

# U.S. POLICY IN SYRIA

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BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EASTERN AND  
SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
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## CONTENTS

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	Page
Bronin, Luke A., Deputy Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes, U.S. Department of the Treasury, Washington, DC .....	12
Prepared statement .....	13
Casey, Hon. Robert P., Jr., U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania, opening statement .....	1
Feltman, Hon. Jeffrey D., Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC .....	5
Prepared statement .....	7
Response to question submitted for the record by Senator Richard J. Durbin .....	48
Risch, James E., U.S. Senator from Idaho, opening statement .....	4
ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD	
Prepared statement of Mark Dubowitz, Esq., Executive Director, Foundation for Defense of Democracies .....	34
Discussion Paper jointly produced by the Foundation for Defense of Democracy and the Foreign Policy Initiative .....	35
Prepared statement of Andrew J. Tabler, Next Generation Fellow, Program on Arab Politics, Washington Institute for Near East Policy .....	43
Prepared statement of Maria McFarland, Deputy Washington Director, Human Rights Watch .....	44



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WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2011

U.S. SENATE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EASTERN AND  
SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:30 p.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Robert P. Casey, Jr. (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Senators Casey, Boxer, Shaheen, Durbin, Risch, Lugar, Corker, and Rubio.

### OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT P. CASEY, JR., U.S. SENATOR FROM PENNSYLVANIA

Senator CASEY. The hearing will come to order.

We will get started. I want to thank everyone for being here today. I will have an opening statement, and then we will go to the statement from our witnesses and then go to questions.

I want to thank everyone for being here today.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee meets today and our Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs meets to examine U.S. policy toward Syria. We know that Syrian men, women, and children have courageously—and that is an understatement—engaged in demonstrations for more than 6 months in their country. They seek basic democratic reforms and protection for human rights, but the Assad regime in Syria has responded with terrible, unspeakable violence. The United Nations estimates that more than 3,500 people have been killed since the unrest began in March of this year.

Over the past week, Syria's third-largest city of Homs has been engulfed in perhaps the worst violence we have seen in Syria this year. In just a week, more than 100 people have reportedly been killed, all of this coming during the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, and all of this coming after months and months of repression and violence.

And perhaps most important of all, this violence comes 1 week after the Assad regime agreed to an Arab League deal for reform. In direct violation of this agreement, Assad's forces have not removed their tanks and armored vehicles from the streets of towns across the country. Violence aimed at demonstrators has not stopped or even slowed. Political prisoners—and there are reportedly tens of thousands of them—have not been released. Neither

international journalists nor human rights monitors have been admitted into Syria.

Assad made it clear to the world that he has no interest in or no intention to pursue democratic reform. In fact, he has proven to the world that democratic reform is now not possible while he remains in power.

For months, I and others have spoken about this grave situation in Syria. I have shared accounts of a regime whose brutality affects 22 million Syrians, as well as my constituents in Pennsylvania. I have told the story before of Dr. Hazem Hallek, a Syrian American who lives in suburban Philadelphia. He was visited by his brother Sakher earlier this year. Sakher, who is also a doctor, was not engaged in politics of any kind. Upon his return to Syria after visiting his brother, he was tortured and killed by Assad's forces just for having visited the United States of America.

The press has reported accounts of school children arrested, parents and community members murdered, disappearances and mutilations all across the country of Syria.

In an August Washington Post op-ed, I wrote that Mr. Assad must step down from power. We, who recognize the horror in Syria, have a responsibility to bear witness to the truth, the truth of this slaughter, and to work against it.

Ambassador Robert Ford has taken on this critical task and represented the United States with honor and distinction, and I would also add with remarkable courage. I applaud the work of the Ambassador and his top-notch Embassy staff. We are grateful for their sacrifice and their service.

But we must continue to take specific and visible actions to support democratic reform.

First, we need to make it clear to the regime's supporters that their behavior will not be tolerated and they will be held accountable just as the regime will be held accountable. The administration, working with our European allies, should sanction more individuals within the regime who are complicit in the repression of protests. To date, 17 individuals and 18 entities have been sanctioned. The world needs to know their names and they need to decide whether they, those who are complicit, will continue to aid and abet a regime which has killed thousands. This week, I will send a letter to the Treasury Department to urge the administration to expand the list of individuals to be sanctioned by the United States. The administration can do this by Executive order and should do so as soon as possible. That is first.

Second, the United States must play a constructive role in isolating or, I should say, continuing to isolate the Assad regime. In October, I called for the establishment of a Friends of the Syrian People contact group. This contact group can serve as a main point of international engagement for the democratic opposition and the Syrian people. The Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, and others could form the core of such a group, which would send a clear message of international solidarity and support of democratic change in Syria. I hope that this suggestion would be seriously considered by the Arab League when it meets to discuss Syria this Saturday. The United States should continue to fully support these regional efforts to pressure the regime.

In its agreement with the Assad government, the Arab League committed to sending international monitors to see firsthand the situation in Syria. Those monitors are needed now, not days or weeks from now, but now. The Arab League should send them today. If Assad blocks the deployment of these monitors, the Arab League should suspend Syria's membership in the organization. The United States should also make another push to pursue a resolution condemning the Assad regime at the United Nations. Strong international opposition and commitment to isolating the Assad regime is the key to bringing about democratic reform.

The U.S. Senate as well should also support these efforts to isolate the regime. Through our regular interaction with embassies here in Washington, individual Senators can express concern for the ongoing violence and show their support for democratic change in Syria.

Third, the courageous Syrian political opposition must work to communicate a unified vision for the future of Syria. This opposition faces many disadvantages that other protesters from across the region did not face. Syrians do not have a Tahrir Square on which to gather in large numbers. They do not have open borders through which they can leave at will and find safe haven. They do not have the full attention of the international media, which have been barred from the country.

Despite these challenges, I believe that the Syrian opposition will be involved directly in the country's future. It is imperative that the Syrian National Council answer questions about its composition and its intent. Who are the members of the Syrian National Council? Where does it stand on the role of the international community in stopping the violence and supporting democratic reform? And most importantly, how will minorities be treated in a post-Assad Syria? We have yet to hear a clear message from the opposition on these most essential issues.

The Syrian National Council must be committed to protecting all—all—of Syria's ethnic and religious groups, including Christians and Alawites. The Syrian National Council must speak with one voice and make it clear that it will advocate for minority rights in the new government it hopes to create. The Syrian people deserve answers to these key questions which will, in large part determine the degree of support the opposition has inside and outside the country.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in a speech on Monday that Assad "cannot deny his people's legitimate demands indefinitely. He must step down; and until he does, America and the international community will continue to increase pressure on him and his brutal regime." So said Secretary Clinton. My questions today will center primarily on how we can and will increase the pressure on this regime.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on a number of key issues.

First, what can regional powers, including the Arab League and Turkey, do to play a more constructive role in supporting the democratic reform process in Syria?

Second, what is the impact of current U.S. sanctions on the Assad regime?

Third, how is the United States working unilaterally and with the European Union to strengthen sanctions on Syria?

Another question is, How does the United States assess the current state of the Syrian National Council. What are the criteria by which this movement should be judged in order to gain international legitimacy?

And finally, what are the assessments of our witnesses of growing sectarianism in Syria and whether it could lead to civil war?

We are fortunate today to have with us two witnesses who can speak about U.S. policy in Syria: the Honorable Jeffrey Feltman, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs at the Department of State—Mr. Feltman, we are grateful you are here—and Luke Bronin, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes at the Treasury Department. We are grateful you are here as well. These witnesses have extensive experience and expertise in the region, and I look forward to their insights as to why our policy has not yet produced the desired results and what more we can do. We are grateful for their testimony today and grateful for their service.

And I would say in conclusion, before turning to Senator Risch if he has any opening comments, that this is a matter, I think, of basic justice for the people of Syria. A long time ago, St. Augustine said without justice, what are kingdoms but great bands of robbers. And the people of Syria for a long period of time, but especially over these last horrific number of months have been robbed of a lot of things, robbed of their dignity, robbed sometimes of their life and their freedoms. And we have to speak out with one voice on a matter of basic justice for this country. And I know that there are a lot of Americans that are deeply concerned about this issue.

And we are grateful that we have so many people here to listen today to this testimony and to listen to the questions of our witnesses. And I am grateful for our colleagues being here.

And I wanted to ask our ranking member, Senator Risch, if he has any opening comments.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF JAMES E. RISCH,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO**

Senator RISCH. Thank you very much, Senator Casey.  
Welcome to all of you.

We have many, many issues that are important under the purview of this committee that deals with the Near East and North Africa. The questions and the issues surrounding Syria certainly are at the top of that list. All of us have watched—not only us in this committee, all Americans—the world has watched as things have unfolded in the Middle East in the Arab world this spring. We have watched them play out, and now everything seems to be focused on Syria. That seems to be where the current unresolved issues are.

There is a huge difference here, of course, between Syria and what happened in Libya. The opposition in Syria is essentially unarmed, and as a result of that, they do not have the ability that the Libyan people had to do what they believed needed to be done.

We, as the United States, need a policy that is very clear that we will do everything we can to cut off the sources of Assad's

finances and also the flow of weapons and to do everything we can to isolate this regime.

I agree with Senator Casey. Mr. Ford is the right person. I disagreed with appointing an Ambassador because Assad had been so brutal with his people. Having said that, I agree with the President that Mr. Ford is the right person for the job.

I think it is in the interest of every American and, indeed, the interest of the civilized world to isolate this regime as much as possible. This is a bipartisan issue. It is an American issue.

I am anxious to hear the suggestions that we get from the panel and hear about the efforts that we are making in that regard, and all of us can commit to move forward to do our best to isolate the regime which hopefully will reach the results that all of us want to see.

Thank you, Senator Casey.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, Senator Risch.

So we will start with the opening statements, and then we will go to questions. I spoke to both of our witnesses and they have agreed to try to keep within 5 minutes if they can. Both of your full statements, of course, will be made part of the record for this hearing. And we will start with Assistant Secretary Feltman. Thank you.

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

Ambassador FELTMAN. Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of the committee, Senator Lugar, thank you for inviting us to appear before you today to discuss our goals with regard to Syria and the strategy that we are implementing to achieve them.

Bashar al-Assad is destroying Syria and destabilizing the region. As Secretary Clinton said 2 days ago, the greatest source of instability in the region is not people's legitimate demands for change. It is the refusal to change. An orderly democratic transition that removes Assad from power and restores stability is clearly in the United States interest, as it is in the interest of the Syrian people. It will support our goals of promoting democracy and human rights, contribute to greater stability in the region, and undermine Iran's influence.

Our message to President Assad can be summed up briefly. Step aside and allow your people to begin a transition to democracy.

Though we would like to see this transition proceed as quickly as possible, we should be prepared for the process, unfortunately, to be long and difficult. Much has already changed since the unrest began 8 months ago. Internally a large and growing number of Syrians have concluded that Assad must go. Protests that started in the remote village of Daraa now take place in nearly every city and major town in the country. For the regime to retain power, the Syrian Army has had to occupy its own country, but the regime's overwhelming use of force has not been able to suppress Syria's courageous street protesters demanding their universal rights.

And internationally, Syria is increasingly isolated as the international community loses patience with Assad's brutality and

broken promises. Nearly all of Syria's neighbors now recognize that Assad is dangerously fomenting instability, and that is why we see this unusual Arab League leadership on a country that is considered to be very important politically and strategically in the Arab world. The Arabs want Assad to stop destroying Syria.

The Gulf Cooperation Council described the regime as, "a killing machine." After several years of strengthening ties with Syria, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan said, "those who repress their own people in Syria will not survive." Totalitarian regimes are disappearing. The rule of the people is coming.

The coverage of the regime's brutality in pan-Arab media has also destroyed Assad's standing in the Arab street. He has become a pariah in the Arab world. Almost all the Arab leaders, the Foreign Ministers who I talk to, say the same thing. Assad's rule is coming to an end. It is inevitable. Some of these Arabs have even begun to offer Assad safe haven to encourage him to leave quickly.

We welcome the efforts of the Arab League to stop the violence, but the regime must be judged by its actions not by its words. The killing, as you said, Mr. Chairman, has continued unabated, and we urge our Arab partners to condemn the regime and assume a greater role in building international pressure, including at the United Nations.

Economically tough United States and European Union sanctions and financial mismanagement by the Syrian regime are changing the calculus of Syria's business elite. Oil revenue is now almost nonexistent. The regime's assets in the United States and European banks have been frozen. And Syria is cut off from most of the international financial system. As cash starts to dry up, the more Syrians see that the regime is not sustainable.

Complementing our international efforts, Ambassador Ford, as both of you mentioned, and his team are doing courageous work. And thank you to this committee for confirming him. He is currently in the United States on leave and we expect him to return to post soon.

Overall, we are following a deliberative course that takes into account Syria's unique circumstances. We do not want to see the situation descend into further violence. The best way forward is to continue support for the nonviolent opposition while working with international partners to further isolate, to further pressure the regime. This creates an environment in which the Syrians can take control of their own future.

You mentioned the Syrian National Council. We welcome the establishment of the Syrian National Council, a broad coalition of opposition groups from inside and outside Syria. When you consider the past 40 years Syrians have been prevented from engaging in any political activity, what the opposition has already achieved is truly remarkable. We, the United States, have not endorsed any particular opposition group. The Syrian people alone will decide who can legitimately represent them. The opposition must continue to expand and consolidate its base within Syria by convincing more Syrians of the legitimacy of its vision and its transition plan which demonstrates that there is a better alternative to Assad.

While we understand the Syrian people's need to protect themselves, violent resistance is counterproductive. It will play into the

regime's hands. It will divide the opposition. It will undermine international consensus. To create better protection for civilians in the near term, we are pressing for access to human rights monitors and journalists. We will relentlessly pursue our strategy of supporting the opposition and diplomatically and financially pressuring the regime until Assad is gone and until the Syrians are able to complete their democratic transition.

Assad may, through his brutality, be able to delay or impede this transition, but he cannot stop it.

We look forward to working with the Syrian people as they chart a new and democratic future.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Feltman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR JEFFREY D. FELTMAN

Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss our goals with regard to Syria and the strategy we are implementing to achieve them.

Much has changed both within Syria and in the international response to what is happening inside Syria since the unrest began 8 months ago. Protests that started in the provincial village of Dara'a have spread to every city and every major town in the country. The Syrian people have demonstrated an irrepressible hunger for a change in the way their country is governed. They are no longer willing to tolerate the blatant denial of their universal rights and trampling of their dignity. They are no longer willing to remain quiet about the rampant corruption, brutality, and ineptitude of the mafia-like Assad clique that has hijacked the Syrian state and transformed it into an instrument whose sole purpose is to retain power in the hands of a small group of self-interested elites.

The protestors in Syria have overcome the barrier of fear. They are out on the streets of cities and towns all over Syria every single day despite the relentless and indiscriminate violence that the regime has deployed against them. According to the estimates of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, over 3,500 Syrians have been killed since the protests began. Tens of thousands have been detained, and many of those have been tortured. In a report of her findings in August, the High Commissioner noted "a pattern of human rights violations that constitutes widespread or systemic attacks against the civilian population, which may amount to crimes against humanity." The violations included murder, forced disappearances, summary executions, torture, deprivation of liberty, and persecution. But the regime's overwhelming use of force has not been able to suppress the street protests. Peaceful street protestors have passed the point of no return. They will not stop until Bashar al-Assad and his clique are gone.

The Syrian army has been forced to occupy its own country. Even small towns are continuously occupied by tanks, armored personnel carriers, and battalions of foot soldiers along with plain-clothes intelligence personnel and regime-sponsored armed groups who do much of the dirty work. The pressure is starting to wear on the army. It is not just the fast, unsustainable tempo of operations and unending redeployments ordered to quell every manifestation of dissent—the soldiers of the Syrian Army are increasingly rejecting a mission that calls for them to kill and brutally repress their own countrymen, in some cases people from their own tribes and hometowns. Military defections, primarily by conscripts and junior officers, are on the rise, and the pressure on senior officers continues to mount.

The violence is still continuing. In its desperation, the regime is executing a deliberate and bloody strategy of channeling peaceful protest into armed insurrection. It is stoking the fears of Syria's minority communities with blatant propaganda about foreign conspiracies and domestic terrorism while cynically claiming that the regime is their only protection from sectarian violence. Make no mistake: the regime is driving the cycle of violence and sectarianism. The Syrian people are resisting it, but the regime is working diligently to fulfill its own prophecy of intercommunal violence.

Assad and his inner circle know they cannot contain or manage peaceful opposition, so they assault it with violence and with terror. They believe they can handle a violent resistance because violence is a medium they know well. Mass arrests, shabiha thuggery and outright regime violence have forced peaceful protestors to adapt their methods. They now arrange gatherings of smaller groups on short notice and disperse before security forces are able to respond. And as they are literally

beaten off the streets, protestors are learning new forms of peaceful resistance such as boycotts and strikes. Security forces have responded to civil disobedience such as last week's general strike in Dara'a with intimidation and vandalism.

While, for the most part, the opposition has thus far refused to be baited into responding with violence, armed resistance to the regime is on the rise, with some taking up arms in self-defense. This is not surprising given that they are faced with increasingly brutal repression and are still denied the political space to organize and make their voices heard peacefully. But it is potentially disastrous to their cause. Forcing the opposition to become violent is the deliberate strategy of the Assad government. The regime is confounded by protestors chanting "peaceful, peaceful" and shopkeepers who shutter their stores in solidarity with those killed and arrested, but it knows precisely how to handle armed insurrection: with brutal and overwhelming force. By working diligently to channel nonviolent opposition into a protoinsurgency, the regime seeks to discredit the opposition, scare minorities into submission, unite security forces against a common enemy, fragment international consensus and tear Syria apart along sectarian lines. This must be resisted.

