

RELEASE IN FULL

From: McHale, Judith A <McHaleJA@state.gov>
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To: H
Cc: Mills, Cheryl D; Sullivan, Jacob J
Subject: Tunisia Update

I wanted to give you a brief update on the Democracy Transition Team for Tunisia. As you recall the areas of focus include education, elections, economic empowerment, media engagement and training, women's issues, and, launching Peace Corps in Tunisia. The concept is to identify targets of immediate opportunity for supporting the democratic transition thus enhancing the perception of the US as a strategic partner. Since there are a number of USG projects already in the works it essential that the efforts of the transition team be closely coordinated with the Embassy and other with other government departments and agencies.

The team will help identify gaps in our programming and focus primarily on short term initiatives to provide a bridge to the longer term projects already in the planning stage. For example, we have identified media training as a critical need. MEPI and USAID are already developing programs in this area but because of standard planning and contracting processes their programs will not be deployed for a number of months. The transition team will begin to immediately address this issue by, among other things, launching a series of virtual training sessions on how to cover elections.

We have now identified team leads for each area and have designated Greta Holtz from NEA as the team leader. Two team members are in Tunisia now and working with the Embassy on expanding access to English language training and providing universities across Tunisia with digital links to a broad array of critical resources and materials. The media specialist departs tomorrow and will work to dramatically expand our engagement with Tunisian media, with a particular focus on the social media activists who played such a critical role in the revolution. As noted above, she will also identify areas for enhanced training and create links between Tunisian journalists and their counterparts in the United States and throughout the world.

I met with Mike Posner yesterday and he told me he has talked to Gordon Gray about a trip out there but has met with some resistance from Gray who wants to postpone Mike's trip until after the election since "the Embassy is swamped". I will be meeting with Jeff later this week and will try to move this along.

We are also working with Jose Fernandez and the EEB team to rapidly expand our efforts to support the Tunisian SME sector. As you know, helping kick start programs to expand SMEs could help address the unemployment situation and provide a tangible benefit to ordinary citizens. There seems to be a bit of internal politicking between EEB and NEA in this area which I am trying to sort out. I am reasonably confident we can work it through but I will let you know if I need any help.

As anticipated, since a transition team is a new idea for the Department, it has been met with both anxiety and skepticism. My feeling is that the best way to overcome the traditional bureaucratic resistance to anything new is to plow ahead and hopefully be able to quickly demonstrate some quantifiable achievements without upsetting too many apple carts.

Will keep you posted.

jm