

# CONFRONTING DAMASCUS: U.S. POLICY TOWARD THE EVOLVING SITUATION IN SYRIA, PART II

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## HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS SECOND SESSION

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## CONFRONTING DAMASCUS: U.S. POLICY TOWARD THE EVOLVING SITUATION IN SYRIA, PART II

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WEDNESDAY, APRIL 25, 2012

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST  
AND SOUTH ASIA,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 1:30 p.m., in room 2360 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Steve Chabot (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. CHABOT. The committee will come to order. Good afternoon, everybody. Sorry for the change in location. Normally we are on 2172, but we had a bunch of hearings happening at the same time so we are here in the Small Business Committee room this afternoon. So sorry for any inconvenience to anyone.

I want to welcome all my colleagues to the hearing of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia. As has been well documented, the human rights abuses being perpetrated by the regime in Damascus are simply horrifying. Recent reports suggest that nearly 10,000 Syrian civilians have now died. Approximately 75,000 have fled the country and over 200,000 are internally displaced within Syria itself.

This is now the fourth hearing that this subcommittee has held on Syrian human rights violations, and I am deeply saddened that each time these numbers continue to grow by leaps and bounds. What is more, the situation shows no sign of improving any time soon. The English language does not have words strong enough to adequately condemn the horrifying abuses that have been committed by the Assad regime and its allies against the Syrian people.

Beyond questions of legitimacy, these despicable acts are proof that the Assad regime is morally depraved, and it is my belief that we and all other responsible nations have a moral imperative to ensure that Bashar al-Assad is removed from power as soon as possible.

Today's hearing is being called to examine U.S. policy options to address the continuing crisis. This subcommittee has had the privilege of hearing testimony from Assistant Secretaries Feldman and Posner as well as Frederic Hof, Special Coordinator for Regional Affairs and one of the administration's point people on Syria.

Although the administration has taken a number of steps on Syria for which it deserves credit, I am deeply concerned that none of these will actually lead to a resolution of the current crisis. While the sanctions that have been implemented by the U.S. and its allies around the world are certainly having an effect, I fear they will not achieve the stated goal to actually bring about the removal of Assad from power.

Some today are looking to Kofi Annan's six-point plan for Syria, the Assad regime's recent acceptance of a ceasefire agreement and the passage of U.N. Security Council Resolutions 2042 and 2043 establishing an observer mission with optimism. I am afraid that I do not share that optimism. Although diplomacy must always be given an opportunity to succeed, I do not see one iota of evidence to suggest that the Assad regime is sincere in any of its international commitments.

Recent reports reference satellite imagery which indicates that the regime has not yet removed all heavy weaponry from population centers in violation of the ceasefire agreement. If it continues, as it has for years, to shirk its international commitments regarding its nuclear program, why should we expect it to honor this agreement now? And if years of sanctions and international isolation have not yet altered the Assad regime's calculations, upon what are we basing the hope that they will now when the regime views itself as in a struggle for its very existence? Hope may be an effective campaign catchphrase, but it is not an effective policy. Indeed, we had all hoped for a clear path forward, that there might be some way through a combination of pressure or enticements to convince Assad to leave power. Those days are long gone.

I fear that those who are advocating for the Annan plan are doing so not because they believe it has any chance of succeeding, but because they do not want to make a far harder, even if necessary, decision.

One lesson that this administration appears not to have learned in over 3 years is that making no decision is, in fact, a decision in and of itself. And the cost is real. As a former official recently noted, "Suppose the administration had not sat on its thumbs and had started delivering nonlethal aid 1 or 2 or 6 months ago. By now we would, in fact, know a great deal more about the opposition, who is real and who has no military capacity, who can get things into Syria and who can't, who is corrupt and who is effective. That we know so little about the opposition is not so much an intelligence failure as a deliberate policy."

Our chief priority must be to get Assad out of power as soon as possible. The longer Assad is allowed to stay in power, the greater the number of innocents killed will be and the higher the likelihood of the conflict evolving into a full-scale civil war will be. Furthermore, Assad's removal would deal an important blow to the regime and Tehran and the terrorists it funds, like Hezbollah.

As our witnesses will outline today, what remains before us are a series of options that range, unfortunately, from bad to worse. As we examine these options, however, we must not allow ourselves to be deluded into thinking that Assad is something that he is not. That he can be coaxed out of power or that he can lead any kind of transition or reform process. He is beyond salvation.

I would now yield to the distinguished ranking member of the subcommittee, Mr. Ackerman from New York, for 5 minutes.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I thank the very distinguished chairman. Atrocities can provoke two kinds of errors from those who witness them. The first is moral collapse, to look away and to refuse to see what is before one's eyes. Whether by impassivity or apathy or rationalization, the nonresponse to horror fails the test of moral responsibility. Each of us, I suspect, has at some point walked away from someone or something which made a claim on our heart. Likewise, we as a government, and we as a nation, have sometimes failed to live up to our own highest aspirations.

The second kind of failure is a form of reflex, a heedless leap into the fire of need. Such acts of selflessness by individuals are often properly understood as heroic, but in the life of nations they may be extremely unwise. Promising to pay any price and bear any burden sounds good on the East Lawn of the Capitol. I suspect those words sound less appealing while trying to survive a night on patrol in a Vietnamese jungle or an Iraqi slum. A man who jumps into the freezing waters to save another may succeed, but as every Boy Scout knows, it would be better to search for a pole or a rope and to pull from solid ground. And indeed, once the leap is made the would-be savior may quickly become a victim as well, doubling the stakes of the crisis.

When this subcommittee met last year to consider the implications of the Syrian revolution, my fear was that we had fallen into the trap of indifference and were seemingly heedless of both the need of the people of Syria as well as the profound strategic implications in the potential collapse of the Assad dictatorship.

While innocent protestors' blood was running in Syria's streets, State Department spokesmen were still rigidly calling for a "restraint on all sides." A smarmy, condescending phrase that really ought to be expunged from our Government's lexicon, and it made the Obama administration seem to be paralyzed. Behind the scenes, however, and to their credit, the Obama administration was working hard on developing the foundations for the broad, international consensus which exists today and has imposed unprecedented political, diplomatic and economic sanctions on the Assad regime, that has opened contacts with the would-be successors to the existing Syrian Government and that is continuing to support the demand of the Syrian people to be free of Assad's tyranny.

Today, I fear the pendulum is swinging toward the second and more potentially dangerous error of precipitous action. I want to be very clear. Profound moral outrage at what the Assad regime has done is not an impediment or a failing. It is a bare requirement for standing in the human race. But the loathing, contempt and anger provoked by Assad's atrocities are poor counselors and doubtful policymakers.

As human beings we must be informed by what we have seen. We cannot pretend to see these events as trivial or somehow normal. The butchery of thousands of men and women, the torture of children, the shelling of civilians in order to sow terror are crimes against humanity and we must not shy away from declaring these acts and insisting on their recognition. We serve no purpose but our own disgrace by hiding, obscuring or downplaying these facts,

but our goal must be more than the satisfaction of our appetite for justice.

As a nation and as a leader in the international community, we continue to have powerful interest in seeing the ultimate destruction of the Assad regime. But that doesn't mean that we want to see Syria in anarchy without any government. We want Assad's forces to stop the killing. We want Assad gone. But that doesn't mean sundry airstrikes or the mere declaration of safe zones will succeed in achieving these ends. We want the Syrian opposition to cohere, to stake out strong, determined positions regarding a liberal, Democratic, pluralistic Syria to come. But it doesn't necessarily follow that releasing a flood of arms will facilitate that objective. We need to engage both our heads and our hearts.

Yes, Assad must go and we need, from both a moral and a national interest position, to facilitate that effort. But determining how to do that is considerably more complex than simply declaring it to be good to do so. It is all well and good for politicians and pundits to make robust speeches. For some, exhortations meet the definition of duty. Nevertheless, words, however righteous and mightily declared, do not feed refugees. They do not send soldiers back to their barracks. They do not collapse corrupt, bloody, failed regimes.

Diplomacy that makes space for the Syrian people's continued popular protests, international cooperation that facilitates the movement of relief supplies, economic sanctions that pressure and squeeze don't inspire us. No statues will be built and no parades will be marched to honor the slow and hopefully steady constriction of a still tightening political-economic noose around Assad and his thugs.

Our goal of course is not wish fulfillment or glory. We are engaged in this work because it is our essential moral obligation and because it serves key national security goals. And that is why despite the starts and stops, despite the agonizing slow pace, despite the endless frustration of coalition building and the diplomatic engagement with adversaries, we must keep at this work until it is done. Assad must go, and for that the noose must tighten. And with the means we have we must speed the work.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much, Mr. Ackerman. We appreciate your statement. And we certainly appreciate the distinguished panel that we have before us this afternoon, and I will introduce them at this time, before they will have 5 minutes to testify, each.

We first have Andrew Tabler who is a Next Generation Fellow in the Program on Arab Politics at the Washington Institute where he focuses on Syria and U.S. policy in the Levant. Tabler served most recently as a consultant on U.S.-Syria relations for the International Crisis Group, and is a Fellow of the Institute of Current World, writing on Syrian, Lebanese and Middle Eastern affairs. Mr. Tabler received his B.A. from William and Jefferson College, and his M.A. from the American University in Cairo. We welcome you here this afternoon.

And next we will have a speaker, Mara E. Karlin who is a lecturer and Ph.D. Candidate in Strategic Studies at Johns Hopkins

University's School of Advanced International Studies. Previously she served in a variety of policy positions in the U.S. Defense Department including Levant director and special assistant to the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy. In connection with her work at the Pentagon, she received the Secretary of Defense Meritorious Civilian Service Award. She is a consultant to the office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy, and an adjunct scholar at the RAND Corporation.

And our third and final witness will be Marc Lynch who is an associate professor of Political Science and International Affairs at the George Washington University, where he also directs the Institute for Middle East Studies. He is also a nonresident senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security, and director on the Project on Middle East Political Science. He is also the editor of the Columbia University Press book series, Columbia Studies in Middle East Politics. He received his Ph.D. in Government from Cornell University.

And we welcome all three of you here this afternoon, and as you know our rules allow 5 minutes from each, and we have a lighting system on your desk. The yellow light will warn you that you have 1 minute to wrap up, and the red light means that we would appreciate it if you would complete your testimony at that time or shortly thereafter.

So we will begin with you, Mr. Tabler. You are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF MR. ANDREW TABLER, NEXT GENERATION FELLOW, WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY**

Mr. TABLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Ackerman, and thank you for this opportunity to testify before the subcommittee today on the situation in Syria, and U.S. Government efforts to force Bashar al-Assad to step aside, as outlined by President Obama in August 2011.

During Part I of this hearing in December of last year, a representative of the Obama administration characterized Assad as a "dead man walking." I agreed with that assessment at the time and I think much of it still holds true. International pressure and sanctions placed upon the Assad regime are having an unprecedented effect on its ability to fund its operations, and evidence shows that hard currency reserves are being rapidly depleted. Unfortunately, however, repeated vetoes by Russia and China at the United Nations Security Council, the overall lack of defections from the core of the Assad regime, and the findings of a recent visit I made to southern Turkey and Lebanon have all helped me understand that Assad still has many more political and military resources that he can call upon to continue what is literally now a death march for months if not years to come. To force Assad to step aside, the United States will need to accelerate efforts from the ground up by supporting the opposition "within Syria" in concert with allies forming the core of the Friends of the Syrian People group of countries.