On the economic front, the regime's financial situation is growing increasingly dire. Tough, targeted sanctions from the United States and the European Union have squeezed the regime's cash-flow. Oil revenue, which used to make up about a third of government revenue, is drying up. Europe used to buy more than 90 percent of Syria's crude. Today it buys none. As a result, the Syrian Government has had to dramatically cut oil production. All its storage tanks are filled to capacity. Despite months of desperate efforts to entice potential new buyers with offers of deep discounts, the regime has been unable to find alternative customers.

Meanwhile, we have required U.S. persons to block Syrian regime property and the EU has frozen assets of two Syrian banks for their role in facilitating the regime's access to the international financial system. Even non-U.S. and non-European companies that are not directly affected by our sanctions have come to the conclusion that it is not in their interest to do business with this regime. And it is not just the United States and EU that are tightening the financial noose around the regime. Canada and Japan have deployed sanctions of their own.

But more than sanctions, it is the financial ineptitude of the Syrian Government that is driving Syria's economy over a cliff. The Syrian economy was already in a precarious state before this crisis. The regime's mismanagement and attempts to buy its way back into political favor have vastly exacerbated the problem. This is why we have urged our Arab and European partners to increase their pressure on the regime now, before Bashar al-Assad precipitates a complete collapse of the Syrian economy.

Turning to the Syrian opposition, one of the more promising recent developments is the establishment of the Syrian National Council, a coalition including secularists, Christians, Islamists, Druze, Alawis, Kurds and other groups from both inside and outside Syria who have joined together to form a united front against the Assad regime. When you consider that for the past 40 years, the Syrian people have been prevented from engaging in any political activity or even political discussion, it is truly remarkable that in a matter of just a few months, the SNC has managed to bring together such a broad array of groups into a united coalition, despite the regime's relentless attempts to thwart their efforts. We have not endorsed any specific opposition group—only the Syrian people can decide who can legitimately represent them. But we take the advent of the SNC very seriously, and we support the broader opposition's efforts to focus on the critical task of expanding and consolidating its base of support within Syria by articulating a clear and common vision and developing a concrete and credible post-Assad transition plan.

There are still many Syrians who, while they are appalled by Bashar al-Assad, see his continued rule as preferable to alternatives they fear will be worse. It is up to the opposition to convince those Syrians that a credible alternative exists and that Assad's departure will not mean chaos, civil war, or a new form of tyranny, but rather a representative, pluralistic, secular and accountable government that will operate by rule of law, respond to the needs of its people, and uphold and protect the rights and interests of all Syrians, regardless of sect, ethnicity, gender or class. The United States understands Syrians will determine their own formula for government by the consent of the governed, but we will not support an outcome that replaces one form of tyranny or repression with another.

We continue to meet regularly with members of the opposition, including, but not exclusively, many SNC members, and we encourage other governments to do the same.

The positions of Syria's neighbors have changed dramatically since March. Whereas, the initial inclination of many leaders in the region was to support Assad as the "devil they knew" and putative guarantor of stability, nearly all of the regional lead-

ers with whom I engage now recognize that Assad and his regime are driving the instability. They recognize that Assad is part of the problem, not the solution and—some quietly, some not so quietly—admit to wanting him gone. They recognize that if Assad is allowed to continue, he will precipitate their worst nightmare: the collapse of the Syrian state with violence spilling over into the rest of the region. This crisis could easily spread beyond Syria’s borders; Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon already host thousands of refugees.

The Gulf Cooperation Council has described the Syrian regime as a killing machine. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said he believes the opposition will be successful in their “glorious” resistance to the ongoing government crackdown. During a September visit to Libya, he said, “Those who repress their own people in Syria will not survive. The time of autocracies is over. Totalitarian regimes are disappearing. The rule of the people is coming.”

The continuous coverage of the Assad regime’s brutality in the pan-Arab media has decimated Assad’s standing on the Arab street. A recent poll by the Arab American Institute suggests that Assad has become a pariah in the Arab world. The poll, conducted in early October surveyed over 4,000 Arabs in six countries. Just 3 years ago, a regionwide poll of the same six countries asked respondents to name a leader, not from their own country, that they most respected. Bashar al-Assad scored higher than any other Arab head of state. Today, however, the overwhelming majority of Arabs side with those Syrians demonstrating against the government (with support for them ranging from 83 percent in Morocco to 100 percent in Jordan). When asked whether Bashar al-Assad can continue to govern, the highest affirmative ratings he receives are a mere 15 percent in Morocco and 14 percent in Egypt, with the rest in low single digits.

The Arab League has repeatedly condemned the regime’s violence and called for a peaceful political solution while insisting that the Syrian regime meet a set of reasonable conditions before any negotiations begin. The League dispatched its Secretary General to Damascus on September 10 and a ministerial-level delegation on October 26. After strenuous efforts to wiggle out of or dilute the League’s conditions, on November 2, the Syrian Government accepted the terms of an Arab League plan that includes:

- A cessation of violence;
- The release of political prisoners;
- The withdrawal of security forces from populated areas;
- Free access for journalists and Arab League monitors; and
- An Arab League-hosted national dialogue between the Syrian Government and the opposition.

We welcome the efforts of the Arab League to stop the Assad regime’s assaults on the Syrian people, but success of the Arab League mission will depend not on what the regime says, but on what it does. The regime must comply with each of these obligations fully—not within weeks but within days. It must not be allowed to exploit this process to buy time through half measures, token gestures, and endless discussion of technicalities, while more Syrians are killed and imprisoned. We strongly support free and unfettered access to Arab League monitors throughout Syria, but they should be complemented by internationally recognized professional human rights monitors as well as journalists. Syria needs credible witnesses throughout the country that can document and deter the regime’s violent excesses.

As for dialogue, it is up to the opposition to decide whether or not it wishes to discuss with the regime the terms of Syria’s transition from dictatorship to democracy. Under no circumstances should a dialogue be a precondition for ending regime violence against Syrian citizens. Nor should the regime be able to dictate which oppositionists should take part in discussions or where those discussions should take place.

Since the Syrian regime “agreed” to the League’s conditions on November 2, scores of innocent Syrians have been killed. Security forces remain deployed in most cities and towns. Tanks and artillery continue to fire into residential areas in Homs. Thousands of peaceful protestors remain in detention. Arrests continued unabated. If the regime continues to spurn this most recent “last chance,” we hope that the Arab League will take additional, clear measures to express its condemnation of the Syrian regime and solidarity with the Syrian people while taking a leading role in building international pressure for a political transition in Syria, including at the United Nations.

The topic of Syria is consistently raised in diplomatic conversations with Arab leaders. And in those conversations, almost all the Arab leaders say the same thing: Assad’s rule is coming to an end. Change in Syria is now inevitable. It is only a question of how long Assad will fight to hold onto power and how many more inno-

cent Syrians have to die before his rule ends. Some Arab leaders already have begun to offer Assad safe-haven in an effort to encourage him to leave peaceably and quickly.

Iran continues to be complicit in the violence in Syria, providing material support to the regime's brutal campaign against the Syrian people. Cynically capitalizing on the Syrian Government's growing alienation from its Arab neighbors, Iran is seeking to increase its influence in Syria and help Assad remain in power as a vital conduit to Hezbollah in Lebanon. But public statements last month by President Ahmadinejad calling for Assad to stop the violence and enact reforms might indicate that even the Iranians doubt the sustainability of Assad's rule. Still, Iran has provided political, financial, and material assistance in support of the regime's brutal crackdown against the Syrian people.

We remain actively engaged in ratcheting up the pressure on Assad bilaterally and multilaterally. Following President Obama's statement on August 18, governments from every continent echoed the President's call for Assad to step aside. Since the beginning of the Syrian unrest, we have pursued targeted financial measures to increase pressure on the Syrian regime and its enablers. We have specifically targeted those responsible for human rights abuses, senior officials of the Syrian Government, and the regime's corrupt business cronies. The Executive order signed by the President in August blocks the property of the Syrian Government, bans U.S. persons from new investments in or exporting services to Syria, and bans U.S. imports of, and other transactions or dealings in, Syrian-origin petroleum or petroleum products. These measures represent some of the strongest sanctions the U.S. Government has imposed against any country in the world.

In addition, European sanctions banning the purchase of Syrian petroleum products—the regime's most important source of foreign exchange—and freezing the assets of select Syrian banks in Europe have had an arguably greater impact given the larger volume of Syrian trade with Europe. We are also working with our international partners, including our Arab allies, to block efforts by the Syrian regime to circumvent American and European sanctions. The United States and European Union will continue to deploy new sanctions against key regime figures, regime enablers (including the regime's corrupt businessmen cronies), and companies and organizations that support the regime. These sanctions include asset freezes and travel bans targeted to affect the regime while sparing the broader economy to the greatest extent possible.

We have led the effort to hold two special sessions of the U.N. Human Rights Council on the situation in Syria. At the second special session, we worked closely with many of Syria's Arab neighbors, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Jordan, to ensure unified regional condemnation of the Syrian regime and to establish a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the ongoing human rights violations. We expect the Commission of Inquiry to be permitted to carry out its mission without restrictions. We believe that the introduction of more witnesses will play a critical role in proving to the world what is really happening in Syria and mobilizing fence-sitting nations to join us in bringing greater pressure to bear on the regime.

Despite the October 4 veto of the EU-sponsored draft resolution on Syria, we remain committed to pursuing multilateral sanctions at the Security Council. But if Russia and China cynically continue to stand in the way of international efforts to end the violence in Syria, the United States and other allies of the Syrian people will consider other steps to ensure the Syrian people are protected. The U.N. is one important channel but not the only one. Nevertheless, we will continue our efforts to convince Russia, China, India, Brazil, and South Africa to change their positions regarding sanctions against Syria, and we will encourage our Arab allies and the Syrian opposition to aggressively engage with those countries as well.

In the meantime, we would suggest that these countries ask and answer some basic questions. Does the regime permit peaceful protest? Does it allow the peaceful opposition to organize, discuss, and deliberate without fear of assassination or arrest? Does the regime permit the U.N. Commission of Inquiry to enter Syria and do its internationally mandated work? Does it allow human rights monitors and journalists to witness the situation on the ground? Has the regime met any of its self-imposed deadlines for reform or for ending violence against civilians? The answer to all of these questions is obviously no.

Complementing our international efforts, Ambassador Ford has been doing exceptional work in providing Washington policymakers with a clear perspective of what is happening in Syria. Thank you for confirming him. He has boldly delivered strong messages to the Syrian regime and met repeatedly with opposition figures and civil society. His courageous efforts show our resolve to pressure the Syrian regime to end its senseless killing, demonstrate our solidarity with the Syrian people, and help to shine an international spotlight on the gross abuses of the Assad regime.

This administration's principled stand against Assad's brutality, and the Ambassador's own actions to show solidarity with the Syrian people, have led to attacks and intimidation by the regime against Embassy Damascus and Ambassador Ford himself. He is currently in the United States on leave, and we expect that he will return to his post before long. For as long as we are able, we will maintain an Embassy and an Ambassador in Damascus. Robert Ford will continue to interact with the Syrian people and the Syrian Government.

Overall, the administration is following a careful but deliberate and principled course. This is necessary given Syria's complex and unique circumstances. We do not seek further militarization of this conflict. Syria is not Libya. Nor, for that matter, is it Tunisia, Egypt, or Yemen. The way forward includes supporting the opposition while working with our international partners to further isolate and pressure the regime through diplomatic and financial means. We will work with the Syrian people and our international partners to do what we must to ensure that Assad and his regime are prevented from murdering Syrian citizens and tearing the Syrian state apart.

The Syrian people are entitled to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association, basic rights enshrined in the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which the Syrian republic is a signatory. The Syrian people are seeking a government that abides by these principles, and which governs only with the consent of its citizens. The emergence of such a government in Syria is in the interest of the Syrian people and in the interest of the United States.

We ideally seek a peaceful Syrian-led political transition that includes the end of Bashar al-Assad's rule and the replacement of the corrupt, incompetent, and violent regime he built and tolerated with one responsive to the needs of the Syrian people. One thing I have learned from the events of the Arab world in the past year is humility regarding my own ability to predict the outcomes or timelines of these convulsive and transformational processes. I cannot tell you exactly how long it will take to achieve this outcome in Syria. It has the potential to be a long, difficult process, but the sooner the better for Syria and the region.

While the United States sympathizes with Syrian military defectors and average citizens attempting to protect themselves, we urge them to think strategically about how best to accomplish their goals. We still believe that violent resistance is counterproductive. It will play into the regime's hands, divide the opposition, and undermine international consensus against the regime. We urge the opposition, and our regional allies, to continue to reject violence. To do otherwise would, frankly, make the regime's job of brutal repression easier. At the same time, all Syrians must know that they have the support of the international community.

How do we stop spiraling violence? As a means of creating greater protection for civilians, documenting human rights abuses, and ensuring that undecided governments have a clearer view of what is really happening inside Syria, we continue to press for immediate, unfettered, and sustained access for internationally recognized human rights monitors, the U.N. Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry, and independent journalists. If skeptics on the Security Council still believe Assad's propaganda about armed gangs, let them join the call for monitors and journalists who could prove it. The introduction of credible witnesses throughout Syria would both deter and ensure documentation of the regime's worst excesses. And it would diminish the temptation for protestors to put down their placards and pick up weapons. The Arab League has already insisted that Syria accept monitors as part of its plan to end the violence. The United States strongly supports European-led efforts to introduce a resolution in the U.N. General Assembly's Third Committee that would insist on the same.

Bashar al-Assad is desperate to convince himself and others that Syria is fine. In the relative calm of central Damascus, he may actually believe it. But when the money runs out, he and his inner circle will be forced to face the desperate reality of their situation and ideally will head for the exits voluntarily.

What we have to say to President Assad can be summed up very briefly: step aside and allow your people to begin the peaceful, orderly transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Bashar al-Assad has proven that he is incapable of reform. Our advice is to President Assad is that he leave now. He may want to study the recent examples of other Arab autocrats who have been confronted by populations that have overcome the barrier of fear to demand their universal rights. If Assad truly has Syria's interests at heart, he will leave now. We will relentlessly pursue our two-track strategy of supporting the opposition and diplomatically and financially strangling the regime until that outcome is achieved.

Senator CASEY. Thanks very much.  
Mr. Bronin.

**STATEMENT OF LUKE A. BRONIN, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR TERRORIST FINANCING AND FINANCIAL CRIMES, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. BRONIN. Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am pleased to join Assistant Secretary of State Feltman. We have a great partnership with the State Department and the State Department's Syria team.

In my testimony today, I would like to review the role of financial sanctions in our Syria strategy.

Since the Syrian uprising began in March 2011, President Obama has issued three new Executive orders. The first, signed in April, targets those responsible for human rights abuses in Syria. The second, signed in May, directly sanctions President Assad and senior members of his regime. And the third, signed in August, imposes a full government blocking program prohibiting all transactions with the Government of Syria, freezing regime assets, banning the export of services to and investment in Syria, and banning dealings in Syrian-origin petroleum.

Each Executive order delegates to Treasury the authority to designate additional individuals and entities, and we have made full use of that authority to target regime insiders and to deny the regime the resources it needs to sustain its continued repression.

Since the uprising began, we have designated more than three dozen individuals and entities. Our actions have targeted insiders and officials such as Assad advisor Buthaina Shaaban, Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem, and Mohammed Hamsho, a prominent businessman and front man for corrupt officials. We have imposed sanctions on Syriatel, the largest mobile phone operator in Syria owned by Assad crony Rami Makhluf. We have designated Hamsho International Group. We have designated Syrian military intelligence, the Syrian National Security Bureau, and Syrian Air Force intelligence, all deeply complicit in the brutal use of violence against peaceful protesters.

Demonstrating the full range of Syria's illicit conduct, we used preexisting authority to target the Commercial Bank of Syria for providing financial services to Syrian and North Korean entities that facilitate weapons of mass destruction proliferation.

And we have used our authorities to highlight the role of Iran, designating the head and deputy head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard's Qods Force and Iran's law enforcement forces for assisting the regime's brutality. Iran claims solidarity with the popular movement sweeping the Arab world today, but Iran's real policy is plain: to export to Syria the same repressive tactics employed by the Iranian Government against its own people.

As we have steadily increased the pressure on the Assad regime, we have done so in close coordination with our allies in Europe and around the world. Like the United States, the EU has designated numerous regime officials and insiders, prohibited new investment in the Syrian energy sector, frozen the assets of the Commercial Bank of Syria, and most significant, implemented a ban on the importation of Syrian oil and gas to Europe.

The impact of these coordinated, multilateral measures has been profound. Today, the Government of Syria finds it increasingly

difficult to access the international financial system. Its ability to conduct trade in dollars has been severely constrained, and it has been deprived of its most significant source of revenue.

The EU previously accounted for more than 90 percent of Syria's crude exports. As a result of the EU's ban, that market has effectively been eliminated, and despite Syria's aggressive efforts to find new markets, there appear at present to be few willing buyers. And while Iran may seek to provide financial assistance to Damascus, Iran itself is under pressure from wide-ranging international sanctions.

In short, working in concert with our allies, we have used our sanctions tools to send Assad and his regime this clear message: your reprehensible actions have consequences. Continued repression of popular dissent will only deepen your isolation.

