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CONTENTS

NEXT STEPS IN SYRIA

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 1, 2012

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:03 a.m., in room SD–419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. John F. Kerry (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Senators Kerry, Casey, Webb, Shaheen, Coons, Udall, Lugar, Corker, and Isakson.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN KERRY, U.S. SENATOR FROM MASSACHUSETTS

The CHAIRMAN. The hearing will come to order. Good morning. Thank you all for being here with us today.

We have a very distinguished panel. We are grateful for some good friends coming in here today to share thoughts with us about an issue that is really dominating concerns in the Middle East right now in many different ways and which presents a lot of complicated policy questions, and that is the evolving situation in Syria obviously.

I think all of my colleagues will agree that we are currently looking at a dangerous and downward spiral in the heart of the Middle East and one that has the potential—not necessarily but certainly the potential—to threaten the security of key regional friends and partners, including Israel but other countries also. And it has profound strategic implications for our country and for other countries in the region. The international community, with American leadership and support, must continue to help the opposition both in ending Assad's reign of terror and in preparing for what comes next after he is gone.

I know that reading today's newspapers, it is clear with Kofi Annan's mission and the difficulties he has faced that President Assad does not yet believe that, or at least certainly does not evidence any indication that he is contemplating that possibility. But most observers, most people analyzing the situation and seeing increasing defections, increasing violence, increasing capacity by the opposition, as well as other indicators, draw the conclusion that the days are numbered.

We know that Bashar al-Assad and his supporters are steadily losing their grip, and as the fighting spreads to Damascus and Aleppo and the defections from the Syrian military increase—and they are—Assad's grip on power becomes more tenuous. The July 18 bombing that eliminated at least four of the regime's most

dangerous henchmen demonstrated the growing reach and sophistication of the armed opposition.

But on the other side, make no mistake. Assad's military is a potent force and it remains a potent force so long as it remains a unified and functioning force. And that is evidenced by the appalling destruction that his forces are inflicting upon Aleppo. Hundreds of thousands of people have fled their homes, many of them children. All told, perhaps 20,000 people—and these are estimates, obviously—have been killed and hundreds of thousands more have had their lives forever changed. And what is difficult about this is there was a period there where the counting seemed to be going on on a relatively precise and regular basis. Now the danger is people have stopped counting to some degree, and we do not know completely what is happening.

I am told by some people that certain things would be a game-changer—use of weapons of mass destruction, for instance, or some massive massacre. But that notion that a massive massacre might be a game-changer somehow begs the question of where to draw the distinction between 100 people a day, 1,000 people a week, 3,000–4,000 a month. And what does the total mean to all of us and to the civilized world? That is certainly something that Russia and China and some other countries in the region need to ask themselves as we go forward here.

We all know the regime has threatened to use weapons of mass destruction against foreign intervention, though it has denied that it would deploy them against its own people. The danger is not just Syria's use of these weapons. As the regime slowly disintegrates, there is a very real danger that these weapons could be misplaced, stolen, or fall into the wrong hands.

We also know that al-Qaeda and other extremist groups are seeking to capitalize on the instability. And as we have learned from previous experiences in Lebanon and Iraq, unwinding cycles of sectarian and terrorist violence can take years. A negotiated political transition remains Syria's best chance to avoid a further descent into chaos, and I think it is clear that time is an important component of this. The longer it goes on and the more disorganized and ad hoc that it is, the greater the prospect that the very people you least want to see involved become more engaged, the greater the prospect that radicals have an opportunity to take advantage of the situation. The faster it were to change and the more orderly it were to change, the less prospect there is for the kind of disruption that threatens the region and that empowers the very people that you least want to see empowered.

That is something that ought to weigh heavily, I think, on our Russian friends because I believe they have the greatest ability to be the game-changers here. And so I think we need to keep engaged very, very aggressively in our diplomacy and in our efforts to try to persuade everybody to see what is in, in fact, everybody's similar interests here.

But with Assad employing a scorched earth policy, the longer his regime stays in power, the deeper Syria's plunge into sectarian civil war is likely to be, and clearly the more dangerous it is for all of the interests that many, many countries share in that region.

So that is why it is imperative that we work to expedite President Assad's exit. Clearly we need to continue to try to convince Russia and China that it is in their interests to seek a political transition that does not include Assad. I think that the votes that have been taken thus far at the U.N. by Russia and China are inevitably beginning to come back to haunt them in ways that they are increasingly becoming aware of. So I think we want to try to approach this thoughtfully, give them the room to move, but also try to do so in a timeframe that meets everybody's imperatives here.

I do believe the time has come to shift our emphasis at the same time to other multilateral vehicles and not just have all our eggs in one basket with respect to Russia. That means the Friends of Syria or, if necessary, organizations such as NATO or alliances ad hoc as we have done before in other instances with the Gulf States or others in the region. What is clear is we cannot appear to be feckless or impotent or ineffective in the face of this kind of use of force by anybody against their own people with the implications that it has for the region itself.

And we cannot allow negotiations in the Security Council to block the provision of vital support to the opposition—that is, from humanitarian aid to nonlethal supplies. And I say that because we all know that others in the region, the Saudis, the Qataris, and others are pursuing their own view of interests, and there certainly is no lack of lethal supplies at this point moving around in that part of the world.

There are steps that the United States could take to help the armed opposition, some of which we want to explore today, and we want to explore a number of questions. What more can be done to facilitate Arab efforts to increase the capabilities of the Free Syrian Army as a cohesive fighting force? Is it appropriate to share intelligence selectively and responsibly with the opposition, particularly on regime force movements? Are there specific instances where we may wish to provide lethal assistance? Are calls for the creation of safe zones or other forms of direct military intervention, such as a no-fly zone—are they either practical or advisable?

I continue to believe that prudent military planning is an imperative, but I also believe we have to be very clear-eyed about that. It would be important not to repeat the mistakes of the past by thinking we can just willy-nilly commit some forces to a conflict without a defined or achievable objective and certainly without sober evaluation of the costs and implications thereof. That is owed not just to the American people but certainly to the men and women of our Armed Forces who have been stretched over these years.

Assad's removal is only the beginning. At last month's Friends of Syria conference, 130 countries and entities agreed to support a transition plan developed by a broad array of Syrian opposition groups. That is not insignificant, my friends. One hundred thirty countries have already agreed to a transition plan, and increasingly countries in the region are becoming more committed to that transition.

So we need to conduct greater planning with these groups and the international community to prepare for that transition. Our

plans should include power-sharing provisions, ensure that all of the key sects are brought into the process, give greater definition than we have today to the Free Syrian Army and to the opposition. That is something they have to do for themselves, but we have to encourage it and help provide the capacity for it and the framework for it, much as we did with Libya and in other instances. In addition, we learned the hard way in Iraq that a winner-take-all transition where key minority groups are excluded and the military is unable to provide basic security is simply a recipe for prolonged civil war.

So to help us navigate these difficult policy challenges, we have, as I said earlier, three very distinguished witnesses.

Ambassador Marin Indyk is vice president and director of foreign policy at the Brookings Institution. He twice served as our United States Ambassador to Israel and is a trusted advisor and confidante to many of the members of this committee and certainly to me as chair, and we value that.

Likewise, Ambassador Jim Dobbins, director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at the RAND Corp., previously served in numerous crisis management and diplomatic troubleshooting assignments in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia, Haiti, and Somalia.

And Andrew Tabler is a senior fellow in the Program on Arab Politics at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and he has spent years living in Syria. We welcome his knowledge and expertise here today.

So thank you all for joining us today and we look forward to your testimony and to a good dialogue.

Senator Lugar.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD G. LUGAR, U.S. SENATOR FROM INDIANA

Senator LUGAR. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I join you in welcoming our distinguished witnesses. We will appreciate their testimony as we continue to consider policy options toward Syria.

I would mention in behalf of the committee that we have been busy with regard to hearings on Syria, but they have been closed and I felt, as did the chairman, it was very important that we have an open hearing that we could hear the witnesses but so could the public and so could the press and help likewise our understanding as we have dialogue with our constituents and others about this very, very important topic. So we appreciate very much your coming.

I would just say since our last hearing in the committee in April, the regime of Bashar al-Assad has carried out further horrific killings, the chairman has mentioned, of innocent civilians, reportedly the use of aircraft, helicopter gunships, to attack cities, has made chilling threats to use chemical and biological weapons to oppose foreign military intervention.

And we have witnessed Syria's descent into a civil war with the cost in lives now exceeding 19,000 lives. Tens of thousands of Syrians have fled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq, and some Syrian diplomats and military officers have defected rather than to continue to associate themselves with the Assad atrocities. A

bombing by rebel forces killed three senior military figures within Assad's inner circle last month.

Yet, we have little reason to be hopeful today for a political settlement. For a third time, U.N. Security Council efforts to address the crisis have been stymied by Russian and Chinese intransigence, and the U.N. observer mission has been drawn down. We have seen reports of the growing presence of terrorists and jihadist elements in Syria attempting to take advantage of the chaos.

Meanwhile, opposition forces and political groups who are coordinating more still remain divided, and this raises concerns that divisions within the opposition are a precursor to what we might expect in a post-Assad political environment.

We remain hopeful that this bloody conflict will ultimately yield to a political process that addresses legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. But the way forward is far from clear as characterized by significant threats, and I remain concerned about the creation of new space in Syria for terrorist groups and the security of the country's stockpiles of unconventional weapons. The risk that sectarian conflict in Syria could spread is very real, and events on the ground will affect Syria's neighbors, including our close ally Israel.

Now, although Assad's departure anytime soon is far from certain, we should be preparing for what is, or who is, likely to emerge after him. The United States must continue to work to limit regional consequences stemming from the Syrian conflict. We must also focus intelligence and counterproliferation assets on containing the Syrian chemical and biological weapons threats. We should be ready to respond quickly to opportunities to help safeguard these stockpiles in a post-Assad environment.

More broadly, we should recognize that our ability to manufacture a predictable outcome of this crisis is extremely limited. Intervention scenarios in Syria come with risks of unintended consequences. We should be skeptical about actions that could lead the United States to an expensive military commitment in Syria.

I thank the witnesses and look forward to their testimony.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Senator Lugar.

I might just mention, as you begin your testimony, obviously one of the complications here is I think most people feel that the last thing you want is to pursue a policy that winds up with a total implosion of the Syrian state because that would be the most dangerous thing of all. And so there is a real threading of the needle here that is pretty tricky to, as I say, get the faster resolution rather than the longer. And I hope you will each sort of address how you think that might be leveraged more effectively now and sort of what options are in the alternative as we go along here.

So, Ambassador Indyk, would you lead off please and then Ambassador Dobbins and Mr. Tabler.

Thank you.

STATEMENT OF HON. MARTIN INDYK, VICE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR OF FOREIGN POLICY, BROOKINGS INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON, DC

Ambassador INDYK. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Senator Lugar, gentlemen. It is a great pleasure to address the Senate Foreign Relations Committee again, and thank you for the invitation.

At the outset, I want to simply associate myself with the remarks of both the chairman and Senator Lugar and say that they provide a very good introduction for what I have to say, and therefore I am not going to repeat what you have said, simply agree with it, and focus on the two things that in my short presentation might be most useful to you, which is, first of all, I was asked to define American interests in this situation and then to talk about what the United States can do.

I want to emphasize that the way things are going, as Senator Kerry has already suggested, things are likely to get a lot worse before they get any better, and the human suffering, therefore, is likely only to increase, perhaps dramatically. And therefore, what the United States does is not only important but it is urgent.

In terms of our interests, they can be summarized I think quite simply, and I think it is fairly noncontroversial in this context. Syria is, of course, as you all know, geostrategically located in the center of the Arab-Israeli heartland bordering Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Israel and has served in the recent decades as the conduit for Iran's efforts to advance its bid for dominance in this sensitive Arab-Israeli heartland. The interests from the United States point of view is because Syria is in a sense in a pivotal position how to draw it into the American-led Arab-Israeli peace camp, and much of the effort over the past decades, since the Nixon Presidency, have been focused on trying to bring Syria into peace with Israel. And that would serve two core interests of the United States, strategic interests, which is stability in this vital but volatile region and the security of our ally Israel.

Beyond that, cutting the Syrian conduit that Iran has used to promote instability on Israel's borders through its Hezbollah and Hamas proxies is also a strategic imperative. Preventing the proliferation or use of weapons of mass destruction, preventing al-Qaeda from taking advantage of the chaos there to establish a base of operations in such a sensitive area, promoting Lebanon's independence from Syria, and deterring Syrian destabilization of Jordan are also important American interests.

Finally, the United States has an interest in advancing the human rights of the Syrian people, which is entirely consistent with our approach to the Arab Awakenings which is to support the pursuit of freedom and dignity for the people of the Arab world.

The point about this is that in other parts of the Arab world, as the United States has had to confront what to do as the revolutions have spread from Tunisia to Egypt now to Syria, is that there was always an inherent tension between our strategic interests and our values, our desire to promote freedom and dignity for the Arab people. In Syria there is no such tension. Our strategic interests and our values coincide in a way that I think makes this different and again imperative that we act in an effective and urgent way to

ensure an orderly transition, if that is at all possible, to a post-Assad Syria.

The question, of course, is how to do that, and I have five steps that I think are important. I focused on the diplomatic side of things. That is my area of expertise. I know you have questions about the military side of things, and I am happy to participate in that, but that is not what my presentation is focused on.

Diplomatically, as the chairman has said, the most important challenge at the moment is to work on the Russians because Russian backing for the regime is important in terms of its avoiding the isolation in the international community and because we need U.N. Security Council cover for so many of the other steps that we need to take. The Chinese are not the problem here. They will go along if we can move the Russians, but our singular inability to do that up to now is hamstringing our efforts to concert an international intervention in support of this process of an orderly transition to a post-Assad Syria.

How to do that, I think, is going to be advantaged in precisely the way you suggested in your opening remarks, Mr. Chairman, by the fact that the Russians sooner rather than later are going to recognize that their position in support of the Assad regime is basically untenable, and there are already indications that they see that. If they are worried, as I think they are, about chaos on their southern borders, the rise of Islamic extremists that can have an influence on their own Muslim populations, then sticking with Assad is the surest way possible of guaranteeing the outcome that they seek to prevent. And that surely must be coming more and more obvious to them as time goes on. If they are worried, as I think they are, about Syria being shifted from the Russian column into the American or Western column, then again, the more that they stick with Assad, the more that they are guaranteeing the result that they seek to avoid.

So it is time, I think, to address them at the highest levels, and I think more can be done by the President with President Putin to try to find a way forward that starts with agreeing that Assad has to go and focusing on what it is that needs to be done to ensure that what comes after him is better than the chaos that is now being threatened.

The second step is, I think, critically important and we can play a role there. It is to guarantee those communities that now support the regime, because they fear the consequences of breaking with it, that there is a secure future for them in a post-Assad Syria. This particularly applies to the Alawites but also to the Christians and other minority communities. How to do that in a credible way is something we can perhaps discuss, but it is an urgent priority to make the Alawite community in particular feel that there is an alternative to the scenario that seems most likely to unfold if we do not find a way to stop the descent into chaos which is the creation of an Alawite rump state in the mountains around Latakia and Tartus that will only guarantee a deepening civil war, sectarian conflict with dramatically negative consequences.