The Assad regime's continued suppression of the Syrian opposition continues, and has claimed upwards of 10,000 lives thus far. Thousands more have been arrested or displaced including those

that have fled to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. Recently the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution backing a six-point plan developed by special envoy Kofi Annan intended to bring about a cessation of hostilities and a process to facilitate a "Syrian-led political transition to a democratic, plural political system." Despite agreeing to this plan, the Assad regime has failed to meet agreed deadlines to cease use of live fire and heavy weapons as well as its commitments to withdraw its forces from population centers.

The United Nations has also approved a plan to place 300 monitors in Syria for up to 3 months to observe implementation of the plan. Given the regime's failure to observe the agreement thus far, it is unclear if the monitors will be able to do their jobs. What the regime's failure to implement the agreement thus far shows, however, is that what has become known as the Annan plan may be able to deal with some of the symptoms of the crisis in Syria, including introduction of monitors and delivery of humanitarian assistance, but has little hope of dealing with the disease itself, a minority-dominated regime with a 42-year track record of being unable to reform, now brutally suppressing an opposition carved out of one of the youngest populations in the Middle East outside of the Palestinian territories.

The regime has thus far had a harder time dealing with civil resistance over the past year than armed resistance. Assad's actions thus far indicate that he wants to use the Annan plan to grind down not only the armed opposition in the country, but the overall protest movement as a whole. Thus the Annan plan as currently implemented serves Assad's interests and directly undermines those of the United States.

The introduction of monitors is a positive development, but only insofar as it will help guarantee Syrians' right to peacefully express themselves in favor of the Assad regime stepping aside. Quite simply, the regime is failing to implement point two of the Annan plan, halting fighting and use of heavy weapons and withdrawing its forces from population centers, because it knows well it cannot implement point six of the plan, respect freedom of association and the right to demonstrate peacefully as legally guaranteed.

Assad knows well that peaceful protestors, who have continued their activities unabated as the international community has focused its attention on the armed opposition, will fill in the main squares and demand his departure or worse. To preclude this scenario he has labeled the peaceful protestors as terrorists and used live fire to put them down.

The best way the United States has of ensuring that President Assad steps aside and expediting the more democratic government in Syria is to implement Plan B, a coordinated effort to pressure the regime from the ground up, including support for the opposition within Syria. This effort is already underway, partially, and would be implemented in addition to the sanctions and other diplomatic pressure. So I want to emphasize this would not replace what the administration has done up until now but would augment it.

The United States is a member of the Friends of the Syrian People, a collection of 83 countries which met for the second time on April 1st. Its core members include Britain, France, Germany, Tur-

key and Saudi Arabia and Qatar, to forge and lead a coalition of countries to more directly support the opposition within Syria. Thus far the United States has committed to only giving nonlethal assistance to the opposition in that country, which could include communications equipment.

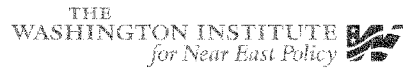
Pressuring the Assad regime to end violence against the population and ultimately make an exit will require such U.S. assistance and much more. In the short term, the United States should share limited intelligence with the opposition inside of the country on the regime's movements.

Second, the United States should intensify its examination of the opposition within Syria and see, quite frankly, which groups with whom we could work and perhaps with whom we cannot work, given their long-term goals in Syria.

And third, Washington should immediately expand contingency planning about possible direct U.S. military support as part of actions to head off massacres or a humanitarian disaster. This includes supporting the creation, with such allies as Turkey, of safe havens inside of Syria. In addition, the United States should consider what kind of military force may be required, and under what circumstances, to assist the opposition in deposing the Assad regime.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Tabler follows:]



### **Confronting Damascus:**

#### **U.S. Policy toward the Evolving Situation in Syria, Part II**

Andrew J. Tabler

Next Generation Fellow, Program on Arab Politics, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives,

Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia

April 25, 2012

Chairman Chabot and Ranking Member Ackerman:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia on the situation in Syria and U.S. government efforts to force President Bashar al-Assad to "step aside," as outlined by President Obama in August 2011.

During Part I of this hearing in December 2011, a representative of the Obama administration characterized Assad as a "dead man walking." I agreed with that assessment at the time, and I think much of it still holds true: international pressure and sanctions placed upon the Assad regime are having an unprecedented effect on its ability to fund its operations, and evidence shows that hard currency reserves are being rapidly depleted. Unfortunately, however, repeated vetoes by Russia and China of United Nations Security Council action, the overall lack of "defections" from the core of the Assad regime, and the findings of a recent visit I made to southern Turkey and Lebanon have all helped me understand that Assad still has many more political and military resources that he can call upon to continue what is literally a "death march" for months if not years to come. To force Assad to "step aside," the United States will need to accelerate efforts from the ground up by supporting the opposition "within Syria" in concert with allies forming the "core" of the Friends of the Syrian People group of countries.

#### **Treating the Symptoms but Not the Disease of the Syria Crisis**

The Assad regime's continued suppression of the Syrian opposition continues, and has claimed upwards of 10,000 lives thus far. Thousands more have been arrested or displaced, including those that have fled to Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Recently, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution backing a six-point plan developed by special envoy Kofi Annan intended to bring about a cessation of hostilities and a process to facilitate a "Syrian-led political transition to a democratic, plural political system." Despite agreeing to the plan, the Assad regime has failed to meet agreed deadlines to cease use of live fire and heavy weapons, as well as its commitments to withdraw its forces from population centers. The UN has also approved a plan to place up to 300 monitors in Syria for up to three months to observe implementation of the plan. Given the regime's failure to observe the agreement thus far, it is unclear if the monitors will be able to do their jobs. What the regime's failure to implement the agreement thus far shows, however, is that what has become known as the "Annan plan" may be able to deal with some of the symptoms of the crisis in Syria, including introduction of monitors and delivery of humanitarian assistance, but it has little hope of dealing with the disease itself -- a minority-

dominated regime with a forty-two-year track record of being unable to reform, and now brutally suppressing an opposition carved out of one of the youngest populations in the Middle East.

The UN monitors who arrived in Damascus recently have observed protestors brave enough to endure a military lockdown that is severely limiting the people's ability to use civil resistance to make Assad "step aside" -- the stated goal of President Obama. The regime has had a far harder time dealing with civil resistance over the past year than armed resistance. Assad's actions thus far indicate that he wants to use the Annan plan to grind down not only the armed opposition, but the overall protest movement as a whole. Thus the Annan plan, as currently implemented, serves Assad's interests and directly undermines those of the United States.

The introduction of monitors is a positive development, but only insofar as it will help guarantee Syrians' right to peacefully express themselves in favor of the Assad regime stepping aside. Quite simply, the regime is failing to implement point two of the Annan plan -- halting fighting and use of heavy weapons and withdrawing its forces from population centers -- because it knows it cannot implement point six of the plan: "respect freedom of association and the right to demonstrate peacefully as legally guaranteed." Assad knows well that peaceful protestors, who have continued their activities unabated as the international community has focused its attention on the armed opposition, will fill Syria's main squares and demand his departure or worse. To preclude this scenario, he has labeled peaceful protestors as "terrorists" and used live fire to put them down.

Diplomacy will continue to play an important role as the crisis unfolds. In the end, Russia and China may be important as part of any effort to get Assad to step aside and usher in a Syrian government more responsive to the demands of its youthful population. But Assad's dodging of the Annan plan's deadline, as well as his attempt via Russia to blur the main tenets of the agreement by introducing monitors before a ceasefire, amply demonstrate the limits of diplomacy at this time.

But perhaps most important, the regime's failure to seriously implement the plan calls into question whether any viable political solution can emerge from Annan's stated goal of "comprehensive political dialogue between the Syrian government and the spectrum of the opposition." In the end, whatever solution emerges will of course be uniquely Syrian. But what will it look like? A "reform" of the political system similar to Lebanon's, where various posts and bodies are essentially allotted to different sects, with Alawites and other minorities gathered around the presidency and the parliament going to the majority Sunni population? The Lebanese system was formed over time and in many ways is dysfunctional. A "managed transition" similar to Yemen -- a goal of the Obama administration -- may be preferable. But Assad seems unlikely to negotiate his own exit, especially as Russia and China have forbidden language in Security Council resolutions outlining what the end goal of the process would be.

#### **Plan B: A Ground-Up Strategy**

The best way the United States has of ensuring that President Assad steps aside and expediting a more democratic government in Syria is to implement "Plan B" -- a coordinated effort to pressure the regime from the ground up, including support for the opposition "within Syria." This effort is already partially underway and would be implemented in addition to sanctions and other diplomatic pressure.

The United States is a member of the Friends of the Syrian People, a collection of eighty-three countries that met for the second time on April 1 in Istanbul to support the people and prepare for a post-Assad Syria. Washington would be well placed to work with the group's other core members -- which include Britain, France, Germany, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar -- to forge and lead a coalition of countries to more directly support the opposition within Syria and prepare for all contingencies concerning the crisis. Different countries would play different roles within this coalition. Gulf countries, for example, have already indicated a willingness to help arm the opposition within Syria. Turkey, which had to deal recently with live fire from Assad's forces in the Oncupinar Syrian refugee camp near Kilis, is now considering methods to funnel support to the opposition and has reportedly developed a contingency plan to create border safe havens for refugees within Syrian territory. Thus far, the United States has officially committed to giving nonlethal assistance to the opposition within Syria, which could include communications equipment.

Pressuring Assad to end violence against the population and, ultimately, make an exit will require more such U.S. assistance. In the short term, the United States should share limited intelligence with the opposition inside Syria concerning the deployment and movement of regime forces -- security, military, and paramilitary *shabbiha* -- especially as they approach population centers for an assault. This will help alleviate the effects of Assad's "whack-a-mole" approach to the opposition, in which regime forces attempt to clear areas -- a tactic that drives up death tolls and refugee flows -- but cannot hold them.

Second, the United States should intensify its examination of the opposition within Syria, both those entities practicing nonviolent resistance against the regime and those engaged in violent revolt. Such assessment should include ways to support popular self-defense alongside civil resistance as two sides of the opposition coin. A key first step would be to intensify the process of identifying and engaging groups that share not only Washington's short-term goal of ousting Assad, but also its long-term goals, including a democratic and secular post-Assad Syria whose government respects human and minority rights.

Third, Washington should immediately expand contingency planning about possible direct U.S. military support as part of actions to head off massacres or a humanitarian disaster. This includes supporting the creation, with allies such as Turkey, of safe havens inside Syria. In addition, the United States should consider what kind of military force may be required, and under what circumstances, to assist the Syrian opposition in deposing the Assad regime.

#### **Dilemmas Posed by Civil and Armed Resistance Will Accelerate Assad's Departure**

Washington should continue to press for UN Security Council resolutions or statements condemning Assad. But to base its approach on the likelihood of international consensus on a workable and sustainable solution to the crisis would be unwise at this time.

