

THE SITUATION IN SYRIA

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

MARCH 7, 2012

Printed for the use of the Committee on Armed Services



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.fdsys.gov/>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

76-271 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2012

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
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THE SITUATION IN SYRIA

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7, 2012

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:05 a.m. in room SD-106, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator Carl Levin (chairman) presiding.

Committee members present: Senators Levin, Lieberman, Nelson, Webb, Hagan, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, McCain, Sessions, Chambliss, Wicker, Brown, Ayotte, Collins, Graham, and Cornyn.

Committee staff members present: Richard D. DeBobes, staff director; and Leah C. Brewer, nominations and hearings clerk.

Majority staff members present: Jessica L. Kingston, research assistant; Michael J. Kuiken, professional staff member; Jason W. Maroney, counsel; William G.P. Monahan, counsel; Michael J. Noblet, professional staff member; and Roy F. Phillips, professional staff member.

Minority staff members present: Adam J. Barker, professional staff member; Christian D. Brose, professional staff member; Paul C. Hutton IV, professional staff member; and Daniel A. Lerner, professional staff member.

Staff assistants present: Hannah I. Lloyd, Brian F. Sebold, and Bradley S. Watson.

Committee members' assistants present: Vance Serchuk, assistant to Senator Lieberman; Carolyn Chuhta, assistant to Senator Reed; Ryan Ehly, assistant to Senator Nelson; Gordon Peterson, assistant to Senator Webb; Lindsay Kavanaugh, assistant to Senator Begich; Patrick Day, assistant to Senator Shaheen; Elana Broitman, assistant to Senator Gillibrand; Ethan Saxon, assistant to Senator Blumenthal; Lenwood Landrum, assistant to Senator Sessions; Clyde Taylor IV, assistant to Senator Chambliss; Joseph Lai, assistant to Senator Wicker; Charles Prosch, assistant to Senator Brown; Brad Bowman, assistant to Senator Ayotte; Ryan Kaldahl, assistant to Senator Collins; Sergio Sarkany, assistant to Senator Graham; and Dave Hanke, assistant to Senator Cornyn.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CARL LEVIN, CHAIRMAN

Chairman LEVIN. Good morning, everybody. The committee meets today to hear from Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Martin E. Dempsey, USA, to update the committee on the situation in Syria and to discuss the policies of the administration with respect to Syria.

It was nearly a year ago that demonstrators in Syria peacefully took to the streets to call for an end to the rule of President Assad and demand an opportunity to choose a leader through a free and fair democratic process. Since those first days of the uprising, the world has watched as the Syrian people have continued to challenge the Assad regime's tyrannical ways. As the weeks and months have passed, peaceful demonstrators have been killed. The tragedy unfolds daily.

According to the United Nations' (U.N.) most recent estimates, more than 7,500 people in Syria have been killed and at least 100 more people are being killed each day. The Assad regime's brutal crackdown has included gross human rights violations, use of force against civilians, torture, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary executions, sexual violence, and interference with access to medical treatment and other humanitarian assistance. These acts, when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against civilian populations, as is the case in Syria, amount, in my view, to crimes against humanity.

President Obama's efforts to build a broad international coalition to put massive pressure on Assad have been met with opposition from China and Russia. They vetoed a proposal brought to the U.N. Security Council by the Arab League to establish a Syrian-led political transition to a democratic, pluralistic political system. Despite these vetoes, the U.N. General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to condemn the Assad regime's brutal use of force against civilians.

Last week the Friends of Syria, which included representatives of the Syrian National Council, Secretary Clinton, and leaders from more than 60 other countries, came together in Tunis, the home of the first Arab Spring uprising, to forge a way forward in Syria, including a call for the Assad regime to end the violence, withdraw its forces from cities and towns, and ensure unhindered access for Arab League monitors.

The Friends also praised the work of the Syrian National Council to form a broad and inclusive body and lay the groundwork for a political transition. Importantly, they agreed to continue to ratchet up the economic pressure through tough sanctions on the Assad family and its supporters. The dialogue in Tunis also included a robust dialogue about whether there is a feasible way to help those that are under assault by the Assad regime in order to defend themselves.

As the international community continues to search for an avenue, there are a number of questions which we must ask about the nature of the conflict in Syria: what is the makeup of the Syrian opposition? How unified are they and would they be a force for democracy and humane governance should they succeed? What are the objectives of the opposition and who are their benefactors? Is there a political entity, such as the Syrian National Council, that is capable of uniting the small bands of fighters across Syria and then coordinating the efforts of the opposition groups against the Syrian military? Have violent extremist elements infiltrated the opposition movement?

The military questions are, of course, equally important: what are the military options available? What are the military actions that could be taken and who would they need to be taken by to

maximize the chances of success, and what are the risks and down sides to each option? These are just a few of the questions that we hope to discuss with our witnesses this morning.

Just as was the case with Libya, there is a broad consensus among regional leaders and organizations on the preferred outcome in Syria: Assad and his cronies must go. There is not, however, a consensus about how this goal can be achieved. Each situation is different. Unlike Qadhafi, who prevented the formation of a capable and professional fighting force, President Assad and his father before him built a substantial and professional military with a modern air defense capability, a large deadly stockpile of chemical weapons, and well-trained troops. So far, this military establishment has remained mainly cohesive and willing to carry out Assad's brutal order to conduct a violent campaign against his people.

Some observers believe the uprising in Syria, which is led by the Sunni majority, could aggravate sectarian tensions beyond Syria's borders in a region already riven by religious and ethnic divisions over power and territory. Syria is also home to an ethnically and religiously diverse population that includes minority Christian, Alawite, and Druze populations. Some religious leaders are raising concerns about the situation in Syria devolving to the point where there is little tolerance for religious minorities, a situation all too familiar to us following the invasion of Iraq.

We must also try to understand the impact of the conflict in Syria on the region. Elements of Hezbollah and Hamas call Syria home. Perhaps more importantly, it is Iran's sole ally in the Arab world. Iran uses Syria and the terrorist organizations it protects to carry out its destabilizing agenda in the region. Syria is also home to a Russian naval installation, Russia's only regular port of call in the Mediterranean. These are but some aspects of the situation that need to be considered as we develop a path forward.

Our witnesses have the responsibility to provide the President options to address these challenges and to provide him their best professional advice as to the pros and cons of such options. As the committee heard from General Dempsey last month, the Joint Staff has already begun the careful planning necessary to support a full range of potential operations, including, I'm sure, humanitarian airlifts, naval monitoring of multilateral sanctions, aerial surveillance of the Syrian military, and aerial enforcement of safe havens. We look forward to discussing these options and many others with our witnesses this morning.

We thank you both for being here this morning. We are grateful for your steady leadership and we also appreciate your very positive relationship with this committee and its members.

Senator McCain.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN

Senator McCAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I join you in welcoming our distinguished witnesses. Let me thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening today's hearing on the horrific situation in Syria. The urgency of this hearing has only grown more important over the past several weeks. It's estimated that nearly 7,500

lives have been lost and many informed observers even think that that figure could be low.

Syria today is the scene of some of the worst state-sponsored violence since the Balkans. What is all the more astonishing is that the violence continues despite the severe international pressure that has been brought against Assad and his regime. Syria is almost completely isolated diplomatically and the regime is facing a punishing array of economic sanctions imposed by the United States, the European Union (EU), the Arab League, and others.

This has been an impressive international effort and the administration deserves credit for helping to orchestrate it. Unfortunately, the violence continues and, worse, it appears to be escalating. Assad seems to be accelerating his fight to the finish, and he's doing so with the active support thus far of Russia, China, and Iran. A steady supply of weapons, ammunition, and other assistance is flowing to Assad from Moscow and Teheran and, as the Washington Post reported on Sunday, Iranian military and intelligence operatives are likely working in Syria to strengthen the regime's crackdown.

General Mattis testified to this committee yesterday that "Assad is clearly achieving what he wants to achieve," that Assad's military campaign is "gaining physical momentum on the battlefield," and that in General Mattis' opinion Assad will "continue to employ heavier and heavier weapons on his people."

Similarly, General Ronald Burgess, the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, and James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence, both told this committee recently that, absent some kind of external intervention, Assad would likely remain in power for the foreseeable future.

The United States has a clear national security interest in stopping the slaughter in Syria and forcing Assad to leave power. The end of the Assad regime could sever Hezbollah's lifeline to Iran, eliminate a longstanding threat to Israel, bolster Lebanon's sovereignty and independence, and remove a committed state sponsor of terrorism that is engaged in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It would be a geopolitical success of the first order and, as General Mattis told this committee yesterday, "the biggest strategic setback for Iran in 25 years."

The President has made it an objective of the United States that the killing in Syria must stop and that Assad must go. The President has committed our prestige and our credibility to that goal and it is the right goal. But the killing continues.

What opposition groups in Syria need most urgently is relief from Assad's tank and artillery sieges in the many cities that are still contested. But time is running out. Assad's forces are on the march. Providing military assistance to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and other opposition groups is necessary, but at this late hour that alone will not be sufficient to stop the slaughter and save innocent lives.

The only realistic way to do so is with foreign air power, which could break Assad's siege of contested cities in Syria, protect key population centers, and help the opposition to Assad on the ground to establish and defend safe havens in Syria where they can organize and plan their political and military activities against Assad.

At the request of the Syrian National Council, the FSA, and local coordinating committees inside the country, the United States should help to lead such a military effort in Syria. But, as I have repeatedly said, this does not mean we should go it alone. We should not. We should seek the active involvement of key Arab partners such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Jordan, and Qatar, and willing allies in the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the most important of which in this case is Turkey.

Rather than closing off the prospects for a negotiated transition that is acceptable to Syria's opposition, military intervention is now needed to strengthen this option. Assad needs to know that he will not win and, unfortunately, that is not the case now.

To the contrary, Assad seems convinced that he can wipe out the opposition through violence and is fully committed to doing so. The ideal political outcome of military intervention would be to change this dynamic, to prevent a long and bloody fight to the finish by compelling Assad and his top lieutenants to give up power without further bloodshed, thereby creating the opportunity for a peaceful transition to democracy, possibly along the lines proposed by the Arab League.

To be sure, there are legitimate questions about the efficacy of military options in Syria and equally legitimate concerns about their risks and uncertainties. It is understandable that the administration is reluctant to move beyond diplomacy and sanctions. Unfortunately, this policy is increasingly disconnected from the dire conditions on the ground in Syria, which has become a full state of armed conflict.

Secretary Panetta, you were Chief of Staff to President Clinton during much of the debate over Bosnia in the 1990s, including the NATO bombing campaign. More than any of us, perhaps, you remember the many painful years when the U.N. and the EU kept sending envoys to Milosevic and the Bosnian Serbs pleading with them to agree to reasonable requests, such as lifting the siege of Sarajevo and allowing access to humanitarian assistance. You also remember how the Serb leaders cynically used these diplomatic entreaties to buy time to continue their killing.

In Bosnia and later in Kosovo, we heard many arguments against military intervention. It was said there was no international consensus for action, that the situation on the ground was messy and confused, that it was not clear who we would actually be helping on the ground, and that our involvement could actually make matters worse.

We heard all these arguments about Bosnia, Mr. Secretary, and now we hear them about Syria again today. We overcame them in Bosnia, thank God, and now we must overcome them in the case of Syria.

I want to close by reading how President Clinton described Bosnia in 1995: "Nowhere today is the need for American leadership more stark or more immediate than in Bosnia. For nearly 4 years, a terrible war has torn Bosnia apart. Horrors we prayed had been banished from Europe forever had been seared into our minds again."

President Clinton went on to say, "There are times and places where our leadership can mean the difference between peace and

war and where we can defend our fundamental values as a people and serve our most basic strategic interests. There are still times when America and America alone can and should make the difference for peace.”

Those were the words of a Democratic President who led America to do the right thing in helping stop mass atrocities in the Balkans. I remember working with my Republican friend and leader Bob Dole to support President Clinton in that endeavor. The question for another Democratic President today and for all of us in positions of leadership and responsibility is whether we will allow similar mass atrocities to continue in Syria or whether we will do what it takes to stop them.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator McCain.

Secretary Panetta.

STATEMENT OF HON. LEON E. PANETTA, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Secretary PANETTA. Chairman Levin and Senator McCain: Thank you for the opportunity to be able to discuss with you the ongoing violence in Syria. This tragedy has justifiably evoked the concern and outrage of the U.S. Government, the American people, and much of the world.

At the outset, I would like to stress that the President and a broad cross-section of the international community have stated unequivocally that Bashar Al-Assad must halt his campaign of killing and crimes against his own people now. He must step aside and he must allow a democratic transition to proceed immediately. Furthermore, through its repeated violations of human rights any government that indiscriminately kills its own people loses its legitimacy. This regime has lost its legitimacy and its right to rule the country.

This situation demands an international response and for that reason the United States has been leading efforts within the international community to pressure Assad to stop his violence against the Syrian people and to step aside. Unfortunately, this terrible situation has no simple answers, and so the result is a great deal of anger and frustration that we all share. There are some members who are concerned about whether we are doing enough to stem the violence in Syria, and that’s understandable. There are others who are concerned about the dangers of involving ourselves in still another conflict in that part of the world, and that too is understandable.

Let me try and address these concerns by providing some context for what is guiding the administration’s views on Syria and our actions in response to the violence. The turmoil in Syria is clearly part of a larger transformation that has been reshaping the Arab world for more than a year. The change we’ve seen has manifested itself in different ways, sometimes through peaceful protests and negotiations aimed at a more responsive government, but also in other cases in violent uprisings and brutal crackdowns from repressive regimes.

Many countries have been affected by these changes and, although each conflict has its own dynamic, it is part of a broader

trend that is fundamentally and irreversibly reshaping the politics of the Arab world. Although this is clearly a challenging and unpredictable period of time, our goal must be to encourage governments to do more to ensure that their people can live in peace and prosperity.

As a global leader with a vital interest in the stability of the broader Middle East, this administration has been determined to do everything we can to positively shape the course of events in the Middle East. But each situation by virtue of the politics, geography, and history of each country is unique and demands a unique response. There can be no cookie-cutter approach for a region as complex and volatile as the Middle East.

Nevertheless, from the outset we have made clear that our response has been guided by three fundamental principles. First, we oppose the use of violence and repression by regimes against their own people. Second, we have supported the exercise of universal rights—right to freedom of expression, the right to peaceful assembly, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, the prohibition against discrimination, and the right to vote through genuine elections that express the will of the electorate. Third, we support political and economic reforms that can meet the legitimate aspirations of ordinary people throughout the region. These basic principles have shaped our response to Tunisia, to Egypt, to Libya, and now Syria.

The violence there has become increasingly dire and outrageous. As Secretary Clinton has noted, the Assad regime has ignored every warning, squandered every opportunity, and broken every agreement. We are forging an international consensus that the Assad regime's brutality must end and that a democratic transition in Syria must begin.

Although China and Russia have repeatedly blocked the U.N. Security Council from taking action, the U.N. General Assembly has given full support to the Arab League's transition plan, delivering a clear message from the international community that the Assad regime has lost its legitimacy, and there are continuing efforts to try and agree on a Security Council resolution as we speak.

The administration's focus now is on translating that international consensus into action along four tracks. First, we are working to increase the diplomatic and political isolation of the Assad regime and encouraging other countries to join the United States, the EU, and the Arab League in imposing sanctions on the Assad regime. These sanctions are having a significant impact.

Second, we are providing emergency humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people, with an initial commitment of \$10 million, and we are working to broaden our efforts at relief.

Third, we are working with the Friends of Syria and other groups to help strengthen the opposition, to try to encourage the various opposing groups to unify and lay a groundwork for a peaceful, orderly transition to a democratic government, a government that recognizes and respects the rights of all Syrians, including minorities.

Fourth, we are reviewing all possible additional steps that can be taken with our international partners to support the efforts to pro-

tect the Syrian people, to end the violence and ensure regional stability, including potential military options, if necessary.

This approach has succeeded in putting unprecedented pressure on Assad, but it is clear that there is no simple or quick solution to this crisis. We believe that the best resolution to this crisis will be a peaceful political, democratic transition led by the Syrian people along the lines suggested by the Arab League. We believe there's still an opportunity to try to achieve that goal.

Although we will not rule out any future course of action, currently the administration is focusing on diplomatic and political approaches, rather than military intervention. Guided by our approach from Libya and elsewhere, we believe it is important in this instance that we do the following: that we build multilateral international consensus for any action that is taken; two, that we maintain clear regional support from the Arab world; three, that we make substantial U.S. contributions to the international effort, especially where the United States has unique resources that can be brought to bear; four, we need to have a clear legal basis for any action that we take; and five, keep all options on the table, but recognize that there are limitations of military force, especially with U.S. boots-on-the-ground.

Each situation, as I said, is unique and, as I've said, there is no simple solution here. The reasons for the differences between our approach with Libya and the current approach to Syria are clear. Although there has been widespread support in the Security Council and the Arab League for military intervention in Libya, no such consensus currently exists with regards to Syria.