As long as Assad maintains his illegitimate hold on power, we will continue to identify individuals and entities that are complicit in the Assad regime's abuses. We will expose, target, and disrupt the regime's sources of revenue and support, and we will continue to engage our partners around the world urging them to block Syria's access to alternative oil markets, asking governments and the private sector to join us in imposing aggressive and comprehensive measures against the Assad regime.

I look forward to continuing our work with this committee, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bronin follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY LUKE A. BRONIN

Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Risch, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to discussing the Department of the Treasury's role in supporting the Obama administration's efforts to end the Assad regime's violent repression of the Syrian people. I am pleased to join Assistant Secretary of State Jeffrey Feltman today. Treasury values greatly our very close, collaborative relationship with the State Department and the State Department's Syria team.

In my testimony today, I would like to review the role of financial sanctions in our Syria strategy; to assess, as far as possible, the current impact of multilateral sanctions; and to outline briefly our continuing priorities and next steps.

SYRIA SANCTIONS REGIME

Since the Syrian uprising began in March 2011, President Obama has issued three Executive orders, each imposing new sanctions in response to the violence in Syria.

On April 29, President Obama signed E.O. 13572, imposing sanctions on certain persons and providing for the imposition of sanctions on persons determined to be responsible for human rights abuses in Syria, including those related to repression. On May 18, in response to the continued escalation of violence against the Syrian people, the President signed E.O. 13573, sanctioning Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and senior officials of Assad's government. Most recently, on August 17, the President issued E.O. 13582, which imposed a full blocking program on the Government of Syria, and followed with a call on Assad to step aside. E.O. 13582 prohibits all transactions between U.S. persons and the Government of Syria, bans the export of U.S. services to and new investment in Syria, and takes aim at a crucial revenue stream for the Syrian Government by banning the importation into the United States of, and transactions or dealings by U.S. persons in, Syrian-origin petroleum and petroleum products.

These three new Executive orders rapidly and significantly expanded the tools we have available for responding to the crisis in Syria. Each Executive order delegates to Treasury the authority to designate additional individuals or entities. Working closely with our colleagues at the State Department, in the intelligence community, and throughout the U.S. Government, as well as with our counterparts in Europe,

Canada, and elsewhere, we have made full use of our authorities to isolate the Assad regime and key regime supporters. To the fullest extent possible, we have worked to deny the regime the resources it needs to fund its continued repression of the Syrian people.

Since the uprising began, we have designated more than three dozen individuals and entities pursuant to these new Executive orders. Treasury actions have targeted, among others, regime insiders and officials such as Buthaina Shaaban, Presidential and Media Advisor to President Assad; Walid al-Moallem, the Foreign Minister; the President's brother, Maher al-Assad; and Mohammed Hamsho, a prominent businessman and member of the Syrian Parliament who serves as a front man for many of the corrupt and illicit dealings of Syrian officials.

In addition to the individuals targeted by our sanctions, we have also targeted key Syrian entities under these new Executive orders. To date, we have imposed sanctions on Syriatel, the largest mobile phone operator in Syria, which was designated for being controlled by Rami Makhluf, a powerful Syrian businessman and regime insider designated under E.O. 13460 in February 2008 for improperly benefiting from and aiding the public corruption of Syrian regime officials; Hamsho International Group, for being controlled by Muhammed Hamsho; Syrian Military Intelligence, which has used force against and arrested demonstrators participating in the unrest; Syrian National Security Bureau, which directed Syrian security forces to use extreme force against demonstrators; and Syrian Air Force Intelligence, which in late April 2011 fired tear gas and live ammunition to disperse crowds of demonstrators who took to the streets in Damascus and other cities, killing at least 43 people in 1 day.

We have also used our authorities to highlight Iranian support for the Syrian regime, designating the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps-Qods Force and Iran's Law Enforcement Forces for providing material support to the Syrian regime's violent response to peaceful protests. We also targeted Ismail Ahmadi Moghadam and Ahmad-Reza Radan, the top two officials of Iran's Law Enforcement Forces, and Qasem Soleimani, the head of the IRGC-Qods Force, under E.O. 13572. These actions demonstrate that, despite the Iranian Government's public rhetoric claiming solidarity with the popular movements sweeping the Arab world today, Iran's official policy is in fact to export the same brutal and repressive tactics employed by the Iranian Government in Tehran in 2009.

In addition to the actions taken under the three most recent Syria Executive orders, Treasury has used preexisting authorities to target the full spectrum of the Assad regime's illicit activities, including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. On August 10, we designated the Commercial Bank of Syria, a Syrian state-owned financial institution based in Damascus, for its provision of financial services to Syrian and North Korean entities previously sanctioned by the United States for facilitating WMD proliferation.

#### *Coordination with allies*

As outlined thus far, we have been aggressive in the application of both targeted and broad-based measures against the Assad regime. Our actions have had an impact. The government blocking program, imposed under E.O. 13582, complicates Syrian oil sales globally by prohibiting dollar clearing for the Syrian Central Bank. The designation of the Commercial Bank of Syria has helped constrain the regime's primary facilitator of foreign transactions. Our targeted designations of regime insiders have boosted the morale of those courageously protesting against the regime.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that, had we been acting alone, our actions would likely have had only a modest impact on the Syrian regime's ability to finance its campaign of violence. Economic relationships between the United States and Syria were limited even before the current crisis. The most significant aspect of our efforts to isolate the Assad regime is that we have not acted alone. We have pursued our strategy in the context of especially close coordination with international counterparts. Our steady escalation of pressure against the Assad regime and its supporters has been conceived of and implemented in concert with our allies.

Like the United States, the EU has designated numerous regime officials and insiders, making it clear to both Syrian Government officials and the Syrian business community alike that association with Assad's regime carries a personal cost. On August 18, when President Obama called for Assad to step down, his call was echoed by our British, French, and German counterparts. The EU prohibited new investment in the Syrian energy sector and issued a ban on the export of Syrian bank notes and coins produced in the EU. Following the U.S. designation of the Commercial Bank of Syria for proliferation activity, the EU last month froze all Commercial Bank of Syria assets in Europe, citing the bank's critical role in facili-

tating financial transactions on behalf of the Syrian regime. Most significantly, the EU implemented a ban on the importation of Syrian oil and gas, depriving the Syrian Government of its largest and most important energy export market.

Canada, too, has moved arm in arm with the United States and Europe. Japan, Switzerland, and Australia have also taken a stand with the international community. Japan announced an asset freeze for Bashar al-Assad and 20 connected individuals and entities, Switzerland has imposed measures similar to those of the EU, while Australia has implemented an arms embargo, a travel ban, and targeted financial measures against the Bashar al-Assad and regime insiders, as well as an arms embargo against Syria. We are engaging additional countries in Europe and Asia, urging them to deny Syria alternative markets for its crude oil exports or alternative ways to access the international financial system. We have and will continue to consult closely with our counterparts in Turkey, where the Turkish Government has made strong statements condemning the Syrian regime.

#### THE IMPACT OF SANCTIONS ON SYRIA

As a result of this robust multilateral effort, the impact on the Assad regime has been profound. Since the implementation of U.S. and EU sanctions on the Syrian petroleum industry, the regime has struggled to find alternative markets for selling its heavy crude. Since the EU previously accounted for more than 90 percent of Syria's crude exports, the EU actions blocking the purchase of Syria-origin petroleum products and banning new investment in the Syrian petroleum industry have had a massive impact. Prior to the imposition of sanctions, the Assad regime generated one-third of its revenue from the oil sector. That source of revenue has been effectively been eliminated.

Though Syrian officials initially indicated their belief that finding alternative markets for Syrian oil would be easy, recent statements from high-ranking government officials paint a different picture. The Syrian Oil Minister, speaking on state-owned television late last month, noted that the government had initially believed that they would be able to shift their crude oil exports to markets in the East immediately, but that that assumption had been wrong. There appear to be few buyers willing to import Syrian crude oil in the short term. In late September, the Syrian Government was forced to cut domestic oil production because it was unable to find buyers for its oil and lacked domestic storage for the newly extracted crude.

In late September, in an apparent effort to preserve foreign currency reserves, the Syrian Government imposed a ban on the importation of a broad range of products, including household appliances and food items. The policy quickly backfired, as inflation spiked and the business elite of the country expressed their anger at the regime. Assad was forced to roll back the ban to maintain support from businessmen, an influential domestic constituency. The episode demonstrated the regime's increasing financial vulnerability and, importantly, focused popular anger on the regime.

We have seen indications that Iran, one of Syria's last remaining supporters, appears to be taking steps to provide financial assistance to Damascus. However, given the pressure that Iran is under from wide-ranging international sanctions, it is unlikely that Iran will be successful in helping mitigate the impact of financial sanctions on the Syrian regime.

The U.S. and EU programs are only a few months old. We have yet to see the full impact of sanctions. However, we have sent to the Syrian Government, and to the Syrian businessmen who have chosen to ally themselves with the regime, this clear message: your reprehensible actions have consequences. Continued repression of popular dissent will only deepen your isolation.

#### THE CONTINUING CHALLENGE AND WAY FORWARD

As long as Assad maintains his illegitimate hold on power, Treasury will continue to work with our colleagues across the administration, including our Embassy in Damascus and our colleagues at the State Department, to identify individuals and entities that are complicit in the Assad regime's repression and deny them access to the United States and international financial systems through targeted sanctions. We will expose the sources of regime support. We will encourage our partners in the international community and private commercial institutions to take parallel actions.

As financial pressure on the Assad regime increases, we know that Syria will look for ways to circumvent sanctions. We are cognizant of this reality and we are closely monitoring the situation to close down any such activity. We will continue to engage foreign governments and appropriate private sector counterparts to block Syrian Government efforts to develop workarounds. As part of our efforts, the Financial

Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) has already issued two advisories to U.S. financial institutions highlighting the risk of flight of proceeds of public corruption and regime assets, and possible attempts by the Commercial Bank of Syria to use nested accounts to maintain access to U.S. dollars. We are urging other financial sector regulators to issue similar guidance to their financial institutions.

Most important, we will continue to engage our foreign partners, working closely with the State Department, in an effort to broaden and deepen the coalition taking action against Syria. Treasury officials engage regularly in jurisdictions that might serve as possible outlets for Syrian financial activity. We will caution our partners to remain vigilant, ask governments and regulators to issue appropriate guidance to their financial sectors, and encourage them to join us in our aggressive and comprehensive application of measures to increase the pressure on the Assad regime.

As we continue to engage internationally, Treasury will also continue to pursue new and innovative ways to use our financial tools to advance U.S. national security objectives.

I look forward to continuing our work with this subcommittee, and I look forward to your questions.

Senator CASEY. Thank you very much.

We will start with one round of questioning.

Mr. Feltman, I wanted to ask you, first of all, about the region and, in particular, maybe we can review a couple of countries in the region that can and will and should play a role in this. But let me start with Turkey.

In your full statement, you mentioned some of the parts of the statements that Prime Minister Erdogan has made. You said in your statement that he has said he believes the opposition will be successful in “their glorious” resistance to the ongoing government crackdown. Certainly that is helpful when you have a neighbor saying that. And then what he has said in September in a visit to Libya, those who repress their own people in Syria will not survive, and he goes on from there.

I guess I would ask you maybe a broad question and then more specifically. No. 1, on this idea of a contact group, how do you assess that and is there any effort to be undertaken by the State Department or the administration to move that forward—a contact group. That is the broad question.

The second, more specific question is what about the role that Turkey has played and can play. What can we do to move them from being somewhat constructive so far to being even more helpful to put pressure on the regime and to help in the region? Does that make sense? I know that second question is not as specific as you may want it.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Chairman, thanks. We welcome your proposal for a contact group for friends of the Syrian people. In fact, we are running with this idea. We are talking with others about it. I have a very senior colleague who is working on coordination with our European allies pretty much full-time, Fred Hoff. I am in touch with the Arabs.

What we would like to do is to try to get the Arabs themselves to play a leadership role in this. One of Assad’s propaganda tools is, oh, this is just an outside plot, and he needs to see that his brother Arabs are also participating in such a contact group. So we are exploring, we are pushing. We take the idea as a very positive one.

Senator CASEY. Let me just interject there. I think the fact that the Arab League has now made an attempt that he seems to be kind of thumbing his nose at—for lack of a better description—

I realize that a couple weeks ago or months ago there might have been a sequencing problem, but I think now that the Arab League has taken some action, I would hope that that would set the table for what could be a broader effort. But that is just an opinion I am interjecting.

Ambassador FELTMAN. We agree with you, Senator Casey. The Arab League's committee that is dealing with the Syria issue headed by the Qatari Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassin includes several Arab States. They are meeting on Friday, a day before the Arab League is meeting on Saturday, to discuss Syria. So the committee on Friday will be discussing a number of options to present to the Ministers on Saturday, and we hope that—I mean, we are encouraging them to look at issues such as the Friends of Libya contact group. We would very much hope that given Assad's clear rejection of their proposal, that they will help us with the Security Council, things like that. So we agree with you that the Arab League is playing an important role and now is the time for the Arab League to actually take some action.

On Turkey, you raise a really important issue. And it is worth remembering that one of, I think, the Assad family's foreign policy successes probably, from their own view, would be the rapprochement that first the father, then the son, were able to have with Turkey from 1998 moving forward. You know, if you looked at the Turkish-Syrian relationship a year ago, they were close friends. They had developed economic ties, political ties, diplomatic ties. It was a very positive relationship, I think, from the Syrian perspective. That is in tatters at this point. When you have statements from the Prime Minister of Turkey such as the ones that I quoted and you described, you can see what has happened.

And Turkey has played an important role in a couple of areas. First, they have provided, basically, safe haven on Turkish soil for Syrian refugees. Turkey is hosting somewhere between 7,500 and 8,000 refugees, roughly, on Turkish soil now, protecting them from the brutality of the Assad regime that they fled.

Second, Turkey is providing facilitation space for opposition to organize, for the opposition to talk to themselves. There is very little ability for these courageous activists inside Syria to get together because they clearly have no rights for peaceful protest. Their rights for speech, freedom of expression are not being at all respected. And so Turkey is providing some space for the opposition forces to meet to discuss, to try to lay out a vision. So it is an extremely important role that Turkey is playing.

And Turkey has, in essence, put on a de facto arms embargo to make sure that arms are not flowing through Turkey back to the clique around Bashar al-Assad to use against his own people.

So we think Turkey is playing an extremely positive, important role here.

In the past, there was a lot of trade between the two countries, a lot of Turkish merchants going across the border to buy things in Syria to trade. That has all dried up just because of the instability in Syria, but we are in close contact with Turkey on all these issues.

Senator CASEY. I guess I would ask you as a followup to that question on Turkey, what would you hope that they could do in the next couple of weeks to be constructive.

Ambassador FELTMAN. First of all, continue what they are doing because it is having a real impact. The opposition's ability to come together, because of the Turkish facilitation, is a tremendous accomplishment.

Also, given the fact that the economic trade between the two countries is dropping, we would like to encourage them to join the European Union, to join Japan, to join Canada, to join us in formalizing some economic sanctions between Turkey and Syria.

Senator CASEY. That is very helpful.

Senator Risch.

Senator RISCH. Thank you.

Mr. Feltman, in your comments, I guess at least the hint was that we need to all buckle up and get ready for the long haul here. Is that a result of the assessment that the people are going to have a difficult time inasmuch as they are essentially unarmed in their attempt to overthrow the government?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Well, part of it, Senator, is just my own humility. I have been NEA Assistant Secretary during this year, and I have learned not to predict things based on what has happened in the Arab world this year. So part of it is just based on my own awareness that predictions about what is going to happen in the Arab world do not always pan out.

But part of it is this question of the unarmed protests that you mentioned. It is incredibly courageous what these Syrian opposition figures—the protesters—are doing every day. They are facing incredible brutality from a government that is basically a family-led mafia that has hijacked the state, and yet they come out every day, day in and day out. There are more demonstrations now than there were at the beginning of this. They are in every town, every city across Syria.

But what Bashar al-Assad is trying to do is to turn this peaceful protest movement into an insurgency. He knows how to deal with violence. He just uses violence against violence. What confounds him is this phenomenon of protesters yelling “peaceful, peaceful,” of shopkeepers closing their shops in solidarity with the protesters. That is what really puts Bashar al-Assad in a bind. And that is why we have been encouraging the opposition, despite the tremendous brutality they are facing, to keep to the peaceful principles to which they have subscribed.

Right now, if the opposition were to turn into a largely armed movement, we think it would, first of all, frighten the minorities. It would frighten the minorities in Syria to believe that Bashar al-Assad's propaganda about chaos after him would come true. It would probably divide the international community.

There is no consensus even among the opposition themselves on the question of arms. None of us question the desire by the Syrians to exercise in self-defense against the kind of brutality that they are facing, but we believe that right now their strength is in this peaceful protest, that they deny Bashar the ability to claim that he is really facing an armed insurrection because he is not. He is

facing people who are demanding their legitimate rights through great courage.

Senator RISCH. How long can they hold on?

Ambassador FELTMAN. I do not know. It goes back to my crystal ball thing. I do not know.

But it is one of the reasons why I think that the Arab leaders have started taking such an active role because they do not want to see him destroy Syria. He is not going to remain. He cannot last. He cannot survive when you have the sort of isolation that Luke described, when you see the pariah he has become. But he can certainly cause a lot more deaths. He can certainly do a lot more damage before he has finally exited from the scene. The best thing for him to do right now would be to exit the scene, and that is what we are trying to find the way to do.