The best means of whittling away the regime's support base continues to be exposing Assad's brutal response to dilemmas posed by the civil and armed opposition inside Syria. What is going on in Syria is not a civil war, but an armed and unarmed insurrection against a regime that responded with extreme brutality to peaceful protest. The opposition in exile organized under the Syrian National Council may be rife with divisions, but as the conflict has morphed into a civil and armed insurgency against the regime, coordination among atomized opposition groups inside Syria has intensified for reasons of sheer survival. The United States needs to find ways to promote,

assist, and influence that trend. Such trials by fire, which now are an inevitable part of the uprising, will likely serve as the forge in which a viable post-Assad Syrian political system is formed. Greater U.S. involvement would increase the chances that the new Syria is much more democratic and closer to American interests than Bashar al-Assad's regime.

Thank you.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. We appreciate your testimony.

Ms. Karlin, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF MS. MARA E. KARLIN, INSTRUCTOR IN STRATEGIC STUDIES, SCHOOL OF ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY**

Ms. KARLIN. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Ackerman. Thank you for holding this important hearing on U.S. policy toward Syria and for inviting me to participate.

Let me state my bottom line up front. The United States knows what it does not want in Syria. But getting to what it does want, the end of the Assad regime, will be messy, difficult and unsatisfying. With that in mind and given the varied constraints on the United States, we can best support transition in Syria by playing a signaling role. There is no debate about the repugnant and despicable acts of the Assad regime in Syria. The longer this conflict lasts, the more bloody, internecine and tragic it will be.

To expand on my bottom line, I would like to offer three critical observations. First, let us step back and dissect what the United States does not want in Syria. We do not want Assad to stay in power. He has proven to be venal and vicious, a murderous thug. We do not want a power vacuum that facilitates continued civil war or begs for a robust long-term U.S. nation-building effort, or enables Syrian territory to be manipulated and disrupted by rogue nonstate and external actors. And we do not want continued violence. Violence that has already resulted in ten times more deaths than when the international community first intervened in Libya last year.

Second, nearly one decade ago, General David Petraeus, looking at the impending chaos in Iraq, posed a crucial question, "Tell me how this ends." The outcome in Syria is not evident today, but I can say with some confidence how it will not end. It will not end with Bashar al-Assad voluntarily stepping aside or choosing exile. It will not end with him making sufficient reforms to enable a transparent and free Syria. This regime will not permit actions that serve to undermine and ultimately overthrow its rule. Those who predicted Assad's speedy collapse or asserted his willingness to inaugurate a new Syria have been proven spectacularly wrong, for Syria today remains immersed in violence and Assad remains entrenched. And how and when Assad departs, will invariably affect the contours and dynamics of the new Syria.

Both of these points illustrate how messy, difficult and unsatisfying our options are. We would be wise to recall them as we consider what the United States should be doing to effectively support transition there, which brings me to my third and final point.

Our operating maxim should be the following. Facilitate the end of the Assad regime while coalescing alternative, viable and inclusive leadership. Both objectives must be actively pursued. To date, efforts to isolate, sanction and advertise the regime's bad behavior have degraded its capabilities, and efforts to support the opposition have helped it delineate a vision of a new Syria. They should be redoubled, emphasizing to key supporters of the Assad regime both

inside and outside of Syria that a transition will occur, and their interests are best served if this happens soon.

But above all, the United States can play a signaling role. It can leverage its comparative advantage as the critical actor to whom other states have looked to for guidance as they respond to the Assad regime's atrocities. Over the last year when the United States has signaled both publicly and privately that it supports vigorous efforts to undermine and counter the regime, it has had an impact.

Washington's active participation in the Friends of Syria committee is an important step, as is its increasing support to the Free Syrian Army. In that vein, the United States has signaled what it will provide, such as communications, intelligence and nonlethal assistance. Providing such capabilities signals U.S. willingness to support an alternative to the regime but with limited cost and commitment.

The United States has also signaled what it will not obstruct, such as other states paying salaries and providing equipment. However, for the FSA to seriously counter the Syrian regime and its military, it needs to be transformed into a coherent and effective fighting force. Solely focusing on equipment assistance will ultimately have a limited impact. Meaningful support will require substantial training, advice, potential reorganization and shifts in personnel, and an overall refinement of its capabilities. To be sure, a strengthened opposition is significant, but it is unlikely to tip the balance in the near term.

Signaling shows that the United States will not stop other states from taking more serious steps to counter the regime. For those regional players that seek to more actively and militarily confront the Assad regime, the United States should not prevent them from doing so, and should consider how it might play a limited complementary role. As Syria's neighbors are flooded by refugees and increasingly destabilized by the upheaval next door, the signal that Washington sends will be of even greater consequence.

In conclusion, the Middle East is mired in uncertainty and fraught with upheaval. For the United States, this arena is more difficult and complex to navigate today than ever before. Yet our interests are largely the same as they were before the revolutions. We must be cautious in our decision making, to be sure, but also cognizant of our priorities.

I thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I am ready to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Karlin follows:]

Mara E. Karlin  
Instructor and Ph.D. Candidate  
Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies  
Testimony to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia  
“Confronting Damascus: U.S. Policy Toward the Evolving Situation in Syria, Part II”  
25 April 2012

Good afternoon, Chairman Chabot, Ranking Member Ackerman and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia. Thank you for holding this important hearing on U.S. policy toward Syria, and for inviting me to participate.

Let me state my bottom-line up front:

**The United States knows what it does *not* want in Syria.  
But getting to what it does want—the end of the Asad regime—will be messy, difficult, and unsatisfying.  
With that in mind—and given the varied constraints on the United States—we can best support transition in Syria by playing a signaling role.**

There is no debate about the repugnant and despicable acts of the Asad regime in Syria. Indeed, two important—and distressing—markers recently passed. First, the Syrian revolution has been raging for more than a year, significantly longer than the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. Second, Syrian President Bashar al-Asad and his cronies have wantonly murdered upwards of 10,000 Syrians. They are continuing—and will continue—to do so. The longer this conflict lasts, the more bloody, internecine and tragic it will be.

To expand on my bottom-line, I would like to offer three critical observations:

- 1) First, let us step back and dissect what the United States does not want in Syria. We do not want Asad to stay in power. He has proven to be venal and vicious—a murderous thug. We do not want a power vacuum that facilitates continued civil war, or begs for a robust long-term U.S. nation-building effort, or enables Syrian territory to be manipulated and disrupted by rogue non-state and external actors. And, we do not want continued violence—violence that has already resulted in ten times more deaths than when the international community first intervened in Libya last year.
- 2) Second, nearly one decade ago, General David Petraeus, looking at the impending chaos in Iraq, posed a crucial question, “Tell me how this ends.” The outcome in Syria is not evident today, but I can say with some confidence how it will not end. It will not end with Bashar al-Asad voluntarily stepping aside, or choosing exile. It will not end with him making sufficient reforms to enable a transparent and free Syrian state. Those who predicted his speedy collapse or asserted his willingness to inaugurate a new Syria have been proven spectacularly wrong, for

Syria today remains immersed in violence and Asad remains entrenched. And how and when Asad departs will invariably affect the contours and dynamics of the new Syria.

Let me be clear: continued oppression and violence in Syria will continue. It may briefly stop if either the Asad regime or the opposition chooses to back down; however, this would only be a respite in the civil war and insurgency currently sweeping across Syria. This regime will not permit actions that serve to undermine, and ultimately overthrow, its rule. Of course, the opposition could choose to return to the status quo ante for the near-term, to re-group, and then return to confront the regime. Doing so will no doubt be difficult since the regime will have learned important lessons about sustaining repression after the last year of conflict, as well as the identities of potential troublemakers. Recall that the Asad dynasty has a history—a genetic history—of harsh and severe retribution.

Both of these points illustrate how messy, difficult, and unsatisfying our options are in Syria. Yet, they only begin to address the very real constraints that exist on the United States at this moment, including fiscal and political. We would be wise to recall them, as we consider just what the United States should be doing to effectively support transition in Syria, which brings me to my final point.

- 3) Third, if we accept that the United States must choose amongst options brimming with tension and uncertainty, there are important steps that we can take. Our operating maxim should be the following: facilitate the end of the Asad regime while coalescing alternative, viable and inclusive leadership. Both objectives must be actively pursued.

To date, efforts to isolate and sanction the Asad regime have met with resounding success, garnering support throughout much of the international community, and degrading the regime's capabilities. They should be continued and deepened where possible. Similarly, nascent efforts to advertise the regime's bad behavior are useful. They should be redoubled, emphasizing to key supporters of the Asad regime inside and outside of Syria that a transition will occur, and their interests will be best served if this happens sooner rather than later. And, uniting the opposition and supporting its efforts to delineate a vision of a new Syria have proven their usefulness.

But above all, the United States can play a signaling role. The United States can leverage its comparative advantage as the critical actor to whom other states have looked to for guidance as they respond to the Asad regime's atrocities. Over the last year, when the United States has signaled—both publicly and privately—that it supports vigorous efforts to undermine and counter the regime, it has had an impact.

Washington's active participation in the Friends of Syria committee is an important step, as is its increasing support to the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

In that vein, the United States has signaled what aid it will provide—such as communications, intelligence and non-lethal assistance. Providing such capabilities signals U.S. willingness to support an alternative to the Asad regime, but with limited cost and commitment. The United States has also signaled what it will not obstruct, such as other states paying salaries and providing equipment to the FSA. However, for the FSA to seriously counter the Syrian regime and its military, it needs to be transformed into a coherent and effective fighting force. Solely focusing on equipment assistance will ultimately have a limited impact on the FSA. Meaningful support will require substantial training, advice, potential reorganization and shifts in personnel, and an overall refinement of its capabilities. To be sure, a strengthened opposition is significant, but it is unlikely to tip the balance in the near-term.

Signaling shows that the United States will not stop other states from taking more serious steps to counter the Asad regime. For those regional players that seek to more actively and militarily confront the Asad regime, the United States should not prevent them from doing so, and should consider how it might play a limited, complementary role. As Syria's neighbors are flooded by refugees and increasingly destabilized by the upheaval next door—indeed, Ankara has indicated it may call on NATO to invoke Article 5—the signals that Washington sends will be of even greater consequence.

In conclusion, the Middle East is mired in uncertainty and fraught with upheaval. For the United States, this arena is more difficult and complex to navigate today than ever before. Yet our interests in the region remain largely the same as they were before the revolutions. We must be cautious in our decision-making, to be sure, but also cognizant of our priorities.

I thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I am ready to answer any questions you may have.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much for your testimony.  
And finally, Dr. Lynch, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF MARC LYNCH, PH.D., PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, DIRECTOR OF INSTITUTE FOR MIDDLE EAST STUDIES, ELLIOTT SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY**

Mr. LYNCH. I thank you Chairman Chabot and Ranking Member Ackerman, and thank you to my two colleagues for their very thoughtful presentations, much of which I agree with.

I would begin with the fact that less than 2 weeks ago a ceasefire came into effect in Syria, which many people did not believe was possible. Four days ago, an unanimous United Nations Security Council resolution was adopted, authorizing a 300-member team to monitor the ceasefire, something else which many people believed to be impossible.

These accomplishments are not ones to be easily or lightly set aside. The urgent and admirable imperative to do something to help the people of Syria and to attempt to bring about the downfall of the Bashar al-Assad regime should not mean that the United States rushes into a poorly conceived military intervention. This painstakingly constructed international consensus and a plan which was always designed to take time to manifest should not be abandoned before it has even had the chance to succeed. There are no easy answers to the Syria problem. It is one of the most difficult that I have dealt with in all of my years working on the Middle East.