For us to act unilaterally would be a mistake. It is not clear what constitutes the Syrian armed opposition. There has been no single unifying military alternative that can be recognized, appointed, or contacted. While the opposition is fighting back and military defections and desertions are on the rise, the Syrian regime continues to maintain a strong military. As Secretary Clinton has noted, there is every possibility of a civil war, and a direct outside intervention in these conditions not only would not prevent that, but could make it worse.

Even though our current approach is focused on achieving a political solution to this crisis, the Assad regime should take no comfort. The pressure is building on the regime every day, and make no mistake, one way or another this regime will meet its end. We will continue to evaluate the situation and we will adjust our approach as necessary.

Let me close by briefly addressing the United States' broader strategic interest in Syria and the region. The stability of Syria is vital to this region and to Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, and Israel. All of these countries and the United States have a strong interest in preventing a humanitarian crisis in Syria. But perhaps most notably, Syria is a pivotal country for Iran. As Senator McCain pointed out, Syria is Iran's only state ally in the region and is crucial to Iran's efforts to support those militants throughout the region who threaten Israel and threaten regional stability.

Unrest in Syria has already greatly weakened Iran's position in the region and it is clear that Iran only stands to lose further as Assad is weakened further. As groups such as Hamas distance

themselves from the Assad regime, Iran is quickly becoming the Assad regime's lone backer. This shows the world the hypocrisy of Teheran.

I cannot predict how this volatile situation in Syria will unfold, but the United States has made clear that we are on the side of the Syrian people. They must know that the international community has not underestimated either their suffering or their impatience. We all wish there was a clear and unambiguous way forward to directly influence the events in Syria. That unfortunately is not the case. That is not an excuse; that is reality.

Our only clear path is to keep moving in a resolute, determined, but deliberate, manner with the international community to find a way to return Syria to the Syrian people.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Panetta follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY HON. LEON E. PANETTA

Chairman Levin, Senator McCain. Thank you for calling this hearing to discuss the ongoing violence in Syria, which has justifiably evoked the concern and outrage of the U.S. Government, the American people, and much of the world.

At the outset, I would like to stress that President Obama has stated unequivocally that Bashar al-Assad must halt his campaign of killing and crimes against his own people now. He must step aside and allow a democratic transition to proceed immediately. Furthermore, through its repeated violations of human rights, the regime has lost its legitimacy, and its right to rule the country. This situation demands an international response, and for that reason the United States has been leading efforts within the international community to pressure Assad to stop his violence against the Syrian people and step aside.

I know that there are some members who are concerned about whether we are doing enough to stem the violence in Syria and that is understandable. There are others who are concerned about the dangers of involving ourselves in still another conflict in this part of the world and that too is understandable.

Let me address these concerns by providing some context for what is guiding the administration's views on Syria and our actions in response to the violence.

The turmoil in Syria is clearly part of a larger transformation that has been reshaping the Arab world for more than a year. The change we've seen manifests itself through peaceful protests and negotiations aimed at more responsive governments in some cases, but also in violent uprisings and brutal crackdowns from repressive regimes in other cases. Many countries have been affected by these changes. Although each situation has been unique, it is part of a broader trend that is fundamentally and irreversibly reshaping the politics of the Arab world.

Although this is clearly a challenging and unpredictable period of time, our goal must be governments that will do more to ensure that their people live in peace and prosperity.

As a global leader with a vital interest in the stability of the broader Middle East, this administration has been determined to do everything we can to positively shape the course of events in the Middle East. Each situation—by virtue of the politics, geography, and history of each country—is unique, and demands a unique response. There can be no cookie cutter approach for a region as complex and volatile as the Middle East.

Nevertheless, from the outset, we have made clear that our response has been guided by three fundamental principles:

- First, we oppose the use of violence and repression by regimes against their own people;
- Second, we have supported the exercise of universal human rights—which include the right to freedom of expression, the right of peaceful assembly, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the prohibition against discrimination, and the right to vote through genuine elections that express the will of the electorate, and;
- Third, we support political and economic reforms that can meet the legitimate aspirations of ordinary people throughout the region.

These basic principles have shaped our response to Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and now Syria. The violence there has become increasingly dire and outrageous. As Sec-

retary Clinton has noted, the Assad regime has ignored every warning, squandered every opportunity, and broken every agreement. We are forging an international consensus that the Assad regime's brutality must end and that a democratic transition in Syria must begin. Although China and Russia have repeatedly blocked the UN Security Council from taking action, the U.N. General Assembly has given full support to the Arab League's transition plan—delivering a clear message from the international community that the Assad regime has lost its legitimacy.

The administration's focus now is on translating that international consensus into action, along four tracks:

- First, we are working to increase the diplomatic and political isolation of the Assad regime—and encouraging other countries to join the United States, European Union, and Arab League in imposing sanctions on the Assad regime;
- Second, we are providing emergency humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people, with an initial commitment of \$10 million;
- Third, we are working with the Friends of Syria and other groups to help strengthen the opposition, encouraging it to unify and lay the groundwork for a peaceful, orderly transition to a democratic government that recognizes and respects the rights of all Syrians, including minorities; and
- Fourth, we are reviewing all possible additional steps that can be taken with our international partners to support efforts to protect the Syrian people, end the violence, and ensure regional stability, including potential military options if necessary.

This approach has succeeded in putting unprecedented pressure on Assad, but it is clear that there is no simple or quick solution to this crisis. We believe that the best resolution to this crisis will be a peaceful, political, democratic transition led by the Syrian people and along the lines suggested by the Arab League. We believe there is still an opportunity to achieve that goal.

Although we will not rule out any future course of action, currently the administration is focusing on diplomatic and political approaches rather than a military intervention. Guided by our approach from Libya and elsewhere, we believe it is important in this instance that we:

- Build multi-lateral, international consensus for any action taken;
- Maintain clear regional support from the Arab world;
- Make substantial U.S. contributions to the international effort, especially where the United States has unique resources that can be brought to bear;
- Have a clear legal basis for any action; and
- Keep all options on the table, but recognize the limitation of military force, especially U.S. boots-on-the-ground.

However, each situation is unique and there is no simple solution to the situation in Syria. The reasons for a different approach between our approach with Libya and current approach to Syria are clear:

- Although there was widespread support in the Security Council and the Arab League for military intervention in Libya, no such consensus currently exists regarding Syria;
- It is not clear what constitutes the Syrian armed opposition—there has been no single unifying military alternative that can be recognized, appointed, or contacted. While the opposition is fighting back and military defections and desertions are on the rise, the Syrian regime continues to maintain a strong military. For us to act unilaterally would be a mistake;
- As Secretary Clinton has noted, there is every possibility of a civil war, and an outside intervention in these conditions would not prevent that, but could expedite it and make it worse.

Even though our current approach is focused on achieving a political solution to this crisis, the Assad regime should take no comfort. The pressure is building on the regime every day. Make no mistake—one way or another, this regime will meet its end. We will continue to evaluate the situation and adjust our approach as necessary.

Let me close by briefly addressing the United States' broader strategic interests in Syria and the region. The stability of Syria is vital to the region—and to Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, and Israel. All of these countries and the United States have a strong interest in preventing a humanitarian crisis in Syria.

But perhaps most notably, Syria is a pivotal country for Iran. Syria is Iran's only state ally in the region, and is crucial to Iran's efforts to support those militants throughout the region who threaten Israel and regional stability. Unrest in Syria has already greatly weakened Iran's position in the region, and it is clear that Iran

only stands to lose further as Assad is weakened further. As groups such as Hamas distance themselves from the Assad regime, Iran is quickly becoming the Assad regime's lone backer. This shows the world the hypocrisy of Tehran.

I cannot predict how this volatile situation in Syria will unfold, but the United States has made clear that we are on the side of the Syrian people. They must know that the international community has not underestimated either their suffering or their impatience. We all wish there was a clear and unambiguous way forward to directly influence the events in Syria. That unfortunately is not the case. That is not an excuse—that is the reality. Our only clear path is to keep moving in a resolute, determined but deliberate manner with the international community to find a way to return Syria to the Syrian people.

Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.
General Dempsey.

**STATEMENT OF GEN MARTIN E. DEMPSEY, USA, CHAIRMAN,
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF**

General DEMPSEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain, distinguished members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to meet with you today and discuss the evolving situation in Syria. The situation is tragic for the people of Syria and for the region. Real democratic reform should have been the Assad regime's response to last year's peaceful protests. Instead, the regime responded with brutality.

Syria's internal convulsions are having consequences for a region already in turmoil. Refugees are fleeing. Spillover into neighboring countries is an increasing concern. We also need to be alert to the movement of extremists and other hostile actors seeking to exploit this situation. We need to be especially alert to the fate of Syria's chemical and biological weapons. They must stay exactly where they are.

With other conscientious nations, the United States is applying diplomatic and economic pressure on the regime to compel Assad and his accomplices to stop killing their own. Our military's role has been limited to this point to sharing information with our regional partners. But should we be called on to help secure U.S. interests in other ways, we will be ready. We maintain an agile regional and global posture. We have solid military relationships with every country on Syria's borders.

Should we be called, our responsibility is clear: Provide the Secretary of Defense and the President of the United States with options. All options will be judged in terms of their suitability, their feasibility, and their acceptability. We have a further responsibility to articulate risk and the potential implications for our other global commitments.

In closing, I want to assure this committee, you, and the Nation that America's Armed Forces are always ready to answer our Nation's call. I am prepared to answer your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Dempsey follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY GEN MARTIN E. DEMPSEY, USA

Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain, and distinguished members of the committee, I appreciate this opportunity to discuss with you the evolving situation in Syria.

The situation is tragic—for the people of Syria and for the region. Real democratic reform should have been the Assad regime's response to last year's peaceful protests. Instead, the regime responded with brutality. When ordinary Syrians tried to defend their homes, the regime opened up with an arsenal of heavy weapons. When

the Arab League acted to end the bloodshed, Damascus actually escalated the violence.

The Syrian people are suffering. These internal convulsions are having consequences for a region already in turmoil. Refugees are fleeing. Spillover into neighboring countries—each one a partner or ally of ours—is an increasing concern.

We also need to be alert to extremists—who may return to well-trod ratlines running through Damascus—and other hostile actors—including Iran—which has been exploiting the situation and expanding its support to the regime. We need to be especially alert to the fate of Syria's chemical and biological weapons. They need to stay exactly where they are.

The regime's brutality has catalyzed a growing international consensus to compel Assad and his accomplices to stop killing their own. With other conscientious nations, the United States is applying diplomatic and economic pressure on the regime, supporting the opposition, and providing humanitarian assistance.

Our military's role has been limited to sharing information with our regional partners—each one very capable in its own right.

Should the Armed Forces of the United States be called on to help secure U.S. interests in other ways, we will be ready. We maintain an agile regional and global posture. We have solid military relationships with every country on Syria's border. We know how to integrate our unique capabilities with others.

Should we be called, our responsibility is clear—provide the Secretary of Defense and the President with options. This is what the Nation expects of us.

Any potential option needs to be judged in terms of several criteria. One is suitability—whether the actions will help produce the intended outcome. Another is feasibility—whether we can accomplish the mission with the time and resources available. We will also consider its acceptability—whether the action is worth the cost and is consistent with law.

We have a further responsibility to articulate risk. All options require us to take some risk—time and capacity have limits. All options also come with unintended consequences. We can anticipate some, but many we cannot. Therefore, we need to be clear-eyed about the potential implications for our other global responsibilities.

In closing, I want to assure you and the Nation. America's Armed Forces are always ready to answer our Nation's call.

I look forward to your questions.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, General.

Let's try 7-minute rounds for questions.

Secretary Panetta, the Arab League has proposed a transition plan. Has the Arab League requested military intervention in Syria?

Secretary PANETTA. It has not.

Chairman LEVIN. Did they support military intervention in Libya?

Secretary PANETTA. They did.

Chairman LEVIN. What explains the difference?

Secretary PANETTA. I think they share some of the same concerns that we do with regards to the situation in Syria and just exactly what kind of military action would have the kind of impact that we all desire. Because of the divisions within the opposition, because of the situation that is occurring there and it's volatile and unpredictable, I think that those concerns have impacted on their decisionmaking here.

Chairman LEVIN. General Dempsey, you've made reference to putting together options for the President should he decide to move in one direction or another. Without telling us what you would recommend, can you give us a menu of military options which might be available?

General DEMPSEY. Yes, I can actually discuss them in greater detail in closed session if you choose to do that. But you mentioned the principal options in your opening statement, which would include humanitarian relief, no-fly zone, maritime interdiction, humanitarian corridor, and limited aerial strikes, for example.

We're at what I would describe the commander's estimate level of detail, not detailed planning; have not been briefed to the President, have been discussed with the President's National Security staff, and, as General Mattis testified yesterday, the next step would be to take whatever options we deem to be feasible into the next level of planning.

Chairman LEVIN. Would the use of air power against their troops be an option? Tell us about the air defenses that Syria has?

General DEMPSEY. First of all, we're extraordinarily capable and we can do just about anything we're asked to do. In doing it, we have some considerations that we would make in terms of whether we would do it alone or with partners, as Senator McCain said clearly. We generally, in fact always, provide a better outcome and a more enduring outcome when we work with partners, especially in that part of the world.

The ability to do a single raid-like strike would be accessible to us. The ability to do a longer-term sustained campaign would be challenging and would have to be made in the context of other commitments around the globe. I'll just say this about their air defenses: they have—and again, I can speak more openly in a closed session about their exact capabilities, approximately five times more sophisticated air defense systems than existed in Libya, covering one-fifth of the terrain. All of their air defenses are arrayed on their western border, which is their population center. So 5 times the air defense of Libya, covering one-fifth of the terrain, and about 10 times more than we experienced in Serbia.

Chairman LEVIN. Has NATO taken up the issue of some kind of an intervention militarily in Syria?

Secretary PANETTA. Not at this point.

Chairman LEVIN. Would it not be useful as a either preliminary consideration or as an important signal to the Libyan regime that at least NATO take up the question?

Secretary PANETTA. I believe that NATO ought to take up the question.

Chairman LEVIN. Can you make sure that that happens, or recommend at least to the President that that be done?

Secretary PANETTA. Yes.

Chairman LEVIN. I think that would be an important signal to the Syrian regime.

General Mattis recently indicated to the committee that President Assad's regime is going to fall, and he said it's just a matter of when and not if. Do you share that assessment and are you as confident that that will happen, and do you attach any conditions to that happening? Secretary, let me start with you.

Secretary PANETTA. I've heard the intelligence and I share the assessment that it isn't a matter of if he'll fall, but when.

Chairman LEVIN. Is that dependent on our actions or other actions against him, or is that going to happen even with the current momentum and the current status quo continuing?

Secretary PANETTA. I've asked the same question of our Intelligence Community and I think their view is that the state of this insurgency is so deep right now and will continue into the future that ultimately he will fall one way or the other.

Chairman LEVIN. General, can you tell us what capabilities there are to get additional weapons to the insurgents or the opposition, and also tell us what weapons Assad is getting and from what source? If you can try to give us as best you can the type of weapons that could be provided to the opposition and what weapons are actually going into Assad and from where?

General DEMPSEY. I can't speak in open session about the source of his weapons, except to say that he has some security arrangements with others, both in the region and outside the region, to provide weapons, what we would describe in our situation as a foreign military sales (FMS) program. He has an existing FMS agreement with at least two nations, that I can discuss in closed session.

Chairman LEVIN. Are you able to tell us what Iran is supplying?

General DEMPSEY. I can in closed session.

Chairman LEVIN. Could you give us some idea in open session? In other words, are you able to give us, if not precisely, can you give us just some general estimate or idea as to what's going in from Iran, types of weapons and quantity, without being too precise?

General DEMPSEY. If Iran succeeds in some of their movements of weapons to Syria, and they have, then it would be largely smaller caliber rocket-propelled grenades, anti-tank weapons.

The other actors who have open FMS agreements are generally upper-tier stuff, including air defense.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

Thank you both.

Senator McCain.

Senator MCCAIN. General Dempsey, are the reports in the Washington Post accurate about Iranian involvement? We don't need a closed session, I don't think, for you to say whether the Washington Post is correct or not.

General DEMPSEY. Parts of the Washington Post reports are accurate, yes, Senator.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you.

Secretary, General Mattis testified before the committee yesterday that the departure of Assad from power, as you stated, would be the "biggest strategic setback for Iran in 25 years." You're basically in agreement with that statement?

Secretary PANETTA. I agree with that.

Senator MCCAIN. By the way, the Kuwaiti parliament has called for arming the opposition. The Saudi foreign minister called for it. Other elements of the Arab League are calling for it. Clearly, it's just a matter of time before the Arab League takes a stronger position on it.

General Mattis told us, General Dempsey, yesterday that Assad's crackdown is "gaining physical momentum." Do you agree with General Mattis' statement?

General DEMPSEY. I do. He has increasingly used heavier weapons.

Senator MCCAIN. So even though you agree that sooner or later Assad will fall, at the moment he happens to be, including regaining control of Homs, gaining momentum; is that correct?

General DEMPSEY. That is correct.