Senator RISCH. Thank you.

Mr. BRONIN, how would you compare the sanctions we have in place on Syria to the sanctions we have in place on Iran on a scale of 1 to 10? Compare the two so we can get a feel as to how those two match each other.

Mr. BRONIN. Senator, I think in both cases we have imposed comprehensive, broad measures to isolate the regimes.

Senator RISCH. Would you say they are comparable?

Mr. BRONIN. They are. I would say they are comparable.

Senator RISCH. And how about comparing those then to what we did in Libya when the chaos started there? Is it comparable to what we did there?

Mr. BRONIN. Also comparable. I would note that in Libya an important distinction is that the action we took followed action in the U.N. Security Council which meant that the action we took in Libya was accompanied by action globally, which amplified the impact in Libya dramatically, and obviously in both the cases of Syria and Iran, we are seeking to develop as broad a multilateral coalition to increase that pressure as we can.

Senator RISCH. What can you tell us about—and I am not asking for anything classified, obviously, but what can you tell us about your expectations? You know, we have all seen year-after-year sanctions, for instance, on Iran, and you know, a regime seems to be able to withstand a whole lot of pain in order to hang onto power. How do you assess where we are headed in Syria as far as the regime's ability to survive just as Iran is?

Mr. BRONIN. Like Assistant Secretary Feltman, I would hesitate to speculate on a specific timeline, but I would say that there are very clear indications that their financial resources are strained. I mean, they are in financial dire straights. Their revenues have been dramatically cut not only as a result of the action against their energy sector, but also the impact of the tourism industry in Syria as a result of the violence. They have seen a dramatic drop in revenue, and I think it is clear that they are having to draw down their foreign exchange reserves much more rapidly than they would like.

Senator RISCH. Thank you.

Thank you, Senator Casey.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, Senator Risch.

Senator Boxer.

Senator BOXER. Thank you, Senator Casey. Senator Risch, thank you both for holding this important hearing. It really is a moment in time that we need to be heard, and I hope that some of our voices will be heard by the people of Syria who, as Senator Shaheen just mentioned to me, are risking their lives every single day to just keeping on this battle that they are in.

In a show of his true colors, President Assad has responded, as you have said, with vicious force instead of respecting the voices of the Syrian people. The U.N. estimates that more than 3,500 people have already lost their lives and thousands more injured, imprisoned, forced to flee. The Syrian Government has ordered Syrian troops to fire on their own communities, orchestrated the torture of prisoners, some only children.

And in August, President Obama rightfully said for the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside. That was an extraordinarily clear message from our President.

The Obama administration has also moved to implement a range of tough sanctions that we just discussed a moment ago. I had teamed up with Senator DeMint to call for these sanctions, prohibiting all transactions between Americans and the Government of Syria, banning United States services to, and new investments in, Syria, and banning the importation of Syrian petroleum. And after our move, the EU moved to ban import of petroleum, and since they purchase 90 percent of all Syrian oil, that is a big deal.

Unfortunately, other members of the international community have utterly failed to stand up against President Assad's abuses. And I wanted to talk to you about one of those countries, Russia. It is my understanding that despite vigorous efforts, the U.S. Ambassador Rice was unable to secure a United Nations Security Council resolution condemning the Syrian Government's crackdown because of a Russian and a Chinese veto. And according to the news reports, Russia led the opposition, and our Susan Rice said that the United States was "outraged" and she called the vote "a cheap rouse by those who would rather sell arms to the Syrian Government than stand with the Syrian people."

So I guess my question is, Would you speak, Mr. Feltman, Secretary Feltman, to Russia's opposition to any condemnation of the Assad regime. Is it that they want to sell weapons? Is it something more than that? Is there something more we can do? What is your take on it?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Senator Boxer, thanks for the question. I am going to have to defer to the Bureau of European Affairs, Assistant Secretary Phil Gordon, for better insights into Russia's motivations because it is out of my area.

But what I can say is talking about Syria, what the Russians say is, first, that they want a peaceful solution. Fine. We want a peaceful solution. The Russians say we want the violence to stop. Fine. We want the violence to stop. The Syrian people want the violence to stop. So I would say, for the purpose of this argument, let us try to take the Russians at their word, that they are sincere for the purpose of this argument. Therefore, they should join us in allowing monitors, allowing media into the country because if they still pretend to believe Bashar al-Assad's lies that what he is doing is

fighting bandits and terrorists, let the monitors in. The monitors can report that. The monitors can tell the world what is actually happening. The international media can say that. If there are bandits and terrorists, the monitors and media will show that.

I do not believe that the Russians will be able to sustain their opposition to the Syrian people indefinitely.

Senator BOXER. I hear you. And let me just say I think this is key. And, Mr. Chairman, I would hope that we could all work together to craft some kind of a message to the Russians because this is critical. They are taking the lead on blocking any type of resolution.

Now, I have a second point I want to make here. According to an Amnesty International Report, the Syrian authorities—I am reading this from the report. “The Syrian authorities have turned hospitals and medical staff into instruments of repression in the course of their efforts to crush the unprecedented mass protests and demonstrations. People wounded in protests or other incidents related to the uprising have been verbally abused and physically assaulted in state-run hospitals, including by medical staff, and in some cases denied medical care.”

The report cites experiences from a number of wounded protesters, including one shooting victim who said that a doctor at a state-run hospital told him—this is a doctor—“I am not going to clean your wound.” This is really hard to say. “I am waiting for your foot to rot so that we can cut it off.” That is supposedly a quote from a doctor.

It also cites a doctor who was forced to flee Syria after he reported a nurse was torturing a young protester. This is what the doctor said. “I remember hearing shrieks of pain,” said the doctor, “so I walked toward the voice and I saw a male nurse hitting the boy hard on his injury and swearing at him as he poured antiseptic on the injured foot in an act that clearly intended to cause the boy additional pain.”

So I have three quick questions I think you can answer.

How much information are we receiving about the abuse and denial of care to injured protesters, including by medical staff?

Second, are the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent currently able to provide care to the wounded?

And then last, in light of this, why have we not been able to use this to turn around the policies of Russia and China?

Ambassador FELTMAN. The information we get, Senator, is mixed. Because the media is not allowed, because there are restrictions put on our diplomats, we get a lot of information, but it could be very detailed in one area and very sketchy in other details. So it is a very mixed picture, but it does provide enough of a vision of what is happening in Syria to confirm some of these horrific stories that you are describing. I do not know the specific examples, but I am sure that Amnesty was able to get eyewitness reports because information is getting out despite the Syrian Government’s best efforts to operate in darkness, to operate in the shadows.

ICRC has had access in Syria. How effective they are able to be inside medical facilities I do not know because ICRC works very quietly. That is one of their goals.

But I think that the stories that you are describing explain how it is that the Syrians can be so courageous that day after day they are going out and protesting because they know of family, of friends, of neighbors who have faced this kind of brutality, and they simply do not want to face it anymore. They are facing a regime that has hijacked the country with the sole purpose of just protecting the elite of that regime.

Senator BOXER. Thank you very much. Again, I will not ask you to answer the last point, but I would hope we would take this information to the Russians and the Chinese. Thank you.

Senator CASEY. Thanks, Senator Boxer.

Senator Lugar.

Senator LUGAR. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to focus on some of the comments you have made on the international aspects of this as they pertain to Syria's neighbors. You pointed out that Turkey has changed its position and now harbors a segment of the Syrian opposition within its borders. But the Lebanese essentially would still appear to be very worried about the unrest spilling across the Syrian border and upsetting their own domestic situation. This is particularly true with regard to the Christians in Lebanon and others fearing the coming of a Sunni regime if the Alawites in Syria are not able to hang on.

In addition to that, there is the problem that is faced by Israel, or at least as Israelis have themselves expressed, that Syria was never a friend, but it was a so-called stable antagonist that was not bound to attack Israel. However, some in Israel now worry that under pressure Assad or others might decide to attack in the hope of gaining some adherence from other anti-Israeli elements in the Middle East, thus creating an unstable situation on yet another front for Israel given the Arab Spring difficulties with Egypt and with others.

Now, in the midst of all of this, the United States understandably is concentrating upon the human rights dilemmas of individuals who want their rights in the country. It has been noted, at least by some of our staff members, in the largest cities there have been very few demonstrations, but out in the hustings, there have been many more. And this leads once again to feelings about sectarian violence, particularly between the Alawites and the Sunnis.

As you try to formulate policy, surely all of these things are on your mind and the Secretary's. On the one hand, you have each of us wanting you to do something to save people who are in the streets indicating they would like to have better civil rights, and we sympathize with that. On the other hand, it could very well be that as we demand the departure of Assad or the departure of Assad plus the people he is with, we tip the scales in this Alawite/Sunni business, and this leads to unintended consequences. After all, this was a Syrian problem. But given the Arab Spring and the current volatile situation in the Middle East, it has all sorts of other international implications.

Now, under those circumstances, what is a policy that we should adopt that tries to bring a degree of stability to the situation even as we promote human rights and continue to espouse those things that we believe are most important? Or are we going to be a tipping force demanding action by the U.N. or demanding action

through sanctions of various sorts? Although the economy of Syria appears to not be drying up, it has been deprived of much of its oil revenue. So we have already had an effect. How much of an effect do we want to have? And if we were successful and Assad left, what would we be left with at that point? What happens to all of the surrounding territories?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Extremely important points, and you are right, that these play into all of our thinking on Syria policy all the time.

I guess there are a couple of basic assumptions we have. What worries the Lebanese is instability next door and how that might spill over. What worries the Iraqis is the same thing. What worries the Israelis is another variation of the same thing. But what is causing the instability right now that they fear is what Bashar al-Assad is doing to his own people.

And the President has been clear, as the chairman was earlier as well, that it is time for Bashar to step aside. Bashar is causing the instability that worries the neighbors. Bashar has gone past the tipping point. He is past the point of no return. The neighbors no longer look at him as the devil you know and so will accept him. They are recognizing with increasing vehemence that he is the cause of the instability that most worries them.

Senator LUGAR. Hypothetically let us say he does go tomorrow. Who steps in and then what do they do?

Ambassador FELTMAN. That is one of the real challenges because the opposition in Syria is still divided. We think that more unites them than divides them because they are talking about the need for Assad to go, the need for a more democratic, secular future. Syrians have equal rights under the law, but there still are big organizational divisions between the opposition people. We cannot pick out which opposition people are the right ones to lead the country.

So one of the things that we are, in our discussions when we meet with opposition figures, be they within the Syrian National Council or outside the Syrian National Council, be they inside Syria or outside Syria, are talking to them about you have to be able to articulate a credible plan, a credible vision that is practical, that shows people who maybe do not like Assad, but are worried about what happens afterward that you have a plan, that it is practical, that it is implementable, that is positive, that is based on rule of law where the government governs with the consent of those governed.

And I think they are starting to do this. There have been some vision papers put out, certain speeches given, but they still have a long way to go, to be frank, on this.

Senator LUGAR. Thank you. As this continues to play out, I am hopeful that we are taking into account the potential for chaos and the lack of people who have formulated what the new plans are or come together at this point.

Ambassador FELTMAN. You are right to be concerned, Senator. But right now, the impending chaos is happening because of what Bashar is doing to his own people. So there needs to be an end to the violence and an opposition that is inclusive, that is able to articulate a practical, positive plan going forward.

Senator LUGAR. Thank you.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, Senator Lugar.  
Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to you and Senator Risch for holding the hearing.

Mr. Feltman, I wanted to begin by commenting on your points about Ambassador Ford and the great work that he has done in Syria and commend him for that. I know all of us very much appreciate his courage and his working with the opposition figures and certainly hope he will be back there very soon.

Can you talk about the current relationship between Iran and Syria and how Iran is playing into what is going on there right now? Are they supporting Assad and to what extent? And how does the violence in Syria affect their view of what is going on?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Senator, it is a very interesting topic because the short answer is yes. Iran is definitely helping Bashar, giving him the tools by which he represses his own people, cracks down on them, et cetera. They are providing expertise, advice, what we would call technical assistance to do bad things. They are providing equipment by which he can monitor opposition activities on the Internet, all that sort of stuff. And it is one of the reasons why, as my colleague mentioned, the IRGC was sanctioned in one of the three Executive orders that the President has announced this year.

At the same time, Iran is embarrassed. You start to see Iranian leaders, even people like Ahmadinejad, who talk about the need to end violence in Syria. They talk about the need for reform. Now, it is completely cynical on their part because they do just as bad of things to their own people, but it suggests to us that the Iranian leadership recognizes, A, that they have lost credibility across the Arab world because of their support of this brutal dictator and that, B, he might not survive. And they have got to start positioning themselves for the day after Bashar. So I think Iran is actually in a very interesting bind right now. They are trying to save him without losing what shreds of credibility they may still have in the Arab world while also trying to signal to the Syrian people that we know that he might not survive and we know that he should not bring those bad things to you.

Senator SHAHEEN. And do we have any information about—is there any information about how the Iranian people feel about their government's support for Assad and what is happening there?

Ambassador FELTMAN. I will have to plead ignorance, Senator. I am not really sure. I have not seen polling on that.

But if I could use your question to pull up something else that is interesting, which is Arab polling. There has been enough Arab polling over the years to see a remarkable shift. A year or so ago, there was a big poll done, thousands of people, six different Arab countries, in which they were asked who is the Arab leader, not from your own country, outside your own country, who you most admire. Bashar al-Assad overwhelmingly came out on top. Now the same countries were polled, the same sort of data, and his numbers, shall we say, are rock bottom. The highest is something like in Morocco like 15 percent think he might survive. In Egypt, it is 14 percent. Everywhere else it is single digits. So his own credibility in the Arab world has suffered tremendously.

And this has, of course, influenced the Arab leadership because Arab leaders have woken up that they need to be a little attentive to their popular opinion this year. And I think it helps explain why the Arab leaders are playing a much stronger role in Syria than they would have a year ago.

Senator SHAHEEN. That does make sense. And given the Arab League's effort to try and reduce the violence in Syria, is there any belief that if the violence continues that the Arab League will actually take any direct action? Will they sanction Assad and the regime? Is there any further effort that we think they might undertake?

Ambassador FELTMAN. I mentioned this a bit in my opening statement. Syria is considered to be a very important part of the Arab world for historic reasons, political reasons. I mean, we do not always like what Syria has done, but Syria is a heavyweight, shall we say, in the Arab world. And so I think the Arab leaders are trying to show that they can deal with a problem in their own backyard, that they can deal with this rather than have to turn to the outside world to solve everything. It would be an embarrassment for them if they are unable to do something to protect the Syrian people at this point.

So when I am talking to the Arab Foreign Ministers—and the Secretary and the White House are engaged with the Arabs—there are a lot of ideas that the Arabs are saying, like we are talking about perhaps suspending their membership. Perhaps we, as the Arab League could, ask the United Nations Security Council for action. So there is recognition that Bashar has basically lied to them. That is positive. There is recognition quietly, not publicly, that his days are numbered.

I look at the contrast between, again, a year ago where Qatar used to lend him a plane to fly around the world on state visits because we had sanctioned the spare parts—he could not have his own plane, and now Qatar is heading up the committee that is trying to find ways to take action in light of Bashar al-Assad's refusal to comply with their Arab League initiative.

Now, I do not want to be naive here. The Arab League traditionally has lots of divisions inside it. So I do not know what they can actually produce, but they do recognize that in a very important way their own credibility with their own population is now on the line.

Senator SHAHEEN. And to follow along with respect to Turkey—Mr. Bronin, in about 40 seconds that I have left—Turkey obviously has made some strong statements condemning Assad and the violence in Syria. Are they prepared to undertake any sanctions against Assad, economic sanctions or others?

Mr. BRONIN. Well, Senator, as Secretary Feltman said, I think it is hard to overstate the significance of Turkey's break with Syria. They have, also as Secretary Feltman mentioned, already imposed what is, in essence, an arms embargo. We have seen remarks from Erdogan suggesting that they are considering additional measures possibly including financial sanctions. We would certainly welcome any such measures and also will engage with them to encourage them to do so.

Senator SHAHEEN. Are we already engaging with Turkey to encourage them?

Mr. BRONIN. Yes.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

Senator Rubio.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

Secretary Feltman, I want to continue to explore the Iran aspect of it. Clearly their ambitions in the region are known and they are counter to not only our national interests, but quite the safety of the world. And I do not think that argument needs to be made any further.

If you could elaborate a little bit more as to how important Syria is to Iran, how strategically important it is to their economy, to their military aspirations, the land bridge that it serves to the rest of the region, and how devastating it would be to them if, indeed, Syria were outside their sphere.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Senator, thanks for the question.

Syria is, I would say, essential to the extremely negative role that Iran has been able to play in the region. Take Hezbollah. The transit routes for the arms to Hezbollah are via Syria. The facilitation that Iran gives to Hezbollah to undermine the state of Lebanon, to put Israel at risk, to basically destabilize the region comes via Syria.

Syria is basically Iran's only friend. Iran is Syria's best friend. In fact, it is one of Syria's few remaining friends. While we have talked earlier about how Russia and China vetoed the Security Council resolution, the Russians and Chinese do care about Arab attitudes. As I said earlier, I do not think that we have seen the end of the story on Russia and China. But if you look at Iran's friends or Syria's friends, they tend to be each other and then a few misguided or purchased Lebanese politicians.

