

[H.A.S.C. No. 113-48]

**THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE
SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC—IMPLICATIONS
FOR U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY AND
U.S. POLICY OPTIONS**

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

HEARING HELD
JULY 17, 2013



U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

82-463

WASHINGTON : 2013

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

HOWARD P. "BUCK" McKEON, California, *Chairman*

MAC THORNBERRY, Texas	ADAM SMITH, Washington
WALTER B. JONES, North Carolina	LORETTA SANCHEZ, California
J. RANDY FORBES, Virginia	MIKE McINTYRE, North Carolina
JEFF MILLER, Florida	ROBERT A. BRADY, Pennsylvania
JOE WILSON, South Carolina	ROBERT E. ANDREWS, New Jersey
FRANK A. LoBIONDO, New Jersey	SUSAN A. DAVIS, California
ROB BISHOP, Utah	JAMES R. LANGEVIN, Rhode Island
MICHAEL R. TURNER, Ohio	RICK LARSEN, Washington
JOHN KLINE, Minnesota	JIM COOPER, Tennessee
MIKE ROGERS, Alabama	MADELEINE Z. BORDALLO, Guam
TRENT FRANKS, Arizona	JOE COURTNEY, Connecticut
BILL SHUSTER, Pennsylvania	DAVID LOEBSACK, Iowa
K. MICHAEL CONAWAY, Texas	NIKI TSONGAS, Massachusetts
DOUG LAMBORN, Colorado	JOHN GARAMENDI, California
ROBERT J. WITTMAN, Virginia	HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, Jr., Georgia
DUNCAN HUNTER, California	COLLEEN W. HANABUSA, Hawaii
JOHN FLEMING, Louisiana	JACKIE SPEIER, California
MIKE COFFMAN, Colorado	RON BARBER, Arizona
E. SCOTT RIGELL, Virginia	ANDRÉ CARSON, Indiana
CHRISTOPHER P. GIBSON, New York	CAROL SHEA-PORTER, New Hampshire
VICKY HARTZLER, Missouri	DANIEL B. MAFFEI, New York
JOSEPH J. HECK, Nevada	DEREK KILMER, Washington
JON RUNYAN, New Jersey	JOAQUIN CASTRO, Texas
AUSTIN SCOTT, Georgia	TAMMY DUCKWORTH, Illinois
STEVEN M. PALAZZO, Mississippi	SCOTT H. PETERS, California
MARTHA ROBY, Alabama	WILLIAM L. ENYART, Illinois
MO BROOKS, Alabama	PETE P. GALLEGO, Texas
RICHARD B. NUGENT, Florida	MARC A. VEASEY, Texas
KRISTI L. NOEM, South Dakota	
PAUL COOK, California	
JIM BRIDENSTINE, Oklahoma	
BRAD R. WENSTRUP, Ohio	
JACKIE WALORSKI, Indiana	

ROBERT L. SIMMONS II, *Staff Director*
ALEX GALLO, *Professional Staff Member*
MICHAEL CASEY, *Professional Staff Member*
AARON FALK, *Clerk*

CONTENTS

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF HEARINGS

2013

	Page
HEARING:	
Wednesday, July 17, 2013, The Security Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic—Implications for U.S. National Security and U.S. Policy Options	1
APPENDIX:	
Wednesday, July 17, 2013	37

WEDNESDAY, JULY 17, 2013

THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC—IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY AND U.S. POLICY OPTIONS

STATEMENTS PRESENTED BY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

McKeon, Hon. Howard P. “Buck,” a Representative from California, Chairman, Committee on Armed Services	1
Smith, Hon. Adam, a Representative from Washington, Ranking Member, Committee on Armed Services	2

WITNESSES

Abrams, Elliott, Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies, Council on Foreign Relations	3
Hof, Ambassador Frederic C., Senior Fellow, Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, Atlantic Council	5
Yacoubian, Mona, Senior Advisor, Middle East, The Stimson Center	7

APPENDIX

PREPARED STATEMENTS:

Abrams, Elliott	45
Hof, Ambassador Frederic C.	53
McKeon, Hon. Howard P. “Buck”	41
Smith, Hon. Adam	43
Yacoubian, Mona	67

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD:

[There were no Documents submitted.]

WITNESS RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED DURING THE HEARING:

Mrs. Davis	83
------------------	----

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING:

Mr. Garamendi	93
Mr. Langevin	87

**THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE SYRIAN ARAB RE-
PUBLIC—IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. NATIONAL SECUR-
ITY AND U.S. POLICY OPTIONS**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC, Wednesday, July 17, 2013.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:05 a.m., in room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Howard P. “Buck” McKeon (chairman of the committee) presiding.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. HOWARD P. “BUCK” MCKEON,
A REPRESENTATIVE FROM CALIFORNIA, CHAIRMAN, COM-
MITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

The CHAIRMAN. The committee will come to order. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. The House Armed Services Committee meets to receive testimony from independent experts on the security situation in Syria. Today we have with us Ambassador Fred Hof, Mr. Elliott Abrams, Ms. Mona Yacoubian, and they are going to provide their insights into the conflict in Syria. Thank you all for joining us here today.

We are now in the third year of the conflict in Syria. The United States estimates that at least 93,000 Syrians have died. Additionally, the Obama administration has finally confirmed the Intelligence Community’s assessment that the Assad regime has used chemical weapons, including the nerve agent sarin, against the opposition multiple times in the last year. With the now verified use of chemical weapons, a stated red line by the Obama administration, and a mounting humanitarian crisis, increased regional instability, spreading sectarian violence, the trajectory of the conflict in Syria appears to be heading in the wrong direction in an already unstable region, threatening U.S. interests. Moreover, a recent string of military gains by the Assad regime, supported by Iran and Hezbollah, has fueled the perception that Assad is winning. Meanwhile, the United States has a largely incoherent and disjointed policy to address the situation in Syria.

Whether one is in favor of or rejects the idea of U.S. military intervention in this crisis, it remains critically important that this committee continues to gain a comprehensive understanding of the military options that may be available to address the conflict in Syria, to include the objectives, limitations, and risks of each. Because the U.S. has vital national security interests at stake and our warfighters might once again be tasked with a complicated mission in a time of fiscal austerity, our panel of experts will provide further insight into the U.S. policy options, and I look forward to your testimony.

Mr. Smith.

[The prepared statement of Mr. McKeon can be found in the Appendix on page 41.]

STATEMENT OF HON. ADAM SMITH, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM WASHINGTON, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate our panelists being here. I look forward to their testimony and any ideas they have on how to deal with what is an enormously complex series of challenges. I think the chairman laid out correctly how important the region is and how large the humanitarian crisis is right now in Syria. An increasingly ethno-sectarian civil war has led to deaths of nearly 100,000 people. Millions more have been displaced or fled Syria. The Assad regime is brutal to its own people, not legitimate.

We need a legitimate government in Syria, and I think we all agree on those points. The troubling thing is what do we do about it. And I think one of the most important policy shifts that we need to understand as a country is the limitations on what the U.S. can do. Our military cannot simply plop down anywhere in the world and fix a situation. Oftentimes it can make it worse and certainly comes at great cost in terms of lives and in terms of resources for the U.S., and my personal opinion is that Syria is one of those places we should be very, very careful about.

I have not yet seen a plan that shows what our military can do to improve the situation. We do not have reliable partners in Syria that we can work with. It is a constantly changing, evolving, and difficult to assess situation. Sending arms into that does not strike me as a positive idea, and certainly, you know, military involvement on behalf of the U.S., I have not seen a plan that shows that that will improve the situation.

Regrettably that leaves us with a diplomatic track. I mean, it is clear what we want. We want the Assad regime to step down and a reasonably stable government to replace it that has the support of the Syrian people, and that is easy to say, very difficult to achieve. We have important partners in the region, including Jordan and Israel. We should work as closely as possible with them to try and find a reasonable alternative, but this is going to be a difficult problem. I don't see a solution to it anytime soon. I believe the U.S. just needs to be careful not to make it worse and not to leap before we look.

But I look forward to the testimony of the experts to give us any further ideas on how we should proceed with our policy, and I thank the chairman for holding this hearing.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Smith can be found in the Appendix on page 43.]

The CHAIRMAN. Each of you has a very impressive resumé. I am not going to read it. But you have extensive knowledge on the subject that you are going to cover. We really appreciate you taking the time to be with us today. Let's start with Mr. Abrams.

STATEMENT OF ELLIOTT ABRAMS, SENIOR FELLOW FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for this invitation. I will try to be brief. You have got my written testimony.

The CHAIRMAN. All of your written testimonies will be inserted in the record without objection. Thank you.

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you. There is a humanitarian disaster in Syria, we all know that. Nearly 100,000 people dead, about a million refugees, perhaps a million one, and perhaps 4 million displaced persons, and we are addressing that through U.N. [United Nations] agencies and other bodies. The question is whether we need to do more, whether to support the rebels or even use military force. In my view, the answer to those questions is yes because otherwise what we face in Syria is an Iranian victory, an Iranian victory that would be a great blow to U.S. interests.

The continuation of the conflict is itself a threat to U.S. interests and U.S. allies. There are more than half a million refugees in Jordan, which is a potential source of great instability there, and it is growing. I remember talking to the King and others when it was 100,000, 200,000, they feared it would be 250. Now the fear is of a million refugees. And as the conflict continues, more and more jihadis arrive in Syria, and we have to wonder about their role not just today but tomorrow, after the conflict, in Lebanon or in Jordan or on the Syrian-Israeli border. But I think the worst effect would be our defeat by Iran, and that is exactly how it would be seen in the region and around the world. On one side Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia supporting Assad, on the other side supposedly the United States, the Europeans, and our Sunni Arab friends in the Gulf supporting the rebels, opposing Assad.

Does it matter who wins? I think it does because around the world but especially in the region our friends and our enemies are going to judge our willpower, and they are going to judge our influence, and they are going to judge our power by the outcome of this conflict. Should we prevail and the Assad regime be replaced by a Sunni regime oriented towards Syria's Sunni neighbors like Jordan and Turkey, it is a huge defeat for Iran and Hezbollah and Russia. Such a defeat for Hezbollah, a terrorist group with global reach, is very much in our interests, but even more importantly the rise of Iranian power in the region would have been seen to be stopped if the Assad regime falls. That is hugely important. Syria is Iran's only Arab ally. It provides Iran with Mediterranean ports and a land bridge to Hezbollah and Lebanon and through Hezbollah, a border with Israel. That all changes if Assad falls.

What happens if we decide this game is not worth playing and the war goes on until Assad more or less crushes the rebellion? First, many more refugees threatening the stability of Jordan and Lebanon. Iranian ascendancy, strengthening Hezbollah inside Lebanon and strengthening Iran throughout the Middle East. An emboldened Iran, seeing a lack of American desire to confront it is logically more likely to become more aggressive in Bahrain, watch out for the future of the 5th Fleet, in Saudi Arabia's eastern province, which is heavily Shi'a, and in its own nuclear program. Surely a display of a lack of American willpower in Syria is going to per-

suade many Iranian officials that we may say all options are on the table but in reality they are not.

So what should we do to prevent an Iranian and Hezbollah victory? First, I do think we have waited too long to provide military help to the rebels, a view that in a sense I share with former Secretary of State Clinton and former Secretary of Defense Gates who over the past year before they left office favored that kind of aid, a position that the President rejected. I believe we should step up the flow of weaponry to prevent their defeat as the weaponry flows in from Russia basically to the Assad side.

I know people say we have no side, there is just jihadis, and it is true that there are plenty of them there and more of them as time goes by. To me that is all the more reason to strengthen those on the rebel side who are Syrians and who are not jihadis, not only so that they win and win faster but so that they are more powerful when the conflict is over.

I don't favor, secondly, a no-fly zone. I think that is a formula for a long-term and difficult commitment of American military resources. What I do favor is a one-time strike at Assad's air assets and air bases. If we eliminate or greatly weaken Assad's ability to use air power, we will significantly tilt the battlefield toward the rebels. We will do it militarily, psychologically, and politically. That seems to be the position if the news reports are right, and they have not been denied, that Secretary of State Kerry recently took.

There is an objection that this strike is impractical, can't be done, too dangerous, air defenses of Syria impregnable. You know, my answer to that is, tell that to the Israelis who have been able to strike inside Syria three times that we know of. How is it possible that they can do it and we, with our stealth technology and with the 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean, we can't do it? I just, frankly, don't believe it.

Mr. Smith said he hadn't seen a military plan. I think this committee should demand a military plan, secretly obviously, but if you haven't seen a military plan, it is because the military doesn't want to give you one. They should be forced to give you a sensible one, not with General Dempsey's 700 sorties, frankly, but a serious one that looks at what the Israelis have done, and says here is what we can do.

The second objection is we can't act without a Security Council resolution. You know, we went through this in the Balkans in 1995 and 1998, and President Clinton made I think what was the right decision in 1998 in Bosnia when he used American military power for national security and humanitarian reasons without a U.N. Security Council resolution. The question I would put is if for our national interests we need to do this, if that is the decision you reach, will you allow Vladimir Putin to stop you in the U.N. Security Council?

This clock is not telling me my 5 minutes are up, but they must be just about up, so let me hope that I can address some of the questions that these comments give rise to, and thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me and inviting me to be part of a panel that is as distinguished as Ms. Yacoubian and Ambassador Hof. Thanks.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Abrams can be found in the Appendix on page 45.]

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Ambassador.

STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR FREDERIC C. HOF, SENIOR FELLOW, RAFIK HARIRI CENTER FOR THE MIDDLE EAST, ATLANTIC COUNCIL

Mr. HOF. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Smith, members of the committee, thank you very much for inviting me today. I hope to be of some use to you in your deliberations. You have my statement, and I will follow the example of Elliott Abrams and just hit some of the highlights of mine.

What are our national security interests in Syria?

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Ambassador—

Mr. HOF. Yes?

The CHAIRMAN. Could you speak directly into the microphone? We are having a little trouble hearing.

Mr. HOF. Is that better?

The CHAIRMAN. That is better.

Mr. HOF. Okay. What are our national security interests in Syria? What is it we want to achieve? How should we go about trying to get what it is we want? President Obama has suggested that it is the effects of regime-inspired chaos on Syria's neighbors that engages, quote, the serious interests, unquote, of the U.S. in the Syrian crisis. Among these neighbors is a NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] ally, Turkey; a close security partner, Jordan; a country whose independence and well-being we have always tried to support, Lebanon; and a country where many Americans have recently made the ultimate sacrifice, Iraq. All of these countries, some more than others, are being swamped by refugees and associated resource and security problems by the Assad regime's practice of hammering rebel-held populated areas with artillery, with aircraft, and occasionally even with Scud missiles.

It is a terror campaign that makes no pretense of seeking military targets. The regime's objective is that of a terrorist, to persuade civilians through the application of random deadly violence to make decisions at the expense of one's enemy. Beyond the four countries being directly victimized by regime terror, Israel's interests are engaged by the spillover of violence into the Golan Heights and the threat to Jordan's security. Even Egypt, in the midst of its own chaos and turmoil, is providing a refuge to tens of thousands of Syrians.

If our interest centers on allies and friends in the region, what are our objectives? Three—in my view, three come to mind. First would be the enhanced security and stability of regional allies and friends in the face of Syria's chaos and the Assad regime's tactics of mass terror; the second would be political transition in Syria away from the regime, including the removal from Syria of all Iran-related military elements, including Hezbollah and Al Qaeda affiliates; and, third, the replacement of the Assad regime with an inclusive national unity government, one committed internally to recovery, reconciliation, accountability, reform, and rule of law, one committed externally to regional peace and stability. Across the

range of these objectives there would be a constant updating of contingency plans related to weapons of mass destruction.

Now, as I said, the key problem affecting allies and friends is the regime's mass terror campaign against vulnerable populations. Ending it should be our top priority, and diplomacy is always the first weapon of choice. The U.N.'s Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria recently reported that the regime's tactics, quote, constitute crimes against humanity, war crimes, and gross violations of international human rights law, unquote. If we are not already doing so on an insistent, sustained basis, we should be urging Moscow to rein in its client. We should make it clear to Russia that if the terror campaign subverting our allies and friends does not stop, we will reserve the right to take steps we deem appropriate to secure our interests.

To the extent we consider military options at all in connection with Syria, it should be, in my view, in the context of helping allies and friends secure themselves from the regime's murderous tactics. We would not under any circumstances want American boots on the ground in Syria. We would not wish to consider unmanned or manned aerial systems entering Syrian airspace, and unless and until we are persuaded that the peaceful diplomatic campaign has run its course unsuccessfully. Even then we would still have the option of watching the terror campaign proceed unabated while pouring more resources into Syria's neighbors so that they could better cope.

We should keep in mind that no-fly zones would not address the biggest of the killers, artillery. We could not proceed with any kind of strike options without the full cooperation of Turkey, Jordan, and other key partners. Although U.N. authorization would not be possible, U.S. unilateralism is something to be avoided.

As we pull out the stops diplomatically to stop the terror campaign, we should try to stabilize the situation on the ground by seeing to it that vetted rebel units in Syria get what they need in terms of military equipment, weaponry, and training, working through the opposition's Supreme Military Council. The regime has a well-established record of conducting massacres in places it can reach on the ground. Most weaponry for the mainstream opposition will not come from U.S. stocks, yet the U.S. should be in charge of the process of determining who gets what. Will all weapons shipments without fail get to the intended recipients? No. No more in Syria than they did in World War II when air-dropped into occupied France. The jihadists and the regime are already armed to the teeth. The Syrian nationalists are the ones who need the help. Their ability to defend territory and reverse the current momentum will have a direct and positive impact on refugee flows. If objectives and strategy are key components of foreign policy, they are life and death items when it comes to military operations. If American diplomacy cannot stop the terror campaign, the President will need options to consider. He may well decide to focus on supporting the neighbors through increased assistance. To the extent he looks at military operations, he will want in the context of objectives to define the mission as narrowly as possible: To destroy or significantly degrade the ability of the Assad regime to terrorize civilian populations with artillery, military aircraft, and missiles. He will be in-

terested in methodologies that minimize U.S. and collateral casualties, knowing full well there are no such things as surgical strikes. He will want to assess carefully the likely reactions of key players, the regime, Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia. He will want buy-in from at least two of the neighbors, Turkey and Jordan. He will want to avoid the proverbial slippery slope.

Syria's revolution is not, after all, America's to win or lose. Once the mission is accomplished and the mass terror campaign either ended or reduced significantly, the direct military role of the United States would be ended. If Iran, for example, elects to intervene massively in Syria, sending its army across Iraq, obviously new calculations in the White House, the Pentagon, and elsewhere will be set in motion.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, there should be no illusion in any event that military intervention will necessarily be a silver bullet and unintended consequences will be ubiquitous regardless of what one does or fails to do. Yet those who try to shut down the debate by demanding "tell me how it will end" should apply the same standard to alternatives, especially that of passively watching developments unfold. In an era of diminishing defense resources brought about in part by sequestration and at a time when a tiny percentage of Americans bear the burden of defending this country, we should not be going out of our way to search for ways to apply military force in various parts of the globe. If we elect to act with kinetic lethality in Syria, the objective should be tied tightly to the situations our allies and friends find themselves in as a result of the Assad regime's survival tactics.

The question is not one of the United States taking ownership of Syria's future. That future belongs to Syrians. Our main task is to decide what we want and how to go about getting it, keeping in mind that supporting allies and friends is where American national interests are surely engaged in the case of Syria.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hof can be found in the Appendix on page 53.]

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Yacoubian.

STATEMENT OF MONA YACOUBIAN, SENIOR ADVISOR, MIDDLE EAST, THE STIMSON CENTER

Ms. YACOUBIAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for inviting me to speak this morning. I very much appreciate the opportunity to address the complex topic of the security situation in Syria and its implications for the United States.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me ask you the same thing, if you could move that microphone.

Ms. YACOUBIAN. Okay. Is that better?

The CHAIRMAN. That is better. Thank you.

Ms. YACOUBIAN. Okay. I would like to make three points this morning in my first remarks. First, the Syrian uprising I think, as has already been noted, has evolved from peaceful protests to a sectarian civil war with significant regional spillover. The conflict has

resulted in a humanitarian catastrophe. The military situation on the ground suggests that Syria's civil war could endure for years.

Over the past few months the Syrian Army has consolidated its control over some key areas. However, Syria will not return to the status quo ante. Vast swaths of Syrian territory remain largely out of the regime's control and under the sway of proliferating armed groups. However, rebel groups remain unable to coalesce and continue to lack unified command and control structures. Radical elements have been gaining ground, imposing their harsh version of Islamic rule on civilian populations. Armed groups inside Syria are growing more fractious and have increasingly started to turn their arms on each other. Numerous reports indicate an increasing number of foreign fighters in Syria. The net effect of both regime and rebel actions suggests that Syria is entrenched in a protracted military stalemate with neither the regime nor the rebels emerging victorious. No military solution exists. Instead the resolution will have to be political, coming via negotiations.

Second, the United States has significant national security interests in Syria. Syria's geostrategic location, its growing importance as a jihadist arena, and its vast chemical weapons stockpile endow it with immense strategic significance. Syria borders several countries in which the United States has major equities—Israel, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq. The conflict's outcome could directly impact their stability. Meanwhile, Syria is particularly attractive to jihadists, perhaps even more so than Iraq. It is a Sunni-majority country bordering Israel, affording jihadists a key opportunity to pursue their goal of a transnational caliphate that includes Jerusalem. The specter of jihadist elements or the Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah gaining access to chemical weapons would constitute a key threat to U.S. national security interests.

Third, while it is important to keep all options on the table, I do not believe the U.S. military should become further engaged in Syria at this point. Syria's complexity cannot be overemphasized, and our on-the-ground knowledge of this conflict is very limited. The downside risks of various military options are considerable. While arming is perhaps the least expensive option and requires the lowest level of U.S. commitment, it is fraught with risk. Effective vetting is very difficult, despite our growing relationship with elements of the Syrian armed opposition. Arming could lock us into a dangerous escalation dynamic by provoking commensurate increases in arms to the regime. From a civilian protection standpoint, arming is perhaps the worst option, presenting the greatest risk of civilian harm. And finally, flooding Syria with arms today will make post-conflict stability and reconstruction significantly more difficult.

Enforcing a no-fly zone or establishing humanitarian safe zones requires a much more significant investment of U.S. resources. The potential for unintended consequences would be high, as this option could be long and messy and still not guarantee civilian safety. The potential for mission creep is significant. Numerous questions arise surrounding the extent and duration of these options. Regime change in Syria could emerge as a necessary next step, dramatically increasing the stakes for the United States. While I remain skeptical about the effectiveness of military options, I do believe

that the limited use of force could be an effective lever for moving Syria towards negotiation.

Circumstances could arise in which the limited use of force, specifically targeted air strikes, may alter the strategic calculation of key players on the ground and pave the way toward negotiations. Of course, the risks of air strikes are also significant. To minimize these risks, standoff weaponry should be employed. The use of surgical military strikes should necessarily be embedded in a well-conceived political and diplomatic strategy.

To conclude, the United States cannot afford to ignore Syria, yet as Fred has also said, there is no silver bullet for resolving Syria's conflict. Military options are not likely to be successful unless they are embedded in a broader coherent strategy. While this hearing's focus is on the pros and cons of greater U.S. military involvement in Syria, the political and diplomatic dimensions of U.S. strategy toward Syria should take precedence.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you for your very thoughtful comments.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Yacoubian can be found in the Appendix on page 67.]

The CHAIRMAN. I remain convinced that this is very, very complicated, and as I have heard from others, there is no silver bullet, there is no simple answer. People say we should use diplomacy. I have assumed that for the last 3 years we have been doing that, but I don't know what progress has been made. People say that we should use military force. What would that be? Air Force standoff weapon strikes? All of those cost money and have risks. At a time when we are cutting a trillion dollars out of our defense, cutting back, you know, a third of our aircraft are grounded now, people are not—they are not up to speed. We couldn't put a man in an aircraft right now and say go. If we launched some of these strikes and maybe killed some Russians that are there, how does that escalate it? If we do go in, how far are we willing to go? We are still in Afghanistan and supposedly negotiating a bilateral security agreement to leave some troops there. We know that if sequestration continues, we will be cutting another 100,000 force out of our Army. Of course, this is on Syria, we are not talking about Egypt, but that is also in the headlines now every day, and we saw, we see the problems with our precipitous leave from Iraq without leaving any force behind is now, you know, greeted every day with violence in that area. So the world is becoming more dangerous every day while we are cutting back our ability to do anything about these issues.