But I respectfully disagree that the Annan plan either helps us out or hurts the United States. It remains the best option that we have available to us to create the political space which would make it possible for the Syrian people to bring about a change from within, without embroiling the United States in a protracted, messy and difficult ongoing insurgency. There are no cheap or easy forms of military intervention which would quickly bring down the regime of Bashar al-Assad or effectively protect Syrian civilians. There are many measures which we could take, which would likely increase the odds of Assad's survival while increase the deaths of Syrian civilians, and it is incumbent upon us to avoid making such foolish decisions.

We also must be highly cognizant of the risks of limited half measures which leave us unable to succeed, but find us embroiled in subsequent steps which could end up placing us in a situation comparable to that of Iraq, where we find ourselves forced to patrol and take responsibility for a shattered polity where we are not wanted.

Rejecting military action does not mean doing nothing. This is a false choice. The United States has effectively taken the lead in constructing this international consensus, which did not appear by magic. The six-point plan presented by U.N. Special Envoy Kofi Annan offers a plausible, obviously far from certain, path toward the demilitarization of the conflict and a subsequent political transition. The ceasefire obviously has not ended the killing, but it has substantially reduced the violence. Since that ceasefire began there has been a dramatic increase in peaceful protest across the coun-

try, and this holds out the hope and demonstrates that the will of the Syrian people has not been broken. We must continue to place pressure on the Syrian regime, increasing economic sanctions, its diplomatic isolation, and preparing for future international justice and accountability, but we should not rush into a military intervention which might be satisfying in the short term but leave us with something far worse than we currently have.

In my prepared statement, I discuss in some detail the shortcomings of a number of available military options including safe zones, humanitarian corridors, arming the opposition and more. I won't take time to talk about those here, though I am happy to discuss them in the questions.

The fundamental point that I would like to make in the time remaining to me is that while the current diplomatic strategy is clearly frustrating, difficult and faces long odds, it is not something which is designed simply to buy time and to not act. There is a logic behind Annan's plan. And that logic is that it is the militarization of the conflict which serves the survival of Bashar al-Assad's regime. The opposition is incapable of winning by force, and it is very unlikely that anything that we do will change that. At the same time, the center of Syrian politics and the very real constituencies which continue to support Bashar al-Assad are bound to him by fear of the future. Minority communities fear that they will face retribution. That they will revenge killings. That they will be butchered in the aftermath of the fall of Bashar al-Assad.

The demilitarization and the ceasefire which Kofi Annan is pursuing are precisely designed to reduce those fears and to carve out the political space necessary to begin a genuine political transition. Nobody, not me and I believe not Kofi Annan, believes that Bashar al-Assad will agree to voluntarily end his regime. He has never demonstrated any willingness or ability to do so. But that is neither necessary for the plan or its objective. Instead, the objective is to create the space for Syrians to find a way to remove Assad by calculating that their interests are best served to rescue their country by removing Assad themselves. And our job must be to create the international space to make that possible.

Thank you, sir.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Lynch follows:]

**Dr. Marc Lynch**

George Washington University and the Center for a New American Security

Prepared Statement for “Confronting Damascus: U.S. Policy toward the Evolving Situation in Syria, Part II.” April 25, 2012.

House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia

“It is time for the Obama Administration to acknowledge what is obvious and indisputable in Syria: the Annan Plan has failed.” This declaration by Senators Lieberman, McCain and Graham on April 19, 2012, came only one week after a United Nations-backed ceasefire came into effect, and two days *before* the passage of a unanimous United Nations Security Council resolution authorizing a 300 member team to monitor the ceasefire. The urgent, and admirable, imperative to do something to help the people of Syria should not rush the United States into a poorly conceived military intervention. The painstakingly constructed international consensus in support of diplomacy and pressure should not be abandoned before it has even had a chance.

Nobody expects the current diplomatic path to quickly or easily end the conflict in Syria, but military intervention does not offer a compelling alternative. There are no cheap or easy forms of military intervention which would quickly bring down the regime of Bashar al-Assad or effectively protect Syrian civilians. Military half-measures, including safe zones, humanitarian corridors and arming the Syrian opposition, would likely spread the violence and increase the numbers of Syrian dead without increasing the likelihood of regime collapse. An initially limited intervention would most likely pave the way to more direct and expensive involvement comparable to the experience in Iraq.

Rejecting military action does not mean doing nothing. The United States has effectively taken the lead in constructing an international consensus in support of diplomatic efforts, including two unanimous Security Council resolutions and ever-tightening economic sanctions. The Six Point Plan presented by UN Special Envoy Kofi Annan offers a plausible, if still far from certain, path towards a demilitarization of the conflict and political transition. The ceasefire for which the United Nations called has not ended the killing, but it has substantially reduced the violence even before the entry of the full international monitoring mission. What is more, the number of peaceful protests across Syria has significantly increased in the two weeks since the ceasefire began. Economic sanctions are taking a real toll on an increasingly isolated Syrian regime.

It is far too soon to give up on a diplomatic process which has just begun. Rather than rush into a risky, costly and potentially counter-productive military intervention, the United States should give the current plan time to work. It should continue to lead international efforts at the United Nations, promote the demilitarization of the conflict, continue to increase the pressure on the Assad regime, build on the efforts underway with the “Friends of Syria” group, support the political development of the Syrian opposition, and prepare the ground for future accountability for war crimes.

### Limited Military Options

The calls for U.S. military intervention in Syria reflect an understandable frustration with the ongoing crisis and with President Assad's defiance of international consensus. But we must not forget the lessons of the poorly conceived military intervention and occupation of Iraq, with its vast human cost and unintended consequences. Even a limited military involvement in Syria risks embroiling the United States into a far longer and more extensive intervention than currently imagined, without protecting the Syrian people from further atrocities or quickly changing the regime in Damascus. I discuss the problems with limited military intervention in detail in *Pressure Without War: a Principled and Pragmatic Strategy for Syria*, published by the Center for a New American Security on February 21, 2012. I summarize here some of the key points.

It is not enough to demonstrate that the cause of intervention is just. The available military options do not have a reasonable chance of improving the situation at an acceptable cost, and could easily make matters worse. Syria is not Libya, where the United States acted with a clear mandate from the UN Security Council and could use air power in support of a well-organized opposition which controlled territory. Syria's demographics, geography, divided population, strategic location, military capabilities and international alliances pose a far more daunting target. We should not rely on overly optimistic assumptions about the efficacy of an intervention, the response of the Syrian regime and its international allies, or our ability to manage the conflict. There are vanishingly few historical examples of entrenched regimes embroiled in a civil war suddenly collapsing after a symbolic show of force from outside. Most likely, limited military intervention would alter but not end the dynamics of a long conflict, embroiling the United States directly in a protracted and bloody insurgency and civil war.

There are at least four different, and potentially conflicting, objectives for military action against Syria which have been articulated: civilian protection; regime change; weakening Iran; and political credibility. These goals are not necessarily mutually compatible. Arming the Free Syrian Army, for instance, would likely lead to a dramatic increase in lost civilian lives and have only dubious hopes of speeding regime change, but increase the chances of embroiling Syria in a long crisis which would harm Iran. Those hoping primarily to change the regime in Syria oppose diplomatic efforts which might reduce civilian deaths.

Finally, the United States must not intervene without international legal authority. Acting without a UN Security Council resolution would undermine the administration's efforts to restore international legitimacy to the center of global politics, and would risk deeply undermining both international institutions and American relations with Russia, China and the developing world. A UN authorization of force against Syria is exceedingly unlikely, however, barring a dramatic escalation of violence. The support of Arab regional organizations and of NATO is important, but does not substitute for the UN.

All forms of limited intervention would likely begin with significant initial air strikes to eliminate air defenses, establish control of the skies and allow freedom of action by the

forces involved. Syrian anti-aircraft capabilities may not be particularly formidable, but no country would risk flying in Syrian air space until these capabilities are destroyed. Yet many Syrian anti-aircraft capabilities are located in or near urban areas, which means that significant civilian casualties could result from any attempt to eliminate them. There is little doubt that the U.S. military could do this if called upon, but it would not be a costless enterprise and would not alone likely end the conflict.

More likely, a no fly zone would pave the way towards a more expansive air campaign targeting Syrian regime ground forces or defending designated safe areas. Many argue that a bombing campaign might force the regime to the bargaining table, boost the morale of the opposition and demoralize regime supporters. Perhaps, but this would be a risky gamble with fleeting benefits, and would likely evolve into a longer-term commitment. There is little reason to believe that the regime would quickly crumble, or that more opposition would rally, in the face of such strikes. What is more, significant civilian casualties or easily-stoked nationalist anger at a foreign bombing campaign might well rally Syrians around the regime rather than turn them towards the opposition.

Using air power to protect civilians and defend the opposition within safe areas or humanitarian corridors is even more complex. Such safe areas could most easily be established and protected along the Turkish border, but most of the threatened civilians live in other parts of Syria. Humanitarian corridors would be extremely difficult to protect, and could create a new refugee crisis if desperate civilians rush into designated safe zones or neighboring countries. Protecting either would require a serious commitment of resources. Declaring a safe area without defending it effectively would only repeat the painful mistakes of history. In Bosnia, thousands of people were murdered in Srebrenica and other designated safe areas when peacekeepers lacked the means to protect them. Even historical “successes” are sobering. Operation Provide Comfort, established in northern Iraq after 1991, was envisioned as a short-term crisis response, but turned into a 12-year commitment that ended only when the United States invaded Iraq in 2003. Creating and protecting a safe area in Syria would therefore require a significant and lengthy investment of troops and resources, and would not likely hasten Assad’s collapse.

The United States and its partners could conduct an extended tactical air campaign, becoming a de facto air force for the FSA, targeting Syrian regime forces and evening the military balance in favor of the opposition. But in contrast to Libya, there are no front lines to police, few tank convoys to destroy on desert highways and no offensives by rebel armies for which an air campaign would clear a path. Regime forces and the opposition are primarily clashing in densely packed urban areas. Civilian casualties would inevitably result from a bombing campaign against ill-defined targets in urban areas with extremely limited human intelligence. And such a campaign in support of a fragmented and weak opposition would almost certainly escalate.

Finally, some are calling on the United States government to arm the opposition, providing advanced weapons, communications equipment and other support to even the balance of power and would enable the Syrian opposition to defend itself and take the

fight to Assad. This is often presented as the least intrusive path. But in fact it might be the worst of all the options. Providing arms to the opposition would not likely allow it to prevail over the Syrian military. The regime would likely discard whatever restraint it has thus far shown in order to avoid outside intervention. What is more, the Syrian opposition remains fragmented, disorganized and highly localized. Providing weapons will privilege favored groups within the opposition, discredit advocates of non-military strategies, and likely lead to ever more expansive goals. It could further frighten Syrians who continue to support the regime out of fear for their own future, and make them less likely to switch sides. Arming the FSA is a recipe for protracted, violent and regionalized conflict. It would be foolish to assume that an insurgency once launched can be easily controlled. It should also be sobering that the best example offered of historical success of such a strategy is the American support to the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union, which led to the collapse of the Afghan state, the rise of the Taliban, and the evolution of al-Qaeda.

In short, limited military options do not have a reasonable chance of ending Assad's regime quickly or at an acceptable price.

