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SYRIA: THE CRISIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

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CONTENTS

	Page
Feltman, Hon. Jeffrey D., Assistant Secretary of State For near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC	5
Prepared statement	6
Ford, Hon. Robert, U.S. Ambassador to the Syrian Arab Republic, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC	12
Prepared statement	6
Kerry, Hon. John F., U.S. Senator From Massachusetts	1
Lugar, Hon. Richard G., U.S. Senator From Indiana	3

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Responses of Assistant Secretary Jeffrey Feltman and Ambassador Robert Ford to Questions Submitted by Senator John F. Kerry	34
Responses of Assistant Secretary Jeffrey Feltman to Questions Submitted by Senator James E. Risch	36
Responses of Ambassador Robert Ford to Questions Submitted by Senator James E. Risch	37
Responses of Assistant Secretary Jeffrey Feltman and Ambassador Robert Ford to Questions Submitted by Senator Jeanne Shaheen	38
Response of Assistant Secretary Jeffrey Feltman to Question Submitted by Senator Christopher Coons	39
Responses of Ambassador Robert Ford to Questions Submitted by Senator Christopher Coons	40

SYRIA: THE CRISIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

THURSDAY, MARCH 1, 2012

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:05 a.m., in room SD–419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. John F. Kerry (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Senators Kerry, Menendez, Cardin, Casey, Webb, Coons, Durbin, Udall, Lugar, Corker, Risch, Rubio, and Isakson.

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

The CHAIRMAN. This hearing will come to order.

Thank you all. I apologize for being a moment late. I was over on the floor and a little bit delayed there, and I will have to go back there at some point in time. Senator Casey will chair at the point at which I will have to do that.

We appreciate everybody coming here to discuss the ongoing situation in Syria.

As we all know, Syria sits in the heart of the Middle East, straddling its ethnic and sectarian faultlines, and all of the region's important powers have a direct interest in what happens in Syria, as do nonstate actors like Hezbollah, Hamas, and others.

Al-Qaeda, through its affiliate in Iraq, appears to be trying to take advantage of the unrest, chaos, if you want to call it that, which is no surprise. Already as many as 9,000 civilians have died, and many tens of thousands more have been displaced from their homes. In the Syrian City of Homs, there has been indiscriminate shelling for 3 weeks now. Hundreds have died and the city is running critically low on food and medical supplies.

Given the indiscriminate killing of its own citizens and given its back of the hand to the global community, as well as to the regional powers that have tried to intervene, it seems clear that the Assad regime is ultimately going to fall. But the longer the end game, the messier the aftermath and obviously the more complicated the in-between. The prospect of a full-fledged sectarian civil war is a stark reminder that a terrible situation could become still much worse with potentially devastating consequences for neighbors, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, and adverse implications for the broader Middle East.

So the question being asked here in the Congress, as well as elsewhere in America and in the world, is where do we go from here. America may have little direct leverage on Syria, but the recent

Friends of Syria conference in Tunis was an important moment that could galvanize the international community against the Assad government, and none of us should ever underestimate the ability of the global community to have an impact on any renegade regime anywhere in the world when the full attention and focus of the global community is properly convened.

The last year has shown that when the world acts with one voice, motivated by the cause of freedom, a tyrant's grip on power does not seem so fierce. That is why the Russian and Chinese veto at the United Nations Security Council was, in fact, so disappointing because it actually extended to Assad a political lifeline to continue to use violence against his own people. We need to encourage the Russians and the Chinese and certainly let them know that while we would like their positive involvement in putting a halt to the conflict, we are able to do, and prepared to do, much more if they continue to block all progress at the Security Council.

The Arab League and GCC have ramped up their political and economic pressure. The EU and Turkey—Turkey, interestingly enough, just a year ago, a close friend and supporter of Syria—have broken and done the same. The U.N. General Assembly in recent weeks voted 137 to 12 to condemn the crackdown. Two weeks ago, the Senate passed unanimously a resolution introduced by this committee condemning the regime for its brutal crackdown and expressing solidarity with the Syrian people.

There are still serious questions about various opposition organizations, including especially the Syrian National Council and Free Syrian Army. They share the goal of getting rid of Assad, and they have traveled some distance in the course of the last year. But they have not yet unified in the way that the Libyan Transitional National Council did.

So I believe it is time for us to redouble our efforts to engage with Syria's political opposition to try to shape their thinking, to understand it more fully, to identify more fully the leadership to strongly encourage them to coalesce into a coherent political force.

With the creation of the Friends of Syria group, there is now a multilateral mechanism for supporting the Syrian National Council and other political groups with technical assistance. But it is true that many Syrians themselves remain on the fence, especially members of the Alawite, Christian, and other minority groups. They are horrified by the regime's atrocities but they are also terrified by the potential for broad-scale sectarian strife.

Thus, it is absolutely vital that the SNC do everything it can to unify politically, to put national aspirations ahead of personal ambitions, to categorically reject radicalism, and to reassure religious and ethnic minorities that they will enjoy full freedoms in a tolerant and pluralist post-Assad society. The nascent Syrian opposition needs to understand that the international community's political support will ultimately be contingent upon their ability to speak with one voice that represents the full diversity of Syrian society and also embraces the values that will bring the global community to its side.

A debate has started in Congress and in the region about whether and, if so, how to support the Free Syrian Army. It is critical that we all proceed with extreme caution and with our eyes wide

open. There are serious questions to be answered about the Free Syrian Army, but it is not too soon to think about how the international community could shape its thinking or encourage restraint. We should encourage the Free Syrian Army to subsume itself under the leadership of Syria's political opposition.

Finally, we are all deeply concerned about the disposition of Syria's biological and chemical weapons and its lethal conventional weapons systems. I know that the administration is fully engaged with respect to this particular challenge and is working diligently to make sure that there are contingencies to prevent these weapons from falling into the wrong hands, and I would urge all of my colleagues to be fully supportive of those efforts.

To help us work through the complexities of this situation—and I want to emphasize this is not Libya, this is not Egypt, this is not Tunis, this is a far more complicated and difficult proposition. But to help us work through those complexities today we are joined by two of the most talented and accomplished members of America's diplomatic corps. I am pleased to welcome Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Jeff Feltman, and former United States Ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford. I should say Ambassador but not currently in-country.

Secretary Feltman knows the region well, and having served as Ambassador to Lebanon, I think he understands as well as anybody the full implications this crisis could have.

Ambassador Ford has worked tirelessly to engage with the people of Syria during his tenure. And Ambassador, I think we all want to commend you on your courageous and important efforts that you made to distinguish between sort of the clientitis that sometimes can embrace those abroad and your own connection to the values that you represented. I think we all were very impressed by that.

Ambassador Ford had to leave the country once in October because of threats to his own safety, but he returned and he continued his efforts until the Embassy finally had to close last month because of the continued deterioration in security.

So we thank you both in advance for providing your insights and look forward to your testimony.

Senator Lugar.

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

Senator LUGAR. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I join you in welcoming Assistant Secretary Feltman and Ambassador Ford to this committee. We do appreciate their leadership as events in Syria have proceeded.

Ambassador Ford and his team on the ground in Syria deserve great credit for documenting evidence of the Syrian Government's aggression against its people, despite substantial personal risk.

Our hearing today takes place amidst the deadly violence, the gross human rights violations, and degradations that the Assad regime continues to inflict on the Syrian people. Since our last hearing on Syria in November, the death toll in this 11-month conflict has risen dramatically. We are confronted by horrific images of the depths to which Assad will go to preserve his power, including tar-

geting civilians, journalists, doctors, aid workers and women and children.

I welcomed the meeting in Tunis last week of the Friends of the Syrian People that brought together 60 nations and international organizations. We should continue to focus attention on humanitarian needs in Syria. The absence of Russia and China from the meeting was an abrogation of their responsibilities in my judgment as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

Events in Syria will impact United States national security and the interests of our close ally Israel. The outcome in Syria will have deep implications for the internal politics of neighboring countries, ethnic conflicts in the Middle East, and broader strategic issues. Terrorist groups are likely to attempt to take advantage of political instability, and intersectarian violence could spill over Syria's borders as groups settle old scores or defend brethren from attacks.

In the midst of this upheaval, we know Syria has substantial stockpiles of chemical and conventional weapons that could directly threaten peace and stability throughout the region. Our Government must be focusing intelligence and counterproliferation assets on containing this threat.

The development of a definable opposition that speaks for most Syrians would improve chances that the damage to the Syrian people and risks to regional stability could be contained. Some constructive opposition voices are attempting to emerge. But at present, the Syrian opposition lacks cohesion and a sufficiently defined political agenda. As a practical matter, it also lacks the physical space and technical means to mature, overcome its internal differences, and develop a plan for a democratic transition. Deep sectarian divisions, outside influences from Iran and elsewhere, and the lack of a democratic political culture weigh heavily against the short-term emergence of a unified opposition on which to base a tolerant democracy.

This presents the United States with limited options. Clearly, we must oppose the Assad regime's aggression against its own people and support international humanitarian efforts. We should also work with willing states to limit any spillover effect generated by violence in Syria. But we should not overestimate our influence to shape events in the country. Further, attempts by the United States or the West to closely manage the opposition could backfire in an environment where the government blames outside influences for Syria's troubles.

While not taking any options off the table, we should be extremely skeptical about actions that could commit the United States to a military intervention in Syria. Under the constitution, any decision placing us as a party to armed conflict in Syria rests with the Congress. As you and others in the administration consider a way forward together with our international partners, I encourage you to work closely with Congress as plans evolve, particularly as the situation becomes more complex.

I look forward to your testimony very much and we are honored that you are with us today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Lugar.

Mr. Secretary, if you would lead off and then Ambassador Ford. Thank you very much. Your full testimony will be placed in the record as if read in full.

STATEMENT OF HON. JEFFREY D. FELTMAN, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ambassador FELTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Kerry, Ranking Member Lugar, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for holding this important hearing.

I appeared before your regional subcommittee in November to discuss the crisis in Syria. And since that time, our European friends have joined us in sanctioning the Central Bank of Syria, impeding the financing of the regime's brutal crackdown. The EU has completed its implementation of its embargo on oil purchases from Syria, halting a third of Bashar's government revenues. The Arab League suspended Syria's membership with many Arab States downgrading diplomatic relations and freezing Syrian bank accounts. The Arab League put forth a political transition plan for Syria; 137 countries supported the U.N. General Assembly resolution condemning the Syrian regime's violence and supporting the Arab League transition plan.

More than 60 countries and institutions met in Tunis as Friends of the Syrian People to endorse the Arab transition plan, to demand an immediate end to the violence, and to commit to practical steps to address the Syrian crisis. The Syrian opposition in Tunis articulated a clear, credible transition plan, and addressed minority fears directly and convincingly.

We announced $10 million in immediate humanitarian assistance, with millions more from other countries.

The U.N., the Arab League, have appointed a joint high-profile envoy, Kofi Annan, with a mandate from the Arab League initiative and the U.N. General Assembly resolution.

And just this morning, the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva overwhelmingly passed a strong resolution, which is the council's fourth, essentially describing the situation in Syria as a man-made humanitarian disaster. And we all know the identity of the man responsible for that disaster.

Now, these are just some of the examples of regional and international resolve. But nevertheless, as both of you have described, we have also seen that the Assad regime has intensified its vicious campaign of attacks against the Syrian people. The situation is frankly horrific, including indiscriminate artillery fire against entire neighborhoods and today's reports from Homs are truly alarming. Large numbers of Syrians are living every day under siege, deprived of basic necessities, including food, clean water, and medical supplies. Women and children are wounded and dying for lack of treatment. Innocent people are detained and tortured and their families left to fear the worst.

Yet, despite the regime's brutality, the people of Syria demonstrate enormous courage. Their determination to continue protesting for their rights, mostly still peaceful protests, is an inspiration and a testimony to the human spirit.

Now, as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs watching the upheavals in the Arab world, I am humble enough to say that we do not know for sure when the tipping point, the breaking point, will come in Syria but it will come. The demise of the Assad regime is inevitable. It is important that the tipping point for the regime be reached quickly because the longer the regime assaults the Syrian people, the greater the chances of all-out war and a failed state.

All of the elements of United States policy toward Syria are channeled toward accelerating the arrival of that tipping point. As I referred to at the start, through the Friends of the Syrian People group, we are translating international consensus into action. We are galvanizing international partners to implement more effective sanctions and to deepen the regime's isolation. We are supporting the Arab League's and now the U.N. General Assembly's call for an immediate transition in Syria. We are moving ahead with humanitarian assistance for the Syrian people demanding that attacks cease and access be granted. And we are engaging with the Syrian opposition on their vision for Syria's future, a proud and democratic Syria that upholds the rights and responsibilities of all of its citizens regardless of their religion, their gender, or their ethnicity.

Now, together we are working to persuade frightened communities inside Syria that their interests are best served by helping to build that better Syria, not by casting their lot with a losing regime, a corrupt and abusive regime which has been a malignant blight in the Middle East for far too long. The goal of the opposition and the Friends of the Syrian People alike is as follows: a Syrian-led political transition to a democratic government based on the rule of law and the will of the people with protection of minority rights.

I would like to close my opening statement by echoing this committee's praise of my fellow witness and friend, Ambassador Robert Ford. Ambassador Ford's courageous actions on the ground in Syria these past months have been a great credit to him, to the Foreign Service, and to the United States. He repeatedly put himself in harm's way to make it clear that the United States stands with the people of Syria and their dream of a better future. And I want to thank this committee for its leadership in supporting his confirmation.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Feltman follows:]

JOINT PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. JEFFREY D. FELTMAN AND HON. ROBERT FORD

Chairman Kerry, Ranking Member Lugar, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for inviting us to appear before you today to discuss our goals with regard to Syria and our strategy for achieving them.