So what I would like to ask, I think probably each of you agree that the U.S. does have national security interests. I would like if you could just briefly state what specifically are our national interests in Syria. You covered some in your opening remarks, but if we could just, you know, name two or three, that would be helpful, and do you agree that the administration could be doing more to secure U.S. interests within the conflict in Syria and that could include applying military resources, and what military courses of action should not be deployed and why?

Mr. Abrams.

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Our national security interests include the stability of Jordan, a long-time ally, preventing jihadis and/or Hezbollah from getting control of Syrian chemical weapons, preventing the Syrian regime from using chemical weapons again, and I would add preventing an Iranian victory that leads many countries in the region, but particularly Iran, to the conclusion that the United States is withdrawing from the region and that it can safely advance its own interests, become a hegemonic power in the region and safely develop nuclear weapons despite our policy that it should not be permitted to do so.

Do you want to stop there or address the question of what—

The CHAIRMAN. Let's do that one, and then we will—if you could come back to the last one.

Mr. HOF. Well, Mr. Chairman, I think there is a range of national security interests here, and Elliott has mentioned several of them. To me, there is one in particular: The stability and well-being of allies and friends in the region. This I think is where the United States needs to hang its hat and put together a strategy that is focused on enhancing the stability and security of our allies and friends in the region. That can take you in any number of directions, but I think that there is absolutely no alternative other than to have an objective and an accompanying strategy, and I think our central interest here has to do with friends and allies. There are others, but the danger is if we adopt some of the others as the centerpiece of our objectives and strategy, we are more inclined, I think, to end up owning the problem. So I would—you know, my advice would be focus on allies and friends. That is the real national security interest here.

Ms. YACUBIAN. I would concur with both Elliott and Fred. I think in the case of Syria, it really does revolve around its geostrategic location. The fact that it borders so many key U.S. allies and that we are already seeing such destabilizing effects of its spillover, today alone I think the news reports said there were errant mortar shells that fell in the Golan, you had an assassination in Lebanon, continuing attacks in Iraq at a time when Iraqi stability is already so fragile following the withdrawal of U.S. troops. So I think from my perspective, I would agree, it is really where Syria is located, the fact that there is a significant chemical weapons stockpile there, and now a growing jihadi presence, the ability for this conflict to destabilize the entire region, a region which is of immense importance to U.S. national security interests I think suggests that it is of critical importance that we pay close attention to what happens in Syria.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. I think you have made very good arguments to our national security interests so that we should be involved. Now militarily, what should we do and what shouldn't we do?

Mr. ABRAMS. Mr. Chairman, as I said in my testimony, I worry a good deal about a no-fly zone. Mona touched on some of the same questions as to why a no-fly zone—we remember this from Iraq—can become an extremely long-lasting and expensive and dangerous effort. In my view there is an option for air strikes. I am unpersuaded by the U.S. military position right now that, you know, you can't do anything until you have done in General

Dempsey's words 700 air sorties to suppress Syrian air defenses. I think there is an option. I think you have not been given that option. I think the President has apparently not been given that option because the military for very logical reasons really doesn't want to do that. But I think it exists. We have the power in the eastern Mediterranean, we have the 6th Fleet, we have bases in the region, and it just strikes me as really odd for us to be in a position of saying, well, the Israelis have the ability to do this, but the United States doesn't. You would have to choose or obviously the military would have to choose what are the targets in terms of Syrian air power, and Fred has mentioned the question of artillery, but what are reasonable targets? If one were doing a one-time strike for political, psychological, and military reasons, what are the air bases? How many fixed-wing aircraft or helicopters could one damage in, let us say, 1 day of strikes?

But I am struck by the message that we leave if after 2 years really the position of the United States is this is all awful but, you know, there really isn't anything we can do, there is literally nothing we can do. The red line the President drew was supposedly turned into military support for the rebels, but we read in the newspapers that in fact there has been no military support for the rebels, so we are in the position of saying we have zero options. I don't think that is a position the United States is actually in, and I think we should frankly be asking the military to come up with a plan that surely can be created.

Mr. HOF. Well, Mr. Chairman, it has been—I did some quick arithmetic, it has been 23 years since I wore the uniform of the United States Army. I am a little bit reluctant, you know, to tell military experts how they should go about doing the job. What is essential here is that our military get some guidance from the Commander in Chief in terms of objectives and strategy.

You asked if there are any particular applications of force that ought to be avoided. I think there is a broad consensus that avoiding the insertion of American boots on the ground is important. I can't conceive of any contingency where American boots on the ground would be required or desirable in Syria.

A no-fly zone, extraordinarily expensive, extraordinarily resource rich in terms of sustaining, and as I think I mentioned in my opening comments, it does not touch the one weapon of terror that is driving this crisis, and that is the use of field artillery against populated areas. I think I would suspect that if the President, Defense Department, Joint Chiefs take a careful look at one potentially good option, it would be a series of air strikes using to the maximum extent possible standoff weaponry aimed at eliminating or seriously degrading the ability of this regime to do the kinds of things that are putting our allies and friends in jeopardy.

This is not necessarily a silver bullet. It doesn't necessarily tilt the military balance on the ground significantly, but I think we have to keep in mind what the objective would be and in this case what the military mission would be. It would be to significantly—it would be to eliminate or significantly degrade the ability of the regime to conduct these mass terror operations, and it would be employed, in my view, only when we have satisfied ourselves that the diplomatic alternatives are just not there, just not working.

You asked, Mr. Chairman, or you commented about you presumed that diplomacy has been going on. To the best of my knowledge—and I have been out of this business in the U.S. Government since September of last year—to the best of my knowledge, the emphasis of our diplomacy with the Russians over the past several months has been on the potential reconvening of a Geneva peace conference. I don't know the extent to which we have really been focusing with the Russians on what their client is doing inside Syria to imperil allies and friends of the United States. We may be doing it. I am not aware of it. My suggestion is if we are not doing it, that is really where the emphasis needs to be.

Ms. YACoubIAN. Just very briefly. Again, I would also be opposed to a no-fly zone because of the enormous costs, the downside risk, the potential for significant mission creep. As I noted in my oral testimony and also in my written testimony, I am also opposed to the option of arming the rebels for the very many reasons I laid out, primarily the concern and risk that arms could end up in the wrong hands, the potential for deeper escalation of the conflict, and we have already seen a significant doubling down of support by Iran and Russia to the regime. I would argue in part because of the small gains that the rebels were making. So I think we risk getting locked into an escalatory dynamic, but I also think it is very important to consider the negative effect on civilian protection that funneling more arms into a chaotic zone of conflict like Syria could have, and indeed I think if much of what we are talking about is understandably motivated by the moral outrage that I think all of us have at seeing the suffering of the Syrian people, I think civilian protection should be a critical element in any such decision. I, too, though, think that there is potentially a place for targeted air strikes, in part to degrade or—I don't know about eliminate, but certainly degrade the regime's ability to inflict harm, but I also think there is importance there, particularly if it is done, and I think it should be done, in alliance with others in the region or as part of a coalition to signal resolve about where our red lines are, what we are and aren't willing to tolerate, and finally and perhaps maybe most importantly, I believe there could be potentially, depending on the choice of targets, the ability to use targeted strikes as a lever to try and shift the calculus of key players on the ground and perhaps move the conflict more toward one of negotiation because ultimately I think that is where it is going to have to go.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Smith.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. In listening to this testimony, I think we are all trying to imagine a world that doesn't exist, which is a world where we could, in fact, impact what is happening. As Mr. Abrams said, we want to win. I think that is true. I mean, there is no question that if the Assad regime survives as a close ally of Hezbollah and Iran, we would rather have the other outcome. We would rather Assad not be there, we would rather have a government in Syria that doesn't support Hezbollah, that is not a close ally of Iran. We would rather have that. But what you have all made clear is what we would rather have is simply not on the table. I mean, it is not like, you know, these targeted air strikes

and all of this is sort of like saying well, we can't eliminate the hornet's nest, so let's just put a stick in it to make ourselves feel better, you know, because we don't like it, we can't just sit here and do anything about it because targeted air strikes are not going to win, okay? You know, no matter what the target, a one-time air strike? I mean, you know, it is probably going to wind up killing some civilians. It might in a minor way degrade some of Assad's ability, but it certainly isn't going to put us in a position to win. All it would do is to some degree perpetuate the stalemate on a slightly different scale. So personally from everything that you have said and from what we have heard from the chairman, there is just no good option from a military standpoint that is going to move us towards the win that I think we would all like to have. It is not going to happen, you know. Assad has the support of Iran. I mean, we had a tough enough time stabilizing Iraq, and Iraq had limited support from Iran, but it didn't have Russia there shifting the weapons. And that was when our military was much, much more well-funded than it is right now. So I think we need to get off of this notion that it is frustrating to do nothing, therefore we have to do something. You know, a ton of instances in life you make a mistake when you are just frustrated by not doing anything, so just lash out in a certain way. None of what has been put on the table here strikes me as helpful.

So the question I want to ask is the one point that has been made that I completely agree with is our allies—Turkey and Iraq and Jordan and Israel—and, you know, what threatens them, what threatens them about what is going on in Syria. Well, one of the biggest things that threatens them is the refugee crisis, so dropping more bombs on the population isn't exactly going to help the refugee crisis, you know, and I guess to some degree what I am arguing for here is to contain the insanity as much as we can to within Syria. It is also worth pointing out that Israelis' military strikes have been very targeted, and they have been targeted to a specific purpose, to stop the shipment of weapons in one case to Hezbollah. I mean, we could do that, if there was a given cache of weapons that we didn't want to go from point A to point B, we could hit it. But it wouldn't in any way significantly degrade Assad's ability to, you know, to fight the war that he is fighting. So the Israel example is not helpful at all in terms of what we would be capable of doing.

What could we do and what should we do to try to contain this within Syria? Because the other point about arming the rebels and, Ms. Yacoubian, I agree with you completely, those arms are bouncing all over the place. I mean, there has been reports of some of the arms that has been helped that were supposedly going to the Free Syria Movement that wound up in the hands of the Assad regime, that wound up in the hands of jihadists. You know, shuffling more weapons in there also doesn't help stabilize the region. How can we contain this so that it doesn't—what can we do to help the refugees, what can we do to help Jordan because, you know, doing a little pin prick on the military side that clearly won't put us in a position to win, and I personally feel having, you know, talked to the Pentagon extensively about this, won't even really significantly shift the balance of power in any way that is advantageous

to us. If we can get off of that and think about what our strategies could be to contain it to Syria, to try to protect Jordan, to try to protect some of our allies, I would be curious, you know, what thoughts you have on that.

Mr. ABRAMS, I guess we will start with you.

Mr. ABRAMS. Thanks, Mr. Smith. I have to say, I don't think it is possible in the sense that if you have a country that comes under—let's say Assad wins, comes under essentially Iranian domination because he will owe his survival to Iran.

Mr. SMITH. Keep in mind, that is what existed up to 2 years ago. I mean, you mentioned, you know, Assad, his support for Hezbollah, his support from Iran, that was the status quo before this started 2 years ago. So we have lived in that world.

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I would—

Mr. SMITH. Not happily, I will grant you, but we have lived in it.

Mr. ABRAMS. Again, I don't fully agree with that. Before this war broke out, yes, he had an alliance with, of sorts with Russia and with Iran, but his survival in power was not clearly and directly dependent on them and not just in aid. It is not just aid. There is an Iranian expeditionary force in Syria, there are Hezbollah troops in Syria, so he is directly dependent on them. If that is the situation in a country that is 74 percent Sunni, I think you will see a continuing outflow of refugees.

Now, we can increase the aid to Jordan. I think, in fact, you have been very generous to Jordan. I would like to see more Gulf aid. They have now been very generous toward Egypt in the last couple of weeks. I would like to see the level of aid to Jordan increased, but you would be leaving a situation, I think, which is quite unstable because you would be leaving a regime there that had just slaughtered 100,000 of its own population, and the regime is still in power. Why would those people stay in that country under the domination of that regime when they could go to Sunni neighbor countries and try at least to have a safer life? I would also say, to be fair to me, I think, we are not talking about pin pricks. We talk about a one-time series of strikes on Assad's air power. He was not initially using air power 2 years ago. He began to use air power when he needed it.

Mr. SMITH. But you seriously think that a one-time strike, no matter how robust it is, would lead to the Assad regime losing—

Mr. ABRAMS. I think that a—

Mr. SMITH [continuing]. Or even significantly degrade their ability to stay in power?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think a one-time strike that largely eliminated Assad's air power and his ability to use those bases as well for a period of time would affect the military balance. If he didn't need to use air power, he wouldn't be using it. That is my thought.

Mr. SMITH. Okay.

Mr. HOF. Well, Mr. Smith, I think you have, you know, you have articulated some reservations here that do illustrate the central point. You know, there are no silver bullets here, and in the context of Syria, which is really the classic problem from hell, this is largely a matter of choosing the least worst of some unpalatable options. Those of us who are suggesting that the Commander in Chief

and the military consider some military options here really are not doing so, sir, out of a sense of frustration or out of a desire to have to be seen to be doing something. We have an objective problem here affecting allies and friends in the region. There are 1.8 million refugees now. The U.N. is estimating that that number could easily double by the end of this year. This problem is being driven by something very specific. It is the regime's survival tactic of choice, which is to use massed fires, both from the ground and from the air on populated areas that are beyond its physical control. Now, would a series of air strikes necessarily decisively affect the balance in Syria and lead to military victory by some other side? Probably, probably not. But is this the American objective here? Is it the American objective to win a military victory in Syria, to take ownership of the Syrian revolution? I don't think it is. I think we need to focus very closely on what the objective would be here. If we come to the conclusion that diplomacy is not really going to work——

Mr. SMITH. Sorry, if we could skip to the really critical part of what you just said——

Mr. HOF. Yeah.

Mr. SMITH [continuing]. And say what you think that objective would be, since it is not, not winning.

Mr. HOF. Yeah.

Mr. SMITH. What would that objective be?

Mr. HOF. I think the objective would be to destroy or seriously degrade the ability of the regime to do this campaign of mass terror. It would entail destroying significant amounts of artillery, air, and missile assets. Would it involve bombing civilians? Certainly, certainly not deliberately. Will there be collateral effects? Of course. Any of us who have ever served in the military understand this. Collateral effects, American casualties should be assumed. There are no cost-free options here.

Mr. SMITH. And my problem is at the end of that, you know, based on every military plan I have seen, the Assad regime still stands, the jihadis are still there, and maybe Assad is able to bomb fewer civilians. How many fewer I don't know. At the end of that, what have we really achieved in terms of shifting the situation in any way out of the terrible situation that it is right now?

Mr. HOF. We have probably given our allies and friends a period of relief. Whether—you know, whether or not it decisively affects the situation on the ground, I don't know that anybody could predict that.

Mr. SMITH. The other question about this is, as has been pointed out, Hezbollah is sending stuff to them, Iran is sending stuff to them, Russia is sending stuff to them, and we go in, you know, take out 50 of their aircraft. What is to stop, you know, Russia from selling them 50 more? What is to stop Iran from sending another brigade in?

Mr. HOF. Yeah, it would probably be difficult to resupply if, you know, if associated support systems are engaged, air fields and so forth. But, look, it is not our job to secure a military victory for the Syrian revolution. If Assad is actually going to be better off without an Air Force, without helicopters, without major parts of his missile force, with major parts of his artillery gone, so be it. I don't

think he is going to be in a better situation. That is not the same thing as predicting that this is the long sought silver bullet.

If I could make just one comment on the arming of rebels. I agree entirely that Syria is awash in arms, but look where they are located. The regime has just about everything it needs. The jihadists, largely with support from private sources in the Gulf, have a great deal. Who are the people that are looking for support here? They are the folks in the middle. They are the Syrian nationalists who are actually trying to produce a decent result here. Sure, we and our allies can cut them off, but what does that do? What does that do for them? What does that do for us?

Mr. SMITH. It is not a matter of cutting them off.

Mr. HOF. I suppose if we want the violence to stop, one alternative here, I guess, would be a regime victory, but I don't think that that is the kind of result that is going to be good either for Syrians or their neighbors.

Mr. SMITH. And I am sorry, I am going to stop my time now. I know there is other people want to speak. I am taking way, way too much time. I am sure other questions will come up that Ms. Yacoubian can address. I yield back. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Thornberry.

Mr. THORNBERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me at least initially change the subject briefly. A couple of you have mentioned the chemical weapons. I appreciate the fact if there is a complete collapse and chaos that involves Jordan, Turkey, Israel, the biggest issue we could imagine, if, as most people say, this thing is going to stalemate most likely for the foreseeable future, it seems to me that the chemical stockpile and especially the chemical weapons getting in the hands of the jihadists is the greatest direct national security danger that we face, and yet at least a couple of you said never any boots on the ground, under no circumstances, et cetera, et cetera. So talk to us a little bit about how you see this chemical weapons stockpile, the danger it poses to us, and are there no circumstances under which limited military action, maybe even boots on the ground would not be appropriate to prevent attacks against the homeland or attacks against our allies in Europe or the region?

Mr. HOF. Thank you, Mr. Thornberry. I guess I will start.

Chemical weapons in the hands of jihadists would definitely be a bad outcome here. Chemical weapons in the hands of a regime willing to use them against the people of Syria is the circumstance that is staring us in the face right now. And to me, this is the most alarming of circumstances because it is an actual fact. And it is one of the reasons perhaps—in the mind of the President of the United States, it is probably the central reason why he sees a transition from the Assad regime to something better as essential.

In terms of the specifics of how this would be handled and whether or not there would be contingencies potentially involving American boots on the ground, I have to say, Congressman, I am skeptical even in those circumstances. But I think that this is probably a question better addressed to the Department of Defense in closed session.

Mr. THORNBERRY. Anybody else choose to weigh in on that?

Mr. ABRAMS. Just to say that I have to assume that there have been—and there have been some press reports—that there have been lengthy discussions between the U.S. military and the Israeli military about this question. And there is a question as to what the Jordanians or Israelis or Turks might be able to do directly, maybe with help from the U.S. that would avoid a direct U.S. military role in that.

Ms. YACoubian. Maybe just very briefly, I mean, my understanding is that in terms of boots on the ground, it would potentially require a significant commitment of forces. I have heard 70,000 or 75,000, which is obviously no small number. Unfortunately I think the options are quite limited. Beyond the thought of working with allies, there is also the potential of working through groups that we are training and working with now in covert programs.

But I would also, if I could, just take a moment to talk or bring the conversation back briefly to the question of targeted strikes. One, there is also the thought—although if the stockpiles are transferred or loss of control takes place, I think that leaves one with very few options. But there is the thought of potentially using targeted military strikes to disable delivery systems of such weapons.

But I think for Mr. Smith's benefit, I just wanted to slightly differentiate my position on targeted strikes. That I see them, again, as something that would have to take place as part of a broader political strategy. And from my perspective, it is not so much the military value of such strikes but rather the question of whether the use of targeted strikes could alter the calculus of key players on the ground, those who are currently supporting the regime, to disavow support for the regime. Is there a way—and it is a very open question—that targeted strikes could be employed in the use of a broader political strategy to try and seek negotiations.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mrs. Davis.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all of you for being here.

If I could pick up on what you were just saying, Ms. Yacoubian. In terms of a broader strategy, one of the things that we know is that we didn't necessarily entertain the question of what next when it came to Iraq particularly. And where have you seen those discussions occurring now? I mean, to what extent—we have talked a little bit about what a post-Assad regime would look like. It is probably pie in the sky right now to think exactly in terms of that. But what kinds of discussions should we be having right now that we are not having?

Ms. YACoubian. Thank you for your question. I think we have to, one, start to think more creatively to the extent possible. I think we all agree it is absolutely a problem from hell. I think we all agree frankly on the analysis with regard to the situation on the ground. The question is, how do we get to some place. And unfortunately I think at this point, a democratic, multi-confessional, inclusive Syria just does feel like a very far off ideal. But at a minimum, how do we try to minimize Syria's spillover? And how do we think more, frankly, creatively about external players? And I do think Russia has a very important role to play. There has been no small

amount of time, I know, and effort devoted to trying to sort of pull the Russians around. I understand the frustration that that has yet to yield much. I still think it is a very important venue to continue to pursue. I do think we have to think a bit more about Iran and its role. It is a key—perhaps the staunchest supporter of the Assad regime. I don't know what the answer is. Is there a way to bridge some of these deeper regional security concerns, whether it is Iran's nuclear capabilities and its role in Syria? I just think that when we talk about the projection of U.S. power, we think largely in military terms. And I think we really need to be thinking more in terms of leadership, our role as the key global power, how can we do more to sort of coalesce a group of key allies, including Russia, who is not an ally but has a key role to play in this.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you. I want to move on. Mr. Ambassador and then Mr. Abrams.

Mr. HOF. It is an excellent question. And the issue of what is next in Syria, what follows this regime is all important in my view. I think we need to approach this first of all with a sense of modesty. There is no way the United States is going to be able to micromanage an end result in Syria. This is not something that we are going to be able to control. Can we influence it around the edges in constructive ways? I would say that if we don't try our best, the answer is going to be inevitably no. I don't think we should start from a sense of hopelessness here. I think the Syrian opposition, the mainstream opposition is in the process right now of establishing an executive council of some kind that is going to try to establish itself on Syrian territory in liberated zones. I think this is something the United States really needs to follow up on. Until there is an alternate government on Syrian territory, a government that pulls together people who are, indeed, dedicated to the idea of one Syria, a nonsectarian Syria, a Syria of citizenship and rule of law, until that exists on the ground, people who are still supporting this regime because they don't know what the alternative is will continue to support the regime. So in my preferred strategy, that is a key direction to go in.

Mrs. DAVIS. Thank you. Mr. Abrams, I am sorry, you only have 22 seconds. But I hope you can do that.

Mr. ABRAMS. I will be brief.

I think the problem is that those kinds of people who Fred Hof is talking about are not getting money and weapons from the Gulf. The more extreme elements are. And we are not backing those people—Syrian nationalists—with anything like the—

Mrs. DAVIS. For the record, do you have metrics that you would suggest in order to actually vet those groups? I mean, do you think that we are looking at that? For the record. Thank you.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 83.]

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Turner.

Mr. TURNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to thank each of you for your contribution to this discussion. This is somewhat of a difficult one because I agree with—Ms. Yacoubian.

Is that close at all?

Ms. YACOUBIAN. It was perfectly fine.

Mr. TURNER [continuing]. On the fact that we have a problem on the issue of the projection of power being a deficiency of leadership.

I want to follow up on what Mrs. Davis was saying. We see that Hezbollah is relevant in Syria. Iran is relevant in Syria. Russia is relevant in Syria. And because of the vacuum of leadership that we have in the United States, it seems as if we are not relevant in Syria. I don't know that anyone could clearly state what the articulated policy of this administration is with respect to Syria. And therefore, the options of what we should do are obviously difficult to conclude.

So my question is going to have two parts. First, I think each of you are advocating that we do need to be relevant and that certainly we don't want an outcome where Hezbollah, Iran, and Russia are the determining relevant players without American leadership. And in doing so, then I would like if you could give us some sense of what should our goal be. Obviously there are a number of options as to what the goal should be—secure weapons of mass destruction, chemical weapons, some argue regime change. In Libya, it was an issue of—the articulated goal was to protect civilians from mass murder. What in your eyes as we see this situation should be the articulated policy of the United States?

And then secondly, Mr. Abrams, I am very concerned with the prospect of—you had indicated, you know, with a robust strike, we could significantly diminish Syria's capability both air and their military bases. I was a significant critic of the administration's policy in Libya because of the concern that it could result in the weapons stockpiles in Libya becoming unsecured. We did see later that that was one of the results.

So I am concerned that an action of robust strike or no matter how limited it might be might actually have that same outcome, that, in fact, by our diminishing Syria's ability to secure its own weapons stockpile that we might create an issue, where, in fact, those weapons fall into the hands of jihadists or those who would pose us a threat.

I would love your thoughts. Mr. Abrams.

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you. What should our role in Syria be? I mean, we have talked about the role of trying to help U.S. allies—for example, Jordan, Turkey, Israel—deal with the crisis in Syria. Inside Syria, I think the way I would put it is, our goal should be to prevent the continuation of power or installation of a hostile regime, hostile to us, and dependent on Hezbollah and Iran for its survival because such a regime is going to be a tremendously destabilizing factor permanently in the region.