#### **Give Annan Plan a chance**

Military options therefore do not offer a magic bullet for protecting Syrian civilians or forcing a change in the Assad regime. The current diplomatic strategy faces long odds as well, but does at least have at least some prospect of success and should not be abandoned prematurely. It is highly unlikely that Bashar al-Assad or his regime will voluntarily comply with a ceasefire, and even more unlikely that they will surrender power. But international diplomacy does not depend on Assad's good intentions. Instead, it aims to demilitarize the conflict and create the political space for change driven by Syrians disgusted by the destruction of their country. Demilitarization through a ceasefire and political opening would undermine Assad's survival strategy, not save him from an otherwise certain defeat.

Syria today remains deeply divided between a growing and resilient opposition and a still substantial pool of regime supporters. The violence, relentless propaganda, and deep fears about the future have polarized the country and helped to keep significant portions of the Syrian population on the side of the regime. At the same time, the resilience and spread of opposition protests despite massive regime violence clearly demonstrates that the regime has lost legitimacy with an equally significant portion of the population. Assad has proven unable to kill his way to victory, but his regime's survival is at the same time well-served by a violent and polarized arena.

The ceasefire, as American officials have consistently noted, is only one part of the Annan plan, but it is an extremely important one which will test whether the regime can survive de-escalation and demilitarization of the conflict. Unsurprisingly, Assad has complied only partially with the ceasefire. Deaths dropped significantly after the ceasefire came into effect on April 12, but killing has continued at a lower level and there have been many reports of violations and attacks. But the pressure to comply will

continue. The expanded UN monitoring team now entering the country may have a restraining effect, though their limited numbers and mandate will not alone be sufficient. There has been a noticeable upsurge in peaceful protests across Syria since the ceasefire came into effect. The focus of its efforts must still be to increase the odds of a “soft landing” after the fall of the Assad regime, one which avoids a chaotic state collapse and instead produces an inclusive and pluralistic political alternative.

The United States should continue to support these efforts to demilitarize the conflict. It should continue to maintain the hard-won international consensus at the Security Council and push Syria’s allies who have supported the current track to pressure Damascus to comply. It should also continue to support parallel efforts to pressure Assad and to help strengthen the fragmented and weak Syrian opposition. Economic sanctions and the civil war itself have combined to badly hurt the Syrian economy and to increasingly isolate the Syrian elite. Such efforts should continue and expand, with more targeted sanctions at both unilateral and multilateral efforts. These should be tied to the other elements of the Annan plan beyond the ceasefire, including a strong push towards a genuine political process. The Syrian opposition should continue to reach out to and attempt to reassure minority communities and those still supporting Assad out of fear that they will be included and protected in a new Syria.

Should the ceasefire take effect, the U.S. should not allow a decrease in deaths to cause international focus on Syria to lag. There should be constant, daily diplomatic pressure and the mobilization of international condemnation. It should continue its effective efforts to disseminate credible information about regime violations of the agreement, such as the satellite images posted by Embassy Damascus. It should push for the regular release of the reports of the UN monitors and accountability for violations of the mission’s terms, and also insist on other elements of the plan such as access for journalists. It should make a particular effort to convey credible information about regime violence to audiences inside of Syria and to break through the propaganda which sustains the regime’s hold on core constituencies.

The U.S. should also continue to collect information about regime atrocities for future war crimes trials. The “Syria Accountability Clearing House” proposed at the recent meeting of the “Friends of Syria” is an important starting point for future accountability. If it is unable to secure Security Council support for a referral to the International Criminal Court, the U.S. should push for the creation of an independent war crimes tribunal for Syria.

Overall, it is easy to share the frustration with international efforts to respond to the atrocities in Syria. Many thousands of Syrians have died as the world has struggled to find an adequate response. There are no guarantees that the current UN plan will succeed either, but it must be given the opportunity to develop. There are no good alternatives. Limited military intervention is unlikely to either protect civilians or hasten Assad’s fall, and would signal the end of the diplomatic alternatives currently unfolding. For now, the United States must stick with “Plan A” and give diplomacy a chance to succeed.

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Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much, Doctor. And we will go ahead and ask questions. At this point I recognize myself with 5 minutes for that purpose. And I would ask Mr. Tabler and Ms. Karlin, Dr. Lynch has painted a relatively bright picture on the Annan plan and seems to be optimistic about its possibilities and success. I wonder if you might feel otherwise, and if you wouldn't mind commenting on that. I appreciate it. We will start with you, Mr. Tabler.

Mr. TABLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't think Marc believes that necessarily the Annan plan is going well. What I said in my testimony, and where I think probably we agree, is that the Annan plan as implemented is the problem. This is not a ceasefire. Having multiple shelling incidents a day on the third largest city in Syria is not a ceasefire. It is not even fragile. It is just not a ceasefire. It is a reduction in hostilities, but even that went out the window a couple of days ago when the death toll spiked again when they began using shelling.

They also have not completely withdrawn their military formations from cities, and this gets to what I think Marc was talking about a little bit later on. The key part of the Annan plan is that the Assad regime is vulnerable to civilian resistance and has been for over a year. It is the peaceful protestors that have kept Assad on his heels. The problem is, is that they are constrained by the placement of military forces inside the country now. They move them around, they move them to the outskirts of town, they put them inside of buildings, and unfortunately, when they move them to the outside of town they begin to use artillery and mortars on the populations inside those cities. So the Annan plan as implemented now, and this is the problem, it contravenes a pillar of U.S. policy going back over 1 year, and that is that Syrians should be allowed to peacefully express themselves and to assemble. And this was established long ago, long before the Annan plan was established. The fact is, is that this has not happened.

And so now we are sending in monitors, again which could carve out that space for protestors. But my only response would be it gets back to my original point, he cannot implement point two of the plan because he cannot tolerate point six. That is, he can't tolerate anything that would allow Syrians to once again flood the main squares of cities and demand that President Assad go, and this is where he is particularly vulnerable. Thanks.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. Ms. Karlin?

Ms. KARLIN. Sir, I would just add, I think Andrew's point about implementation is particularly cogent, and there are two issues that illustrate this for us. First of all, as of yesterday there were 11 out of 300 observers in Syria. Realize observers should be working 24 hours a day, so that would leave very few working at each hour of the day even if you get to the large number of 300. So the numbers are extraordinarily small.

I will add another example which I think is telling. Right now there is an observation force on the border between Syria and Israel. It has been there since the aftermath of the 1973 war. Indeed, it has been an extraordinarily quiet border. But not because of the presence of that force, but because it is in both states' interest to have it. If it is not in the interest of Assad to actually imple-

ment the key aspects of the Annan plan, which involve his transition, then the observers really won't be able to do a whole lot. Thank you.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. Mr. Tabler, in your testimony you stated that, "Washington should immediately expand contingency planning about possible direct U.S. military support as part of actions to head off massacres or humanitarian disaster. This includes supporting the creation with allies such as Turkey, of safe havens inside Syria. In addition, the United States should consider what kind of military force may be required and under what circumstances to assist the Syrian opposition in deposing the Assad regime." Ms. Karlin and Dr. Lynch also discussed this subject. As I am sure you know, whether and how to aid the Syrian armed opposition continues to be very contentious.

What assistance if any do you believe should be provided to the armed opposition and under what circumstances? What do you believe are the risks and benefits of arming or training the armed opposition, and additionally, are foreign nations providing aid to Syrian rebels already, and if so, how should that factor into our decision making?

Mr. TABLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To answer your question, I think that the immediate first step is to expand the non-lethal assistance to the armed opposition within Syria. And what I mean by that is communications gear and other kinds of equipment that will allow them to better communicate with each other and coordinate their operations. I think that this is particularly the smart move in light of the Assad regime's failure thus far to implement the Annan plan.

There are risks to dealing with an opposition that you don't know. The opposition inside of Syria is headless. It is not leaderless. There are many leaders. And the operations of the opposition within Syria are civil and armed and they vary by region. And there are some regions where we are more familiar with the groupings, particularly around Homs for the revolutionary councils and in Daraa. Idlib province is a bigger concern. There are groups there which are operating, which many perceive not to be in the long-term interest of the United States. It is also a very confusing environment.

But what I learned from my last visit to the Turkish-Syrian frontier was that this assistance was already going across the border. I have heard that there is more assistance going across the border. A lot of this assistance by the way is not funneled via States. It is funneled via individuals. A lot of times, for example, weapons. The armed opposition inside of Syria obviously is getting weapons from somewhere. Where they are getting them from is, actually Syrian officers are selling them to Turkish intermediaries who are then selling them back to members of the opposition. And all this requires is wealthy people coming up with some cash. There is plenty of cash in the Middle East and it is already making its way there. So that trend is established.

The question going forward is, given that there isn't a resolution to this—and I think Mara is right, I just don't see how this settles down anytime soon. Are we going to allow other countries in the region who don't share our long-term interests inside of Syria be

able to affect the outcome with the opposition? Or should the United States get more directly involved? And I think the only way to answer that is to take a much closer look at the groups that are on the ground and determine who you can work with and who you can't. And I think to your original point, we should have done this much earlier and we didn't. We worked it from the top down when we should have also, not instead of but also, been working it from the bottom up.

Mr. CHABOT. Okay. Thank you very much. My time is expired. The gentleman from New York is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I found it interesting that the chairman invited you to fight among yourselves and nobody really rose to the bait, which leads me to suspect that you are a lot closer to agreeing that there is no clear solution to this problem, or am I wrong in that?

Ms. KARLIN. Sir, I think you are probably right in that. Having spent a lot of time wrestling with these issues, I think the three of us are cognizant of how difficult and, as I noted, how unsatisfying the options are. That doesn't mean we shouldn't choose one of those options, I think, as Mr. Chairman mentioned. But I think we deeply appreciate we are now in the 13th month of this conflict. Ten thousand people have been killed. It is hard not to be rather sober about it.

Mr. LYNCH. I would agree with that. Mr. Tabler, Ms. Karlin and I, we see the same Syria and we see the same facts. I would say that there are two, only two clear areas where I think that we seriously disagree. I think the first is on the potential for the ceasefire and the Annan plan to actually have a positive effect on events inside of Syria. And here, and actually even here I agree with much of what was said. For example, I think that the observer mission must be rushed in much more quickly. The French Foreign Minister just proposed that all 300 should be on the ground within 15 days. That is something the United States should support strongly. This should not be slow rolled. But if you look at what has happened in the areas where observers are currently located, violence stops, and then they leave and violence starts again. And that is the point of having an expanded mission on the ground in order to make sure that they don't have to leave and that you can actually create that political space. So for the Annan plan I think we disagree on the potential utility of that.

And the second, I think, very serious area of disagreement is on the question of arming the free Syrian Army and the Syrian opposition, which quite frankly, I think, would actually lead to the worst possible outcome in that it would stand up—

Mr. ACKERMAN. You are for don't arm them.

Mr. LYNCH. I am very much for don't arm. And the reason for that is that by doing so what you do is you create a balance of power on the ground in which the opposition is not going to be able to win, but you will succeed in generating enough violence to scare the other Syrians back into the arms of the regime and you end up with a protracted insurgency. I look back in history and I try and see examples of this strategy working. The only one I can find is Afghanistan, mujahideen in Afghanistan. And how did that end up? The Afghans stayed collapsed. The Taliban took power and al-Qaeda was created. I can't think of another example in modern his-

tory in which a strategy of arming the opposition, picking and choosing who you can work with and trying to bring down an entrenched——

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you. Mr. Tabler, do we arm the opposition?