Senator MCCAIN. So would you characterize this as a fair fight, when he's using artillery and tanks to kill Syrians?

General DEMPSEY. I would characterize the Assad regime as brutalizing their own citizens.

Senator MCCAIN. I see. But since sooner or later he will fall, we don't have to act?

The President said yesterday he has taken no options off the table. Mr. Panetta, in the case of Syria you said in your opening statement that includes "potential military options if necessary." Yet, Admiral Stavridis and General Mattis stated that there had been no contingency planning either in NATO or U.S. Central Command. Will there be some contingency planning?

Secretary PANETTA. We have looked at a number of options that could be involved here.

Senator MCCAIN. But will there be contingency planning?

Secretary PANETTA. We have not done the detailed planning because we are waiting for the direction of the President to do that.

Senator MCCAIN. Mr. Secretary, President Obama issued a presidential directive stating: "The prevention of mass atrocities is a core national security interest of the United States." That's the administration's policy. With at least 7,500 and possibly more than 10,000 dead, with Assad using tanks, "gaining momentum" according to General Mattis, would you agree that mass atrocities have occurred and are occurring in Syria?

Secretary PANETTA. I don't think there's any question that we're experiencing mass atrocities there.

Senator MCCAIN. So the President said yesterday he's taken no options off the table, and you said in your opening statement that includes, as I mentioned, potential military options, if necessary. Can you tell us how much longer the killing would have to continue, how many additional civilian lives would have to be lost, in order to convince you that military measures of this kind that we are proposing necessary to end the killing and force to leave power, how many more have to die? 10,000 more? 20,000 more? How many more?

Secretary PANETTA. I think the question, as you stated yourself, Senator, is the effort to try to build an international consensus as to what action we do take. That makes the most sense. What doesn't make sense is to take unilateral action at this point.

As Secretary of Defense, before I recommend that we put our sons and daughters in uniform in harm's way, I have to make very sure that we know what the mission is. I have to make very sure that we know whether we can achieve that mission, at what price, and whether or not it will make matters better or worse. Those are the considerations that I have to engage in, and obviously the administration believes that every effort ought to be made to deal with those concerns in the international setting to try to build the kind of international consensus that worked in Libya and that can work in Syria if we can develop that.

Senator MCCAIN. Let me tell you what's wrong with your statement. You don't mention American leadership. Americans should lead in this. America should be standing up. America should be building coalitions. We shouldn't have statements like that we are not going to intervene no matter what the situation is. Such has

been, at least up until now, the statements by the administration and the President.

In past experiences, those that I mentioned before, America has led. Yes, it has been multilateral and multinational, as is absolutely vital. We're not leading, Mr. Secretary.

General Dempsey, again I hear the same old refrain that I've heard for many, many years: "It's not clear what constitutes the Syrian armed opposition." That was the same argument that this administration used for not intervening in Libya at the beginning.

By the way, I might add that the prime minister and deputy prime minister of Libya are former professors at the University of Alabama, far better than being from Senator Lieberman's alma mater. But anyway. [Laughter.]

We can find out who they are. They're not fighting and dying because they're al Qaeda. They're not fighting and dying and sacrificing their lives because they're Muslim extremists. They're fighting and dying because they want the same universal rights and freedom that we are guaranteed in our Constitution.

So I reject the argument that we "don't know who they are." We spend a lot of money on defense and we spend a lot of money on intelligence. We should know who these people are and it would be easy enough to find out. The best way, of course, to help them organize is to provide them with a safe haven where they can organize and train and equip.

I was interested in your answer, and I'll conclude with this, that sooner or later Assad will fall. I don't disagree with that. In the meantime, he's gaining momentum. He's regained Homs. The death count goes up and the atrocities continue.

Yet the President says a core national security interest of the United States is the prevention of mass atrocities. Mass atrocities are going on. I would hope that America could lead and exercise the options necessary to stop these atrocities, as has been the actions of the United States of America in the past in both Republican and Democratic administrations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator McCain.

Senator Lieberman.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to Secretary Panetta, General Dempsey. On this question of what to do in Syria, I'm of like mind with Senator McCain, except on the unfortunate reference to the brave graduates of Yale University. I'll have to talk to him later about that. [Laughter.]

Perhaps we are of like mind because we went through in the 1990s together similar circumstances in Bosnia and Kosovo. Secretary Panetta, certainly in Bosnia you were there in the White House. In each case, the American entrance into that conflict was late, but had a very constructive effect and a civil war was terminated.

In my opinion, the humanitarian and strategic arguments for the United States to be involved, to help lead an international effort which is military to stop the slaughter in Syria are actually greater than they were in the case of either Bosnia or Kosovo. As great as those were, there obviously is the humanitarian crisis, which is that, as we've all agreed, Assad is slaughtering his people. He has

them out-gunned and for all we know he'll keep doing it and not leave office until he's worn them down.

Beyond that are all the strategic reasons that I think we also agree on, which is how positive it would be if Assad, who's the only ally of Iran, at this critical moment is taken down, how liberating it would be to the Lebanese people next door, who have suffered under Syrian repression.

There's another element to this, too, which perhaps is so unique and different that we're not giving it enough weight. In our foreign policy, we've done a lot of things over the years, including in recent years, to try to essentially regain the confidence of the Arab world, of the Muslim world. We have here a moment where the Arab League, the Gulf Coordinating Council, Turkey, are out there—I know Turkey's not the Arab world, but in the region—against what's happening in Syria. I think if we seem to be holding back—and incidentally, I think those countries are out there both because they see their own strategic interest in this, but also because their people are demanding it, because of the wave of change sweeping across the region.

So to me this is both humanitarian, strategic in terms of its negative effect on Iran if we can help bring Assad down, but also can help improve our relations with not just our allies in the Arab world, but the so-called Arab street. When I've been to Libya, as an example, the United States and NATO are naturally extremely popular and there's a lot of appreciation for them because in their hour of need we were there. I hope and pray that we can come to do that again with regard to Syria.

I agree this is not something we should do alone. But the truth is without American leadership helping to organize this coalition and being prepared, as you've suggested, to provide some of the critical resources that we have, it won't happen in a timely way and it won't be successful.

I want to say very briefly, to me, I have kept saying that the factors that led us into Libya with an international coalition are here. They're happening. We worried about mostly, about a humanitarian disaster. They're here.

But, Secretary Panetta, you've cited a few reasons why Syria is different from Libya and, respectfully, I want to offer a different view. One is that there was widespread support in the Security Council and the Arab League for military intervention in Libya. No such consensus exists regarding Syria. That's literally true, and that's particularly because of Russia and China and what they're doing in the U.N. But within the Arab League there's clearly a lot of interest in a military intervention in Syria. The same is true of the Gulf Coordinating Council. I take it that the Saudis and Qataris are thinking of beginning to arm the Syrian opposition as well.

The other thing I want to say is that in Kosovo, as we all remember, the U.S. with a coalition of the willing acted without U.N. Security Council approval because again there were one or two nations blocking it. So that shouldn't stop us from acting.

The second concern is that we hear all the time the Syrian armed opposition is—we're not sure who they are, they have no single coordinating person at the top or group at the top. Again, I

agree, but that was true in Libya as well. The militias that formed in different parts of the country were not connected. In some sense they were hostile to one another. You can see that playing out in some ways in Libya today.

But when the international community came in it gave strength—with military assistance, to the Transitional National Council there and they worked together with our assistance to bring about the change that occurred.

Finally, the statement that military intervention would not prevent civil war, but could expedite it. I know Secretary Clinton said something to that effect. Obviously, there is a civil war going on now, and recent history shows that foreign military intervention in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Libya has actually, Libya most recently, been critical in ending civil wars in those countries and the absence of foreign military intervention in countries like Rwanda, the Congo, Somalia, and others has doomed those countries to suffer through extended civil wars.

I think the clock is running. People are being killed in great numbers every day. I think if we don't get the international community together in a coalition of the willing soon, we're going to look back and say we not only didn't do the right thing morally to stop innocents from being killed, we missed an extraordinary strategic opportunity to strengthen our position and the position of free people in the Middle East.

I want to give you an opportunity to respond if you will, without asking a specific question.

Secretary PANETTA. Senator, I want to make the point that the concerns that Senator McCain and you and others have expressed are exactly the concerns of the administration. We're not divided here and we are not holding back. This administration has led in Iraq, we've led in Afghanistan, we've led in the war on terrorism, we led in Libya, and we're leading in Syria. We are working with those elements to try to bring them together.

If the agreement here is that we ought not to just simply go in unilaterally, then we have to build a multilateral coalition. We have to be able to work at that. It's not that easy to deal with some of the concerns that are out there. But nevertheless we're working at it. Secretary Clinton is working at it every day. There are diplomats that are engaged on this issue. We are trying to engage with NATO. We are trying to engage with these other countries. There are other countries that are interested in trying to provide provisions. We are working with them, we are talking with them. We are looking at every option to try to put that in place.

Can it happen today? Can it happen now? No. It's going to take some work. It's going to take some time. But when we do it we'll do it right. We will not do it in a way that will make the situation worse. That's what we have to be careful of.

Senator LIEBERMAN. I thank you for the statement. I'm encouraged by it, and all I can do is plead with you and other nations that we're reaching out to to move as quickly as possible, because people are dying every day and strategic opportunities are being lost.

The fact is that we have an opportunity here and it's also a responsibility, and I think it's critically important that we exercise it.

I'd say finally that I know some people continue to hope that a way can be found for President Assad to leave the country and usher in the democratic process of transformation that we've talked about. From everything I hear, everything I see, he will only do that if he thinks his life, his regime, is really in jeopardy. Right now, I think he thinks he's dominant and has the kind of momentum, physical momentum, that General Dempsey spoke about today.

So the sooner we put international military pressure on the Assad regime, the sooner we have a chance to end this peacefully.

Thank you.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Lieberman.

Senator Brown.

Senator BROWN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, you said we're leading in Iraq, Afghanistan. I don't disagree with that. Leading in Syria, I haven't really seen it yet, and maybe that's because we're not privy to the information you are.

I would suggest, Mr. Chairman, based on some of the intelligence that we would need to make those determinations, that we set up a secure briefing so we can better understand the intricacies of what's happening, because right now I agree with everything, surprisingly, that Senator Lieberman said, and that is, I think, very important. It was very well said about we're missing a potential opportunity.

That being said also, I'd like to shift to General Dempsey. We know that Syria has substantial chemical and biological weapons stockpiles. We also know that the regime will eventually collapse. That seems to be the general consensus. Is there a plan available to address that weaponry and do we have an elimination plan of any kind set up?

General DEMPSEY. Senator, I would very much like the chance to talk with you about it, but not in an open hearing. But I'll give you the magnitude: 100 times more than we experienced in Libya.

Senator BROWN. Great. Thank you. I would like that opportunity to get that briefing, once again.

Sir, based on what you saw in Libya, what are some of the lessons that we learned, that we need to apply to any thoughtful consideration of military intervention in Syria? Because ultimately, I recognize everyone basically hated Qadhafi. They wanted to get him out. We had the Arab League. We had a broad coalition. I know the U.N. problems that we're having.

But I recognize what Senator Lieberman and Senator McCain said, that we do have a lot of thoughtful, concerned partners in that part of the region that want to step up. Is there a chance we would move without the U.N. and just with those partners to take advantage of that leadership role that we should have?

General DEMPSEY. My job, Senator, is to place military options in context. So when you asked me about lessons learned that are transferable from Libya to Syria, sure, there are some tactically for sure: how to enable indigenous forces on the ground without boots-on-the-ground.

But I very much want to elevate our thinking here about this. We're talking about Syria, but we're looking at it through a soda straw. It doesn't exist as an individual, isolated country. It's in the context of the region. It's in the context even of actors outside the region. The inside of Syria is a far different demographic, ethnic, religious mix than it was in Libya. We need to understand that before we seek to use a particular template to solve the challenges they face.

It's not just about the military. The Secretary and I happen to be the face of the military, but this issue has to be dealt with in context and we're looking at it through a soda straw.

Senator BROWN. Mr. Secretary, who aside from the United States do you think is in the best position right now to exert the most effective pressure on the Assad regime?

Secretary PANETTA. There's no question in my mind that Russia could play a very significant role in putting pressure on Assad. They have a port there. They have influence there. They have dealings there. Unfortunately, the position they've taken in the U.N. was to oppose the resolution, and that's a shame.

But there's no question that they and the Chinese, if they wanted to advance the cause of the Syrian people, they could bring great pressure on them to do the right thing.

Senator BROWN. I'm presuming Secretary Clinton is working and reaching out?

Secretary PANETTA. That's correct.

Senator BROWN. Thank you.

I'm all set, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Brown.

Senator Reed is not here. Senator Nelson is next.

Senator NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen, for your distinguished service.

It's been reported that al Qaeda leader Ayman Zawahiri and other violent extremists have called on members of their group to support the uprising in Syria. General Mattis before the committee yesterday stated that there is already evidence that the terrorist network is involved in supporting the opposition.

Do we have an idea regarding the number of violent extremists that are engaged in the uprising, Mr. Secretary?

Secretary PANETTA. We do, but I would prefer to discuss that in closed session.

Senator NELSON. I understand. But we do have an idea, so it's not that we don't have the intelligence.

Secretary PANETTA. We have intelligence.

Senator NELSON. We have the intelligence. Do we have an idea of what sort of outside assistance they're getting as well? You don't have to tell me what it is necessarily.

Secretary PANETTA. That's correct.

Senator NELSON. Do we have some idea of what Iran is providing in the way of outside assistance?

Secretary PANETTA. That's correct.

Senator NELSON. To the level of detail that we need to have?

Secretary PANETTA. As a former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, I would like a lot better detail.

Senator NELSON. Always one more detail. I understand that, of course, yes.

If the decision to arm the Syrian opposition force is predicated on defining the force, how long do you think it might take us to be able to have that definition of the force if a decision is made on a multinational basis to engage in arming that force internally?

General DEMPSEY. Again, in open session I'll say there's approximately 100 groups that we've identified as part of the opposition, rough numbers.

Senator NELSON. Some of them aren't necessarily terrorist organizations?

General DEMPSEY. No, no. In fact, we can go into that more in closed session as well, but we're not suggesting that that part of al Qaeda that has made its way to Syria has aligned itself or is in bed with the opposition. But they're there trying to exploit it, and so that's a factor that we have to consider.

Of those groups, to your question about how long would it take us if we chose to do something through the opposition, the question would be not how quickly we could, let's say, vet them all, but how quickly we could vet enough of them that could form some kind of coherent core. But it doesn't exist today. Despite our aspirations and hopes that it would, it doesn't exist.

Senator NELSON. It hasn't occurred yet, but it could occur on its own, but there is some concern about it getting worse before it gets better, more people dying in the interim. So obviously time is of the essence in trying to get international interest in this, given the fact that we have two of the largest countries in the world not supporting our efforts.

If we made the decision and we have a multinational force and we have 100 groups to go through, how reasonable do you think it is that you'll get a coalescence of those groups? Will providing the arms and providing support, if we don't put boots-on-the-ground, that that coalescence will occur? Do we think that it will happen that way, or will they be just disparate and devolve into some sort of a civil war?

Secretary PANETTA. Senator, I really wish we could predict that. But it's dangerous to do that. We faced somewhat the same situation in Libya. In heading up the intelligence operation there, it was one of the first orders of business, was to try to figure out who the opposition was and where they were located and what they were doing, what kind of coordination they have.

Here you have triple the problem because there are so many diverse groups that are involved. Whether or not they can find that one leader, whether they can find that one effort to try to bring them together in some kind of council, there are efforts to try to make that happen, but frankly they have not been successful.

Senator NELSON. Are we in a position where we have plans in place in the event that we engage in Syria to some extent or another to deal with the potential of the chemical weapons that they currently have?

Secretary PANETTA. I think, as General Dempsey has pointed out, that is clearly one of our great concerns and we have developed options to try to address those concerns.

General DEMPSEY. If I could reinforce, if you think it's a concern of ours, you can imagine the concern it is of Syria's neighbors. So we are in consultation with them about that challenge.

Senator NELSON. What are the chances of neighbors in the region working with us—perhaps they are—to get multinational interest in this?

Secretary PANETTA. There are efforts to try to engage the neighbors with regards to the issues in Syria, and the neighbors clearly share the concerns that we all have with regards to the situation there. Two neighbors are being directly impacted by refugee problems, both in Turkey and Jordan. We're engaging with both of them. We're engaging with others to try to see what we can do to try to build at least a coalition of those countries to try to engage with regards to some of the issues there.

Senator NELSON. In our efforts to do that do we think that they're getting sufficiently motivated and sufficiently concerned to engage in some joint effort with their neighbor, Syria?

Secretary PANETTA. There is great concern, and they're experiencing directly the concern, not only from the refugees, but from the fallout of what's going on in Syria. They too are concerned about what ultimately happens there when Assad is removed or steps aside, what are going to be the consequences within Syria itself, because that could have a huge impact on them as well.

Senator NELSON. Thank you both and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Nelson.

Senator Ayotte.