Just on your point on the air strikes. Yes, I think what happened there is we, in a sense, collapsed the government of Libya, and it was replaced by anarchy. So that gets us back to what I think Fred Hof was saying. One of the reasons for trying to establish an alternative government and build up its strength now is to prevent that moment or period of complete anarchy when there is no control over the Syrian military and military stocks. That is a risk that is run. I don't think it is run by a series of air strikes that are aimed primarily at Assad's air power. But I think it is run by a collapse of the regime if that collapse is followed by nothing, by anarchy for months.

Mr. TURNER. Thank you, Mr. Abrams. Ambassador.

Mr. HOF. Congressman, in terms of what our goal should be in the context of Syria, number one, enhance the security and stability of our allies and friends in the region. Number two, transition, political transition away from this regime. Three, replacement of the regime with something decent. Those are broad goals. They have obviously got to be filled in with a detailed strategy—diplomatic and perhaps military—to go about it. The proliferation problem. Yes, it is there. But again, the biggest problem is the one that is staring us right in the face. A regime sitting on an enormous stockpile of weaponry, conventional and unconventional, and a regime that has a track record for transferring weaponry, including Scud missiles, to terrorist organizations. We need to look at contingencies, obviously; but we shouldn't forget at all what is staring us right in the face with the current situation.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Langevin.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank our panel for what has been a very fruitful discussion. Obviously these are critically important issues to our national interest, and we certainly appreciate your contributions to this dialogue today.

I think that the argument that has been raised today about some type of limited strikes have merit. And I take from your discussion here today the fact that it would, in fact, degrade Assad's military capability in some way. I also believe, too, it seems to me that there is a strong psychological benefit to some type of a limited strike, is what I am hearing.

Let's face it, the rebels at one point were doing pretty well. And then with the Hezbollah coming into the region and some other things that have occurred, the tide has shifted. And now it seems that Assad's forces are the ones that are dominating. And certainly that has had an effect on the rebels' ability to coalesce and to fight with a coherent strategy. So it seems to me that it also would send a message to the nations of the region that the United States does see this as a vital national interest and that we do and are willing to put skin in the game.

There is also the troubling fact that there have been approximately 100,000 people that have been killed in this conflict. And without some demonstrable action, it appears that the world community is willing to stay silent with that many people having been killed. I am also troubled by the fact that the Assad regime has used WMD [weapons of mass destruction] on its own people, and there has still been no demonstrable response on the part of the world community. And in my mind, that only appears to embolden them to keep doing it again. So I would disagree respectfully with the ranking member who would say that this is not going to have any benefit at all.

Can you comment again further on its ability to degrade, a limited strike, degrade the Assad regime's military capability but also the psychological benefit boost that this may give to the rebels but also the psychological effect that it might have on Russia being then forced to the table to help actually be willing to sit down and broker some type of a peace effort.

Can you comment on the things that I have mentioned?

Mr. ABRAMS. If I can start, Mr. Langevin. I take your point, and I agree with the point. And I think that where we stand now is, if you are looking at this from the Iranian or Russian point of view, there is no American position. Are the Americans going to react if you send an Iranian expeditionary force into Syria? Apparently not. Are the Americans going to react if you use chemical weapons against the population several times over? Apparently not. So why should you give anything up at the negotiating table? There is no pressure on you. There is no American pressure. So I think this action would have that kind of impact.

If your goal is a successful negotiation, it is more likely you will get one, I think, if we take that route. And it will also have an impact on the ground because, as I noted before, Assad did not initially use air power. That is something he started doing when things were going badly for him. And I, therefore, assume—and I think it is reasonable—that denying him the use of a lot of his air power would have an impact on the battle on the ground.

Mr. HOF. Congressman, when John Kerry became Secretary of State, one of the central points he made about Syria was that having a Geneva negotiation of some kind is a really good idea. It is a good objective, provided one key thing happens. And that is, Assad's calculation has to be changed. He has said this numerous times in numerous places, both publicly and privately. Changing Assad's calculation. Right now, that calculation is changing. It is changing in the wrong direction. He has got Hezbollah and Iran all in. He has Americans debating whether the positive forces in Syria are worthy of any kind of support at all. I think in this case I would tie a military operation directly to a military mission. There may be additional benefits, but I wouldn't necessarily count on them.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. Conaway.

Mr. CONAWAY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all for being here today. If you look back on the history of Syria, but for the chemical weapons, isn't this just the latest iteration of a long process that these folks go through periodically either on their own or forced from the outside to reset the political structure within the country? The French tried in the 1920s to, in effect, set up a bit of a partitioning within the country. Can you talk to us about whether or not that is a rational approach to—going back to Ambassador Hof's comments early on that the clearest national security interest articulated so far other than the chemical weapons is the chaos inside Syria and its impact on its neighbors. And so if we could get to eliminating that chaos within the country, would partitioning be a step in that direction?

Ms. YACUBIAN. Thank you. Maybe I will take a quick stab at that.

My sense is that partition is not the way to go in Syria, that it would dramatically increase the already significant levels of human suffering, that you could see all kinds of instances of ethnic cleansing and other things. I think that the territorial integrity of Syria and maintaining its cohesion should be a key goal in all of this at the end of the day, that the end state of Syria should be a cohesive Syria that remains—

Mr. CONAWAY. Okay. Speak to this then: What does reduce the violence inside the country?

Ms. YACoubian. Well, again, I think from my perspective, this is a long—this is a very difficult issue. I mean, I would want to maybe take a little bit of issue with what you started your question with, which is how we got to where we are. I think we need to bear in mind that what has happened in Syria comes within the context of broader change that is sweeping the Arab world. It did start as peaceful protests. There is a significant yearning amongst the Syrian people to live peacefully and democratically and so on. My own sense is, though, that seeking to divide the country or allowing the divisions that are already permeating to take hold would not constitute—

Mr. CONAWAY. All right. Well, not necessarily quibbling over what triggered this latest dustup.

Mr. ABRAMS. Mr. Conaway, I think one has to remember, it is a 74 percent, 75 percent Sunni country. There is no way that that minority Alawite regime allied to the Shi'a Iranian regime is going to be able to remain in power except through brute force.

Mr. CONAWAY. All right.

President Obama said using chemical weapons was a red line. The press has reported—open source reporting—that chemical weapons have been used. The chairman said that he thinks the administration is about to confirm that.

Being that the biggest player on the field shouldn't bluff, if it has actually happened or happens in a big wide-scale event. Let's clearly eliminate the question as to whether or not it has actually happened. Let's say he throws it at one of the opposition's strongholds in a big event. What would be your advice to the administration?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think the President should prove that he was not bluffing. And whether it is through a very substantial provision of arms to the rebels or direct military action by the United States, I think the regime has to be harmed. It needs to be damaged so that it learns a lesson that this is not going to be tolerated and that it will come out worse if it does it again.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Ambassador.

Mr. HOF. I think, Congressman, that back on June 13, the administration acknowledged openly that chemical weapons have been used. This is a hard conclusion that people have come to. You know, there are some lingering questions about chain of command and all of that. But chemical weapons were used. The administration said that its response was going to be to increase significantly assistance to the armed opposition. I believe that has been translated into a desire for weapons targeted to vetted elements of the Syrian armed forces. I definitely think that needs to happen and quickly. And more importantly, the United States, I think, has to play a central role, kind of an umpiring role in deciding who gets what from major sources because under no circumstances will weaponry coming out of American sources be the major source of weaponry. We need to play a big role in deciding the stuff that is coming out of Gulf countries and elsewhere. Where is it going? Make sure it goes to people that we want it to go to.

Mr. CONAWAY. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Duckworth.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Ambassador, I want to pick up on your answer and sort of looking at the next steps. If the administration's stated objective is to achieve a negotiated settlement to the Syrian conflict that involves President Assad stepping down, then as we are looking at which weapons go where, we are going to potentially be dealing with all the groups that are involved, what steps should the United States take in our engagement with these opposition groups and regional actors to increase the likelihood of this post-conflict transition process that will lead to stability in Syria? Are we then saying that these groups get some of these arms, these don't? How do we do that?

Mr. HOF. Yes. Thank you for your question. It is a rather complex process of picking and choosing. For quite some time now, various departments and agencies of the United States Government have been diligently involved in trying to determine who inside Syria needs to be supported, okay. Over the last several months—indeed, over the past year, a real track record has been established in terms of providing nonlethal assistance to various groups, individuals inside Syria. So it is not as if we are flying blind here. Okay. I think that the vetting has been thorough. As I mentioned earlier, if we expect 100 percent success, it is just not going to happen. It is inevitable in a complex operation of this kind that some things will get to the wrong people. But the wrong people, believe me, are already flush in weaponry.

I think the key element here, beyond providing arms, is working with allies to make sure that supplies coming from elsewhere go to the right people. And then working very closely with the Syrian opposition, as difficult as that is—and believe me, I know how difficult it is—to get an alternate government established on liberated Syrian territory. This will be the key step to trying to influence a decent outcome in Syria.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Well, but opposition groups have refused to even participate in the Geneva II peace conference. So is it reasonable to have an expectation that we think that we can influence a level of change within this opposition so that they will all come to the table? Is that what you are saying, that we are going to tie access to resources to you must come to negotiations? Is that what you are saying?

Mr. HOF. I am persuaded that Secretary Kerry and his staff will be able to persuade the Syrian opposition to attend a Geneva II conference, if such a conference comes about. I mean, we have to keep in mind the purpose of Geneva. It is transition from the current regime to a national unity body. Okay? If the opposition is convinced that that is the purpose and that is why people will get to Geneva and they will be able to exercise a veto basically—all of this is in the Geneva agreement—I am convinced the opposition will be there, that it will not permit the regime to show up and debate an empty chair. And I think Secretary Kerry can bring that off.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. Mr. Abrams, did you want to add to this?

Mr. ABRAMS. No.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Okay.

Ms. YACOUBIAN. I think that the Geneva process is certainly ultimately the way to go. But I personally am skeptical about the use of arms to sort of entice rebels to go, in particular because I think whether or not—even if we are able to coerce them to the table, I think the real question is, how much influence on the ground would those rebels that would come to the negotiating table have? And I think increasingly, we are seeing a situation in which more extreme elements, those associated with Al Qaeda and others, are having more and more impact on the ground.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Coffman.

Mr. COFFMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

All of you have stated that one of the key threats in Syria are the stockpiles of chemical weapons I think falling into the wrong hands. I believe that Israel has done four air strikes by—well, it at least has not denied—four air strikes into the region to interdict the movement of weapons that they felt obviously that would fall into the wrong hands. We support Israel militarily through aid. Syria is on their border, clearly in their sphere of influence. All of you I think have stated in one form or another that Israel's interests and U.S. interests are the same. So why is it then that greater U.S. involvement is needed, given Israel's capability to intervene in the region?

Mr. ABRAMS. Mr. Coffman, my answer to that would be that we are in a sense playing two different games here. Israel has a narrow goal, which is to prevent the movement of weaponry to Hezbollah. That is basically what they are doing.

On the broader question of relations between Syria, Hezbollah, Iran, U.S.-Iran, U.S.-Russia, who rules Syria, what happens to Jordan, that in a sense is a higher level game that a superpower can play. But I don't think you can say to Israel, look, you are in charge of the whole region, and you have got to determine the outcome of the war in Syria. I don't think you can say to them that we are going to stay out of this, your job is to police Syria.

Mr. HOF. Congressman, the only point I would add to that—and I am sorry if I sound like a broken record—chemical weapons in Syria are already in the wrong hands. They are in the hands of a regime that is neck deep in criminal activity and a regime that has a proven track record for proliferation over the years. So I just hope we don't lose sight of that particular point.

Ms. YACOUBIAN. Maybe I will just very quickly add, I think the Israelis have themselves said they have no interest in getting directly involved in Syria. I think they are very wisely protecting their own interests, doing what they feel they need to do when their red lines are crossed. But I think understand that, for them, I don't think it is in Israel's interest nor do I think it is in the region's or our interests for Israel to become more directly involved in Syria.

Mr. COFFMAN. In terms of a resolution, I think all three of you dislike the notion of partition. And I served in Iraq in 2005–2006 with the Marine Corps, and I know that it was floated in the Congress at that time about partitioning Iraq. And there were whole provinces that fell on one side of the sectarian divide or another.

But Baghdad had communities certainly that were on one side or the other. But Baghdad was a mix between Shi'a and Sunni. I understand in Syria that there are specific areas that are dominated by Alawites versus Sunni Arabs. Is there a viable solution that would, in fact, maybe even either divide the country or create sort of a loose federation, as in the case of Iraq with the Kurds and the Sunnis and the Shi'a?

Mr. HOF. Congressman, I think if that kind of a solution is going to come about either on a permanent or an interim basis, it will be the product of events inside Syria. The key difference, of course, is in Iraq we were an occupying power. We actually had a good deal to say about the future of Iraq's political shape. In Syria, an analogous situation does not exist. I agree with Mona Yacoubian that for Syria territorial integrity at the end of the day I think is important. But the key point is I think it is important to almost all Syrians.

Mr. COFFMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. CONAWAY [presiding]. Mr. Johnson from Georgia, 5 minutes.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Abrams, I believe it was you that I heard earlier this morning talk about the fact that the U.S. should—I don't want to say apply pressure. I am not sure that you used that terminology. But there should be some work to cause the Russians to become more responsible in terms of their support for the Assad regime.

Is that a fair characterization?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I do believe it. I think actually it was Mona Yacoubian who talked more directly about that.

Mr. JOHNSON. All right.

Ma'am, since you talked about that, let me ask you, what impact does the Edward Snowden drama have on our ability to encourage the Russians to change their behavior?

Ms. YACOUBIAN. That is a terrific question. And I have to confess, I haven't thought about it in terms of the impact on Syria. But I think the extent to which there is greater mistrust—and it is already a fairly tortured relationship—can't help in terms of our ability to work with the Russians or convince them.

But I would say this, I do think in terms of trying to understand Russia's calculations with respect to Syria, that whereas, I, as an analyst, and I think others had initially thought there was more common ground between the U.S. and Russia with respect to Syria. I think what I am seeing is that from the Russian perspective, the precedent of international intervention leading to the unseating of a regime is anathema. And I think they look to Libya as the prime example and seek to avoid that at all costs. So I think the extent to which there is greater mistrust in the U.S.-Russian relationship, the extent to which the Russians feel that they are somehow going to be led down a path that from their perspective leads to an outcome that is untenable, I think it makes it all the more difficult.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you.

Either one of you gentlemen care to respond?

Mr. HOF. Congressman, I think the only thing I would add to that—and again, it is an excellent question. And I hadn't thought of the Snowden aspect of this either.

I certainly don't think that there should be any sense of a trade-off here. I think we need to be very, very, very direct in a professional way with the Russians, saying, look, your client is hurting our allies and friends. He is doing it in a way that is entirely gratuitous, a way that has no objective military purpose. It is terror on a mass scale. We want you to weigh in with your client and make it stop.

Now whether or not Moscow has the objective ability to bring that about is another question altogether. Bashar al-Assad may just tell them, thanks for your views on national security, I am going to do what I feel like doing. But it seems to me at a minimum, at a minimum, this is where we really need to be pressing Moscow.

Mr. JOHNSON. Is it your belief that the points that you have made have not been made by this administration to the Russian people or to the Russian leadership?

Mr. HOF. Congressman, I don't know the answer to that question. I think what I do know is that our emphasis with Moscow over the last 3 months or so has been on trying to resurrect the Geneva process and bring about a Geneva II conference. Whether or not there has been a specific sustained diplomatic campaign focused on the Russians and the behavior of their client, I honestly don't know.

Mr. JOHNSON. Anyone else want to comment?

All right.

Okay. Well, what will a relationship between the U.S. and Syria look like if Assad is able to retain power?

Mr. ABRAMS. If Assad is able to retain power, I don't think we can re-establish a relationship with him, not after the mass murders that he has committed, war crimes, crimes against humanity, 100,000 dead, the use of chemical weapons. I don't see that has any future.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you.

Mr. CONAWAY. The gentleman's time has expired. Mr. Scott from Georgia for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I apologize. I had to step out for a minute. If you answered some of my questions, I apologize.

But, Ambassador, you made the statement that Syria's revolution is not America's to win or lose. I wrote it down when you said it. And I agree with you. I don't think that the crisis in that country rises to the level or national interest that we should intervene militarily. I think there is broad support for the humanitarian assistance, both from myself and from many others. And I think there is just a tremendous amount of agreement that we must support our allies—Israel, Jordan, Turkey—in that area.

My concern from the testimony comes from the fact that each of the three of you have suggested that in some way, shape, or form, the U.S. could get involved militarily, whether it be with targeted air strikes or other things, essentially trying to carry out a mission of removing Assad. And you have also each indicated that we should not put boots on the ground.

So my question is, if the United States does not put boots on the ground to secure the chemical weapons that Assad currently has, who do you intend to have secure those weapons?

Mr. HOF. I will take a stab at that, Congressman. I think over the past 18 months, the Department of Defense, in consultation with Israel and perhaps others, has conducted a very, very serious planning process that addresses that question in some detail. I am not familiar with the contours of that process, Congressman. And I think the question you are posing is an excellent one. I think it is probably better posed to the Department of Defense in closed session. And I would just add, speaking for myself as a former military officer, I am not looking for an excuse for U.S. military intervention in Syria as the first option, okay. My sense of priority has to do with our friends and allies in the region and how they are being swamped by the gratuitously violent terroristic campaign of this regime, okay. If an end to that can be brought about diplomatically, I am 110 percent in favor of that.

Mr. SCOTT. Ambassador, I apologize. We only get 5 minutes.

If I could move though. Assad is a bad guy. Gaddafi was a bad guy but the U.S. made a decision to take Gaddafi out but not secure his weapons. And I think serious questions remain about where his weapons are throughout that whole region of the world now because we did not secure the weapons. And my question again gets back to, if Assad goes, what happens to the chemical stockpiles? And aren't they more likely to end up in the hands of Hezbollah? And while Assad has used chemical weapons, certainly some of the people that are trying to get those weapons would use them—they are not going to sit on them. They are going to use them in a much broader and, I would say, immediately after they get those weapons systems. And they will hit Israel, and they will hit our other allies with them. So how do we secure the chemical weapons after Assad is gone?

Mr. ABRAMS. Could I just jump in and say, in the case of Libya, he had nonconventional weapons. He had a nuclear program which we did secure.

Mr. SCOTT. We secured it first.

Mr. ABRAMS. First. So that prior to that sort of last act—at that point, you were talking about conventional weapons only but you were not talking about nuclear, chemical, or biological.

Mr. SCOTT. That is right. And that makes this more complex.

Mr. ABRAMS. It does.

Mr. SCOTT. We secured them first.

Mr. ABRAMS. The weapons were there. I would say, I think if Assad starts to move those weapons to Hezbollah, I think we see Israeli action, whether we like it or not.

Mr. SCOTT. Sure.

Mr. ABRAMS. If the regime falls, then I think that is the question that, like Fred Hof, I think the Americans, Jordanians, and Israelis and maybe the Turks have been talking about now for about a year, who does what to secure those weapons in case of anarchy?

Mr. SCOTT. My point is somebody has got to put boots on the ground. And I want to make sure that it is the United States or our allies that are taking possession of those chemical weapons, to

destroy them, not somebody who is going to turn around and use them against those very allies that we are there to protect.

Mr. Chairman, I yield the remainder of my time. Thank you for your testimony.

Mr. CONAWAY. Thank you. Mr. Garamendi from California for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Thank you. I have I guess a legal question. Do air strikes amount to an act of war? Ambassador.

Mr. HOF. Yes, I would say they do.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Very good. The Constitution says that then the U.S. Congress must authorize those strikes.

Secondly, this area is fraught with many schisms—religious, tribal, and the like. There has been very little discussion here at this table about the Shi'a-Sunni schism, about the Alawites, the Kurds, even Christians. And I think we really need to take that into account as we try to figure out what to do here. One of our colleagues at an earlier hearing on this said, is it America's role to be the executors of the defunct British Empire? Well, that is my question to you gentlemen and lady. Is that what we are really doing here? Are we trying to keep together something that the British put together essentially a century ago?

Ms. YACUBIAN. I will take an initial stab at that. I mean I think there are certainly concerns that with Syria, we are seeing potentially the unraveling of the Sykes-Picot agreement that organized the 20th century post-World War I, post-Ottoman Levant. And I think that would have very significant repercussions for stability in the region. So I view it more as a question of stability or, by contrast, the destabilizing impact of Syria's current conflict.

For me, I think one issue that we haven't talked much about beyond the question of the Sunni-Shi'a divide, which is significant and I think you are now seeing as a result of Syria a zone of sectarian conflict that stretches from the Mediterranean to beyond Baghdad, in particular the Sunni-Shi'a dimensions of it. I also think we need to think very seriously about the disposition of the Christian minority in the Levant and in the Arab world more broadly who are feeling increasingly under threat.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Now that you are thinking about it, what are your thoughts?

Ms. YACUBIAN. Well, my thoughts are I think that we need to look for a Syria—and again, unfortunately, I think the Syrian opposition could and should do much more to attract members of the Syrian minority, the Christian minority in particular, as well as the Alawites. They, I think, have not really created a vision of a post-Assad Syria in which minorities would feel that they would not only survive but thrive.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Thank you. Ambassador.

Mr. HOF. I think, Congressman, there are plenty of Christians, Kurds, and even Alawites in the Syrian opposition. I think that opposition has said the right things about the future of minorities in Syria, about the need for a Syria in which Syrian citizenship trumps all other forms of political identification.

Mr. GARAMENDI. And this would be about as successful as our previous effort in Egypt.

Mr. Abrams, your thoughts on this.

Mr. ABRAMS. I would refer to something I said before. It is a 74 percent Sunni country. It is, therefore, natural that it would be ruled by Sunnis, we would hope with all of the usual guarantees for human rights protections for those who are not part of that group. The only way you are going to ever rule that country by an Alawite or Shi'a group is by force. That is the only way it is going to be done henceforth. That is really the only way it was done under the Assads, father and son.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Just another question in the last moment. Refugee support.

Is it appropriate for the United States to provide significantly more support to Turkey, Jordan, and perhaps Lebanon with regard to refugees? Should we be doing that?

Ms. YACIOUBIAN. We are the largest provider of humanitarian assistance. I think the role the U.S. could play at this point is perhaps to play more of a role to encourage in particular our Gulf allies who have significant resources at hand to provide more.

Mr. GARAMENDI. In other words, we have done enough. Ambassador.

Mr. HOF. The big problem that still faces us, Congressman, is inside Syria where the regime blocks the United Nations from reaching rebel-controlled areas.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Thank you.

Mr. ABRAMS. I agree with the idea of getting the Gulf allies to do more. You have authorized an awful lot of money.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Final point. I got 2 seconds. And for the record, should the United States be putting pressure on Qatar and others in the Gulf to cool it? Or increase? Could you provide that for the record?

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 93.]

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

Mr. Bridenstine from Oklahoma for 5 minutes.

Mr. BRIDENSTINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Abrams, I appreciate your testimony. I appreciate the testimony of everybody here.

I do have a concern. I think you are greatly overestimating the effectiveness of a 1-day air strike option. And I will say that. I am a Navy pilot. I flew Operation Southern Watch in Iraq. I flew Operation Shock and Awe in Iraq. That was the most effective probably war effort in American history, and it took 2 weeks in order to have the desired effects of getting our troops all the way to Baghdad and getting us in a position to win. The statue of Saddam came down. You mentioned that it was an overestimate of 700 sorties in order to take out the air defense systems of Syria. I was just going to ask, what do you think would be an appropriate number of sorties to take out the air defenses of Syria?

Mr. ABRAMS. Mr. Bridenstine, I would say that is one of the reasons that I don't favor a no-fly zone because you may well have to do that. Where I think that is an exaggeration is that if you were doing this the way the Israelis have done it, why do you need to take out the air defense systems? You are doing this from outside Syria. You are using, presumably, cruise missiles as well as air-to-ground missiles.

Mr. BRIDENSTINE. But it goes to desired effects. The desired effect, according to you, is to severely degrade the capacity of Assad to use air assets and air bases.

Mr. ABRAMS. Right.