Mr. TABLER. I think that we need to identify groups with whom we could work and potentially arm some of those groups.

Mr. ACKERMAN. If we arm those groups what does that do? Does that bring Assad down or does that guarantee that the U.N. peace-observing mission has nothing to observe because there is no peace?

Mr. TABLER. Well, they are observing the implementation of the six-point plan. They are not observing peace or even are supposed to keep the peace, so they can observe the agreement all they want and make their own decisions.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Well, I don't know. It seems sometimes that policymakers are more interested in checking the boxes. We have a six-point plan, one, two, three, four, five, six. We don't care what the hell happens as long as that did whatever the plan said.

But if the ultimate goal here is to get rid of the Assad regime, do you do that with arming the people? And if you arm the people, it would seem to me that what Dr. Lynch said, you are going to give the observers a lot more to observe. Because if you arm one side more than they are armed, they are going to use those arms because that is what they have the arms for.

Mr. TABLER. Right. We have the ability to arm the opposition in greater numbers, but——

Mr. ACKERMAN. Is it wise to do that is the question, and what does that yield?

Mr. TABLER. They are going to get the weapons whether we give them to them or not, and this is the problem. I mean there is——

Mr. ACKERMAN. We don't have to, we can move on to the next country and call the next panel. Are you saying we shouldn't do anything because they are going to do it anyway, so we are wasting a lot of time, resources——

Mr. TABLER. I am saying to blanketly not support the armed opposition inside of Syria would not be, I think that it is necessary to do so in order to pressure the Assad regime. That does not mean that we throw away the rest of our policy.

Mr. ACKERMAN. My concern is, when there is not a clear, everybody can agree to want to go forward plan to a horrible situation that is festering somewhere, that what we do on this side of the table is we break down onto our own sides, and it becomes an exercise in let us blame the administration or let us defend the administration. And our real concern has to be, on both sides of our tables here, is to figure out what we do as a humane people that is in our national interest to resolve this situation the best and fastest way we can with the least damage to human beings and to the greatest advantage to our American national interest. And we don't seem to have a clear path by which to accomplish that. Is that a fair assessment? Forget about us bickering on this.

Ms. KARLIN. Frankly, I don't know that there is a clear and satisfying path. I will say this. To take off of Marc's points, if we look at some historical examples, there was really 1½ years of turmoil

and tumult including the positioning of observers in the Balkans until Srebrenica happened, and that was the spectacular attack that fomented the international communities' involvement.

And I would also respectfully counter one of the points that Marc had made regarding other scenarios where we have seen arming an opposition, pushing out a government or rendering impotent. I think if we look at Lebanon in the early 1980s, Iran's efforts to support the formation and strengthening of—

Mr. ACKERMAN. I don't know that that is a wise thing to do to go back in history and find out who beat who and how they did it, because someone will then come up with an observation that this is a different country and it is a different century.

Ms. KARLIN. Indeed, sir, indeed.

Mr. ACKERMAN. So while it might be historically interesting, we are not going to make any policy decisions based on the Philistines beat the Hebrews or something somewhere back in the—

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired but if somebody wanted to complete that thought that would be good.

Mr. ACKERMAN. That would not be me.

Mr. CHABOT. Dr. Lynch, did you want—

Mr. LYNCH. Sir, if I may. I think that what unites the three of us at the table is, and I think what actually meets your mandate of us not simply bickering is that none of the three of us is urging doing nothing. All of us would like to orient our policy to see that Bashar al-Assad's regime ends and the Syrian civilian population is protected. Our disagreement, I think, is fundamentally about what is the best way to do that. And I think that makes for a better and more constructive kind of policy debate, and one which hopefully can go forward.

Mr. CHABOT. Okay, thank you very much. The gentleman's time has expired. The gentleman from Nebraska, Mr Fortenberry, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the witnesses for coming today. I am sorry I don't have the benefit of your earlier testimonies since I arrived late, and if any of this is redundant, please forgive me.

But I think the central question here is, what does a post-Assad regime governance structure look like? What is the probability of that actually happening? And then the third question is related to an interesting scenario that I encountered on a radio call-in show recently. It was a national program. A gentleman came on who was American but of Syrian descent and who said that our policy ought to be to defend Assad. He was a Christian, and because Assad protects the Christians that should be the United States policy, which again begs the other question as to how he holds a coalition together that continues to empower him to provide some semblance of governance structures in the midst of this chaos.

So everybody follow me on those three points?

Mr. TABLER. Congressman, we don't know what a post-Assad Syria would like yet. I can tell you based on what the country is that it would be a very diverse one. A quarter of the population are minorities, and the Sunni community, the 75 percent of the country are divided between tribal Sunnis, settled tribal people, urbane Sunnis from Aleppo and Damascus, and then more conservative

Muslim Sunnis from the northwestern part of the country in Idlib province. It would look like a mosaic.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Then the binding element currently, force and fear? It has got to be a bit beyond that.

Mr. TABLER. In the past that is certainly how the Assad regime has ruled over the country. I think a post-Assad Syria that would not be necessary. I would imagine that you would see a country that would have to come up with some kind of structure that would be able to incorporate all those different communities into it.

But there is a tremendous amount of bickering inside of the opposition. I think there are two distinctions here. One is, the exiled opposition, the Syrian National Council, is incredibly divided and they have had a lot of problems. One of the reasons is because they are not facing any gunfire and they are not under pressure to come together. They are arguing over chairs. And why would they argue over chairs? Well, a lot of Western countries, Middle Eastern countries, and including in a de facto sense, the United States, only engaged this Syrian National Council and they ignored the rest of the opposition inside the country. So they have no incentive to come together until very recently.

The opposition inside the country has come together in some areas, have coalesced more quickly in the face of live fire. There is nothing that focuses the mind like being shot at. And I think that that is a trend that we have seen in a number of different areas including around Homs.

The reason why one of your perhaps constituents was arguing—

Mr. FORTENBERRY. It wasn't my constituent by the way.

Mr. TABLER. Oh, sorry.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. And I rejected the premise. The United States is not going to stand by idly and watch this kind of brutality. It is not who we are, and the times in which that has happened we go back and question ourselves.

Mr. TABLER. Right.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. So I rejected his premise. But at the same time it points to this idea of Assad being able to hold this coalition together in some manner with some degree of authority, whether that is legitimate authority or whether it is through fear and force primarily.

Mr. TABLER. The Saudis call the way that President Assad rules now, the killing machine. We call it Whac-A-Mole. It is very simple. You send military forces into areas that you don't control. You try to clear them but you can't hold them. And it drives up death tolls, it drives refugees across the border.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Well, it is unimaginable that he can sustain this into time—

Mr. TABLER. The Assad regime is—

Mr. FORTENBERRY [continuing]. Given the state of the world and the interconnectedness of the world, the resources that are transnational that can flow to people who want to affect governance outcomes.

So back to the question. What does a post-Assad regime look like?

Ms. KARLIN. Thank you, sir. Let me make two points. A post-Assad Syria is still violent. I think we can be cognizant of that. Because you have had an authoritarian structure really imposing it to rule through violence and the potential for violence for decades, we can expect violence to continue. Given its diversity there are a couple models one could look at. One could look at Iraq or one could look next door at Lebanon. Neither——

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Is a Lebanese model multiple confessions, government of multiple confessions viable?

Ms. KARLIN. It would be difficult. I think in the near term it is possible. The challenge with the Lebanese model is it doesn't really function very well. I mean you have a government that entirely impedes all actions, so those are not heartening models. That said, compared to authoritarian regimes——

Mr. FORTENBERRY. It doesn't function well, you are correct. But somehow it functions.

Ms. KARLIN. But somehow it does function.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. In the midst of the rise of sporadic chaos somehow the mail gets delivered at the end of the day.

Ms. KARLIN. It does, messily, to be sure. And it is even difficult for the bureaucracies to move forward in any way in Lebanon, even something as simple as ambassadorial confirmations. But that said, they do exist and you don't have the same degree of violence, for example. And furthermore, in Lebanon you do have the challenge of an extraordinarily powerful, armed nonstate actor of Hezbollah helping govern it.

On the question that the individual asked you, it is an intriguing one. Look, the straw man for why one would support Assad would be that he had brought stability. And that is really what the exchange was. He was supporting terrorist groups, had a covert nuclear program, undermined the Arab-Israeli conflict, fomented instability in Lebanon and Iraq, but at the end of the day Syria was stable. That is really no longer the case, and I don't know that anyone really predicts that to be the case for the near to immediate term. Thank you.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Thank you.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Thank you.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. We will move into a second round here and I will yield myself 5 minutes. As the conflict in Syria enters its second year, the prospect for a prolonged conflict, I think many of us believe, has the potential of intensifying. If the conflict in Syria evolves into a protracted battle between government forces and an array of various Sunni militias, some analysts fear that governance inside the country could erode significantly and that the conflict could expand to other countries in the region.

Under what circumstances do you believe the conflict in Syria could or would spread to, or draw other countries of the region into this? And I will just go down the line beginning with you, Mr. Tabler.

Mr. TABLER. It is possible that the conflict, such a conflict could spread, but as we found out from Iraq and also a number of other conflicts in the region, domino theories and contagions don't often hold true. I think Lebanon is particularly susceptible to some sort

of pressures from Syria, given that you have many of the same communities that go over the border and the close history between those two countries. But I think what is going on, actually in Lebanon the situation is rather quiet. Certainly is a lot hotter up in the areas in the north where the refugees are coming across the border. I think what is going on in Syria is a uniquely Syrian one. It is a tempest.

Again, the prospects for the Assad regime reforming, in my opinion based on my long experience there and particularly in the knowledge of Bashar al-Assad's regime, is close to zero. It is a minority-dominated regime like Saddam Hussein's. I think the chances of them splitting any time soon, I think it is going down by the day. On the other hand you have this young opposition carved out of what is essentially one of the youngest populations in the Middle East. It is headless. I don't see how this is politically solved. Even if President Assad wanted to cut a deal tomorrow with whom would he negotiate? And who would be able to take people off the streets? That is the real challenges, and I think this is one of the reasons why all three of us have been, and many others, have been scratching our heads the last few months.

Mr. CHABOT. Okay, thank you. Ms. Karlin?

Ms. KARLIN. Thank you. In terms of the spread, I think there is actually very real potential for it. And I look at Turkey as really the center of gravity here. You many have seen the Turkish Prime Minister's recent comments where he had suggested that he may ask NATO to invoke Article 5. We know the last time Article 5 was invoked was following the September 11th attacks and really the only time since then. That is a bold statement. It shows how discomfitted he is by the actions of the regime in Syria and by the slews of refugees and potential violence further plaguing the country. So it could be increased to be sure. Lebanon, frankly, is used to——

Mr. CHABOT. I am sorry. Article 5 is the mutual defense?

Ms. KARLIN. Yes, sir. And Lebanon is used to being regularly destabilized by various regional events, and no doubt one would expect that to happen.