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Secretary Panetta. Thank you, General Dempsey.

I would like to ask about the role of China and Russia here. Let me just say upfront—I'm sure you'll agree—that it's outrageous that China and Russia blocked the U.N. resolutions, both of them, also most recently in February. As I understand it, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies report that was issued in June 2010, the arms imports from Russia to Syria between 1997 and 2008, that Russia's been a leading arms supplier to the Assad regime. Is that the case?

Secretary PANETTA. That's true.

Senator AYOTTE. Do they continue to provide arms to the Assad regime now?

General DEMPSEY. Yes, Senator, they do.

Senator AYOTTE. So Russia is continuing to provide arms to the Assad regime as they murder their own people?

General DEMPSEY. They have a longstanding FMS relationship with them and it continues on unabated.

Senator AYOTTE. It doesn't seem to matter to Russia at all that they are using these arms to murder their own people. It's outrageous.

As I understand it, China has also provided in the past arms to the Assad regime as well, to a lesser extent.

Secretary PANETTA. Let me get back to you, because there are other areas of assistance, but I'm not sure about arms.

Senator AYOTTE. Okay. I would appreciate a follow-up to that.

[The information referred to follows:]

During the past 8 years, China has been the second largest arms supplier to the Syrian military; however, its arms trade with Syria lags far behind Russian sales to Damascus.

Senator AYOTTE. They certainly to some extent have provided assistance to the Assad regime in the past. Do we know if they're providing any assistance now of any type?

General DEMPSEY. No, I haven't been tracking intelligence on China's role in arms sales, Iran, and you noted Russia, from the report.

Secretary PANETTA. But I think economically they have had ties into Syria that they still are trying to maintain.

Senator AYOTTE. Is it not true also that, with respect to our posture with Iran in terms of wanting to impose the toughest economic sanctions possible to ensure that Iran does not develop nuclear weapons capability, that Russia and China are a key to that, because we know that Russia has actually an economic interest, unfortunately, in the Iranian nuclear program and that China relies heavily on Iran for oil exports? Is that not true?

Secretary PANETTA. Correct.

Senator AYOTTE. Yet they have failed also to step up to the plate to impose the types of tougher sanctions we would like them to do so that the world is together to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons capability; is that not true?

Secretary PANETTA. You're correct.

Senator AYOTTE. What can we do to be tougher on Russia and China if they are going to take their position in the world as part of the world leadership? I view their behavior in blocking the U.N. resolution as irresponsible and also the fact that they haven't stepped up to the plate to make sure that we stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons capability. It's all related and it's obviously very detrimental to the safety of the world. What should we be doing there to be tougher on them?

Secretary PANETTA. Obviously, you should hear this directly from Secretary Clinton, but my knowledge is that Secretary Clinton is exhausting every effort to try to engage both Russia and China in this effort, particularly Russia because of its longstanding relationship there, because it owns a harbor in Syria and has the record that you just described with Syria, that Russia could, if they wanted to accept the responsibility that they should, they could be helpful here in the effort to try to remove Assad.

Senator AYOTTE. I appreciate those efforts. Mr. Putin just got re-elected and I would hope that he wouldn't want the blood of the deaths of Syrians on his hand and that he would stop selling arms to the Assad regime, and, of course, that both Russia and China would step up, support the U.N. resolution. Both those countries, in my view, I don't know why they would not want to pursue every possible means to stop what is happening and the bloodshed there.

I appreciate all of your efforts on it and I hope that they understand that we're very serious about that. We will, in Congress, look at actions we can take, too, because this is really wrong and they're on the wrong side of history, both with respect to the Syrian regime. They're on the wrong side of history with respect to Iran, and they will look back at this as a big mistake by both of these countries if they don't step up to the plate right now.

I also wanted to ask about the Assad regime's relationship just with some of the groups that we have labeled terrorist groups. What's the Assad regime's relationship with Hezbollah?

Secretary PANETTA. That's probably better addressed in a closed session in terms of the specific relationship, but there has been a longstanding relationship between Hezbollah and Syria. It's actually diminished of late. Hezbollah has stood aside and hasn't directly been involved in some of the violence that's taken place in Syria.

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you.

Also with Hamas?

Secretary PANETTA. Hamas the same, the same thing.

Senator AYOTTE. In fact, as I understand, at least based on public reports, Hamas is actually stepping back from the situation. Yet Iran has not stepped back?

Secretary PANETTA. Correct.

Senator AYOTTE. They're continuing to push forward.

Secretary PANETTA. That's right.

Senator AYOTTE. Let me ask you, does the violence that's happening in Syria have any impact on stability in Iraq?

Secretary PANETTA. Interestingly, there was a point at which, obviously, Iraq was standing to the side and not engaged. I think, as a result of what they've seen happening in Syria, that Iraq itself has now asked for Assad to step down and they are more engaged than they were in the past.

Senator AYOTTE. Do you view this as a positive step?

Secretary PANETTA. Yes.

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you both. My time is up. I appreciate your being before the committee today on such an important issue.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Ayotte.

We are planning on a closed session immediately following this, and if we succeed that means surely that there will only be one round here, and it is our plan to succeed.

Senator Reed.

Senator REED. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Secretary, and General Dempsey.

General Dempsey, all of the military options which are beginning to be contemplated—the humanitarian corridors, limited aerial strikes, safe havens—all would presume that we would have complete control of the air space over Syria. Given what we know about their air defense systems, that would presume—I don't know if you can comment openly—that the first step in any type of military operation would be a campaign to suppress their air defense systems. Can you give us some general notion about how long that would take and how challenging it would be?

General DEMPSEY. Senator, as I mentioned, we've demonstrated the capability to penetrate air defense systems for a discrete purpose in a very limited amount of time, and that stays; we still have that capability. As I mentioned, to conduct an enduring or a sustained campaign we would have to suppress the air defense. In closed session, we do have an estimate, based on gaming and modeling, of how long it would take to do that, given the density and the sophistication of their air defense system. But it would be an extended period of time and a great number of aircraft.

Senator REED. It would be, by the nature of our capability, presumptively led by the United States, rather than our NATO allies, because of our capabilities?

General DEMPSEY. Almost unquestionably. We have the electronic warfare capabilities necessary to do that.

Senator REED. So from a perceptual view alone, the opening stages in any military operation would be an extended, almost exclusively air campaign by the United States against Syria, presumably supported politically by the Arab League, NATO, the EU, and everyone else. But the first kinetic part of the operation would be ours for several weeks before we actually started even going in and effectively protecting Syrians. Is that a fair judgment?

General DEMPSEY. It is a fair judgment. We can only act with the authorized use of military force either with the consent of a nation, in our national self-defense, or with an U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR). So we would have to have some legal basis. It would be my military advice that, whatever we do, we be part of a coalition, both because we increase our capability and capacity, but also we've shown that that produces an enduring outcome.

Then we'd have to balance it against risk elsewhere in the region.

Senator REED. The other aspect is that in testimony yesterday General Mattis indicated that, unlike Iraq, there were no natural safe haven areas, the mountains. Also, I think unlike Iraq, there's no force, very well-organized that could provide even a limited self-defense. So creating these safe havens, there's a geographic challenge and there's also an institutional challenge. Who's going to physically defend them?

We could have air power and try to interdict Syrian military convoys and tank columns, but that wouldn't work 100 percent. So is that another challenge that you're considering?

General DEMPSEY. Yes, it is a challenge. Again, in the context of this, as you note, the border with Iraq, the border with Jordan, the border with Israel, and the border with Turkey all have their own unique complexities. So I think we'd have to go through that.

But I want to be clear. We can do anything. It's not about can we do it, but it's should we do it and what are the opportunity costs elsewhere and what are the risks.

Senator REED. In terms of opportunity costs, there are costs in collateral civilian casualties to air operations. There are costs in terms of time, a lot of time or some time to set up the operations. So that the notion that we can in a few hours or days quickly go in and establish superiority, stop the fighting, is not accurate.

General DEMPSEY. You obviously have a military background, sir. [Laughter.]

Senator REED. I show up on time most times, if that's it.

Secretary PANETTA. Senator, if I could just point out, again we can discuss this in closed session, but what we've talked about is that air defense system that is pretty sophisticated. But more importantly, a lot of it is located in populated areas. There would be severe collateral damage in going after those areas.

Senator REED. Let me change the subject, Mr. Secretary, because we've talked on the military aspects, but there's a political aspect here. I'm not at all an expert on Syria, but what struck me in some

of my reading is that there is a small Alawite clan of Shia who dominate the government, but the other minority sectors, the Syrian Kurds, the Syrian Christians, also seem to see their future most closely allied with Assad and his group. They are very influential, even though a minority, very influential. There has yet to be the creation of a truly national and credible opposition to Assad. So it's awfully difficult to build this or to get him off when there's nobody to take his place and there's still strong support in areas, in communities, that you wouldn't necessarily think would be supporting him.

Is that part of the analysis that you looked at?

Secretary PANETTA. That's correct, and that's part of the problem. Having worked pretty closely on the Libyan situation, when there were some leaders that came to the front and were able to organize a council and it had credibility with the opposition, and unfortunately that's not the case here. There are some outside groups that are trying to organize, but there isn't the relationship with regards to what's happening in the country. As a result, it's very difficult to be able to know who we deal with there in terms of an opposition.

Senator REED. The only, the final point I'd make, is that, going back to military capacity in Libya—and again, I think the first point is we have to assume Syria is not Libya. But there, there seemed to be tribal paramilitary organizations. I don't get the same impression that outside the military there's any type of security forces, there's any kind of counterpoint; and that we would have to, unless there was a political solution to force Assad off, if he was going to be deposed it would have to be organized. We'd have to organize a force and that would take many, many months.

General DEMPSEY. That's the current state of our thinking about how we might do this. If you think about two recent experiences: Libya, we had tribal forces on the east and west collapsing onto the center, essentially. Even in Afghanistan, we had the Northern Alliance collapsing on the center. There's no geographic density of opposition to collapse anywhere. They're all intermingled.

By the way, it's 70 percent Sunni and 30 percent Druze, Christians, Alawi Shia. The Alawites have been in control and have essentially protected the others. So there is that dynamic as well.

Senator REED. Thank you very much, gentlemen.

Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Reed.

Senator Cornyn.

Senator CORNYN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, you discussed briefly with Senator Ayotte Russia's role in Syria.

Mr. Chairman, I have an article in Reuters February 21, 2012. The title is "Russia boosts arms sales to Syria despite world pressure." I'd ask unanimous consent that that be made part of the record.

Chairman LEVIN. It will be made part of the record.

[The information referred to follows:]

Russia boosts arms sales to Syria despite world pressure

Tue, Feb 21 2012

By Thomas Grove and Erika Solomon

MOSCOW/BEIRUT (Reuters) - Russia faces a growing international outcry over its arms sales to Syria but shows no sign of bowing to pressure and has even increased deliveries of arms that critics say are helping keep President Bashar al-Assad in power.

The biggest importer of arms to Syria, Russia sold Damascus nearly \$1 billion worth of arms including missile systems last year, while shipments of hard-to-track Russian small weapons have risen since the uprising against Assad started, government defectors say.

In January, the Russian ship Chariot, loaded with arms and ammunition, turned off its radar and sailed quietly to Syria to avoid attracting the attention of world powers increasingly frustrated by Russia and China's refusal to back U.N. Security Council resolutions aimed at ending 11 months of violence.

Citing the increased violence, Arab and Western countries have started hinting they could arm Assad's opponents, a move that some political and defense analysts say could increase the possibility of civil war.

Moscow accuses the West of being one-sided, and says the arms it sells have not been used by Assad loyalists to kill 7,000 people, a figure used by advocacy groups, as violence has raged.

But rebel soldiers and an official who defected from the government say Moscow's small arms trade with Damascus is booming, and the government doubled its military budget in 2011 to pay for the crackdown on the opposition.

"I would say that on average the funds (for Defence Ministry expenditure) were doubled for 2011," said Mahmoud Suleiman Haj Hamad, the former chief auditor for Syria's Defence Ministry who defected in January.

He said by telephone from Cairo that Russian arms accounted for 50 percent of all deals before Assad's crackdown on the protesters. China and North Korea provided 30 percent, and Iran and other suppliers 20 percent, he said.

The government had boosted its defence budget and arms imports by cutting funds to other ministries in areas such as education and health by as much as 30 percent, he said.

"Before the uprising, Russia was trading weapons with Syria in a more limited manner. More recently ... Russia began giving more weapons to Syria," he said.

"To my knowledge, Russia was shipping monthly," he said, referring to deliveries prior to his defection last month.

A LEGAL TRADE

ThomsonReuters shipping data shows at least four cargo ships since December that left the Black Sea port of Oktyabrsk - used by Russian arms exporter Rosoboronexport for arms shipments - have headed for or reached the Syrian port of Tartous.

Separately was the Chariot, a Russian ship which docked at the Cypriot port of Limassol during stormy weather in mid-January. It promised to change its destination in accordance with a European Union ban on weapons to Syria but, hours after leaving Limassol, reset its course for Syria.

A Cypriot source said it was carrying a load of ammunition and a European security source said the ship was hauling ammunition and sniper rifles of the kind used increasingly by Syrian government forces against protesters.

The source also said Russian manufacturers had increased production to meet the demand from Syria. The ship's owner Westberg said that the ship was carrying a "dangerous cargo."

Syria hosts a Russian naval facility on its Mediterranean coast, a rare outpost abroad for Moscow's military. Damascus has also been a loyal Russian arms customer since the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, when it used Soviet-made weapons against Israel which was largely supplied by the United States.

Assad has been perhaps the closest ally Russia has in a region where a year of unrest has set back its efforts to build influence and economic clout.

Numerous Russian weapons advisers work in Syria and Rosoboronexport has an office with a staff of about 20 in the country, a source close to the company said.

CAST, a Moscow-based defence think tank, says Russia sent Syria at least \$960 million worth of heavy arms - which included several missile systems - in 2011 and has some \$4 billion in outstanding contracts.

Russia and China vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution last year that could have led to an international arms embargo on Syria. They also blocked a resolution this month calling on Assad to step down.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called this month's veto by Russia and China a "travesty" and Washington's U.N. ambassador Susan Rice said "any further bloodshed that flows will be on their hands."

British-based advocacy group Avaaz Campaign Director Alice Jay said there was an "urgent need for an arms embargo." Hamad, the former military auditor, said many sales of Russian small arms are carried out through traders. It was not clear if they had the Kremlin's blessing to trade the weapons.

Soviet arms are also sold by other states that have stockpiles of Soviet-era weapons that can be confused with arms coming from Russia.

"I know that Syria is paying for some of the weapons through traders and middlemen, not through contracts between states," said Hamad.

A spokesman for Rosoboronexport said Russia's small and heavy arms delivery programme to Syria was running on schedule without any increases in volumes.

"The rate of delivery is not being changed. They are going according to plan. They are not being sped up or increased. Of course if there were sanctions, we would stop it completely," said spokesman Vyacheslav Davidenko.

COUNTERFEIT WEAPONS

Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin, denied Moscow had a hand in aggravating the conflict in Syria, "especially when what we are delivering is not that which can be used to shoot demonstrators."

Russia has suggested that the arms the Syrian military is using against forces Assad describes as foreign-backed terrorists and armed gangs are not of Russian origin but copies of Soviet weaponry.

"I would not make any statements that they are killing demonstrators with Russian arms," Deputy Defence Minister Anatoly Antonov told Itar-Tass news agency. "If Kalashnikov machine guns are being used to these ends, then it is obvious that they are counterfeit."

Defence analysts say Syria also receives arms from long-time ally Iran that are dominated by copies of Soviet-era arms or Chinese-made copies.

"Iran is swimming in Chinese weapons, cheap Soviet clones or pseudo-indigenous weapons, so they get Chinese weapons. But we don't know what because they come from Iran. (They are) most probably small arms and light weapons," said Ruslan Pukhov, director of the CAST think tank.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin denied last week any suggestion that Beijing shipped weapons to Syria through Iran.

But shipments of Russian arms to Syria have become so frequent that rebel soldiers try to track the deliveries from Syria's ports to military bases in the interior.

A former army lieutenant who defected in August and gave his name only as Omar explained how he and dozens of other fighters use a network of port workers to find out when shipments of arms arrive and where they are going, sometimes ambushing convoys.

"Every few weeks, trucks move weapons from the coast to bases in the interior," he said. "Almost all of them are Russian."

Anti-government rebels and defence analysts say that even if Russia cut its supplies to Syria, Damascus would still be able to get hold of Iranian, North Korean and Chinese imports. It also produces some of its own weapons.

The loss of revenue from arms sales to Syria would deal only a limited blow to Russia as it is much smaller than the income from deals with Rosoboronexport's larger customers, India and Algeria.

Russia may also find that the demand for small arms grows, rather than heavy weapons, as the conflict moves to the cities and the prospects of civil war grow.

"We're talking about light weapons that allow the army and security services to be more mobile and confront what is practically turning into a civil war," said Ayham Kamel of risk research organization Eurasia Group.