Much has changed since Assistant Secretary of State Feltman's testimony to the Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs on November 9, 2011, and regrettably, on the ground in Syria, things have largely changed for the worse. Peaceful protests have continued, the opposition has become better organized and more capable both inside and outside Syria, the international community is now more united in its resolve to end the crisis, and the diplomatic and economic isolation of the Syrian regime has deepened, but the regime's criminal brutality against the Syrian people has only intensified, especially in the wake of the February 4 double-veto in the U.N. Security Council.

The February 22 report of the U.N. Human Rights Council-sponsored Commission of Inquiry on Syria included a number of alarming findings:

- The Syrian regime's forces have committed more widespread, systematic, and gross human rights violations, amounting to crimes against humanity, with the apparent knowledge and consent of the highest levels of the State. Antigovernment-armed groups have also committed abuses, although not comparable in scale and organization to those carried out by the State.

We would add that, unlike the armed opposition, the Syrian Government is carrying out attacks with tanks and heavy artillery.

- The army intensified its bombardment with heavy weapons—particularly in Homs—after the withdrawal of the League of Arab States observers in late January. As a result, large numbers of people, including many children, were killed. Several areas were bombarded and then stormed by State forces, which arrested, tortured, and summarily executed suspected defectors and opposition activists.
- Residential buildings in the Bab Amr neighborhood of Homs were shelled by tanks and antiaircraft guns. State snipers also shot at and killed unarmed men, women, and children. Fragmentation mortar bombs were also fired into densely populated neighborhoods.
- Security agencies continued to systematically arrest wounded patients in State hospitals and to interrogate them, often using torture, about their supposed participation in opposition demonstrations or armed activities. The commission documented evidence that sections of Homs Military Hospital and Al Ladhiquiyah State Hospital had been transformed into torture centers. Security agents, in some cases joined by medical staff, chained seriously injured patients to their beds, electrocuted them, beat wounded parts of their body or denied them medical attention and water. Medical personnel who did not collaborate faced reprisals.
- The military and security forces continued to impose blockades on areas with a significant presence of antigovernment-armed groups, including in Homs, Hama, Idlib, and Rif Dimashq. Medicine, food, and other essential supplies were not allowed to pass. State forces arbitrarily arrested and assaulted individuals who tried to bring in such supplies. The government also withheld fuel rations and the electricity supply to punish communities and families whose members had participated in antigovernment demonstrations.
- Torture in places of detention continued. Victims and witnesses provided credible and consistent accounts of places and methods of torture.
- Children continued to be arbitrarily arrested and tortured while in detention.
- The commission received credible and consistent evidence identifying high- and mid-ranking members of the armed forces who ordered their subordinates to shoot at unarmed protestors, kill soldiers who refused to obey such orders, arrest persons without cause, mistreat detained persons, and attack civilian neighborhoods with indiscriminate tank and machine-gun fire.
- On 20 December, local residents discovered the bodies of 74 defectors in a deserted area between Kafar Awid and Kasanfra. Their hands had been tied behind their back and they appeared to have been summarily executed.

This litany of egregious human rights violations demands an international response, and it is outrageous that the U.N. Security Council has been repeatedly blocked from answering the calls of the Arab League and the pleas of the Syrian people. The United States and the broader international community are determined not to allow two members of the Security Council to prevent the pursuit of a political solution to the crisis in Syria and the provision of urgent assistance to the Syrian people. As demonstrated in the February 16 adoption by 137 votes to 12 of a U.N. General Assembly resolution fully supporting the Arab League transition plan, and the outcomes of the February 24 meeting of the Friends of the Syrian People Group, there is a growing chorus of condemnation from the international community that is gaining strength and unity of purpose.

As Secretary Clinton said at the February 24 Friends meeting in Tunis, the Assad regime has ignored every warning, squandered every opportunity, and broken every agreement. But in Tunis on February 24, as it did in the U.N. General Assembly the week before, the international community spoke with one voice, joining in support of the Arab League's initiative, demanding an end to the Assad regime's brutality and the beginning of a democratic transition in Syria. The Friends meeting in Tunis marks a turning point for translating international consensus into action. Although different countries took different positions on foreign intervention and arming the opposition, there was unanimous condemnation of the human rights violations and crimes of the Assad regime. Subsequent Friends meetings, with the next scheduled for mid-March, will take stock of initiatives launched and engage in more detailed planning.

The key outcomes of the February 24 Friends meeting were:

- A massive outpouring of international support for Syrian people and consensus that a political transition from tyranny to democracy must begin now.
- Recognition of the Syrian National Council (SNC) as a legitimate representative of Syrians seeking a transition. The SNC shared a credible vision for political transition and directly addressed minority concerns.
- Pledges of tens of millions of dollars in humanitarian assistance, including $10 million from the United States.
- A call on the Syrian Government to immediately cease all violence and to allow safe, free, and unimpeded access by the U.N. and other humanitarian organizations, clearly placing the onus on the Syrian regime; and the creation of a working group to coordinate international assistance, led by the U.N.
- A firm commitment to contribute substantially to rebuilding Syria in the process of transition and to support its future economic recovery through the establishment of a working group on economic recovery and development.
- A strong affirmation of support for the naming of Kofi Annan as a special envoy for both the U.N. and the Arab League to advance a political solution reflecting the consensus behind the Arab League transition plan and the U.N. General Assembly resolution.

The Friends Group echoed the Arab League's demands that the Syrian Government immediately halt all attacks against civilians; guarantee the freedom of peaceful demonstrations; release all arbitrarily detained citizens; return its military and security forces to their barracks; and allow full and unhindered access for monitors, humanitarian workers, and journalists.

It fully supported the Arab League's call for a negotiated political solution to this crisis and an inclusive democratic transition to address the legitimate aspirations of Syria's people in an environment free from violence, fear, intimidation, and extremism. Only a genuine democratic transition will solve this crisis. The Arab League has set the goal of the formation of a national unity government followed by transparent and free elections under Arab and international supervision, and Assad's departure must be part of this. The United States and the other Friends of the Syrian People are firmly committed to the sovereignty, independence, national unity, and territorial integrity of Syria.

We are taking concrete action along three lines: providing emergency humanitarian relief, ratcheting up pressure on the regime to hasten Assad's fall, and preparing for a democratic transition.

Conditions in affected areas of Syria are dire and worsening. Emergency assistance is desperately needed, but the regime is doing everything it can to prevent aid from reaching those who need it most. It is attacking aid workers, doctors, and journalists reporting on the suffering. We deeply regret the deaths of all those who have fallen while trying to aid the Syrian people and get their story out to the world. We particularly regret the tragic loss of two American journalists, Anthony Shadid and Marie Colvin, the latter of whom gave her life to report on the horrors being perpetrated against the Syrian people.

As an immediate response to the urgent need for humanitarian assistance, the United States is providing $10 million to quickly scale up humanitarian efforts, including support for displaced Syrians in Syria and in neighboring countries. These funds will help support emergency health activities, and get clean water, food, blankets, heaters, and hygiene kits to Syrian civilians in need. We will provide more humanitarian support in the days ahead. Trusted humanitarian organizations have prepositioned humanitarian supplies at hubs in the region, and they are already on the ground poised to distribute this aid as soon as safe access can be arranged. We are engaged in focused diplomatic efforts to secure such access.

As to the second line of action, increasing the pressure on the Assad regime, it is time for more countries to impose sanctions on the regime and its supporters, as the United States, the European Union, and the Arab League have done—freezing assets, boycotting Syrian oil, suspending new investment, imposing travel bans, and reducing diplomatic ties. We welcome the EU's February 27 announcement of sanctions against the Syrian Central Bank, and we call on those states that are supplying weapons that the regime can use to kill civilians to halt immediately. For nations that have already imposed sanctions, we must work with these partners to help them enforce their sanctions vigorously and prevent the Syrian regime from evading those sanctions. The United States, through the Syria Accountability Act and a robust set of Executive orders issued by President Obama, already has a comprehensive toolkit of sanctions, which are being applied against the regime. We will continue to ratchet up the pressure on key groups and individuals by methodically and deliberately rolling out designations of additional individuals and entities, especially against those implicated in human rights violations, and preventing the Syrian regime from turning to other financial centers to conduct its activity.

The United States, along with other countries around the world, has clearly stated that there must be an appropriate mechanism for accountability for those responsible for atrocities perpetrated in Syria. Noting that "the Syrian people want justice, but what they want first and foremost is an end to the bloodshed," the Syrian National Council has called for the formation of a Truth and Reconciliation Committee. We strongly support the spirit of Senate Resolution 379, which condemns the regime's violent abuses of the Syrian people and urges the international community to review legal processes available to hold regime officials accountable.

There should be no doubt that Assad's rule is unsustainable. It is being carried forward, for the time being, by the regime's strategy of unleashing brutality against civilians and stoking fears among Syria's various communities. Citizens inside and outside Syria have already begun planning for a democratic transition, from the leaders of the SNC to the grassroots Local Coordinating Committees and Revolutionary Councils across the country, which are organizing under the most dangerous and difficult circumstances. Supporting this process should be our third line of action.

We have seen the SNC leadership articulate a compelling vision of the path Syria must take, in line with the Arab League's January 22 plan that makes clear its intention to remove the regime while preserving the Syrian state and its institutions. As SNC President Burhan Ghalioun said in Tunis on February 24,

- A national unity transitional government will be formed to include leaders from the internal and external opposition and political, military, and technocratic figures from the government who have no complicity in crimes against the Syrian people.
- The transitional government will oversee the organization of elections for a Constituent Assembly, which will draft a new constitution based on parliamentary, pluralistic, and democratic rule to ensure a civil state in Syria.
- It will draft a political party law and a new election law and oversee the holding of parliamentary and Presidential elections to be held within a period to be defined (12 to 18 months).
- State institutions, including both civil administration and the armed forces, will be maintained but will undergo changes to make them more transparent, accountable, and effective.

Assad is tearing the fabric of Syrian society apart and seeking to pit community against community. To repair that damage and build a sustainable democracy, all Syrians will have to work together—Alawis and Christians, Sunnis and Druze, Arabs and Kurds—to ensure that the new Syria is governed by the rule of law and respects and protects the universal rights of every citizen, regardless of ethnicity, beliefs, religion, or gender.

But as SNC President Burhan Ghalioun said in Tunis,

> What is happening today in Syria has nothing to do with a conflict between a minority and a majority. Those who are guilty of violating people's honor and trampling on their rights, who kill their fellow countrymen and steal from them, have no religion or ethics, and are not of us. They have no humanity. And so I say to my fearful Alawite compatriots: You are my brothers and sisters, and your unique role in rebuilding the new Syria cannot be undertaken by anyone else, because it is a right you have earned through your historic struggle for Syria. No one has the right to hold you responsible for crimes committed by the Assad-Makhlouf mafia. You are not responsible for the actions of corrupt dictators. I say to my Christian brothers and sisters: Many of you left your historic Syria in the past in search of freedom and better opportunities. When you left, a dearly held part of Syria died. The new Syria is no longer merely a dream—it is within our reach, and we will work together to ensure that each Christian who needed to leave can return to the land of his or her forefathers. [To Syrian Kurds:] The new Syria will have a decentralized government. Your identity will be nationally recognized and respected and your rights as citizens will be assured. [Post-Assad Syria] will be a homeland for all its equal citizens, a democratic civil state based on the rule of law and civil liberties in which our citizenship transcends any social, ethnic, or sectarian faction.

We view the Syrian National Council as a leading and legitimate representative of Syrians seeking peaceful democratic change and as an effective representative for the Syrian people with governments and international organizations. The SNC has articulated a plan for the future, starting with an effective transition. Although the SNC still has weaknesses to remedy, it is by far the broadest, most inclusive, and most internationally visible of all the opposition groups. It is a necessary represent-

ative of the Syrian opposition to governments and international organizations. We will continue to work with the SNC and other nonviolent opposition groups and activists to help them build capacity and improve their communications. We urge the full range of opposition groups and individuals in Syria, including representatives of all ethnic and religious minorities, to come together around the SNC's vision for a peaceful and orderly transition. Only a genuine transition to democracy will solve this crisis.

The United States and the other members of the Friends of the Syrian People Group are sending a strong message that the world will not tolerate the replacement of one form of tyranny with another. We will resolutely oppose acts of vengeance and retribution. We will support a managed transition that leads to a new Syria where the rights of every citizen are respected and protected.

While we regret that it has been necessary to suspend operations at our Embassy in Damascus for security reasons, Ambassador Ford remains our Ambassador to Syria and its people, and our outreach to the Syrian people continues. Ambassador Ford is now leading our Syria team in Washington. We will continue to vigorously support the opposition and help it to build support among key groups inside and outside Syria. We must help the leaders of Syria's business community, military, and other institutions to recognize that their futures lie with a reformed Syrian state and not with a self-serving criminal regime that has no future.

Inside the country, civilian-led revolutionary councils are becoming increasingly capable and influential. They play a number of key roles in besieged communities including provision of food and medical assistance, coordination of civilian protection, support to families of the fallen and detained, communications support, and basic governance. They are increasingly establishing effective civilian control over disparate armed opposition groups. Beyond supporting the revolution, these councils are filling the gaps left by a corrupt and self-serving government, which augurs well for the emergence of a robust and capable civil society in post-Assad Syria.