Connected to that, I think, is the need to work actively, although below the radar, on Assad's Alawite generals. The defections that the chairman referred to are taking place of senior officers, but

they are not the Alawite generals and we have not yet seen any defection of whole units. Indeed, it is interesting to note that for all of the publicity given to the defections, the fact that the army has essentially stuck together in support of the regime is, I think, a reflection of the fact that they, like the regime itself, see at the moment that there is only a binary choice: to kill or to be killed. And we have to start to work on them to try to convince them that there is a place for them in a post-Assad Syria. Indeed, they can play an important role as the army in securing the stability of the state in this post-Assad environment. We have learnt from Iraq how dangerous it becomes when the army disintegrates, and we have to think about whether there is a way that we can take advantage of the incredible strain on the army officers to convince them that there is life after Assad rather than the alternative of just sticking with him and going down with him. Again, I have some other ideas about that which we can explore.

Coordination with the Arabs and Turks and Israelis who have the greatest stake in what happens in post-Assad Syria is also essential. That is already taking place and I think that as the Saudis and the Qataris and the Turks take the lead in terms of arming and training the opposition, we have an important supportive role to play. But we also have to talk to them about something that I think they are less concerned about than we are, and I think they should be concerned about it, which is that they should not be doing things which have the potential to fuel a sectarian Sunni-Shia-Alawi conflict that can spread quite easily from Syria to Lebanon, to Iraq, and to Bahrain as Iran decides to play payback for the loss of its Syrian ally in Bashar al-Assad. And there is a real danger to our interests and, I would argue, to their interests in this kind of sectarian breakout, and I do not think they are sufficiently concerned about it but they should be.

Finally, the opposition. It is essential that the opposition get its act together, and it seems that we have limited ability to influence that but we have to try, I think, a lot harder, particularly with the insiders who are carrying the fight on at the moment, to try to find a way to get them to act in unison to put forward a coherent political platform and to convey to these minority communities, the Alawites and the Christians, the guarantees that I talked about, that they have a future in a post-Assad Syria as well. None of these things are easy and there is no sure-fire recipe for producing an orderly transition, but we have to keep our eye focused on that and do whatever we can in an urgent and effective way to try to bring it about.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Indyk follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARTIN INDYK

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to address your esteemed committee on a matter of critical urgency and importance to U.S. interests in the Middle East. The situation in Syria today is a source of immense human suffering with a death toll of over 100 Syrian citizens a day, and a cumulative death toll that exceeds 20,000 people. Now a major refugee crisis is brewing: hundreds of thousands are fleeing fighting in Syria's main cities of Damascus and Aleppo and are crossing Syria's borders with Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon. Images of Syrian artillery and warplanes attacking the suburbs of ancient Aleppo, reports of sectarian massacres, open discussion of circumstances in which Syria's arsenal of chemical weapons

might be used, and indications of jihadist elements joining the battle, all point to a heightening conflict in which the death toll is bound to rise, perhaps dramatically. If Syria is indeed "spinning out of control," as Defense Secretary Panetta recently declared, then what he has witnessed in the past 16 months of revolt might just be the harbinger of a far greater human disaster to come.

This is especially alarming because Syria is not like any of the other Arab countries that have undergone revolution since January 2011. The regime represents an Alawite minority community that numbers some 1.5 million people and enjoys the support of a Christian community of an additional 2.2 million people. That represents roughly 20 percent of the population. The Alawites fear that if the regime falls, they will be slaughtered—that there is no place for them in a post-Assad, Sunni-dominated Syria. Sixteen months of killing has not yet generated any major defections from these minority communities—only Sunni officers, diplomats, and business elites are now breaking with the regime. With their backs to the wall, the Alawite regime considers its choice as binary—either kill or be killed. And it has a well-armed fighting force of perhaps 300,000, a paramilitary force—the feared "shabiha" (ghosts)—of several more thousand, and the backing of Iran and Hezbollah to carry on a fight to the death.

Although the regime and its core supporters have the will and means to fight on, it is nevertheless impossible to imagine that they will prevail against a Sunni majority that has every right to be enraged by Assad's killing spree and that is gaining strength as it garners fighting experience and outside military support from the Sunni states of Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. Already the regime has ceded control over much of the country and its borders; the Syrian Kurds are busy establishing an autonomous zone in the east; the economy is in free fall; and its international isolation is growing.

Since the dynamics of this situation suggest that things will get a lot worse before they get any better, and the human suffering will only increase, perhaps dramatically, what is the United States to do?

It is worthwhile in these circumstances to begin with a definition of United States core interests in Syria, which is geo-strategically located in the center of the Arab-Israeli heartland—bordering Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Israel—and which has served as the conduit for Iran's efforts to advance it's bid for dominance in this sensitive region. Henry Kissinger famously remarked that there could be no Arab-Israeli war without Egypt and no Arab-Israeli peace without Syria. For that reason, successive United States administrations have sought to bring Syria into the peace camp with Israel in order to shore up two core, strategic interests: stability in a volatile but vital region; and security for Israel. In that context, cutting the Syrian conduit that Iran uses to promote instability on Israel's borders through its Hezbollah and Hamas proxies is also a strategic imperative. Similarly, preventing Syria from proliferating or using weapons of mass destruction serves our strategic interests. The promotion of Lebanese independence from Syria and the deterrence of Syrian destabilization of Jordan are also important American interests though of less strategic weight. Finally, the United States has an interest in advancing the human rights of the Syrian people, consistent with its pursuit of freedom and dignity for the people of the Arab world.

In other Arab states where the people have revolted against their authoritarian rulers, the United States has had to balance promotion of its values against the pursuit of its interests. In Libya, for example, the United States had a quite limited strategic interest but chose to support military intervention because of the desire to prevent the almost certain massacre of the citizens of Benghazi. In Bahrain, by contrast, the United States chose to put its strategic interest in stability in neighboring Saudi Arabia ahead of its support for the rights of Bahrain's citizens, one-third of whom were in the streets demanding fundamental reforms.

In Syria, however, there is no such tension between American strategic interests and American concern for the human rights of the Syrian people. Both would be well-served by the prompt removal of the Assad regime, especially because its continuation in power will not only cause immense suffering to the Syrian people, but also because the longer it stays the higher the likelihood of a descent into chaos that could cause severe damage to our other interests in Syria and the wider region (the stability of Syria's neighbors, avoidance of conflict with Israel, prevention of the use or proliferation of Syria's chemical weapons, avoidance of the spread of a sectarian Sunni/Shia conflict, etc.).

Thus, how soon the regime falls, and how it passes from power have become vitally important questions for U.S. policy. But the Obama administration finds itself hamstrung in this situation. It has good reason to be reluctant to intervene militarily: the American people are weary after 10 years of war in the greater Middle East; the international community is, at least for the time being, divided; the

Syrian army still wields considerable capabilities—including chemical weapons—that could drive up the cost of intervention; and the opposition is divided and unable so far to present a coherent alternative that the United States could actively help take power. All of these factors can and probably will change over time: the American people will become increasingly angry with the wholesale slaughter of innocents; Russia and China will find it increasingly untenable to block U.N. Security Council action; the Syrian army will likely crack under the strain of prolonged conflict with its own citizens; and the opposition is already beginning to coalesce around a more coherent platform for transitioning to a post-Assad Syria.

However, the longer it takes for these developments to unfold, the harder it will be to effect an orderly transition to a post-Assad Syria. The Alawites could repair to a "rump state" in the mountains around Tartus and Latakia, resulting in a prolonged sectarian civil war that could generate ethnic cleansing, large numbers of displaced persons and refugees, and a possible overflow to Lebanon (where Shia Hezbollah dominates over restive Sunni and Christian communities), Iraq (where a Shia government in Baghdad is now confronting an al-Qaeda resurgence), and potentially Bahrain (where a Sunni king rules over a Shia majority in revolt and where Iran might well play "payback" for the loss of its Syrian ally).

Time is therefore of the essence, and action needs to be taken nothwithstanding the many constraints. I believe a combination of the following steps is now necessary:

1. *Work With the Russians on a Political Process:* Because Russian backing for the regime is increasingly untenable, and because we need U.N. Security Council cover for so many of the other steps, it is essential to persuade the Russians that their interests can be better protected by working with us rather than against us. Secretary of State Clinton has been working this issue hard but as the Russians begin to see the light, it will be important for the President to engage Putin on a more regular and intense basis to help remove his distrust of our motives and convince him that we have a common interest in preventing the rise of Islamic extremism near his borders by working on an orderly transition together. That orderly transition begins with Assad standing aside in order for a United States and Russian-sponsored political dialogue to be launched. At the moment the Russians insist that the dialogue be with Assad, which is a nonstarter for the opposition. We have to find a way to convince them that helping to remove Assad is the only way to produce the dialogue that they want.

2. *Guarantee the Christians and Alawites:* As long as these communities fear for their very survival they will stick with the regime. They need to receive credible guarantees that their lives and interests will be preserved in a post-Assad, Sunni-dominated Syria. These guarantees will likely need to be backed by a U.N.-sponsored protective force since they will have no faith in commitments extended by the opposition. Planning should get underway now for such a blue helmet force that will need to be ready to intervene either when Assad steps aside or when he is overthrown. But there can be no such force without Russian cooperation (hence step #1).

3. *Work on the Alawite Generals:* If credible guarantees can be provided to their community, these generals may be more willing to consider splitting with Assad and his henchmen. Their units are already under considerable strain; their inner sanctum has already been penetrated; some of them must see the writing on the wall. If an orderly transition is to be sustained, the army will need to play a stabilizing role which requires generals with their intact units defecting to the opposition. The Russians can play a useful role here if they are in harness with us; other means can be used to contact them. At a certain point it might also makes sense for Israeli and Turkish units to conduct large-scale exercises on their respective borders with Syria (they each have recently reinforced their troops there). IDF positions on the Golan Heights are 40 kilometers from Damascus; Turkey has a lengthy border with Syria. Military exercises on their own sides of the border could concentrate the minds of the Syrian generals on the potential for a three-front war if they don't move against Assad and his inner circle.

4. *Coordinate With the Arabs, Turks, and Israelis:* Saudi Arabia and Qatar have taken the lead in concerting Arab League opposition to the Assad regime and in arming the opposition. We need to work closely with them to ensure that their arms are going to the elements in the opposition that have an interest in an orderly post-Assad future for all Syria's citizens. In particular, the Saudis and Qataris need to be cautioned against lighting a sectarian fire that could easily spread to Bahrain and cause immense instability in the gulf.

Turkey has a key role to play in promoting an orderly transition. Prime Minister Erdogan and Foreign Minister Davutoglu have spoken about the creation of humanitarian corridors across the Turkish border in Syria. With the potential for a large-

scale refugee inflow, the Turks may soon be ready to move. However, that will require a U.N. cover and NATO support. We should be planning for both those contingencies now.

We should be consulting closely with the Israelis, given their knowledge of the Syrian army and their intense interest in ensuring that Syria's chemical weapons are not transferred to Hezbollah or fall into the hands of jihadist elements. There may be low profile ways in which they can help the opposition too.

5. *Concert the Opposition:* One of the most problematic challenges to the achievement of an orderly transition—beyond persuading Assad to step down—is to get the opposition to generate a coherent and credible leadership that commands the loyalty of a majority of the many factions that have now assumed a role in the Syrian revolution. Progress on this effort has been frustratingly slow. Hopefully the greater focus now on the internal opposition will yield a more detailed and accurate mapping of all these groups that will then make an effort to unify them more possible.

None of these steps are easy and there is no sure fire recipe for producing an orderly transition to a post-Assad Syria. Nevertheless, there is so much at stake for our strategic interests and so much to gain from preventing a descent into chaos that we must do our best by acting quickly and resolutely.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ambassador. Appreciate it.

Ambassador Dobbins.

STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES DOBBINS, DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY CENTER, RAND CORPORATION, WASHINGTON, DC

Ambassador DOBBINS. Thank you, Senator Kerry, Senator Lugar. It is always a great privilege and a pleasure to appear before this committee and I thank you for having me back again.

As you said, Mr. Chairman, in your opening remarks, I think I have been invited not as an expert on Syria, which I am not, but as somebody who has had experience in previous crisis management situations, military interventions, stabilization operations to perhaps comment on what those lessons might mean for the choices we face with respect to Syria.

I would like to start by examining the case for a greater external intervention in Syria and then look at the requirements for post-war stabilization and reconstruction in that country.

In considering any possible military intervention in or over Syria, there seem to be at least three questions which would need to be addressed. First, whether we should, in fact, support and perhaps participate in such an operation. Second, what form such an operation might look like, and thirdly, what sort of international role the United States and others might play in a post-conflict reconstruction phase.

In determining whether or not an external military intervention would occur, it seems to me that three conditions would need to be fulfilled. First of all, there would have to be an adequate justification. Second, there would have to be some prospect for success. And third, the interests of major powers with the capacity to influence events would have to be sufficiently engaged to make them accept the risks and the costs.

I think the first of those criteria can be pretty easily dealt with. I think in both of your own remarks you have already laid out the case that justifies international intervention should states choose to move in that direction. It is clear that President Assad is not exercising his responsibility to protect his population, and it seems to me clear that the international community has just cause to step in to do so if it chooses.

The next question would be whether there is some prospect for success in such an operation. Peace enforcement operations in Syria would be quite demanding. Syria has a reasonably well equipped and so far largely loyal army, relatively modern air defenses, a large arsenal of chemical weapons. It has at least one ally, Iran, and some support from Russia.

On the other hand, the Assad regime's core domestic support comes from a minority of the population. The rebels are increasingly numerous and effective, if not yet politically unified. The rebellion draws its support from the most numerous segment of the population. The rebels enjoy an effective sanctuary in neighboring Turkey, and whereas the regime is largely isolated internationally, the insurgents are already drawing moral and material support from a very wide range of countries, including the United States.

Most observers have concluded, including if one reads in the press, most U.S. Government analysts have concluded that the Syrian regime's days are numbered, that it is only a question of time before Assad and his regime will fall, the major issues being how much damage it will do before that occurs and how much chaos will ensue thereafter.

This is in contrast to Libya. In Libya, the United States and its partners intervened in support of what was at the time the losing side in that civil war and helped it reverse the tide. In Syria, by contrast, the issue would seem to be whether to intervene on what appears to be the winning side in order to help it terminate the conflict more quickly.

But even if direct military engagement could accelerate an acceptable conclusion, it would not be cost- or risk-free, and therefore, it raises the question of whether we or others have adequate strategic interests to accept the risks and the costs. I think largely because of Syria's alignment with Iran, the conservative Sunni regimes of the region have a strong interest in Assad's fall.

Similarly, the newly democratizing Arab nations have a similar interest, one that both secular and Islamist parties can share since both democrats and Islamists can both expect to increase their influence in a post-Assad Syria.