(Additional reporting by Dominic Evans in Beirut, Khaled Oweis in Amman and Michael Martina in Beijing; editing by Elizabeth Piper)

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Senator CORNYN. I'm grateful to you for that.

This article suggests that Russia has continued to supply a variety of weapons to Syria through an arms exporter by the name of Rosoboronexport. I guess, General Dempsey, I'm catching myself because I know you suggested some of this you'd like to go into in closed session.

But let me ask, Secretary Panetta, General Dempsey, does Russia have a physical presence in Syria as part of their arms sales business?

Secretary PANETTA. They do.

Senator CORNYN. What specifically, Secretary Panetta, is Russia's interest in Syria?

Secretary PANETTA. They've had a longstanding economic and military relationship in Syria. As we said, the port there in Syria is owned by the Russians. It's their port. So they've had a lot of shipping that's gone in there over the years. They've transferred not only military aid, but also economic assistance as well. So they've had a very longstanding relationship with Syria that makes them one of the key players. If they really wanted to assert the kind of responsibility they should, they would be a key player in bringing pressure on Assad.

Senator CORNYN. Let me transition just a little bit to the Department of Defense's (DOD) business transactions with this same firm I mentioned to you earlier, Rosoboronexport, that is engaged in military sales of Russian weapons to Assad's regime. Reportedly, this company has signed a deal with the Syrian government to sell it 36 combat jets capable of hitting civilian ground targets.

Can you confirm that?

Secretary PANETTA. I can't. I'd have to look into that.

[The information referred to follows:]

We cannot confirm that such a deal was signed. According to Russian press reports—citing a source close to Rosoboronexport, Russia's state arms export corporation—in late 2011, Moscow signed an agreement to sell 36 Yak-130 jet trainer aircraft to Syria. Senior Russia Government officials, when questioned about this deal, have reiterated that arms sales to Syria remain legal under international law, though they have not confirmed the agreement.

Senator CORNYN. I don't mean to blind-side you. I'll certainly share this article with you, and I'd be interested in following up in greater detail.

Rosoboronexport was sanctioned by the United States in October 2008 for assisting Iran's nuclear program, but those sanctions were lifted by the Department of State in May 2010. This is what I wanted to get to. It's my understanding the DOD has, through an initiative led by the U.S. Army, is currently buying dual-use Mi-17 helicopters for the Afghan military from this very same company.

I'd like to know whether either one of you can confirm that at this point?

General DEMPSEY. No, but I can certainly take that for the record. I can confirm we are buying Mi-17s for the Afghan military, but I can't confirm that that's the corporation providing them.

Senator CORNYN. I understand that and I look forward to following up with you.

[The information referred to follows:]

Yes, the U.S. Army is purchasing Russian Mi-17 helicopters for use by the ANSF from Rosoboronexport. A response to the 12 March written inquiry on this same subject from Senator Cornyn and 16 other U.S. Senators is also forthcoming from the Secretary of Defense.

The U.S. Army entered into a contract to procure 21 Mi-17 helicopters from Rosoboronexport. Nine have been delivered, 6 are complete awaiting shipment, and the remaining 6 will be ready for delivery by the end of May. We have completed payment for all. The Department has also exercised an option for two additional aircraft and has a requirement from the NATO Aviation Training Command-Afghanistan for an additional 10 aircraft. Once this option is exercised, the contract will be complete. These aircraft are delivered in a full military mission ready configuration, including spare parts and a 1-year warranty. The Mi-17 acquisition effort is critical to building the capacity of the ANSF. Our acquisition of these Mi-17 heli-

copters is part of our strategy to hand over the security of Afghanistan to the Afghan people. Rosoboronexport is the sole entity controlling export of military Mi-17 helicopters.

The Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan identified an operational requirement, which was validated by the Commander, U.S. Central Command, for acquisition of Mi-17 helicopters for the Afghan Air Force (AAF). The decision to procure Mi-17s was made after considering and eliminating the Bell Huey II as an option. The Mi-17 has proven operational capabilities in the extreme environments of Afghanistan. The Mi-17 has low technical complexity compared to other platforms, making it easier for AAF members to maintain and operate, while being supportable within Afghan educational limitations. A change in acquisition strategy would add additional aircraft types to the fleet and would complicate the maintenance, sustainment, and supply systems required to support the fleet. Introduction of a new helicopter to the AAF might require two additional years of U.S. assistance to Afghanistan.

The purchase of Mi-17s from Rosoboronexport has reduced the risk of acquiring counterfeit aircraft or spare parts and has given us unprecedented access to original equipment manufacturer technical data that we would not otherwise receive. This ensures the safe operation and airworthiness of these aircraft, which are routinely flown by U.S. aircrews mentoring the AAF. Options for procuring used Mi-17s on the secondary market exist, but new Mi-17s are only manufactured in Russia. Since Mi-17s have fixed flight hour life limits that cannot be extended, sustained support to Afghanistan may require replacements for their oldest Mi-17s.

Note: The termination of sanctions imposed on Rosoboronexport pursuant to Section 3 of the Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Act was effective 21 May 2010.

Senator CORNYN. General Dempsey, can you explain why we would buy helicopters for the Afghan military from this arms exporter that's been sanctioned by the U.S. Government for its illicit activities with Iran, and which is the principal means by which Russia is arming Assad's regime and killing so many Syrians?

General DEMPSEY. Assuming we are, because again I have to confirm or deny that we are, but assuming we are, as the process goes in a competition, if they're not sanctioned and enter the competition it could very well be that they ended up being the lowest bidder and therefore they could very well have been selected. But I can't confirm that. I have to get back to you, Senator.

Senator CORNYN. I understand that.

If, in fact, this article is correct, this means that, instead of creating jobs and selling American helicopters to the Afghan military, we are working with a Russian arms exporter to sell these Mi-17 helicopters, which makes absolutely no sense to me. But as you said and as I've said, I don't want to blind-side you with this information. I'd like to get an explanation.

But if, in fact, if this report is true that this same arms dealer is arming Assad's regime and killing innocent Syrians and also under a contract with DOD to provide helicopters to the Afghan military, that causes me significant concerns, and I bet it does you, too. So I'd like to get to the bottom of that, if you will help me do that.

General Dempsey, you talked about the need to balance the risks of intervening in Syria with other parts of the region. What would happen if Assad were to fall and the forces of democracy begin to, hopefully, take root in Syria? What would that do to Iran's aspirations in the region? What would that do to Hezbollah, a terrorist organization supported by Iran? What would that do to Hamas and what would that do to Lebanon? What would be the impact that you would hope for in the region?

General DEMPSEY. As General Mattis testified yesterday, it would certainly diminish Iran's influence in the region and set back their aspirations of becoming a regional hegemon dramatically.

Senator CORNYN. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

Thank you, gentlemen.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Cornyn.

Senator Blumenthal is next.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you both for your very forthright and also careful and cautious approach to this problem. I think many of us are approaching this issue with a high degree of humility, given the lack of complete or even reliable information and looking forward to knowing more as you brief us in a more secure setting.

But even with all that care and caution, I'm struck, Mr. Secretary, by the certitude of your prediction that this regime will fall. You say: "Make no mistake. One way or the other, this regime will meet its end." There are very few things in life that are inevitable and right now the Assad regime seems on the march. It seems to have momentum on its side. You have described very graphically how this opposition is less organized than the Libyan.

So I think that's the reason that many of us here feel that we need to do more, that the United States needs to take a more aggressive and proactive role in this fight without—and I should stress—without American troops on the ground, no boots-on-the-ground.

That's the reason that Senator Graham and I are planning to introduce and cosponsor a resolution that will ask for condemnation of Assad for the war crimes that he is inflicting on his own people, the brutal and barbaric criminal actions against his own people, and the slaughter and massacre that's taking place, that will seek to send that message that you describe in your testimony that the United States will support the Syrian people.

But, of course, there really need to be more than just words here. So let me begin by asking whether there is currently planning for the delivery of medical and other humanitarian aid to the opposition?

Secretary PANETTA. Yes, there is. Let me also mention, with regards to your prefacing remarks, it's always dangerous to make predictions in that part of the world, and what I'm giving you is the best assessment by our intelligence community as to the situation there in Syrian.

But I also think that you shouldn't take it for granted that somehow we're going to sit back and allow the status quo to be the case. We are working very hard at trying to build the international coalition that we need. We're working hard at humanitarian aid. We're working hard at trying to do everything we can to try to bring additional pressure on Syria in order to ensure that Assad does step aside.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Is humanitarian aid being delivered now?

Secretary PANETTA. We are delivering elements of humanitarian aid as we speak.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. How much? Can you quantify it?

Secretary PANETTA. \$10 million was the case that we had. In Homs alone, we have U.S. Government partners that have deliv-

ered food for 4,000 households, and they've also delivered medical supplies. We're working with the international community to try to gain greater access, and the International Committee of the Red Cross and the World Food Program are working with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to provide additional aid. So we're trying to do that on a broader front.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I appreciate that information.

How quickly and in what quantities could that humanitarian aid be increased?

Secretary PANETTA. I'm going to have to look at that and give you a more direct answer based on what the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development are doing right now to try to increase that aid. I can give you a more explicit answer based on getting that information from them.

[The information referred to follows:]

Our priority, before and after Assad's departure, is getting humanitarian assistance into Syria. As you know, Secretary of State Clinton pledged \$10 million in U.S. humanitarian assistance for Syria in the March Friends of Syria meeting in Tunisia, and she indicated that more aid would follow. These funds will help support makeshift medical facilities, train emergency medical staff, and get clean water, food, blankets, heaters, and hygiene kits to Syrian civilians in need. This assistance includes \$3.5 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, \$3 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross, \$3 million to the World Food Program, and support for other international nongovernmental partners.

U.S. humanitarian efforts also include bolstering existing regional stockpiles of humanitarian supplies and equipment to be delivered to those Syrian communities in greatest need. The build-up of stockpiles of food and other emergency relief supplies are a result of the growing international effort to rush humanitarian aid into Syria to alleviate the suffering of vulnerable communities as access and conditions allow.

Our ability to provide more humanitarian aid depends substantially on the conditions on the ground. The primary constraint facing the humanitarian organizations through and with which we work is a lack of safe, continuous access to affected populations—not a lack of funding, medical supplies, or other provisions.

Over the coming weeks, we will continue to explore how we can best support humanitarian efforts in Syria, including whether and how to increase humanitarian assistance.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Is planning underway to increase that aid?

Secretary PANETTA. That's correct.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. On communications equipment, which seems essential for a diverse and divided opposition to really launch a coordinated defense and offense, what is being done to provide communications equipment?

Secretary PANETTA. I'd prefer to discuss that in a closed session, but I can tell you that we are considering an array of non-lethal assistance.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Is it fair to say that planning is ongoing to provide that assistance?

Secretary PANETTA. That is correct.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Even though right now as we speak none is being provided?

Secretary PANETTA. That's correct.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. With respect to other technical assistance, putting aside for the moment the air strike capability, is other technical assistance being provided?

Secretary PANETTA. Plans are being made to provide an array of non-lethal assistance, including technical assistance.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. General Dempsey has very well described the time that it would take to suppress the aerial defense, but I take it that issue is not an obstacle to providing these other kinds of assistance?

Secretary PANETTA. That's correct.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. It could be done immediately?

Secretary PANETTA. That's correct.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. I would appreciate additional information to this committee as to what can be done, within what timeframes, short of air strikes.

Is there support among any of the potential allies in military action for the kind of planning that you are doing? In other words, are specific countries volunteering specific contributions in potential military action?

Secretary PANETTA. That's again something I think we'd prefer to discuss in closed session. But there have been discussions in other countries about that.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. So that planning is underway, fair to say?

Secretary PANETTA. I'd rather discuss that in closed session.

[The information referred to follows:]

U.S. Government assistance-humanitarian supplies and communications equipment—includes items that the Syrian opposition has indicated would help in their efforts to organize. As implemented by the Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development, we view this non-lethal assistance as critical to supporting our policy to hasten the fall of the Assad regime, and to move forward with a Syrian-led democratic transition.

We are working closely with our allies and partners, particularly Jordan and Turkey, to understand the dynamic composition of all elements of the Syrian opposition. Providing arms is not something we are considering now, as we believe it could heighten and prolong the violence in Syria. We remain focused on diplomatic efforts to increase pressure on, and the isolation of, the Assad regime.

There is still no consensus within the international community regarding possible military intervention in Syria. However, the United States continues to plan for a range of contingencies with allies and partners.

General DEMPSEY. Yes, I'd say it's risen to the level of collaboration; consultation, not planning.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. In order to do planning you would have to engage in that consultation; is that fair to say?

Turning to the resolution that Senator Graham and I have proposed, do you think, a sense of the Senate that there should be an investigation and prosecution of Assad for war crimes would have an encouraging and positive effect on the determination of the Syrian people to resist this regime?

Secretary PANETTA. Senator, I'd prefer that you direct that question to the State Department because of the negotiating they're doing on a broader international front. I think you need to ask them the question whether this would be helpful.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. We'll do that.

Let me just close, because my time has expired, by saying that I very strongly share Senator Cornyn's concerns about the sales of equipment by the same company that is arming the Syrians to the Afghan Government, helicopters that are being sold to the Afghanistan Government, by the very same company that is acting on behalf of the Russian Government to arm the Syrians. I share his concern that there appears to be a less than compelling reason to

use Russian helicopters sold by Rosoboronexport in Afghanistan when we could be selling our own helicopters to them.

I also ask, Mr. Chairman, that an additional article on that subject be made a part of the record. It is a July 24, 2011, article from the Washington Times titled: "Pro-Russia policy stalls Afghan copters."

Chairman LEVIN. It will be made a part of the record.
[The information referred to follows:]

The Washington Times

The Official Newspaper of 2012

Pro-Russia policy stalls Afghan copters

Moscow demands sole-source role

By Bill Gertz

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The Washington Times

Sunday, July 24, 2011

A Pentagon program to rush 21 helicopters to Afghan military forces in time for this summer's fighting season was derailed by the Obama administration's conciliatory policy toward Russia and by Army procurement missteps amid allegations of corruption, according to current and former defense officials and military contractors.

Four Russian-made Mi-17 dual-use civilian-military helicopters were sent to Afghanistan in September 2009 under a competitively bid Navy contract that delivered the aircraft in a record 45 days.

But eight other helicopters that were painted in Afghan National Army Air Corps colors are now sitting in a warehouse in Slovakia because their delivery was blocked last November by the Russian government. The reason: Moscow demanded the Pentagon use the state arms trader Rosoboronexport as the sole-source contractor for the helicopters.

The contract change boosted costs by tens of millions of dollars and delayed further deliveries until later this year, at the earliest, according to officials involved in the procurement.

"Gaining political points with the Russians trumped meeting military requirements, and as a result we have a one-year delay in getting aircraft into Afghanistan," said John J. Young, former undersecretary of defense for acquisition under former President George W. Bush.

Mr. Young said he is encouraged that Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Ashton Carter, current undersecretary of defense for acquisition, are reviewing the delays.

"I think they want to see equipment delivered to the Afghan forces, so the Afghan government can assume greater responsibility for the security of their country," Mr. Young said.

The 21 additional Mi-17s could have been purchased legally by private companies directly from the Russian manufacturer, like some 36 others purchased by the U.S. government in the past several years for Iraq and Pakistan, through U.S., Russian and East European brokers.

The reason private companies were used as middlemen was that U.S. companies until recently were barred from using Rosoboronexport, after the arms exporter was slapped with U.S. economic sanctions in 2008 for selling weapons to Iran and China.

The Obama administration in May lifted the sanctions as part of its so-called "reset" policy with Russia and opened the helicopter deal to Moscow's bureaucratic red tape and corruption, according to officials involved with weapons procurement.

A 2008 cable from then-U.S. Ambassador to Russia William J. Burns, currently awaiting confirmation as deputy secretary of state, said Russia ignores most U.S. protests about its weapons exports and uses arms sales to Iran, Syria and other rogue states to undermine U.S. interests.

"Russia attaches importance to the volume of the arms-export trade, to the diplomatic doors that weapon sales open, to the ill-gotten gains that these sales reap for corrupt senior officials, and to the lever it provides the Russian government in stymieing American interests," Mr. Burns said in a secret cable made public by WikiLeaks.

Pentagon spokesman Col. Dave Lapan said the Mi-17s are military helicopters and that Moscow "made the decision that the export of helicopters for Afghanistan needed to go through Rosoboronexport."

"The Russian government's decision did cause a delay, because it required us to restart the process," he said. "However, the longest source of delays in terms of days has been working through the bid protests, some of which predate the Russian government's decision."

Defense Technology Inc., the Huntsville, Ala.-based Navy contractor, took the Pentagon to court over the sole-source Rosoboronexport contract and lost.

The company, according to its president, Mark Young, was notified in December that its contract for the 21 Mi-17s was canceled and that eight remaining Mi-17s waiting to be delivered were put on hold after the Army said all sales had to go through Rosoboronexport. (Mark Young is not related to the former Bush administration official.)