Mr. BRIDENSTINE. One-day strikes without first preempting the air defense systems, I just don't think that is a realistic scenario. And as far as air defenses, I haven't looked at the Syrian order of battle as far as air defenses go. But I imagine they have a Russian system possibly that might have, you know, eight nodes, four radars, four missile defense batteries all distributed and networked. I mean, we are talking about a very large strike package to eliminate that one system. The reality is, 700 sorties is very realistic to degrade their air defense systems.

Mr. ABRAMS. I don't dispute that. My question is, what can you achieve if you don't go into Syria and, therefore, require that?

Mr. BRIDENSTINE. And let me just follow up for a second.

Let's say we do that 1-day air strikes, and let's say the desired effects are there, which I am very skeptical of.

Mr. ABRAMS. Right.

Mr. BRIDENSTINE. And I say that with all due respect.

But let's say we did that. The next question is, what is the response from the Russians? Does that mean they are going to go home? Does that mean they are not going to provide any more weapons? Does that mean they are not going to provide any more support? Or does it mean they are going to escalate? And I would argue that if they know that our strategy is a 1-day air strike, then they are, indeed, going to escalate, knowing for sure that we would de-escalate. And I am not saying that we would de-escalate. But I go back to what Mr. Turner said earlier. We have a problem with leadership here in the United States. And if the Russians believe that their escalation will warrant our de-escalation, then it is in their best interest to continue to escalate. And I guess what I would ask you is, what would be your assessment as to our response once Russia escalates?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, on the latter point, I think escalation would only be additional arms sales to Syria. But as Fred said, that depends to some extent on what is left of the airpower infrastructure in Syria whether they can do that.

The Russians have not really responded, for example, to Israeli air strikes. Presumably they would want to sell more to Syria, and they like getting paid for it. But I want to go back. I think the questions you have asked can be answered best by the Pentagon. That is, suppose you were told you may not go into Syria. You have got to do it, in a sense, from border areas, and you can use cruise missiles. What can you achieve?

In informal conversations I have had with some people in the American military, they have suggested they could achieve a lot. That is not the official position of the Pentagon. And I think you are going to need to push very hard to get answers to those questions. But I think it would be worth doing so because in a sense, you are saying I am speculating, and you are right. And I am speculating because the Pentagon has never really given us the answers to this. They don't want to but they should be pressured to do so.

Mr. BRIDENSTINE. Roger that. I yield back.

Mr. CONAWAY. The gentleman yields back. Ms. Shea-Porter for 5 minutes.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Thank you.

Mr. Abrams, I was looking up some of your comments in previous conflicts. And you had stated in one of your articles that—and I am going to quote, “In Lebanon, the administration has cooperated with the Saudi Arabian Government, which is Sunni, in clandestine operations that are intended to weaken Hezbollah, the Shi’a organization that is backed by Iran. The U.S. has also taken part in clandestine operations aimed at Iran and its ally Syria. A by-product of these activities has been the bolstering of Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to Al Qaeda.”

Do we really know what we are doing?

Mr. ABRAMS. As I read about some of the things that are happening in Syria, I think that is a very fair question. But if we don’t know what we are doing here in Syria, which is now we are in the third year, it is really an indictment of, to some extent, the administration, to some extent, frankly, the leadership of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. That is, if in the third year we can’t distinguish who are jihadis and who are Syrian nationalists with whom we might wish to work, why is that? How is it really possible that we are 3 years—or in the third year into this and we don’t know? It seems to me that is either a failure of policy or it is a failure of carrying out the policy by CIA. You know, I just don’t understand how it is possible that with 3 years of work we would not know the answers.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Well, it seems to me that at one point we are worried about Shi’a and at the next point we are worried about the Sunnis, and we just seem to flip them. And the word that we always use to describe the guys who we are against at the moment are the “extremists.” So my question to you is, aren’t they all fairly extremist when they are out there fighting and killing one another? I know we have all heard of some pretty gruesome stories coming from the rebels, the ones that were initially portrayed to us as those who were going to save Syria.

And so my worry here—and I think we should all be concerned about this—is that as they look at us and try to figure out where we are and that region tries to figure out where we are, we are not really clear exactly ourselves. So to step into a conflict—as heartbreaking as it is and as devastating as it is. And I have a family friend who is actually missing there in Syria. So as heartbreaking as all this is, I don’t think we are really—you know, to bring in any kind of weaponry or to bring in any kind of force right now, we don’t understand the consequences. And by reading your words then and looking now, I am concerned that in 3 years we will be writing something different.

So I would like to open that up. Would you like to comment? I see you nodding down there.

Ms. YACUBIAN. Well, I very much share your concerns. And I think that is what I elucidated in my written testimony as well, that I think we need to be humble about how complicated things are in Syria. It is a situation that is evolving very quickly. We have

very few, if any, assets on the ground. But I also want to just underscore one of the points you made which I take to heart. And that is the use of the term “extremist” and what it means to qualify a particular group as extremists. Typically in the past or in the context of Sunni extremism, we use it when we talk about jihadists, those that are affiliated with Al Qaeda. But as you rightly point out, there is a documented instance of a pretty horrific atrocity being committed by someone with the Farouq Brigade which is considered a brigade that is—and I don’t like to use the term “moderate” either—more moderate. I think when one begins to understand the dynamics at play in Syria, the depth of sectarian hatred, the term “extremist” becomes a bit blurry.

In my mind, he certainly, by committing an act of cannibalism, committed an atrocity that is extraordinarily extreme. And I don’t think we would want to be supporting or sending arms to such a group either. So I would simply underscore your point.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. And it is an awful, awful position, but I am struck by the silence of the world at large and wondering if they are showing good judgment, better judgment, worse judgment, but I would just say that we shouldn’t race in when we are not exactly certain about what the consequences will be.

Mr. ABRAMS. I would only just reiterate, but this didn’t start 2 weeks ago, it started more than 2 years ago. If our intelligence agencies cannot really identify which group is which, I think that is a remarkable intelligence failure.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Nugent from Florida for 5 minutes.

Mr. NUGENT. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate that, I appreciate this panel. The recurring theme, I think, particularly as you talk about this started over 770 days ago, I don’t think the options have gotten any better. I agree with you that I don’t believe that our intel is very actionable in regards to, you know, we are concerned about chemical weapons falling into the wrong hands. I am just not certain who those wrong hands are. You know, we talk about the Assad regime and Hezbollah, but when you start talking about 75 percent of the population is Sunni, and we heard testimony that whether it is extremist or moderate, I am not so sure what moderate means in the vernacular of what we are talking about. So I guess I am at a quagmire in regards to, you know, what are we doing. I mean, I understand the stated idea is to have Assad go, but I haven’t heard a clear response as to who the heck is going to replace him and how is that going to affect our friends in the region. Right now they have an issue as it relates to, you know, people coming over their borders and trying to secure and trying to feed and trying to take care of and keep unrest down because of what that brings, but that might be minor compared to the issues that we could be unleashing upon them if, and like once I said, who is the right folks who are going to have control over chemical weapons? Can anybody help me understand who the right folks are?

Mr. ABRAMS. Can I just make one little stab at that? Certainly the right folks are not international terrorists. That is to say—

Mr. NUGENT. Absolutely.

Mr. ABRAMS [continuing]. People connected to Al Qaeda or jihadis from around the world. I mean, that in a sense, that is the easy part of the answer. The harder part of the answer is distinguishing among Syrian groups, which are the ones with whom we might wish to cooperate and which are the ones that we would never wish to cooperate with and which we would try to keep out of power in Syria.

Mr. NUGENT. But do we actually have the control to try to keep someone out of power in Syria?

Mr. ABRAMS. All we can do, I think, is strengthen the people who we would like to see stronger. We can't really prevent—certainly some of our Gulf allies we can try to influence, but we can't prevent private citizens from pouring money into groups that we wish that they wouldn't help. So it seems to me all we can do is to say, well, these are some groups that look good to us, that look better to us, we would like them to be stronger today and as part of the fight over the post-Assad Syria, and we haven't really been doing much of that.

Mr. NUGENT. Do any of you think that—you know, I have heard you mention about, you know, projecting some air power, whether it is standoff or whatever to strike, and I guess to punish the Assad regime because you are really not going to probably have a dramatic effect on his ability to inflict serious pain on those, but there are those that want us to send additional arms or heavy weapons. Do any of you subscribe to the idea that that is going to be the way out? Or does that create additional problems?

Mr. HOF. Congressman, I think the choice before us right now in the face of a very significant intervention on the part of Iran and Hezbollah is whether or not we are just going to stand back and witness, you know, the military defeat of people who we have, indeed, gotten to know quite well over the last couple of years. I don't think that anybody is going to make the argument that providing weaponry to vetted Syrian rebels is going to be the decisive gesture that wins the conflict in Syria. The goal here, I think, is a good deal more modest. It is to stabilize a situation on the ground which, if not stabilized, could conceivably lead to the worst of all possible outcomes, and that would be a military victory on the part of a regime that is responsible for upwards of 100,000 deaths already.

Mr. NUGENT. One last thing. So the more involved we get, the stronger the motivation is for, I believe, Iran and Hezbollah and Russia to ramp it up because for the same reasons we don't want to lose, they don't want to lose, and I will leave it at that.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. CONAWAY. Thank the gentleman.

Mr. Smith.

Mr. SMITH. Just quickly, and I am going to follow up in a moment on that point because that is what I wanted to ask about a little bit. One thing we haven't mentioned throughout this whole hearing, and just for the record should be, is if we were to decide to do anything, even a, you know, more limited strike, the DOD [Department of Defense] has said they would need a supplemental, they would need Congress basically to vote for the money to pay

for it. That is a rather significant impediment to getting there. I just thought it was worth pointing out for the record.

Then following up on the point about, you know, we have heard all along that, you know, well, if we let this happen, it reduces our influence because we look weak, and there is nothing worse in the world apparently than looking weak. But the question that I have is over the course of the last 12 years now in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Libya we invested certainly in the case of the first two an enormous amount of money, well over 6,000 lives between Iraq and Afghanistan. I confess I haven't looked recently at the number of wounded, but it is pushing close to 100,000, trillions of dollars, and went all in, okay? Took out three regimes. On that very basic level, unquestionably we won, you know. We took out a regime to establish the fact basically, you know, if it is important to us, we are going to put the resources in, and we are going to do this, which is kind of part of the argument for why we can't stand back and watch Assad. At the end of that process, do we have that type of influence in those parts of the world? Did it, in fact, enhance our credibility? The tone of my voice, you know, suggests my answer to that question. No. You know, 6,000 lives, 100,000 wounded, a trillion dollars, all right? And it did not increase our credibility one lick. In fact, in many, many minds in that part of the world, it did the exact opposite. It made them once again resent us trying to mess in their part of the world.

So even if we invested the resources, even if we could, quote, win and actually take out Assad, I completely reject the premise that somehow that is the path to having this part of the world bow down before our wishes, and there is an enormous, enormous cost to this ridiculous philosophy that, you know, once a conflict has started you have to put everything into it to make sure you win because otherwise you will look weak, you know, otherwise your influence will go down. Have we learned nothing over the course of the last 12 years from our three efforts where we went all in and at the end of it, it didn't come out with us being feared and having that influence. The world is vastly more complex than that, and I guess if there is one thing I hope from Syria and everything else is that we begin to get the message out there in the world, particularly in the Middle East, that the U.S. doesn't control it because at this point if something bad happens there they blame us for it. If there is some way to sort of ramp back the expectations and the ability of the United States of America to reach into this region of the world and fix everything for good, or for ill for that matter, that is something that I think we ought to do. So all this talk about what we have to do something because otherwise people will think we don't have influence doesn't just miss the point, I think it is dangerous, and I will give you a moment to respond to that.

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, just my brief response. If that is the view of the United States, it is—becomes the view, it is a misfortune that the President said Assad must go and then said there is a red line on chemical weapons because you shouldn't say those things if you don't mean them. The President has said he doesn't bluff. He shouldn't bluff, no President should bluff. So that puts us in a very unfortunate position because the President has said some other

things like I will prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons, and you can't keep saying those things if you don't actually mean them.

Mr. SMITH. Yield back.

Mr. CONAWAY. Thank you. One quick one on the impact on Israel and its continued safety, particularly in the Golan Heights and others. Assume that this thing just continues to muddle along, can you give us your perspective of what you believe the impact will have on Israel and its issues?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I can start. I think they will take care of themselves on the question of arms transfers. I think the greatest concern from their point of view is the stability of Jordan and what kind of regime ends up being in power in Syria, and if what you have is a regime that is essentially a cat's paw now for Hezbollah and Iran, then that I think is dangerous for the whole region.

Israel's security depends on two things—one, their ability to defend themselves, but, two, their alliance with the United States. So if the perception in the region is that the United States is withdrawing, is less active, is unwilling, for example, to take on Iran, maybe unwilling to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear weapon state, that that will affect their security.

Mr. CONAWAY. Ambassador Hof.

Mr. HOF. I would just add, Mr. Chairman, that, you know, from the Israeli point of view, I think the key near-term problem is, indeed, as Mr. Abrams said, the security of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in the Syria context. Beyond that, you know, I suspect the Israelis are evaluating the position of the United States, the attitude of the United States, the leadership of the United States in the context of the one issue that totally dominates Israeli politics these days, and that is Iran and what the United States would eventually bring to the table in that context.

Mr. CONAWAY. Right. Ms. Yacoubian, any comments?

Ms. YACOUBIAN. I have nothing to add. Thank you.

Mr. CONAWAY. All right. Thank you. Anything quickly on the—should we read too much or too little into the assassination of one of the Free Syrian Army's lead generals, Hamami, by the jihadists, is that one-off or is that something that we think we will see more of that kind of internal violence within the opposition groups?

Mr. HOF. I expect, Mr. Chairman, we are going to see more of it, and I think one thing to keep in mind here, the presence of jihadist groups in Syria is a direct product of the tactics the regime has used against its opponents from the beginning, and the presence of jihadist elements in Syria is a gift that keeps on giving to the Assad regime, and in its ability to try to take control of a narrative, in its ability to try to convince us that the only choice that is out there is the Assad regime or a group of people engaging in cannibalism. This will be that regime's ultimate victory if they are able to sell that narrative.

Mr. CONAWAY. Ms. Yacoubian, do you have a comment?

Ms. YACOUBIAN. Yes, if I could just add, and it is not a one-off. We have had violence already taking place between elements of those groups affiliated with Al Qaeda and elements of the Free Syrian Army. I would only add, I think, unfortunately it heralds perhaps a second far more dangerous phase of the conflict in Syria, which is one in which you have armed groups fighting each other

to try and define this country. You are seeing increasingly civilians chafing under the strictures of fairly, fairly extreme Islamic rule in certain parts of the country where the regime has receded. So unfortunately I think that it is something to be very wary of and a concern going forward.

Mr. CONAWAY. Well, thank you very much for your comments today. Not a lot of pretty picture over there, but as the photographer said, if you want a pretty picture, you have got to bring me a prettier face. So thank you all very much, and this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:20 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

JULY 17, 2013

PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

JULY 17, 2013

Opening Statement of Chairman Howard P. “Buck” McKeon
“The Security Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic—Implications
for U.S. National Security and U.S. Policy Options”
July 17, 2013

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. The House Armed Services Committee meets to receive testimony from independent experts on the security situation in Syria. Today, we have with us Ambassador Fred Hof, Mr. Elliott Abrams, and Ms. Mona Yacoubian to provide their insights into the conflict in Syria. Thank you for joining us today.

We are now in the third year of the conflict in Syria. The United Nations estimates that at least 93,000 Syrians have died. Additionally, the Obama administration has finally confirmed the intelligence community’s assessment that the Assad regime has used chemical weapons, including the nerve agent Sarin, against the opposition multiple times in the last year. With the now verified use of chemical weapons – a stated redline by the Obama Administration – and a mounting humanitarian crisis, increased regional instability, spreading sectarian violence; the trajectory of the conflict in Syria appears to be

heading in the wrong direction in an already unstable region – threatening U.S. interests. Moreover, a recent string of military gains by the Assad regime, supported by Iran and Hezbollah, has fueled the perception that Assad is winning. Meanwhile, the United States has a largely incoherent and disjointed policy to address the situation in Syria.

Whether one is in favor of or rejects the idea of U.S. military intervention in this crisis, it remains critically important that this committee continues to gain a comprehensive understanding of the military options that may be available to address the conflict in Syria – to include the objectives, limitations, and risks of each – because the U.S. has vital national security interests at stake and our warfighters might once again be tasked with a complicated mission in a time of fiscal austerity.

Our panel of experts will provide further insight into the U.S. policy options. I look forward to your testimony.

**Opening Statement of Hon. Adam Smith,
Ranking Member, House Committee on Armed Services
Hearing on
The Security Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic—Implications for U.S.
National Security and U.S. Policy Options
July 17, 2013**

Thank you, you Mr. Chairman, and thank you also to our witnesses here today. We appreciate you coming to help us think through how the United States should respond to the ongoing conflict in Syria.

Syria presents us with an enormously complex series of challenges. An increasingly ethno-sectarian civil war has led to the deaths of nearly 100,000 people. Millions have been displaced internally or driven out of Syria and into neighboring countries which are themselves strained to care for these refugees and in some cases threatened with destabilization. Iran and Russia are arming the Assad regime, Hezbollah and Iranian units are fighting for the regime, and foreign fighters have streamed into the country to fight for both the regime and the opposition, including an al Qaeda affiliate. The opposition itself, both on the political and military levels, is fractured and prone to infighting. On top of this, Syria has an enormous arsenal of chemical weapons, which seem to have remained secure to date, but which greatly concern everyone who looks at the situation there.

The United States does not have many good options to positively impact the situation on the ground. All of us would like to stop the killing, end the threat of terrorism, control the chemical weapons, end Syria's role as Iran's conduit for weapons to Hezbollah, and help the Syrian people achieve peace and democracy. But the options that are presented to us, no fly zones, arming some portion of the rebels, or even air strikes on Assad's remaining air force, are unlikely to accomplish these goals. And none of them are likely to build a cohesive, moderate opposition that, even if they won, is likely to be a democracy that respects all of Syria's ethnic groups, is capable of combating extremism, and is a net contributor to regional security.

Faced with all of this, my conclusion is that the right path for the United States at the moment is to work with the international community and the Russians where we can to bring the Assad regime and the political opposition to an agreement on a transitional government in Syria. The so-called “Geneva II” track is not likely to be easy and it may not be successful. But if it works, it is the least bad option for Syria and the region.

While the diplomatic track is progressing, I believe we need to work with our regional allies and countries in the neighborhood, to deal with the fallout from Syria and to prepare for the worst. We should be doing as much as possible to help Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, and Iraq deal with the refugee problem. We need to share as much intelligence with our regional allies as we can to forestall extremists from spreading from Syria to other countries or from taking advantage of the Syrian situation to cause local sectarian and ethnic conflicts. We should work with Israel to stem the flow of weapons to Hezbollah and to enhance their security. And we should work with everyone we can to help ensure the security of Syria’s chemical weapons—it is not in the interests of anyone to have those fall into the hands of al Qaeda or any other extremist group. I know that we are doing some of this, but I hope our witnesses can help us think through what more we can do in this areas and other areas to help contain problems stemming from the Syrian conflict.

Again, thank you Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing, and thanks to our witnesses for appearing today. I yield back.

**COUNCIL on
FOREIGN
RELATIONS**

July 17, 2013

The Security Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic – Implications for U.S. National Security and U.S. Policy Options

Prepared statement by

Elliott Abrams

Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies

Council on Foreign Relations

Before the

House Armed Services Committee

United States House of Representatives

1st Session, 113th Congress

Hearing on The Security Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic – Implications for U.S. National Security and U.S. Policy Options

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this invitation to appear before you to discuss the situation in Syria and how it affects U.S. national interests. For today's hearing, I will not dwell on past errors in U.S. policy that have led to the dire situation we now face. We can debate them, but we are where we are today.

In Syria today we see an Iranian expeditionary force, bolstered by an estimated 2,000 troops from Iran's ally Hezbollah and armed by Russia, seeking to crush a popular rebellion. Syria is 75 percent Sunni, so the Alawite Assad regime and its Shia supporters in Tehran and Lebanon will never win the support of the Syrian people to rule that country. The only hope for Iran, Hezbollah, and Assad is to kill enough rebel fighters and civilians to end the uprising. At this point they have killed an estimated 100,000 people and done immeasurable damage to Syria's economy and infrastructure—and they will keep on killing and destroying.

The Council on Foreign Relations takes no institutional positions on policy issues and has no affiliation with the U.S. government. All statements of fact and expressions of opinion contained herein are the sole responsibility of the author.

We and many other countries are addressing this humanitarian disaster through various forms of aid to United Nations bodies and other groups. But the question our country faces is whether to do more—whether to support the rebels or to use military force ourselves. In my view the answer to both questions is yes, because an Iranian victory in Syria would be a great blow to American interests.

The continuation of this conflict is itself a threat to U.S. interests and allies. For example, there are already roughly a half-million Syrian refugees in Jordan, and that number is rising steadily. Jordan does not have the resources—the money, but also other resources such as water—to sustain that number, and it could easily soon be 600,000, 700,000 and even at some point a million. This strain threatens the economy of Jordan and its security. The Kingdom of Jordan is one of our key allies in the Middle East and stability there should be a prime concern of ours.

As the conflict continues and more and more jihadis arrive in Syria, we must also wonder about their role tomorrow in Lebanon and along the Syrian-Israeli border. Their growing presence in the area is another serious threat.

But worse yet for us would be our defeat by Iran—and that is exactly how it would be seen. On one side, Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia support Assad; on the other, the United States, EU, and our Sunni Arab friends from the Gulf support the rebels. Does it matter who wins? Yes—because around the world but especially in the Middle East allies and enemies will judge the power, influence, and willpower of the United States and our friends by the outcome of this conflict.

Should we prevail and the Assad regime be replaced by a Sunni regime oriented toward Syria's Sunni neighbors, this will be a huge defeat for Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah. Involvement in Syria is already arousing discontent among Lebanon's populace, including Shia who wonder why their sons are dying for Bashar al-Assad, and a defeat in Syria will undermine Hezbollah inside Lebanon. Its power has been rising there for decades; now, a turning point might be reached and it might start declining. Given Hezbollah's global reach as a terrorist group, that's very much in our interest.

Similarly and even more importantly, the rise of Iranian power in the region would be seen to have been stopped if the Assad regime falls. Iran's influence has also been viewed as growing steadily—partly due to the demise of a hostile Sunni regime in Iraq (at America's hands) and to growing Iranian influence there; partly to Iran's perceived role in places like Yemen, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province; partly to Iran's steadily advancing nuclear program; and partly to the sense that America, the overwhelming power in the Middle East since World War II, lacked the desire or ability to stop Iran. If we defeat Iran in Syria, all this is changed and what King Abdullah of Jordan once called the “Shia crescent” stops being cemented.

Remember that Iran's only Arab ally is Syria, which also provides it with Mediterranean ports and a land bridge to Hezbollah in Lebanon—and through Hezbollah, Iran gets a border with Israel. This all changes if Assad falls.

Conversely, what happens if we decide the game in Syria is not worth the fight, and the war goes on until Assad more or less crushes the rebellion? Many more refugees, threatening stability in Jordan and Lebanon. Iranian ascendancy, strengthening Hezbollah inside Lebanon and Iran throughout the Middle East. An emboldened Iran, seeing a lack of American desire to confront it, is logically more likely to become more aggressive in Bahrain, the home of our Fifth Fleet, in Saudi Arabia's heavily Shia Eastern Province, and in its own nuclear program. Surely a display of American lack of will power in Syria will persuade many Iranian officials that while we may say “all options are on the table,” in reality they are not—so Iran can proceed happily and safely toward a nuclear weapon.

So what should we do, to prevent an Iranian and Hezbollah and Russian victory over our side, the United States, European allies, and our Sunni allies?

First, we waited far too long to provide military help to the rebels, a view that I share with former Secretary of State Clinton and former Secretary of Defense Gates. You will recall news reports that they called for such aid in internal administration discussions last summer—a year ago. I am not privy to the exact level and composition of aid being given today, but I hope it is not too little too late, and we do know that it is very late. One reason this war in Syria has gone on so long, and seen so many reverses for the rebels, is that Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah have been more dedicated and generous to their side than we have to ours. We and our allies should step up the flow of weaponry, and do that fast.

I am well aware that many will say we have no “side” in this conflict, especially because thousands of opponents of the Assad regime are jihadis. To me, that is all the more reason to assist and strengthen those rebels who are Syrians and who are not jihadis, not only to win this war faster but to give them the upper hand when the war is over and a new government must be formed.