And then for a more creative option is really to look at Jordan. For example, we saw slews of Iraqi refugees go to Jordan and dramatically shift the Jordanian economy because they came with a lot of money. And so Jordanians couldn't afford housing. That led to some real difficulties for the Hashamites. So there is the violent challenges, those that we are most aware of and the tangible ones, and also the ones that are under the radar and indirect but actually have really problematic consequences. Thank you.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. And Dr. Lynch?

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, sir. I agree again with what my colleagues have said. I would also point to the potential impact on Iraq, which as you know we spent a great deal of time, blood and treasure trying to stabilize, and is uniquely vulnerable to a spill-over given the long border and the history of cross-border relations there.

There is also the potential for reverse impact where if you go back to the 1950s, the last time you had a really unstable Syria, it becomes a battleground for regional conflict, proxy war, between

in this case, the Gulf States and Iran basically becomes an arena in which they fight their battles. And that historically is something which was very destabilizing for Syria and across the region. And it becomes an extremely useful place for a group like al-Qaeda, which is mostly on the ropes, to reconstitute itself. To project itself as the defender of embattled Sunnis in Syria, this could possibly be its only opportunity to reestablish itself as a meaningful force in Arab politics. It has not done so to this point. I think that much of what we have seen is propaganda from Bashar's regime, but looking ahead is something which any serious strategic assessment has to take into effect.

The final part of my answer to your question and to Representative Fortenberry's question is that much depends on how violent the transition process is. An extended, turbulent, violent transition process is more likely to create both a violent, unstable situation inside of Syria and across the region. And I think that is the great concern of the Turks in particular as they try and find a solution.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. And the gentleman from New York is recognized for a second round, if you want to go. We are into the second round so I can go. All right, go ahead, Mr. Connolly. We will go to the gentleman from the Commonwealth of Virginia. Not the State, but the Commonwealth.

Mr. CONNOLLY. That is right. Can anyone name the four Commonwealths in the United States? There are only four.

Mr. CHABOT. Kentucky.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Kentucky, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Virginia. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Ackerman, for your graciousness.

Ms. Karlin, you talked about Turkey. There have been some alleged encroachments, shooting across the border, targeting some refugees perhaps even. How helpful has Turkey been during the Syrian crisis from the U.S. point of view, would you say?

Ms. KARLIN. Thank you, sir. The Turks as you may know had a very close relationship with the Assad regime for a number of years. In fact, this was how Prime Minister Erdogan really showed his comparative advantage, was that he believed and he articulated that he could bring the Syrians in for a close relationship with not just the U.S. but also with the Israelis. You might recall he had tried to broker an Israeli-Syrian peace deal. So that relationship was critical for the Turks, and that is why for the first few months of this conflict we saw the Turkish leadership, both the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister, very enthusiastically trying to work with Assad to reform. And then they realized he wasn't going to, and they were scorned and they were perturbed.

And since then I would say they have actually been quite helpful. They have welcomed in the refugees. They have supported them as much as possible. In fact, in many ways you could probably say the Turks have been more forward-leaning than a lot of other states, the United States, and also in Western Europe, because they are perturbed by what he has done. They are particularly perturbed that Assad lied to them. They thought he had this potential and he clearly didn't. They are now feeling the direct effects of the turmoil in Syria, and it is why, I think, they are the most worried about this dynamism in the contours of what really plays out. So

I think they can be a close ally here, but I do believe they are going to look for what role the U.S. is willing to play in support of them.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Did you want to comment, Dr. Lynch?

Mr. LYNCH. I would just add that when you look at Turkey, the Kurdish issue, the roles—

Mr. CONNOLLY. I was just going to ask about the Kurds. Go ahead.

Mr. LYNCH. There you are. They are obsessed and have a deep problem with their own Kurds, and that leads them to be highly skeptical of any post-Assad situation in Syria in which the Kurds enjoy autonomy or any form of seemingly—

Mr. CONNOLLY. Although correct me if I am wrong. In Syria the Kurds have been relatively quiescent compared to say Iraq or even for that matter, Turkey.

Mr. LYNCH. For the Turks this is matter of great concern. The rationality or the history is not something which is necessarily guiding their decision making in that regard. But I would say that with the Kurds, and I would say even more broadly, again in response to Mr. Fortenberry's question, is that the Syrian opposition has not done a good job to this point of trying to reassure communities like the Kurds, the Christians, the Alawis. And if there is going to be any hope of a stable or nonviolent transition, they need to do a much better job of guaranteeing the security and the inclusion and participation of such minority communities.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And you bring up a very good point. The Assad regime has been a minority Alawite regime since its founding. The Alawites are in some quarters of the Islamic world considered worse than heretics, even nonbelievers. And I don't judge that but they have got a problem in mainstream Islam in terms of acceptance. One could look at what is going on in Syria and differentiate it from Libya or some other situations and say, well, for the Alawites this is do or die. If they lose power there are a lot of other problems besides just the fall of a regime, from their point of view.

How much of a dynamic do you think that represents and how if at all, you talked about reach out and reassure the Alawites. Well, that sounds good, but I mean given the dynamic and given the current power structure that has been in place for quite some time, that is a lot easier said than done. Any of you can comment.

Mr. TABLER. The minority nature of the regime galvanizes it against the kind of splits like we saw in Egypt and Tunisia. A split meaning, for the military, acts as a and ousts the ruling family in the name of the nation. Because the idea is that if the Assad family is thrown out that along with it go the prospects of the Alawites. I think that that is a real barrier. It makes this regime much more rigid.

And the reason why the Obama administration has tried to work with Russia in this regard is not because of any kind of love for Russia, but rather it is based on an assumption, an uncertain one, that the Russians have assets inside of the Syrian military which will be able to be called upon later to convince the generals in that country, despite the fact they are Alawites, to expel the Assad family. I think there have been a number of conversations in this regard. But thus far it seems that the Russians are not willing to go along with it. Either it is based on their own calculations in the

region or, and there are others that speculate, that it is based on their own conversations with the Alawite generals themselves that they realize that the regime can hold on for some time. And that makes this a particularly difficult problem to solve diplomatically involving Russia.

Mr. CHABOT. Okay, the gentleman's time has expired. Did you want to make a comment, Dr. Lynch?

Mr. LYNCH. Yes, very briefly. I do not believe that the sectarian dimension is the most important here in the sense of Sunni-Shia conflict or of the Alawites being heterodox. I think for mainstream Sunnis this is not a major issue. It is a major issue for Salafi jihadists of the al-Qaeda variety who are as you say deeply hostile to any form of Shiaism and including Alawis. But I think that the real risk is that this can increasingly become something which defines relations as the conflict progresses, as we saw in Iraq where you did not have a great deal of sectarian tension early on, but as the killing proceeded the battle lines and the identity lines became harder and harder. And even intermarriage and living in close quarters wasn't enough to protect people from that sectarian differentiation.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired. The gentleman from Nebraska, Mr. Fortenberry, is recognized for 5 minutes in the second round.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. What are your thoughts as a panel on leveraging military assets by a coalition of nations to create space for humanitarian relief and space for the development of a new and just and legitimate form of governance for Syria?

Mr. TABLER. Working inside of such a coalition for the creation of where there would be safe havens, buffer zones, humanitarian corridors, there are a variety of concepts, is something which there are contingency plans for this together with Turkey which have been developed by multiple sides. It is certainly doable. It presents a number of challenges militarily. That would allow a space where refugees could run as the game of Whac-A-Mole continues.

But also, and the Syrian opposition has argued this, that this would create a space also politically inside the country where people would be able to go and organize and essentially have a Benghazi. It is unclear if immediately that would happen. It certainly would have a political effect inside the country. It certainly would be a major loss for President Assad to lose control over areas of his country. It would depend on though how it was carved out, if simply Turkey invaded to prevent refugees coming across.

Where this problem intersects with the Kurdish problem is that every time there is a game of Whac-A-Mole people die, people go across the border into that group. And this is what the Turks are worried about now. Turkey is worried that the PYD, the Syrian version of the PKK, which they consider a terrorist organization, that members in Syria now are acting as police in the Kurdish communities. They could then melt into these refugees going across the border, and that is a national security threat to Turkey. It is one of the reasons why Article 5 could be invoked. And so that is one of the reasons why Turkey would intervene.

But there is also a possibility that areas like in Eastern Syria where the tribes are dominant could also break away. And that

would function also politically. In Eastern Syria particularly you have serious production of oil and natural gas. So that would very quickly constrain the regime's ability to refine gasoline and diesel fuel as well as the production of natural gas which fires most of their power plants.

Ms. KARLIN. Let me just quickly add, sir, the creation of such areas would no doubt be a turning point, and I think Andrew nicely delineated what some of those might look like. There are of course challenges inherent in what those areas do, to be sure, but I think it is important that we are cognizant no matter what terminology we use. Those areas generally will look pretty similar whether they are safe havens, support havens, no-fly zones, you name it. They will all at least within the Assad regime's eyes be seen as the same. And that is important to be cognizant of. Whether or not we should actually establish them or support others doing them is a separate issue. But I think from the Assad regime's perspective this is all the same. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. So without running afoul of the ranking member's warnings about history, let me say that history is fairly clear that safe zones don't work. That the safe zones don't work. That either they require an enormous amount of diplomatic and military effort to sustain, or else they become in a sense unfunded mandates in which you offer guarantees of protection which you are not able to deliver, then you end up with your Srebrenicas.

And so I think that it could be a turning point, but likely a turning point to deeper involvement. In order to establish a safe zone, for the United States with the way its military works, you would need to first establish a no-fly zone. That requires heavy bombing often in urban areas.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Let me be clear. I didn't say the United States.

Mr. LYNCH. Well, whoever does it. I mean I think no military is going to be willing to act in these areas without having the military ability to do so safely. And so basically this is something which sounds easy, but actually it is quite difficult when you look at what it actually entails. And then once you have done it you then have to maintain it. If you look at the example of in 1991 we declare Operation Provide Comfort and we spent the next 12 years protecting the Kurdish north, and that did not lead to a cascade of Saddam falling. We also declared a no-fly zone in the south to protect the Shia and that didn't work at all. And in fact, so you can go back and you look at those examples.

I would say that whatever happens, it has to be done with the mandate of the United Nations and with international legitimacy. NATO, I think, cannot do this on its own. It doesn't matter if the Arab League supports it. Those are useful steps toward getting a Security Council resolution, but acting without the Security Council would make this something destructive of international laws and norms rather than building respect for international law. And I think for this administration or for any administration, this would be an extremely dangerous step to take.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired. The gentleman from New York is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I think there is a certain amount of international naivete spearheaded by American and Western notions of democracy, that somehow we will settle this all down by having some kind of big general election and everybody is going to peacefully abide by whatever the results are, which is something we can hardly do in this country anymore let alone expect it to happen in a place where you have such sectarian and other kinds of interest. This is going to require, I think, taking a close look at what Russian expectations are, how to get the Russians on board so that they can resolve the issues that are very important and critical to them, and other countries as well. I will put that out there for anybody who wants to comment on it.

But in specific, looking at the major players who can have an influence or an effect on the resolution of this problem, which countries are the most critical of the Obama administration or American interests, if I could defang the question as I started to propose it, and apply the Goldilocks litmus test of the porridge being too hot or too cold, or who thinks we are getting it just right? Do we have critics that are not on board because of what we are doing, and who are vocal of what they think we should or should not be doing?