The United States and its European allies also have a strong interest in Assad's fall, again largely due to that regime's alignment with Iran. Syria provides the main bridge through which Iran is able to support Hezbollah and Hamas, influence Lebanon, outflank its Sunni Gulf adversaries, and threaten Israel. Absent that bridge, it will be much more difficult for Iran to support any extremist groups in the Levant, and without an ability to do that, Iran would retain little practical means of damaging Israel. The case for international and specifically American support for the Syrian uprising, thus, seems to warrant serious consideration.

The next question would be what an intervention might look like. The United States is already providing nonlethal equipment and advice. So the question would be to move beyond that to provide some levels of lethal equipment or, even beyond that, to join in some sort of international intervention perhaps in the form of an imposed no-fly zone. This would certainly be more difficult than the air campaigns that the United States led over Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, or Libya, in none of which the United States lost

a single pilot. But the task does not seem beyond the capacity of the United States and its partners.

There is, of course, the danger that any external military involvement in Syria, if it lacked broad international support and broad international participation, would only encourage others to interfere on behalf of the regime, thereby extending and even widening the conflict. In order to avoid such an outcome, I believe, therefore, that several conditions would need to be fulfilled before the United States would want to go down this path.

First, the Syrian opposition would need to ask for such help. It has not done so and it may never do so. But they could be quietly encouraged to consider the possibility seriously.

Second, most Arab League governments would need to endorse such a call as they did with respect to Libya. Turkey, and Saudi Arabia in particular would need to take the lead, much as Britain and France did with respect to Libya, in canvassing for broader international support for such an operation and in participating in any military coalition. Most NATO allies, particularly the more powerful, would also need to participate in such an effort.

A U.N. Security Council resolution would certainly be desirable, but as was the case in Kosovo, not absolutely necessary in order to secure broad international support and approbation.

For these reasons, I do not think the United States should get out in front of the Syrian opposition or the Arab League or the major regional powers in championing such an action, but I do believe that the still-escalating violence in Syria will generate more serious consideration of these steps in the coming weeks and that the United States should not be resisting such a flow but instead trying to encourage quietly the meeting of these conditions. In the meantime, the administration should consider how to step up other forms of support for the resistance.

This brings me to my third question, which is what about post-war stabilization. I suspect the major question in American minds is whether we are in danger of being sucked into another manpower-intensive stabilization operation that then turns into a long counterinsurgency campaign. I think this is unlikely for the following reasons.

First, as a general rule, civil wars that end in negotiated settlements often require some third-party oversight to implement whatever agreement has been reached because the two parties remain armed, they remained mutually suspicious and they are unlikely to fulfill the conditions of any peace settlement because they fear that the other side will fail to do so, and therefore, some third party is usually necessary to oversee implementation.

By contrast, civil wars that end in a clear-cut military victory by one side and a clear-cut defeat by the other generally are less dependent on external intervention to provide security and oversee the implementation or the emergence of a sustained peace.

It seems to me that serious civil war is unlikely to end in a negotiated agreement between Assad and the opposition. Provided the rebels get sufficient external support, the war also seems unlikely to result in an indefinite stalemate. A more likely result—not a certain one, but a more likely result—will be something more akin to

Libya in that the rebels will eventually win decisively and the former regime will collapse and be unable to reconstitute a threat.

On the other hand, Syria more resembles Iraq than it does Libya in the sense that it is divided religiously and ethnically, not just tribally. And the likelihood, as Martin has already indicated, of sectarian violence in the aftermath of the fall of the regime is quite likely. The United States, we will recall, intervened in Kosovo to protect the Albanian Muslims from the orthodox Serbs, and then spent the next 10 years protecting that Serb minority from the Muslim majority. We had the same experience in Iraq where we intervened. We liberated the Shia majority and then spent much of the next several years trying to protect the Sunni minority from the retribution.

It is not impossible that we will see this kind of descent into sectarian war in Libya, and al-Qaeda has already positioned itself to engage in this kind of sectarian violence.

In my written testimony, I provided some details, courtesy of my colleague, Seth Jones, on al-Qaeda's penetration into Syria which should be a real source of alarm. We face the prospect of an expanding al-Qaeda presence and that of other extremist groups, and a presence allied effectively with a rising Sunni-dominated resistance movement, a presence, that once consolidated, can eventually pose a risk to all of Syria's neighbors, including Israel, and to the United States.

In order to avoid an Iraq-like sectarian violence in Syria, it will be important to work during the civil war, not just after it, to unify the opposition, marginalize al-Qaeda and other extremist groups, encourage defections from the regime, particularly from its Alawite core, and encourage inclusion of representatives of that community within the opposition leadership. Martin has already spoken about all of those things. I certainly agree, but I also tend to think that our influence will be greater during the war than afterward and greater if we are engaged on the side of the opposition than if we are standing on the sidelines providing unsolicited advice.

I am sure the Obama administration is already advising the Syrian opposition along these lines, but our ability to advance these goals will tend to be in direct proportion to the help the United States provides the opposition in their fight to overthrow the regime. Promises of post-war aid will mean less in forging a relationship with the eventual rulers of Syria than decisive action now. The new Syrian leadership will be formed in the crucible of war and in all likelihood will prove resistant to the admixture of elements that did not participate in the fight or to influence from governments that did not support them in it. It would, for instance, be a great mistake to allow the emerging leadership of Syria to conclude that al-Qaeda had done more to help them prevail than did the United States.

I am pleased to learn that the State Department, through the U.S. Institute for Peace, has been working with Syrian emigres and more recent refugees on post-war planning and reconstruction. This is very important. But what is more important now for the U.S. Government than drafting plans is forging relationships with those likely to next govern Syria. These relationships should be developed at many levels—diplomatic, covert, military, economic, and

political—to include democracy building work by our Republican and Democratic institutes, and contacts with individual Members of Congress, as well as with all the relevant arms of the executive branch.

As I said, my expectation is that Syria's civil war will probably result in the regime's collapse, not a negotiated settlement, that the victors will not want foreign troops on the ground, and that there will, therefore, be no serious consideration of a large-scale manned stabilization force.

Having myself been involved in international military operations, as you mentioned, Mr. Chairman, in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, not all of which were famously successful, I would be the last to minimize the complexities, dangers, and costs associated with any such effort in Syria. It is for this reason that I do not believe the United States should become the standard bearer for such an intervention. I do believe, however, that the United States should up its assistance to the rebels, quietly let those on the front lines, particularly Turkey and Saudi Arabia, know that it will back initiatives they may wish to take toward more direct military engagement, and provided the earlier-mentioned conditions are met, America should provide those military assets needed for success that only the United States possesses in adequate numbers.

Thank you again for having me.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Dobbins follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAMES DOBBINS

Chairman Kerry, Ranking Member Lugar, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this morning. I come to this discussion about policy toward Syria not as a country or even regional expert, but as someone with experience of other civil wars, international military interventions, stability operations and post conflict reconstruction efforts.

In debates over earlier missions, I observed that those most familiar with the conflicted societies in question often tend to be the most pessimistic about the prospects for pacifying and reforming them. By contrast, those who come from a background in stabilization and reconstruction tend to believe that peace can be restored and some measure of political and economic reform achieved, but only with a significant commitment of time and effort.

A third category of individual, those with little knowledge of the society in question or the process of stabilization and reconstruction, sometimes believe that the desired results can be achieved quickly, easily, and cheaply. This group was much more in evidence before our invasion of Iraq than it is today. Indeed, the pendulum may have swung too far in the opposite direction, encouraging an equally erroneous belief that military interventions can never produce positive results at acceptable costs.

In considering any possible military intervention in or over Syria, there are several questions to be addressed. First, should the United States support and perhaps even participate in such an operation? If the answer is yes, then second, what form should such an operation take and what role should the United States play? Third, what should be the international and American role in the post conflict reconstruction phase?

Three criteria will dominate any decision to intervene militarily: the humanitarian, the practical, and the strategic. Has the violence reached a level that both justifies and provides broad international support for intervention? Is there a reasonable prospect that such an intervention could succeed in ending the fighting on acceptable terms? Are the strategic interests of states—in particular those powerful enough to effectively intervene—sufficiently engaged to lead them to do so? Unless the answer to all these questions is yes, external military intervention to stop the fighting is unlikely.

The first of these criteria can be readily established as regards Syria. A repressive regime with a history of extreme abuse is making war on its own people, shelling

and bombing its major cities. This behavior has been widely, indeed almost universally condemned, but in reaction to repeated demands to halt attacks on its civilian population, the regime has only escalated the level of violence. Clearly the Syrian Government is not fulfilling its responsibility to protect its population, and the international community now has just cause to step in to do so.

But sufficient justification does not automatically translate into practical feasibility or sufficient motivation. Peace enforcement operations in Syria would be quite demanding. Syria has a reasonably well equipped and so far largely loyal army, relatively modern air defenses and a large arsenal of chemical weapons. It has at least one ally, Iran, and some support from Russia. On the other hand, the Assad regime's core domestic support comes from a minority of the population; the rebels are increasingly numerous and effective, if still not yet politically unified; the rebellion draws its support from the most numerous segment of the population, that is to say the Sunni community; the rebels enjoy an effective sanctuary in neighboring Turkey; and whereas the regime is largely isolated internationally, the insurgents are already drawing moral and material support from a wide range of countries including the United States.

Most observers, including it seems U.S. Government analysts, believe the Syrian regime's days to be numbered, the open issues being how much damage it will do before falling and how much chaos will ensue thereafter. In Libya, the United States and its partners intervened in support of what was—at the time—the losing side and helped it reverse the tide. In Syria by contrast, the issue would seem to be whether to intervene on what appears to be the winning side in order to help it more quickly terminate the conflict.

Even if direct international military engagement could accelerate an acceptable conclusion to the conflict, it would not be cost or risk free. This is where the strategic interest of external parties comes into play. Largely because of Syria's alignment with Iran, the conservative Sunni regimes of the region have a strong interest in Assad's fall. The newly democratizing Arab nations have a similar interest, one that both secular and Islamist parties can share, since both democrats and Islamists can expect to increase their influence in a post-Assad Syria.

The United States and its European allies also have a strong interest in Assad's fall, again largely due to that regime's alignment with Iran. Syria provides the main bridge by which Iran is able to support Hezbollah and Hamas, influence Lebanon, outflank its Sunni Gulf adversaries and threaten Israel. Absent that bridge, it will be much more difficult for Iran to support for extremist groups in the Levant without which Iran would retain little practical means of damaging Israel.

The case for international and specifically American support for the Syrian uprising thus seems worth serious consideration, both as regards justification, feasibility and strategic interest. The next question is what such an intervention might look like and how it might be structured.

The rebels are already getting arms, equipment, training and sanctuary from abroad, although so far the American role has reportedly been limited to nonlethal equipment and advice. A further step might be overt international military involvement, which could take the form of some aerial engagement, perhaps to impose a "no-fly" zone over some or all of Syria. The enforcement of such a zone would almost certainly require substantial American participation, particularly in the early stages when Syrian air defenses would need to be taken out. Doing so would present a tougher challenge than faced during the air campaigns over Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan or Iraq, in none of which the United States lost a single pilot, but the task is hardly beyond the capacity of the United States and its partners, so long as regional states provide basing and overflight rights.

There is the danger that external military involvement in the Syrian civil war will only encourage others to increase their backing of the regime, thereby extending and even widening the conflict. In order to avoid such an outcome, there are several preconditions that, in my judgment, would need to be met before the United States would want to consider backing and participating in any such effort. First, the Syrian opposition would need to ask for such help. So far they have not and they may never do so. But they might be quietly encouraged to consider the possibility seriously. Second, most Arab League governments would need to endorse such a call, as they did with respect to Libya. Turkey and Saudi Arabia, in particular, would need to take the lead, much as Britain and France did with respect to Libya, on canvassing for broader international support and participating in the military coalition. Most NATO allies would need to support and several of the most important would need to participate in such an effort. A U.N. Security Council mandate for military action, such as was had in Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Libya, would also be highly desirable, but, as was demonstrated in Kosovo, not absolutely necessary to secure broad international approbation.

Russia and China can be expected to oppose any such intervention, even if it had clear Syrian rebel and overwhelming regional support. Russia might even increase its material assistance to the Syrian regime, although it seems unlikely that Moscow would risk Russian forces in confrontation with a very broad international coalition. Indeed, faced with the prospect of such a coalition and the thereby increased likelihood of a rebel victory, Moscow might even decide to step out of the way rather than be humiliated and lose any remaining influence it might have in post-war Syria.

I do not think that the United States should get out in front of the Syrian opposition, the Arab League, the major regional powers and its European allies in publicly championing such action. But I do believe that the still escalating violence in Syria will generate more serious consideration of an external intervention in each of those quarters. I believe the United States should not resist such a flow but instead begin quietly trying to channel it, as the Obama administration ultimately did with respect to Libya. In the meantime, the administration should be considering how to step up other forms of support for the resistance.

This brings me to my third question: what about post-war stabilization and reconstruction? Here, I suspect that the major question in American minds is whether we are in danger of being sucked into another manpower intensive stabilization operation that then turns into a counterinsurgency campaign. I think not, for the following reasons.

First, as a general rule, civil wars that end in negotiated settlements are normally more in need third-party oversight if peace is to stick. Both parties remain armed and mutually suspicious and neither will implement those elements of the peace accord that might weaken its capacity for self-defense. Only a substantial third force can provide sufficient confidence to both parties to the agreement to carry out its provisions. By contrast, those civil wars that end in clear-cut victories rather than negotiated settlements or drawn out stalemates tend to be less prone to resumption, and the societies in question tend to be less dependent on external forces for their security in the immediate post-war environment.

Syria's civil war seems unlikely to end in a negotiated agreement between Assad and the opposition. Provided the rebels get sufficient external support, the war also seems unlikely to result in an indefinite stalemate. A more likely result will be something more akin to Libya, in that the rebels will eventually win decisively, and the former regime will collapse and be unable to constitute a threat to its successor.

On the other hand, Syria more resembles Iraq (and former Yugoslavia) than Libya, in that it is divided religiously and ethnically and not just tribally. As the persecuted Shia majority in Iraq, once liberated, turned on its Sunni oppressors, and as the persecuted Muslim majority in Kosovo, once liberated, turned on its Serbian Orthodox oppressors, so in Syria, revengeful Sunni extremists seem quite likely to turn on the Alawite minority.

Al-Qaeda is already positioning itself to engage in such sectarian violence. As my RAND colleague, Seth Jones, has pointed out, al-Qaeda makes up a small part of the resistance movement, but its strength appears to be rising. Since last December, al-Qaeda has conducted roughly two dozen attacks, primarily against Syrian security service targets. Virtually all have been suicide attacks and car bombings, and have resulted in more than 200 deaths and 1,000 injuries. According to estimates from one intelligence service in the region, al-Qaeda has at least doubled its ranks to some 200 operatives composed of Iraq jihad veterans, small numbers of foreign fighters, and local extremist recruits.

What explains al-Qaeda's rise? One factor is the draw of a new jihad—smack in the middle of the Arab world. While roughly three quarters of Syria's Muslims are Sunni, the government is ruled by a minority Alawite sect that is an offshoot of the Shia version of Islam, albeit one most Shia also regard as heretical. For Sunni extremist groups like al-Qaeda, a Shia government in Sunni territory is unacceptable.