According to news reports, the aid promised by the Obama administration several weeks ago has not moved; the rebels have gotten nothing. In part this is said to be due to concerns about proper vetting of potential recipients. It's impossible for me to judge who has the better of that argument, but I find it difficult to believe that our intelligence agencies are completely incapable of distinguishing among the groups. And as to arms getting into the wrong hands, well, they are today almost entirely in the wrong hands. We need to act if we would like to see some of them in the right hands.

Second, I do not favor a no-fly zone. That seems to me to be a long-term commitment of military resources, day after day after day, and we know from the Iraq experience how difficult that can be. Instead, I favor a one-time strike at Assad's air assets and air bases. We know that the use of air power, fixed wing and helicopter, has been a huge advantage for the regime in its struggle to survive and prevail. If we eliminate or greatly weaken Assad's ability to use air power, we will tilt the battlefields toward the rebels—militarily, politically, and psychologically. According to news reports, in taking this position I ally myself with Secretary of State Kerry who also favors it.

I would add that the House and Senate intelligence committees are said to have a second doubt about supplying some weapons to the rebels, which is that alone this action would have too little impact. It would not much change and certainly not transform the situation on the ground, some members are said to argue. I agree with that argument, and that is another reason why I favor both aid to the rebels and a strike at Assad air assets.

The first objection to such a strike is practical: too dangerous, we are often told, given Assad's impregnable air defenses. General Dempsey was reported to have said to Secretary Kerry that we would need 700 air sorties to take down Syria's air defenses. This strikes me as absurd, frankly, and my response is “tell that to the Israelis.” They have three times, that I know of, struck inside Syria. How is it possible that they can do it and we—who have stealth technology they lack, and far stronger forces in the Sixth Fleet and nearby bases—cannot? The Israelis did not enter Syrian air space, apparently using air to ground missiles. Can we not do this, in addition to using sea-based cruise missiles? My own conversations with military officers suggests that we can. We would not, this way, eliminate all of Assad's air power, every base, every aircraft—but we would eliminate the bulk of it. So we should.

The second objection is that we cannot act without a UN Security Council resolution. Obviously we will not get one, given Russia's support for Assad. The Committee may take that view, but it has not always been the American view. President Obama's ambassador to NATO, Ivo Daalder, wrote this analysis of the change in Clinton administration thinking about intervention in Bosnia in 1995:

Why was the summer of 1995 any different? Why the emergence of a firm consensus on a concerted strategy now when it had eluded the Clinton administration for over two years? The answer, in part, lies in the horrors witnessed by Srebrenica—a sense that this time the Bosnian Serbs had gone too far. That certainly proved to be the case in the Pentagon, where Defense Secretary William Perry and JCS Chairman John Shalikashvili took the lead in pushing for the kind of vigorous air campaign that was finally agreed to in London. The real reason, however, was the palpable sense that Bosnia was the cancer eating away at American foreign policy, in the words of Anthony Lake, Clinton's national security adviser. U.S. credibility abroad was being undermined perceptibly by what was happening in Bosnia, and by the America's and NATO's failure to end it. ["Decision to Intervene: How the War in Bosnia Ended," by Ivo H. Daalder, Brookings, December 1998, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/1998/12/balkans-daalder>].

I would suggest to you that we are in a similar situation, with American credibility being undermined and our inaction in Syria in the face of the Iranian, Hezbollah, and Russian challenge "eating away at American foreign policy." And of course, the Clinton administration finally decided to act in Kosovo in 1998, under the NATO umbrella, without a UN resolution. If we conclude that the humanitarian and national security justifications for action are sufficient, I would urge that we not be stymied from acting by the interests of Mr. Putin's Russia.

Mr. Chairman, these comments no doubt give rise to many questions and I look forward to discussing them with members of the Committee. I am grateful to you for inviting me today and for holding this hearing on the very grave situation in Syria.

COUNCIL *on* FOREIGN RELATIONS

1777 F Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006
tel 202.509.8400 fax 202.509.8490 www.cfr.org

Elliott Abrams

Elliott Abrams is senior fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in Washington, D.C. He served as deputy assistant to the president and deputy national security adviser in the administration of President George W. Bush, where he supervised U.S. policy in the Middle East for the White House.

Mr. Abrams was educated at Harvard College, the London School of Economics, and Harvard Law School. After serving on the staffs of Sen. Henry M. Jackson and Daniel P. Moynihan, he was an assistant secretary of state in the Reagan administration and received the secretary of state's Distinguished Service Award from Secretary George P. Shultz. In 2012, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy gave him its Scholar-Statesman Award.

Mr. Abrams was president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., from 1996 until joining the White House staff. He was a member of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom from 1999 to 2001 and chairman of the commission in the latter year, and in 2012 was reappointed to membership for another term. Mr. Abrams is also a member of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, which directs the activities of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. He teaches U.S. foreign policy at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service.

Mr. Abrams joined the Bush administration in June 2001 as special assistant to the president and senior director of the NSC for democracy, human rights, and international organizations. From December 2002 to February 2005, he served as special assistant to the president and senior director of the National Security Council for Near East and North African affairs. He served as deputy assistant to the president and deputy national security adviser for global democracy strategy from February 2005 to January 2009, and in that capacity supervised both the Near East and North African Affairs and the democracy, human rights, and international organizations directorates of the NSC.

He is the author of four books, *Undue Process* (1993), *Security and Sacrifice* (1995), *Faith or Fear: How Jews Can Survive in a Christian America* (1997), and the recently released *Tested by Zion: the Bush Administration and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (2013); and the editor of three more, *Close Calls: Intervention, Terrorism, Missile Defense and "Just War" Today*; *Honor Among Nations: Intangible Interests and Foreign Policy*; and *The Influence of Faith: Religion and American Foreign Policy*.

**DISCLOSURE FORM FOR WITNESSES
CONCERNING FEDERAL CONTRACT AND GRANT INFORMATION**

INSTRUCTION TO WITNESSES: Rule 11, clause 2(g)(5), of the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives for the 113th Congress requires nongovernmental witnesses appearing before House committees to include in their written statements a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source of any federal contracts or grants (including subcontracts and subgrants) received during the current and two previous fiscal years either by the witness or by an entity represented by the witness. This form is intended to assist witnesses appearing before the House Committee on Armed Services in complying with the House rule. Please note that a copy of these statements, with appropriate redactions to protect the witness's personal privacy (including home address and phone number) will be made publicly available in electronic form not later than one day after the witness's appearance before the committee.

Witness name: Elliott Abrams

Capacity in which appearing: (check one)

☒ Individual

☐ Representative

If appearing in a representative capacity, name of the company, association or other entity being represented:

FISCAL YEAR 2013

federal grant(s) / contracts	federal agency	dollar value	subject(s) of contract or grant

FISCAL YEAR 2012

federal grant(s) / contracts	federal agency	dollar value	subject(s) of contract or grant

FISCAL YEAR 2011

Federal grant(s) / contracts	federal agency	dollar value	subject(s) of contract or grant

Federal Contract Information: If you or the entity you represent before the Committee on Armed Services has contracts (including subcontracts) with the federal government, please provide the following information:

Number of contracts (including subcontracts) with the federal government:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
 Fiscal year 2012: _____;
 Fiscal year 2011: _____.

Federal agencies with which federal contracts are held:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
 Fiscal year 2012: _____;
 Fiscal year 2011: _____.

List of subjects of federal contract(s) (for example, ship construction, aircraft parts manufacturing, software design, force structure consultant, architecture & engineering services, etc.):

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
 Fiscal year 2012: _____;
 Fiscal year 2011: _____.

Aggregate dollar value of federal contracts held:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
 Fiscal year 2012: _____;
 Fiscal year 2011: _____.

Federal Grant Information: If you or the entity you represent before the Committee on Armed Services has grants (including subgrants) with the federal government, please provide the following information:

Number of grants (including subgrants) with the federal government:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
Fiscal year 2012: _____;
Fiscal year 2011: _____.

Federal agencies with which federal grants are held:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
Fiscal year 2012: _____;
Fiscal year 2011: _____.

List of subjects of federal grants(s) (for example, materials research, sociological study, software design, etc.):

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
Fiscal year 2012: _____;
Fiscal year 2011: _____.

Aggregate dollar value of federal grants held:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
Fiscal year 2012: _____;
Fiscal year 2011: _____.

STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR FREDERIC C. HOF
Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council, Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East
House Armed Services Committee
The Security Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic
Implications for U.S. National Security and U.S. Policy Options
July 17, 2013

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Smith, Members of the Committee, I am honored to have been invited to share with you some thoughts about the situation in Syria and U.S. policy options for dealing with this problem from hell. Having served for slightly more than a year (until September 2012) as special advisor to the Secretary of State for transition in Syria, I can attest to the fact that there are no easy or glib answers in this matter; there are no silver bullets in our government's holster. To choose a policy direction in the case of Syria is, by definition, to choose between profoundly unattractive and risky options, of which inaction itself is one.

The reason this is so has to do with the nature of the problem. In mid-March 2011 a group of teenagers in the economically depressed Syrian city of Deraa decided it would be fun and in keeping with Arab Spring activities elsewhere in the region to spray paint anti-Assad regime slogans on the walls of buildings. Regime security forces rounded them up, beat them, separated some from their fingernails, and denied their parents' access to them. Peaceful protests broke out spontaneously. The regime responded with deadly violence. By so doing - by demonstrating its contempt for an aggrieved citizenry already contending with a lack of economic opportunity - the regime dropped a match on the dry tinder of economic hopelessness in Syria's secondary cities and their suburbs.

The Assad regime knew it would be swept from Syria if it permitted peaceful protest to flourish. President Bashar Al Assad had a choice: deal with the protests politically, arresting criminals in his security services and generously compensating their victims; or respond with deadly force. He chose the latter. This choice caused the protests to spread, and as they did the regime persisted with its program of lethal force, mass incarcerations, and torture. Quite deliberately it channeled something it could not handle - peaceful protest - into something it thought it could handle: armed resistance.

By succeeding in snuffing out peaceful protest in favor of armed resistance, the Assad regime put Syria on the fast-track to destruction. Most of the protestors were Arab Sunni Muslims, an ethnic-sectarian group accounting for roughly two-thirds of Syrians. The regime itself was dominated by Alawites, who account for about twelve percent of the population. As resistance spread the regime found it would have to rely disproportionately on military units, armed intelligence operatives, and criminal bands that were overwhelmingly Alawite in composition and therefore relatively reliable. This largely Alawite-Sunni Muslim confrontation attracted to Syria a range of foreign Sunni jihadists, including some from Iraq who had enjoyed longstanding relationships with the Assad regime's intelligence services. The entry of foreign jihadists was and is a gift that keeps on giving to the Assad regime, which uses their presence to attract and justify the support of Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia, and to try to persuade Syrian minorities and others that the alternative to corrupt, family rule in Syria is a reign of terror under the auspices of Islamist barbarians.

By opting for violence, therefore, the regime inescapably opted for a largely sectarian battle. By so doing it attracted foreign Sunni jihadists: enemies of the regime on the surface, but a lifeline in fact.

Today, Syrians looking for a third way between rule by a criminal family and rule by primitives must face a very unpleasant fact: the very presence of foreign jihadists in Syria is enabling the regime gradually to take control of the narrative; to assert, with near-perfect cynicism, that it and it alone is the alternative to savages who remove and eat vital organs from living human beings; and to assert, with perfect mendacity, that there is nothing Syrian about the Syrian revolution. The jihadist presence in Syria, augmented by a narrative that falls on the receptive ears of Americans who understandably fear foreign entanglements and those who correctly see Al Qaeda as America's deadly enemy, is making us hesitate to support those seeking a civilized third way, making us doubt our ability to do anything useful in the Syrian context, and therefore making relative inaction a comfortable default position for many. To the extent the Assad regime, on life-support courtesy of Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia, can persuade the West to adopt an attitude falling somewhere between moral equivalence and "a plague on all houses," it can anticipate staying alive long after many observers pronounced it all-but-dead.

We can stipulate, therefore, that the way this conflict has evolved now makes it very hard for American officials to define a way forward featuring solid footing. Perhaps the best starting point is to define what we want. What are our national security interests in Syria? What is it we want to achieve? How should we go about trying to get what we want?

President Obama has suggested that it is the effects of regime-inspired chaos on Syria's neighbors that engages "the serious interests" of the U.S. in the Syrian crisis. Among these neighbors is a NATO ally (Turkey), a close security partner (Jordan), a country whose independence and well-being we have always tried to support (Lebanon), and a country in which many American service people recently gave their lives (Iraq). All of these countries - some more than others - are being swamped by refugees and associated resource and security problems by the Assad regime's practice of hammering rebel-held populated areas with artillery, aircraft, and missiles. It is a terror campaign that makes no pretense of seeking military targets. The regime's objective is that of a terrorist: persuade civilians, through the application of random deadly violence, to make decisions at the expense of one's enemy. Beyond the four countries being directly victimized by regime terror, Israel's interests are engaged by the spillover of violence into the Golan Heights and the threat to Jordan's security. Even Egypt, in the midst of its own political turmoil, is providing a refuge to tens of thousands of Syrians who have fled their country's chaos.

Others have defined U.S. Syria-related interests in terms of the "responsibility to protect" doctrine, the desirability of defeating a range of adversaries on Syrian soil, securing weapons of mass destruction to prevent their dissemination, neutralizing Al Qaeda elements, and so forth. Some of these defined interests could produce objectives that might easily lead to American ownership of the Syrian revolution. Others - those having to do with WMD and Al Qaeda - might logically lead one to back a regime that has manipulated both to its advantage. Standing with allies and friends would seem to be a prudent basis for deciding objectives and strategy.

Using the allies and friends aspect of the Syrian crisis as the national interest foundation, what is it we would want to achieve? What would be our objectives?

Three objectives come to mind: enhanced security and stability of regional allies and friends in the face of Syria's chaos and the Assad regime's tactics of mass terror; political transition in Syria away from the regime, including the removal from Syria of all Iran-related military elements (including Hezbollah) and Al Qaeda affiliates; and the replacement of the Assad regime with an inclusive national unity government, one committed internally to recovery, reconciliation, accountability, reform, and rule of law; one committed externally to regional peace and stability. Across the range of these objectives would be the constant updating of contingency plans related to WMD.

If these are our objectives, how would we go about achieving them? What are the key elements of the strategy we would pursue? Clearly we would want it all to add up, ideally, to the achievement of all three objectives.

The central problem affecting allies and friends is the regime's mass terror campaign against vulnerable populations. Ending it should be our top priority, and diplomacy is always the first weapon of choice. The UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria recently (June 4, 2013) reported that the regime's tactics "constitute crimes against humanity, war crimes and gross violations of international human rights law." If we are not already doing so on an insistent, sustained basis, we should be urging Moscow to rein in its client. We should make it clear to Russia that if the terror campaign subverting our allies and friends does not stop we will reserve the right to take steps we deem appropriate to secure our interests.

To the extent we consider military options at all in connection with Syria, it should be in the context of helping allies and friends secure themselves from the regime's murderous tactics. We would not, under any circumstances, want American boots on the ground in Syria. We would not wish to consider unmanned or manned aerial systems entering Syrian airspace unless and until we are persuaded that the peaceful diplomatic campaign has run its course unsuccessfully. Even then we would still have the option of watching the terror campaign proceed unabated while pouring more resources - humanitarian, economic, and security - into Syria's neighbors so they could better cope. We should keep in mind that no-fly zones would not address the biggest of the killers: artillery. We could not proceed with any kind of strike options without the full cooperation of Turkey, Jordan, and other key partners. Although UN authorization would not be possible, US unilateralism is something to be avoided.

As we pull out the stops diplomatically to stop the terror campaign, we should try to stabilize the situation on the ground by seeing to it that vetted rebel units in Syria get what they need in terms of military equipment, weaponry, and training, working through the opposition's Supreme Military Council. The regime has a well-established record of conducting massacres in places it can reach on the ground. Most weaponry for the mainstream opposition will not come from U.S. stocks. Yet the U.S. should be in charge of the process of determining who gets what. Will all weapons shipments, without fail, get to their intended recipients? No: no more in Syria than they did during World War II when air-dropped

into occupied France. The jihadists and the regime are already armed to the teeth. The Syrian nationalists are the ones who need the help. Their ability to defend territory and reverse the current momentum will have a direct and positive impact on refugee flows.

As we try our best to help the mainstream armed opposition stabilize the ground situation, we should - with the help of the Friends of the Syrian People - prepare the Syrian opposition to establish, on Syrian territory and as soon as possible, a governmental alternative to the regime. Such a government would require recognition, resources, and help with self-defense. Yet a government featuring people and a program designed to appeal to those grudgingly supporting the regime as a default position would present the long-awaited, essential, decent alternative to the Assad regime. Such a government would also unblock massive amounts of humanitarian assistance frozen outside of Syria awaiting the permission of the regime to move into rebel-controlled areas. If the Geneva process were to go anywhere, this government could serve as the interlocutor with the current government in Damascus, producing a post-Assad national unity government. Mobilizing the international community to promote a respectable and effective alternative to Assad and the nucleus of post-Assad governance should be a major US diplomatic priority, notwithstanding all of the difficulties presented by an often fractious Syrian opposition.

As we work with the opposition to prepare to govern inside Syria, we should keep the door open to a Geneva peace conference and help the opposition configure a coherent, representative, and legitimate negotiating team. In order to secure the cooperation of the Syrian opposition, however, we must keep in mind the purpose of Geneva, as stated in the agreement reached on June 30, 2012: to create, on the basis of mutual consent, a transitional governing body exercising full executive power. The purpose of Geneva is to move into a transitional governing arrangement, one preserving state and governmental institutions to the maximum extent possible consistent with human rights standards. If Assad or any of his coterie are to play a role in Syria's transitional governance, it would only be with the consent of the Syrian opposition. Although it is very unlikely to transpire, a near-term negotiated end to this nightmare can preserve Syria and secure its neighbors.

As we pursue a multifaceted diplomatic campaign, all elements of which are designed to secure Syria's neighbors, transition the regime, and replace it with something decent, we should also be working with partners to design a post-Assad multinational stabilization force to work with a new Syrian government to help protect vulnerable populations and neutralize undesirable stay-behind elements. Ideally such a force would be under UN auspices or authorization. U.S. combat service support and even combat air support might be vital. Yet no American boots should be on the ground in Syria. Helping post-Assad Syria stabilize itself will, of course, enable millions of Syrian refugees to return home from the neighboring countries. In this connection, the creation of an international interim reconstruction fund for Syria will also be important.

The objectives and strategy outlined here are heavy on the diplomatic side, but do not rule out military intervention entirely. If objectives and strategy are key components of foreign policy, they are life and death items when it comes to military operations. If American diplomacy cannot stop the terror campaign imperiling U.S. allies and friends, the president will need options to consider. He may well

decide to focus on supporting the neighbors through increased assistance. To the extent he looks at military options he will want, in the context of objectives, to define the mission as narrowly as possible: to destroy or significantly degrade the ability of the Assad regime to terrorize civilian populations with artillery, military aircraft, and missiles. He will be interested in methodologies that minimize US and collateral casualties, knowing full well that there are no such things as surgical strikes. He will want to assess carefully the likely reactions of key players: the regime, Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia. He will want buy-in from at least two of the neighbors (Turkey and Jordan) he is trying to help. And he will want to avoid the proverbial slippery slope. Syria's revolution, after all, is not America's to win or lose. Once the mission is accomplished and the mass terror campaign either ended or reduced significantly, the direct military role of the US would be ended. If Iran (for example) elects to intervene massively in Syria, sending its army across Iraq, obviously new calculations in the White House, the Pentagon, and elsewhere will be set in motion.

There should be no illusion, in any event, that military intervention will necessarily be the long-sought silver bullet. And unintended consequences will be ubiquitous, regardless of what one does or fails to do. Yet those who try to shut down the debate by demanding "tell me how it will end" should apply the same demand to alternatives, especially that of passively watching developments unfold. In an era of diminishing defense resources brought about by sequestration and at a time when a tiny percentage of Americans bears the burden of defending this country, we should not be searching for ways to apply military force in various parts of the globe. If we elect to act with kinetic lethality in Syria the objective should be tied tightly to the situations our allies and friends find themselves in as a result of the Assad regime's survival tactics. Indeed, if the regime survives, the results will be bad for its neighbors and catastrophic for Syria. The question is not, however, one of the U.S. taking ownership of Syria's future. That future belongs to Syrians. Our main task is to decide what we want and how to go about getting it, keeping in mind that supporting allies and friends is where American national interests are surely engaged in the case of Syria.



Published on *Atlantic Council* (<http://www.acus.org>)

[Home](#) > User

Frederic C. Hof

Biography

Frederic C. Hof



Frederic C. Hof is a senior fellow with the [Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East](#) ⁽²⁾. On March 28, 2012 President Obama conferred on Ambassador Hof the rank of ambassador in connection with his new duties as special advisor for transition in Syria. Amb. Hof was previously the special coordinator for regional affairs in the US Department of State's Office of the Special Envoy for Middle East Peace, where he advised Special Envoy George Mitchell on the full range of Arab-Israeli peace issues falling under his purview and focusing on Syria-Israel and Israel-Lebanon matters. He joined the Department of State in April 2009 after serving as president and CEO of AALC, limited company, an international business consulting and project finance firm formerly known as Armitage Associates LC. ⁽¹⁾



Amb. Hof's professional life has focused largely on the Middle East. In 2001 he directed the Jerusalem field operations of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee headed by former US Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell and was the lead drafter of the Committee's April 30, 2001 Report. In 1983, as a US Army officer, he helped draft the "Long Commission" report which investigated the October 1983 bombing of the US Marine headquarters at Beirut International Airport. Both reports drew considerable international praise for fairness and integrity.

A 1969 graduate of the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, Amb. Hof began his professional career as an Army officer. He is a Vietnam veteran and served as a US Army Middle East foreign area officer, studying Arabic at the Foreign Service Institute in Tunisia and receiving a master's degree from the Naval Postgraduate School. He served as US Army attaché in Beirut, Lebanon and later in the Office of the Secretary of Defense as Director for Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestinian Affairs.

Amb. Hof has written extensively on Arab-Israeli issues. He is the author of *Galilee Divided: The Israel-Lebanon Frontier, 1916-1984* (Westview Press, 1985), *Line of Battle, Border of Peace? The Line of June 4, 1967* (Middle East Insight, 1999), and *Beyond the Boundary: Lebanon, Israel and the Challenge of Change* (Middle East Insight, 2000). He has also written many articles on Jordan Valley water issues. His writing on the Israel-Syria, Israel-Lebanon and (by virtue of his work on the "Mitchell" Committee) Israel-Palestinian tracks of the Middle East peace process has contributed positively to the body of literature promoting Arab-Israeli peace.

His awards include the Purple Heart, the Department of State Superior Honor Award, the Secretary of Defense Meritorious Civilian Service Medal and the Defense Superior Service Medal. He resides in Silver Spring, Maryland with his wife, Brenda.