All of the prominent opposition groups have dismissed the regime's February 26 referendum on amendments to the Syrian Constitution as a farce. While amending the Syrian Constitution to impose term limits (which would effectively allow Assad to serve two more 7-year terms) and end the Baath Party's monopoly on power may sound positive in principle, the opposition, understandably, has zero confidence that these are anything more than cynical cosmetic changes. Amendments to the constitution mean nothing as long as the regime continues to exhibit a blatant disregard for the rule of law. Moscow's championing of these so-called reforms as a means of addressing the concerns of the Syrian people is ridiculous.

The recent call by Ayman al-Zawahiri for jihad in Syria and the sophisticated al-Qaeda-style car bomb and suicide vest attacks in Damascus and Aleppo are, of course, alarming. However, we assess that al-Qaeda has little political influence in Syria so far, and opposition voices in Syria have already explicitly rejected Zawahiri's statement. This remains essentially an organic, home-grown revolution supported by Syrians seeking a better life and a better future. Extremist elements, and foreign fighters in particular, still appear to have a relatively small role. We will continue to monitor extremist groups closely and work with our partners to disrupt flows of terrorist financing or foreign fighters.

We will constantly evaluate what is happening inside Syria and adjust our approach accordingly. But before we consider additional measures, we should first try to implement fully what we agreed to in Tunis. The revolution in Syria unquestionably reflects many elements that we have seen in other Arab Spring revolutions, but the situation in Syria poses a unique set of challenges. Syria is home to a complex and potentially volatile mix of ethnic and religious communities. Syria sits at the middle of a complex web of relationships with other countries and actors in the region. Whereas military leaders in Tunisia and Egypt made a choice to stand with the people, this has not yet happened in Syria. While there was widespread support in the Security Council and the Arab League for intervention in Libya, no consensus exists regarding Syria.

The United States role has largely been defined in terms of encouraging a peaceful transition by working to isolate the regime diplomatically, strangling its cash flow, and encouraging the opposition to unite around a platform of outreach to Syria's minorities and peaceful, orderly political transition. Moreover we have helped build an international coalition dedicated to these same goals and methods.

We do not want to speculate about what might be warranted in the future. At this point, we do not believe that the further militarization of the situation is the best course. As Secretary Clinton has said, "There is every possibility of a civil war. Outside intervention would not prevent that—it would probably expedite it. As you try to play out every possible scenario, there are a lot of bad ones that we are trying to assess." If the regime fails to accept the terms of political initiative outlined by

the Arab League and end violence against citizens, we do not rule out any options. For now, we assess that a negotiated political solution is still possible and is the best way to end the bloodshed and achieve a peaceful transition to democracy, but as the Secretary said in London last week, "There will be increasingly capable opposition forces. They will, from somewhere, somehow, find the means to defend themselves as well as begin offensive measures."

We regret that there is no simple or quick solution to this crisis. Assad remains focused on killing his own people, and for now, even if we thought it would be helpful to arm the opposition, it remains unclear exactly whom among the disparate and disjointed groups we would be arming or how effective this would be. While we believe the vast majority of those opposing the regime reject terrorism, it is troubling that Hamas and al-Qaeda both claim to support the opposition. Meanwhile, Russia and Iran, while they continue to criticize the rest of the international community for intruding into Syria's internal affairs, are intervening as enablers of the regime's butchery. Clearly we have long, hard work ahead of us.

We are exploring urgently what is desirable and viable in the U.N. Security Council. We have discussed a number of ideas but it is premature to suggest there is any concrete course of action at this time. We continue to believe that it is long past time for the Council to act. The killing we are witnessing requires all countries to redouble their efforts. We must convince the Russian and Chinese Governments that they are currently setting themselves against the aspirations not only of the Syrian people but of the vast majority of the populations of the Middle East.

Meanwhile, earlier this week we participated in an urgent debate at the U.N. Human Rights Council highlighting the ongoing gross violations of human rights and the Syrian Government's refusal to grant access by trusted humanitarian organizations to those Syrians most in need of medical support, food, and shelter. Today in Geneva, the Human Rights Council is expected to adopt an Arab-cosponsored resolution, with strong international support, condemning the regime's human rights violations and calling for a cessation of violence and unimpeded humanitarian access.

We cannot predict exactly how the situation in Syria will unfold. While the military and security forces remain largely cohesive, especially the officer corps, we have seen thousands of desertions from the regular army. The army is under increasing strain from a high operational tempo and the challenges it confronts in dealing with local populations in the areas it is ordered to occupy. There is growing evidence that some of the officials in the Syrian Government are beginning to hedge their bets—moving assets, moving family members, looking for a possible exit strategy. We see a lot of developments that we think are pointing to pressure on Assad. We hope this pressure will lead him to make the right decision regarding humanitarian assistance and, ultimately, lead him to cede power voluntarily. But in the event that he continues to refuse, the pressure will continue to build, and sometime in the coming months there will be a breaking point. One way or another, this regime will meet its end, the sooner the better so that more lives can be saved.

We want the Syrian people who are suffering so terribly to know that the international community has not underestimated either their suffering or their impatience, and we are moving in a resolute but deliberate manner. We also want those Syrians who are still uncertain about what would come after Assad to understand that we appreciate their concerns and fears, but a political transition that respects the rights of every Syrian and puts in place a democratic process will be, by far, the best outcome for them and their children. Along with the Syrian opposition, the Arab League, and the other Friends of the Syrian People, we will continue to reinforce this message.

As President Obama said, "The Syrian regime's policy of maintaining power by terrorizing its people only indicates its inherent weakness and inevitable collapse. Assad has no right to lead Syria and has lost all legitimacy with his people and the international community." No one should minimize the challenges Syrians will face after Assad, but the alternative is in no one's interests. Each day of repression and violence will make it more difficult for Syrians to reconcile, rebuild, and chart the new future that they deserve. The continued crackdown by the regime also increases the risk of sectarian conflict and chaos in the heart of the Middle East. We are redoubling our efforts, with our allies and friends, to relentlessly pursue these three tracks of delivering humanitarian relief, increasing pressure on the regime, and supporting democratic transition. We will continue to adjust our tools and tactics as necessary, to expedite the end of the Assad regime, so the Syrian people, with the support of the international community, are able to lead their country on a path to a more just, democratic, and prosperous future that supports stability and security in the region. When the regime meets its inevitable end via a peaceful, orderly tran-

sition or otherwise, the United States will be there to help Syrians reconcile, rebuild, and chart the new future that they deserve.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary. We appreciate that.

Ambassador Ford. Maybe you should not say anything. Just stop. [Laughter.]

STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT FORD, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ambassador FORD. Senator, Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member Lugar, Senators Casey, Cardin, Corker, thank you very much for this invitation to come and speak to the committee about Syria today.

I do not want to do a long opening statement because I am hoping we can open discussion about Syria, but I would just like to say how much I appreciate this committee's support during my time in Damascus. Several times we got messages from members of the committee staff asking how we were doing and how my team was doing. I would just like to say that the team really appreciated those messages, especially during some of the tenser moments. It meant a great deal. I had a terrific team in Damascus, and I really would like just to thank this committee for your support for our efforts.

Beyond that, I think the statement that Ambassador Feltman made is quite good and I will stop there.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador. That does give us an opportunity to get a good dialogue, and we certainly appreciate it.

Let me begin by asking both of you if you would share with us your perceptions of the state of the Assad regime itself right now. Are there any fissures? There have been some defections, not at the highest level, obviously. There have been some executions, we understand, of various military figures, maybe some others, as a deterrent to any plots or defection. What is your judgment about the current fragility, if it is indeed that at all, of an Alawite family enterprise that has a lot to lose, obviously?

Ambassador FELTMAN. A couple of things I would say on that, Senator.

First, the Assad regime is under greater stress now, I think, than it was even 2 or 3 months ago. This is in part because the military is more challenged. There has been a steady stream of desertions. The military has so far retained its cohesion. The security services have retained their cohesion, but they are under significantly more stress now in the first quarter of 2012 than they were, say, even as recently as 3 or 4 months ago.

Within the ruling circle, if I may call it that, I think there is greater concern. They are aware that the business community, for example, is very unhappy. They have changed several times on a dime some of their economic policies to try to placate an increasingly unhappy business community which is suffering because of the sanctions that we have imposed, that Europe and now Arab countries have imposed. They are, I think, also concerned about

their support on the street. So in general, I think they understand that this is the biggest challenge during the 40 years of the Assad-Makhlouf family's domination.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Secretary, do you want to add anything? You do not have to. Do not feel compelled.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Just to refer back to that tipping point, the breaking point that I talked about in my opening statement, because part of the region's and international community's calculation is to appeal to, as you talked about, Senator, those people who have not yet made up their minds to side with change but who do not like the direction in which Assad is taking them. So a lot of what you see coming out of meetings like the one in Tunis are ways to appeal to the broader Syrian population, as well as specifically targeting some members of the military and the business community, to try to move them toward change. A very important part of getting to that tipping point is getting more and more people on the side of change.

The CHAIRMAN. Today's—I cannot remember which, whether it was the Post or the Times, but there was a photograph of the Kuwaiti Parliament having a vigorous debate and ultimately deciding to condemn the violence. There seems to be a somewhat surprising, unique if you will, movement in the GCC and among a number of Arab countries to really taking unprecedented—the Arab League taking unprecedented steps here. Could you speak to that and to what the potential is that within the Arab world itself here what the reactions may be, and therefore what potential there is for that to have an impact on the outcome?

Ambassador FELTMAN. I think the Arab leadership on the issue of Syria has been remarkable. As I said in my opening statement, we are backing the Arab League's own transition plan. Syria sees itself as a major country in the Arab League. The Syrians call themselves the beating heart of the Arab world, and suddenly the Arab League has essentially suspended Syria's membership in the Arab League. This is not a North African country like Libya that is a little bit out of the Arab mainstream. It is significant what the Arabs are doing.

Now, why is this happening? I think in part this is happening because of the Arab Spring. If you look at opinion poll after opinion poll, Bashar al-Assad is at the bottom of the list of popularity among Arab leaders. He has no credibility across the Arab world, and I think Arab leaders want to show their own populations that they get it, that they understand that they need to be in tune with Arab popular opinion.

Without question, part of this has to do with the competition with Iran. People know that Bashar al-Assad has made Syria a proxy for Iran, a subservient partner to Iran, so part of this from the GCC is competition with Iran.

But I would not underestimate the impact of the Arab Spring even on those Arab countries that are not going through transition. I believe that Arab leaders recognize that they cannot be on the complete opposite side of their public opinion, that the Kuwaitis, for example, would have seen this debate in the Kuwaiti Parliament yesterday.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Secretary, based particularly on your experience in Lebanon and the region, share with us your perceptions of the risks of the ethnosectarian violence that could follow, I mean, if there is a total explosion or implosion, however you want to phrase it.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Well, without question, the minorities in Syria look at Lebanon or more recently Iraq and they look at that with fear. And I think we all understand their fear, and I defer to Ambassador Ford to talk about the calculations inside Syria. But I think we all understand that fear. And so part of our challenge and particularly the challenge of the Syrian opposition is to disprove Bashar al-Assad's theory. It is his theory that says look at Lebanon, look at Iraq. That is where we are headed if you do not back me. And there is a real responsibility on the part of the Syrian National Council, the broader opposition groups, to show by word and by deed that that is, in fact, not where they have to go.

The CHAIRMAN. What are the dynamics, if you would, between the Syrian National Council and the Free Syrian Army and the internal local groups, Mr. Ambassador?

Ambassador FORD. Mr. Chairman, a couple of things I would say on that. The two organizations are separate. There is not a hierarchy between them. The Syrian National Council has its own executive body and then a broader general assembly.

The Free Syrian Army, as best we understand, has its own leadership hierarchy. They are not organically linked. However, they certainly do talk to each other, and on the ground in Syria, local revolution councils are being set up now. If you watch, for example, Al Jazeera television, you will often see the spokesman for the Revolution Council in Homs talking about the atrocities that are going on there. It is a young man, a very brave man, named Abu Salah, who literally will go through the streets. It was he that broke the news about Marie Colvin's death, for example. People like Abu Salah talk to the Free Syrian Army but he is not Free Syrian Army.

And so you mentioned in your statement, as did Senator Lugar, about the divisions within the Syrian opposition and there are different organizations. It makes it a little more complex. So they talk to each other. Sometimes they coordinate, but they are not organically linked.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Lugar.

Senator LUGAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to take up a point that you made, Secretary Feltman, about the European Union's embargo of Syrian oil exports and the success this initiative has yielded in terms of bottling up a high percentage of the government's income. Both this measure and other sanctions, including our own, against Syria have caused what seems to be, in normal terms, an economic depression in the country. This is likely to grow further.

Are you aware of how much food is currently produced in Syria and what food supplies are available to the people of the country? We understand a drought has occurred this year. This was a critical factor clearly in Egypt. Even while things were going on in Tahrir Square, food subsidies had ceased and those in the country-

side were not eating very well. This was a cause of considerable unrest.

But even if there were these problems with the business community or with the moneys for the Assad regime, it would appear still, at least from press accounts, to the outside observer that the Alawites, who are certainly a minority at 10 or 11 percent of the population may face an existential problem. Now, not all of the Alawites may be in favor of Assad, but there is, I think, general fear that their fate is likely to be very, very grim. As a matter of fact, there is not likely to be, as you called for, protection of minority rights.

But I was interested in your prediction of a more accelerated turnover of the regime than most are predicting. Most press accounts that I have seen from various scholars indicate that the Assad regime might remain in power for several years rather than months, and that the lack of cohesion among the opposition could increase rather than diminish as more independent opposition groups enter the force.