Since 2003, Syria has been the primary transit hub for foreign fighters headed to Iraq. Now the tables have turned on Syria. Al-Qaeda in Iraq has apparently sent small arms and light weapons—including rifles, light machine guns, and rocket propelled grenades—to its Syrian contingent. Al-Qaeda in Iraq has also sent explosive experts to augment its Syrian contingent's bombmaking capabilities and deployed fighters to boost its ranks.

Jones reports that with this assistance Al-Qaeda leaders in Syria have begun to establish an organized political and military structure. They have appointed a management council, set up a headquarters, and created regional networks with military and religious leaders to run operations, manage cross-border facilitation, and procure weapons and other supplies.

We are thus faced with the prospect of an expanding Al-Qaeda presence in Syria, one allied effectively with a rising Sunni dominated resistance movement, a pres-

ence that once consolidated can eventually pose a threat to all of Syria's neighbors, including Israel, and to the United States.

In order to avoid Iraq-like sectarian violence in Syria, it will be important to work during the civil war to unify the opposition, marginalize Al-Qaeda and other extremist elements, encourage defections from the regime—particularly from its Alawite core, and encourage inclusion of representatives of that community within the opposition leadership. I expect that the Obama administration is already advising the Syrian opposition along these lines. But American influence and ability to advance such goals will tend to be in direct proportion to the help the United States provides the opposition in their fight to overthrow the regime. Promises of postwar aid will mean much less in forging a relationship with the eventual rulers of Syria than decisive assistance now. The new Syrian leadership will be formed in the crucible of war, and in all likelihood will prove resistant to the admixture of elements that did not participate in the fight, or to influence from governments that did not support them in it. It would, for instance, be a great mistake to allow that leadership to conclude that Al-Qaeda had done more to help them prevail than had the United States.

I was pleased to learn that the State Department, through the U.S. Institute of Peace, is assisting Syrian émigrés and more recent refugees to plan for the postwar reconstruction. This is certainly a useful exercise. Yet planning divorced from resources and power, as these efforts necessarily are, will likely have only limited impact on actual events. What is more important for the U.S. Government to do at this stage than drafting plans is forging relationships with those likely to next govern Syria. These relationships should be developed at many levels, diplomatic, covert, military, economic and political, to include democracy-building work by our Republican and Democratic Institutes, contacts with individual Members of Congress, as well as with all the relevant arms of our executive branch.

As we get to know the Syrian opposition better, we will discover, I have no doubt, that not all are democrats, that many are ill disposed toward the United States, and that most if not all are ill disposed toward Israel. We will also discover, I expect, that most are even more ill disposed toward Iran, and therefore not inclined to help Tehran extend its influence into the Levant.

My expectation is that Syria's civil war will result in the regime's collapse, not a negotiated settlement, that the victors will not want foreign troops on the ground, and that there will therefore be no serious consideration of a large-scale foreign manned stabilization force. One can envisage circumstances where very limited external military assistance might be needed, for instance to secure chemical weapons sites, but a far better outcome will be for the regime's armed forces to remain largely intact, albeit under new command, and thus still responsible for the security (and eventual disposal) of these weapons. Contrary to Iraq, where the American military dropped leaflets informing Iraqi troops that they would be killed if they remained in uniform and under arms, the Syrian opposition should be encouraged to assure rank and file Syrian soldiers that they will be safe, and indeed paid and protected as soon as they cease fighting. It appears that the Obama administration is so advising the Syrian opposition.

Having myself helped organize international military operations in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, I would be the last to minimize the complexities, dangers, and costs associated with any such effort in Syria. It is for this reason that I do not believe the United States should become the standard bearer for such an intervention. I do believe, however, that the United States should up its assistance to the rebels; quietly let those on the front lines, particularly Turkey and Saudi Arabia, know that it will back initiatives they may wish to take toward more direct military engagement; and provided the earlier mentioned conditions can be met, America should provide those military assets needed for success that only the United States possesses in adequate number.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to taking your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Mr. Tabler.

STATEMENT OF ANDREW TABLER, SENIOR FELLOW, PROGRAM ON ARAB POLITICS, WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. TABLER. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Lugar. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations today.

I have met with many of you personally and your staff since I left Syria nearly 4 years ago, and over my years of working in Syria and Lebanon, I followed closely the committee's hearings on Syria and United States attempts to deal effectively with Bashar al-Assad's regime. I think I speak for all my Syrian friends and their families in thanking the committee for convening this hearing at a key time not only in the Syrian people's attempt to throw off 40 years of tyrannical rule, but in taking the big next step with them of building a better, more democratic Syria.

However, if Washington's limited policy of diplomatic isolation, sanctions, and piecemeal support for the opposition continues as is, I feel the next government in Syria, whatever part of Syria that is, will more likely than not be suspicious and hostile to United States interests. The reason is simple: Washington invested too much time in diplomacy at the United Nations instead of directly helping the Syrian people hasten Bashar al-Assad's demise, which is apparently our policy objective. This should now include the provision of lethal assistance to elements of the Syrian opposition with which the United States can acquire agreements on code of conduct and end use. The good news is that it is not too late to change course, but time—and I cannot emphasize this more—is very, very short.

I have been asked to make a few comments about the situation on the ground, as I see it, based on not only my observations from here but from my trips to the region. The death toll in Syria's 17-month uprising, as Chairman Kerry said, is around 20,000, with 30,000 around in detention, but hundreds of thousands are internally displaced. The uprising started civilian in nature but has since morphed into an armed uprising, insurrection, in response to the Assad regime's crackdown. The Assad regime, armed to the teeth by Russia and Iran, continues to implement what they call in Syria the "security solution" to cow the opposition into submission. Much to the regime's chagrin, it can militarily clear areas but it cannot hold them. Akin to the carnival game, whac-a-mole, every time Assad attempts to hit the opposition's head, it disappears only to pop up somewhere else. The opposition is giving the Assad regime precisely the opposition it cannot decapitate which slowly wears down the regime's forces but, sadly, not before the regime and its killing machine take thousands more Syrians with it. Before Syria achieves its slow motion revolution, it seems set to suffer, as Chairman Kerry outlined, a slow motion massacre.

Washington's response to this worsening situation has been to isolate Assad, sanction his regime and its members, and pursue U.N. action that, if achieved, would open the door for a multilateral effort to bring down the Assad regime. It has not worked because Russia continues to veto resolution after resolution on Syria, most recently a chapter VII resolution to implement the Action Group for Syria Communique of June 30. Meanwhile, Washington has given its Middle East allies, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, a

nod to support the opposition with lethal as well as nonlethal assistance. And some dedicated people in the U.S. Government, who I applaud, have spent the last few months reaching out to the opposition inside of Syria and mapping their positions and providing limited nonlethal aid to the nonviolent opposition.

The picture is still far from clear, but the Syrian opposition can best be described as headless but not leaderless and with a general flat structure. Had we based our strategy last winter on what was happening on the ground in Syria, we would have had much better visibility not only in terms of military operations, but these groups' political aspirations now and into the future as well. The YouTube videos streaming out of Syria tell us how they fight and their immediate goal of bringing down the Assad regime. But they tell us precious little about their long-term political aspirations, assessments that can only be achieved kinesthetically through working with groups directly on the ground. And by not directly working with the Syrian opposition, armed and unarmed, the United States will know little about how to influence them. In some cases, it will be because we do not know them. But if we continue on our current path, it is more likely that they will be angry that the United States stood by and did far less than it could have to accelerate Assad's demise, which is apparently our policy objective.

As has been mentioned earlier, third forces are afoot in Syria, some against United States interests, and they are stepping in to fill the void that has been created in this chaotic situation in Syria. Anecdotal and media reports indicate that individuals and governments in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, as well as others, are sending much-needed lethal support to the opposition. In fact, there was a report yesterday that MANPAD's had actually showed up in Aleppo.

In terms of state policy, all openly support the U.S. short-term interests of bringing down the Assad regime, but it is still far from clear if they support U.S. long-term interests, including a democratic and secular Syria that respects minority rights and shuns terrorism, let alone Middle East peace. In addition, third forces such as al-Qaeda affiliates, including Jebhat al-Nusra or the Nusra Front, have established a presence in Syria. There are increased reports over the last few months of increased foreign fighters entering Syria, and that is in all areas not just in the north where it was previously outlined.

In my written testimony, I have talked a bit about laying down redlines for the Assad regime which surprisingly, despite the length of the uprising, the Obama administration has not yet done even with news recently that the Syrian regime is moving its chemical weapons, which has set off extensive speculation in the U.S. Government about what Assad may be prepared to do with those weapons as his control over the country deteriorates. It would be comforting to think that Assad knows that using such weapons of mass destruction would be crossing a redline, but unfortunately, that would be too optimistic. In fact, I think as the evidence shows, Assad's response to the uprising thus far—he has ignored every international ultimatum.

The international community, therefore, faces a dilemma. Should chemical and biological materials be put at the disposal of those

running a possible Alawite rump regime and those directing the shabbiha armed gangs roaming the Syrian countryside, there is much greater likelihood of atrocities or genocide. And it is not only the pro-Assad groups that the United States must worry about. As the Syrian regime loses its grip on power, the roughly 45 different CW facilities and tons of chemical weapons materials that United States officials estimate are scattered across the country could fall into the hands of Sunni extremists. Like the regime, these extremists cannot be counted on to act responsibly about CW. They might be tempted to use it against the regime and its supporters as well.

In conclusion, my best estimate is that it will be those on the ground who are now taking the shots against the Assad regime that will be calling the shots after he is gone. While the Obama administration is reticent to intervene militarily in Syria, in some cases for good reason, while in others not, actively assisting the opposition within Syria to take power would be a foreign policy "threefer" for Washington: Assad and those directly linked to his killing machine would be gone; the United States would have an opportunity to foster a new relationship with an emerging political entity or entities in what is today Syria; and we would eliminate a major ally of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Levant.

I think I differ here a little bit from the previous presentations in that I think it is much more likely that the Assad regime is not going to fall, but it depends on what falling means. I think it is much more likely that it is going to contract. I see no way of effectively doing and intervening and trying to influence these developments in Syria without some sort of intervention from the United States, be it directly in response to CW use or mass atrocities or indirectly by supporting the Syrian opposition. I am not advocating dropping weapons on the Syrian opposition and wishing them good luck, but rather reaching out to them, identifying which groups with which the United States can work, supplying them with what they need, and watching closely what they do militarily and politically in what remains a long and bloody fight for freedom in Syria.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Tabler follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ANDREW J. TABLER

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Lugar, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. Over my years of working in Syria and Lebanon, I followed closely the committee's hearings on Syria and United States attempts to deal effectively with Bashar al-Assad's regime. I think I speak for all my Syrian friends and their families in thanking the committee for convening this hearing at a key time not only in the Syrian people's attempt to end over 40 years of tyrannical rule, but its taking the big next step of building a better, more democratic Syria. If Washington's limited policy of diplomatic isolation, sanctions, and piecemeal support for the opposition continues as is, however, I fear the next government in Syria will more likely than not be both suspicious and hostile to United States interests. The reason is simple: Washington invested too much time in diplomacy at the United Nations instead of directly helping the Syrian people hasten Bashar al-Assad's demise. The good news is it is not too late to change course. But time is very short.

SITUATION ON THE GROUND

The death toll in Syria's 17th month uprising is now around 20,000, with 30,000 in detention or missing, putting the conflict on par with that of the Libyan Revolution. An uprising that started out as civil in nature has in response to the Assad regime's use of live fire, shelling, helicopter gunships and fixed wing aircraft

morphed, quite naturally, into an armed insurrection. The Assad regime, armed to the teeth by Russia and Iran, continues to implement what they call the "security solution" to cow the opposition into submission. Much to the regime's chagrin, it can assert itself militarily but cannot "clear and hold" areas where the opposition operates. Akin to the carnival game "whac-a-mole", every time Assad attempts to hit the opposition's head it disappears, only to pop up somewhere else. The opposition is giving the Assad regime precisely opposition it cannot decapitate, which slowly wears down the regime's forces. But, sadly, not before the regime and its "killing machine" take thousands more Syrians with it. Before Syria achieves it slow motion revolution, it seems set to suffer a slow motion massacre.

WASHINGTON'S RESPONSE

Washington's response to this worsening situation has been to isolate Assad, sanction his regime and its members, and pursue U.N. action that, if achieved, would open the door for a multilateral effort to bring down the Assad regime. It has not worked because Russia continues to veto resolution after resolution on Syria, most recently a Chapter VII resolution to enforce the Action Group for Syria Communique of June 30—a skeleton transition plan for Syria. Meanwhile, Washington has given its Middle East allies Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar a nod to support the opposition with lethal as well as nonlethal assistance. Meanwhile, some dedicated people in the U.S. Government have spent the last few months reaching out to the opposition inside of Syria and mapping their positions. The picture is still far from clear, but the Syrian opposition can perhaps be best described as headless but not leaderless with a generally flat structure. Had we based our strategy last winter on what was happening on the ground in Syria, we would have much better visibility not only in terms of military operations, but these groups' political aspirations as well. The YouTube videos streaming out of Syria tell us how they fight, and their immediate goal of bringing down the Assad regime. But they tell us precious little about their long-term political aspirations—assessments that can only be achieved kinesthetically through working with groups directly on the ground. And by not directly working with the Syrian opposition—armed and unarmed—the United States will know little about how to influence them. In some cases it will be because we do not know them. But if we continue on our current path, it will be because they are angry that the United States stood by and did far less than it could have to accelerate Assad's demise.

THIRD FORCES AFOOT

Others forces, some inimical to U.S. interests, are stepping in to fill the void. Anecdotal and media reports indicate that individuals and governments in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, as well as others, are sending much-needed lethal support to the opposition. In terms of state policy, all openly support the U.S. short-term interest of bringing down the Assad regime. But it is far from clear if they support U.S. long-term interests of a democratic and secular Syria that respects minority rights and shuns terrorism, let alone supports Middle East Peace. In addition, "third forces" such as al-Qaeda affiliates, including Jebhat al-Nusra, have established a presence in Syria. There are increased reports over the last few months of increased foreign fighters entering Syria.

THE MASS ATROCITY RED LINE

More and more members of the Syrian opposition, especially the armed or unarmed elements inside the country, realize that it is up to them to take down Assad. While the exiled opposition continues to argue over chairs and positions, albeit while doing some laudable work on preparing for a post-Assad Syria, all aspects of the Syrian opposition continue to advocate direct U.S. intervention in Syria—air strikes, no-fly zones, humanitarian corridors, and safe havens. It is unclear which option may occur and when, especially in the face of repeated U.S. and allied announcements about the limits of all military options in Syria, but mass atrocities and/or the use of chemical and biological weapons (CBW) would seem the most probable triggers.

Since the beginning of the Syrian uprising, Washington has repeatedly demanded that President Bashar al-Assad desist from employing the most brutal tactics against his own people—only to see the Syrian regime use them anyway. With the recent assassination of four senior Assad regime members coming only days after reports that Syria is moving its chemical weapons stockpile, the U.S. Government must now draw a line in the sand for Assad. And this time, the Obama team must stick to it, or risk a humanitarian and national security calamity.