Recent Interviews:

Panorama Interview with Frederic C. Hof ^[3]
Al-Arabiya | June 12, 2013

Middle East Expert Warns Syria 'Getting Worse' ^[4]
Austrian Broadcasting Corp. | June 18, 2013

Conflict in Syria Continues to Degrade ^[5]
NPR | June 8, 2013

BBC's Kim Ghattas Report on US Policy on Syrian Crisis ^[6]
BBC | May 29, 2013

A Candid Discussion with Frederic Hof ^[7]
Foreign Policy Association | May 3, 2013

Political Solution in Syria
^[8]Radio Rai 1 | March 30, 2013

Assisting Armed Rebels in Syria
^[9]PBS NewsHour | March 15, 2013

Analysts See Shift in US Response to Syrian Conflict ^[10]
NPR | March 11, 2013

US Perspective on Syrian Civil War ^[11]
Orient TV | March 8, 2013

Syrian Conflict ^[12]
Radio BBC 5 Live | March 7, 2013

Crisis in Syria ^[13]
Al Arabiya | February 1, 2013

Joyce Karam Interviews Frederic C. Hof on Syria Crisis ^[14]
Al Hayat | January 11, 2013

President Bashar Assad: His Inner Circle and His Options ^[15]
NPR | January 8, 2013

Assad Calls for Talks but Denounces Opposition ^[16]
BBC | January 6, 2013

No Diplomatic Solution in Syria
^[17]CNN | December 12, 2012

As Syrian Rebels Receive Endorsement, Will They Also Get Military Assistance? ^[18]
PBS NewsHour | December 12, 2012

Syrian Conflict Could Escalate in Many Directions ^[19]
NPR | December 9, 2012

International Community Strategize for Ending War ^[20]
PBS NewsHour | December 8, 2012

Political and Military Pressure Tightens On Damascus
^[21] NPR | December 1, 2012

Publications:

Syria: Blackberry Diplomacy ^[22]
MENASource | July 11, 2013

Syria: The Allies Angle ^[23]
MENASource | July 1, 2013

Syria: War and Peace ^[24]
MENASource | June 28, 2013

Syria: The President Speaks ^[25]
MENASource | June 24, 2013

Syria: The G7+1 Communique ^[26]
MENASource | June 19, 2013

Syria: A Crossing for its Own Sake? ^[27]
MENASource | June 14, 2013

Syria: Is Geneva II the Key?
^[28] MENASource | June 13, 2012

Syria: Seven Qs and As on Military Intervention ^[29]
MENASource | June 11, 2012

Syria: Hezbollah's Military Intervention
^[30] MENASource | June 5, 2013

Syria: Steps to Resolve the Problem from Hell
^[31] MENASource | June 4, 2013

Syria: Is a No-Fly Zone on the Table? ^[32]
MENASource | May 30, 2013

Syria: America's Stake ^[33]
MENASource | May 23, 2013

Syria: Will Geneva Happen? Should it Happen? ^[34]
Viewpoint | May 20, 2013

Syria: Geneva Resurrected? ^[35]
Viewpoint | May 8, 2013

Syria: Keeping One's Eye on the Ball ^[36]
Viewpoint | May 7, 2013

Syria: The Chemical Weapons Red Line
^[37]Viewpoint | May 1, 2013

Syria and Geneva: No Precondition, but a Certain Result ^[38]
Viewpoint | April 25, 2013

Syria: Defending the Indefensible ^[39]
Viewpoint | April 22, 2013

Consent of the Governed: A New Middle East Political Order? ^[40]
Viewpoint | April 15, 2013

The No Fly Zone Conundrum
^[41]Viewpoint | April 08, 2013

A New Syria Must Have US Support ^[42]
Washington Post | March 27, 2013

Syria: Is Iraq the Wrong Lesson? ^[43]
Viewpoint | March 26, 2013

The United States, Europe, and the Case of Syria
^[44]Viewpoint | March 25, 2013

Syria: A Slippery Slope?
^[45]Viewpoint | March 18, 2013

Syria's Opposition: Ready or Not? ^[46]
Viewpoint | March 11, 2013

Can Syria Survive? ^[47]
Viewpoint | March 8, 2013

Syria: Kerry's Opening to the Free Syrian Army ^[48]
Viewpoint | March 5, 2013

Syria: From Objective to Strategy ^[49]
Viewpoint | February 22, 2013

Syria: Thinking Strategically ^[50]
Viewpoint | February 19, 2013

The President's Decision-Making on Syria
^[51]Viewpoint | February 12, 2013

Syria: Transitional Government and US Choices
^[52]Viewpoint | January 29, 2013

Syria: Strategy for What? ^[53]

Viewpoint | January 23, 2013

Syria: Is It Too Late? ^[54]

Viewpoint | January 14, 2013

Forming a Syrian Opposition Government: The Time is Now ^[55]

Viewpoint | January 8, 2013

Syria 2013: Will the Poison Pill of Sectarianism Work? ^[56]

Viewpoint | January 3, 2013

Syria's Time is Running Out ^[57]

Foreign Policy | December 19, 2012

Syria: Seven Key Points ^[58]

Viewpoint | December 13, 2012

The Dublin Meeting and its Meaning for Syria ^[59]

Viewpoint | December 07, 2012

Syria: Has the Bubble Burst? ^[60]

Viewpoint | December 05, 2012

Source URL: <http://www.acus.org/users/frederic-c-hof>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.acus.org/users/frederic-c-hof>
- [2] <http://www.acus.org/program/hariri-middle-east-center>
- [3] <http://www.acus.org/newshof104>
- [4] <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2013/s3784533.htm>
- [5] <http://www.acus.org/news/frederic-hof-us-military-and-political-options-syria-npr>
- [6] <http://www.acus.org/news/frederic-hof-obama-administrations-hopes-solution-syria-bbc-world-service>
- [7] <http://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2013/05/03/a-candid-discussion-with-frederic-hof/>
- [8] <http://www.acus.org/news/frederic-c-hof-political-solution-syria-radio-rai-1>
- [9] <http://www.acus.org/news/frederic-c-hof-assisting-armed-rebels-syria-pbs-newshour>
- [10] <http://www.acus.org/news/frederic-c-hof-us-response-syrian-conflict-nprs-morning-edition>
- [11] <http://www.acus.org/news/frederic-c-hof-us-policy-syria-orient-tv>
- [12] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01r1878>
- [13] <http://www.acus.org/news/hof-crisis-syria-al-arabiya>
- [14] <http://alhayat.com/Details/471490>
- [15] <http://m.npr.org/news/World/168883337>
- [16] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p012ph66>
- [17] <http://amanpour.blogs.cnn.com/2012/12/12/backlash-to-u-s-moves-in-syria/>
- [18] http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/world/july-dec12/syria2_12-12.html
- [19] <http://www.npr.org/2012/12/09/166819229/syria-conflict-could-escalate-in-many-directions>
- [20] http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/world/july-dec12/syria2_12-06.html
- [21] <http://www.npr.org/2012/12/18/167549822/political-and-military-pressure-tightens-on-damascus>
- [22] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-blackberry-diplomacy>
- [23] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-allies-angle>
- [24] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-war-and-peace>
- [25] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-president-speaks>
- [26] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-g71-communiqu%C3%A9>
- [27] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-crossing-its-own-sake>
- [28] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-geneva-ii-key>
- [29] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-seven-qs-and-military-intervention>
- [30] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-hezbollahs-military-intervention>
- [31] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-steps-resolve-problem-hell>

- [32] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-no-fly-zone-table>
- [33] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-americas-stake>
- [34] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-will-geneva-happen-should-it-happen>
- [35] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-geneva-resurrected>
- [36] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-keeping-ones-eye-ball>
- [37] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-chemical-weapons-red-line>
- [38] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-and-geneva-no-precondition-certain-result>
- [39] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-defending-indefensible>
- [40] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/consent-governed-new-middle-east-political-order>
- [41] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/no-fly-zone-conundrum>
- [42] http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-new-syria-must-have-us-support/2013/03/26/126d4654-962a-11e2-9e23-09dce87f75a1_story.html
- [43] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-iraq-wrong-lesson>
- [44] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/united-states-europe-and-case-syria>
- [45] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-slippery-slope>
- [46] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syrias-opposition-ready-or-not>
- [47] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/can-syria-be-saved>
- [48] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-kerrys-opening-free-syrian-army>
- [49] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-objective-strategy>
- [50] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-thinking-strategically>
- [51] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/presidents-decision-making-syria>
- [52] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-transitional-government-and-us-choices>
- [53] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-strategy-what>
- [54] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-it-too-late>
- [55] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/forming-syrian-opposition-government-time-now>
- [56] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-2013-will-poison-pill-sectarianism-work>
- [57] http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/12/19/syrias_time_is_running_out
- [58] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-seven-key-points>
- [59] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/dublin-meeting-and-its-meaning-syria>
- [60] <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-has-bubble-burst>

**DISCLOSURE FORM FOR WITNESSES
CONCERNING FEDERAL CONTRACT AND GRANT INFORMATION**

INSTRUCTION TO WITNESSES: Rule 11, clause 2(g)(5), of the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives for the 113th Congress requires nongovernmental witnesses appearing before House committees to include in their written statements a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source of any federal contracts or grants (including subcontracts and subgrants) received during the current and two previous fiscal years either by the witness or by an entity represented by the witness. This form is intended to assist witnesses appearing before the House Committee on Armed Services in complying with the House rule. Please note that a copy of these statements, with appropriate redactions to protect the witness's personal privacy (including home address and phone number) will be made publicly available in electronic form not later than one day after the witness's appearance before the committee.

Witness name: FREDERIC C. HOF

Capacity in which appearing: (check one)

☒ Individual

☐ Representative

If appearing in a representative capacity, name of the company, association or other entity being represented:

FISCAL YEAR 2013 NONE FCH

federal grant(s)/ contracts	federal agency	dollar value	subject(s) of contract or grant

FISCAL YEAR 2012 NONE FCH

federal grant(s)/ contracts	federal agency	dollar value	subject(s) of contract or grant

FISCAL YEAR 2011 *NONE* *TEH*

Federal grant(s)/ contracts	federal agency	dollar value	subject(s) of contract or grant

Federal Contract Information: If you or the entity you represent before the Committee on Armed Services has contracts (including subcontracts) with the federal government, please provide the following information:

Number of contracts (including subcontracts) with the federal government: *NONE* *TEH*

Current fiscal year (2013): _____

Fiscal year 2012: _____

Fiscal year 2011: _____

Federal agencies with which federal contracts are held: *NONE* *TEH*

Current fiscal year (2013): _____

Fiscal year 2012: _____

Fiscal year 2011: _____

List of subjects of federal contract(s) (for example, ship construction, aircraft parts manufacturing, software design, force structure consultant, architecture & engineering services, etc.): *NONE* *TEH*

Current fiscal year (2013): _____

Fiscal year 2012: _____

Fiscal year 2011: _____

Aggregate dollar value of federal contracts held:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____

Fiscal year 2012: _____

Fiscal year 2011: _____

Federal Grant Information: If you or the entity you represent before the Committee on Armed Services has grants (including subgrants) with the federal government, please provide the following information: *None*

Number of grants (including subgrants) with the federal government:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____
 Fiscal year 2012: _____
 Fiscal year 2011: _____

Federal agencies with which federal grants are held:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____
 Fiscal year 2012: _____
 Fiscal year 2011: _____

List of subjects of federal grants(s) (for example, materials research, sociological study, software design, etc.):

Current fiscal year (2013): _____
 Fiscal year 2012: _____
 Fiscal year 2011: _____

Aggregate dollar value of federal grants held:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____
 Fiscal year 2012: _____
 Fiscal year 2011: _____

Freddie C. Hoff
 1121 Fairview Court
 Silver Spring, MD 20910

**The Security Situation in the Syrian Arab Republic:
Implications for U.S. National Security and U.S. Policy Options**

**Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, July 17, 2013
Mona Yacoubian, Senior Advisor, Middle East, The Stimson Center**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the House Armed Services Committee, for inviting me to speak this morning. I very much appreciate this opportunity to address the complex topic of the security situation in Syria and its implications for the United States. The timing for this important hearing could not be better as the situation in Syria continues to deteriorate, and U.S. policy makers face a series of extraordinarily difficult questions on how to respond.

In preparation for this hearing, I was asked to consider a number of key questions revolving around the issue of whether the U.S. military should be further engaged in Syria and if so, to what end. The current discussion in Washington has focused on a number of military options including the enforcement of a no-fly zone, the creation of a humanitarian corridor or buffer zone, and the arming of Syrian rebels.

In addressing potential benefits and limitations of various military options currently under consideration, I was also asked to elaborate on the strategic objective that would be achieved through greater U.S. military engagement in Syria as well as to articulate why the situation in Syria is significant to U.S. national security interests.

The Security Situation in Syria

Before tackling these thorny questions, I would like to first offer my assessment of the current security situation in Syria. Now well into its third year, Syria's uprising is by far the most brutal of the Arab revolts. It rapidly evolved from a peaceful protest movement to an armed uprising in the face of brutal government repression. The Syrian regime has spared no effort to put down the uprising, including the use of airstrikes and ballistic missiles against civilians and the alleged use of chemical weapons. Unfortunately, Syria's crisis has now morphed into a sectarian civil war with significant spillover effects on Syria's neighbors, particularly Lebanon and Iraq.

The conflict has resulted in a humanitarian catastrophe. More than 100,000 Syrians have been killed, primarily civilians. The United Nations estimates nearly 2 million refugees have fled Syria, while more than 4 million Syrians are internally displaced. Even larger numbers of Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance including food and medical aid. Concerns over the spread of disease and malnutrition are mounting. Syria has witnessed significant devastation, including widespread destruction of public infrastructure, schools, mosques and homes.

As the conflict grinds on, the military situation on the ground suggests that Syria's civil war could endure for years. Over the past few months, the Syrian army has succeeded in consolidating its control over some key strategic areas. Assisted by a doubling down of military support from Iran and the Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah, the Syrian regime secured an important military victory in Qusayr. It is now waging a battle to re-take Homs, Syria's third largest city. The regime has also worked to root out rebels from the Damascus suburbs. It may also seek to re-take Aleppo, mired in a brutal stalemate for nearly a year. Taken together these

gains would mark an important consolidation of regime control over Damascus and the strategic corridor leading to the Mediterranean coast where Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's Alawite sect has established a secure area.

However, Syria will not return to the status quo ante. Vast swathes of Syrian territory remain largely out of the regime's control. While the armed groups have not managed to seize control of any of Syria's major cities, they do control large areas of the countryside as well as the provincial capital of Raqqa on the Euphrates River. The Kurdish region of northeastern Syria is increasingly autonomous, while Sunni-dominated areas north and east of Aleppo are under the sway of armed rebel groups. It is difficult to envision how the Syrian army would be able to re-take all of this lost territory.

At the same time, rebel groups remain unable to coalesce and continue to lack unified command and control structures. Indeed, if anything armed groups inside Syria are growing *more* fractious and have increasingly started to turn their arms on each other – a deeply concerning sign for the future. In addition, numerous reports suggest an increasing number of foreign fighters are entering the Syrian arena. Arab jihadists from North Africa, Egypt and the Gulf, as well as fighters from as far afield as Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Caucasus are joining the battle.

From the uprising's start, the Syrian opposition, both armed and unarmed, has been riven with personal and ideological rivalries. Unfortunately, they have not managed to unite around a clear vision of a post-Assad Syria. Moreover, the external opposition lacks significant support inside Syria. Meanwhile, the political opposition inside Syria has been eclipsed by the armed groups as the country descends deeper into civil war.

Three emerging trends among the armed groups suggest a deepening and protracting of Syria's conflict, with dim prospects for a resolution any time soon.

- **First, radical elements among the armed groups—particularly those espousing a Salafi-jihadist ideology, appear to be gaining ground and imposing their ways on the civilian population.** This trend was brutally illustrated in an episode last month when Islamic extremists tortured and then publicly executed a 15-year-old boy for allegedly committing blasphemy. The incident is perhaps the most egregious, but not the only such example. Increasingly, civilians are chafing at the strictures of hardline jihadists whose harsh interpretations of Islamic rule collide with the more tolerant approach that has long characterized Syria.
- **Second, as ideological divisions and competition for control among armed groups intensify, rival rebels are increasingly fighting each other.** Sporadic episodes of intra-rebel fighting have been reported over the past several months in various areas of rebel control. In Raqqa, for example, members of the al-Nusra front, an al-Qaeda aligned group, have engaged in battles with members of the Farouq brigade which is allied with the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Last week several FSA fighters in Idlib province were killed in intense fighting with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), another Al-Qaeda affiliated group. The jihadist extremists beheaded the FSA battalion commander and his brother. In another episode last week, a senior FSA commander was shot dead by ISIS elements in the coastal governorate of Latakia.
- **Third, even among “moderate” armed groups, acts of sectarian extremism have been documented.** The most egregious case concerned an atrocity committed by a

commander (since renounced by the group) with the Farouq Brigade, considered among the more moderate of the armed groups. In a widely viewed video, the commander cut out and ate the heart of a slain Syrian soldier. The episode underscores Syria's deepening sectarianism and legitimizes fears among Syria's minority community that there would be no place for them in a post-Assad Syria. As the Sunni-dominated armed opposition increasingly resorts to sectarian violence, Syria's Alawite and Christian communities will likely adhere to their reluctance to disavow the Assad regime which increasingly may be perceived as the lesser of two evils.

Implications of Syria's Military Stalemate

The net effect of both regime and rebel actions on the ground suggests that Syria is entrenched in a protracted military stalemate that could last years. In this scenario, the regime would maintain its control of Damascus, perhaps Homs, and possibly other key cities, as well as the ancestral Alawite homeland in western Syria. Proliferating armed groups would continue to battle both the regime and, increasingly, each other. Yet, neither the regime nor the rebels would emerge victorious.

As the fighting continues, Syrian civilians will suffer the greatest toll. Refugee flows are already projected to grow to 3.5 million by year's end. Jordan's resources are already stretched thin from hosting nearly half a million Syrian refugees and additional inflows could tip the country into a period of significant instability. Lebanon will also bear a significant impact should its Syrian refugee population—currently one million—continue to swell, particularly given its delicate confessional balance.

The conflict's sectarian aspects will likely grow more acute, with destabilizing consequences for the region. Syria is increasingly an arena of competition for regional proxies of Iran and the Sunni Gulf states. This proxy dimension further complicates the conflict, deepening its sectarian aspects. Already, Lebanon and Iraq, have witnessed a notable escalation in sectarian strife related to Syria's fallout. Iraq has been plagued with the worst spate of sectarian violence in five years. Enflamed sectarian tensions in Lebanon could further deteriorate into prolonged instability. Indeed, as the Syrian conflict's boundaries grow more blurred, a dangerous sectarian dynamic is sweeping the region from the Mediterranean to Baghdad and beyond.

In this scenario, which I believe to be the most likely, no military solution exists to the Syrian conflict. Neither the regime nor the rebels will be able to gain a sufficient military advantage to vanquish the other side. If a military victory is to be had, it would come at a huge price, nothing less than the country itself. The pursuit of all-out military victory would in essence lead to the complete destruction of Syria.

Instead, the resolution will have to be political and will need to come as the result of negotiations. History suggests that it could take some time before the parties are ready to come to the negotiating table. Lebanon's civil war endured for 15 years before it ended via the Ta'if accord. The key questions for U.S. policy makers center on whether levers exist which can accelerate the path toward negotiation. Can the strategic calculus of the Syrian conflict's key protagonists be shifted toward favoring a political outcome? How do we get there? What leverage can be used by the United States and other external actors to shift the paradigm toward negotiation? Can military intervention play a role in shifting the calculus?

Syria's Significance for U.S. National Security Interests

Syria's geostrategic location in the heart of the Arab world, its growing importance as a jihadist arena, and its vast chemical weapons stockpile endow it with important strategic significance for U.S. national security interests.

- **Geostrategic location.** Syria borders several countries in which the United States has significant equities: Israel, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq. As such, the Syrian conflict's outcome could *directly* impact the stability of countries holding crucial importance to the United States. It has already adversely affected stability in Iraq, Jordan, and Turkey. Moreover, the Syrian conflict's sectarian spillover has the potential to destabilize the entire region, with the possibility of cascading crises in Jordan, Iraq and even further into the Gulf. In addition, Syria borders Lebanon, home to Hezbollah, a potent U.S. adversary.
- **Jihadist arena.** Certain aspects of the Syrian arena make it particularly attractive to jihadists, perhaps even more than Iraq. First, unlike Iraq, the majority of Syria's population is Sunni Arab (65%), living under the harsh rule of an Alawite minority for more than four decades. Salafi jihadists consider Alawites to be apostates and have long called for the overthrow of the Assad regime. Second, the particular brutality of the Assad regime's repression of the Sunni opposition, unleashing ballistic missiles and even chemical weapons on its civilian population, has deepened jihadist rage against the Assad regime, making the imperative of its overthrow even more urgent. Third, Syria shares a border with Israel, bringing the jihadists even closer to their goal of a transnational caliphate that includes Jerusalem. While Iraq provided an opening to bring the jihadist struggle more directly into the Arab world than Afghanistan, Syria affords the opportunity to fight the battle at the region's heart.
- **Chemical Weapons (CW) stockpiles.** Syria is reported to have one of the largest chemical weapons stockpiles in the world. It possesses stocks of sarin, mustard gas, and possibly the nerve agent VX. U.S. and other intelligence agencies report with a high degree of certainty that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons, namely sarin, on a small scale against armed opposition groups, possibly on multiple occasions.

The combination of these three elements: geostrategic importance, jihadist arena, and CW stockpiles comprises a potent mix that could dramatically threaten U.S. national security interests. In particular, the specter of jihadist elements or Hezbollah gaining access to chemical weapons would constitute a key threat to U.S. national security interests. Similarly, Syria's descent into all-out chaos, given the presence of jihadists and chemical weapons in the heart of the Arab world, would pose a threat of significant magnitude to U.S. regional allies.

Assessing U.S. Military Options in Syria

While it is important to keep all options on the table, I do not believe the U.S. military should become further engaged in the Syrian crisis at this point. Syria's complexity cannot be overemphasized, and our "on-the-ground" knowledge of the conflict is deeply limited. The downside risks of various military options under consideration—from arming to enforcing a no-fly zone—are considerable. Syria's growing chaos—marked by deepening rivalries among the armed groups and growing influence of jihadist extremists—is not propitious for U.S. military engagement. Indeed, the use of force—whether direct or indirect—could exacerbate rather than improve the situation on the ground, with dire consequences for the United States and the region.

Arming the rebels. I will focus primarily on the question of arming the rebels, currently a topic of fierce debate. While arming is perhaps the least expensive option and requires the lowest level of U.S. commitment, it is fraught with risk for U.S. national security interests and would further endanger Syrian civilians rather than enhance their protection. Among the key risks inherent in arming:

- **Effective vetting is very difficult.** Despite our growing relationship with certain elements of Syria's armed opposition, ensuring that weapons do not end up in the wrong hands is a difficult proposition at best. First, our understanding of these rapidly proliferating and evolving groups remains limited given our absence on the ground inside Syria. Moreover, arms are fluid; they are the currency of war, moving seamlessly from hand to hand. Youtube videos already attest to sophisticated weapons purchased from Croatia by Saudi Arabia ending up in the possession of al-Qaeda militants in Syria. In addition, recent press reports indicate that Iranian-backed Shiite militias fighting for the regime have U.S. weapons, perhaps captured, stolen, or purchased on the black market. Both examples highlight that it is virtually impossible to guarantee that U.S. arms flowing into a chaotic Syrian arena could not one day end up with those who would do harm to the United States or our allies.
- **Arming will further escalate the conflict.** Arming necessarily accelerates the Syrian conflict's dangerous escalation by provoking a commensurate (or possibly disproportionate) increase in arms flows to the Syrian regime by its allies. The past few months have already witnessed a dramatic increase in Iranian and Russian military support to the regime, likely spurred by earlier rebel gains. The pursuit of a military "edge" over the regime is an illusory quest that will more likely lock us into an escalatory dynamic, further protracting the conflict. As an increase in arms to the rebels is met by heightened arming of the regime, urgent rebel requests for greater and more sophisticated U.S. weapons will undoubtedly follow. Moreover, with intra-rebel fighting gaining prominence, U.S. arms could also end up fueling these battles rather than the fight against the regime.
- **Syrian civilians will suffer.** The understandable moral outrage over the suffering of the Syrian people has prompted urgent calls for the United States to "do something." Yet, from a civilian protection standpoint, arming is possibly the worst option. In a February 2013 [report](#) evaluating the impact of various military interventions on civilians, the Center for Civilians in Conflict noted that arming "presents the greatest risk of civilian harm" mainly due to misuse and unintended proliferation. While not on the same scale as the Syrian regime, Syrian rebels are increasingly accused of committing human rights abuses and war crimes. Civilians have been caught in the middle of a widening conflict, suffering the greatest casualties. Sending more arms into the conflict will likely only increase the harm done to civilians.
- **Taking sides in a sectarian civil war heightens threats.** Syria has now evolved into a sectarian civil war with regional spillover. By funneling arms to one side, the United States is explicitly taking sides and potentially exposing U.S. interests to a wider range of threats. The United States paid a high price for engaging in Lebanon's civil war in the 1980s, most notably with the embassy and marine barracks bombings.
- **Post-conflict challenges.** Flooding Syria with arms today will make post-conflict stability and re-construction significantly more difficult. Previous conflicts, including

most recently in Libya, have demonstrated that recovering arms in a post-conflict zone is challenging at best. Arms proliferation increases the likelihood for militias to remain in place post-conflict, dramatically reducing the possibility of establishing peace and the rule of law. Arms may also flow out of Syria to other conflicts, fueling instability elsewhere.

