues to provide Lebanese Hizballah and Palestinian terrorist groups with extensive funding, training, and weapons. As President Bush and Secretary Rice have made clear, America stands with the Iranian people, who suffer under the regime's continued repression and economic mismanagement. We seek to one day be the best of friends with the Iranian people.

## DEMOCRACY AND REFORM

We continue to support the path of democracy and reform enunciated by the Lebanese government. Lebanon

has accomplished much over the past year—the Lebanese have compelled Syrian troops to withdraw and they have held free and fair elections. After a destructive war provoked by Hizballah, UNSCR 1701 provides the essential framework to support the Lebanese people as they work to reassert their independence, strengthen their democracy, reestablish the sovereignty of the Lebanese government and armed forces over all their territory, and implement their call for national dignity, truth, and justice.

We are striving to express our solidarity with the Syrian people. Their aspirations for a better life of dignity are thwarted by an atavistic regime that cracks down harshly on Syrian civil society, seeks to intimidate the Lebanese, fails to control its border with Iraq, and sponsors Palestinian and Hizballah terrorist groups. We continue to highlight the critical importance of Syrian regime compliance with U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1644, 1636, 1559, 1595, and 1701, and our continued commitment to see an end to Syrian support for Hizballah's armed aggression in Lebanon and to bring to justice those responsible for former Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri's assassination.

In Saudi Arabia, a partnership was initiated by King Abdulaziz and President Roosevelt in February 1945, and has been continued by a succession of kings and presidents. Saudi Arabia is the symbolic heart of the Muslim world—the birthplace of Islam and location of its two holiest cities. We look for the Kingdom to take a leading role in ensuring the predominance of a moderate form of Islam and in expanding citizen participation, increasing opportunities for women, and promoting a vibrant private economic sector.

North Africa, a region with which the United States has had relations since our independence, is growing in importance to our regional and strategic interests. More than one-half of Arabs live in this region, counting Egypt. Our reestablishment of more normal relations with Libya has occurred against the background of historic achievements in that country's renunciation of terrorism and its WMD and long-range ballistic missile programs. Morocco has emerged as a regional leader and key U.S. partner on reform. Algeria has also embarked on a path to serious reform following a decade of domestic upheaval. We are encouraging Tunisia to match its tremendous economic and social record with a comparable effort at political reform. These countries have further to go with respect to political and economic reform and respect for human rights, but we are prepared to help them. We are also aware that they face a common threat from

religious extremism and have developed the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative as one way to deal with it. This will require steady work to support U.N. efforts to resolve the longstanding dispute over the Western Sahara, whose resolution is ultimately the key to true regional cooperation.

### **CONCLUSION**

All of these issues constitute a challenging and difficult agenda. Some of these crises have now occupied policymakers and governments for decades. But we know that the voices of reform, for positive change, and for greater humanity in governance did not originate from the West; they came from regional leaders both inside and outside government. We readily acknowledge that democracy will develop in the region with its own Middle Eastern characteristics and with its own timing. We are

providing tangible support to reformers and peacemakers in the region so that conflict will diminish, democracy can spread, education can thrive, economies can grow, and women can be empowered. We are heartened by recent important progress in Kuwait and Qatar in the field of women's rights. We work diligently to support all of this change in an environment of mutual respect and humility, deeply conscious of the need to respect the traditions and culture of the region and to listen to the people, even when their voices are raised in anger or criticism. ■

For more information:

*<http://www.state.gov/p/nea/>*

*<http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/>*

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A member of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the onsite Iraqi contractor discuss the electrical situation at the Diwaniyah Maternity and Children's Hospital in Ad Diwaniyah, Iraq.



(U.S. Army photo by PFC Timothy J. Villareal)  
(Released)



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An estimated 15,000 Egyptian jobs have been created as a result of a U.S.-brokered agreement that has dramatically increased Egypt's trade with Israel. This worker is at a textile factory in Cairo.

A U.S. Navy mass communications specialist shows children his video camera during a visit to the Adhamiyah district of Baghdad, Iraq, in September 2006.



(U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Richard Rose)  
(Released)

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Students walk through the entrance to Hassan II Ain Chock University in Casablanca, Morocco.

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A camel keeper waits for tourists on the beach with the Jumeira Residence construction site in the background in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.



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Officials from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) monitor humanitarian supplies being delivered in Beirut, Lebanon, on July 29, 2006. This delivery included 20,000 blankets, 2,000 tarpaulins, and seven one-ton medical kits designed to support 100,000 people for three months.