Recent news that the Syrian regime is moving its chemical weapons has set off speculation within the U.S Government about what Assad may be prepared to do with those weapons as his control over the country deteriorates. It would be comforting to think that Assad knows that using such weapons of mass destruction would be crossing a redline—but unfortunately that would be too optimistic. After all, Assad has ignored every other international ultimatum directed at him since the beginning of the revolt.

The same pattern has held true with attempts to force Assad into a negotiated transition through the U.N. Security Council, where Russia and China recently vetoed for the third time a resolution that would have imposed sanctions against the regime if it did not end its brutal crackdown.

This must end. Washington and its allies must lay down and enforce redlines prohibiting the use of Syria's chemical weapons—one of the Middle East's largest stockpiles. To do so, Washington should lead its allies in the "Core Group" of the Friends of the Syrian People gathering—Britain, France, Germany, Canada, Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia—in issuing a stark warning to Assad that mass atrocities in Syria will be met with an immediate military response.

Assad's most recent moves are part of a well-established pattern that test and push U.S. and NATO redlines. The Assad regime has increasingly deployed artillery and combat aircraft to suppress the Syrian opposition, despite Washington's warning not to do so. A few weeks ago, Syria shot down a Turkish F–4 fighter jet, a provocation for which it received only verbal condemnation by NATO. The Syrian Government's history of such reckless moves stretches back years: In 2010, Assad reportedly transferred Scud D missiles and M–600 rockets to the Lebanese militant party, Hezbollah, essentially handing strategic weapons to a third party and removing his ability to restrain the self-proclaimed Party of God.

When Bashar was master of Syria, such behavior was seen as an annoyance rather than a threat to U.S. national security interests. Today, all that has changed. The Assad regime is mired in a grinding conflict with the Syrian opposition, in which it is steadily losing control, as demonstrated by the July 18 assassinations of senior regime figures in the heart of Damascus and recent battles there and in Aleppo with the opposition. Furthermore, a number of massacres by Alawite forces in Sunni villages around the cities of Homs and Hama indicate that Alawites and the regime they dominate may be attempting to clear Sunni villages in order to set up a rump Alawite enclave in their historic homeland along the Syrian coast in the event of regime collapse.

The international community therefore faces a dilemma: Should chemical and biological materials be put at the disposal of those running a possible Alawite rump regime, and those directing the shabbiha "armed gangs" roaming the Syrian countryside, there is much greater likelihood of atrocities or genocide. And it's not only the pro-Assad groups the United States must worry about: As the Syrian regime loses its grip on power, the roughly 45 different CW facilities and tons of chemical weapons materials that U.S. officials estimate are scattered throughout the country could fall into the hands of Sunni extremists. As I mentioned, these groups not only do not share America's long-term interests in Syria, but increasingly resent Washington for standing by and doing little while Syrians are slaughtered. This sentiment is unlikely to improve if Washington and its allies simply watch and hope for the best while the Assad regime moves around its chemical weapons stockpile.

The time to act is now, before disaster strikes. By leading an effort to warn the Syrian regime about the dire consequences of using its chemical weapons stockpile, and raising the possibility of a military response in the event that effort fails, Washington will be communicating to Assad that he would be sealing his fate if he crosses this last remaining redline.

END GAME

My best estimate is that it will be those on the ground who are now taking the shots against the Assad regime that will be calling the shots after he is gone. While the Obama administration is reticent to intervene militarily in Syria—in some cases for good reason, while in others not—actively assisting the opposition "within Syria" to take power would be a foreign policy "threefer" for Washington: Assad and those directly his killing machine would be gone, the U.S. would have an opportunity to foster a new relationship with the emerging political entity or entities in what is today Syria, and we would eliminate a major ally of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Levant. Getting there will be hard, but if Washington does not start now the United States runs the risk of playing catch up when it is too late.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much. A lot of information on the table, a lot of different concepts.

Let me pursue with you, Mr. Tabler, just a couple things. You particularly prompted my curiosity with a couple of your last comments, and I want to explore it a bit.

But let me just say beforehand so people are aware: This is our third hearing on Syria publicly, but we have had four classified briefings/hearings, one as recently as last night, and then last week, the Foreign Relations Committee alone had one. So we are digging into a lot of this stuff, and some of the things that you assert are—for instance, with respect to a redline, I cannot go into the details here, but I can tell you there is a redline and people know what it is. The people who need to know know what it is without going into any further discussion of it.

But let me sort of explore with you a couple things first. You just said in some cases for good reason they have chosen not to be supportive, and in some cases not. Can you flesh that out a little bit for me?

Mr. TABLER. Sure.

The CHAIRMAN. What are the instances where it is for good reason and when is it not for good reason?

Mr. TABLER. Right. I think that oftentimes there are—I find it very interesting that when talking about intervening in Syria, that there seems to be a laundry list of reasons to do very, very little. I understand that because I lived in that country. I understand its complexities, its political complexities, and then in terms of intervention, as Ambassador Dobbins laid out, there are military complexities as well.

I realize Syria has formidable air defenses. I think that the United States and its allies can take care of them if it wanted to or if it had to.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, let me just say there is no question that we can. I mean, that is not the issue.

Mr. TABLER. Correct.

The CHAIRMAN. The question is at what cost and with what implications.

Mr. TABLER. Well, exactly. I think, though, that it depends on what your foreign policy objectives are at this moment. I think the Obama administration was wise in saying that President Assad had to step aside and that that is actually the solution to this problem. The problem is, though, by not doing more to accelerate that, is that you are setting off that sectarian war in the Levant that you supposedly want to avoid. It is because the regime is dominated by Alawites. It is not completely Alawite, but dominated by Alawites and other minorities, and the opposition is primarily Sunni. The clash between these two forces very quickly turns into that sectarian war that you fear.

So if we really fear that—and we do not want to set that off for a variety of reasons, including chemical weapons and biological weapons and so on—then doing more sooner rather than later would seem to make sense. It would be easier to control direct action in Syria than indirect action, but we seem to be very reticent to do that as well. So then we get into the very difficult game of supporting indirectly groups inside of Syria.

And I can tell you we do not know that much about—I think you have been receiving briefings. I can tell you I have never seen a conversation in Washington where there is such a free flow of information between those of us that work on Syria and the U.S. Government in terms of what is actually going on on the ground inside. And it is there—and I emphasized this in my testimony—we were just far, far too late in recognizing that this conflict is being driven, this hurricane, political hurricane that has developed, by events on the ground not by what happens in Geneva or in New York.

So I think that there is a lot more to do, but the question is what is the wisest move. It seems right now that the wisest move, in terms of moving our lines forward, would involve supporting the opposition inside of Syria with all the pitfalls that go along with it.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, there has been, as you know, in the meeting in Paris and the other meetings—Istanbul or elsewhere—very significant efforts made to flesh out who is the opposition. I mean, do you know precisely who you would provide weapons to?

Mr. TABLER. Absolutely not, but——

The CHAIRMAN. Well, do you not think we need to know that?

Mr. TABLER. Absolutely.

The CHAIRMAN. I mean, that component of the opposition is in the process of now consolidating and in fact defining its goals and leader hierarchy.

Mr. TABLER. That is correct. Then therefore, as I outlined, I think the first step is that we are going to have to do a much, much better job of actually not only identifying and mapping these groups, which I think a lot of the U.S. Government has been doing including in the State Department—I was actually praising a number of them who have taken on this task—but also we are going to have to directly engage with these groups and see what they can do. It is because in my opinion I think this is more likely to be a grinder conflict in which the regime contracts. Ambassador Indyk talked about a rump Alawite state. I think that the breakup of Syria, at least temporarily, is much more likely than the regime just tipping over, and therefore, we are going to be dealing with multiple communities inside of Syria that could simply—some of which could be supportive of United States interests and some of which could be directly opposed to us.

The CHAIRMAN. I would like to ask all of you to sort of comment on this next question, which is part of that. What is the danger here—and is there anything at all we can do about it—of this majority Sunni emergence, for very understandable reasons, supported by other Sunni nations in the region with an Islamist agenda?

Mr. TABLER. It would depend on what kind of Islamist agenda it would be. Is it likely that groups which have Islamist agendas, including the Muslim Brotherhood or Salafists, are going to have a strong role in a post-Assad Syria? Yes, that is likely. But Syria's Sunni community is also very divided and I think will remain so. Sunnis from the northwest who are very conservative are very different than tribal Sunnis from the east or those who are tribal but settled in the south in Daraa, let alone the minority communities

which will probably not join Islamist parties, at least not in large numbers.

In terms of extremists, it is possible that in a post-Assad Syria, if they have completely fill the void that has been created in the country without more, I think, assistance from the West, I think it is likely they could perhaps shoot above their weight in a post-Assad Syria, but I do not think they would be able to hijack that Sunni political space.

The CHAIRMAN. Ambassador Indyk.

Ambassador INDYK. First of all, as a general principle, I think we have got to be careful of avoiding falling into the trap of the jihadist bogeymen that has been used by our previous allies like Hosni Mubarak to convince us not to do the thing that we thought was the right thing to do. So, Andrew I think laid out of the complexity of Syria. But Syria has been a secular country for a long time and there is not a natural breeding ground for al-Qaeda there. It is the conflict that provides the opening.

And I endorse the idea, which I think you also support and the administration is now doing, which is more active engagement with the insiders, the people who are doing the fighting. I thought that Jim Dobbins put it very well. That is where the leadership is going to be forged in "the crucible of war." His words. But I think it is exactly right.

And part of the engagement in which we should be looking at the question of whether we need to arm them, but in that process, we need to make clear there are certain requirements. And one of the most important is that they stand up and articulate a vision of a post-Assad Syria which stands against the kind of things that al-Qaeda and jihadists want to promote. They need to be taking the lead in defining the kind of Syria that they want, and if it is consistent with our vision, then we should be supporting them more actively.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you want to comment, Ambassador Dobbins?

Ambassador DOBBINS. Please. I mean, al-Qaeda and similar groups are essentially parasites. They will attach themselves to any Muslim insurgency anywhere in the world. They will pick sides and they will participate in an effort to gain credibility, to gain recruits, to gain visibility.

The best way to marginalize extremist groups like that is not to suppress the insurgents but to support the insurgents. This is what we did in Bosnia where we supported Muslim insurgents against orthodox Christian persecutors. This is what we did in Kosovo. This is what we did in Afghanistan where we supported the Northern Alliance, the Muslim insurgents, against an oppressive Taliban government. And this is what we did in Libya where we supported the insurgents. And in each case, we were successfully able to marginalize these more extreme groups within the resultant regimes.

There is not an insurgent in the world who would not rather have American support than al-Qaeda's if he is given that choice. And so what we are arguing—at least what I am arguing here—is that we ought to give them that choice.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Senator Lugar.

Senator LUGAR. I would like to ask sort of the basic question we perhaps began with and that is the idea that we do have a foreign policy with regard to Syria right now and that is that Assad must go. And so having come to that point, this sort of follows that Mubarak must go and that Qadhafi must go. And we seem to have adopted a pattern with regard to the Arab Spring and the Middle Eastern states that these are authoritarian regimes. It is simply a matter of time until people in the country decide that they want to replace their leadership.

We could, I suppose, note that there are authoritarian regimes in many other continents, really all over the world, and that as a matter of fact, it may very well be in the course of a few years of time that people will want to revolt in those countries. And our first analysis may be that whoever the leader is must go, that it finally is time that the authoritarian regime is gone. But as some have pointed out, we have been down that trail.

Without oversimplifying it, I was impressed with Tom Friedman's column in the New York Times on Sunday in which he points out that essentially in Iraq, we adopted the thought that Saddam Hussein must go and, as a matter of fact, sent in a very substantial military force to make sure that occurred. Then we really did intervene with regard to who should rule the country. It is a long story, but we spent the better part of 10 years working our way through this situation until finally some elections were held and the Iraqis decided that we ought to go. And they may or may not have determined their fate finally. But this was very expensive in terms of hundreds of billions of dollars, loss of American lives, and so forth. But, nevertheless, we have not been deterred from this kind of thinking with regard to other countries.

What I want to ask just basically, if you are a ruler of a country and you may be a very evil ruler with very bad thoughts about life in general, why is it necessary that we as a matter of American foreign policy dictate that you must go? And is it not logical that if you are such a ruler, you will use whatever force you have to retain control of your situation?

And now making it more complex, as you have all pointed out, in the case of Syria, if you are with a small group, the Alawites—and as a matter of fact, they are not deserting, and you have all suggested it may end up with a breakup of Syria geographically with the Alawites, as a matter of fact, becoming a small country or part of the picture. As opposed to whether Assad goes or not, the Alawites may decide we do not want to go. As a matter of fact, we are prepared to fight.

So we can give advice to all sorts of other groups in Syria on how to deal with Assad, but then we begin to get into the facts of how do you deal with the Alawites. Do you go after them? Is our mission then a united Syria?

And the question will rapidly arise outside of the forum of this committee with the American people as a whole, what kind of popular support is there in the United States for this sort of complex intervention country after country? And my judgment for the moment is very little. As a matter of fact, foreign policy as a whole, as many have pointed out, has a very small part in our own national debate currently. So this is occurring on the fringes but

it occurs very rapidly in the middle if it costs money, if it costs lives, and if it sets a precedent for further intervention.

So I am sort of basically asking the question why should the United States, as a matter of foreign policy, our own security policy, intervene at all beyond at least the debates that we have had in international fora asking the Arab League what do you have to do about all of this. There are others who are much more intimately involved, it would seem to me, in terms of their national interests than our own.

Can you give me an overall thought as to what the interests finally are of the United States that are so vital that we ought to risk money and lives in Syria?

Mr. Indyk.

Ambassador INDYK. Thank you, Senator Lugar.

First of all, on your point about declaring the objective as being that Assad must go and Mubarak must go or Qadhafi must go, I actually think it is a mistake for the United States to be deciding those things in that way or making it look like we decide when they can stay and when they can go. I think it is a lesson from the Arab Awakening that the Obama administration should take on board. It is up to the people of Egypt or Libya or Syria to decide whether their leaders should go or not. And in the case of these authoritarian leaders, we should support that. But we should be supporting it; we should not be dictating it. And we have too often in the Arab Awakenings put ourselves in the position where it looks like we are dictating it, and I think that is a mistake.

It is particularly a mistake—and I think this is what you were getting at. It is particularly a mistake if we articulate the objective and we are not prepared to take the action to achieve that objective because then it opens up a gap between our objective and the means that we are prepared to use to support it and that creates a credibility problem for the United States.

And the third problem, which was really driven home by what happened in Libya, is that if we get a Security Council resolution in that case with the acquiescence of the Russians and the Chinese and the Indians and the Brazilians that was designed to protect the Libyan people but had nothing, no language, there about overthrowing Qadhafi, that we would have been much better off using the language of protecting the Libyan people that would have led to their overthrow of Qadhafi, which in fact happened, but without the expression of the objective because that torqued the Russians and the Chinese in particular and gave them an excuse, which has come back to haunt us in Syria, that they are not going to allow any kind of U.N. Security Council resolution because we took it and used it as an excuse for a regime change, which they are not prepared to support, at least not yet.