Can you comment generally on the critical problems of the present, including the economic depression and maybe dire food shortages that lead to general unrest, quite apart from the lack of cohesion among the opposition? Further, can we reasonably anticipate in any period within, say the next 3 to 5 years, that there can conceivably be a transition to a government that is even tenuously democratic and compliant with international norms? The general prediction that I see among observers of this situation is that Assad might go, but the chaos that would ensue would be horrible with regard to the killing of people and the general melee. It is not a question then of choosing sides. It is a question of containing the disaster that has been created by the lack of authority.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Senator Lugar, the dangers you point out are real. The opposition leadership recognizes those dangers. It is one of the reasons why I said our policies to try to accelerate the arrival of that tipping point—I do not know when the tipping point is going to come, and I would not even venture a guess. But I hope I did not make it sound as if it is coming tomorrow. I wish it were, but we do not have any magic bullets to make it come tomorrow. The longer this goes on, the deeper the sectarian divisions, the higher the risks of long-term sectarian conflict, the higher the risk of extremism. So we want to see this happen earlier.

But the risks that you point out are recognized by the opposition, and despite all of the divisions that Ambassador Ford knows better than I do between the government and the opposition, the leadership of these various groups do seem to have a common goal. They do seem to have a common understanding of the importance of the fabric of Syrian society, the importance of preserving that fabric.

I was in Tunis with Secretary Clinton and listened to a very inspiring address by the head of the Syrian National Council, Berhan Ghalioun. He appealed directly to the Christians in Syria. He appealed directly to the Alawites as well, but to the Syrians he said something—I will not get the quote exactly right, but he said something like many of you have left over the years. Many of you have felt the need to leave over the years, and when you leave, part of Syria dies. And we want a Syria where you can all come home.

Again, it is not an exact quote but I am trying to convey the sentiment of that.

So I think there is something to work with with the opposition leadership, which is an understanding that what is special about Syria is that rich mosaic of communities, religions, ethnicity, and people want to preserve that.

Now, the Alawites are scared. You are absolutely right, and Ambassador Ford would know more about that than I do.

On the economic side of things, the Syrian business community, as I understand, is a very—it is a Levantine—they are Levantine traders. They have worked for decades, if not centuries, on commerce across the Middle East, connections to Europe and beyond. This is one of those communities that needs to understand, in our view, that its future is better assured under a different type of system than is there now. And one of the things that came out of the Tunis meeting was a discussion—a commitment by the Friends of Syria to set up a working group to talk about reconstruction of Syria afterward in ways that the business community could see. We are talking practically about the trade relations, the investment relations, the financial connections that Syria can have after Assad in a better system.

Right now, the sanctions that are being imposed on Syria by Turkey, by the Arab world, by Europe, by the United States have cut-outs for humanitarian supplies, including food and medicine. Those do not fall in general under any of these sanctions. However, food prices are rising, without question. And with 30 percent of the population of Syria under the poverty line before this started, without question, there must be hardship for people inside Syria because of the sanctions. But we are doing cut-outs for food and medicine. We are making sure that we have supplies prepositioned in Syria and nearby to reach vulnerable populations. Part of the assistance that the Secretary announced in Tunis on February 24 was to make sure that we had the money to pay for known partners who are used to dealing in conflict situations to be able to get humanitarian supplies into vulnerable populations.

Senator LUGAR. I thank you very much.

Do you have a comment, Ambassador, on that?

Ambassador FORD. If I might, Senator, let me address three issues real quick. First the economic situation that you asked about, and then I would like to make two points on the political side.

First, with respect to the economy, it is in a sharp downward spiral, a very sharp downward spiral. The exchange rate, for example, has depreciated almost 50 percent in less than a year, really in a space of about 7 months. That has driven prices up in the local markets; for example, in Damascus where we monitor prices, food prices went up something like 30 percent between December and the beginning of February. It was a very sharp rise. What that is doing in Syria is causing consumers to contract their purchases, and that is aggravating the downward spiral. It is one of the reasons the business community is so upset.

In that sense, the sanctions that we have imposed have had a real impact. We have tried, as best we can, Senator, to target our sanctions so that they do not hurt the Syrian people. We have tar-

geted government revenues, for example, in order to make it harder for the government to pay for its repression, to pay for its military and security forces. But we have never tried to block supplies of, for example, heating oil or cooking gas that would go into Syria. But there are terrible shortages of these things. When I went back in December, after being in the United States last fall, the stories I heard from people told of their fear of the repression and being arrested, but the next thing out of their mouths was that there is no cooking gas. There is no heating oil. And Damascus is surprisingly cold in the winter. It snows.

So the economy is hurting. The food supplies are available, as Ambassador Feltman said, but people are reducing their consumption, generally because of prices.

With respect to the political side of this, Senator, two points I think really must be made. First, the Assad regime in its darkest moments will try to paint this as a fight against Sunni, Arab, Islamist extremists; they are trying to frighten minority communities, especially considering that these minority communities looked at what happened in Lebanon and Iraq. They are very afraid.

I think it is important for Americans to understand that this is not about Alawis versus a Sunni Arab majority. Lots and lots of Alawis suffer just as much repression, just as much brutality as do their neighbors down the road in Sunni Arab neighborhoods. It is important, for example, that one of the leading activists on the ground inside Syria right now—and she is in hiding and she moves around from place to place and then will pop up at demonstrations—she is an Alawi, a young woman Alawi, movie actress, very well known, and she is very brave. I mean, the government has tried to arrest her many times. So she circulates around. She is an Alawi and people know that. This is not Alawi versus Sunnis. This is about a family that happens to be Alawi that has dominated the country and stripped it for 40 years. Alawis are suffering too.″

We have constantly urged in our discussions with the Syrian opposition in the country and outside the country to underline to the Alawi communities and all of the communities in Syria, whether they be Christians or business people, Druze, Kurds—it is a very complex social make-up—that all people in Syria would be treated equally, that all people's basic human rights would be respected and that it would be a Syria where all different communities would be able to live in harmony. We underline that message every time we meet the opposition.

The opposition, as you have noted, is divided, and I think it is probably a reach to think they are going to unify anytime soon into one single organization. I do not think that is going to happen.

My question is a little different. Can they unite around a vision? And I described and Ambassador Feltman has described our vision and our suggestions. Can they unite around a vision and can they unite around a transition plan? They do not have to unite into one single party, but they do need to share a vision and they do need to share an agreement on the way forward. And that is also what we are counseling them. We are not writing their transition plan. That is not our role. They need to do it. Syrians need to do it. But they do need to come together behind a plan.

Senator LUGAR. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

I need to ask you—hopefully we can stay. We have a lot of Senators and I want everybody to have a chance to be able to get questions. So we need to try to hang in on the time.

Senator Menendez.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, can you talk to us about what measures are being taken to encourage the Russians and the Chinese to remove their objection to action in the Security Council? And in that regard, as you answer that, is State consulting with Treasury on the possibility of designating and imposing sanctions under Executive Order 13572 on Russian and Chinese entities selling weapons to Assad? Because there are a lot of media reports stating that Russian state arms dealers are continuing to supply the Assad regime with arms. At least four cargo ships have left a Russian port for the Syrian port of Tartus since December of this past year carrying ammunition, sniper rifles, and a host of other armaments. Can you give us a sense of both what is being done at the Security Council to move them from their present intransigence toward Security Council action and whether we are considering, in the face of this weapon flow, actions under the Executive order?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Senator, thanks for the question. You put your finger on a key element of any way forward in Syria, which is what is the role of Russia.

I have to admit from the outset that I am not a Russia expert. You know, I defer to my bosses and my colleagues in the European Bureau to talk about Russian motives and things. But I want to assure you that sort of the contact with Russia at all levels is continuing.

Russia has had interest and influence in Syria for a long time, and it seems to us that Russia is not going to preserve those interests that Russia deems to be important if it basically rides the Assad-Makhlouf Titanic all the way to the bottom of the Mediterranean. This is not a very wise move for the Russians to preserve their interests.

I went out with a colleague, Fred Hoff, to Moscow a couple of weeks ago at the request of the Secretary to actually have a pretty deep discussion with the Russians about how we see the way forward in Syria, how we see the inevitable demise of Assad. And I felt that there was a lot of discomfort in Russia about where they are. Their analysis is not all that different from ours about how unsustainable the situation is for Bashar al-Assad inside Syria.

But so far we have been disappointed. I can use stronger language about Russia's action. Even today, for example, when the Human Rights Council in Geneva passed a resolution condemning what is happening in Syria, the vote was 39 to 3. Who were those three? China, Russia, and Cuba who voted against the resolution simply on human rights grounds.

We think it is time for the Security Council to act. We think it is past time for the Security Council to act. This is the type of situation in Syria that deserves Security Council action. So we are still in discussion with the Russians in an attempt to persuade them

that they can be part of a solution. They can use their influence inside Syria to be part of a solution rather than continue to block.

The question of arms that you raise is a deeply disturbing one. Why are the Russians, who condemn foreign interference in Syria, being the ones, along with the Iranians, to actually continue to be shipping arms in Syria. But I think that for much of this, Senator, we should probably have a discussion with colleagues from other agencies in a different setting.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, I am happy to have that. I just want the administration to be thinking about what happens if we cannot get our Russian and Chinese counterparts to understand—they seem to be doubling down. At least Russia seems to be doubling down. You say they seem to reach the same analysis that the final result will be that Assad would not stand. But, however, their flow of armament almost seems to be doubling down, as well as their intransigence in the Security Council. So at some point, that Executive order, if it is to have meaning, needs to be enforced, and I certainly hope that at a minimum we would do that because stopping the flow of armaments to Assad is incredibly important.

Let me ask you one other question. What is the possibility of this situation devolving into a civil war, and if it does, what concerns do you have for the political and economic implications of a Syrian civil war on Syria's neighbors, specifically on Lebanon and Jordan, which will undoubtedly receive thousands of Syrian refugees?

Ambassador FELTMAN. There has already been a spillover in the neighboring countries as Syrians fleeing the violence go to neighboring countries to look for refuge. You have families in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, Iraq that have taken in Syrian friends and relatives. This is already an impact. In Lebanon, there have been people killed across the border by Syrian forces firing across the border. There have been violations of Lebanese sovereignty by Syrian forces crossing the Lebanese border. So there is already a spillover effect, Senator, which is deplorable. And we salute those families in those countries that are hosting Syrians outside their borders. Part of what we are trying to do is to provide assistance to those host families and governments.

As Ambassador Ford said, Bashar al-Assad wants his people, wants the world to believe that if it is not for him, there is going to be a civil war. So part of this is the Bashar al-Assad propaganda machine to frighten people into believing they have no alternative but to stick with him or they end up in civil war. So part of what the region is trying to do, the opposition is trying to do, the international community is trying to do, is to help provide that path to avoid the civil war because all of us do recognize that it is a risk.

But as Ambassador Ford said, more articulately than I can possibly say, it is not a question right now of Alawites versus Sunnis. It is a question of the Assad-Makhlouf mafia that has basically hijacked the entire state of Syria for four decades in order to enrich itself and protect itself against the Syrian people. That is what is happening right now.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator CASEY [presiding]. Senator Risch.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Senator Casey.

Ambassador Ford, first of all, thank you for your service, and I applaud your statement of what our policy is and your conveying that to the opposition and what they need to do and how they think about this.

Having said that, in looking at what is happening on the ground over there, your statement about it being a complex society I think is an understatement, but I understand. You know, you have the Druze and the Kurds and the Sunnis and the Alawites and about a dozen other even smaller groups.

The difficulty I have is how—I understand what you are telling them they need to do where everybody is welcome, everybody is going to be equal, and what have you. They do not have much of a history of that, and our culture has trouble thinking along those lines because they are so segregated. I mean, they are not like we are where we amalgamate into one society. I mean, they are very, very segregated. They marry within their groups. They stay within their groups. They socialize, do business within their groups. So saying that, well, you know, when Assad goes—and I believe he will go—they are all going to get together and do this and particularly looking at their organization right now, I am pretty pessimistic about that. So I hear what you are saying and I think it is a good position to take, but from a purely pragmatic standpoint, could you maybe analyze your own analysis of it from that standpoint?

Ambassador FORD. Senator Risch, it is a very fair question. It is a very fair question.

It is the sad truth that not only in Syria, but in many countries in that region, there is no history of rule of law and respect for human rights. I mean, that is just the historical reality.

What I would say is just a couple of things on this.

One of the things that I have learned from the Arab Spring, which is really unprecedented in my 30 years working in the region going back to when I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Morocco in 1980, what we have seen in the last year is unprecedented. One of the things that I have learned is there is a new generation coming up, and this generation is very plugged into the Internet and it is very plugged into satellite television. They know much more about how to upload different kinds of videos. I mean, I had never watched YouTube until I went out as Ambassador to Syria. Now I watch it every day.

Senator RISCH. Do not want to know what you watch.

Ambassador FORD. We will not go there, Senator.

But what I would say is there is no history, but the people there that are leading the protest movement have a vision. They have a vision. And I heard this very strongly when I went to Hama and I heard this very strongly when I visited some of the restive suburbs around Damascus and when I went to Jassim. I heard this very strongly. They want a country where people are treated with dignity, everybody treated with dignity. And that is the key word, Senator, "dignity." And they have a vision of a country ruled by law. My own experience having served in Iraq for 4½ years is this is a very hard thing to do, and it takes time. I saw the same thing in Algeria as well when I served there.