What is happening on the ground in Syria is quite interesting because as our Embassy—and I thank you all for the comments on Ambassador Ford which, of course, we certainly all endorse. Our Embassy reports—it also comes in through other channels—that these demonstrations across Syria have, among other demands, an anti-Hezbollah, anti-Iran flavor to them. The Syrian people know exactly who it is that is providing the assistance to their government to kill them, arrest them, and torture them. They know it is from Iran and from Hezbollah, which means that a change in government that comes about where you have a government in Syria that is governing by the consent of the people is not going to be the asset for Iran that Syria is today. It is in our strategic interest to see that this change takes place quickly.

I will mention Iraq as well. There have been mixed press reports about what do the Iraqis think about what is happening in Syria right now, and they are concerned, as Senator Boxer said, about instability in the region. But Iraq suffered grievously from what this regime did to them. The Syrian regime facilitated, allowed the use of Syrian territory, Syrian airport for terrorists to get into Iraq and blow up thousands of Iraqis, hundreds of our own servicemen. I do not think the Iraqis have any illusions about Syria. It will also help Iraq to have a different Syria next door.

Senator RUBIO. Just in terms of the general policy goal of limiting and containing and defeating Iran's ambitions, violent ambitions, for the region and the world, the loss of the Assad regime would be a devastating blow to Iran. Is that accurate?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Yes. I would—yes, yes. People talk about there could be another sort of Alawite or not Alawite but Assad in a palace coup inside, but I think that is very unlikely. So, yes, the high probability is that a government that comes in with the consent of the Syrian people will not be an asset of Iran.

Senator RUBIO. Now, one of the concerns that I think Senator Lugar raised and I think some have, watching the experiences in other parts of the region, is that if Assad's regime were to fall, they were to leave, they would be replaced by another form of radical government or one that would not respect, for example, religious minorities in the country. We know that there is concern about that.

What progress, in terms of the resistance, whether it is the Syrian National Council or others, have they made in terms of—or what is the potential for that being ameliorated, in essence, lessened?

Ambassador FELTMAN. You know, it is a concern of everyone, including the Syrian opposition themselves. The slogan of the Syrian opposition is "Syria is one people." They are trying to show and practice that they recognize that the Syrian national identity is composed of many, many diverse sects, ethnic groups, et cetera. And in the various opposition groups, including the Syrian National Council we have talked about, you do see Alawites, Christians, Kurds, Druze, that are participating. But the majority of this is still a Sunni-heavy movement. In part, the country itself is heavily Sunni.

But it goes back to what we were talking about earlier, that the opposition has started to articulate and needs to continue to articulate why it is that Bashar's predictions of what will happen after he leaves are wrong, that it will not be chaos, that the minorities, members of the armed services, members of the judiciary, that all parts of Syria will have a proper role to play, will have their rights respected in the future of Syria. The burden is on the Syrian opposition to be talking to the same people.

I do not think that based on our own conversations with Syrian minority groups, that there are any illusions about Bashar or any love for Bashar. They may have once seen him as the force of civility. They now recognize that he is driving the country to ruin. But they are worried about what happens afterward and that is what the opposition needs to work on.

Senator RUBIO. My last question, Mr. Bronin, is on sanctions. I have read the full menu of sanctions that we have placed and that others have placed around the world, the European Community, Canada. Japan I think recently did so as well, others.

I have been aware for some time now there is a flight from Damascus to Caracas that takes place about every 2 weeks or so. Is there any evidence of nations in the Western Hemisphere, Venezuela in particular, but others providing assistance to evading any of these sanctions?

Mr. BRONIN. Senator, thanks for the question.

I cannot speak to any specific examples of financial support. Clearly the Assad regime is looking around the world for support and also for alternative markets. I will say just as a general matter they have not found much success to date.

Senator RUBIO. The testimony is that as of now, we have not found any willing, open participants in efforts to undermine our efforts or other nations' efforts to aid them in circumventing—obviously, except for Iran—circumventing these sanctions.

Mr. BRONIN. Again, I cannot speak directly to any specific forms of financial support.

With respect to finding markets that might replace what they have lost when they lost the European oil market, that is correct. They have not found anything that would even begin to replace what they have lost.

Senator RUBIO. OK, thank you.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, Senator Rubio.

Senator Durbin.

Senator DURBIN. First, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you and the ranking member for allowing me to attend this subcommittee, which I may not be a formal member of, but have followed closely. And thank you for your leadership.

And I thank the witnesses for being here.

It was about 2 months ago that I had a meeting with a large group of Muslim Americans in Chicago of Syrian descent, and naturally they are following this very closely and are very concerned about it. And they asked several questions which I will ask.

First, Mr. Bronin, whether or not the sanctions which we have imposed have gone far enough. And several things that they asked about I told them I would follow through with, and that is whether or not we are, for example, targeting Lebanese banks involved in Syria and whether or not we have expanded our sanctions regime where we are currently targeting oil exports to include other elements of the oil and energy sector of exploration and production and transport.

Mr. BRONIN. Thanks very much, Senator. An important question.

To the question of the Lebanese financial sector, we have designated one Lebanese financial institution. It is a subsidiary of the Commercial Bank of Syria, the Syrian-Lebanese Commercial Bank.

We are also regularly engaged with our counterparts in Lebanon to stress the importance of remaining vigilant and not allowing their financial system to be exploited by the regime or regime insiders. I think, in particular, after an action that we took earlier this year in making a PATRIOT Act section 311 finding against the Lebanese Canadian Bank in Beirut, the Lebanese are very alive to the risks that they run if they allow their financial system to be exploited. But again, we continue to engage very regularly with Lebanese counterparts.

Senator DURBIN. And what about expanding the sanctions pursuant to the suggestion of Senator Gillibrand, which I have joined in, to go beyond oil exports into other aspects of the oil and energy sector?

Mr. BRONIN. Our sanctions currently already do prohibit and investment in the Syrian oil sector. They prohibit all transactions

between United States persons and the Government of Syria, and the Europeans have taken a similar action as well.

Senator DURBIN. That is good to know.

Mr. Feltman, a question was asked as to why we are not pursuing at the U.N. Security Council the referral of Mr. Assad to the International Criminal Court. Can you tell me?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Senator, Ambassador Rice and her team in New York are extremely active looking at how we can use the U.N. system in the best way to, first of all, raise attention to what is actually happening in Syria and then to try to find ways to stop the violence. We are looking for support with Russia and China to see that we can get a Security Council resolution on Syria. Right now, we are also working with European and other partners on getting a General Assembly resolution on Syria passed through the third committee that would also call for the types of human rights monitors that we think would give some protection to the Syrian people. There have been two special sessions, that we have helped lead, of the U.N. Human Rights Council. So we are looking at all the ways that the U.N. system could help us achieve that goal of stopping violence and moving toward a democratic transition in Syria.

Senator DURBIN. Mr. Feltman, I applaud what the administration has done through Ambassador Rice, and I think calling for the vote in early October in the United Nations, even though it failed, it at least brought the issue to the forefront and forced nations to stand up and vote. And the question I am asking, since the Arab League has intervened and that effort has clearly failed and we have pronounced that, why are we not following up again at the United Nations Security Council either with a similar resolution or specifically directing the efforts of the International Criminal Court toward Mr. Assad.

Ambassador FELTMAN. On the International Criminal Court, since we are not members, I would look for the lead of others.

But on the Security Council, this is an option that we are pursuing. We are looking for the right time. We are hoping that something comes out of the Arab League on Saturday that will help us with those on the Security Council who did not let the resolution pass the last time. Definitely this is a matter that the U.N. Security Council should be dealing with, and we would hope that Russia and China, in looking at how the Assad clique has just refused all attempts of mediation from others, would now realize it is time for the Security Council to act.

Senator DURBIN. I followed through a little bit on this after thinking about it and working with my staff on the question of the U.N. Security Council. And one can certainly come up with a rationale for the Russian position that may have something to do with arms sales, a rationale for the Chinese position which is fairly consistent with their foreign policy. But I have really struggled with Brazil, India, and South Africa.

And I asked the Ambassador, Mrs. Rao, to come in my office and talk about the Indian position on this. And she said to me what I think others have said, and I would like you to comment on it. She believes there is evidence—at least she told me there is evidence—

that the opposition in Syria is armed and violent. And I have not heard that, not from any credible source. Have you?

Ambassador FELTMAN. There are increasing incidents of the opposition using arms. Some of this is in self-defense—I think any of us would understand. For the large part, the opposition movement is still peaceful. What Bashar wants is for the opposition movement to turn entirely violent so he can say to the world, look, it really is an insurgency. He does not know how to deal with peaceful protesters.

First of all, thank you for seeing the Indian Ambassador. That is a welcome initiative because we have been talking with the Indians and others as well.

But what I would say to her is what the U.N. Security Council is trying to do, what the Arab League is trying to do, what the U.N. Human Rights Council is trying to do is to get monitors in the country. If there are terrorists in the country, they will either stop attacking because they do not want to reveal their action or they will be revealed by these monitors. We think it would put a check on the brutality that the Assad regime has inflicted on its own people. But they can use their own arguments to get themselves to the point of supporting a Security Council resolution because if they truly believe what she told you, if she truly believes that, she should not be frightened to have monitors there.

Senator DURBIN. I think that is a constructive suggestion.

Mr. Chairman, I really hope other colleagues on the committee can join me in inviting the ambassadors from these countries that are stymieing the efforts of the United Nations Security Council to come and explain to us. Many of these are our friends, historically our friends, South Africa, for example, and India for that matter. And it would seem to me to be at least valuable to note that we see their opposition and would like some explanation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, witnesses.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, Senator Durbin.

We will go to a second round. We may not all have questions, but I wanted to raise at least two or three more points.

Mr. Bronin, I wanted to raise with you—and today we probably do not have enough time to cover all of this, but I wanted to raise a question about an article that appeared in the Wall Street Journal. It is dated October 29 of this year. The title of the article is “U.S. Firm Acknowledges Syria Uses Its Gear to Block Web.” I will just read two pertinent parts, really the first two paragraphs, short paragraphs.

“A U.S. company that makes Internet blocking gear acknowledges that Syria has been using at least 13 of its devices to censor Web activity there, meaning Syria, an admission that comes as the Syrian Government cracks down on its citizens and silences their online activities.

“Blue Coat Systems, Incorporated of Sunnyvale, CA, says it shipped the Internet, ‘filtering,’ devices to Dubai late last year believing they were destined for a department of the Iraqi Government. However, the devices which can block Web sites or record when people visit them made their way to Syria, a country subject to strict U.S. trade embargos.”

And I will just read one more part. “Blue Coat told the Wall Street Journal the appliances were transmitting automatic status messages back to the company as the devices censored the Syrian Web. Blue Coat says it does not monitor where such ‘heartbeat’ messages originate from.” And it goes on from there.

I know that you and your team are familiar with this.

I guess the basic question I have—and I know I am putting you on the spot, but if you have an answer, we would want to hear it today. Has this company, Blue Coat Systems, Inc., violated the U.S. trade embargo. That is the first question.

Mr. BRONIN. Senator, with respect to—our export control regime is administered by the Commerce Department and I would have to refer you to the Commerce Department for specifics on this particular instance, unless Secretary Feltman has anything he would like to add.

Senator CASEY. Secretary Feltman, I do not know if you have either an answer or a comment.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Reinforcing what Luke said, this is administered by the Department of Commerce. The Department of Commerce is looking into this very specific case because there was no license issued to send this stuff to Syria. Since the export controls were put in place in 2004, any such item like this that would be exported to Syria requires a case-by-case examination and an export license. There were no export licenses issued for this, and the Department of Commerce is investigating it. I would defer to them on the state of the investigation.

Senator CASEY. Just for the record just so that we are clear, I would suggest to the administration to make sure that an answer is forthcoming, whether it comes from the Commerce Department or from whatever agency the answer would emanate because part of our responsibility here is not simply to point fingers at other countries and impose sanctions that are kind of far away. We got to make sure that our Government, our companies are doing the right thing here as it relates to Syria.

I wanted to ask a broader question that has been referred to by a number of us, but I wanted to try to get it in a summary form before we conclude about sanctions. We know and I know that both of you have spoken to the issue of sanctions. In fact, there was a recent CRS report that outlined—and I am looking at a report that is rather recent, but the last two pages of this report—this is a report dated November the 4th. But they set forth a table where they listed all of the sanctions and the individuals sanctioned.

I guess I would ask you two questions. No. 1 is how would you assess the success or impact of sanctions to date—both U.S. and other sanctions; EU and others. And No. 2, what if anything can you tell us that is forthcoming by way of sanctions? I have some ideas about whom should be sanctioned, but I want to hear from you first about the assessment of where we are and, second, where we could be headed with additional sanctions. And it is really for both our witnesses.

Mr. BRONIN. Thanks very much, Senator.

First, with respect to the impact that sanctions are having, I would note that Syria has for a long time been among the more sanctioned countries, and so the ties between the Syrian and the

United States financial system were limited. Our actions have been comprehensive and aggressive, but there is only so much we can do unilaterally. The real significance of what has been done is that we have done it in concert with the Europeans in particular, and the European actions have really been dramatic. The impact has been profound.

Senator CASEY. Mostly because of oil?

Mr. BRONIN. Mostly because of oil. Their actions go beyond oil. And you know, their actions like ours—I do not want to diminish the importance of the symbolic nature of the actions as well—by highlighting the activity of those complicit in the human rights abuses and also by highlighting the Syrian business community who support the Assad regime—you know, we are sending an important message both to the protesters on the streets in Syria that we stand by them, and I think we are sending a message to the Syrian business community, an important constituency, that there are severe personal costs to associating one's self too closely with Assad.

Senator CASEY. And just a quick followup. Would it be accurate to say—and I guess I am getting this from a couple of places, including your testimony. Let me rephrase the question. You say in your testimony on page 4, prior to the imposition of sanctions, the Assad regime generated one-third of its revenue—that is total revenue—from the oil sector and that has been effectively eliminated. Is that correct?

Mr. BRONIN. That is correct, Senator.

Senator CASEY. Mr. Feltman.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Yes, just quickly. It is worth noting the contrast between today and not too far in the distant past, which is that only recently Europe was looking at an association agreement with Syria. Europe was in an advanced state of negotiations with Syria about having an association agreement with trade and all sorts of other benefits that would have accrued to the Syrians. Today they have sanctioned Syria. They have sanctioned two of the primary Syrian banks. They have cut off the oil revenues, which we have talked about, but that is over \$4 billion a year in loss, and the Syrians have not been able to find any other customers. So it is as if, with the other subjects we have talked about—it is worth remembering where we were not very long ago and where we are today, which helps gives us the sense of inevitability that basically Bashar is finished.

Senator CASEY. What can you tell me—maybe you do not know the answer to this. It is a tough one to answer I guess. Sanctions as it relates to Turkey—why do you not think they have taken that step and can they, will they?

Ambassador FELTMAN. I do not know. All of us have been in discussions with the Turkish officials, as have, of course, our bosses at the Cabinet level and the White House, with the Turks because the Turks have played an important role. The Turks have played the essential role in terms of providing space for the opposition. The effective arms embargo that they have put in place has had an impact on the regime's ability. And in practice, much of the economic ties between the two countries has already dried up, just as a matter of course.

But as I said earlier, we would like to see them take the additional step of actually putting some legal sanctions in place that parallel the sanctions that the EU, the United States, Japan, and Canada have done.

Senator CASEY. I do not know if any of our colleagues have more questions, but I just have one comment. I was asking our staff not too long ago when you consider the number of people slaughtered here, by one estimate now more than 3,500, if you do the math in terms of population proportionally, it is the equivalent of more than 43,000 Americans being killed by our Government. I know it is a different world. It is not necessarily comparable in terms of the way we have traditionally responded to our own challenges here. But it is hard to comprehend that that kind of a slaughter is taking place, and it does not get near enough attention in this town. So we are going to keep at it.

Unless Ranking Member Risch or Senator Lugar have any other questions—Senator Lugar?

Senator LUGAR. Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask about the food situation in Syria. The reason I ask is that over in the Agriculture Committee from time to time we get reports about the changes in exports or imports in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya after the Arab Spring. Without going into all the details, the facts are that the expense of importing grains that were a part of the diets of those countries has increased significantly. Beyond that, the capacity to pay and to exchange moneys, given problems in the banking system, have created a situation in which in these countries there may be as much as a 40-percent decline in the amount of food being consumed by the people. That is a very large change. And some have pointed out in the past that leaders in these countries retain their power through so-called food subsidies, in other words, if people were very unhappy in the hustings, somehow they were pacified by money coming out that they use for food.

What I am not clear about is how this applies to Syria, because I really have not heard anything on any nutrition and food supply impacts resulting from the sanctions or the loss of export money or exchange. Has there been an impact there?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Senator, in terms of sanctions, of course, even in our case, food and medicine are exempted from sanctions. That is really the only examples of exemption from sanctions. And we do not have reports of sanctions themselves having an impact directly on the food supply. In fact, the only reports we have had of shortages of food in Syria so far are places that are sort of under siege, places where it has been hard to get food in because the army and the security services are occupying the outskirts. But we have not had reports of widespread malnutrition, widespread food shortages in Syria.

But you touch on a very important point, which is the subsidy question. Even before this all started, Syria's economy was heavily subsidized, mismanaged one would say. They have suddenly had a drop of revenue from the oil, from the tourism revenues, from trade with Turkey at the same time that Bashar and his clique are trying to maintain some semblance of control and some semblance of loyalty through the subsidy program.