However, a letter to Mr. Young sent by DTT's partner in the deal, Ukrainian state exporter Ukrspetsexport, revealed that the 21 helicopters could have been delivered to Afghanistan legally by the spring of 2011 using Ukraine's military- and civil-cooperation agreement with Russia.

Also, the Navy praised DTI for expediting delivery of the four helicopters sent in 2009 in 45 days to the Afghan National Army Air Corps for \$43.4 million.

"The helicopters were assembled within two days and provided urgently needed vertical logistics capabilities for the war effort," said Lt. Cmdr. Asid Lohdi in a Navy contractor assessment report.

DTI then bid and won the Navy contract for 21 more Mi-17s, with the first six to be sent within 180 days of signing a contract.

The Russian state arms company become involved after Mr. Carter, the undersecretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics, in January 2010 ordered the creation of new office called

the Non-Standard Rotary Wing Aircraft Office and put the Army in charge, in an effort to consolidate helicopter and other purchases.

In November 2010, then-U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Beyrle wrote to the Russian government, asking whether private companies could buy Mi-17s for Afghanistan directly from the manufacturer.

On Nov. 25, 2010, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Rybakov replied that only Rosoboronexport could be used by the Pentagon to buy Mi-17s for Afghanistan, according to a translation of the Russian-language letter.

The Rosoboronexport contract for the 21 helicopters was delayed by DTI's court challenge, but concluded on May 26 with the first deliveries planned for October, Col. Lapan said.

As a result, Mark Young of DTI estimates that cost for each Mi-17 increased from \$15 million per aircraft to \$19 million and probably more. Delivery schedules under the Army-Rosoboronexport deal also slipped from this summer to October, meaning Afghan forces could not use them during the current fighting season.

Mr. Young estimates that the new contract will cost the Pentagon \$46 million more for the 21 helicopters than if the Navy had been allowed to use private companies to buy the aircraft.

The Army office running the helicopter procurement also is under investigation by the Pentagon inspector general over several alleged improprieties, according to current and former officials with direct knowledge of the probe.

The IG is investigating whether Army officials failed to follow procurement guidelines for the sole-source contract with Rosoboronexport, they said. Also, officials in the Non-Standard Rotary Wing Aircraft Office are being probed for allegations of improperly steering contracts to a company in Alabama.

A spokesman for the Pentagon inspector general declined to comment.

A company called FTA alerted the IG to the Army's purported mishandling of funds related to a contract with a St. Petersburg, Russia, company that was involved in refurbishing Mi-17s. A company official said that, after they alerted the Pentagon to Russian contract violations, they were ordered to ignore the violations and continue payments.

As much as \$17 million in improper payments is involved in the investigation, the official said.

Another indication that conciliatory policies toward Russia are involved in the helicopter procurement problems is the fact that the Czech Republic has offered to give its Mi-17s to Afghanistan.

Secretary PANETTA. Senator, we need to look at those reports. If those reports are true, we would share your same concern.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. There's no denial in the reports, for what it's worth, that it is true. There's no denial from any official sources. I would hope that we would have a response.

Thank you so much for your service to the country and your very helpful testimony here.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Blumenthal.

Because we would all be very much concerned with the issue that Senator Cornyn has raised and Senator Blumenthal just mentioned, we would hope that you'd give us the detail on that forthwith. Thank you.

Senator Graham is next.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you.

I'm no helicopter expert, but I asked that question when I was over in Afghanistan about a year or 2 ago, and I was told that the helicopter in question is just a better fit for the Afghan military in terms of maintenance and capability. So that may not be the case. If there's an American helicopter that fits the needs of this, I'm all for them buying from us. But that's what I was told. So I'd like to hear more.

Senator Blumenthal made a very good observation. I don't think any of us who want to be more involved in Syria believe that boots-on-the-ground is a good idea. They haven't been requested and certainly we're not anywhere near that point for me.

I would like to build on what Senator Blumenthal asked. He asked a very good question. You basically said, Mr. Secretary, that Assad should be viewed as a war criminal. I think that's a good analysis to take.

The U.N. Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria in February issued a report, 72 pages, but this is the sum and substance of it to me: "Such violations"—talking about atrocities, gross human rights violations—"originated from policies and directives issued at the highest levels of the Armed Forces and the government."

Do you agree with that? Is that a pretty good characterization?

Secretary PANETTA. In Syria?

Senator GRAHAM. Yes.

Secretary PANETTA. In Syria, yes.

Senator GRAHAM. I think it is. Senator Collins and I were talking. The dilemma is if you go after him maybe it entrenches him.

I've come to believe in situations like this that he's going to do what he's going to do, and if he were rational he wouldn't be doing what he's doing. But from his point of view, he obviously believes he's rational, and he's trying to just wait us all out and kill as many people as he can and hope we get tired of it and walk away.

It would be really good for the Syrian people to know that the international community views what's being done to them as an outrage and that they would get support, morally and otherwise, from the idea that we all saw the abuses against them as unacceptable. So I don't know how it affects Assad, but I sure think it would help them.

Now, let's get into the situation of what happens after he leaves. Do you really believe, Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey, that the people are going through this pain and suffering at the end of the day to replace Assad with al Qaeda?

Secretary PANETTA. No.

General DEMPSEY. No, nor do I.

Senator GRAHAM. The real concern we have is that there are minorities in the country, the Alawites in particular, that could really be on the receiving end of some reprisals if we don't think about this; is that right?

Secretary PANETTA. That's correct.

Senator GRAHAM. In our efforts to find out what happens next, are we guiding the Syrian opposition in any way to form a plan? Are we involved with them?

Secretary PANETTA. Obviously that's the biggest challenge, because we are dealing with a pretty disparate group.

Senator GRAHAM. Are we trying to create order out of chaos?

Secretary PANETTA. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. See, somebody's going to bet on the stock that follows Assad and I want to be on the ground floor of this new enterprise. I don't want to just show up after it's over. I want to get ready now and try to mold the outcome, and you don't have to have boots-on-the-ground to do that.

But when it comes to what happens next, do you believe that if Assad were replaced by the will of the international community, led by the United States, that that may do more good regarding Iran's ambitions for nuclear weapons than sanctions, if they saw the international community take their ally down, that we had the resolve to do it?

Secretary PANETTA. It would certainly add to the impact of the sanctions to have this happen in convincing Iran that they're alone.

Senator GRAHAM. I just can't help but believe if their ally Syria went down because the international community led by the United States said enough is enough and did reasonable things to take him down, that that wouldn't have a positive impact.

Now, when it comes to planning, Senator Blumenthal asked a lot of good questions about what we're doing and what we're planning. Am I wrong to assume that from your testimony the President of the United States has not requested a military plan regarding engaging Syria?

General DEMPSEY. No, that's not correct. The President of the United States, through the National Security Staff, has asked us to begin the commander's estimate, the estimate of the situation.

Senator GRAHAM. That's good. So there is movement in process in DOD to provide the President some options; is that correct?

Secretary PANETTA. Correct.

Senator GRAHAM. Now, when it comes to China and Russia, do you believe they will ever change their tune at the U.N., that we'll ever get them on board for a U.N. resolution like we had in Libya regarding Syria?

Secretary PANETTA. I don't think it's totally out of the question. Both countries have been embarrassed, I think, by the stand that they took on the U.N. resolution.

Senator GRAHAM. But they can withstand a lot of embarrassment.

Secretary PANETTA. Yes.

Senator GRAHAM. If you were a betting man, do you believe that they will ever come on board?

Secretary PANETTA. If Russia wants to maintain its contacts with Syria, maintain their port, and have some involvement with whatever government replaces Assad, they might be thinking about an approach that would allow them to have some impact on where this goes. So I don't rule it out that they wouldn't—

Senator GRAHAM. Would you say that should not be our only option, that we should come up with a contingency plan in case Russia doesn't wake up one day and realize they're on the wrong side of history, that we have another way of engaging without China and Russia?

Secretary PANETTA. Absolutely.

Senator GRAHAM. Now, let's talk about the Arab League. The Arab League has changed mightily in the last year, haven't they, given their involvement in the Mideast?

Secretary PANETTA. They sure have.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you believe it's generated by the Arab Spring; that the Arab League was an association of dictatorial regimes that now are betting on the right side of history, and they see Assad as being on the wrong side of history, and that's incredibly encouraging?

Secretary PANETTA. Absolutely.

Senator GRAHAM. Don't you think in our long-term national security interests we have a window in time here to marry up with the Arab League in terms of military, humanitarian, economic, follow-on assistance to the countries that have people who are saying, I'm tired of being led by dictators? Are we doing enough to seize that moment in history?

Secretary PANETTA. I can assure you that Secretary Clinton and I are working with our Arab League partners to try to do everything we can to develop and maintain the coalition that was established with Libya, but to maintain it as a continuing influence over what happens elsewhere in that region.

Senator GRAHAM. My final thought is that if the slaughter continues I do believe that the world, including the United States, has the capability to neutralize the slaughter through air power. Given the way the world is and the way Syria is, is there a likelihood, even a remote possibility, that if we engaged the artillery forces and the tank drivers who are killing people who basically have AK-47s, that maybe the other people in tanks would get out and quit if we blew up a few of them?

General DEMPSEY. There's certainly that possibility.

Senator GRAHAM. I think that is a high likelihood.

Thank you both for your service.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Graham.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Panetta, General Dempsey, thank you both very much for being here.

I want to follow up on the issues that have been raised about arms shipments from Russia and China. Reports are that 30 percent of Syrian arms come from China and North Korea. You talked a little bit about the Russian perspective, but I'm not clear whether we think there is any way to engage the Chinese on this issue. Is this something the international community has developed a strategy on for how to prevent or reduce future arms shipments from Russia and China?

Secretary PANETTA. The international community is concerned about what you just discussed, and the international community, led by the United States, is trying to engage both Russia and China to try to see if we can change their approach to Syria.

General DEMPSEY. Senator, if I could, we said here this morning that it's very clear and documented that Russia has an arms sale agreement with Syria. We've also said we need to get back to you on whether China does. I don't know the answer to that question.

Senator SHAHEEN. That comes from published reports.

I appreciated what you both had to say about our efforts around humanitarian aid. I think most of us looking at the pictures, the reports on the news, the pictures in the newspapers of the slaughter that's going on inside Syria, are very concerned about the cost in human lives, particularly for civilians, the women and children who have been killed.

Obviously, as the result there have been a lot, thousands of refugees who are going over the borders. First of all, is there more that we can or should be doing to address those refugees who are fleeing, as well as the humanitarian efforts on the ground in Syria that you talked about?

Then can you also address concerns that we might have about the destabilizing effect that refugees might have, particularly in Lebanon?

Secretary PANETTA. We are doing everything we can to expand the humanitarian effort. There is more that can be done and that needs to be done. Indeed, one of the options we're looking at is whether or not to establish these humanitarian zones to try to assist the refugees in a more effective way.

The refugee flows, if they continue at the rate that we see are clearly going to have an impact on the neighboring countries. We've already seen that happening.

General DEMPSEY. Could I add, Senator? Having lived over there for more than 5 years, refugees, because of family and tribal relationships, they're hard to pin down actually, how many and where they are, because they blend in.

Senator SHAHEEN. Sure.

General DEMPSEY. So during the Iraq war there were many Iraqi Sunni al Anbar refugees that flowed into Syria, and what we're seeing is some of them are flowing back now. We think maybe 15,000 from Syria into Jordan, maybe 10,000 into Lebanon, maybe 10,000 into Turkey. The way you first learn about it is when they put demands on the host nation medical system and some other things.

So the answer to the question is yes, of course there's more we can do and should. We have to do it through the host nations because they really understand this in a way that we can't.

Senator SHAHEEN. How engaged are the Arab League and the European community in supporting these kinds of humanitarian efforts?

Secretary PANETTA. They're very engaged, and we are working with the international community and the Arab League in addressing the humanitarian issue.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

To go on to Syria's weapons arsenal, I know that there have been reports that they have the biggest chemical weapon arsenal in the world. I had a chance to ask General Mattis about this yesterday, about what concerns we have should Assad fall, about the security of those arsenals and what potential threat to the rest of the region they might present. Can you address that?

General DEMPSEY. I can address it in great detail in closed session.

Senator SHAHEEN. Okay. I appreciate that.

Senator Collins, Senator Gillibrand, and I sent a letter to the administration expressing our concerns about this.

Secretary PANETTA. Senator, there's no question that they have huge stockpiles and that if it got into the wrong hands it would really be a threat to the security, not only of the regional countries, but to the United States.

Senator SHAHEEN. Recognizing that you don't want to address this in an open session, but can you compare it to the situation that we found in Libya last year? I know 20,000 Manportable Air-Defense System (MANPADS) disappeared in Libya. So how do we compare this situation?

Secretary PANETTA. It's 100 times worse than what we dealt with in Libya, and for that reason that's why it's raised even greater concerns about our ability to address how we can secure those sites.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. Are there new sanctions the administration and Congress could enact that would further dissuade other countries who might be assisting Syria either directly or inadvertently to try and continue to isolate Syria and those countries who are helping?

Secretary PANETTA. There are. I have to tell you, one of the things that has really come together are the sanctions that have been put in place. They target senior leadership and their assets. They're hampering foreign transactions. There's been a gross domestic product (GDP) decline from a minus 2 to a minus 8 percent. So the GDP has taken a hit from the sanctions. There's a loss of revenue, 30 percent loss of revenue due to the oil embargo that's taking place, and that's continuing to have an impact. There's been almost a 20 percent currency depreciation.

Senator SHAHEEN. So do we think there's a possibility that Assad is just going to run out of money if this continues indefinitely?

Secretary PANETTA. They'll always struggle to find ways around some of this, but this is squeezing him badly and they are at least in the process of running out of money.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

Senator SESSIONS.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you.

Thank you, both of you, for your service to the country.

I had the opportunity to travel a few weeks ago with Senators McCain and Graham and Blumenthal and others to the Middle East. I think there is a sense, in Senator McCain's vast experience in this region, that the United States' position clearly spoken does impact people. Revolutions and people are standing up against oppressive regimes are encouraged and emboldened if they sense the United States clearly articulates the justice of their cause.

I think we've been a bit weak on that. In Iran, when we had the revolution there, the protests there, that was a window of opportunity I am really, really disappointed we didn't somehow participate more positively in.

So I don't know. I believe you said, Secretary Panetta, or maybe General Dempsey, there's a difference between contingency planning and a commander's estimate. What is the difference?

General DEMPSEY. The commander's estimate, the acronym is "METTT." What are the potential missions, what is the enemy order of battle, what are the enemy's capabilities or potential enemies, what are the troops we have available, and how much time? So mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time or METTT. That's a commander's estimate.

Senator SESSIONS. You're looking at that?

General DEMPSEY. Yes.

Senator SESSIONS. Have you completed that?

General DEMPSEY. Yes.

Senator SESSIONS. You said, Secretary Panetta, that you're waiting on the President before doing contingency planning. What would be the contingency planning? What would be the next level?

General DEMPSEY. The next level of detail would be for us to take actual units from someplace else and apply them against that template in order to come up with operational concepts, how would we do it.

Senator SESSIONS. If you were another nation that was potentially interested in helping in this situation, wouldn't you be a little more impressed if we'd gone further in our detail? Does it not suggest that we are really not that interested in taking action if we have not gone further?

Secretary PANETTA. No, not at all. I think the assumptions that we've worked through, we've discussed them with the President, we've discussed them with the National Security Council. We are in the process of developing even further ideas with regards to some of those options. Ultimately, obviously, when the President makes the decision as to what course he wants to take in line, obviously, with our international partners, we'll be ready to go.

Senator SESSIONS. You said that we'll take our time earlier, and when we do, it will be well-prepared. But I have to say, Senator Blumenthal and others have raised the question of whether or not this window is not already closing. Dictators have successfully crushed revolutions many times in history. How confident are you that this—I know you have an estimate, but I don't see how an estimate that this country—that Assad's about to be toppled can be justified based on what we're seeing just publicly on the ground.

Secretary PANETTA. Senator, the fundamental issue that is before us is whether or not the United States will go ahead and act unilaterally in that part of the world and engage in another war in the Muslim world unilaterally, or whether or not we will work with others in determining what action we take. That's the fundamental decision that needs to be made.

Senator SESSIONS. Isn't there a window, and can you say with certainty that, even in a matter of a few weeks, that Assad may have reestablished his control in the country and there would be no likelihood of his regime toppling?

Secretary PANETTA. According to the intelligence estimates that I have seen, this insurgency is not only continuing, but it's growing wider. When that happens, it's going to continue to put a tremendous amount of pressure on Assad.

Senator SESSIONS. Maybe that's—I hope that's true and I hope that we don't miss an opportunity here. I know Senator Kerry and Senator McCain said use a no-fly zone over Libya. A long time

went by before that was done. Many believe, I think Senator McCain believes, I believe, that had they been listened to early there might have been fewer casualties and the regime might have collapsed sooner.

So I just would say I value your opinion on this, because you know more detail than I do.

General Dempsey, in one of your criteria for determining what we might do militarily you say you have to ask the question of whether the action is worth the cost and is consistent with law. What law does the U.S. military look to?