But there is change coming and values and norms are changing because they are more plugged into the rest of the planet than they used to be. And Syrians are actually surprisingly plugged into the Mediterranean, for example. That was one of the things when I went out there.

Senator RISCH. That is an interesting observation. The question I would have is, does that spill over to their cultural hard-wiring that they have, if you would? Obviously, they were raised by parents in a society that protected them from the other minorities or other sects in the country. Is that breaking down at all? Do you see that at all? Are they intermarrying? I guess that would be probably the most telltale sign of that.

Ambassador FORD. In Damascus, there are many mixed marriages—many, many—and in other parts of the country as well. In fact, one of the things, if we had Syrians sitting at this table instead of me, they would say to you, Senator, but we have always lived together peacefully and we have never had these problems. We are not like Iraq. We are different.

I think one of the things that the political opposition needs to do—and we told them this repeatedly—is they need to address the fears directly and not simply fall back on the argument that Syrians historically have lived together peacefully between communities and therefore there is no problem. There is a problem. There is a problem and they need to address it.

I think the younger people do understand that fear. In the demonstrations every Friday where they have the big ones, the really big ones, there frequently are banners. This is watching it on YouTube that say Ash Shawb as Suri wahi, which is Arabic meaning the Syrian people are one. And what they are trying to express there is no sectarian divisions. Do not let the Assad regime play one community off against the other, which is very much what the regime ultimately is trying to do.

There are signs all over Damascus that the government put up saying beware of sectarian strife. Well, the opposition is saying the people are unified against you. It is the government that is even raising the issue in the first place.

Senator RISCH. Thank you, Ambassador Ford. I appreciate your optimism on the subject. I hope you are right.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator CASEY. Senator Cardin.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, Ambassador Ford, thank you very much for your heroic service. We watched what you were doing in Syria and I know the international community was also, and it was a bright moment, I think, for United States leadership. So we thank you very much for that.

Secretary Feltman, I think we all agree that there will be a tipping point that the Assad regime will not survive. The challenge, though, is that until that happens, the humanitarian disasters will only get worse. So how many people are going to lose their lives or their lives will be changed forever until that tipping point is reached is a matter of grave interest to all of us.

You point out that there is a growing unity in the region, in the Arab world, which would, I think, point out that our options may

be stronger than we think. We may have more opportunities to try to save lives. I am very mindful of Senator Lugar's cautionary notes, and we all share that.

But I guess my point is what can we do? What can the United States do in leadership to minimize the sufferings that are taking place and will take place until the Assad regime is removed? What can we do working with our international partners to provide the best opportunity for the safety of the civilian population in Syria during this period of time?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Senator, thank you. This is a question we are talking about all the time. What can we do either ourselves as Americans, but more importantly, what can we do together with our partners in the region and beyond? And the "what we can do together" question, I think, is the more important one particularly because frankly our influence in Syria is much less than the influence of some of our neighbors. Our economic ties with Syria before all this started were extremely limited compared to the economic ties between Syria and Europe, Syria and Turkey, Syria and the Arab world.

And there was an international consensus that came out of Tunis that we all need to be doing more on the humanitarian side working with partners who have a history of working in conflict areas that can get things in to vulnerable populations inside Syria, working with the neighbors who are hosting people who have fled Syria. There is a consensus, an international consensus, on that from the region, from the world. That is an important short-term goal is getting things in, making sure warehouses are stocked, supplies are prepositioned.

There was an international consensus as well for increasing the pressure on Assad through a variety of means. We have talked a lot about the sanctions already. But there are always more sanctions that can be done particularly from those countries, as I said, that have had stronger economic ties in order to deprive the regime of its income.

There is a consensus that we all need to be working with the Syrian opposition in all of its forms, and Tunis there was a recognition that the Syrian National Council is a legitimate representative of the voices of the Syrian opposition and we are working with that.

But I think that your question actually hints at something beyond that. I think for more aggressive action, we would need to have a larger international consensus than currently exists.

One thing that we are definitely working on, going back to Senator Menendez's question, is to see what role the Security Council can play because we think it is high time. It is past time for the Security Council to be playing a role. And that too was a consensus that came out of Tunis, that people and countries and institutions represented there want to see an end to the blockage by Russia and China of the Security Council taking action.

Senator CARDIN. You are right. I was trying to probe as to what more we could do. I agree with you. You need international unity, and the Security Council is where we normally start that. It is not the exclusive area. It is not the determinative area, but it is certainly one which would give us a stronger footing. Having the Arab

League is clearly important. So I would hope that we would work together exploring options to be more aggressive, where we can effectively in unity with the international community.

You mentioned another point that I found very interesting and that is the popularity of the Assad regime being at the low point. And I would expect that Hamas recognized that when it pulled out of Damascus, which is presenting, I think, a real challenge for us, a terrorist organization that we clearly are very concerned about their influence in that region. It looks like they are taking further steps to become more popular among the Arab population and countries.

Can either one of you give us an update on Hamas and its movement and how we are going to counter some of their issues and its relationship not just with Syria, but also with Iran and with other countries in that region?

Ambassador FELTMAN. I mean, I think it says something when you have a terrorist organization that has been coddled for years, decades, by the Assad regime basically pulling out saying that they cannot even stand what the Assad regime is doing. But you are exactly right. It gets at the popularity question.

If you look at Zogby polls, you know, Zogby has a long history, credible history of doing polls in the Arab world. A couple of years ago, there was a question posed to Arabs. Who is the most popular Arab leader outside of your own country's leader, since everyone would have to say my own leader is the best? At least a couple of years ago, they would have said that. And Bashar al-Assad was the most popular leader outside of whatever the home country is. If you look at the same polls today, the same questions in the same places, he is at the bottom of the list. That is not lost on even terrorist organizations like Hamas.

But this does not change our calculus on Hamas. Our demands on Hamas are the Quartet demands on Hamas which is, you know, Hamas, to be accepted as a responsible player, needs to accept the Quartet conditions of recognition of Israel, renunciation of violence, and adherence to all the agreements that have been signed between the PLO and Israel. So it is interesting and telling that even Hamas cannot stomach what Bashar is doing to his people, but it does not change our calculation.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator CASEY. Senator Rubio.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you both for being here today. And, Ambassador Ford, thank you. I know everyone is telling you that, but thank you for your service. It is one thing to sit here and talk about these things. It is another thing to be there and be the target of some of some pretty vicious stuff. So thank you for your service to our country and for this cause.

A quick question before I want to get to the bigger one. I read in Bloomberg Business this week that the head of the Venezuela national oil company said that the company is not prohibited from shipping oil to Syria under current sanctions. I do not know if that is correct or not. We will just follow up with you and see if that is the case under the current system.

Ambassador FELTMAN. It is technically correct that they are not prohibited from shipping oil to Syria. It is still morally wrong to be providing diesel that can be used in military machines that slaughter innocent Syrians. So it is morally wrong, but it is not legally wrong.

But it also is not the same as what Syria had before November, which is the ability to export its own oil, earn its own revenues to put in the pockets of Bashar to do with as he wants.

Senator RUBIO. And that is a conversation for another day. But one of the things we can talk about is how can we reduce third-party support for the Assad regime, and this just brought that to light.

But what I really want to focus on is more of the U.S. national interests. What I want to do is kind of posit a view of it to you and see what you both think about it. We look at something in a country that for many, many years has been kind of a transit point and haven for terrorists. Especially Damascus has been kind of the hub of all that, in addition, a state sponsor of terrorists themselves and a key ally of our biggest problem in the region, not just for us but for the world—Iran. Now, the people there say we want to get rid of the guy that runs this place, and obviously there is a lot of internal divisions. We have talked about the complexities of all of that.

But in the midst of all this, it seems to me that as much as anything else—and clearly this is about regime change. This is clearly about a change of direction for the country. But from our strategic point of view, it is also a competition for future influence; in essence, who is going to influence the direction that Syria goes in the future? Islamists, al-Qaeda, and others see that. They see this chaos and they say we can go in there and take advantage of this chaos to our advantage, create an even better place for us to operate in. And on the other hand, nations like ours see this potentially as an opportunity to go in and influence the Syrian people to embrace what you, Ambassador, have said what you think is their widespread sentiment, which is rule of law, a functioning democracy, a country that decides they want security, that they do not want to be a haven for terrorism. They just want to be normal people living in a normal country with normal and everyday aspirations.

And so as much as anything else, our involvement, I think, is about what influence our view of the world, which we think is better for the Syrian people, could ultimately play in that country. And my guess is, having only been on this committee for a year, having traveled, for example, to Libya in the aftermath of what happened to Libya—I know there are big differences between Libya and Syria, as the Secretary pointed out a couple of days ago.

But one of the things I was struck by, as you drove through the streets of Libya, is pro-American graffiti on the walls, people walking up to us in the street, who I know were not staged, to thank us for the role America played, even though some of us wanted us to even do some more in that regard.

And my point is I think it is going to be really hard 5 years from not, not impossible—anything is possible and I am certainly not an expert on the culture, but I think it is going to be really hard for an Islamist to go to one of these young guys who was thanking us,

who thought America was on their side, and convince them to join some sort of anti-American jihad in a couple years. On the other hand, I can tell you they are really angry at the Chinese. They are really upset at some of the countries that turned their back at them.

And I think that is kind of happening here too, I hope, that people in Syria clearly know that the American people, that this Senate, that the people of the United States are on the side of their aspirations. We cannot decide who wins and who is in charge and how they balance all these internal conflicts that they have, but we clearly want them to be able to pursue their peaceful aspirations, and we want them to have a country that prospers. And I think in the national interest of the United States, it is critical that future generations and Syrians in the future say, hey, you know, America was on our side. We do not have a problem with the American people and we want no part of these strange movements that would have us join some anti-American sentiment. And we hope that one day that means they will also be not so anti-Israeli, maybe even pro, although that is wishful thinking. But I think that is what our national interest is here in the big picture.

I know I took longer than I wanted to to explain it, but I wondered if you would agree with that or criticize it or share your thoughts in that regard.

Ambassador FELTMAN. I will make a couple comments and I will let Robert talk about inside Syria.

I mean, first of all, I cannot believe that any of these countries, anyone, is looking to trade one kind of tyranny for another type of tyranny. We do not know for sure how these transitions across the Arab world are going to turn out, but I think it is pretty clear that this quest for dignity means that people are going to guard against going from one tyrant to another type of tyranny. We have also seen that while al-Qaeda has tried to exploit unrest across the region, that that al-Qaeda ideology does not have any appeal for the sorts of young people and protesters across the region that are looking for dignity and opportunity.

In terms of the Syrian people, I will defer to my colleague, Ambassador Ford, but I will give you one example similar to your experience in Libya that he would probably be too modest to raise. But when Ambassador Ford went to Hama, when Hama was being encircled by Syrian tanks, the people of Hama tossed flowers onto his limousine. He got back to Damascus and the regime staged an attack against our Embassy. The people of Syria know exactly where Robert Ford stood in terms of their rights and aspirations, and Robert Ford represented us very ably in showing that is where the American people stood.

Ambassador FORD. Senator, I think it is very telling that in the demonstrations every week in Syria, they burn Russian flags, they burn Chinese flags, they burn Hezbollah flags. That tells you what they think. Frankly, from our strategic interests, that is a good thing, I think, in the sense that we want Syria in the future to not be the malignant actor that it has been supporting terrorist groups and being the cause of a great deal of regional instability. And so I think there is huge potential strategic gain for us as a country with the changes going on in Syria.

But that is not why the Syrians are doing it. That is not why the street protest is doing that. They are doing it because they want dignity. And I think it is very important for us, as we go forward, to keep in mind that the most important thing we can do is keep stressing over and over our support for universal human rights being respected in Syria like other countries: freedom of speech, freedom to march peacefully, the right to form political parties, and to have life under a rule of law, a dignified life. That is what I tried very hard constantly to underline during my time there, just those basic values.

The Syrians can work out their politics, and as Senator Risch said, it is going to be hard. It is going to be really hard. But if we stay on the track of respect for their human rights, we will ultimately be on the side that wins here.

Senator CASEY. Thank you very much. I am next in line and I will try not to use all of my time.

But, Assistant Secretary Feltman, thanks for being here today and for your ongoing public service.

Ambassador Ford, you have heard it before, but it bears repeating. We are grateful for your service in so many assignments but especially under the horrific circumstances you have had to face, and we are grateful you are with us today.

I guess some of us, not being on the ground like you were, have difficulty in imaging or even articulating the scale and the gravity of the violence. It is just hard to even comprehend. Even though we see the television images all the time, I just cannot even imagine what it is like. A number of us have been, frankly, impatient with what Washington has done or not done. I will say both the Senate and other institutions. So we are impatient. We are also frustrated.

This hearing today is one way to advance the development of a body of work that can undergird another resolution. I know we just had a resolution. Frankly, I thought it was very weak. I supported it but it was not nearly enough. So I am glad that we having this hearing to advance the ball.

I wrote down two words here when working with Damian and Chloe on our staff about the formulation of questions, and they are two words that, I think, make sense for what we are trying to do, at least what I hope we could do. One is "solidarity" and one is "commitment," that we need to figure out a way to not just express outrage and not just talk about solidarity, but figure out ways to, in fact, bring about a policy or strategy that will demonstrate, that will prove, in a sense, our solidarity with the Syrian people. That is one priority.

And the other is commitment to a number of things, a number of priorities, but commitment especially to humanitarian and medical assistance. If we are going to say, as I think it is the consensus position, that this should not be a military engagement on our part, if we say that, we better get the other parts right. And the other parts are humanitarian and medical assistance.