Mr. LYNCH. Let me start that. I think that Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been very vocal in wanting us to take a firmer line. It reminds me of an old line that we once heard from Secretary Gates that they want to fight Syria with the last American.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I wrote that down before you said it.

Mr. LYNCH. Yes, it is right there for you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. So they are not sending any of their citizens.

Mr. LYNCH. Exactly.

Mr. ACKERMAN. They are holding our coat and wishing us the best in the fight.

Mr. LYNCH. Exactly. I think that Russia, I think, Andrew has already spoken of quite effectively. I would only point out two things here. The first is that a lot of Annan strategy, Kofi Annan strategy, is built around trying to hold the Russians here, which is to say that this is a plan to which they have agreed. It is their ideas, and in a sense they then take on a certain responsibility to deliver.

The second point I would make is that everybody tends to equate Russia and China but, in fact, their interests in this are quite different. China has no interest to speak of in Syria. It has a great deal of interest in the energy of the Gulf, and they are much more likely to be responsive to Saudi Arabia and Qatar in terms of pressure on them to shift their position. And so I would not speak of Russia and China as a unified bloc. They have different interests and they might behave differently. You have already seen signs of that in New York at the Security Council.

Mr. ACKERMAN. What is your view of their attitude toward what we are doing?

Mr. LYNCH. I think for China, simply standing up to the United States at the moment is something which is useful for them politically given their grievances and things happening in Asia, but they have no intrinsic interest in Syria in the way that Russia does. And as a straightforward realpolitik, which is how I think the Chinese approach the world, it is much more important for them to keep

the energy producers of the Gulf happy than it is for them to keep Syria or Russia happy.

Mr. FORTENBERRY [presiding]. The gentleman's time has expired. So let us——

Mr. ACKERMAN. I want to appeal for the judges. I think the clock was running from the last time, right?

Mr. FORTENBERRY. It is confusing to me too.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Did I go 8½ minutes?

Mr. FORTENBERRY. It didn't seem that long, but it is always interesting to listen to you and time flies by. But don't know what the time was.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I take that as the ultimate compliment.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Chairman, if I may. The clock kind of went the opposite direction.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Is that what happened.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And I believe the gentleman had——

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Well, I didn't want to lose my legitimacy of authority in the chair here, so I apologize if I cut you off prematurely.

Mr. ACKERMAN. No, I will abide by the decision of the chair.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Well, why don't we do this? The chairman is back and I will return the gavel to him.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I would ask you now to consent that the gentleman from New York be granted an additional minute.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I would rephrase that and say my remaining minute.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Your remaining minute.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I would just like to hear the response of the panel to try to get their, what I was trying to elicit, Mr. Chairman. It was not the fault of the gentleman who was in the chair, but the clock went haywire and reversed itself.

Mr. CHABOT. Are you using your minute right now?

Mr. ACKERMAN. Only if you think so. I was trying to elicit from the distinguished panel what they thought of the assessment of other countries viewing whatever our policy is, as whether we are being too harsh or not harsh enough.

Mr. CHABOT. Okay, very good.

Ms. KARLIN. Sir, I would just add, I think Marc did a nice job of delineating those in the Middle East who are frustrated by our policy. I would be sure to add to that the Turks who I think have looked for very strong signals from the United States and have not received them. And on the Russia point, it is one worth considering in that the Russians have a lot to lose if the Assad regime goes, and very little to gain at this stage. They lose money. They lose a lot in arms sales. They lose access to their only port out of what had been the Soviet Union's territory. And for them to just do a little to impede change in Syria delivers a lot.

They perturb the United States no doubt. They really by themselves accede at the table. When we talk about the Annan plan, so much of the discussion is, well, what are the Russians going to do about it? That is really where the focus is. So for the Russians, and of course if we look at what has happened in the region in the last 1½ years and the massive losses that they found in Libya given

the change in administrations there, they are not enthusiastic about seeing a new Syria.

On the China piece, I would just add to Marc's comments. The Chinese are notoriously uncomfortable when other states look at domestic politics, when they look at what is happening internally and how a state treats its population. For decades, the United States focused on Syria's foreign policy, what it was doing outside of its borders. And now really for the first time in a long time we are looking inside, and that is not something that the Chinese are inherently comfortable with. Thank you.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired. The gentleman from the Commonwealth of Virginia is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the chair. And something that you said, Dr. Lynch, intrigued me. You said safe zones don't work. Surely that is an arguable point. There are a lot of people who believe the safe zone, if you can call it that in Iraq, for at least Kurds, did work, which is why that part of the country even to this day is prospering and growing and attracting investment and so forth. We actually kind of cordoned it off and helped protect it from Saddam Hussein at the time. I may take your point on the south, but wouldn't you agree that at least an arguable case could be made that it worked in the north?

Mr. LYNCH. Yes, it could. But the cost was about 20,000 deployed troops, and it consumed an enormous amount of America's diplomatic attention to maintain authorization for that at the Security Council over the years. And midway through, in 1996, one of the Kurdish political parties invited Saddam Hussein's troops in to come and help finish off his political rival, and our no-fly zone was unable to prevent that. And so it was a guarded success at very high cost. But my point would be that what it did not do was what many people claim a safe area in Syria would do, which is to create a space where an alternative Iraqi leadership could emerge and thrive. Efforts to do that by the Iraqi National Congress failed rather spectacularly and it did not create a rallying point, which then led to a domino effect throughout the—so in other words, yes, it was a limited success in protecting the Kurds in a geographically concentrated space with almost complete ethnic homogeneity—

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yes. And I thought that was maybe the broader point you were making which is, Syria is not Iraq. I mean it is much more Balkanized, much more difficult to find a safe zone to say, well, that is going to be the safe zone, and we have three distinct, although there was lots of intermingling, but three distinct areas in Iraq that we could have, we pointed to.

Mr. Tabler, did you want to comment on that?

Mr. TABLER. I think that the idea of safe zones, yes, they are problematic. Yes, they are sort of a half measure so to speak between a overwhelming direct military intervention to sort of rip out the disease itself. And I would expect that these solutions, a safe zone or some of these other solutions are not perfect ones, but they are ones that are probably going to be considered, and I know are very seriously being considered by Turkey, as ways to try and manage the conflict as it goes forward.

So then the question becomes, should the United States contribute to an effort now to deal with this problem and what it

should be, or do we just wait and let this go on for 10 years which some estimates in this town indicate. And just see where it goes and allow other people to, and including our allies, to try and affect its outcome. I think this would be easier to solve if I could really clearly see what the solution politically would be, and I just can't see it. I don't know anyone that really knows the country or knows——

Mr. CONNOLLY. That is my final question for all of you. Revolutions always start off better than they usually end. And yet looking at today's Egypt and Libya I would say the jury is out. What have we produced, collectively, not just the—and so as we look at Syria there are reports just this week that perhaps there has been some infiltration by extremist elements, terrorist elements, trying to exploit the situation.

What ought to be, what could be a likely result given the experience we have just had with the Arab Spring and given what we know about Syria and its differences with other Arab countries?

Mr. TABLER. The Assad regime is already destabilized and it will continue to deteriorate one way or the other. And into that very volatile vacuum can step other parties, for sure, and it can suck in a lot of other countries in the region and it can draw in a lot of other countries including the United States as well. The ultimate outcome, the settlement of the Syrian revolution is unclear.

But what I can tell you is this. Whether America does something or not this is going to continue. This is not going to settle down any time soon. I don't know anyone I have met in the region who thought so, and we really need to be able to look at this as a storm and how are we going to deal with it. This is a bit different than a tornado. A tornado, you just have to let it blow through. In this particular case there are some things we can do, the question is now, what?

Ms. KARLIN. Sir, I would just add to that. It is hard to know when a revolution really ends. When we look at Egypt, for example, there are large swaths of the population that still think the country is in revolution. And yet there are those, particularly amongst the more conservative elements, that see the revolution as over. They have succeeded. They are in power, and moving on. And so I think that is a dilemma that we will see in Syria also. It is one we saw in Iran during that revolution also, if you will excuse me for citing history again, sir.

So the results, what we know is this will be messy and we know that the violence will continue. It will be difficult. It will probably embroil various members of the region. And ideally the U.S. will be able to help shape how it plays out to a degree. But it is not stopping. I think we are all probably in quite a violent agreement about that. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. And even though we are over time, I would simply say that I agree with Andrew that this is likely to continue for quite some time. And again, if you see what the ceasefire did in the 2 weeks since it has come into effect, each Friday you have seen a qualitative jump in the number of peaceful demonstrations. And the fundamental question is whether that is enough to develop into the sort of tide of peaceful protest which could pose genuine problems for the regime. I think that Andrew's sense is that if that

begins to happen the guns will come back out in much more force, which is precisely the point at which we need a united international community ready to put serious pressure on Assad to stop that from happening. That is why I want the observer mission to move in much more quickly, why it is so important to keep international consensus to the U.N. and why we need to push that forward.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CHABOT. I thank the gentleman. The gentleman's time has expired. I want to thank the members of the panel for their excellent testimony.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Chairman?

Mr. CHABOT. Yes.

Mr. ACKERMAN. If I might before you conclude. Just for the record, I didn't mean to disparage all of history.

Mr. CHABOT. It is too late now.

Mr. ACKERMAN. But just to try to reclaim my honor.

Mr. CHABOT. It is okay, you are retiring anyway.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I just wanted to caution us that we are not always informed by events in third century Babylonia as to what to do in 21st century Afghanistan.

Mr. CHABOT. Excellent. Okay, thank you very much. And we want to thank the very fine presentation by the panel this afternoon. I think it was excellent testimony. And without objection, members will have 5 legislative days to submit questions or supplement their statements. And if there is no further business to come before the committee, we are adjourned. Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 2:59 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

## A P P E N D I X

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MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

**SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE**  
**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
*U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*  
*WASHINGTON, D.C.*

**Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia**  
**Steve Chabot (R-OH), Chairman**

April 23, 2012

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, to be held in **Room 2360** (Small Business Committee Room) of the Rayburn House Office Building **(and available live via the Committee website at <http://www.hcfa.house.gov>)**:

**DATE:** Wednesday, April 25, 2012

**TIME:** 1:30 p.m.

**SUBJECT:** Confronting Damascus: U.S. Policy Toward the Evolving Situation in Syria, Part II


**WITNESSES:** Mr. Andrew Tabler  
Next Generation Fellow  
Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Ms. Mara E. Karlin  
Instructor in Strategic Studies  
School of Advanced International Studies  
Johns Hopkins University

Marc Lynch, Ph.D.  
Professor of Political Science  
Director of Institute for Middle East Studies  
Elliott School of International Affairs  
George Washington University

**By Direction of the Chairman**

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## COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON MESA HEARINGDay Wednesday Date April 25 Room 2360Starting Time 1:30 Ending Time 3:00Recesses ☐ (to ) (to ) (to ) (to ) (to ) (to )

Presiding Member(s)

Steve Chabot

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒Executive (closed) Session ☐Televised ☐Electronically Recorded (taped) ☐Stenographic Record ☐

TITLE OF HEARING:

"Confronting Damascus: US Policy toward the Evolving  
Situation in Syria, Part II"

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Steve ChabotJeff FarenthamGary AckermanGerald Conolly

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an \* if they are not members of full committee.)

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE: .....

or

TIME ADJOURNED .....

Subcommittee Staff Director