Enforcing a no-fly zone/creating humanitarian corridors or buffers. This subset of options necessarily requires a much more significant investment of U.S. resources. It would also entail the cooperation of Turkey and Jordan whose national security interests would also need figure into the arrangements, adding yet another layer of complexity.

The potential for unintended consequences would be high. The direct use of force in Syria would constitute an act of war, directly exposing the United States to a far more significant set of risks. Such options also entail far more severe repercussions should they fail. I am not a military strategist, but my basic understanding is that enforcing a no-fly zone or creating humanitarian safe zones would necessarily demand a significant commitment of U.S. force, could be long and messy, and still not guarantee civilian safety. Indeed, civilians would likely be casualties as part of these operations. Syria reportedly has one of the most sophisticated air defense systems in the world. Neutralizing Syria's air defenses would require a major commitment of force, with a high likelihood of collateral damage.

Moreover, the potential for "mission creep" is extremely high. Numerous questions arise surrounding the extent and duration of these options. What would be the end goal? What if it is not successful? What are the next steps? Regime change in Syria could emerge as a necessary follow-on option, dramatically increasing the stakes for the United States. In essence, engaging the U.S. military more directly via the enforcement of a no-fly zone or the creation of humanitarian safe zones stipulates a far deeper U.S. commitment with a greater likelihood that the United States ends up "owning" the Syria problem, at a potentially significant cost of U.S. blood and treasure.

Use of force as part of a broader negotiation strategy. While I remain skeptical about the effectiveness of military options in the current environment, a bigger strategic question concerning the use of force as a means to reach negotiations is worth considering. Circumstances could arise in which the limited use of force, specifically targeted airstrikes, may alter the strategic calculations of key players on the ground and pave the way toward negotiations. Such circumstances are not easy to discern, but could revolve around a confirmed, large scale chemical weapons attack killing a significant number of civilians. Other egregious acts resulting in either large-scale civilian casualties and/or major spillover into one of Syria's neighbors could also serve as a platform for the limited use of force.

Of course, the risks of targeted airstrikes are also significant. To minimize these risks, the use of standoff weaponry, likely ship-borne missiles, would be in order. Such strikes would need to be undertaken in concert with key allies. Equally important, the use of surgical military strikes should necessarily be embedded in a well-conceived political and diplomatic strategy that seeks to resolve the conflict through negotiations. Target selection should aim to both strongly signal US. and allied resolve and also to prompt key actors on the ground to shift their calculus. An effective strategic communications strategy would also be a necessary component of this option. While the potential for "mission creep" also exists with limited surgical strikes, the risk could be

minimized if this option is undertaken with clearly-defined objectives that seek to directly address an egregious act and alter the cost-benefit analysis of key actors on the ground.

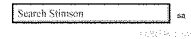
Conclusion

The United States cannot afford to ignore Syria. Yet, there is no “silver bullet” for resolving Syria’s conflict. Military options are not likely to be successful unless embedded in a well-conceived political and diplomatic strategy. While this hearing’s focus is on the pros and cons of greater U.S. military involvement in Syria, the political and diplomatic dimensions of U.S. strategy toward Syria should take precedence. To the extent possible, the United States should work to help bring the Syrian conflict toward resolution by working through international and regional channels to find a political solution to the conflict. Understanding that this could take time, the United States must work to assuage the human suffering that has accompanied the conflict, leveraging support from both regional and international actors to address Syria’s growing humanitarian crisis. As well, the United States should seek to insulate regional allies from Syrian spillover and help tamp down regional tensions.

U.S. military options should be evaluated in this broader context. Ultimately, U.S. military options should be deployed in the service of a broader political and diplomatic strategy. A more aggressive U.S. military posture in the absence of a deeper, coherent strategy is unlikely to bring Syria closer to resolution, improve humanitarian conditions, or minimize regional spillover. In fact, such involvement could exacerbate the situation.

Moreover, greater U.S. military involvement in Syria must be assessed not only in terms of whether it would bring Syria closer to resolution. The impact of military engagement must also be measured on an Arab world that is fraught with tension and in the midst of destabilizing change. Across the region—from North Africa to Egypt to the Levant and the Gulf—U.S. engagement has been met with suspicion and at times, outright hostility. Policy makers and military planners therefore must also assess the impact of greater U.S. military engagement on this volatile region more broadly.

Finally, the American public has also expressed deep skepticism about the merits of greater U.S. military engagement in Syria. While respondents appear to be supportive of humanitarian assistance, even the most limited of U.S. military options—arming the rebels—has been met with disapproval. Americans have no appetite for U.S. engagement in a third Middle Eastern war.



Experts / Mona Yacoubian

Mona Yacoubian

Senior Advisor, Middle East | Project Director, Pathways to Progress
MIDDLE EAST/SOUTHWEST ASIA

Mona Yacoubian joined the Stimson Center in November 2011. Her work focuses on the Arab Uprisings, with a particular concentration on Syria. Ms. Yacoubian directs **"Pathways to Progress: Peace, Prosperity and Change in the Middle East,"** a joint initiative with the George C. Marshall Foundation that explores the dynamics propelling the Arab revolts and seeks innovative policy solutions that will ensure that the region embarks on a path towards peace and prosperity. Ms. Yacoubian also co-directs the **Stimson-US Institute of Peace Lebanon Working Group**. She previously served as a Special Advisor and Senior Program Officer on the Middle East at the US Institute of Peace, where her work focused on Lebanon and Syria as well as broader issues related to democratization in the Arab world. Ms. Yacoubian has worked as a consultant on the Middle East for several years. From 1990-1997, she served as the North Africa analyst at the US Department of State.

Ms. Yacoubian is a frequent commentator on the Arab world and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She was a Fulbright Scholar in Syria (1985-86) and held an International Affairs Fellowship with the Council on Foreign Relations. Ms. Yacoubian has an MPA from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and a BA from Duke University.



[Download Hi-Resolution Photo](#)

PHONE 202-464-6011

FAX 202-238-9604

EMAIL myacoubian@stimson.org

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- **Op-ed: Egypt's Chaos Need Not Derail the Arab Spring**, July 12, 2014, *International Business Times*
- **Op-ed: Hezbollah's Gamble in Syria**, June 2, 2013, *Foreign Affairs*
- **Op-ed: Give Peace Talks in Syria a chance**, May 10, 2013, *CNN.com*
- **"Interview | Syria's Continuing Civil War,"** March 7, 2013, Council on Foreign Relations
- **"Sustaining the Spring: Economic Challenges, Environmental Risks, and Green Growth,"** February 2013, Stimson Center
- **"Roundtable: Arming the Syrian Rebels,"** February 21, 2013, *Foreign Policy*
- **"Spotlight | It's What Happens After The Elections That Really Matters,"** February 1, 2012, Stimson Center
- **"Interview | Developments in Syria,"** December 9, 2012, CSPAN's Washington Journal
- **"Spotlight | Reinvigorate American Soft Power To Shape Change In The Arab World,"** December 10, 2012, Stimson Center
- **"Shifting the paradigm in Syria,"** October 12, 2012 *Foreign Policy*
- **"Engagement, not withdrawal, is needed in Arab World,"** September 21, 2012 in *The Hill*

Middle East/Southwest Asia

Middle East/Southwest Asia

Mona Yacoubian | Experts | The Stimson Center | Pragmatic Steps for Global Security

- "Arab Spring Must Also Weather Environmental Threats," July 30, 2012, *Al Monitor*
- "Syria Slides into the Abyss," July 23, 2012, *The Monkey Cage*
- "Harnessing Innovation for Economic Growth in the Arab World," July 6, 2012, Stimson Center
- "International Conference Could Be Crucial," June 25, 2012, *New York Times*
- "Spotlight | Crisis in Syria Nears Breaking Point," June 18, 2012, Stimson Center
- "A Syrian Turning Point for Russia?," May 29, 2012, Council on Foreign Relations
- "Syria's Last Chance for Peace," May 1, 2012, *Al Monitor*
- "Make Russia Part of the Solution," March 30, 2012, Room for Debate, *New York Times*
- "The Road to Syria's Salvation Runs Through Moscow," March 1, 2012, Middle East Channel, Foreign Policy
- "Is Egypt Heading Off the Rails?" February 23, 2012, Stimson Center
- "Middle East 'Marshall Plan' Will Sustain Arab Spring," January 11, 2012, *The Hill*
- "Syria and the New Iraq: Between Rivalry and Rapprochement," in *Iraq, Its Neighbors and the United States: Competition, Crisis, and the Reordering of Power*, edited by Henri Barkey, Scott Lasensky, and Phebe Marr (United States Institute of Peace, 2011)
- "Hezbollah After Assad," December 1, 2011, *Foreign Affairs*
- "Regional Dynamics of the Syrian Uprising: The Impact on Lebanon and Hezbollah," (Peace Brief) October 2011, U.S. Institute of Peace
- "Saving Syria from Civil War," October 5, 2011, Middle East Channel, Foreign Policy
- "Non-Governmental Organizations," in *Seismic Shift: Understanding Change in the Middle East*, May 2011, Stimson Center
- "Even If Bashar Wins, He Has Already Lost," May 3, 2011, Middle East Channel, Foreign Policy
- "Impact of the Arab Uprisings," April 18, 2011, U. S. Institute of Peace
- "Lebanon's Unstable Equilibrium," November 2009, U.S. Institute of Peace
- "Bridging the Divide: U.S. Efforts to Engage the Muslim World," *Middle East Journal*, Summer 2009 (Subscription required to access full article)
- *Dealing with Damascus: Seeking a Greater Return on U.S.-Syrian Relations*, Council Special Report No. 33, June 2008
- "Building Momentum for Reform: The Islamist-Secular Alliance in Yemen," in *The Challenge of Islamists for EU and US Policies: Conflict, Stability and Reform*, SWP and USIP, November 2007 (Link to complete publication)
- "Rethinking the War on Terror: New Approaches to Conflict Prevention and Management in the Post-9/11 World," in *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World*, USIP Press, 2007
- "Engaging Islamists and Promoting Democracy: A Preliminary Assessment," (U.S. Institute of Peace, 2007)
- "Promoting Middle East Democracy II: Arab Initiatives," (U.S. Institute of Peace, 2005)

MULTIMEDIA

- "Audio | The debate over U.S. arms aid for Syrian rebels," June 18, 2013, Interview on WHY's "Radio Times with Marty Moss-Coane"

Mona Yacoubian | Experts | The Stimson Center | Pragmatic Steps for Global Security

- "Audio | Mona Yacoubian w/Tim Farley on POTUS Morning Briefing," June 18, 2013, Interview on SiriusXM's "The Morning Briefing with Tim Farley"
- "Continued Conflict in Syria," June 9, 2013, Interview on C-SPAN Washington Journal
- "Civil Unrest in Syria," June 7, 2013, on C-SPAN
- "Spillover from Syria: Managing the Threat," May 30, 2013, at Council on Foreign Relations
- "Plans Proceed for Another International Meeting on Syria," May 14, 2013, on NPR Morning Edition
- "Video | The Syrian Civil War and Chemical Weapons," May 12, 2013, on CCTV
- "Podcast | Syria Accused of Repeatedly Using Chemical Weapons," April 24, 2013, on NPR Morning Edition
- "Video | US Policy Toward Syria," March 10, 2013, CSPAN's Washington Journal
- "Video | "What is in store for a post-Assad Syria," " December 18, 2012, Center for National Policy
- "Video | An Update on Developments in Syria," December 9, 2012, on C-SPAN's *Washington Journal*
- "Video | US Policymaking Considerations Regarding Regional Geopolitical Dynamics of Syria," October 25, 2012, National Council on US-Arab Relations
- "Turkey and the Regional Dynamics of the Syrian Crisis," September 27, 2012, Middle East Institute
- "KQED Radio's Public Affairs Program Forum," September 17, 2012, Forum with Michael Krasny KQED Radio (NPR affiliate)
- "The Continuing Crisis in Syria," September 14, 2012, on Encounter, a VOA news radio program
- "Video | In Syria, 'Whac-A-Mole' Revolution Turns Increasingly Bloody," June 11, 2012, on PBS NewsHour
- "Video | An Update on the Situation in Syria," June 3, 2012, on C-SPAN's *Washington Journal*
- "Podcast | Syria Update: Religion and Rebellion," April 17, 2012,
- "The Cost of Syria's Crackdown," January 15, 2012, *Inside Syria* (Al Jazeera)
- "KPFF Interview on Ongoing Political Instability Inside Syria," December 23, 2011, KPFF 90.7 FM (Los Angeles, California)
- "Escalating Violence in Syria," August 17, 2011, Diane Rehm Show (NPR affiliate WAMU 88.5 FM, Washington, DC)
- "Viewpoint with James Zogby," June 23, 2011, Arab American Institute
- "Life Is Complicated in Lebanon," June 18, 2011, Bloggingheads.tv
- "The Crisis in Yemen and Syria," June 14, 2011, Radio Times with Marty Moss-Coane (NPR affiliate WHYY 90.9 FM, Philadelphia, PA)
- "A New Day in the Middle East?," February 2, 2011, Bloggingheads.tv
- "Lebanon's Political Crisis," January 26, 2011, Kojo Nnamdi Show (NPR affiliate WAMU 88.5 FM, Washington, DC)
- "Lebanon and Syria: The Challenge of an Evolving Relationship," 2010, Middle East Institute
- "Security and Political Reform in the Greater Middle East," January 8, 2009, U.S. Institute of Peace

Mona Yacoubian | Experts | The Stimson Center | Pragmatic Steps for Global Security

"**Democracy Building and Consensus in Lebanon**," July 9, 2009, Kojo Nnamdi Show (NPR affiliate WAMU 88.5 FM, Washington, DC)

◦ "Dealing with Damascus: Seeking a Greater Return on U.S.-Syrian Relations," February 5, 2009, Council on Foreign Relations Podcast

**DISCLOSURE FORM FOR WITNESSES
CONCERNING FEDERAL CONTRACT AND GRANT INFORMATION**

INSTRUCTION TO WITNESSES: Rule 11, clause 2(g)(5), of the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives for the 113th Congress requires nongovernmental witnesses appearing before House committees to include in their written statements a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source of any federal contracts or grants (including subcontracts and subgrants) received during the current and two previous fiscal years either by the witness or by an entity represented by the witness. This form is intended to assist witnesses appearing before the House Committee on Armed Services in complying with the House rule. Please note that a copy of these statements, with appropriate redactions to protect the witness's personal privacy (including home address and phone number) will be made publicly available in electronic form not later than one day after the witness's appearance before the committee.

Witness name: Mona Yacoubian

Capacity in which appearing: (check one)

☒ X Individual

☐ Representative

If appearing in a representative capacity, name of the company, association or other entity being represented:

FISCAL YEAR 2013

federal grant(s)/ contracts	federal agency	dollar value	subject(s) of contract or grant
IOP 10-242	US Institute of Peace	\$55,000	Lebanon and Syria

FISCAL YEAR 2012

federal grant(s)/ contracts	federal agency	dollar value	subject(s) of contract or grant

--	--	--	--

FISCAL YEAR 2011

Federal grant(s) / contracts	federal agency	dollar value	subject(s) of contract or grant

Federal Contract Information: If you or the entity you represent before the Committee on Armed Services has contracts (including subcontracts) with the federal government, please provide the following information:

Number of contracts (including subcontracts) with the federal government:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
 Fiscal year 2012: _____;
 Fiscal year 2011: _____.

Federal agencies with which federal contracts are held:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
 Fiscal year 2012: _____;
 Fiscal year 2011: _____.

List of subjects of federal contract(s) (for example, ship construction, aircraft parts manufacturing, software design, force structure consultant, architecture & engineering services, etc.):

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
 Fiscal year 2012: _____;
 Fiscal year 2011: _____.

Aggregate dollar value of federal contracts held:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
 Fiscal year 2012: _____;
 Fiscal year 2011: _____.

Federal Grant Information: If you or the entity you represent before the Committee on Armed Services has grants (including subgrants) with the federal government, please provide the following information:

Number of grants (including subgrants) with the federal government:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
Fiscal year 2012: _____;
Fiscal year 2011: _____.

Federal agencies with which federal grants are held:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
Fiscal year 2012: _____;
Fiscal year 2011: _____.

List of subjects of federal grants(s) (for example, materials research, sociological study, software design, etc.):

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
Fiscal year 2012: _____;
Fiscal year 2011: _____.

Aggregate dollar value of federal grants held:

Current fiscal year (2013): _____;
Fiscal year 2012: _____;
Fiscal year 2011: _____.

**WITNESS RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED DURING
THE HEARING**

JULY 17, 2013

RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MRS. DAVIS

Mr. ABRAMS. I believe our intelligence agencies are in touch with a wide variety of groups, as are friendly and cooperative agencies of other governments. Presumably we are looking for individuals who are, first of all, Syrian rather than foreign, and who have no known connection to AQ or any group related to it. And we would be looking for effectiveness in the current fighting: good leadership, skilled use of whatever arms they have, ability to recruit. [See page 18.]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING

JULY 17, 2013

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. LANGEVIN

Mr. LANGEVIN. The U.N. envoy to Iraq told the U.N. Security Council yesterday that "Iraqi armed groups have an increasingly active presence in Syria" and that the conflict in Syria was spreading to Iraq, as Iraqi groups reportedly take up arms against each other in Syria. Iraq just had its bloodiest four months in 5 years, with nearly 3,000 people killed and over 7,000 injured. Coupled with Hezbollah's strong support of the Assad regime and the spike in violence in Lebanon tied to Syrian involvement, this has all the signs of a dangerous regionalization of the Syrian civil war. How much further might this spread without further aid or intervention by the U.S. and its allies? Does it still make sense to think of this as a Syrian conflict? If the Syrian war ended tomorrow, how much of this conflict would persist in other venues, such as sectarian conflict in Iraq or Lebanon—in other words, is Syria now a pressure valve for other simmering regional conflicts?

Mr. ABRAMS. Syria's civil war is now a proxy war, due to the introduction of Iranian and Hezbollah troops, and due to the massive refugee flows it is now a source of regional instability. In my view, the remaining questions are how long it will go on and who will win. If Assad survives due to Iranian help, Iran and Hezbollah will have defeated the United States, EU, and our Arab allies and power relationships in the entire region will have changed. Syria is in my view less a pressure valve for other conflicts than a cause for exacerbating them—and a means for Iran and Hezbollah to diminish the influence of the United States in the entire region.

Mr. LANGEVIN. I share concerns that have been expressed about aid, particularly lethal aid, being directed to some of the more extremist elements of the Syrian rebel groups. Is the United States doing enough to coordinate with other aid-donating countries to dry up such aid and focus efforts on less extreme elements, and if not, what more can and should be done?

Mr. ABRAMS. I don't believe we can coordinate effectively with others if we are not in this game. Why should they take our advice? If we want to influence who gets aid, as we should, we will have to start providing aid ourselves. Then we'll be in a good position to know more, and to influence whom our allies are assisting.

Mr. LANGEVIN. What are the United States and partner countries, particularly those with significant refugee populations such as Jordan and Turkey, doing to combat the spread of radicalism within the refugee camps? As these camps grow larger and more established, is there a need to provide more robust efforts, and what might these look like?

Mr. ABRAMS. Both governments are trying to police the camps, using combinations of border controls on who gets in, police in the camps, intelligence work, and military patrols near the camps. I hope and assume we are in close discussions with both governments about the security challenges they face and how we might help. Intelligence sharing and financial aid to their military and police agencies would seem to be helpful. But fundamentally we must rely on them to protect themselves and let us know when help is needed.

Mr. LANGEVIN. I am deeply concerned that the spillover of both refugees and violence into Lebanon could further destabilize that country, particularly as the full effects of Hezbollah's overt support of the Assad government lead to increased sectarian tensions. Beyond addressing the conflict inside the borders of Syria, is there more that the U.S. and its partners can do to prevent destabilization of the Lebanese government, or is it now inextricably tied to the Syrian conflict? Can Hezbollah and the Assad regime be decoupled, or is Hezbollah now in too deep to change course? Can you explain the impacts of Hezbollah's decision to back Assad on its standing within the region?

Mr. ABRAMS. Hezbollah has cast its lot with Assad, presumably at the call of Iran but in its own interests as well. It is already paying a price in the region and inside Lebanon: once seen as a bold opponent of Israel and popular for this reason among Sunnis, Hezbollah is now seen as a Shiite group willing to sacrifice Sunnis, and indeed its own country, for Shia group interests and Iran. Hezbollah and the Assad regime will be decoupled now in only one way: the demise of the Assad regime. For now, while war continues in Syria, instability in Lebanon is guaranteed and unavoidable. There isn't much we can do in Lebanon to change this. For example, the

Lebanese Army is refusing to police the border with Syria or to challenge Hezbollah, so increasing our aid to it does not seem to me an effective route.

Mr. LANGEVIN. What might a successful political settlement in Syria look like, and how has that changed since the confirmation of the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons?

Mr. ABRAMS. A successful political settlement can't be conjured out of thin air, and must reflect the balance on the ground. So if we want a successful outcome, the rebels must be winning militarily. It might then be possible to negotiate for a new transitional government that represents all Syrian population groups and gives real guarantees to prevent violence against the Alawite community. All this is much harder now, as time has passed and there has been massive loss of life at the hands of the Alawite regime and its regular and irregular forces. The use of chemical weapons has the same impact, evoking the desire for revenge.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Historically, how successful has the U.S. been in using the provision of military assistance to empower moderate rebel groups, and what are the prospects for using such aid to increase U.S. influence among the Syrian opposition groups in particular?

Mr. ABRAMS. We certainly got great influence with the contras in Nicaragua, and I would suggest in Afghanistan too, with the Northern Alliance. When aid is being provided by other governments and groups and we provide little, our influence will naturally be limited. I do not suggest that any group will become a tool of American policy and nothing more, but provision of support will mean we start to build relationships, know whom we are dealing with, know whom to back with more help, and give them reason to listen to us.

Mr. LANGEVIN. General Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has recently stated that the central strategy for Syria is "capacity-building" to help prevent violence within Syria from spreading to its neighbors. He specifically mentioned that "The U.S. will leave some Patriot missile batteries and some F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft in Jordan and is working with its Iraqi counterparts, the Lebanese armed forces, and Turkey through NATO" to ensure that they're prepared to account for the potential spillover effects. Do you agree with this approach?

Mr. ABRAMS. No, I do not. I believe American passivity regarding Syria is extremely dangerous. Gen. Dempsey would leave the Iranian and Hezbollah expeditionary forces in Syria to defeat the rebels and change the entire power balance in the Middle East. Our friends and allies are already wondering why Iranian adventurism and even hegemony appears to be acceptable to the United States.

Mr. LANGEVIN. The U.N. envoy to Iraq told the U.N. Security Council yesterday that "Iraqi armed groups have an increasingly active presence in Syria" and that the conflict in Syria was spreading to Iraq, as Iraqi groups reportedly take up arms against each other in Syria. Iraq just had its bloodiest four months in 5 years, with nearly 3,000 people killed and over 7,000 injured. Coupled with Hezbollah's strong support of the Assad regime and the spike in violence in Lebanon tied to Syrian involvement, this has all the signs of a dangerous regionalization of the Syrian civil war. How much further might this spread without further aid or intervention by the U.S. and its allies? Does it still make sense to think of this as a Syrian conflict? If the Syrian war ended tomorrow, how much of this conflict would persist in other venues, such as sectarian conflict in Iraq or Lebanon—in other words, is Syria now a pressure valve for other simmering regional conflicts?

Mr. HOF. What began as a civil conflict in Syria between peaceful demonstrators and a regime that responded with deadly violence quickly became a conflict with not only regional, but international implications. Foreign fighters from all over the world are now flowing into Syria, while the conflict's spillover effects on Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, and other neighbors are becoming dire. Syria is both inflaming sectarian tensions across the region and acting as a theatre where long-standing animosities in the Middle East are playing out.

It is likely that the regional effects of the Syria crisis will outlast the conflict itself. Resettlement of millions of refugees who have fled to neighboring states, for example, will undoubtedly be a contentious and perhaps dangerous process. Resentment between the Sunni majority in the Middle East and various minorities (Shia, Alawite, Christian, Druze, etc.) will fester regardless of whether an internationally-supported negotiated political solution is reached in Syria.