So my first question is for Mr. Feltman. I know the Friends of Syria meeting took place and that was very positive. And I know we have a commitment of $10 million to the refugees and the IDPs. But I want to get a better sense of what was agreed to at Tunis

specifically as it relates to humanitarian assistance and what the United States can do to address this horror. So if you can just walk through what is definite in terms of an agreement and what will actually lead to action.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Chairman Casey, thanks.

In Tunis, the discussion on humanitarian issues fell into two categories: first, how do we help those countries around Syria that are hosting Syrians who have fled their country, and that is, frankly, an easier topic. First of all, the countries themselves, the families in those countries have been generous, and it is a question of helping host—there are not large-scale, for the most part, refugee camps. For the most part, people have gone to stay with friends and relatives outside of Syria. And so it is a question of helping those host families getting assistance to what camps there are, and that is a relatively straightforward proposition. You know, on our part, the State Department's Population, Refugee, and Migration Bureau is working in those areas.

But the second question is a much harder one that came up in Tunis, and it comes up internally inside the United States Government, which is access inside Syria. How do you reach the vulnerable populations inside Syria? That is a much, much harder issue. And right now, the problem of humanitarian deliveries in Syria is not supplies. It is not related to money. The international community has sufficient resources, has sufficient commitments. It is a question of access.

Just yesterday, you had Valerie Amos, who is the U.N. Under Secretary, the humanitarian coordinator, who had been waiting in Beirut for days for a Syrian visa to go into Syria. She finally left because it was clear the Syrians were not going to be giving her a visa. And that tells you something, that not only is Bashar killing his people, butchering his people, but he is also trying to prevent the international community from having the right sort of response.

Now, it does not mean we are not responding. Unfortunately, in today's world, there are a lot of conflict situations around the world. There are a lot of partners with whom we have worked in conflict situations around the world already. So you can work with groups, WFP, others. AID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance has a history of being able to work inside conflict areas through trusted partners to make sure that our assistance is going to where it is directed. But it is not easy.

So the big question is access, and it goes back to Senator Menendez's question about the Russians because this is one area where the Russians have expressed a lot of concern as well about the humanitarian situation. And we would like to see that Russian concern that is stated on humanitarian to be translated into the type of pressure on the Assad regime that helps ease these questions of access.

Senator CASEY. Thank you.

Ambassador Ford, anything?

Ambassador FORD. I liked your two words, Senator, "solidarity" and "commitment." And I think especially right now, when people in cities like Homs and Idlib and Zabadani are under siege, I think holding this hearing is terrific and I think the concerns expressed

by bodies like the U.S. Senate are especially important. I would never want Syrians to think that because we closed the American Embassy, we are no longer interested in their efforts there to create a new Syria that treats people with dignity.

And with respect to the commitment that Jeff was talking about, I would just underline that we do need to get access. We have supplies positioned. We just need to get access into the country. And if the Russians would, indeed, translate their expressed policy into actions in terms of pressure on the Syrian Government, we would hope that they would do that now.

Senator CASEY. Thank you very much. My time is up. I will submit some others for the record.

Senator Corker.

Senator CORKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to the other chairman who was here first, I am glad we are having this hearing and I hope we will have multiple hearings on Iran. It feels to me that we are moving into a position where military conflict is going to be weighed, and I cannot imagine why we are not having a hearing on Iran, both classified and unclassified, every single week. But I sure hope in your temporary capacity, we can urge that. I would think all of us would benefit from it.

But we thank both of you for your testimony and for your service to our country.

We had a classified briefing yesterday that could not have been more different than the one we are having today. It is really kind of fascinating.

You know, when we talk about the opposition groups, this part I do not think is classified. I mean, you ask, OK, what are these guys fighting for? The word "democracy" never comes up. I mean, basically you have got an Alawite minority that has dominion over, if you will, a Sunni population mostly, and what the Sunnis are fighting for is dominion over the minority population. I mean, we heard no words whatsoever about anything other than this being a conflict between one group of people that has been oppressed by another group of people and their desire to change that equation.

And so when I hear these flowery statements, I do hope, especially Ambassador Ford, since you have been there, if you could educate us a little bit because this is a night and day presentation from what we had through our intelligence community yesterday.

Ambassador FORD. Senator, the opposition is divided. There is no question about that. And it is fractious, and there are competing visions within the Syrian opposition. There is an Islamist element, for example, as contrasted to a secular element. And that is why I spoke before about the need for the opposition to unify around a vision and the need for the opposition to unify around a transition plan. The transition plan would, in fact, be the way to attract people that have been sitting on the fence so far to join the protest movement itself.

I do not know what you heard in the briefing yesterday, but let me just say from direct, firsthand experience, I have talked to people who have organized the demonstrations, and I have had team members from my embassy talk to them repeatedly. We got a very clear message from them, the people who organized this, Senator,

that they have a vision of a state that abides by rule of law and is not targeting the Alawis.

However, it is a complex society and the longer the violence goes on and the government is driving this violence, perhaps intentionally with this in mind, the greater the risk that the sectarian conflict that we have seen in Homs but really has not been seen to such a degree in other cities—Homs is the worst—that it would spread and metastasize into other cities in Syria.

But let me give you some very concrete examples. There are Druze communities in southern Syria. The Druze community is now more and more saying that they should stop supporting Assad's regime and begin to support the protest movement. There have been calls by leaders in a city called Suwaida, which is south of Damascus, for Druze to stop serving in the Syrian military and to join the protest movement. There have been calls within the Alawi community, including Alawi religious figures, to stop supporting Bashar al-Assad and his regime. I think the expression they used in their communique last autumn was it will be the ruin of us if we continue——

Senator CORKER. If I could, I mean, I appreciate all the background and history. But I think what you are saying is there is no central vision. There are lots of differing visions. And we have diplomatic relations, if I remember correctly, with Syria. Is that correct?

Ambassador FORD. Yes, we do.

Senator CORKER. And I think you went over there to work with this government to put reforms in place. And by the way, there was a controversy over you being there. I very much supported you going and doing that. I thought that was an intelligent thing for us to do. But we have diplomatic relations. We are working on reforms, and they obviously have done some really, really terrible things and are brutal and obviously are not the kind of government we want to see pervasive around the world.

But the fact is that this is not exactly a democracy movement in Syria right now. I mean, there are some people who are espousing that. You are talking about the people who are organizing, but the people fighting, from what I understand, are fighting for power in government. They are not fighting under the banner of democracy, as was laid out by Mr. Feltman, at least by our intelligence community anyway.

Ambassador FORD. Senator, I am going to have to respectfully disagree. The public statements from senior figures in the Free Syrian Army speak about supporting a democratic state. We do not know yet what they would do were they in power. We only have their——

Senator CORKER. Who would be in power, by the way? I mean, I think it is pretty interesting. If Bashar was gone, who would be the person that was leading the country there? I mean, who is it we are supporting, if you will, morally at least?

Ambassador FORD. We are supporting a transition which the Syrian National Council has laid out in connection with a roadmap set out by the Arab League. In a sense they are linked. Out of that would be a process by which a leadership would be chosen. I cannot give you a name. I can define the process for you. But I cannot give

you a name. I think this is an important point, though, Senator. The people who are doing the fighting say they are fighting to defend the protest movement. So there is a link even if you cannot say that the fighters themselves claim they are fighting for democracy.

Senator CORKER. Do you think it is in our national interest—and I will close with this—to be involved in military operations, arming operations to going in with al-Qaeda and Hamas and others and certainly the folks that are on the ground, the opposition groups, to overthrow this government?

Ambassador FORD. Senator, as I said, we have been supporting a plan developed by the Arab States for a political transition. The Secretary spoke earlier this week of some of the discussions that we have had in-house about how complicated this is in terms of thinking about arming people in Syria, arming the opposition, how complicated it is in terms of, A, knowing who is it, exactly, you are giving the arms to and what do they represent. This gets into a little bit of your question of what are they fighting for. How would you deliver it? What good would it do when they are facing tanks and they are facing heavy artillery? These are extremely complex questions, and I think we are not yet at a point where we could discuss it in this kind of forum at least.

Senator CORKER. Listen, thank you, and I appreciate you laying out the tremendous complexities and competing forces and the lack of knowledge of even what this is really all about. And hopefully over time, we will understand that more fully and I am sure you will play a role in that. Thank you.

Senator UDALL [presiding]. Senator Webb.

Senator WEBB. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, gentlemen, I appreciate your being here today. Both of you are a great repository of experience in the region. I appreciate the opportunity to listen to you on a number of areas.

I would like to pick up a little bit on this notion of "afterward," which you mentioned several times today. What exactly is the afterward? What would it potentially be, and what would it potentially not be?

We can look back in fairly recent history and there are a couple of realities I think we ought to be looking at as starting points. One is that repressive regimes sometimes do survive. Probably the best example of that is the Chinese Government itself when it turned its army and its tanks on its own people in Tiananmen Square about 22–23 years ago and, depending on the count, killed more than 1,000 of its own people. And it is still in power. It is more than still in power, we all know.

Another reality is particularly in this part of the world—and both of you have an enormous repository of experience in this part of the world—the outcomes from these types of unrests are rarely quick. They are rarely clean, and they are rarely fully predictable. I have an engineering degree and I look at a lot of what has been happening over the last year sort of through the eyes of the chaos theory. You know, the "chaos theory" actually is a scientific theory. It is not political. It is a political term. But one degree off, one assumption off, you end up with a compilation of results that is far away from where you thought it might be. And perhaps the best,

clear example of that is Lebanon itself, looking back in the 1980s and beyond.

But also, I think we have to say openly that we do not know what is going to come out of the last year. We do not know how the Arab Spring is going to play out. It is going to take years for it to clearly manifest itself in some sort of a political apparatus in a number of these different countries.

There are two questions—I am going to ask them both together in the interest of time here—that I would seek your thoughts on.

The first is that there are actors in this region, government actors, that quite frankly may not be saying this openly but might be very hesitant about the complete removal of the present Syrian regime, that believe that a weakened regime might be more palatable in terms of regional instability, even security in some of these countries than what would result from capitulation. And I think, Ambassador Ford, your answer to Senator Corker kind of shows how difficult the building blocks would be to put together a replacement regime.

And the second is we have talked a lot about Russia, but I would like your thoughts as to why China has declined to be more forthcoming.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Senator, thanks.

You are absolutely right that we do not know how these Arab transitions are going to turn out. And of course, the challenge is that our interests in how they turn out are great, but we have to be modest about how much influence we can play in helping to determine those outcomes. And so you put your finger on a big issue given the transitions going on in the Arab world.

But in terms of the United States, it is not in our interest to see the Bashar al-Assad regime survive. We have, obviously, talked a lot about the moral, the human rights, the ethical questions today, but we have also touched on the strategic questions. This was a regime that exported terror into Iraq that killed our soldiers in Iraq——

Senator WEBB. Trust me. I am not advocating that end result. The question was that there are countries in the region that would be making that point quietly if not openly.

Ambassador FELTMAN. But I think if you look at the Arab League transition plan, when you talk about what happens afterwars, the Arab League transition plan was designed with that fear of chaos and civil war in mind because it was designed in a way by which not Assad himself, but parts of the current system and the opposition movement together work on a pragmatic, practical transition plan that preserves the state's unities, that preserves the state institutions. It is one of the themes that we get repeatedly from Syria's neighbors, as well as from Syrian opposition. The army has to be preserved. The security services need to be preserved. And so I think the people are, in fact, working on a transition plan with the idea that you can preserve the state but a state that is no longer a malignant actor in the region but can be a positive actor in the region.

Senator WEBB. A vote was called and out of respect for my colleagues—I appreciate that observation. Could you give me just a quick thought on the situation with China?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Yes. Neither one of us are great experts on China, having served our careers in the Middle East.

But China tends to follow Russia on the Security Council in many of these cases is what my colleagues in the International Organizations Bureau tell me. And China also has certain trading interests inside Syria. But China also has interests elsewhere in the Arab world, and there is where I think the dialogue with China needs to focus on, which is what China has to lose by losing credibility elsewhere in the Arab world.

Senator WEBB. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator UDALL. Thank you, Senator Webb.

As he said, we had a vote go off at 11:31. So it is a 15-minute vote, but I think we will be able to finish. I just have a few questions to be able to finish up here and release you and adjourn the hearing, unless we have other Senators come in.

There are reports that Saudi Arabia and Qatar may be planning to arm the rebels in Syria or may have already begun to arm the rebels. In addition, it has been reported that religious support for arming the rebels has increased in Saudi Arabia.

What is the position of the United States with regard to the possibility that Saudi Arabia or other Arab countries are arming the rebels and are we communicating what our position is on arming the rebels? And could that lead to the empowerment of Hamas and al- Qaeda as a result?

I realize and I apologize. I was in the chair presiding over the Senate. Some of this may be ground that you have gone over, but if you could answer that, that would be great.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Senator, we have been very hesitant about pouring fuel onto a conflagration that Assad himself has set. So we are very cautious about this whole area of questioning. And that is why we have worked with this international consensus on political tracks, on economic tracks, on diplomatic tracks in order to get to the tipping point that we were talking about earlier.

Now, there is self-defense going on inside Syria right now. We cannot criticize the right to self-defense when people are facing the incredible brutality. But we would like to use the political tools that are at our disposal. That includes the Security Council in order to advance the tipping point because it is not clear to us that arming people right now will either save lives or lead to the demise of the Assad regime. There are a lot of very complicated questions. Robert went through some of them earlier. Right now, the Syrian regime is using tanks and artillery against entire neighborhoods in Homs. I do not think when you hear the Saudis and Qataris talking about arming the opposition, they are talking about somehow getting tanks into the opposition and how would the opposition know how to use them anyway? So it is a really serious question. People are talking about it. People are looking at it. But there are a lot of complications that one needs to consider.