So for all those reasons, I think it is a mistake to articulate it in that way even though it may be our objective. We should be supporting the aspirations of the people of Syria who seek to overthrow the regime, and that presentation I think is important.

Now, the second point is will the American people support an intervention. And I think it is true that you would know this better than I because you have constituents that express this, but the American people seem to me to be war-weary particularly of wars

in the greater Middle East, 10 years on, the longest wars in our history, as you said, a huge price paid in both blood and treasure. People are not ready for another intervention in the Middle East, and I think that is why there is a constraint that operates on the behavior both of President Obama and of Governor Romney in terms of the positions that they articulate in this situation.

But as the situation deteriorates and if we see the kind of humanitarian disasters that we fear, that is, massacre on a large scale or use of chemical weapons for the purpose of ethnic cleansing, then I think the American people will reach the point where they say the United States has to do something about that.

It would be unfortunate if we had to get to that situation, and that is why I think the discussion about other ways to help the opposition which, as Jim Dobbins has pointed out, they are on the winning side—they are making surprising progress. I must say I was surprised—maybe Andrew was not—that they were able to carry the fight to Damascus and Aleppo so quickly. And I think that we really need to get behind them with all the other things that we talked about this morning to try to avert the situation in which the American people finally come around to supporting a much more boots-on-the-ground type military intervention of the United States.

Senator LUGAR. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Lugar.

Senator Coons.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Chairman Kerry, for holding this hearing.

And I want to thank this panel of distinguished witnesses for their insight and their experience and what you have shared with us about the increasingly volatile situation in Syria and the unconscionable levels of violence. As we all know, the Assad regime has moved from an aggressive internal crackdown to now mass atrocities against its own people and seems likely, as has been suggested, to engage in a grinding internal conflict that hopefully will not cross redlines of using weapons of mass destruction against its own people, but they have so far shown no limitation in their capability, willingness, and inclination to use heavier and heavier weapons.

So I am gravely concerned that we need to do more. We must do more to rally the international community to lead responsibly. And you have laid out a number of very challenging and interesting questions about how we can more effectively do that.

I am strongly inclined to join Senator Rubio in supporting tougher sanctions. I am going to urge more active engagement, as you suggest, in mapping the opposition and in engaging with them both within and outside Syria and doing more to support what I think will ultimately be the successful opposition in their efforts to remove Assad and his regime.

But I would be interested in hearing some concrete input on a few more points, if I could.

How do you think we can actively engage with the opposition on the ground within Syria and outside in the region in a way that is best likely to bridge divides, sectarian and regional divides internally, that is best able to give Alawite generals some sense of a

post-Assad future and some buy-in to a transition and that is most likely to lead to some prospect for a post-Assad Syria that remains a unitary state and where there is respect for human rights and some prospect for democracy? And where can we make the greatest missteps in that engagement?

Mr. Tabler strongly suggests that by really solely focusing on a U.N. and a Geneva outside-of-the-region multilateral effort, we are failing to address emerging conditions on the ground.

Ambassador Indyk, you I think raised some very important points about encouraging defections and not overreaching.

And I believe, Ambassador Dobbins, you were also pointing out that the post-Saddam Iraq has some very pointed lessons for us about not completely dismantling the security forces and the very real risks should that happen.

So my core question, How can we best engage on the ground in Syria with the opposition and regionally to encourage a transition that bridges rather than exacerbates sectarian divides? If you would just in order, Ambassador Indyk, Ambassador Dobbins, Mr. Tabler.

Ambassador INDYK. Well, first of all, I do not think it should be done at the expense of that diplomatic effort at the international level.

Senator COONS. Agreed.

Ambassador INDYK. And there is no reason why we cannot do both at the same time because we need both.

And I am interested to hear you say that about the sanctions because I do think there is more that we can do on the sanction front. In fact, we have not done as much as the Europeans have done on that front to make it much more uncomfortable for people to support the regime.

On the ground, well, I will defer to people who have more expertise on that. I think Andrew can address it.

But the key decision here is to focus on the inside rather than on the outsiders. We spent a lot of effort with the outsiders—frankly, it has failed at least so far—to unify them, to get them to articulate a clear vision for a post-Assad Syria and it seems impossible. We should have learnt from the experience with the external Iraqi opposition which was very similar. There are plenty of Chalabis around, but to get them all to work together in an effective way seems to be a full-on mission particularly because they are not connected with the people who are doing the fighting. So I think getting in there on the ground, which I believe we are already doing, and mapping it, trying to understand who these people are, forging the relationships with them, figuring out who is reliable, who is not, and then helping them, helping them in whatever ways we can especially in terms of intelligence assistance because they are fighting a war.

And then, of course, on the military side, whether we can do it through the Turks and the Qataris I think would be preferable but it may reach a point where we have to provide them with the kind of equipment, but it is important that we do it because we may, thereby, have a greater ability to control what happens to it than if it is sent through proxies.

Senator COONS. Thank you.

Ambassador Dobbins.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I will defer to Andrew on who we should be engaging. I think he is much more familiar with the actors.

I would just say that if we have something to offer, we have a better chance of a meaningful engagement. And to the extent we are offering arms, training, and other forms of assistance, we are going to empower those whom we engage with. And so we have an opportunity to shift the balance within an opposition that is still somewhat disunited toward those factions that are most likely to work toward the future of Syria that we have all talked about.

Senator COONS. I agree.

Mr. Tabler, you spoke to a headless but not leaderless opposition within and without Syria. I would be interested in your thoughts as well.

Mr. TABLER. Sure. To answer your question and its essence, actually the Assad regime is very good at confusing those on the outside, and there is good reason for that. It is also a very confusing country. I found that the best way to deal with it was to make my decisions first based on what it was that I was after, if I was investigating a story, if I was writing something, and it was not just in terms of what my overall policy goal was.

So in this particular case, for example, we are looking at a situation where we are trying to examine the opposition within Syria. And as Ambassador Indyk says, there have been some real limitations with the opposition in exile. Those are actually the words of President Obama after his meeting with Prime Minister Erdogan. What does that really mean?

Well, there are a number of groups that are on the ground which are very influential. Revolutionary councils particularly in Homs have been very effective. Elements of the Free Syrian Army, which is essentially a sort of franchise organization. So there are many different factions of it. Those would be groups that I can identify immediately with whom we should be building closer relationships and trying to understand. And I think that we are, but again it was far too slowly.

The way you do that is actually quite simple and then gets more complicated. If you go to border areas, the fighters just are not inside of Syria or those that are in exile. They come and go all the time. They come and go all the time not just to Antakya and to Kilis but also to Istanbul as well. You can meet them all the time. They have been waiting to meet with us for a long time. U.S. Government officials were actually forbidden from meeting with anyone in the Free Syrian Army up until earlier this spring.

Then what you do is you can also communicate with people who are inside the country. We do it at my institute all the time. We Skype with people who are inside of the country. That is one of the wonderful things about the Syrian revolution is that so much of it takes place online in the sense that you can easily and readily access these, oftentimes including video.

Now, of course, you have to then weigh that up. You have to listen to your gut, and that is where you have to experiment and kinesthetically try and understand who you are dealing with and what they are capable of. It is very difficult work and it is work that, though, I think if we base our strategy on that and working with

some allies as well who are doing similar operations, we are much more likely to turn the tide against the Assad regime inside the country. That will bend the Russians eventually because in this case to Senator Lugar's earlier point about interests, it is not just about morals. It is about placing your bets going forward.

You see, the Assad regime is in systemic failure. It is a minority-dominated regime that cannot reform, that rules over one of the youngest populations in the Middle East outside the Palestinian Territories. There is no way that it can hold on. It can hold on in a more limited form, but it is just systemic failure. You see, we are placing our bets for a future in the Levant and the only way to do that is to engage it as it is. And if we do not do that very rapidly, I fear that we are going to lose all the texture of what is going on, and unfortunately, we are going to be handing it over to, in some cases, our allies in the region, but also a lot of our adversaries.

And this is where the earlier comments about al-Qaeda become much more dangerous. Jebhat al-Nusra inside of Syria is real. It is growing. There are more foreign fighters inside of Syria. They have not hijacked the revolution, but if they are the ones who are coming to the Syrian people's assistance while the United States does relatively little, we should not be surprised in a post-Assad Syria that they look upon those other forces more favorably than they do us.

Senator COONS. Thank you for your testimony. Thank you to the panel.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Corker.

Senator CORKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I thank all of you as witnesses. I think this has been one of the more interesting discussions we have had on foreign policy in a while, and I think that part of the discussion today centered on the fact that—talking about our national interests. And I think one of the things that we as a committee and Congress can do in general that we have not done is really, in advance of issues like we have in Syria, more fully lay out what it is that drives us into kinetic activity and what our national interests are and to begin looking at some of the important issues. We tend to, it seems to me, respond to many of these things in an emotional way at the moment and say some things, Mr. Indyk, as you have said in your testimony—say some things—these are my words—that sort of respond to the emotions of the time. But we really strategically do not talk about those things in advance. We really do not develop a lens here through which all of these conflicts ought to be looked at. And I hope that over time the committee will do that.

As I listened to your testimony, it is sort of three schools of thought. We have one who is really focused on diplomacy, and I appreciate your insights. And Mr. Dobbins, this is not a pejorative statement, but it is more a lead-from-behind approach, if you will, I think and I think there is a lot of merit to what you have said about that. And then a much more direct involvement from you, Mr. Tabler.

One of the things our State Department I think would say if they were here is, look, things are going pretty well right now. I mean, the folks that we like are gaining momentum, and why would we get involved and mess that up? You know, a lot of unintended con-

sequences. When I say that, by the way, I am very aware of all the violence on the ground, the lives that are being destroyed and people that are being harmed, and I am in no way making light of that. But I think our State Department—as a matter of fact, I know they would say it—is, look, things are going pretty well right now. Why would we get involved and create some unintended consequences?

Mr. Tabler, if you would, you never, to my knowledge, responded to Senator Kerry's ask about how we militarily get more involved, how we arm some of the opposition groups more directly, or at least I did not hear it. And I would like for you to respond both to what I think the State Department would say if they were here but, secondarily, how we would get more involved directly in a way that did not lead to unintended consequences.

Mr. TABLER. Thank you for the question.

If the State Department was here—and I have the pleasure of meeting with a number of them pretty regularly. I think that actually there have been a number in the State Department who I commend who have actually tried to look more closely at what is going on actually on the ground in Syria and how to more effectively for the United States to indirectly intervene. And that involves supporting some of the groups that I talked about earlier. That is a type of intervention. It is a slow one. It is complicated. There are some unintended consequences but you can turn the tap oftentimes on and off, and I think that we have done that, not necessarily with the armed groups inside the country at least overtly, but some of the civil groups inside of the country.

When it gets into the question concerning the direct intervention, that is where you have to really start looking at triggers I think. And in there I can see two immediately in front of us that are very realistically going to emerge from the conflict here in the coming months and that is mass atrocities of some type, including massive refugee flows across borders, and then the other would be—and it could be in combination—use of chemical weapons. These two developments could trigger a direct intervention by the United States. There are several different plans for that, as I think this committee knows, everything from——

Senator CORKER. So you are not then—I, by the way, have never heard anybody lay out any redlines, OK, for what it is worth. I have been in almost all these hearings and I might have stepped out and taken a call. I do think that chemical use or biological use would be a redline, and I do think that would trigger involvement by us most likely.

But I thought I heard you advocating direct involvement before that type of activity and now in order to shape things in such a way that after whatever happens, we had a more friendly group on the ground toward our interests. So, if you will, do not talk about the redline events, because I think you are advocating direct involvement prior to those redline events.

Mr. TABLER. Correct, correct. And I generally describe it and my colleague, Jeff White, at the Washington Institute as well—we have described it as indirect intervention, and that involves actively reaching out with groups which are inside of the country, all of whom will speak with us and have wanted to speak with us

for some time in very lengthy conversations, understanding what it is that they want—and this is including armed groups as well—and then trying to weigh up, OK, do these people support our long-term interests in Syria or not and are they worth betting on or not. It is a very detailed—I would say it is an intelligence operation, but it is actually beyond that because so much of what happens now in Syria is simply out in the public. So it also involves some kind of outreach to the groups inside of the country much more than we are doing at the moment.

Those in the State Department that are dealing with this—it is a very limited number of people. They only have so much capacity. And that is because a lot of other resources to our approach have been directed toward diplomacy, negotiations in Geneva, votes and vetoes ultimately in New York, which were not successful.

Senator CORKER. So you are not advocating arming directly the opposition, if I hear you correctly. You are advocating covert operations on the ground, CIA, DIA, other types of involvement in that way. Is that what you are saying?

Mr. TABLER. No. I think we are already doing that. I do not know in any kind of detail, but I can say that at this point, given the direction of the conflict, I think that what we need to do is assess, OK, which groups could we arm, and should we arm, at what point and make that decision. And I think that we are actually at that decision given where the conflict is going.

Senator CORKER. I see the other two witnesses shaking their heads up and down. So you all are in agreement that we are at a point body language-wise—I would love for you to verbally state something. [Laughter.]

But you all are in agreement that we are at a point where we should decide which groups we are going to arm and which we are not. Is that what I see the body language indicating?

Ambassador DOBBINS. Yes.

Ambassador INDYK. Yes. I think that is right. I think to say things are going well and therefore why get involved and mess it up is, I think, a too optimistic assessment of the situation. There is no doubt that Assad is in a situation from which he cannot recover, but the things we have talked about before are the reasons to be concerned about not taking a kind of relaxed view about this. That is, it is different in Syria to the other situations we have dealt with. This is an Alawite regime representing an Alawite community that essentially sees their choice as either kill or be killed. And so the consequences can be very bad, and they are coming down the road. And the consequences in the region because of the sensitivity of Syria's geostrategic location can also be very bad for our interests.

So that is why I think it is important for us to step up our active engagement, but to do it in a wise way because you are absolutely right that we have to avoid the unintended consequences to the extent that we can anticipate them, imagine them. So that is why we need to do it in a way that, first of all, we understand who we are supporting and what their intentions are. And we cannot rely, frankly, on our allies to be doing that for us. They have different standards because their objectives are different to ours. And so that is why I think the answer is, "Yes."

Senator CORKER. And I know my time is up. But, Mr. Dobbins, I normally like yes or no answers, but in this case if you would expand on us directly arming opposition groups, I would appreciate it.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I think the time has come to consider that and pick those groups that we think are most consistent with our interests and our vision for the future and begin to advantage them in terms of the internal politics by providing assistance, including perhaps money, as well as arms and advice.

I do think there is a dilemma here. There is a risk. We support the resistance, the opposition. The opposition, when it begins to win, is probably going to itself perpetuate some atrocities. There are going to be groups that we support who are going to go off and murder Alawites and maybe Christians and others. I think, to some degree, that is inevitable. The answer to that is it will be even worse if we do not support them. If we stand aside and do not get engaged, we can keep our hands clean, but the result will probably be an even worse civil conflict than if we get involved and use our influence to try to attenuate what we probably cannot entirely avoid. And there is a political risk involved to that.