You see signs—I mean, I will defer to the experts at Treasury—of a little bit of a panic among the upper echelons of this elite system. For example, they put a ban on the import of luxury goods into Syria in order to try to save hard currency probably to help buy the foodstuffs and help the subsidy program going for the general population. But they had to reverse because there was such popular outcry against this. So you are seeing cracks in the system that suggest that they really are concerned about their ability to keep the current subsidy program going.

Senator LUGAR. I just raise the question because many feel that the problems for President Mubarak really came down to this. There were the young people in Tahrir Square. There were people demanding their rights. But Egypt is a country of 80 million people, and the millions that were usually getting the subsidies from the Mubarak government were not getting the subsidies. And so as a result, there was a whole pattern there in terms of countrywide revolt which was maybe a major factor in finally changing the government.

Mr. BRONIN. I have not much to add to what Secretary Feltman said. I would note that the ban on imports that the Syrian Government posed at the end of September I think was significant for a couple of reasons. I think it was imposed in large part to protect their foreign exchange reserves, which is a demonstration that the actions we have taken together have had a significant impact. And importantly, I think the fact that the ban was imposed and then subsequently revoked is just one example of many examples of sort of erratic, inconsistent policymaking by the Syrian regime which has really focused the anger and dissatisfaction of the Syrian people on the Syrian regime rather than on the international community.

Senator CASEY. I want to thank both of our witnesses.

Let me just say for the record before we go that the record will be kept open for 1 week for members of the committee.

Second, we have received testimony for the record from the following organizations. They are three: No. 1, the Foundation for the Defense of Democracy; No. 2, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy; and No. 3, Human Rights Watch. So those will be made part of the record as well.

Senator CASEY. So if there is nothing further, we are adjourned. We want to thank our witnesses and this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

#### ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

##### PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARK DUBOWITZ, ESQ., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FOUNDATION FOR DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Central Asian Affairs.

FDD formed a Syria Working Group comprised of scholars, experts, former government officials, Syrian and Middle Eastern dissidents and others to help inform the policy discussion surrounding developments in Syria and supporting the Syrian people, who have suffered under a repressive, violent, and radical regime for more than three decades. We believe they deserve the chance to reject oppression, change their government, and build a nation based on civil rights and human dignity. We also believe that the current government in Syria does not have the will or ability to lead a transition to democracy and must instead step aside. Finally, we believe

that the deplorable human rights conditions in Syria demand international attention. Those outside of Syria must hold the regime accountable for the violence committed against its population and support those dissidents in Syria standing up for their inalienable rights.

The Syria Working Group produced a discussion paper looking toward a post-Assad era. It contains policy recommendations for consideration by the administration and like-minded nations to further assist the anti-regime Syrian opposition.

I am grateful for the opportunity to submit this discussion paper as my testimony before the committee. I note that this document was jointly produced by my colleagues at FDD including Reuel Marc Gerecht, John Hannah, Tony Badran and Ammar Abdulhamid, as well as my colleagues from Foreign Policy Initiative which include Jamie Fly and Robert Zarate.

## DISCUSSION PAPER

### TOWARD A POST-ASSAD SYRIA: OPTIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES AND LIKE-MINDED NATIONS TO FURTHER ASSIST THE ANTI-REGIME SYRIAN OPPOSITION

*“Despite graphic media coverage, American policymakers, journalists, and citizens are extremely slow to muster the imagination needed to reckon with evil. Ahead of the killings, they assume rational actors will not inflict seemingly gratuitous violence. They trust in good-faith negotiations and traditional diplomacy. Once the killings start, they assume that civilians who keep their heads down will be left alone. They urge cease-fire and donate humanitarian aid.”*—Samantha Power, now Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs in the National Security Council, in “A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide” (Harper Perennial, 2003).

With a long history of exporting terrorism beyond its borders, the Syrian government is now waging a campaign of systematic, internal terror against its own people. Officials at the United Nations conservatively estimated in November 2011 that President Bashar al-Assad’s security forces and pro-government militias have killed over 3,500 civilians since the country’s anti-regime protests started in March 2011. In addition, the Assad regime has jailed at least 30,000 Syrians, with human rights groups reporting that nearly 100 detainees have died in captivity.

The international community, however, remains unable to muster a collective response, as recent proceedings in the U.N. Security Council illustrated. This is unfortunately due in large part to the way in which the United States and its allies secured Security Council support for NATO’s intervention in Libya. On October 4, 2011, Russia and China vetoed a resolution that would have condemned the Syrian government for its egregious human rights abuses, and demanded an end to its lethal crackdown on the opposition. Months earlier, Russian and Chinese diplomats similarly shielded the Assad regime from efforts by the United States and Western governments to get the Security Council to consider a resolution that would have censured Syria’s controversial nuclear program.

Given the deadlock in the international community, this memorandum examines U.S. options for responding, either individually or in concert with other nations, to the Assad regime’s relentless murder of Syrian civilians.

The current Syrian government is a dangerous enemy of the United States. Over the past decade, the Assad regime has supported terrorist groups across the Middle East, destabilized its neighbors, pursued a secret nuclear program with North Korean assistance, aided foreign militants that have killed American and allied soldiers in Iraq, and served as a key regional ally to the Middle East’s most dangerous country, Iran. The United States certainly has a moral obligation to work with others to try and halt the continuing humanitarian crisis in Syria. But it also has a powerful strategic interest in seeing not only the collapse of the Assad regime, but also the emergence of a post-Assad Syria with moderate, representative government that respects human rights, upholds the rule of law, promotes stability in the Middle East, and dramatically weakens the region’s Iranian-led anti-American bloc.

This memo proceeds in three parts. Part one summarizes the response of various foreign governments to the Assad regime’s mass murder of Syrian civilians and other human rights abuses. Part two highlights statements by Syrian opposition groups calling for humanitarian intervention in Syria. And part three offers a discussion of options for the United States to respond to the Assad regime.

#### I. FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS CONDEMN THE ASSAD REGIME

Inspired by “Arab Spring” revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, Syrian citizens first began peaceful protests against the authoritarian government of Bashar

al-Assad in mid-March 2011. But what first began as a small set of disparate, anti-regime assemblies throughout the country quickly turned into a larger movement that has increasingly begun to transcend class and ethnicities, and even gained the support of a growing cadre of Syrian military defectors.

By mid-April 2011, the Assad regime sought to quell pro-democracy demonstrations by promising to end emergency rule, enact political reforms, and release detainees arrested during the prior month's protests. Predictably, however, the regime's promises proved empty. On April 22, 2011—one day after emergency rule was supposedly lifted by the regime—security forces and pro-regime gunmen killed nearly 100 protestors across the country. One day later, government forces killed at least 12 mourners at the funeral of pro-democracy protestors in the city of Homs. Over the ensuing months, the Assad regime's systematic targeting of civilians continued. As of October 2011, the U.N. officials estimate that the Assad regime has killed in excess of 3,000 Syrian civilians and detained at least 30,000 more since the beginning of the protests. However, the Syrian government has imposed a media blackout that has severely constrained the flow of information, so the actual death toll is likely much higher.

The Assad regime's murderous suppression of Syrian civilians has triggered strong condemnation from countries in the Middle East. For example, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan described the regime's attacks on civilians as "savagery" in June 2011. And the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) called for serious political reforms in Syria and "an immediate end to the killing machine" in September 2011.

Broader international condemnation has also been harsh. For example, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe charged that "[t]he Syrian regime has committed crimes against humanity" on August 8, 2011. Shortly thereafter, the U.N. High Commission for Human Rights concluded in a report that the Assad regime was responsible for ordering "human rights abuses, including summary executions, arbitrary arrests and torture." In one passage, the report stated:

. . . there were reports that on 1 May in Dar'a, about twenty-six men were blindfolded and summarily executed by gunshots at the football stadium, which had been transformed into the security forces headquarters for that area. Executions also occurred during the sieges of cities, and during house-to-house searches.

In addition, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanethem Pillay, accused the Syrian government of perpetrating "egregious violations of human rights" in response to the pro-democracy protests:

These include summary executions, excessive use of force in quelling peaceful protests, arbitrary detentions, torture and ill-treatment, violations of the rights to freedom of assembly, expression, association and movement, and violations of the rights to food and health, including medical treatment to injured persons.

Although the United States repeatedly condemned the Syrian government for these atrocities, it did not initially call for Assad's removal. After much internal debate within the Executive Branch, however, U.S. policy changed on August 18, 2011, when President Obama demanded in a statement that Assad step down:

The future of Syria must be determined by its people, but President Bashar al-Assad is standing in their way. His calls for dialogue and reform have rung hollow while he is imprisoning, torturing, and slaughtering his own people. We have consistently said that President Assad must lead a democratic transition or get out of the way. He has not led. For the sake of the Syrian people, the time has come for President Assad to step aside.

Reiterating the President's new posture towards the Assad regime, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on September 2, 2011:

The violence must stop, and [Assad] needs to step aside. Syria must be allowed to move forward. Those who have joined us in this call must now translate our rhetoric into concrete actions to escalate the pressure on Assad and those around him, including strong new sanctions targeting Syria's energy sector to deny the regime the revenues that fund its campaign of violence.

Nonetheless, the Assad regime's assaults on the Syrian protest movement continued, even into the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. In response, President Obama said at a speech before the U.N. General Assembly on September 21, 2011:

As we meet here today, men and women and children are being tortured, detained and murdered by the Syrian regime. Thousands have been killed, many during the holy time of Ramadan. Thousands more have poured across Syria's borders. The Syrian people have shown dignity and courage in their pursuit of justice—protesting peacefully, standing silently in the streets, dying for the same values that this institution is supposed to stand for. And the question for us is clear: Will we [at the United Nations] stand with the Syrian people, or with their oppressors?

Despite U.S. calls for the United Nations to act, however, the Security Council failed in a vote to pass a resolution on Syria on October 4, 2011, due to Russian and Chinese vetoes. After the vote, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, said:

. . . the United States is outraged that this Council has utterly failed to address an urgent moral challenge and a growing threat to regional peace and security. . . . For more than six months, the Assad regime has deliberately unleashed violence, torture, and persecution against peaceful protesters, human rights defenders, and their families.

Russia's and China's support for the Assad regime should not come as a surprise, however. Russia appears to have no interest in hampering relations with Syria, its fifth-largest trading partner. Indeed, Russia's military maintains a naval base in the port city of Tartus, and its arms contracts with the Syrian military are currently worth \$4 billion or more. For its part, China likely worries that further uprisings across the Middle East could spur domestic unrest at home. Moreover, Iran, a long-time ally of the Assad regime, has intervened even more directly to prop up the Syrian government. In particular, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has intensified financial and military assistance to the Assad regime.

## II. SYRIANS CALL FOR HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION

In the absence of a strong international response to the Syrian government's internal war on the pro-democracy opposition, some previously peaceful protesters have begun to take up arms to defend themselves against the Assad regime's security forces. In addition, several thousand Syrian army troops have reportedly defected to join with other dissident protesters and form a self-organized resistance group now known as the Free Syrian Army. Armed clashes between government forces and protesters are on the rise, as Syria appears increasingly on the verge of a civil war.

Members of the Syrian opposition have also begun to call for the international community to intervene and prevent further bloodshed by the Assad regime. For example:

- On September 27, 2011, leading Syrian opposition groups—including the Syrian Revolution General Commission, the Damascus Declaration, the Syrian Emergency Task Force, among others—said that they “seek international intervention in the form of a peacekeeping mission with the intention of monitoring the safety of the civilian population.”
- On October 2, 2011, the Syrian National Council, an opposition organization modeled after Libya's Transitional National Council, said: “The Council demands international governments and organizations meet their responsibility to support the Syrian people, protect them and stop the crimes and gross human rights violations being committed by the illegitimate current regime.”
- On October 4, 2011, Syrian National Council member Radwan Ziadeh said: “The people inside Syria are calling for a no-fly zone and an intervention, but not the activists outside Syria. We on the outside know that the international community is not there yet. But the people inside are very frustrated with the international community.”
- And on October 28, 2011, opposition groups throughout Syria organized “No-Fly Zone Friday,” a series of coordinated protest rallies to urge the international community to intervene and halt the Assad regime's assault on civilians.

The Obama administration, however, has hesitated to answer these and other calls for international humanitarian intervention in Syria. During an interview with Fox News Sunday on October 23, 2011, Secretary of State Clinton urged embattled Syrian civilians to remain peaceful and inexplicably denied that opposition groups had called for international intervention:

In Syria, we are strongly supporting the change from Assad and also an opposition that only engages in peaceful demonstrations. And you do not

have from that opposition, as you had in Libya, a call for any kind of outside intervention.

Administration officials have also counseled the Syrian opposition to avoid militarizing the conflict—a morally questionable approach for people facing lethal violence directed against themselves and their families on a daily basis.

That said, regional actors have begun to take initial—albeit limited—steps to respond to the Assad regime. For example, Turkey has vocally criticized the Assad regime for its continuing assaults on protestors; cut all arms shipments to Syria; and provided safe haven to Syrian refugees and military defectors. Ankara has also long indicated its openness to targeted sanctions on the Syrian government, but has yet to impose them. In an interview with the Financial Times on November 1, 2011, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu did not rule out more aggressive measures such as extending a buffer zone or a no-fly zone into Syrian territory to protect civilians:

The Syrian regime is attacking the Syrian people which is unacceptable. . . . When we see such an event next door to us of course we will never be silent. . . . We hope that there will be no need for these types of measures but of course humanitarian issues are important. . . . There are certain universal values all of us need to respect and protecting citizens is the responsibility of every state.

In addition, the Arab League recently put out a proposal for the Syrian government to halt the violence against civilians and begin a dialogue for reforms with the opposition movements. Although the Assad regime accepted this proposal on November 1, 2011, Syrian opposition members have expressed deep skepticism. Indeed, Syrian security forces subsequently renewed attacks on Homs, the country's third-largest city, with The New York Times reporting on November 8, 2011, that an estimated 111 people died over a five-day period.

### III. U.S. OPTIONS IN SYRIA

Under the authoritarian rule of the Assad family, Syria has posed and continues to pose a threat to U.S. national security interests. The Syrian government is a state sponsor of terrorism; pursued programs related to weapons of mass destruction; and strengthened ties with rogue states like North Korea and Iran. The State Department reports that the Assad regime, in addition to its atrocious human rights record, has served as a “key hub for foreign fighters en route to Iraq and a safe haven for Iraqi Baathists expressing support for terrorist attacks against Iraqi government interests and coalition forces.” Syria has also served as a critical link between Iran and the Hezbollah terrorist network. Indeed, the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service quoted a U.S. official on background as saying: “The Syrians are doing things in terms of deepening their entanglement with Iran and Hezbollah that truly are mind-boggling. They are integrating their military/defense systems to unprecedented levels. Hafez al-Assad never would have gone so far and it is becoming hard to see how they can possibly extricate themselves.” Furthermore, numerous Palestinian terror groups—including those listed as Foreign Terrorist Organizations by the State Department—continue to operate within Syria's borders and maintain offices in Damascus.

Many thousands of lives are at risk if the Assad regime continues its relentless assault on Syrian protestors. The Obama administration has declared the violence in Syria a “humanitarian crisis” as thousands of civilians have already fled to northern Turkey in efforts to escape the Assad regime. As the situation deteriorates further, the number of displaced persons and refugees is expected to rapidly increase. Syrian security forces also have reportedly pursued Syrian dissidents who have fled to Lebanon, and planted land mines along the country's border with Lebanon to halt the further flow of refugees. Indeed, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, now calls Syria “an urgent moral challenge and a growing threat to regional peace and security.”

While President Obama has declined so far to call for direct international involvement in Syria, the United States nonetheless has a vested national interest in preventing the further slaughter and displacement of innocent civilians in Syria. As the Presidential Study Directive on Mass Atrocities of August 4, 2011, states, “Preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States.” It continues:

Our security is affected when masses of civilians are slaughtered, refugees flow across borders, and murderers wreak havoc on regional stability and livelihoods. America's reputation suffers and our ability to bring about

change is constrained, when we are perceived as idle in the face of mass atrocities and genocide. Unfortunately, history has taught us that our pursuit of a world where states do not systematically slaughter civilians will not come to fruition without concerted and coordinated effort.

Given that a collective response from the U.N. Security Council is unlikely, what options does the United States have for responding to the Assad regime's continuing atrocities against the Syrian people? In late August 2011, Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution identified potential measures, including a maritime operation to enforce stronger sanctions, a Kosovo-style air strike campaign, or even a military invasion to carry out regime change. The United States should not only keep all of those options on the table, but also explore the following intermediate steps.

*Option (1): Impose Crippling Sanctions on the Syrian Government*

The United States should work to immediately expand the scope of sanctions on the Assad regime for its mass murder of Syrian civilians and other human rights abuses. So far, the Obama administration has responded slowly to the Syrian government's violent crackdown on protestors, imposing three incremental rounds of Executive Branch sanctions on Syria:

- Executive Order 13572, signed by President Obama on April 29, 2011, targets the property and interests not only of several high-ranking Syrian officials and entities, but also of the Qods Forces, a special unit of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps that is believed to be strongly aiding Syria's anti-opposition activities.
- Executive Order 13573, signed by the President on May 18, 2011, expands the list of Syrian officials sanctioned by the United States for human rights abuses to include Bashar al-Assad himself, as well as Syria's vice president, prime minister, defense and interior ministers, and head of military intelligence.
- Executive Order 13582, signed by President Obama on August 17, 2011, freezes all Syrian assets under U.S. jurisdiction, bars U.S. citizens and companies from participating directly or indirectly in a broad range of transactions with Syrian entities, and blacklists a new set of Syrian individuals and companies.