Senator UDALL. Ambassador, if you have any thoughts on that.

Ambassador FORD. I agree exactly with what Ambassador Feltman said.

We understand the earnest desire, the need for people under siege in a place like Homs or in a place like Dana when their homes are being attacked by thugs and people want to take up arms to defend themselves. We understand that. It is human, I mean, to protect your family. We cannot criticize that.

However, Senators Kerry and Lugar both spoke about the need for us to work with regional states to find a durable solution, and that is our thinking too, and that is why we have been so strongly in support of the Arab League initiative and the transition process that it laid out.

If I may just add one other comment, Senator Udall, we too have noticed the increase in support from religious figures in some Arab countries for taking up more arms against the Syrian Government. We have seen statements by various religious figures across the Arab world. We have cautioned the opposition that if they declare some kind of big jihad, they will frighten many of the very fence-sitters still in places like Damascus and it will make ultimately finding a solution to this, a durable solution, more difficult. We do not want to see Syria go toward civil war. We want to see the violence stop immediately and to see Syria begin a political transition.

Senator UDALL. Thank you for those answers.

The other issue—and it may have been touched on a bit—is this whole issue of weapons of mass destruction and what is happening in Syria. If and when the Assad regime falls, are we considering and making plans regarding how to account for those weapons, how to ensure they not fall into the hands of terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda? Is this an issue that is being discussed among the allies and people in the region that are concerned?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Senator, you put your finger on an extremely important point, and this is a topic that is being discussed actively with Syria's neighbors, with our allies in Europe and elsewhere.

Syria is not even a signatory of the Chemical Weapons Convention. This is just a reminder of the destabilizing role that Syria has played over the years, the fact that these stockpiles even exist. We do not have any indication at this point that these stockpiles have fallen out of the control of the Syrian Government, but it is one of the reasons why a managed transition is so important rather than a chaotic transition program.

But we are watching this. We are watching this carefully. A lot of discussions with the neighbors. Some of the discussion we would have to have in a different setting than today.

Senator UDALL. Great, thank you.

Ambassador, do you have any other thoughts on that issue?

Ambassador FORD. I would just underline that it is a subject of great concern to us and we are looking at what needs to be done. But let me assure you, Senator, we have got a lot of people working on it.

Senator UDALL. Well, I know you do. You know, when I get home to New Mexico, a lot of people—you realize there is a lot of concern about kind of the brutal massacre of the Syrian people by its government when really this started out as a peaceful protest and then evolved into what we are seeing today.

So all of us, I think, on the committee very much appreciate Senator Kerry holding the hearing. We very much appreciate both of you being here.

We are going to keep the record open until the end of the week. There may be additional submissions and you may or may not get additional questions as was indicated earlier.

But thank you very much for your service.

And with no additional questioners here, we would adjourn the hearing.

[Whereupon, at 11:45 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY JEFFREY FELTMAN AND AMBASSADOR ROBERT FORD TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JOHN F. KERRY

Question. At the recent Friends of the Syrian People conference in Tunis, the United States pledged $10 million in support to help provide humanitarian assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons. Please provide some details on how this money will be spent to provide much-needed humanitarian assistance to these vulnerable populations. How will that money be spent? What account will it come from and how are we ensuring that there is oversight and efficient disbursement of those funds? There are reports that, with the withdrawal of opposition fighters from Homs, aid agencies have been allowed to deliver food and medical supplies to the city. What steps is the United States taking to help these aid agencies expand their capacity to address the critical needs of Syrian civilians impacted by the violence?

Answer. The United States is currently in the process of providing more than $10 million in humanitarian assistance to support those affected by the violence in Syria. This assistance will support international and nongovernmental humanitarian partners, including $3.5 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), $3 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), $3 million to the World Food Programme (WFP), and over $1 million to a nongovernmental organization (NGO) working in Syria and in the region.

Assistance through UNHCR and ICRC is delivering critical medical services and supplies, food, water, blankets, hygiene kits, heaters, and winter clothing to the Syrian people. This funding will also provide support for host families who are sheltering displaced Syrians due to the ongoing violence and to those who have fled to neighboring countries. Assistance through WFP is targeting 100,000 people affected by the civil conflict in 11 governorates in Syria. The WFP operation provides rations to displaced Syrians and host families, households that have lost breadwinners or livelihoods, female-headed households, and unaccompanied minors. Assistance through the NGO is supporting emergency medical services in Syria. This funding is coming from the Migration and Refugee Assistance and International Disaster Assistance accounts.

Safe access for humanitarian workers continues to be a challenge—and we hold the Syrian Arab Republic Government responsible for providing this access. The United States welcomes the news that U.N. Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos, and U.N. Arab League Special Envoy to Syria Kofi Annan have travelled to Damascus. The United States continues to urge all parties to permit safe access for delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Department of State and USAID are in constant contact with our partners regarding the distribution of this assistance to ensure it reaches its intended beneficiaries. USG officials will travel regularly to the region to meet with host government officials, humanitarian partners, and beneficiaries to assess the effectiveness of the international community's humanitarian response. Humanitarian organizations have recently been able to access Homs and are in the process of providing assistance to that area, as well as in other parts of Syria. In coordination with other donors, the Department of State and USAID will continue to ensure our partners have the support they need to maintain these critical humanitarian operations.

Question. The Friends of the Syrian People meeting brought together many nations in support of the pro-democracy movement in Syria. Leaders from around the world reaffirmed their commitment to isolate the Assad regime politically and economically.

- What are the next steps since the initial Friends of the Syrian People meeting?
- What is the objective of the Friends of the Syrian People? Will there be regular meetings to coordinate international efforts to assist the pro-democracy movement in Syria?

Answer. On February 24, the United States along with 60-plus members of the Friends of the Syrian People made commitments to get humanitarian aid to the suffering Syrian people, to increase diplomatic pressure and tighten sanctions on Assad and his regime, to strengthen the transition planning of the opposition, and to support the efforts of U.N. envoy Kofi Annan and the Arab League to end the violence and begin a true dialogue that will lead to the change the Syrian people deserve. Since the inaugural meeting, the EU announced its 12th round of sanctions against the Assad regime, which were expanded on February 27 to include Syria's Central Bank and trade in precious metals and diamonds. Joint U.N.-Arab League Special Envoy Kofi Annan announced plans to travel to Damascus to meet with the Assad regime and will present a proposal to end violence and unrest in Syria, increase access for humanitarian agencies, release detainees, and start an inclusive political dialogue. It is not clear that he will be able to make progress. Russian FM Lavrov intends to meet with the Arab League's Syria Committee on March 10.

On the humanitarian front, the Friends of the Syria People meeting resulted in pledges of tens of millions of dollars in humanitarian assistance for the Syrian people. Although U.N. Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos was not granted authorization to travel to Syria in late February, we have urged Syrian authorities to grant immediate and unfettered access as soon as possible. As part of its ongoing emergency food operation targeting 100,000 conflict-affected individuals in Syria, since February 20, the World Food Programme has delivered 16,850 family food rations—sufficient to feed approximately 84,000 people for 1 month—to Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) warehouses in 11 governorates. Between February 20 and early March, the SARC had distributed over 7,000 WFP food rations to beneficiaries in 11 designated governorates, although several of the worst-affected areas within the governorates remain inaccessible due to insecurity. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation also announced that Syrian authorities had granted the group permission to send humanitarian aid to Syria.

As outlined in the Chair statement of the Tunis conference, the goal of the Friends of the Syrian People is to achieve "a political solution to the crisis that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people for dignity, freedom, peace, reform, democracy, prosperity and stability." We are continuously consulting with the like-minded partners on ways to pressure the regime to end violence and enable a political process to move forward. Turkey plans to host the next formal meeting of the Friends of the Syrian People on April 1, 2012.

Question. Besides the SNC's public statements at the Friends of the Syrian People meeting, how are the FSA and local Syrian groups publicly committing themselves to a democratic, tolerant, and pluralistic Syria?

Answer. The Syrian National Council has articulated its vision of a future Syria based on the rule of law and institutionalized politics within a free and civil society that respects minority rights. It has made clear that it will not accept any form of discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or gender.

It is difficult to give broad assurances about the thoughts and beliefs of groups in a country as diverse as Syria, particularly when freedom of expression and speech has been denied for decades. However, from our interactions with the other segments of the internal Syrian opposition, it is clear that the leadership has a vision of a country where people are treated with dignity and the country is governed by the rule of law. Despite the regime's efforts to sow seeds of sectarianism, we have observed an opposition that is welcoming of all segments of society committed to that vision. Many of the local grassroots groups such as the Local Coordination Committees (LCCs) have released statements advocating for the unity of the Syrian people, not the division. The LCCs, for example, state their political vision as "aiming toward a transition into a pluralist democracy, based on freedom for the public as well as equal political and legal rights among Syrians." In addition, our most trusted contacts explain to us the structure, format, and leadership of several local revolutionary councils in which no one person or group maintains dominance over the other and decisions are made in an open forum. Admittedly, there are elements of the opposition that advocate violence and intolerance, but this is not a view held by the majority of the Syrian opposition.

Question. You said in written testimony that you are taking concrete action on three lines—humanitarian relief, ratcheting up pressure, and preparing for a democratic transition. Can you describe in greater detail what concrete actions you are taking that are preparing Syria for a democratic transition? Are we supporting, with finances, equipment, or training, groups inside or outside of Syria? How are these efforts being coordinated with other international actors?

Answer. We are supporting a political transition laid out by the Syrian National Council in connection with a roadmap set out by the Arab League. We have regular contacts with Syrian opposition figures. Sometimes we meet in coordination with other partners, such as at the Friends of the Syrian People (FOSP) meeting. We are coordinating these actions with our likeminded partners through the FOSP group, as well as through our engagement at the U.N. Security Council and other U.N. bodies.

The United States is providing over $12 million in humanitarian assistance through the U.N. and other humanitarian organizations for emergency medical care in Syria and the delivery of clean water, food, blankets, heaters, winter clothing, and hygiene kits to Syrian civilians in need. We and our partners are exploring ways to get food, medicine, and other humanitarian assistance to those Syrians affected by violence via traditional humanitarian channels and other informal networks.

RESPONSES OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY JEFFREY FELTMAN TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. How confident are you that the Assad regime has maintained control of its WMD stockpiles? Should Assad determine his regime is falling, do you believe that he would use WMD on his own people? Under what conditions might Assad transfer WMD or WMD components to Hezbollah? What other proliferation risks do you anticipate if the Assad regime collapses?

Answer. The United States and its allies are monitoring Syria's chemical weapons stockpile and we believe it remains under Syrian Government control. INR would be happy to provide further details and context in a classified briefing.

Question. In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, European Command Commander Admiral Stavridis testified that he thought U.S. assistance through the provision of weapons and communications equipment would help the opposition organize and help topple the Assad regime. Is the administration actively considering the sale of weapons and other military equipment to the Free Syrian Army? What countries are currently supplying weapons to the Syrian opposition?

Answer. We have not seen our role to date as one of injecting arms and munitions into Syria or encouraging others to do so. As Secretary Clinton has said, "There is every possibility of a civil war. Outside intervention would not prevent that—it would probably expedite it. As you try to play out every possible scenario, there are a lot of bad ones that we are trying to assess."

We have been very resistant to the idea of pouring fuel onto the fire ignited by the Assad regime. Rather, we have defined our role largely in terms of encouraging a peaceful transition by working to isolate this outlaw regime diplomatically, crimping its cash flow, and encouraging the opposition to unite around a platform of outreach to Syria's minorities and peaceful, orderly political transition. Moreover, we have built an international coalition dedicated to the same goals and methods, one that has been on display in the U.N. General Assembly and the recent Friends of the Syrian People conference.

For now, we assess that a negotiated political solution is still possible and is the best way to end the bloodshed and achieve a peaceful transition to democracy, but as the Secretary recently said in London, "There will be increasingly capable opposition forces. They will, from somewhere, somehow, find the means to defend themselves as well as begin offensive measures."

The intelligence community, in a classified setting, would be best positioned to provide a response on the provision of weapons to the Syrian opposition.

Question. What types of conventional weapons, logistical support, intelligence, and economic assistance can we confirm the Russians are providing the Assad regime?

Answer. We are concerned about the continuation of Russian support to the Syrian regime, including weapons sales. For example, according to Cypriot authorities in January 2012, 60 tons of Russian ammunition from state arms trader Rosoboroneksport stopped briefly in Cyprus before continuing on to Syria. The

majority of Syrian weapons are Soviet or Russian origin and Russian officials have openly admitted continuing to implement arms sales contracts with Syria.

We have voiced our concerns about Russian weapons sales to Syria repeatedly, both publicly and through diplomatic channels with senior Russian officials. Last August and most recently on March 7, Secretary Clinton publicly urged Russia to cease arms sales to Syria. We will continue to press Russia on any activities that contribute to the Syrian regime's violent crackdown or threaten regional stability.

Question. Does Russia have a physical presence on the ground in Syria? If so, please describe that presence.

Answer. Russia's physical presence in Syria includes an Embassy in Damascus, a Cultural Center in Damascus, and a consulate in Aleppo. Russia has yet to evacuate the officials staffing these locations, and these facilities remain operational. Moscow also maintains a naval supply and logistics support base in Tartus—its only military base outside the former Soviet space and only port on the Mediterranean Sea—which it has operated since 1971. Tartus, however, probably does not have a significant complement of Russian naval personnel at this time, and we believe that Russians working on oil-related projects have likely been evacuated.