Ambassador INDYK. Could I just add one quick point, Senator Corker, which is that this is one part of a strategy.

Senator CORKER. I understand. I know a lot of diplomacy is.

Ambassador INDYK. Because if we only focus on this, then we will not be able to achieve our objectives.

Senator CORKER. And I heard everything you said on the front end, and I agree with those points too. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Senator Shaheen.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you all for being here. I am sorry to have missed your testimony.

But I just want to follow up a little bit on Senator Corker's line of questioning and start by saying I do not think, and the officials that I have heard from relative to what is happening in Syria, that the approach has been laid back and one that has not suggested that we are doing everything we can to follow very closely what is going on and to try and engage at every opportunity. So my impression has not been what I thought I heard a couple of you say that we were taking too laid-back an approach on Syria.

But let me ask you with respect to arming the opposition. There have been reports that we are engaged in providing communications equipment and other support, that there are other countries that are providing arms to the opposition. Are you all suggesting that that is not enough and that we should be actively arming opposition groups at this time? And if that is what you are suggesting, then what do you think we ought to be looking for in terms of those groups we should be supporting with arms and what the implications of that might be? I do not know.

Ambassador Indyk, do you want to go first?

Ambassador INDYK. Well, I think, Senator Shaheen, that we need to know who we are arming. That is the question that we have to answer first. I do not think we quite have that answer yet. When we know the answer to that question—and that is an urgent ques-

tion to answer. We need to be actively engaged and so I think we are in trying to get that answer. But then, yes, once we have that answer, once we are satisfied that these are the right people to be arming, these have some responsibility and some consistency and some leadership and are committed to a post-Assad Syria that involves all of its communities, then yes, we should be arming them, but only in terms of arming them with things that they cannot get through others. And it is precisely those things that we need to know whose hands they are in. We need to have some accountability for them.

Senator SHAHEEN. Do either of you have anything different to add to that analysis?

Ambassador DOBBINS. Well, the risk of operating exclusively through cutouts, the Saudis, the Turks—they have objectives of their own. They will favor groups that are not necessarily the groups that we would favor. The Saudis are likely to favor Salafist groups.

Senator SHAHEEN. I understand, and I am sorry to interrupt. But can you, if you would, describe the kind of groups we ought to be looking at if we were looking at arming particular groups? What criteria should we have and what kind of values should we be looking for?

Ambassador DOBBINS. Well, I think Martin has given a good expression of this. I think we should be, obviously, looking at those who are—first, there is probably a small minority who actually want a secular, democratic Syria. But I think we also ought to be looking at moderate Islamists, including perhaps the Muslim Brotherhood representatives who are prepared to operate within a democratic environment based on popular sovereignty and operate much as the governments in both Tunisia and Egypt seem to be operating.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Mr. Tabler, you mentioned chemical weapons in your exchange with Senator Corker, and it is one of the things that I have been very concerned about. I know a number of other folks have too. When I asked Secretary Panetta about this issue back in March, we talked about it in the context of what we saw in Libya with the MANPAD's, and he said it would be 100 times worse in Syria. I wonder if you could interpret the recent reports of movements of the chemical weapons in Syria and how we should view that.

Mr. TABLER. Sure. There is a lot that is handled—this issue is traditionally handled by the intelligence community. It is well known that Syria has one of the stockpiles of chemical weapons in the Middle East. It is not a secret.

I think that there is particular worry in the regime moving them. There are several worries. One is that moving these materials makes them subject then to being captured by other forces which are actively operating in the country. But I think maybe more importantly if these materials are, say, moved to some of their facilities near Homs, for example—there is a lot of fighting in Homs. Homs is adjacent to the Alawite coast and the Alawite mountains where that sect hails from. So if you move them into facilities there, they could be not only put at the disposal of the regime, which is fighting a struggle against the opposition, but could also

be put at the disposal of an Alawite rump state or an entity of some type. It might not even be a state. It could be used as a fear tactic. It could be used as a deterrent so that they are not attacked into the future, probably a pretty effective one. And that could affect the next steps that we all have to make in Syria.

Then there is the other problem in that there are so many different sites and, from what I understand, so much of it is weaponized that it could fall into the hands of some of the insurgents and then they could, of course, use them against the regime in a fit of fury, which would of course not be good for all concerned, including the United States I think. But also those materials then could be sold outside of Syria. And then I think it becomes a larger security question for the United States. It is incredibly complicated and one again that if you stand back and you do not do more in this regard, then I think it becomes more risky going forward.

Senator SHAHEEN. So are you saying then that you think the movement of the weapons is because the Syrians are interested in having all of those options for using them. It is not, as some have speculated, to move them to a safer place to make them more secure.

Mr. TABLER. It depends on safer for whom. I think that the regime would like to have it at their disposal. It is not because they do not believe that they are trying to sort of live up to whatever commitment they have, even privately, concerning nonproliferation. I think that they would like to have it at their disposal to use as they are on their way out. But ultimately those choices are with Bashar al-Assad and his regime.

And I can only say from someone who lived in Syria for a long time, Bashar al-Assad is not a very rational actor. He is quite unpredictable and Janus-faced. And this goes for his entire regime. It makes him very different than his father Hafez. It was a major miscalculation to think otherwise. Unfortunately, Bashar, when cornered—we just do not really know what he is going to do. So in such a case, it would be better to err on the side of caution.

The question is what can we really do other than issue some of the private redlines that I think have not issued recently.

Senator SHAHEEN. Mr. Chairman, my time is up but could I ask one more followup?

The CHAIRMAN. You may.

Senator SHAHEEN. I asked General Mattis, the CENTCOM commander, this question back when he was before the Armed Services Committee, and his response was that it would require an international effort to secure the chemical weapons. I wonder if you, Mr. Tabler, or either of our other panelists could speak to what that international effort might look like and whether we should feel like it is underway now, or have we heard any attempts to address it?

Ambassador DOBBINS. It depends on what we mean. I think the actual dismantling of these weapons could take place under some sort of international regime, not a military regime, but technicians who would come in with the cooperation of the then Syrian government and begin to dismantle these weapons. I think there are precedents for that, and that is perfectly plausible.

I think some sort of international military force that would rush in and seize the sites is less plausible. I think the desirable out-

come is that the Syrian military continue to secure these sites under the oversight of a new government, and that is why, as others here have suggested, we want to, and are, counseling the opposition not to go down the road we went down in Iraq to disperse the military but rather to try to retain them as a coherent and cohesive force under a new government and thereby retain control of those weapons. And either Syria will continue to have the weapons or it will be under diplomatic pressure from the United States and others to give them up in an internationally monitored way.

Ambassador INDYK. I did not hear General Mattis' remarks, but there is potentially other interpretations of the word "international" which means Israel. Israel has made it clear that this is a redline for them. You know, Israel is not up in space in this situation. The Israeli defense forces on the Golan Heights are 40 kilometers from Damascus and it is downhill. And they have a capable army. This for them is unacceptable if the chemical weapons are handed over to Hezbollah. So I think that is their particular redline that they are looking at. I would guess that Secretary of Defense Panetta has been talking to them about under what circumstances it might be necessary to intervene.

In this very specific case, because I do not think it is a good idea for the Israelis to be intervening in Syria—I do not think they want to in other circumstances which would enable Assad to turn this into an Arab-Israeli conflict. But in these particular circumstances, the Israelis have a better ability than I think anybody else to get control of those weapons, particularly if they have been transferred or if they are about to be—I mean, if the control of them is disintegrating and they are about to be taken up by elements that we would not want them to get hold of, that is, jihadi elements.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

Before we wrap up here, I want to try to bear down on a couple of things that I think are sort of hanging out there that, at least in my mind, are not quite as clear as I would hope they might be.

Senator Lugar appropriately put the larger question of intervention on the table and bore down on the experiences of Iraq and elsewhere and the larger balance here, and I think everything that he said is a very important check on anybody's approach to or thinking about the stakes here. But at the same time, we have interests and I would like to see if we can put this into a tighter framework. I do not know if you can.

But, for instance, there seems to be an agreement that if something were to happen with these weapons of mass destruction or if there were a sufficient perception of a threat to our interests directly or to the region or to allies in the region, that we might have to move. Is that agreed? And do you believe, each of you, that if that were the case, that would merit potentially some kind of intervention? I see nodding, but let us have a verbal.

Mr. Tabler.

Mr. TABLER. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Dobbins.

Ambassador DOBBINS. Yes, although I am not sure how effective that intervention would be ex post facto. The threat of the intervention, however, might be very important to prevent the use.

The CHAIRMAN. Ambassador Indyk.

Ambassador INDYK. Yes. And on this issue, we will have the Russians with us, and I do not know whether you have noticed their statements on this, but they too have warned the Syrian——

The CHAIRMAN. They have been pretty clear on it. I agree.

Ambassador INDYK [continuing]. The Assad regime.

The CHAIRMAN. The second potential trigger that I have heard is people talking about some very significant massacre, that if all of a sudden there seems to be a blood letting, not dissimilar to what prompted President Clinton to move in the Balkans, et cetera, that that might trigger us. Is there an agreement on that?

Mr. TABLER. Yes. I think that not only would that be a trigger, but I think in terms of getting to Senator Lugar's earlier point, there is quite a bit of support in terms of the American people about issues of mass atrocities and genocide. There was recently a study, a poll that was conducted by the U.S. Holocaust Museum in which you can see that the Syrian issue itself, isolated, is not a major political issue, but if it is combined with other Middle Eastern issues or on genocide or mass atrocities, it actually moves very quickly up the ladder.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you both agree with that?

Ambassador Dobbins.

Ambassador DOBBINS. Yes, but I would go a little bit beyond that. I am not sure we just sort of passively wait for some trigger to move us forward.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, that is my next question.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I think Senator Corker said correctly I think that I am advocating that we lead from behind on this. But the lead is as important as from behind; that is, I do not think we should become the standard bearer for an international intervention, but I think we should be quietly working behind the scenes to try to align the various things that would need to occur to make such an intervention feasible and successful.

Ambassador INDYK. Yes, but there is also a deterrent factor, just as we discussed in the chemical weapons case, that we need to be signaling—and not just us, but the international community needs to be signaling to the Assad regime that this kind of mass atrocities, ethnic cleansing, the deployment of chemical weapons for that purpose is a redline for the whole international community. And we need to try to deter that from happening rather than to wait for it to happen before we intervene.

Ambassador DOBBINS. A plausible redline, short of chemical weapons use, is the use of fixed wing aircraft to bomb large urban conglomerations, and I think that is a redline one ought to at least think about. It is the kind of intervention that could be taken—it could be just simply cruise missiling their air bases. If they did it, it would not necessarily require an air war to deter that kind of thing. But there are options short of these massive casus belli.

The CHAIRMAN. And in order to do that, do you believe that it would require a U.N. resolution of some kind or would it require

support? Could NATO authorize that? Could the GCC, as we saw in Libya, be a sufficient authority for that kind of an activity?

Ambassador DOBBINS. I think a Security Council resolution is obviously desirable. Kosovo demonstrated that you can get international support, broad international support, without one if necessary. I would think you would want an Arab League endorsement or at least a vast majority of the Arab League, the GCC, most of NATO, and a clear call from the Syrian opposition.

The CHAIRMAN. Here you get into a sort of fuzzier line, but if we are talking about the possible trigger of some sort of "large" massacre, how do you draw the line between a hundred people a day in Homs or the army unleashed to walk through a neighborhood to kill children and women and just pull people out of their apartments and send enough terror in that community but, quote, not quite get into that line where everybody sees it? I guess what I am saying is there is kind of a new normality, and maybe that new normality is way over a line that people ought to be willing to accept.

Ambassador INDYK. I mean, I take your point and it is a disturbing observation. But I do think that there is a difference in the kind of mass atrocities—imagine deployment of chemical weapons that we saw in Iraqi Kurdistan against whole areas, designed to clean out Sunnis from this Alawite rump state. I think that is the distinction we are talking about.

Also, now that the fighting is in Syria's biggest cities, the chances for much higher casualties grows, and that is where the fixed wing aircraft issue comes in as well. So I think that we are approaching a point where the new normal, as you describe it, will look like a picnic compared to the horrors that could unfold. So even though I feel kind of queasy about this because in a sense you are in danger of legitimizing the things that are happening now by drawing a redline against those terrible things, but nevertheless, if your standard is to try to save as many lives as possible, it is important to do it.

The CHAIRMAN. Just so the record is really crystal clear on this: Some people might argue or some Americans might feel, hey, we have got enough problems. We've got unemployment. We've got stuff going on here. We just pulled out of—you know, got our troops out of Iraq. We are slowly transitioning in Afghanistan and so on and so forth. And so some arguments are made, hey, it is their fight and they've got to figure this out.

Why is it in our interest to be engaged in the "diplomacy"? Senator Corker was sort of—you know, there was a chuckle in the audience about increased diplomacy. Obviously not a lot of folks have a huge sense of confidence that that is going to work.

What is the interest here for us? Obviously there are interests. I think there are very significant interests. Ambassador Indyk, in your testimony you specifically talk about the stability of the region and our ally Israel, and those are only two, I think, of a number of interests. But I would like you guys to articulate for us what are the compelling interests here, seriatim, which ought to compel us to say we do need to think about arming people or we do need to be more proactive in working with the Turks and the GCC and

others. What are the interests? Why is America's—what, if any, are the interests that are at stake?

Mr. TABLER. Of course, the most immediate issue—and the way this is usually handled in public concerns moral and ethical issues about how we respond to these kind of atrocities and this kind of brutality in Middle Eastern countries. But I look at it—I mean, I can never advocate letting the Assad regime survive for any moment longer than it has to for those reasons.

But I think in terms of direct interests, what I outlined before. What you are witnessing in Syria now is authoritarian karma. In the 10 years following the 1982 Hama massacre, most Syrians stayed home, the society contracted. And what happens when men and women stay home for long periods of time together without any good TV? Well, you have a surge in birth rates. Syria was among the 20 fastest-growing populations on the planet. All those people born of that time and a little after are swarming that regime, and it is just in systemic failure.

And, Senator Lugar, again responding to your earlier question, I think it is about America actually betting on, like any business would or any individual would, what is coming in the very, very near future.

Second, I think there is the avoidance of a much more expensive war in the Levant which could affect directly Americans in terms of fuel prices or concerning Israel or a number of our other interests that are in the Middle East. Syria's importance is geography, and I think that is something that we can all recognize.

There is, of course, the interests in terms of avoiding genocide, as I outlined before, and I think those are formidable.

But last but not least—and we have not talked about this today, and this is something that affected me as a young person watching politics in the Levant and getting interested in the Middle East. This would be a decisive blow for the Islamic Republic of Iran. I cannot emphasize that enough. And I think that is in our interests to roll back Iranian influence wherever we find it, as we try and deal with preventing their nuclear program. We can do prevention and containment at the same time.