The United States can and should do more to establish a stronger set of sanctions capable of truly crippling the Syrian government. Indeed, the Assad regime is already economically vulnerable, and could be impacted quickly—perhaps decisively—by more comprehensive sanctions. Thanks in part to existing sanctions, it appears that Damascus has poor access to hard currency; is depleting its dollar reserves in attempts to maintain its currency and pay its security forces; and faces the prospect of hyperinflation, especially in the absence of continuing financial aid from Iran. As *The New York Times* reported on October 10, 2011: “The Syrian economy is buckling under the pressure of sanctions by the West and a continuing popular uprising, posing a growing challenge to President Bashar al-Assad's government as the pain is felt deeply by nearly every layer of Syrian society.”

The President and Congress should therefore work to quickly pass legislation for harsher U.S. sanctions on Syria, including extraterritorial sanctions aimed at convincing Member States of the European Union (E.U.), Turkey, and other countries to join the United States in targeting Syria's energy industry, financial and banking system, and other sectors that are funding the Assad regime. Pending legislation relevant to this effort includes:

- *The Syria Sanctions Act of 2011* (S. 1472)—originally introduced by Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Joe Lieberman (ID-CT), and Mark Kirk (R-IL)—would penalize, for the first time, foreign entities that aid, contribute to, or invest in Syria's energy sector. Given that American companies are now prohibited from conducting business in Syria, the Syria Sanctions Act would impose extraterritorial sanctions to persuade other countries to establish comparable prohibitions by preventing foreign entities that hold financial stakes in Syria's power industry, purchase Syrian petroleum, or export gasoline to Syria, from having access to U.S. government contracts and financial institutions.
- *The Syria Freedom Support Act of 2011* (H.R. 2106)—originally introduced by Representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) and Eliot Engel (D-NY)—seeks to strengthen U.S. sanctions on Syria, and targets the country's exports, financial transactions, banking, and procurement activities. In particular, the bill contains measures to impede the development of Syria's petroleum resources, and the development and export of its refined petroleum products. The bill also imposes wide-ranging sanctions related to Syria's sponsorship of international terrorism, as well as its weapons of mass destruction and missile programs.

As Reuel Marc Gerecht and Mark Dubowitz, both of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), wrote in the *Washington Post*: “Obama wouldn't necessarily

have to lead from the front” in implementing more comprehensive sanctions on Syria. They explain:

The European Union is slowly but surely developing tougher sanctions. The E.U., which purchases most of Syria’s oil, just passed an embargo, effective November 15, on importation of Syrian crude. Implementing further comprehensive measures against Syria’s energy sector and central bank and Iranian commercial entities heavily invested in Syria may require the presidential bully pulpit and some arm-twisting of European allies and the Turks. But Bashar al-Assad’s bloody oppression gives Washington the high ground. What seemed impossible five months ago is becoming practicable.

To that end, the United States should further press Turkey, E.U. Member States, and other countries to impose unilateral sanctions on the Syrian government for human rights abuses; to crack down on Lebanese banks operating in Syria; and to target specific Syrian businessman who collaborate with the regime, but value their ability and that of their families to travel, study, and do business abroad. Travel bans might also be imposed on certain Syrian officials, and actions taken to stop Western airlines from flying to and from Syrian airports.

In addition, Washington should work with like-minded nations to multilateralize sanctions against Syria’s controversial nuclear and missile programs and designate the Syrian entities and individuals involved in Syria’s covert nuclear program with North Korea. As a first step, the Obama administration should push E.U. Member States to join the United States in targeting Syria’s Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC). The U.S. Treasury Department reports that the SSRC “controls Syria’s missile production facilities and oversees Syria’s facilities to develop unconventional weapons and their delivery systems.” The Bush administration sanctioned the SSRC under the Executive Order 13382 of June 28, 2005. Indeed, given recent revelations that the Syrian government had reportedly obtained nuclear assistance from Pakistani proliferator A.Q. Khan related to uranium enrichment, the United States should continue to work with international partners to press the Assad regime both for its human rights and nuclear transgressions.

*Option (2): Provide Assistance to Syrian Opposition Groups*

To begin with, Washington should immediately intensify its political engagement with the various anti-regime groups both inside and outside of Syria. A key objective would be to help empower the moderate members of the Syrian opposition vis-a-vis the Islamist elements. In parallel, the United States, in conjunction with international partners, should work with the Syrian opposition to craft a strategy for more effective and sustained messaging to key groups (e.g., Alawis, Christians, and the Syrian business community), with the aim of reassuring them and fracturing their ties to the Assad regime and the untenable status quo in Syria.

Besides intensified political engagement with the Syrian opposition, the United States and like-minded nations should explore the full spectrum of options for direct assistance. At one end of the assistance spectrum, is financial aid to the recently formed movements of striking Syrian workers in Deraa and other towns. Indeed, the Assad regime, fearful of the potential of the Syrian strike movements, has taken aggressive measures to suppress them.

Washington should also work with partners should help opposition groups to establish television and radio broadcasting capability into Syria capable of circumventing the Assad regime’s signal jamming. They should also supply encryption-enabled portable communications equipment to the protest movement within Syria. As Gerecht and Dubowitz wrote in the Washington Post, Syrian opposition groups could greatly benefit from a cross-border wireless Internet zone that stretches to the Syrian city of Aleppo, a commercial center roughly 20 miles from Turkey. Such a communications network will require Turkish acquiescence—no longer unthinkable—and financial resources (depending on its range and speed, between \$50 and \$200 million). However, if Washington is unwilling to foot this bill alone, the Obama administration should consider tapping into existing Pentagon and CIA covert funds, and soliciting the remainder from our European and Arab partners.

In addition, the United States and European Union should immediately take actions against telecommunications companies that have reportedly assisted the Assad regime’s efforts to monitor and intercept the communications of the Syrian opposition. For example, Bloomberg News reported on November 3, 2011, that an Italian-based company doing just that:

Employees of Area SpA, a surveillance company based outside Milan, are installing the system under the direction of Syrian intelligence agents, who’ve pushed the Italians to finish, saying they urgently need to track people, a person familiar with the project says. The Area employees have flown

into Damascus in shifts this year as the violence has escalated, says the person, who has worked on the system for Area.

At the other end of the assistance spectrum, the United States could consider providing arms-related assistance—or encouraging the provision of arms-related assistance by partners in the region—that would enable members of the Syrian opposition to better defend themselves against the Assad regime’s relentless attacks. Although Syria currently lacks the sort of unified opposition that emerged in the early stages of protests in Libya, military defectors and opposition forces are becoming self-organized and increasingly united. At the forefront of Syria’s armed opposition movement is the Free Syrian Army, a group of thousands of military defectors led by former Syrian Air Force Colonel Riad al-Asaad. Over the last few months, the group has mounted formidable challenges to Syrian government forces in several locations, including Homs, Jabal Zawiya, and Deir al-Zour. Defectors have focused their attention on protecting civilians and protestors in specific neighborhoods.

Precedents for providing self-defense assistance to anti-regime Syrian groups may be found in U.S. efforts to help provide self-defense arms to the Bosnian Muslims in the face of Slobodan Milosevic’s Serbian military forces in the 1990s and, more recently, to the Libyan opposition in the face of aggression by the Qaddafi regime. As The New York Times has reported, Turkey is now providing assistance to the Free Syrian Army out of the refugee camp on its border with Syria.

It is critical that the United States become actively engaged and involved in shaping this force, rather than exclusively “subcontract” the effort to regional actors. Indeed, if the Syrian protestors want to arm themselves against the regime’s depredations, it is morally tenuous for the Obama administration to urge that the Syrian opposition remain non-violent. Concerns about Syria’s internecine strife are legitimate, but they should not lead us to disparage those who are trying to protect themselves and their families from the Assad regime’s murderous security forces—especially if no one in the international community will come to their defense. Official American rhetoric on this issue ought to change.

*Option (3): Limited Retaliatory Air Strikes*

The United States should examine options related to limited retaliatory air strikes against select Syrian military targets. The air strikes could be limited in duration and scope, surgically targeting Syrian air defenses, command-and-control assets, training facilities, and/or weapons depots. Each air strike would contain a narrow and clearly defined military objective, and the United States could enact such strikes intermittently or in response to severe actions by the Assad regime against civilians.

In recent years, limited air strikes have been successfully launched against Syrian assets. For example, several U.S. military helicopters carrying Special Forces penetrated Syrian airspace undetected in October 2008 to kill Abu Ghadiya, the Al Qaeda leader responsible for funneling foreign fighters and money into Iraq. The raid occurred five miles from the Iraq border in the eastern town of Sukkariya. Also, Israel’s Air Force penetrated Syrian airspace in September 2007 and destroyed a secret nuclear reactor in the Dair Alzour region built by the Assad regime with North Korean assistance.

Limited air strikes could potentially be a more palatable, intermediate military option for the Obama administration and foreign governments. This option would not require a sustained military presence and would involve far fewer military resources. The immediate goal of this option would be to rein in the regime’s military operations and make clear the United States and allies will no longer tolerate the Assad regime’s continued killing spree. Another goal could be to encourage further defections from the Syrian military.

Limited air strikes pose short-term risks. President Assad has already stated that the Syrian government would aggressively retaliate if it came under attack by international forces. For example, Assad could order either direct attacks—or indirect attacks through Hezbollah proxies—against Israel. The Syrian government could increase internal violence against the population in an effort to prevent further defections from the military and demonstrate resolve against international pressure. However, such retaliatory threats clearly underscore the dangers of allowing a terrorist-supporting regime to survive. Terrorism becomes a trump card that can be pulled out at anytime against anyone, foreign or domestic, who threatens the Assad regime.

*Option (4): Impose No-Fly/No-Go Zones in Syria*

The United States should also consider imposing no-fly or no-go zones to protect Syria’s population from further attacks by the Assad regime’s security forces. In re-

cent months, opposition groups within Syria have begun calling for an international intervention on humanitarian grounds.

Efforts to impose no-fly or no-go zones in Syria, of course, will benefit from strong international support. A no-fly zone will likely require air support from both NATO and Arab allies. And as Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution wrote, under a no-go zone—perhaps in Syrian territory adjacent to its borders with Jordan or Turkey—“[o]ne or two major parts of Syria might be protected in this way, at least reasonably well, by a combination of outside airpower and perhaps a limited number of boots on the ground.”

Syria's air defenses, however, will likely pose a more formidable obstacle than those encountered by the United States and NATO in Libya. Syria's Air Force is comprised of approximately 548 combat aircraft; air defenses including Russian-made Pantsir S1E and Buk-M2E air-defense systems; and other anti-aircraft weapons. The Syrian National Council recently published a map displaying the location of Syria's Soviet-designed surface-to-air missiles and air defenses.

Any such mission will likely require use of American military assets to defeat Syria's extensive air defenses and air force. While the 2007 Israeli air strike on Syria's secretly-built nuclear reactor demonstrated that those systems can be overcome, they will nonetheless need to be neutralized in order for large-scale air operations to be conducted. The United States presently has two aircraft carriers in the region that could assist with dismantling Syria's air defenses and supporting a no-fly or no-go zone: the USS *John C. Stennis* and the USS *George H.W. Bush*.

If NATO countries were to join in a no-fly or no-go zone effort, Incirlik air base in Turkey could be used to support NATO air forces (and American squadrons of F-15s, F-16s, and A-10s that are currently based in Europe) in a potential coalition mission, as it was used to support the Northern No-Fly Zone over Iraq during the 1990s. In addition, the British Royal Air Force's Akrotiri base in Cyprus could be utilized, as it was during the NATO-led Operation Unified Protector in Libya in 2011.

Establishment of a no-go zone would strongly benefit from diplomatic support from Middle Eastern governments, especially Turkey and Jordan. As part of a no-go zone, the United States, NATO allies, and regional partners could establish safe havens along the Jordanian and Turkish borders. Already, thousands of Syrian refugees have fled and sought refuge in Turkey. A portion of Syria's Idlib province, along the northern border with Turkey, could provide a defensible option. This would emulate U.N.-mandated safe havens implemented in Iraq following the Gulf War in 1991.

To protect against future attacks the zone would require continuous surveillance, credible retaliatory capabilities, and perhaps ground forces. This level of intervention would require long-term political will by coalition forces. The importance of international support in this effort cannot be understated, as the Assad regime has repeatedly shown its disdain for international boundaries. Syrian tanks and troops have repeatedly crossed the border into Lebanon to abduct and kill purported deserters. On October 6, 2011, Syrian troops—backed by tanks and armored vehicles—killed a farmer and shelled an abandoned factory in the Lebanese border town of Aarsal. Further news reports show repeated cross-border incursions by Syrian troops near Hnaider and Mouanse.

Syrian opposition members say implementation of no-fly or no-go zones in Syria could provide much-needed cover to opposition forces, thereby encouraging mass defections from the Syrian military. In a promising development, leading U.S. lawmakers are now discussing the possibility of no-fly and no-go zones in Syria. For example, Senator Joe Lieberman (ID-CT) first suggested looking at military options to protect Syrian civilians in March 2011, and returned to the idea of no-fly and no-go zones in October 2011. And during an October 23, 2011, speech before a World Economic Forum meeting in Jordan, Senator John McCain (R-AZ) discussed the possibility U.S. military involvement in Syria:

Now that military operations in Libya are ending, there will be renewed focus on what practical military operations might be considered to protect civilian lives in Syria. . . . The Assad regime should not consider that it can get away with mass murder. [Libyan dictator Muammar] Gadhafi made that mistake and it cost him everything.

However, the U.S. Ambassador to NATO, Ivo Daalder, told a reporter on November 7, 2011, that alliance members are not currently considering intervening militarily to stop the Assad regime: “There has been no planning, no thought, and no discussion about any intervention into Syria. It just isn't part of the envelope of thinking, among individual countries and certainly among the 28 [full NATO mem-

bers]. . . . If things change, things change. But as of today, that's where the reality stands.

CONCLUSION: TIME FOR THE UNITED STATES TO LEAD FROM THE FRONT ON SYRIA

Despite gridlock in the U.N. Security Council, the United States nonetheless has options for responding, individually and in concert with others, to the Assad regime's continuing assault on the Syrian people. After months of facing relentless violence, Syrian opposition groups are now increasingly demanding decisive international action to prevent further bloodshed. It's time for policymakers and lawmakers in the United States, Europe, Turkey, and other countries to act.

The Syrian people have shown astonishing fortitude in withstanding the regime's brutal security forces. The Assad regime is now trying to kill its way back to internal "stability." But such actions, of course, will do the opposite of what the regime intends: Syria will slide further toward civil war, thousands more will die, and the West and Turkey will eventually be forced to intervene—except Syria's ethnic and religious mosaic will likely by then be torn apart, making a humane post-Assad Syria much more difficult to build. Foreign intervention sooner offers Syria, the Middle East, and the West the likelihood of a much better outcome.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ANDREW J. TABLER, NEXT GENERATION FELLOW, PROGRAM ON ARAB POLITICS, WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY

Mr. Chairman, the situation on the ground in Syria continues to deteriorate. This week, the United Nations estimated that over 3,500 Syrians had been killed since anti-Assad-regime protests broke out on March 15. Thousands more have been arrested in what now can be described as the most brutal crackdown against civilians since Hafiz al-Asad's genocidal massacre in Hama 29 years ago.

Protests in Syria have largely remained peaceful in nature, with Assad-regime forces using live fire to disperse crowds. The hope of the protestors, as well as the Syrian opposition in exile, was that the protests, as in Egypt and Tunisia, would bring the masses onto the streets, garner clear support from the international community, and force the regime to choose between stepping aside or continuing to hold onto power through brute force. Despite large protest numbers and condemnation by Western and regional countries, Assad has apparently decided to fight it out until the end.

The regime's strategy is simple: deploy military and security units fully into restive areas around Der'a, Hama, Deir Ezzor, Idlib, and Homs; use live fire to scare those "on the fence" from taking the protests into the central squares of Damascus and Aleppo; rely on vetoes of U.N. Security Council resolutions by Russia and China; point to statements by Western and regional countries that a military solution is "off the table"; wear down the protestors so they return home; and launch a "reform" initiative that the regime can pay lip service to.

The gambit has worked thus far. The protestors continue to come out in the streets daily, and intensively on Fridays, to demand the fall of the Assad regime. But it is hard for them to see a light at the end of this bloody tunnel. Frustrated, protestors are now calling for international support via a no-fly zone or a buffer zone along Syria's borders where those opposing the regime could seek safe haven, etc. But with each announcement that such schemes are not in the making, protestors face an increasingly grim future.

Increasing numbers in the Syrian opposition are seeking to take matters into their own hands. Defectors from the Syrian military—who fled their posts rather than obey orders to fire on protestors—are aligning themselves with the "Free Syrian Army"—an armed group whose leadership is based in Turkey with active operations in and around Homs, Idlib, and other Syrian locales. Added to this are two other types of armed groups: unidentified Salafist elements and certain criminal gangs whose members originate in Syria's brisk smuggling trade. While all three groups continue to be well outgunned by the security forces, many Syrians see the activities of such groups, absent international action of some type, as the only way to ultimately displace the regime.