These disastrous effects underscore the need for an end to the violence in Syria, but U.S. military intervention is not a panacea. It is crucial that the United States have realistic goals in approaching this dilemma. U.S. military action could destroy or significantly degrade the Assad regime's artillery, air, and missile capabilities in order to slow the massive civilian slaughter in Syria and stem the flood of refugees into neighboring countries. These measures may have other positive effects as well, such as changing the overall combat momentum on the ground. Yet such effects

should not be assumed. The goal would be to mitigate the effects of the Assad regime's survival strategy on the neighbors and on the region as a whole.

Mr. LANGEVIN. I share concerns that have been expressed about aid, particularly lethal aid, being directed to some of the more extremist elements of the Syrian rebel groups. Is the United States doing enough to coordinate with other aid-donating countries to dry up such aid and focus efforts on less extreme elements, and if not, what more can and should be done?

Mr. HOF. Who gets arms in Syria and from whom is important. The United States, its key allies (UK, France, Turkey), and others (Qatar, Saudi Arabia) must try to insure that weaponry going into Syria reaches armed groups committed politically to a Syria in which citizenship reigns supreme over ethnicity, sect, gender, and all other ways in which people can be divided politically. The United States, in particular, should not be shy about working closely with Turkey to master weapons logistics and end-use. Most importantly, to be credible with Syrians and regional actors in this role, the United States will have to become directly involved in arming units now affiliated with the opposition Supreme Military Council; a process that may well be underway.

The Chief of the Supreme Military Council, General Salim Idris, has made clear his determination to see to it that the right people get the right arms and equipment. He will need the full support of the United States in this endeavor. It will not be enough for the United States to supply lethal assistance of its own. It, with the cooperation of Turkey and Jordan, must be in charge of the weapons supply chain. Only in this way can the risk of arms going to wrong people be minimized. Realistically, however, the risk can never be totally eliminated: no more in Syria today than in occupied France during World War II.

Mr. LANGEVIN. What are the United States and partner countries, particularly those with significant refugee populations such as Jordan and Turkey, doing to combat the spread of radicalism within the refugee camps? As these camps grow larger and more established, is there a need to provide more robust efforts, and what might these look like?

Mr. HOF. The United States should continue to provide resources to non-governmental organizations and the United Nations for humanitarian aid and security for refugees in order (among other things) to deter and counter political radicalism in refugee camps. Episodes in official refugee camps involving recruitment of child soldiers, sexual violence, and exploitation for labor are particularly alarming, as they create dangerous breeding grounds for radicalism if allowed to persist and grow. Support of the Jordanian, Lebanese, and Turkish governments and their security forces is also important as they attempt to uproot these human rights violations.

As to what the United States and partner countries are actually doing to combat the spread of radicalism in refugee camps, it is a question better put to serving officials.

Mr. LANGEVIN. I am deeply concerned that the spillover of both refugees and violence into Lebanon could further destabilize that country, particularly as the full effects of Hezbollah's overt support of the Assad government lead to increased sectarian tensions. Beyond addressing the conflict inside the borders of Syria, is there more that the U.S. and its partners can do to prevent destabilization of the Lebanese government, or is it now inextricably tied to the Syrian conflict? Can Hezbollah and the Assad regime be decoupled, or is Hezbollah now in too deep to change course? Can you explain the impacts of Hezbollah's decision to back Assad on its standing within the region?

Mr. HOF. Lebanon's stability is suffering as a result of the conflict in Syria, due in no small part to the historical, political, and demographic linkages between the two countries. The duration and outcome of the ongoing war in Syria will undoubtedly have implications for Lebanon's domestic balance of power and political incentive structures.

However, Lebanon's ability to withstand crises that will inevitably come its way depends upon the strength of its national institutions. To this end, the United States should continue to support the Lebanese Armed Forces and encourage its role as a neutral arbiter in domestic feuds, stress the need for a formal political process in Lebanon including the holding of elections, and continue to finance humanitarian relief efforts to help the Lebanese government cope with the influx of Syrian refugees.

Hezbollah's choice to participate directly in the conflict on the side of the Syrian regime indicates that its relationship with the Assad regime, and more importantly the Islamic Republic of Iran, is of more strategic importance to it than the role it has built for itself in Lebanese domestic politics. It is unlikely at this point to decouple with the Assad regime, as it has demonstrated itself to be an actor with regional considerations that trump its domestic agenda. However, it is difficult to predict

whether the party's decision-making process will change if the Assad regime suffers decisive military defeat in Syria.

Without a doubt, Hezbollah's decision to participate militarily in Syria is having a negative effect on its reputation both inside Lebanon and regionally. Hezbollah has, in effect, seceded from the Lebanese political system to intervene in Syria at Iran's behest. Many Lebanese, including Shia constituents, are questioning the party's judgment, demanding to know why such a sacrifice is being made for a corrupt Syrian regime. The link between Hezbollah's leadership and Iran is unbreakable. Only if the Iranian-Assad regime link is broken can Hezbollah and the regime be decoupled.

Mr. LANGEVIN. What might a successful political settlement in Syria look like, and how has that changed since the confirmation of the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons?

Mr. HOF. A successful political settlement in Syria would follow the roadmap specified in the June 30, 2012 Final Communiqué of the Action Group on Syria, convened in Geneva by former U.N. and Arab League Special Representative Kofi Annan. The Final Communiqué, accepted by the Permanent Five members of the U.N. Security Council, envisions a "transitional governing body" being created by opposition-government negotiations on the basis of mutual consent—i.e., mutual veto (thereby ensuring that figures viewed as unacceptable by each side would not serve). This governing body, a national unity government perhaps, would receive full executive powers from those now exercising them. Although the Final Communiqué did not mention the name "Assad," it was understood by all that the mutual consent process would render him and his regime ineligible for any future role in the governance of Syria without requiring his resignation or departure as preconditions for the negotiations themselves. Therefore, the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons does not alter the diplomatic framework of negotiations.

The advantage of a political settlement employing the Geneva model would be that it would keep in place large segments of the civilian and security bureaucracy, something that could facilitate post-conflict security measures, refugee resettlement and humanitarian aid. Indeed, serving members of the current and past government—though not members of the family-based regime—might continue to serve in a national unity government. Such a scenario would be reassuring to minorities, whose status in Syria has been shaken by the Assad regime's overtly sectarian survival strategy.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Historically, how successful has the U.S. been in using the provision of military assistance to empower moderate rebel groups, and what are the prospects for using such aid to increase U.S. influence among the Syrian opposition groups in particular?

Mr. HOF. It is difficult to identify historical models roughly analogous to the complexities of Syria. There have been cases (El Salvador, Afghanistan) where the U.S. provision of arms produced desired, if (in the case of Afghanistan) transient political objectives. Still, the lessons learned from mistakes in providing military assistance to groups that did not share interests with the United States (in a lasting way) should not be forgotten. Yet they need not paralyze U.S. decision-making in a conflict that involves national interests of the United States and its allies. General Salim Idriss, Commander of the Free Syrian Army, has shown himself to be a capable, moderate, and pragmatic interlocutor of the United States; a person who merits U.S. support. And although there can be no realistic guarantee that all weapons will at all times reach their intended recipients, the United States has invested considerable time and resources into the vetting of Syria's armed opposition to minimize the likelihood of this happening. The provision of military assistance is perhaps the only way that the United States can both boost its relationship with the moderate Syrian opposition, and elevate the position of those groups at the expense of two parties steeped in terrorism: the regime and extremist militias attracted to the Syrian conflict by the regime's sectarian survival strategy.

Mr. LANGEVIN. General Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has recently stated that the central strategy for Syria is "capacity-building" to help prevent violence within Syria from spreading to its neighbors. He specifically mentioned that "The U.S. will leave some Patriot missile batteries and some F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft in Jordan and is working with its Iraqi counterparts, the Lebanese armed forces, and Turkey through NATO" to ensure that they're prepared to account for the potential spillover effects. Do you agree with this approach?

Mr. HOF. Three broad objectives might usefully frame U.S. efforts with regard to Syria: (1) enhancing the security and stability of regional allies and friends being inundated with refugees fleeing the Assad regime's terror campaign of massed fires (artillery and air) on civilian population centers beyond its control, as well as massacres in places it can reach on the ground; (2) removing from power a family-based

regime whose desire to survive and the means it employs constitute a palpable threat to regional peace; and (3) replacing that regime with a national unity government dedicated to reform, reconstruction, reconciliation, and rule of law, all in the context of non-sectarian citizenship and protection of vulnerable populations. None of these objectives implies the desirability of American unilateralism or the inevitable advisability of specific means, military or otherwise, to achieve them.

Nevertheless U.S. strategy must, by definition, aim to accomplish specific objectives: either the three cited above or others approved by the president. President Obama has cited the effects of the Syrian crisis on Syria's neighbors (including allies and friends of the U.S.) as involving serious U.S. interests. These effects are being caused by the Assad regime's habit of shelling and bombing populated areas it does not control. One approach to the Assad regime's terror campaign of artillery, aerial, and missile assaults on heavily populated areas beyond its control is to continue to pour money and other resources into the countries absorbing the resultant refugee flows and other forms of back-blast. Another approach is to press Russia diplomatically to oblige its client to stop the mass terror campaign. Should diplomacy fail, a third approach could be to undertake a focused aerial campaign of limited duration aimed at destroying or significantly degrading the ability of the regime to terrorize the Syrian populace with artillery, military aircraft, and missiles; a campaign that would feature the use of stand-off weaponry and would require buy-in, at a minimum, from Turkey and Jordan: two countries that would benefit greatly from such an intervention.

As for the steps articulated by General Dempsey, they are useful on their own merit. They do not, however, rise to the level of "central strategy."

Mr. LANGEVIN. The U.N. envoy to Iraq told the U.N. Security Council yesterday that "Iraqi armed groups have an increasingly active presence in Syria" and that the conflict in Syria was spreading to Iraq, as Iraqi groups reportedly take up arms against each other in Syria. Iraq just had its bloodiest four months in 5 years, with nearly 3,000 people killed and over 7,000 injured. Coupled with Hezbollah's strong support of the Assad regime and the spike in violence in Lebanon tied to Syrian involvement, this has all the signs of a dangerous regionalization of the Syrian civil war. How much further might this spread without further aid or intervention by the U.S. and its allies? Does it still make sense to think of this as a Syrian conflict? If the Syrian war ended tomorrow, how much of this conflict would persist in other venues, such as sectarian conflict in Iraq or Lebanon—in other words, is Syria now a pressure valve for other simmering regional conflicts?

Ms. YACUBIAN. The regional spillover repercussions of the Syrian conflict are significant and growing. It is no longer makes sense to consider the Syrian uprising as a purely Syrian conflict. It has morphed into a sectarian civil war with significant spillover into Syria's neighbors. The sectarian aspect of Syrian spillover is particularly concerning, given the attendant instability and violence. Sectarian spillover has been most pronounced in Iraq and Lebanon, two countries with pre-existing sectarian tensions. To a far lesser extent, Turkey has also experience a degree of sectarian instability with its minority Alavi population, provoked by the Syrian conflict. Going forward, primary concerns regarding sectarian spillover will continue to focus on Iraq and Lebanon. Iraq's security situation continued to deteriorate through July and August continues to spiral downward. More than 1,000 Iraqis were killed in sectarian violence in July alone. Lebanon is witnessing from mounting sectarian violence that has stoked pre-existing tensions. Lebanon's population is deeply polarized over the question of Syria, with Sunnis largely supporting the rebels and Shia standing behind the Syrian regime. As both sides have intensified their involvement in Syria, the fight has increasingly come to Lebanon. In particular, the Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah's decision to send fighters to Syria in support of the regime has provoked increasingly brazen attacks on Hezbollah's stronghold, likely by Sunni radicals. An August 15 car bombing in the Beirut's Shiite-dominated southern suburbs killed 24 people, making it the most serious bombing since Lebanon's civil war. Even if the Syrian conflict ended tomorrow, it is likely that sectarian violence in Iraq and Lebanon would persist. The region is now in the throes of a powerful sectarian dynamic, supercharged by the violence unleashed by the increasingly tumultuous Arab transitions.

Mr. LANGEVIN. I share concerns that have been expressed about aid, particularly lethal aid, being directed to some of the more extremist elements of the Syrian rebel groups. Is the United States doing enough to coordinate with other aid-donating countries to dry up such aid and focus efforts on less extreme elements, and if not, what more can and should be done?

Ms. YACUBIAN. The United States is attempting to streamline and manage the arming process in Syria, however with very limited, if any, success. While the U.S. government has worked assiduously behind the scenes to help unify the Syrian op-

position, both political and military, it has repeatedly run into significant roadblocks. The U.S. has worked with key Gulf countries, namely Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which provide the bulk of military assistance. The appointment of General Salim Idriss as Chief of Staff of the Supreme Military Council (SMC), the armed element of the Syrian opposition, was intended to spearhead these efforts at coordinating and directing military aid to “moderate” elements within the armed opposition. However, General Idriss’s influence with an increasingly factionalized and extreme armed opposition has remained somewhat limited. Moreover, while Qatar has reportedly professed a desire to work more closely with the United States, it is not clear the Qataris are willing to implement the stringent controls necessary to insure that arms do not get into the hands of al-Qaeda-aligned jihadists. While Saudi Arabia is strongly opposed to the establishment of a jihadist enclave in Syria, Qatar appears to be less concerned by this potential scenario. Moreover, beyond official Gulf support for the Syrian rebels, private donors, particularly from Kuwait, constitute another key source of military support. Private donations to the rebels are extremely difficult to track and virtually impossible to control.

Mr. LANGEVIN. What are the United States and partner countries, particularly those with significant refugee populations such as Jordan and Turkey, doing to combat the spread of radicalism within the refugee camps? As these camps grow larger and more established, is there a need to provide more robust efforts, and what might these look like?

Ms. YACUBIAN. I am not familiar with what efforts are being undertaken in the refugee camps to combat radicalism. Turkey hosts fewer refugees than Jordan and boasts more modernized facilities. Turkey’s well-developed infrastructure and financial well-being also provide greater assurances that the camps are well-managed and not overly-crowded. Jordan, by contrast, is increasingly overwhelmed by mounting refugee flows. A recent U.N. report noted that security is a major concern in the Zaatari refugee camp—Jordan’s largest camp with 130,000 refugees—where both organized crime networks and armed opposition groups operate in the camp. Given the high proportion of youth in the camp, jihadist recruitment is an ongoing concern. As the refugee flows out of Syria continue to mount, it is increasingly important to insure that there are adequate resources to meet the growing needs of both the refugee population and their host countries. In particular, to stave off radicalization and recruitment of teenagers and young men in the camps, it is essential that education efforts as well as after-school programming are enhanced. In addition, it will be critical to insure that the camps are provided with adequate security.

<http://www.unhcr.org/51f7d9919.html>

Mr. LANGEVIN. I am deeply concerned that the spillover of both refugees and violence into Lebanon could further destabilize that country, particularly as the full effects of Hezbollah’s overt support of the Assad government lead to increased sectarian tensions. Beyond addressing the conflict inside the borders of Syria, is there more that the U.S. and its partners can do to prevent destabilization of the Lebanese government, or is it now inextricably tied to the Syrian conflict? Can Hezbollah and the Assad regime be decoupled, or is Hezbollah now in too deep to change course? Can you explain the impacts of Hezbollah’s decision to back Assad on its standing within the region?

Ms. YACUBIAN. Lebanon’s fate has long been intertwined with that of Syria—well before the Arab uprisings—and the two countries will continue to impact each other. Given that Syria’s conflict is project to endure for months, if not years, Lebanon must contend with the challenges of a “new normal”—a Syria that has descended into a bloody, sectarian civil war. Lebanon’s challenges are further heightened by Hezbollah’s deepening involvement in Syria. Hezbollah’s “all-in” approach to supporting the Syrian regime has resulted in increasing blowback into Lebanon, further exacerbating sectarian tensions with an increasingly radicalized Sunni community. Hezbollah has made clear that its support for the Assad regime is unwavering, so attempts to “peel” Hezbollah away from Syria are not likely to be successful.

Hezbollah’s decision to support the Assad regime at all costs has constituted a critical strategic choice from which there is likely no return. Hezbollah’s policies of sending fighters and providing training and other forms of assistance to the Assad regime in an increasingly bloody sectarian civil war has essentially transformed the organization from a broad-based “resistance” movement with wide popular support across the Arab world to a sectarian militia. As a result, Hezbollah has provoked the ire of a Lebanon’s increasingly radicalized Sunni community. Hezbollah strongholds in Beirut, the Bekaa and south Lebanon are increasingly becoming an arena of confrontation between Sunni and Shia. Most notably, two car bombings within the span of one month in Beirut’s southern suburbs are emblematic of a new era of violence in Lebanon, directed specifically at Hezbollah. While Hezbollah will

maintain its position as the most powerful military force in Lebanon, it will increasingly come under threat from such asymmetric attacks.

Mr. LANGEVIN. What might a successful political settlement in Syria look like, and how has that changed since the confirmation of the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons?

Ms. YACUBIAN. At this point, it is extremely difficult to envision a successful political settlement in Syria in the short term. Too much blood has been spilled and important opportunities for diplomacy and negotiation have been lost. That said, at some point, the Syrian conflict will necessarily reach a point where the parties to the conflict are exhausted and ready to negotiate. The conflict still seems far from that critical point. However, ultimately, the solution to Syria's conflict will be political rather than military. A successful political settlement in Syria would maintain Syria's cohesion, rather than allowing for the break up of the country into sectarian enclaves. Syria would be a multi-confessional democracy with a market economy in which minorities feel safe and a part of a new post-Assad Syria. The confirmation of the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons, albeit on a small scale, only underscores the extent to which the regime will go to maintain its hold on power. This in turn suggests that the conflict will endure for some time before there is any hope for political negotiations. Unfortunately, the longer the Syrian conflict lasts, the dimmer the prospects are for a successful political settlement.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Historically, how successful has the U.S. been in using the provision of military assistance to empower moderate rebel groups, and what are the prospects for using such aid to increase U.S. influence among the Syrian opposition groups in particular?

Ms. YACUBIAN. In general, it is difficult to find examples of how U.S. military assistance has been successfully used to empower moderate rebel groups. History is, however, replete with examples of negative "blowback" from the U.S. provision of arms to rebel or insurgent groups. In the Middle East, the most notable example is U.S. assistance to the Afghan mujahideen in the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, these very weapons became the fuel for radical Islamist groups which were the precursor to Al-Qaeda. It is my sense that the provision of military assistance to Syrian opposition groups will only increase U.S. influence in limited instances and for bounded periods of time. Ultimately, groups will always act in their perceived self interest, whether or not it aligns with their military benefactors.

Mr. LANGEVIN. General Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has recently stated that the central strategy for Syria is "capacity-building" to help prevent violence within Syria from spreading to its neighbors. He specifically mentioned that "The U.S. will leave some Patriot missile batteries and some F-16 Fighting Falcon aircraft in Jordan and is working with its Iraqi counterparts, the Lebanese armed forces, and Turkey through NATO" to ensure that they're prepared to account for the potential spillover effects. Do you agree with this approach?

Ms. YACUBIAN. I agree with the approach to Syria outlined by General Dempsey. Our ability to influence the battle raging on the ground inside Syria is necessarily limited since we are wisely not willing to commit to U.S. "boots on the ground" or more significant levels of direct or indirect military intervention. Given these inherent limitations, it is essential for the United States to employ whatever resources it can leverage to help insulate our allies in the region from Syria's spillover to the extent possible.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. GARAMENDI

Mr. GARAMENDI. Is the U.S. exercising influence over both the Saudi and Qatari regimes to prevent them from arming elements of the opposition that threaten the interests of the U.S. and our allies and that further lead to instability in Syria? If not, why not?

Mr. ABRAMS. In my view, we have likely had conversations with those governments and conveyed our views. The problem is that we are not players in this game, so our views don't count for very much. One of the benefits of actually arming rebel forces is that we would greater influence over both those groups and others who are also arming them; in that case, the American call for close coordination would be seen as natural. Today we are seen as people sitting on the sidelines trying to tell others what the rules are.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Please quantify the refugee assistance requirements of both Turkey and Jordan and indicate the current and future assistance that should come from the U.S. to meet these requirements.

Mr. ABRAMS. There are now 1.7 million Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR, and UNHCR says the financial need is for \$3 billion, of which \$1.125 billion has yet been received. The United States and then Kuwait are the most generous funders in the cases of both Jordan and Turkey, and there are roughly half a million refugees in each country. It is difficult to quantify financial needs because future refugee flows are unpredictable.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Is the U.S. exercising influence over both the Saudi and Qatari regimes to prevent them from arming elements of the opposition that threaten the interests of the U.S. and our allies and that further lead to instability in Syria? If not, why not?

Mr. HOF. This is, of course, a question better put to serving officials. Suffice it to say, however, that the search for clients within the Syrian opposition by certain Gulf states and the support for jihadist elements inside Syria from mainly private Gulf sources have had an entirely deleterious effect on the course of the Syrian revolution and have played completely into the hands of the Assad regime. There have been strong indications in the press that Secretary of State Kerry is trying to ensure that all external military assistance—weapons, equipment, training, and intelligence—go through General Salim Idris and the Supreme Military Council. There are likewise strong indications that this is the policy and practice to be pursued by key Gulf states. Yet this will require constant supervision and verification.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Please quantify the refugee assistance requirements of both Turkey and Jordan and indicate the current and future assistance that should come from the U.S. to meet these requirements.

Mr. HOF. This is an excellent question, though one better put to serving U.S. government officials.

On August 7, President Obama announced more than \$195 million in additional USG humanitarian assistance to help feed, shelter, and provide medical care for children, women, and men affected by the ongoing conflict in Syria, bringing the total amount of U.S. humanitarian assistance for the crisis to more than \$1 billion. This funding supports relief efforts both inside Syria and in neighboring countries. For a more detailed breakdown of U.S. assistance, visit the State Department's official website: <http://www.usaid.gov/crisis/syria>

However, the United Nations has repeatedly warned that the growing needs of Syrian refugees and the countries hosting them are far outpacing international commitments to address the crisis. The United States and its allies should therefore continue to pledge humanitarian relief to Syria and, perhaps more importantly, find alternative methods of delivery (cross-border, for example) that more effectively reach intended recipients. Given that the United Nations still considers the Assad regime to be Syria's government, and given that the so-called government can (and does) deny permission for United Nations humanitarian aid workers to operate in liberated areas of Syria, funding emphasis should also be placed on non-governmental organizations not constrained by the rules applying to the United Nations.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Is the U.S. exercising influence over both the Saudi and Qatari regimes to prevent them from arming elements of the opposition that threaten the interests of the U.S. and our allies and that further lead to instability in Syria? If not, why not?

Ms. YACIOUBIAN. In the midst of continuing, if not deepening, turmoil across the region, the United States continues to try to exercise influence over both the Saudi and Qatari regimes to prevent them from arming jihadists and other extremists that threaten Western interests. Our success to date has been mixed at best. Saudi Arabia has determined that its own strategic interests would be threatened by the establishment of a jihadist stronghold in Syria. As a result, the Saudis appear to be working to insure against arms getting into the hands of jihadists. Qatar, on the other hand, has been more willing to allow arms to flow freely into Syria, including to radical jihadist elements. To the extent, countries share U.S. interests in preventing arms from going to jihadists, therefore, the U.S. has been relatively more successful in exercising influence. However, with countries whose agendas differ from that of the United States, U.S. influence is far less notable. In large part, wealthy Gulf nations have far greater resources at their disposal than the United States and the United States' ability to influence their policies vis-à-vis arming the extremists remains somewhat limited.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Please quantify the refugee assistance requirements of both Turkey and Jordan and indicate the current and future assistance that should come from the U.S. to meet these requirements.

Ms. YACIOUBIAN. Of the two countries, Jordan has been far more stretched given the large number of refugees it hosts (UNHCR notes that 512,000 have registered, while the Jordanian government puts the number of Syrian refugees in Jordan at 1.3 million.) Jordan estimates that since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, the cost

of hosting Syrian refugees will be \$1.68 billion by the end of 2013. Meanwhile, Turkey hosts about 490,000 refugees. Turkish authorities estimate that the cost of hosting these refugees [is] approaching \$1 billion. As the largest single donor to humanitarian efforts in Syria, the United States has shouldered its fair share of the burden. At this point, it is incumbent on wealthy Gulf countries to provide greater financial assistance to the effort. Pledges of Gulf assistance totaling \$1.5 billion have not been fulfilled.