So I think that constellation of interests, alongside these moral questions, will guide our choices in the future.

The CHAIRMAN. Ambassador Dobbins.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I would second that last comment. I think despite the war-weariness that you suggested, our country is poised on the lip of a war with Iran, a war which would be far more consequential than getting involved on the side of the winners in Syria. And that threat and that potential course of action seems to have broad support within our country.

And yet by far the most decisive thing we could do to reduce Iran's capacity to threaten Israel is not eliminate its nuclear program. It is to eliminate its access to the Levant which it gets principally through Syria. If Iran is denied its ability to support surrogates on Israel's border, it no longer has any practical way of threatening Israel. It could threaten a nuclear exchange in which the United States and Israel would both respond overwhelmingly. That is not a plausible threat and it would have no other threat. So there is nothing more effective, I think, to put the Iranian

threat in some perspective and reduce its pressure on Israel than to flip Syria.

The CHAIRMAN. The Honorable Indyk.

Ambassador INDYK. Yes, flip Syria. If only we could do that.

Look, this is not about our interests in a secure Israel in my view. Obviously, that is important, but Israel in these circumstances can look after itself, including dealing with the problems of a Syria serving as a conduit to Hezbollah on its northern border and Hamas in the south. Hamas has already moved out of the Iranian/Syrian camp. That is already plus one for us and for Israel and those who want to see peace in the region. And Hezbollah is now in danger and feeling quite anxious about its situation in Lebanon.

It would definitely be in our strategic interests if Iran were to lose its conduit through Syria. So do not get me wrong on that. That is a strategic plus. But what we have got to worry about is a strategic minus which is that what happens in Syria destabilizes Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and ultimately Bahrain. And I say that because a Sunni-Shia sectarian conflict that starts in Syria is going to spread. We already see its potential for spreading to Iraq and certainly in Lebanon and Jordan is feeling very pressured at the moment. And if the Iranians lose Syria, which is a strategic plus for us, they may well play payback in Bahrain, and Bahrain with its Shias presents a potential for the way that the Sunni king is dealing with it I think is a tragic mistake. There is already the potential to blow there. But with Iranian involvement, it can blow and spread to Shias in Saudi Arabia who are already in the early stages of a revolt, and that can have profound strategic consequences.

So that is, I think, the interests that we have that is paramount in this situation, and in order to shape the outcome in Syria, we have to be involved in what is going on not in terms of military intervention with troops on the ground except in the circumstance we have already discussed, extreme circumstances, but certainly in trying to shape the outcome in a way that prevents these worst case scenarios from happening.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I am glad you laid that out the way you just did because I think, with all due respect, I agree with the comments made by each of our other witnesses, but I think what you have just talked about is the strategic centerpiece of why it is critical for us not just to be involved, but to try extra hard to see if we cannot move the Russians to understand the dangers also to them of that flow of events and to the region as a whole. To me that is the centerpiece of this, which is a Sunni, Shia, sectarian, religious explosion that could have profound long-term impact.

I do not think there is any such thing as a sort of permanent rump Alawite state. I think the Alawi would be enormously challenged if there were the complete implosion of the state. I mentioned earlier I think avoiding that, that is the threading of the needle here that is so vital, and that is why I think we have to look very carefully at all of these other alternatives that you have put on the table, gentlemen.

So I thank you very, very much.

Senator Webb has arrived. I have a 12 noon that I need to attend to and Senator Lugar does. So I will recognize Senator Webb, ask him to close out the hearing, if he would. Senator Shaheen, if you want another round——

Senator WEBB. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to ask some questions and then I may allow Senator Shaheen to close the hearing since I know she has several other questions as well.

The CHAIRMAN. That is great. I appreciate that enormously.

And let me thank our witnesses very, very much for being here today. We really appreciate it.

Senator Webb.

Senator WEBB [presiding]. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And gentlemen, I watched most of this hearing from my office. I followed the discussions, the statements that have been made and your answers. Watching the past 15 or 20 minutes caused me to want to come down here and ask a couple of very specific questions. I think they are important for the record and also for the challenges that we have been going through in terms of the unilateral use of Presidential power in our foreign policy particularly since the Arab Spring.

But three issues come to mind here listening to the conversations that have taken place. And the first is: When does a regime, any regime, lose its legitimacy to the point that the international community decides that something needs to be done? And we are talking about Syria today, but I had a conversation with Secretary Panetta in the Armed Services Committee on this point when we were talking about Libya. And he had made a statement that any regime that deliberately takes the life of its own people who are involved in a peaceable dissent loses its legitimacy. And I said, would you include China in that category given the events of Tiananmen? Would that fall into that category? And he said personally, rather than as policy, he believed that it would.

The second question from watching your discussions today is: What redlines actually exist in any of these situations where we might be calling for an intervention?

And a third, which really compelled me to come down here to hear your views, is: How is it decided? This issue was brought up. How was it decided then—Ambassador Indyk, it was your comment about—I think it was you who made the comment about, well, if you would have an arbitrary line, if it is 100, if it is 200 where the line is, it kind of might even confuse the situation even more on the ground. So how is it decided that the United States itself should get involved in these situations? Chairman Kerry said, should this be NATO? Should it be a United Nations Security Council vote? Should it be the encouragement of the Arab League?

And I would say that when it comes to this relatively new concept of humanitarian intervention, that the best way that we should be resolving that question is to put it to a vote in the United States Congress. We never even got a floor debate on Libya. I just think that is wrong. I think if the administration had properly put the issue before the Congress, the likelihood is that it would have been supported. But you begin to see, listening to the discussions that are taking place today and the gradations that are

involved in the events that we would be looking at in these countries, how important it is in my opinion that we resolve that by a vote here.

And so I would like your thoughts on those three points and what seems to me to be missing here. Ambassador Indyk?

Ambassador INDYK. I think that the Panetta rule is the right one, but a regime that starts firing on its own people by definition is losing its legitimacy. It has lost all legitimacy and therefore should step aside. I would say that is something the people who are affected by this should be the ones to decide that because legitimacy supposedly comes from the people. What does it mean to lose legitimacy? But you are dealing with authoritarian regimes, and the people do not get to express themselves through the ballot box. But when you see large-scale demonstrations against the regime and the hundreds of thousands and millions in the case of Syria all across the country and the regime responds by opening fire on peaceful protestors, then I think you can say it walks like a duck. They have lost the legitimacy.

Senator WEBB. So if Tiananmen occurred today with the Chinese Government rolling out tanks and killing hundreds, if not thousands, of its own people, that it would also fit the Panetta rule.

Ambassador INDYK. Yes, I think that is right. As an objective standard, they would have lost legitimacy if they fired on their people in that way.

One of the redlines—we went through a lot of that discussion, but I think that use of weapons of mass destruction is a clear redline. Massacres and ethnic cleansing should be a redline. We have already seen some but they are limited in scope. I am talking about large-scale massacres should be a clear redline.

How is it decided? I mean, yes, I think you are right that the people's houses should have a decision—should have a say in when the nation goes to war. But in the Libyan case it seems to me a little less clear-cut. There was a clear and immediate danger that needed to be addressed. There was not time to take a vote. And one can anticipate the kinds of interventions we have been talking about today, and I think there is more time to have that discussion just as I do not think that we should be intervening unless we have the support of the international community with us well. So it is both of those things. But ultimately we should be doing those things, but the bottom line is they should not hold us up from intervening if it means enforcing those redlines.

Senator WEBB. Well, I would submit to you there was plenty of time in Libya. We had months once the initial action was taken. There were a number of us, including Senator Corker and myself, who were asking this to be brought up for debate. The situation we had with the humanitarian intervention is kind of unique in our history. I just do not think we have resolved this properly in terms of the balance of power between the executive and legislative branch, unique because—and you obviously know—there is not a treaty involved, we are not under attack, we are not under imminent attack, we are not responding to situations where we are rescuing Americans. It is clearly a unilateral decision, and in my view, time not being a factor, it ought to be brought up here.

Gentlemen, would you like to add anything else? I am now taking up Senator Shaheen's time.

Ambassador DOBBINS. As I said in my testimony, I think that any international intervention, U.S. or otherwise, three questions have to be answered affirmatively before it is going to happen. First of all, do you have an adequate justification, which is part of your question, you know, what is the threshold? Second, do you have a prospect of success? And third, do you have sufficient interests engaged to make the costs and risks worthwhile? You have to answer all three of those questions positively.

In the Chinese case, you might argue that you have gotten the first one. You know, Tiananmen Square might have provided a justification. You certainly had absolutely no prospect of success, and your interests would not have compelled U.S. military intervention. And so even if you cross the first threshold, you have not crossed the other two.

Now, in terms of what justifies, the international standards have changed. You now have an international standard which was adopted by a global summit which is called the "responsibility to protect," and what it says is that governments have a responsibility to protect their citizens, and when they fail that responsibility in some serious way, the international community has a right to intervene to take over that responsibility to protect those citizens. So that is now a global standard, which of course you can then debate endlessly in any particular situation, but I think with respect to Libya and now to Syria, most of the world believes that particular threshold has been crossed.

Senator WEBB. Let me just quickly respond to both points you just made so that we can see if Mr. Tabler wants to say anything before I yield to Senator Shaheen.

With respect to the Tiananmen situation, the point to be made is if we stand for anything as a country, then we would have an obligation to declare those sorts of acts of a magnitude that we would not recognize the validity of that government. I think that is really the point, whether we would intervene directly or not. You cannot have two different standards just because one country is more powerful than another country in terms of the validity of a regime.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I think you are confusing recognition with legitimacy.

Senator WEBB. No, I am not confusing either. If the government is so repressive that it deliberately kills its own people—that is the standard where you say that government no longer has validity—then it does not matter how powerful that government is.

And second, with respect to the responsibility to protect, I understand the concept. My position is, my belief is that when you make that determination, you should be making it in the U.S. Congress not by one individual of whichever party who happens to be the President.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I do not disagree.

Senator WEBB. Mr. Tabler, would you like to add anything?

Mr. TABLER. I am OK.

Senator WEBB. Thank you.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN [presiding]. Thank you and I appreciate the patience of each of you testifying. I know we have gone beyond the time that we promised to keep you here, but I had one final question. It is not as philosophical and broad as Senator Webb's.

But in the discussion that I have heard, there has not been any reference to the idea of safe zones in Syria, and that is something that a number of people have called for. And I just wanted to get your thoughts about that and what would really be involved in setting up a safe zone. And could it be effective?

Mr. Tabler.

Mr. TABLER. I will try and answer that as best I can. I think that it depends on what triggers the creation of a safe zone. And if we look at other cases and sort of compare to the trajectory of the struggle in Syria, I think what is very likely to happen is something akin to the Balkans. So you have this grinding conflict between the regime and the opposition. Already areas of the country are outside the government's control, but they can still reassert themselves in those areas. If the opposition takes a stand and the regime tries to reassert itself and fails, the opposition could simply plant the Free Syria flag in the ground and declare liberated territory. That would then be similar to the Balkans.

That then would put Turkey and I think the United States and its allies in a dilemma. What do you do because the regime is going to throw everything they can at that to make sure that that is no longer valid. That is going to drive up refugees flows into Turkey, death tolls, internally displaced persons. And then the question is, What do we do to protect that area? And there is a whole escalation chain that goes along with that, that goes the whole way from sending in troops, for example, from Turkey or air strikes.

But I think there is a general lesson from the Balkans that you do not create safe zones that in some ways just set themselves up to be possible hostages going forward. And I think that policymakers are aware of that. And the question is, How would that apply to Syria? And again, I think it is going to be driven by how this unfolds on the ground.

Senator SHAHEEN. But when you talk about the importance of being able to actually defend and preserve a safe zone, are you not ultimately talking about needing to have boots on the ground from some place?

Mr. TABLER. Yes. I mean, it would depend on where. There are a number of border areas of Syria where this is, I think, likely, for example, a pocket north of Aleppo, Idlib province, Daraa, even eastern Syria. All of these areas it could happen. It would depend on what the—you know, the country was able to intervene.

I think in the case of Turkey, that is a possibility because they are well placed to do that. In Lebanon and Iraq, even Jordan, it is more difficult.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Ambassador DOBBINS. I think you might plausibly or possibly be able to defend a safe zone with air power alone. For instance, the United States and its allies defended Benghazi with air power alone.

Senator SHAHEEN. I understand that but the situation is a little different in Syria. Is it not?

Ambassador DOBBINS. Well, you could probably not defend all safe zones, but you might be able to defend safe zones where the combination of insurgent capacity on the ground and a commitment of air power would provide a reasonable degree of security if you were prepared to commit air power to that extent. I mean, you would need to get an expert. But air power has certainly shown in Libya the capacity not only to create safe zones but to push them, to extend them ever forward.

Senator SHAHEEN. Sure. But I assume that assumes that the Syrian military is not able to strike out air power that would come in to defend those safe zones, and there is some capacity to do that right now.

Ambassador DOBBINS. If they challenged, then you would have to take out their air defenses, which would be a major operation, but probably more feasible than actually putting troops on the ground except in maybe a very limited geographic area. I would defer to Andrew, but my guess is the Syrian opposition does not want foreign troops on the ground.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Ambassador INDYK. Well, just as a practical matter, the Turks have made clear in several statements by their Prime Minister, their Foreign Minister. They have called for humanitarian corridors which are, in effect, safe havens. And I think that is the most likely circumstance in which it would come about, that is to say, the Turkish Army would provide the boots on the ground that you are talking about to protect a safe haven for the Free Syrian Army and all of the refugees that are now flowing across the border into Turkey and are being housed on the Turkish side of the border. I mean, if we get a massive refugee flow, that would become the justification for doing that. And as a NATO member, there might well be a need for NATO to provide the kind of air cover that we have discussed here. So as a practical matter, that is the way I could see it unfolding and it may be coming soon, depending on—I think the trigger will be the refugee situation, the refugee flow of a major nature toward the Turkish border.

Ambassador DOBBINS. Another just example of this was what we did in the Kurdish areas of Iraq after the first gulf war when the Turks who feared a large influx of Kurdish refugees, which was the last thing they wanted, put pressure on the U.S. Government to force Saddam to essentially give up those areas, and we used exclusively air power to do that.

Senator SHAHEEN. But I guess the point I was—and you have indicated, Ambassador Dobbins, that at least given the current circumstances of the Syrian military, that there could be some significant collateral damage as the result of taking that kind of action. Did I understand you to agree with that?

Ambassador DOBBINS. Yes. I said that we managed to conduct the air wars in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya without losing a single pilot. We probably could not replicate that with respect to Syria.

Ambassador INDYK. But I would just say that on the other side, although that is certainly possible, the Syrian Army is under huge strain already, and we have pilots flying and defecting, taking their aircraft to Jordan and so on. And we have seen in the past when

the Turkish Army mobilizes, the Syrian Army was not prepared to confront them. So although there is potential for the kinds scenarios that you just discussed, I actually think the risk is lower than we fear. But it has to be a Turkish lead in my judgment. I do not see it working in any other way.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you all very much. We appreciate your willingness to stay so long and all of your insights.

At this point, I will close the hearing.

[Whereupon, at 12:30 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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