Until now, U.S. policymakers have supported Syria's peaceful protest movement, with Ambassador Robert Ford's visits to besieged cities such as Hama spotlighting the regime's human rights abuses. The Embassy has also met with Syrians on the ground to better gauge the direction of the conflict. This effort has been augmented by a robust sanctions regime. Following President Obama's announcement last August that President Assad must "step aside," Washington enacted the remaining parts of the 2004 Syrian Accountability Act, broadened the scope of Treasury Department designations of regime officials and associates, and announced a ban on

Syrian oil sales. The administration also successfully enlisted the support of the European Union countries to also call for Asad's departure and adopt similar measures.

With the regime using brute force to maintain its grip on power, and Syrians increasingly pursuing parallel tracks of both peaceful and armed resistance to the Asad regime, the United States now needs to develop a concerted plan to prepare for all contingencies and bring about the demise of the Asad regime. The longer the regime holds on, the bloodier and more sectarian the conflict is likely to become and spread to neighboring countries.

This plan should include the following action items:

- Form a Syria contact group: Until now, the Obama administration has been careful not to "get out ahead" of the Syrian protest movement or regional allies, who are well poised to exact pressure on the Asad regime. In the face of the Asad regime's failure to implement the recent Arab League initiative, the Obama administration should formally push for the formation of a Syria contact group that would shepherd concerted multilateral pressure—a method that historically worked best with Damascus—and develop a strategy for ending the Asad regime.
- Develop a strategy for peeling away Asad regime supporters: The Asad regime is a minority Alawite-dominated group whose core consists of similar heterodox Shia offshoots (Alawites, Druze, and Ismailies) who make up the command of the military and security services. But the regime's stability also relies on other communities with extensive familial and trade ties to Western countries, most notably Christians and Sunni businessmen. A plan to use targeted U.S., EU, and Turkish sanctions against the regime's most egregious supporters will, if used at key political junctures, substantially weaken the Asad regime's grip on power.
- Help the Syrian opposition plan ahead: The fear generated by the regime crackdown, petty differences among opposition figures, as well as over 40 years of authoritarian rule have hobbled the Syrian opposition's ability to plan. It is unrealistic to expect or require the Syrian opposition to come up with civil resistance strategy like that used by opposition protestors in Belgrade or Cairo to bring down regimes there. Rather, the United States should assist the Syrian opposition in developing a civil resistance strategy that broadens the protests to include tactics such as boycotts and general strikes. This will maximize the political power of the peaceful protest movement.
- Push for Human Rights monitors: The Asad regime literally wants to bury its human rights violations. The United States should facilitate, along with like-minded diplomats from allied countries, the deployment of human rights monitors, including people from Arab countries and Turkey, to keep the Asad regime's crackdown in the spotlight.
- Prepare for a militarization of the conflict: With Security Council action blocked by Russia and China and increased fighting by defectors around Homs and elsewhere, the chances for sectarian war are increasing. Regional actors (individuals and states), seeing a moral and strategic imperative, will likely be drawn into what could be a proxy struggle. To this end, the United States will need to explore with its allies the possibility of the creation of "no-fly", "no-go", or "buffer" zones as ways to contain the conflict and help garner support for the Syrian opposition.
- Push for Security Council action: The failure of last week's Arab League initiative to end the violence has opened the door for the United States and the Europeans to return to the Security Council for a resolution on Syria. While Russia and China have vetoed past measures, they will find it increasingly hard to do so as Arab efforts to negotiate a soft landing to the crisis fail. Security Council resolutions will serve as the basis for maximizing multilateral pressure, especially comprehensive sanctions and possible future use of force.

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PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARIA MCFARLAND, DEPUTY WASHINGTON DIRECTOR,  
HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Risch, and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on U.S. policy and the human rights crisis in Syria.

Since largely peaceful protests in Syria began on March 18, 2011, the Syrian security forces, under the command of President Bashar al-Assad, have been engaged in a relentless crackdown. According to the United Nations, more than 3,500 people,

largely civilians, have been killed, while tens of thousands more have been arrested, detained, forcibly disappeared, and tortured.

The government has also blocked access for most international human rights monitors and foreign journalists, and has imposed a tight information blockade. Human Rights Watch conducted interviews with hundreds of residents who have escaped to neighboring countries and spoke to many witnesses still inside Syria. We have documented systematic, widespread, and gross violations of human rights by the Syrian Government, which may amount to crimes against humanity.

Syria has blatantly flouted its commitments, under a recent Arab League-sponsored deal, to cease the violence, withdraw all troops from cities and towns, and allow access to journalists and Arab League monitors. Due to ongoing restrictions on independent monitors, Human Rights Watch has had difficulty verifying specific information on the latest spate of killings. But it is clear that the last week has seen an intensification of the violence, with reports of mounting deaths as part of a renewed government crackdown, particularly on the city of Homs.

Predictably, the Syrian Government has consistently denied the abuses. Syrian officials accuse “terrorist groups” or “armed gangs” of causing the violence. They inconsistently and vaguely claim that the armed gangs are responsible for the deaths of protesters, or that the armed gangs have attacked security forces, leading the security forces at times to kill residents by mistake.

Human Rights Watch research indicates that the protests have been overwhelmingly peaceful. We have documented a few instances in which civilians and armed defectors used force, including deadly violence against security forces. But while these incidents should be fully investigated, they can in no way justify the systematic violence of the Syrian security forces against their own people.

The decision of some protesters and defectors to arm themselves and fight back, shooting at security forces, shows that the strategy adopted by Syria’s authorities has dangerously provoked escalation in the level of violence, and highlights the need for an immediate cessation of lethal force against peaceful protests lest the country slip into bloodier conflict. The protests themselves were sparked partly by the developments in Tunisia and Egypt. But they are mostly a local response to four decades of government repression, by a population that could no longer tolerate the heavy hand of Syria’s security services. Despite the government’s ongoing killings and torture, the protests have continued to escalate throughout the country, and they are unlikely to go away anytime soon.

That means that the international community, including the United States, faces the difficult challenge of bringing pressure to bear on the government of Assad to stop the abuses and ensure that civilians are protected.

So far, the U.S. response has been largely positive and helpful. In public statements, President Obama has condemned the Syrian Government’s brutality and clearly expressed support for “a transfer of power that is responsive to the Syrian people,” most recently in his September 21, 2011, speech before the U.N. General Assembly.

The United States has also taken direct action. The Treasury Department has imposed targeted sanctions on senior Syrian officials, including Syria’s Foreign Minister, which ban Americans from doing business with these individuals and block any assets they may have in this country. The United States has also imposed sanctions on Syria’s oil sector, banning the importation of petroleum products from Syria.

Ambassador Robert Ford’s performance within Syria has also been very helpful, and sets an example for how U.S. Ambassadors should conduct themselves in repressive societies: speaking out publicly, engaging with civil society and opposition groups, and personally traveling to areas affected by the crackdown to show solidarity with Syrians who are asking for their human rights. We urge Congress to ask why the State Department does not encourage its Ambassadors to other comparable countries to adopt a similar approach.

#### INTERNATIONAL ACTION ON SYRIA

##### *U.N. Human Rights Council Resolutions*

Internationally, the United States has played an important role in pressing for action, including by sponsoring a special session on Syria at the U.N. Human Rights Council (HRC) in April, which called on the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to conduct a mission to investigate events in Syria. While OHCHR was not granted access to Syria, it was able to release a report in August, finding “a pattern of human rights violations that constitutes widespread or systematic attacks against the civilian population, which may amount to crimes against humanity.”

Also during the August session of the Human Rights Council, the United States backed a European Union-sponsored resolution on Syria that unequivocally condemns the Syrian Government abuses and calls for them to end. The resolution also established a Commission of Inquiry (Col) charged with investigating the abuses, identifying those responsible, and reporting back to the HRC. The Col report will also be transmitted to the U.N. General Assembly. This resolution was an important political signal, as it received a much broader support at the HRC than the April resolution. Only four states voted against the resolution (Ecuador, China, Russia, and Cuba), while a broad majority of 33 HRC members voted in favor of it.

The Commission of Inquiry, which has received no cooperation from Syria so far, is required to publish its report by the end of November 2011 and to update it in March 2012.

#### *Veto at U.N. Security Council*

Unfortunately, other governments have succeeded in blocking effective action at the U.N. Security Council.

On August 18, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillai asked the Security Council to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court for the investigation of alleged atrocities against antigovernment protestors. Just before Pillai's deposition, U.S. President Barack Obama and the European Union had recommended sanctions and called on Assad to step down.

But despite these reports and statements, on October 4, after 7 months of near complete inaction, Russia and China vetoed a Security Council resolution calling on Syria to end the violence against its citizens.

India, Brazil, and South Africa abstained from the vote, invoking concerns that the condemnatory resolution might lead to the imposition of sanctions (and expressing concern over NATO action in Libya, which they viewed as exceeding its mandate), while claiming to be deeply concerned about the plight of the Syrian people. These three countries have so far opted for a softer approach on Syria: in August, they sent a delegation to Syria with the aim of encouraging the Syrian Government to exercise restraint and to initiate talks with the opposition. In later public statements they said they had called for an end to the violence and respect for human rights.

#### *Arab League Initiative*

Yet more recently the League of Arab States has taken action. An Arab League delegation led by Qatar and made up of the Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Oman, Algeria, and Sudan as well as Nabil el-Araby, the league's secretary general, visited Syria in October. Russia expressed support for the initiative.

On November 2, the Arab League announced that it had reached a deal with the Syrian Government that required Syria to halt all acts of violence and protect Syrian citizens, release all those detained in connection with the protests, remove security forces from cities and residential neighborhoods, and grant field access to organizations of the Arab League and to the international media to monitor the situation.

If Syria had respected the deal, this would have represented an important step forward. But after reportedly releasing about 500 detainees on the occasion of the holiday of Eid al-Adha, the Syrian Government has continued its crackdown. According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, more than 60 people are reported to have been killed by military and security forces since Syria signed the Arab League deal. These include at least 19 on the Sunday that marked Eid al-Adha.

#### NEXT STEPS

The Arab League's response during an emergency meeting this Saturday to Syria's failure to fulfill the terms of its deal may be an important turning point. Depending on the position they take, it is possible that not only the Arab League states but also countries like India, Brazil, and South Africa, could be persuaded to support stronger measures on Syria. Given Russia's support for the Arab League initiative, it too, should support an escalation of international pressure on Syria.

Human Rights Watch has called upon the General Assembly to take action where the Security Council has failed to do so. Resolution 377A of the U.N. General Assembly states that "if the Security Council, because of lack of unanimity of the permanent members, fails to exercise its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security [...], the General Assembly shall consider the matter immediately." We have urged the General Assembly to also ask the U.N. Secretary General to name a special envoy for Syria, as well as refer the upcoming

report of the Commission of Inquiry back to the U.N. Security Council for further consideration.

Aside from action at the United Nations, we have successfully urged the European Union, to impose additional sanctions, including by freezing the assets of the Syrian National Oil Company, Syrian National Gas Company, and the Central Bank of Syria until the Syrian Government ends gross human rights abuses against its citizens.<sup>1</sup> The EU has also frozen the assets of 35 Syrian officials and four entities in response to Syria's widespread human rights abuses. The EU imposed similar assets freezes against the Libyan oil sector and central bank in March.

It may be that no amount of international pressure will have an immediate effect. But over time, we believe that coordinated international sanctions, including those that target specific individuals, can weaken support for the government's abuses among key political groups.

#### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a number of concrete measures that the international community, including the United States, can take to protect civilians in Syria. We urge the United States to work with its allies, particularly its allies in the Arab world, to achieve the following goals:

- **Granting Unhindered Access to Independent Observers:** As reporting on Syria gets more difficult and countries interpret events on the ground very differently, there is a need for independent observers on the ground who can document and publicize what is happening. The U.S. government and its allies should push the Syrian Government to allow the Commission of Inquiry appointed by the Human Rights Council to have access to the country and ensure full cooperation from the Syrian authorities in conducting its investigations.
- **Deployment of Monitors:** Another step that could make a difference on the ground immediately is the deployment of human rights monitors in Syria. An independent monitoring presence could help clarify the situation on the ground, ensure rapid responses to violations reports, and provide reliable reporting concerning ongoing violations, as well as addressing such issues as the extent of use of force by protesters. In addition, a monitoring presence in hotspots within Syria could lead the security forces to use greater restraint and reduce the level of violations itself.
- **Timetable for Implementing Reforms:** President Assad's promises of reform are not credible as long as security forces are shooting at protesters and detaining activists. The international community needs to set a timetable for reforms and hold the Syrian authorities accountable for respecting the timetable. Some reforms should be immediate, such as the release of all detainees held merely for peaceful protest or political activity, and an accounting for all those detained and being held incommunicado.
- **Preventing Syria from Obtaining Surveillance Technologies:** Recent reports indicate that Syria is in the process of constructing an elaborate surveillance network to track the communications and activities of its citizens.<sup>2</sup> To set up the system, it needs to obtain specific surveillance technologies from a number of Western countries, including the United States. These countries should be actively looking for ways to discourage or prevent the sale of such technologies to Syria. The U.S. Congress should ensure that existing U.S. sanctions and export controls are adequate to address this situation, and urge other countries, particularly in the European Union, to adopt similar restrictions on Syria. Going forward, the U.S. Congress should examine U.S. export control laws and

<sup>1</sup> Under Syrian law the government is the major shareholder in the oil and gas sector through its ownership of the Syrian National Gas and Syrian National Oil companies. These two companies have a 50 percent share in every oil and gas project in Syria. In a March 2010 report, the International Monetary Fund estimated that the Syrian Government earns approximately €2.1 billion from oil and gas revenues per year. Most of Syria's oil and gas is used domestically, but it exports about 150,000 barrels per day, and around 95 percent of that goes to Europe, primarily to Italy, the Netherlands, France, and Germany. We have urged the EU to conduct regular reviews of the impact of sanctions to assess any potential humanitarian impact, and to tie the lifting of the sanctions to measures that demonstrate a change of policy by the government, such as an end to the use of excessive and lethal force against peaceful demonstrators, releasing all detainees held merely for participating in peaceful protests or for criticizing the Syrian authorities, and full cooperation with the fact-finding mission mandated by the United Nations Human Rights Council or other international mechanisms tasked with investigating alleged human rights violations.

<sup>2</sup> See "Syria Crackdown Gets Italy Firm's Aid with U.S.-Europe Spy Gear," Bloomberg News, November 3, 2011 (available at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-11-03/syria-crackdown-gets-italy-firm-s-aid-with-u-s-europe-spy-gear.html>).

regulations to ensure that surveillance and other technology cannot be sold to governments likely to use it against their citizens or to further repression.

Finally, we urge the U.S. Government to support U.N. General Assembly action on Syria, including the establishment of a U.N. Special Envoy on Syria and support referral of the Col report to the U.N. Security Council for further action. We also hope the United States will provide meaningful and public support for the work of the Human Rights Council, its Commission of Inquiry, and the OHCHR in Syria, and undertake to follow up on reports and recommendations emanating from the U.N. human rights organs.

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RESPONSE OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE JEFFREY D. FELTMAN TO QUESTION  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR RICHARD J. DURBIN

*Question.* There have been several recent disturbing reports that U.S. manufactured technology is, despite sanctions, winding up in the hands of the Assad regime in Syria where it is being used as an instrument of suppression, preventing the Syrian people from communicating with one another and with the outside world. Two companies specifically cited in a November 14 Bloomberg article are Net App, Inc. and Blue Coat Systems, Inc. both based in Sunnyvale, CA.

- Given that we have sanctions in place and that there has never been a more critical moment in history for supporting opposition voices in Syria, what more can we do to prevent this?
- What evidence is there to indicate Net App and Blue Coat products are, indeed, being used in Syria?
- How will company officials be held accountable if: (a) it's confirmed that their products are not being used in Syria and (b) that they could have reasonably assumed that this was the final destination for the products sold to a third party?

Background: Bloomberg reported on November 14 that the Italian company Area SpA has been installing a wide-reaching Internet surveillance system (Asfador) for the Syrians in a \$17.9 million deal, using equipment from the U.S. company NetApp Inc., France's Qosmos SA and Germany's Utimaco Safeware AG.

Asfador, per Bloomberg, includes "the capability to intercept, scan, and catalog virtually all e-mail flowing through Syria . . . The software and hardware for archiving e-mail came from NetApp, a Sunnyvale, California-based company with a market value of about \$15 billion and more than 10,000 employees." According to Bloomberg, "The story also indicates that "at least some NetApp employees probably knew who the end-user was." NetApp has received U.S. Government contracts worth more than \$111 million since 2001, including one on September 15. There are also reports that technology made by another Sunnyvale-based company, Blue Coat Systems Inc., is being used by Syria to censor the Internet. <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2011-11-14/companies-that-aid-syria-crackdown-deserve-sanctions-slap-view.html>.

*Answer.* The Department of State is both aware of and concerned about recent reports regarding the use of U.S. technology by repressive regimes in general, and Syria in particular, to target human rights activists and dissidents. We take these reports very seriously. At this time, the U. S. Department of State has no further evidence that Net App or Blue Coat Systems' products are being used in Syria beyond what has been publically disclosed by the respective companies.

The United States has maintained stringent controls on exports and reexports to Syria since the implementation of the Syrian Accountability Act in 2004. With very narrow exceptions, exports and reexports of items subject to the Export Administration Regulations require a license issued by the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry & Security (BIS). Both U.S. and foreign companies that violate U.S. export controls may be subject to civil and criminal penalties. In addition to controls on exports, the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control maintains additional controls on the export and reexport to Syria by U.S. Persons of goods and services. Our export control policies are designed to assist ordinary citizens who are exercising their fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly and association, while preventing exports of goods and services that repressive regimes can use against their people.