Question. Since Russia decided to be Assad's diplomatic cover and military enabler, what leverage does the administration have with Russia regarding the Syrian crisis? Is the administration ready and willing to use that leverage with Russia over its support of Assad's brutal crackdowns?

Answer. The United States diplomatic engagement with Russia during the Syrian crisis has been intense and direct. In public and on the record, Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Rice have unequivocally voiced the United States strong support for the resolutions presented in the Security Council on Syria and sharply criticized the transfer of arms to the Assad regime. The administration has conveyed its deep concerns about Russia's approach to Syria at the highest levels, including in discussions with President Medvedev, Prime Minister (and President-elect) Putin, and with Foreign Minister Lavrov.

While this issue is clearly one where the United States and Russia have fundamental differences of opinion, we have found space, albeit limited, for cooperation with Russia on facilitating the visits to Syria of the United Nations/Arab League Special Envoy Kofi Annan and Under Secretary General Valerie Amos. We also note Foreign Minister Lavrov's March 10 visit to the Arab League meeting in Cairo, where he discussed the conditions that could enable a political solution to the crisis. The administration will continue its intense diplomatic engagement with Moscow with the aim of facilitating a just, peaceful, and sustainable political transition of power from the Assad regime in Syria.

RESPONSES OF AMBASSADOR ROBERT FORD TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

Question. As the crisis goes on, are the various minority groups and other opposition forces within Syria overcoming the trust-deficit that has inhibited their ability to join forces effectively, or are the differences hardening? What leads you to your conclusion?

Answer. Rather than a lack of trust, it is the Assad regime's brutal tactics that are the primary reason internal opposition groups remain localized. Grassroots organizations cannot hold public meetings, Syrians cannot travel freely between towns, and members of the opposition do not advertize their affiliation for fear of arrest, torture, and execution by the Syrian regime's forces. Groups also operate in an environment of intimidation and perpetual fear that they could be infiltrated by a regime informant.

Although the opposition may be limited by geography and Assad regime's campaign of violence, we see indications of a united vision and coordinated messages at the numerous peaceful protests that continue to occur on a daily basis. Signs and chants of "One, one, one, the Syrian people are one" are widespread. The Syrian National Council (SNC) also maintains connections to many of the grassroots organizations within Syria, and is working to strengthen these ties. The SNC has made clear that it will not accept any form of discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or gender. We support the Syrian National Council's vision of a future Syria based on the rule of law and institutionalized politics within a free and civil society that respects minority rights and have urged them to continue their outreach to opposition groups inside Syria. Members of minority groups have been and continue to be involved in the protest movement across Syria, but the SNC needs to constantly find

ways to reassure those groups that the future state will not discriminate against minorities.

Question. What is your level of concern that foreign arms entering Syria will end up in the hands of al-Qaeda, or that the Syrian opposition will start colluding with al-Qaeda? Under what conditions would the latter occur?

Answer. We are following this issue very closely as the unrest in Syria persists. We are concerned that terrorists will view the situation in Syria as fertile ground to establish safe haven and conduct operational and other planning. We see indications that al-Qaeda in Iraq is extending its reach into Syria. We are closely monitoring whether terrorist elements may seek to insert themselves into elements of the Syrian opposition without their knowledge.

We have been and will continue to engage closely with all of Syria's neighbors to raise awareness of multiple border security issues—weapons smuggling and terrorist transit being foremost among these. In addition, we will continue to engage with the Syrian opposition, and particularly the Syrian National Congress, to make certain that they are aware of the various threats, and communicating effectively across the opposition movement to warn of the dangers of cooperating with terrorists. The ability of terrorists to exploit the unrest in Syria will be hindered greatly by concerted and aggressive efforts by Syria's neighbors to secure borders.

Question. Do you believe that U.S. interests in Syria are greater or lower than Libya?

Answer. We believe that the Syrian people deserve the same opportunity to shape their future that the Tunisians, Egyptians, Libyans, and Yemenis now enjoy. The United States has an interest in assisting democratic transitions all across the Middle East and North Africa. We must support calls from within the region to strengthen each of the building blocks of stable, thriving societies: a responsive, accountable government; an energetic, effective economy; and a vibrant civil society.

Question. Have current sanctions and other diplomatic efforts achieved their intended results? What demonstrable changes have they caused in the regime's behavior?

Answer. U.S. sanctions, coupled with robust multilateral efforts, are effectively squeezing Assad's cash flow and their effects continue to grow. For example, in January 2012, the Syrian Oil Ministry announced that Western sanctions on Syrian oil exports had eliminated $2 billion in revenue since September 2011. Depriving the government of this revenue makes it more difficult to finance its campaign of repression. Furthermore, our designation of more than three dozen regime officials and enablers to date makes it clear to both Syrian Government officials and the Syrian business community alike that association with Assad's regime carries a personal cost. Although the core of the Assad regime has not abandoned him, the continued pressure has encouraged some defections, including the recent defections of the Syrian Deputy Petroleum Minister and four Brigadier Generals from the Syrian military. We have crafted U.S. sanctions to avoid harming the Syrian people to the maximum extent possible; however, the Assad regime's own economic mismanagement and corrupt practices have exacerbated the economic situation in Syria and squeezed the business community, a key regime constituency.

It should be noted that economic relationships between the United States and Syria were limited before the current crisis. Had we acted alone, our actions would likely have had only a modest impact on the Syrian regime's ability to finance its campaign of violence. Our steady escalation of pressure against the Assad regime and its supporters has been coordinated and implemented in concert with our allies, including the EU, Switzerland, Canada, Japan, Australia, and Turkey. At the Friends of the Syrian People conference, participants committed to take steps to apply and enforce restrictions and sanctions on the regime and its supporters as a clear message to the Syrian regime that it cannot attack civilians with impunity. We will revisit these commitments at the next Friends of the Syrian People meeting.

RESPONSES OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY JEFFREY FELTMAN AND AMBASSADOR ROBERT FORD TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN

Question. Proliferation Concerns.—The Syrian regime's arsenal of both conventional and chemical weapons is a significant concern. According to a recent report, Syria probably has "one of the largest [chemical weapons] programs in the world" with "multiple types of chemical agents," including chlorine and more modern nerve gasses. Senior U.S. officials have described a "nightmare scenario" if the regime suddenly falls apart and the stockpiles of chemical weapons are at play.

The concern here is obviously proliferation and that Assad might actually use these against his own people. Do you feel that we have an accurate estimate of the number and location of chemical and other weapons held by the Syrian regime?

Answer. The United States is closely monitoring Syria's proliferation-sensitive materials and facilities. We believe Syria's stockpiles of chemical weapons, ballistic missiles, man-portable air defense systems and other conventional weapons remain secure under Syrian Government control. We concur with the Intelligence Community's assessments of Syria's weapons stockpiles.

Question. In your testimony, you stated that the United States has begun coordinating with allies in Europe and elsewhere about the threat posed by these weapons. Can you address the regional aspects of this threat?

Answer. Should the Assad regime fall, or if domestic security deteriorates significantly, the safety and security of Syria's stockpile of chemical and conventional weapons and delivery systems may potentially come into question, with serious consequences for regional and international security. As the political violence in Syria continues unabated, the importance of ensuring the security of Syria's conventional and unconventional weapons and other sensitive materials remains critical. The U.S. Government is working to address these challenges in cooperation with countries in the region, our allies and other international partners.

Question. How does the situation in Syria compare to our experience in Libya last year—both in terms of what we know and what steps we are taking to work with countries in the region?

Answer. The situation in Syria is much more complicated than that in Libya, particularly with regard to chemical weapons and ballistic missiles. Unlike Libya, which has been in the process of destroying its chemical weapons stockpile, Syria is not a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention and maintains a highly active chemical weapons program with a stockpile composed of nerve agents and mustard gas. Syria also has an active ballistic missile program. In addition, like Libya, Syria maintains a significant stockpile of man-portable air defense systems. In the event of a political transition in Damascus, regional states will need to take a substantial role in ensuring the security and eventual elimination of these weapons. The U.S. Government is working to address these challenges in cooperation with our allies and regional partners.

RESPONSE OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY JEFFREY FELTMAN TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CHRISTOPHER COONS

Question. I have worked with Senator Collins and others to highlight the decisive action taken by the administration to develop a mass atrocity prevention strategy, including the issuance of a Presidential Study Directive (PSD–10) in August and subsequent creation of an Atrocity Prevention Board. What role, if any, does the administration's mass atrocity prevention strategy play in guiding the U.S. response to the ongoing violence in Syria? What is the administration's position on taking punitive action against Assad and members of his regime for war crimes and crimes against humanity?

Answer. The prevention of further atrocities is at the forefront of our administration's Syria strategy. Presidential Study Directive-10 was not completed prior to the outbreak of violence in Syria and the interagency Atrocities Prevention Board is currently forming its operating procedures and guidelines. Nonetheless, senior officials are considering atrocity prevention principles and examining how to apply these principles to the current crisis in Syria.

Our immediate focus remains stopping the violence and brutality inflicted on the Syrian people by the regime and initiating a political transition, but we firmly believe that senior figures of the regime and those who join them in perpetrating this bloodshed must be held accountable for their crimes. Already we have placed sanctions on all the senior officials involved in the repression. As the transition in Syria proceeds, and as the U.N.'s Commission of Inquiry recognized, the Syrian people will need to have a leading voice in determining issues of accountability.

RESPONSES OF AMBASSADOR ROBERT FORD TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CHRISTOPHER COONS

Question. You have been extremely vocal and active in expressing support for the Syrian people over the Internet, especially via Facebook and Twitter. Please describe restrictions on Internet freedom in Syria and the extent to which Syrian citizens' online activity is monitored by the regime.

Answer. Internet repression has long been a problem in Syria, and it has increased significantly since mass pro-democracy uprisings began last year. Individuals and groups cannot freely express their views via the Internet without risking their lives, or facing the prospect of arrest and punishment. The Syrian regime monitors Internet communications, including e-mail and chat rooms, and has interfered with and blocked Internet service in various cities. Security forces are often largely responsible for restricting Internet freedom, and the government also applies the media law, as well as general legal code, to regulate Internet use and prosecute users. Over the last year, we have also seen the emergence of organized cyber criminals who claim an allegiance to the Syrian Government and carry out attacks against activists online.

In February 2011, after nearly 5 years, the government lifted bans on Facebook and YouTube. However, human rights observers reported the government continued to impede the flow of information on government violence out of the country, particularly YouTube images of protesters being beaten, arrested, and killed. In December 2011, the government banned the use or import of iPhones, which had been used by citizens to document and share evidence of violence surrounding the protests. According to various human rights groups, all of the country's Internet service providers regularly block access to a variety of Web sites. Observers estimate approximately 180 sites were blocked at one time or another in 2011, including the pro-reform site "All4Syria.org" and sites associated with Kurdish opposition groups, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. The government monitors people logging into Facebook and sometimes arrests persons for their postings.

Over the course of the last year, we saw a rise in Internet and mobile communications blackouts. In June 2011, the Department issued a statement in response to reports of a communications shutdown across much of Syria, condemning it as an effort to suppress the Syrian people's exercise of their rights to free expression, assembly, and association. Opposition members and technical experts report that such blackouts have continued on a regional basis, often occurring on Fridays and other key moments to coincide with the timing of antigovernment protests.

Human rights activists report that the government often attempts to collect personally identifiable information of activists on the Internet in order to coerce or retaliate against them. Activists have reported that they were forced by Syrian authorities to turn over the passwords to their e-mail and social media accounts, exposing their communications as well as all of their contacts.

Technical experts report cyber attacks of growing sophistication and frequency that target civil society, from a "man-in-the-middle" attack on Facebook in May 2011 that enabled surveillance of users to complex viruses designed to take over the computers of key journalists and activists. Pro-government cyber criminals such as the Syrian Electronic Army have claimed credit for defacing and dismantling activists' accounts and Web sites.

The Department is committing its attention and resources to countering these efforts to repress Syrian citizens' rights online. Countering increasingly active Internet surveillance and censorship efforts requires a diverse portfolio of tools and training. State Department grants support more advanced countercensorship technologies, including circumvention tools in Arabic, as well as secure mobile communications and technologies to enable activists to post their own content online and protect against cyber attacks and surveillance. Circumvention tools that have received support from the State Department provide unfettered Internet access to tens of thousands of Syrians.

Question. In November, I joined Senators Casey and Kirk in writing to Secretaries Clinton and Bryson about disturbing reports of the sale of U.S. technology to Syria that could be used for online monitoring and censorship by the regime. Do you have any update on these reports and subsequent investigations into the sale of this technology to Syria by U.S. companies?

Answer. We are aware that the Department of Commerce's Office of Export Enforcement is conducting an investigation into this matter. On December 16, 2011, Commerce added one individual and one company in United Arab Emirates to the Bureau of Industry and Security Entity List. The two parties were added based on

evidence that they purchased U.S.-origin Internet filtering devices and transshipped the devices to Syria. The same devices have been the subject of recent press reporting related to their potential use by the Syrian Government to block pro-democracy Web sites and identify pro-democracy activists as part of Syria's brutal crackdown against the Syrian people. The Entity List contains a list of names of certain foreign persons—including businesses, research institutions, government and private organizations, and individuals that have been determined through an interagency review process to have engaged in activities contrary to U.S. national security and/or foreign policy interests. These persons are restricted from receiving items subject to U.S. jurisdiction. Further questions should be directed to the Department of Commerce.

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