General DEMPSEY. If I could, I'd like to address both since they are related. So cost, resources, risk incurred elsewhere by the use of force one other place. It's a zero-sum game. We take them from someplace else, we use them for how long. That's the kind of issue of cost, and the question of blood and treasure.

The issue of legal basis is important, though. Again, we act with the authorized use of military force either at the consent of a government, so when we're invited in, or out of national self-defense, and there's a very clear criteria for that. Then the last one is with some kind of international legal basis, an UNSCR.

Senator SESSIONS. Wait a minute. Let's talk about an international legal basis. You answer under the Constitution to the U.S. Government, do you not? You don't need any international support before you would carry out a military operation authorized by the Commander in Chief.

General DEMPSEY. No, of course not. That's the second one.

Senator SESSIONS. I just want to know that, because there's a lot of references in here to international matters before we make a decision. I want to be sure that the U.S. military understands, and I know you do, that we're not dependent on a NATO resolution or a U.N. resolution to execute policies consistent with the national security of the United States.

Now, Secretary Panetta, in your talk, in your remarks, you talk about: first, we are working to increase diplomatic isolation and encouraging other countries to join the EU and the Arab League in imposing sanctions. Then you note that China and Russia have repeatedly blocked the U.N. Security Council from taking action.

Are you saying and is the President taking the position he would not act, if it was in our interest to do so, if the U.N. Security Council did not agree?

Secretary PANETTA. Senator, when it comes to our national defense, we act based on protecting the security of this country and we don't look for permission from anybody else when it comes to our national defense.

When it comes to the kind of military action where we want to build a coalition and work with our international partners, then obviously we would like to have some kind of legal basis on which to do it, as we did in Libya.

Senator SESSIONS. Now, some sort of legal basis. We're worried about international legal basis, but nobody worried about the fundamental constitutional legal basis that this Congress has over war. We were not asked, stunningly, in direct violation of the War Powers Act. Whether or not you believe it's constitutional, you certainly didn't comply with it. We spent our time worrying about the

U.N., the Arab League, NATO, and too little time, in my opinion, worrying about the elected representatives of the United States.

As you go forward, will you consult with the United States Congress, and can we be assured that you will have more consultation and more participation and legal authority from the duly elected representatives?

Secretary PANETTA. Believe me, we will. We don't have a corner on the market with regards to issues involving our defense. We want to consult with Congress. We want to get your best advice and your guidance. When we take action, we want to do it together.

Senator SESSIONS. Do you think that you can act without Congress and initiate a no-fly zone in Syria, without congressional approval?

Secretary PANETTA. Again, our goal would be to seek international permission and we would come to Congress and inform you and determine how best to approach this. Whether or not we would want to get permission from Congress, I think those are issues we would have to discuss as we decide what to do here.

Senator SESSIONS. I'm almost breathless about that, because what I heard you say is: We're going to seek international approval and we will come and tell Congress what we might do, and we might seek congressional approval. I want to just say to you, that's a big—wouldn't you agree? You served in Congress. Wouldn't you agree that that would be pretty breathtaking to the average American? So would you like to clarify that?

Secretary PANETTA. I served with Republican Presidents and Democratic Presidents, who always reserved the right to defend this country, if necessary.

Senator SESSIONS. But before we do this you would seek permission of the international authorities?

Secretary PANETTA. If we're working with an international coalition and we're working with NATO, we would want to be able to get appropriate permissions in order to be able to do that. That's something that all of these countries would want to have some kind of legal basis on which to act.

Senator SESSIONS. What legal basis are you looking for? What entity?

Secretary PANETTA. Obviously, if NATO made the decision to go in that would be one. If we developed an international coalition beyond NATO, then obviously some kind of U.N. Security Resolution—

Senator SESSIONS. So a coalition of—so you're saying NATO would give you a legal basis and an ad hoc coalition of nations would provide a legal basis?

Secretary PANETTA. If we were able to put together a coalition and were able to move together, then obviously we would seek whatever legal basis we would need in order to make that justified. We can't just pull them all together in a combat operation without getting the legal basis on which to act.

Senator SESSIONS. Who are you asking for the legal basis from?

Secretary PANETTA. Obviously, if the U.N. passed a Security Council Resolution, as it did in Libya, we would do that. If NATO came together, as we did in Bosnia, we would rely on that. So we

have options here if we want to build the kind of international approach to dealing with the situation.

Senator SESSIONS. I'm all for having international support, but I'm really baffled by the idea that somehow an international assembly provides a legal basis for the U.S. military to be deployed in combat. I don't believe it's close to being correct. They provide no legal authority. The only legal authority that's required to deploy the U.S. military is Congress and the President and the law and the Constitution.

Secretary PANETTA. Let me just for the record be clear again, Senator, so there's no misunderstanding. When it comes to the national defense of this country, the President of the United States has the authority under the Constitution to act to defend this country and he will. If it comes to an operation where we're trying to build a coalition of nations to work together to go in and operate, as we did in Libya or Bosnia, for that matter Afghanistan, we want to do it with permissions either by NATO or by the international community.

Senator SESSIONS. I'm troubled by that. I think that it does weaken the ability of the United States to lead. If we believe something ought to be done, I'd be thinking we would be going more aggressively to NATO and other allies, seeking every ally that we can get. But I do think ultimately you need a legal authority from the United States of America, not from any other extraterritorial group that might assemble.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. I wonder, Senator Webb, if you would yield to me just for one moment. I won't take it off your time.

Senator WEBB. Certainly, certainly.

Chairman LEVIN. I would just like to clarify that last point, because you used the word "permission" at times as being helpful to achieving an international coalition. You don't need any authority from anybody else, any permission from anybody else, if we're going to act alone. You've made that clear. You said it three times. I think that's essential.

But what you, as I understand it, are saying is that if you're seeking an international coalition it would help if there is a legal basis internationally in order to help obtain that legal coalition. I don't think the word "permission" is appropriate even in that context, by the way. I think you really corrected it when you said a legal basis in international law would help you achieve an international coalition.

Secretary PANETTA. That's correct.

Chairman LEVIN. If you're seeking an international coalition, having that kind of international legal basis will help. I think that's what you're trying to say and I hope that is what you're trying to say.

Secretary PANETTA. That's what I'm trying to say.

Chairman LEVIN. Okay.

Secretary PANETTA. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Senator Webb.

Thank you, Senator Sessions.

Senator WEBB. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Senator Sessions is raising an important point.

Senator WEBB. Senator Sessions is. I don't want to eat up too much of my own clock on this, but—

Chairman LEVIN. You have the time that's allotted.

Senator WEBB.—I would like to clarify a point that has been a concern to me on this very same issue. That is the difference between the United States acting unilaterally if we decide it's within our national interest and it's something that you, Mr. Secretary, have raised in terms of the situation in Syria—there's a difference between that and the President deciding to act unilaterally in an area that arguably has not been defined as a national security interest.

I made floor remarks on this. I have a great deal of concern when you look at the Libya model, where the basic justification has been humanitarian assistance, which is very vague and it's not under the historical precepts that we have otherwise used, like a treaty if you're talking about NATO, or defending Americans who have been captured, as in Grenada, or retaliating for a certain act, as we did in Libya, say, in 1986, when I was in the Pentagon.

So, I think, Senator Sessions has raised a point of concern, and I would like to just put a parentheses around that, but hold the thought. I think there definitely is room for some very serious discussion here in Congress on the way that the President, any President, can decide unilaterally to use military action in this rather vague concept of humanitarian assistance.

But to set that aside, what I really would like to talk about today are my thoughts about your testimony, and I would like to say very specifically that I found both of your testimonies with respect to the situation in Syria very reassuring. It was very careful and forthright. I think there's a lot of wisdom in the approach that you're taking on this.

I think when people are talking about the need for leadership, we need to understand and we need to have a little sense of history here. Leadership is not always taking precipitate action when the emotions are going. It's in achieving results that will bring about long-term objectives. Probably the greatest strategic victory in our lifetime was the Cold War. That was conscious, decades-long application of strategy with the right signals with respect to our national security apparatus.

There's no one in the world that will doubt the ability of the United States to put lethality on the battlefield if we decide to do it. But that's not really always the question when we're developing these kinds of policies, at least not the first question. I thought your testimonies were very clear on that from both of you.

Secretary Panetta, your comment about each situation is unique. General Dempsey, I think your example of the danger of looking at this through a straw is probably the best way to put it. We have to look at all of the ramifications in these sorts of matters.

I think the principles that you've laid down, we should all support this type of logic: to forge an international consensus, to translate the consensus into acts, and to at least express our hope that this change can be brought about through a peaceful political transition. I was taking notes as you made your testimony, Secretary Panetta.

I want to ask you about one thing that you said because I think we all need to think about it. You said, I think this is a direct quote, I'm an old journalist here, I can write fast: "Any government that indiscriminately kills its own people loses its legitimacy."

Would you say that is a statement of the policy of the United States?

Secretary PANETTA. I would.

Senator WEBB. Would you believe that with the circumstances in Tiananmen Square 1989, when the Chinese government turned its own soldiers loose and its own tanks loose on its own people and killed more than 1,000 people, would you say that fits into this statement?

Secretary PANETTA. Let me put this on a personal view. My personal view would be that that was the case there.

Senator WEBB. I think it also illustrates your comment that in policy terms each situation is unique and that we have to try to use the best building blocks we can in order to best address these types of situations, depending on where they happen and what other capabilities any one of these governments might have.

This is something, I actually held a hearing on this in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, talking about what might be viewed as the situational ethics in terms of American foreign policy. But it clearly demonstrates that you can't—there's no one template here when we're attempting to resolve differences in philosophy and policies with different countries.

So I would say that I do believe your exchange with Senator Sessions may have been lost in translation because it went back and forth so much, but I do believe Senator Sessions has a very valid point in terms of presidential authority. But I strongly support the analytical matrix, the policy matrix, that you are putting into place with respect to Syria.

I thank you for your testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Webb.

Senator COLLINS.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I think that this hearing and discussion this morning, as well as yesterday, demonstrate how difficult the challenge is that is posed by Syria. I don't think this lends itself to an easy solution, as appalled as we all are by the slaughter of the innocent civilians in Syria.

One of the options that I'd like to return to which has been discussed today is whether or not we should try to arm elements of the Syrian opposition. I think this too is a difficult issue. Although, Mr. Secretary and General Dempsey, you both responded to a question from Senator Graham that you don't think al Qaeda's the ultimate victor, if you will, once the regime falls. When Secretary Clinton testified at a House hearing last week, she raised the question of, if we arm, who are we arming? She specifically noted that Zawahiri of al Qaeda is backing the Syrian opposition.

Her comment recalled to me the situation in Afghanistan, where some of the groups that we armed in the 1980s are now some of the same people who are attacking American soldiers today, perhaps using some of those same arms.

So, General, if the United States or another country or even an international coalition chose to arm opposition groups in Syria, what's your assessment of the risk that we might be taking that we could end up arming terrorist groups or other enemies that are hostile to the United States or to Israel or to other allies in the region?

General DEMPSEY. If you sense any reluctance on my part at this point, it's because I can't get my intellect around that risk. I just can't understand it yet. But I will tell you that the President's been very directive with the intelligence community that that's what has to happen, that we have to be able to understand the opposition. To the extent we can, we should help it coalesce into something that's understandable and definable, coherent enough. Then if we ever do reach a decision to arm the opposition, it just can't simply be arming them without any command and control, without any communications, because then it becomes a roving band of rebels, and I think we can do better than that. But we're not there right now.

Senator COLLINS. Secretary Panetta?

Secretary PANETTA. Senator, one thing we found in this region of the world is that once you provide these arms, there are no boundaries as to where they can wind up. We saw that happen in Libya and we are seeing evidence of some of the weapons used there popping up in the Sinai and elsewhere. If we provide arms in Syria, we have to have some sense that they aren't just automatically going to wind up going to Hezbollah, going to Hamas, going to al Qaeda, going to other groups that would then use those weapons for other purposes.

Senator COLLINS. I think that's an extremely difficult issue as we look at whether or not to encourage the provision of arms or to provide arms ourselves.

Senator Shaheen and I have been working on the MANPADS issue with Libya. We've been very concerned about that. As you say, the situation in Syria makes the Libyan situation pale by comparison, plus Syria has, as I understand it, large stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons as well. So it's a very difficult issue.

I want to get your assessment of the NATO Secretary General's comment last week when he said that NATO would not get involved in Syria because western assistance would be insufficient to solve the crisis. He said that: "NATO could not bring about a sustainable solution to the problem," and instead he advocated for an Arab League-led effort to the crisis.

First, I would ask what your general reaction to the Secretary General's statement was, Mr. Secretary. Second, can we expect military and humanitarian assistance from the Arab League?

Secretary PANETTA. First of all, I understand his concerns about the situation in Syria from a military perspective, because we share some of the same concerns. At the same time, I think that NATO in the very least ought to take a look at the situation there and determine whether or not they could play an important role there.

The fact is, when you look at Libya, even though NATO was there, we had partners in the Arab community that joined that coa-

lition that were very helpful to the operation there. It's that kind of coalition that can work very effectively.

Turning to the Arab League, the Arab League obviously is working to try to develop an approach here. Individual nations are looking at different ways to try to provide assistance of one kind or another. But the Arab League itself doesn't have the capability that NATO has to be able to engage militarily, if necessary.

Senator COLLINS. I was in Turkey recently and obviously Turkey historically had good relationships with Syria, but the Prime Minister has been very strong in calling for Assad to step aside and indeed has provided sanctuary for the FSA within its borders. What advice are we getting from the Turks on what approach we should be taking towards Syria? Are there conversations ongoing with Turkey?

Secretary PANETTA. Yes, there are. Turkey has actually exercised very responsible leadership with regards to the issue. Obviously, they have a direct concern because it is a border country, but they have called for Assad to step down. We have engaged with them on consultation with regards to the concern over the chemical and biological sites that are located there, and we're continuing to consult with them with regards to refugees as well.

But the answer to your question is that Turkey is playing a very responsible role in dealing with this issue.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, would you allow me one very quick final question?

Chairman LEVIN. Yes, please.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you.

General Dempsey, is Iraq playing a positive role in actually interdicting the transshipment of supplies, ammunition, and weapons? It's really straddling the communications and transportation lines between the two countries.

General DEMPSEY. Iraq has done two things that I view as quite positive. One was, as the Secretary mentioned, the statement that they too now advocate Assad stepping down. So that's on the political side.

On the issue of Iranian shipments crossing through their air space, they have, in fact, demarched Iran to cease doing that. They have requested—remember now, they don't have the ability to control their air space. They can't interdict anyone crossing it. But they have on more than one occasion insisted that Iranian air flights across Iraq would land to be inspected, and at their insistence once that occurred the flights were delayed and in some cases we believe to allow the offloading of the shipment, so that it wasn't identified when it landed in Iraq.

So they are, they are trying. But again, they don't have much capability to do anything beyond diplomatic engagement.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you both.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Collins.

We're now going to move directly to SVC-217 in the Capitol Visitor Center for our closed session. Thank you both. This hearing stands adjourned.

[Questions for the record with answers supplied follow:]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CLAIRE McCASKILL

SYRIAN WEAPONS

1. Senator McCaskill. General Dempsey, the outcome of the current conflict in Syria will have strategic repercussions throughout the region. We know the Syrian regime has a substantial chemical-biological weapons capability, a significant integrated air defense system, thousands of shoulder-launched anti-air missiles, and a wholly unsustainable political hierarchy. The Syrian security situation continues to deteriorate as the Assad regime escalates the level of lethal force employed upon its own people. As a result, the regime is battling for its survival against a popular uprising, raising the prospect of a civil war. Also, according to your testimony, the options available to address the situation are extremely challenging. Based on our intelligence of the make-up of the opposition, would it be possible for the international community to provide arms to the rebels without running the risk that those weapons could fall into the hands of al Qaeda forces operating in Syria?

General Dempsey. Based on our understanding of the armed Syrian opposition and deteriorating economic conditions inside Syria, it would be impossible to eliminate the risk of foreign-provided weapons falling into the hands of any of the various extremist groups operating inside Syria, to include al Qaeda. Although al Qaeda is operating in Syria, our assessment is that the opposition forces may be unaware that they have al Qaeda cells in their midst. The international community could certainly take a variety of actions to ensure that weapons are initially delivered to the “right” opposition forces. However, the nature of the fight and the lack of organization and cohesion among the opposition forces could lead to weapons finding their way into the wrong hands.

2. Senator McCaskill. General Dempsey, what are the most significant risks of providing arms to the Syrian opposition?

General Dempsey. A significant risk is that foreign-provided arms might fall into the hands of any of the various extremist organizations that are currently operating in and around Syria. Such groups, including al Qaeda, seek to exploit deteriorating security conditions in Syria, exacerbate sectarian tensions, and threaten U.S. interests by destabilizing our allies in neighboring countries. An additional concern is that those weapons might empower elements of the opposition who do not share our interests in a democratic, pluralistic, and inclusive Syria that respects the rights of Syria’s substantial minority communities. Finally, there is a substantial risk that better armed opposition elements operating independently of any political process would simply increase levels of violence in Syria and further inflame sectarian tensions—making any eventual political reconciliation that much harder to achieve.

3. Senator McCaskill. General Dempsey, what other options should the international community consider that would reduce the chance of providing support to groups that run counter to U.S. security interests, such as al Qaeda, while still applying pressure against the Assad regime?

General Dempsey. The United States is working with the international community to increase pressure against the Assad regime and all options remain on the table. Currently, the Assad regime is conflating the opposition’s use of force with al Qaeda-type terrorist attacks in order to discredit the opposition and promote a self-serving narrative that regime forces are actually defending—rather than oppressing—Syria’s people. We are also aware of violent extremist intentions to exploit any security vacuum in Syria to further their own political objectives. Consequently, I believe the international community should exhaust all options for facilitating a managed political transition in Syria before seeking to effect such a transition via military means.

4. Senator McCaskill. General Dempsey, should the Syrian regime collapse, have precautions been taken or are there plans in place to ensure that the Syrian stockpile of chemical-biological weapons will not fall into the hands of groups that oppose U.S. interests?

General Dempsey. Yes. We have a plan in place that covers a wide range of potential scenarios and provides options to address those scenarios. We also continue to work with our allies and regional partners to share information and coordinate activities. The United States and our allies are closely watching the security and disposition of Syria’s unconventional weapons.

5. Senator MCCASKILL. General Dempsey, if the United States decided to support airstrikes on Syria, how much of a risk does the air defense system and anti-air missiles pose to our aircraft?

General DEMPSEY. [Deleted.]

6. Senator MCCASKILL. General Dempsey, can we mitigate the risk posed to our aircraft by the Syrian air defense system and anti-air missiles?

General DEMPSEY. We can best mitigate the risk posed to our aircraft from these systems by destroying them. Any other course of action would result in an enduring risk to our aircraft. Destruction would require attacking surface-to-air missile (SAM) launchers, radars, and their command and control. Mobile SAM systems would be challenging and would require our aircraft to rely heavily on onboard defensive systems and tactics for protection until the mobile SAMs were engaged. With the large number of mobile SAMs in Syria, it will be challenging to ensure we have destroyed every mobile SAM.

Attacking mobile SAM systems may provoke retaliation in the form of ballistic missile attacks on U.S. forces or allies and risk widening the conflict. There is the possibility of collateral damage if targeted SAM sites are located in populated areas. However, a sustained air presence over Syria to protect humanitarian corridors or establish a no-fly zone would require a sustained air campaign to defeat the integrated air defense systems.

SYRIAN REGIME CHANGE

7. Senator MCCASKILL. General Dempsey, is it reasonable to think that if the Assad regime collapses, with or without U.S. assistance, that the Syrian Government that arises after the collapse will cooperate with the United States and the international community?

General DEMPSEY. Depending on how long it takes for the Assad regime to collapse, and how much damage is done to the multi-confessional fabric of Syrian society during the process, it is possible that no cohesive Syrian Government will emerge with which the United States and international community could cooperate. If the Assad regime were replaced by a government that manages to maintain Syria's national unity such a government might be inclined to cooperate with the international community in exchange for economic and security assistance.

8. Senator MCCASKILL. General Dempsey, what players already exist in Syria that will almost certainly vie for power if the Assad regime collapses?

General DEMPSEY. Information on opposition groups operating inside Syria's cities and villages is limited, and it cannot be ruled out that local leaders and groups, of which we currently know little, could emerge to compete for power should the Assad regime fall. Likewise, the means by which Assad is eventually removed will have an impact on who is best positioned to compete for power. If Assad is removed through military force, the armed groups responsible for his overthrow are likely to demand the largest share of power in a post-Assad Syria.

If the conflict in Syria is settled peacefully or through negotiations, the groups best placed to vie for power are senior members of the Syrian National Council, the Free Syrian Army (FSA), the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, National Coordination Board, Local Coordination Committees, Kurdish groups, the Sunni business class, or various current regime officials.

9. Senator MCCASKILL. General Dempsey, are these players friendly to the United States?

General DEMPSEY. Most elements of Syrian political and military opposition are actively seeking foreign support and would welcome financial or material assistance from the United States. It is not yet clear what a post-Assad Government, could look like or what its international relations priorities would be.

Much of the leadership of the Syrian National Council would welcome friendly relations with the United States. There is little information on the FSA's views of the United States. Additionally, it is too soon to predict what position the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood would take on improving relations with the United States.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROGER F. WICKER

ROLE OF NATO IN SYRIA

10. Senator WICKER. Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey, the March edition of Foreign Affairs contains an essay by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Ambassador Ivo Daalder and NATO Supreme Allied Commander Stavridis, titled: "NATO's Victory in Libya". This piece highlights the successes and lessons learned from Operation Odyssey Dawn. The U.S. and NATO intervention in Libya serves very much as an exemplar for similar intervention in Syria. Their essay explicitly notes that: "When a group of countries wants to launch a joint intervention as a coalition—which confers political legitimacy—only NATO can provide the common command structure and capabilities necessary to plan and execute complex operations. Multilateral coalitions built on an as-needed basis, by contrast, have no common doctrine for conducting military operations, no common capabilities or command structure for quickly integrating national forces into a cohesive campaign, and no standing mechanisms for debating and then deciding on an agreed course of action." Have you had any discussions or consultations with our NATO allies on contingency planning regarding Syria?

Secretary PANETTA. First, I would like to emphasize that the United States is committed to bringing an end to the atrocities perpetuated by the Assad regime as soon as possible. Our focus has been and continues to be on diplomatic and political approaches to this situation, rather than military intervention. But we have not ruled out any course of action. We remain engaged with our allies and partners as we determine how best to resolve the crisis in Syria.

We have not started planning within NATO for military contingency operations. For NATO to take action, including formal military planning, all 28 members must agree to do so. As we saw in Libya, many allies would be hesitant to commit NATO as an organization to intervene militarily in Syria without clear support from countries in the region and a proper international legal basis, such as a Chapter VII U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR).

In the case of Syria, a consensus for military intervention does not exist at this time in the Arab League, the U.N. Security Council, or NATO. There are also concerns about the effect of military intervention on Syria's neighbors, potential refugee flows across the borders with Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, and the possibility that violence may spread into these countries or along Israel's borders.

Although the objective of protecting civilians and supporting universal human rights are similar in these two cases, we do not believe the same means employed in Libya are available or advisable at the current time in Syria. Several factors—including demographic, ethnic, geographic, religious, and military capability—distinguish the challenges posed by the situation in Syria, as compared to the situation in Libya prior to Operation Odyssey Dawn. On February 29, 2012, NATO Security General Rasmussen stated: "We haven't had any discussions in NATO about a NATO role in Syria and I don't envision such a role for the alliance," and that "Syria is ethnically, politically, religiously much more complicated than Libya. This is the reason why the right way forward is different." Likewise, it is important to note that the Syrian regime has approximately five times more sophisticated air defense systems than existed in Libya, covering one-fifth of the terrain, in addition to much larger conventional and chemical weapons stockpiles.

The U.S. Government continues to pursue a range of non-military options, such as increased sanctions, to increase pressure on the Syrian regime, in addition to our work at the U.N. Security Council and with our international partners, including the Arab League and U.N.-Arab League Envoy to Syria, Kofi Annan. As I noted, we are committed to bringing an end to the atrocities perpetuated by the Assad regime as soon as possible.

General DEMPSEY. I have discussed the current situation in Syria with some NATO allies. However, we have not discussed contingency planning with any other members of NATO. To date, NATO has not discussed any possible future role that the alliance could play with regard to the situation in Syria.

11. Senator WICKER. Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has increased their rhetoric about arming the Syrian opposition forces. What options exist for NATO and the GCC to expedite arms assistance to the Syrian opposition?

Secretary PANETTA. In order for NATO to take action, all 28 members must agree to do so. Many allies would be hesitant to commit NATO as an organization to intervene militarily in Syria, without clear support from countries in the region and a

proper international legal basis, such as a Chapter VII UNSCR. In addition, NATO, as an organization, does not provide arms to any nation or opposition entity.

GCC member states have offered critical support and participation in international efforts to stop the violence in Syria, and to develop a political solution to the crisis. Although we continue to assess options and the feasibility of providing security assistance to the Syrian opposition, we do not believe it is appropriate to provide lethal assistance, at this time. We encourage the GCC and other interested parties to use diplomatic influence and resources to pressure the Assad regime and encourage the Syrian opposition to halt violence, and to begin the orderly transition to democracy.

General DEMPSEY. To date, NATO has not discussed any possible future role that the alliance could play with regard to situation in Syria. The provision of lethal aid to the opposition is problematic for a variety of reasons to include: opposition unity and vetting, achieving the requisite legal basis to preclude lethal aid, and avoiding transfers to various extremist organizations operating within Syria. Some members of the GCC have publically advocated providing arms to the Syrian opposition but this is presently a problematic option for the United States. We are not aware of any NATO options to expedite arms assistance to the Syrian opposition.

12. Senator WICKER. Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey, similar to our efforts in Libya, do you currently believe there is sufficient consensus within NATO to support alliance-led airstrikes to establish humanitarian safe-havens for civilians in Syria?

Secretary PANETTA. I do not believe there is sufficient consensus at this time.

For NATO to take action, all 28 members must agree to do so. As we saw in Libya, many allies would be hesitant to commit NATO as an organization to intervene militarily in Syria without clear support from countries in the region and a proper international legal basis, such as a Chapter VII UNSCR.

General DEMPSEY. Currently, I do not believe there is consensus within NATO for such action. To date, NATO has not discussed any possible future role that the alliance could play with regard to the situation in Syria.

SYRIAN REFUGEES

13. Senator WICKER. Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey, on Monday, March 5, 2012, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that over 2,000 Syrian refugees—including Christians—have fled to border towns in Southern Syria in the hopes of crossing to Lebanon. For those who make it to Lebanon, many Syrian refugees fear agents from their own country's security services. Anecdotal stories have circulated of kidnappings and collaboration between Lebanese and Syrian security forces. Turkey says it hosts more than 11,000 Syrians in camps along the border with Syria, including more than 1,000 who crossed in the last month. Jordan has more than 80,000 Syrian refugees, according to the government. About 100 have entered Jordan in the last 2 days. I continue to be concerned about the crisis regarding Syrian refugees seeking refuge in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. For instance, our NATO ally Turkey is hosting over 11,000 Syrian refugees while Jordan is reportedly hosting over 80,000 Syrian refugees. What is the Department of Defense (DOD) prepared to do in terms of food or logistical assistance to help address this regional refugee crisis in the Levant?

Secretary PANETTA. The State Department and USAID are the lead U.S. Government agencies for foreign humanitarian assistance. They are providing substantial support to the humanitarian relief effort in Syria and the surrounding countries through a number of humanitarian organizations.

It is DOD's job to ensure the President has a range of viable options at his disposal, and that we have fully considered all contingencies. This does not imply, however, an intent or recommendation to execute any particular contingency plan.

General DEMPSEY. DOD is actively engaged with both our allies and the U.S. Government interagency to evaluate and address the refugee situation. Recent bilateral discussions with both Turkey and Jordan included the refugee concern and all parties continue to share information related to this topic. U.S. interagency, including DOD, Department of State, USAID and other elements continue to plan for assistance as it may be required to support the UNHCR and related efforts on the ground within the region. UNHCR leader Valerie Amos assessed the situation on the ground concurrently with U.N. envoy Kofi Annan's visit to Syria and the United States continues to fully support UNHCR efforts on refugees throughout the region.

SYRIAN DEPENDENCY ON RUSSIA

14. Senator WICKER. Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey, it is no surprise given Vladimir Putin's so-called presidential victory over the weekend that Russia continues to be an ardent supporter of the Syrian regime's survival. Russia and China have blocked measures in October and February supporting an Arab League-drafted transition plan. According to the Moscow Times, Russia's current economic investment in Syria totaled \$19.4 billion in 2009. In recent years Syria purchased modern anti-tank and anti-air missile systems from Russia. In 2008, Syria agreed to purchase advanced fighters, air-defense systems, tactical missile systems, and submarines from Russia. These sales are not limited to equipment and also extend to personnel training and other activities. As such, what is the level of Syria's economic and military dependency on Russia for towards the Assad regime's survival?

Secretary PANETTA. Russia is the largest supplier of military equipment to Syria, and is also an important economic partner. Unfortunately, Russia continues to supply weapons to Syria. The United States has repeatedly raised our concerns regarding Russia's decision to continue these weapons deliveries. However, Assad's survival does not solely hinge on further Russian military or financial aid. Russian political support for Syria, particularly in the U.N. Security Council, has shielded Syria from international efforts to stop the violence and to hold the Assad regime accountable. However, we have recently been encouraged by Russian support for U.N.-Arab League envoy to Syria, Kofi Annan.

General DEMPSEY. The survival of the Syrian regime is not ultimately contingent on Russian financial and military support. However, this support does place Damascus in a more confident position when attempting to weather unrest and the regime continues to value Russia as one of its most important foreign allies. Russian top cover at the U.N. has further solidified the regime's intransigence while continued arms supplies, including advanced defensive systems, likely bolster Damascus' confidence it can deter foreign military intervention.

Beyond the arms trade, Russian companies have made a number of investments in Syria, including some from Russia's powerful energy sector, such as a natural gas production facility and pipeline. Russia exported \$1.1 billion worth of goods to Syria in 2010, about 6.3 percent of Syria's imports.

15. Senator WICKER. Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey, can you elaborate on the ongoing military-to-military cooperation between Syria and Russia?

Secretary PANETTA. Syria continues to be one of Russia's closest military partners in the Middle East, and Russia remains Syria's largest supplier of military equipment. Despite the international condemnation of Assad's harsh crackdown on Syria's own population, Russian arms deliveries continue. Russia has military advisors in Syria and a naval logistics base in the Syrian Port of Tartus. The United States has repeatedly raised our concerns regarding the continued deliveries of weapons to Syria and we will continue to do so as long as the violence continues and Assad remains in power.

General DEMPSEY. [Deleted.]

16. Senator WICKER. What level of intelligence cooperation do you believe exists between the Syrian and Russian security services?

Secretary PANETTA. [Deleted.]

General DEMPSEY. [Deleted.]

IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN SYRIA

17. Senator WICKER. Secretary Panetta, in late January 2012, General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Iranian Quds Force (an elite unit of Iran's Revolutionary Guards), visited the Syrian capital. This visit represents the most prominent signs of Iran's assistance to Syria, including military equipment. Additionally, recently General Mattis, while describing a deteriorating situation in Syria, stated that it was fueled in part by Iran. In what capacity has Iran and/or al Qaeda contributed to these horrific events taking place in Syria?

Secretary PANETTA. [Deleted.]

18. Senator WICKER. Secretary Panetta, would a collapse of President Assad's rule likely end Iran's cozy ties with Syria and potentially redraw the Mideast's pathways of influence?

Secretary PANETTA. [Deleted.]

19. Senator WICKER. Secretary Panetta, would the Assad regime's demise choke off aid to Tehran's main anti-Israel faction, Hezbollah in Lebanon?
Secretary PANETTA. [Deleted.]

SYRIAN FORCES

20. Senator WICKER. General Dempsey, Syrian forces reportedly executed 47 Syrian soldiers who tried to defect in the city of Idlib just this past week. The regime of President Assad is currently beset by an armed insurgency mounted by the FSA. The FSA, which consists of some 20,000 army defectors armed as light infantry, has mounted numerous lethal ambushes and hit-and-run raids on loyalist troops. What is your assessment of the Syrian military and what is the level of loyalty towards Assad?

General DEMPSEY. The Syrian military maintains a force of over 300,000 Active Duty personnel and a robust Reserve Duty Force, which can be drawn upon at need. The majority of Syria's armed forces remain loyal to Assad. The Syrian military has been beset by regular defections of soldiers since unrest began, but overall its capabilities remain strong. To date, neither senior military officers nor members of Assad's inner circle have defected. The highest ranking defectors to date have held the rank of brigadier general.

21. Senator WICKER. General Dempsey, what is your opinion on the capabilities of the FSA?

General DEMPSEY. The capabilities of the FSA have steadily grown in recent months; however, the organization remains beset by logistical shortfalls and lack of unity among its leadership.

The ability, or inability, of the FSA to exercise operational control over the armed opposition bears continued monitoring. In recent months, the FSA has issued several calls for the armed opposition operating within Syria to unite under the FSA's banner, suggesting the group has had difficulties exercising control over disparate armed groups throughout Syria.

FSA members are actively seeking military aid from foreign sponsors, including ammunition, small arms, and advanced weapons systems.

22. Senator WICKER. General Dempsey, what can the United States and NATO do to help these opposition forces?

General DEMPSEY. Alliance political leaders must answer the question regarding what NATO can do to help the opposition forces. However, to date, NATO has not discussed any possible future role that the alliance could play with regard to helping the opposition forces in Syria.

[Whereupon, at 11:32 a.m., the committee adjourned.]

