

**A CRISIS MISMANAGED:
OBAMA'S FAILED SYRIA POLICY**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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A CRISIS MISMANAGED: OBAMA'S FAILED SYRIA POLICY

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 5, 2013

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:08 a.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. The subcommittee will come to order.

Before I give my remarks, I wanted to point out that Mr. Connolly was kind enough to point out that the title of our hearing was a little prejudgmental. So we will be careful with the prejudgmental titles of hearings, although my statement will not follow that caveat.

After recognizing myself and Ranking Member Deutch for 5 minutes each for our opening statements, we will then recognize other members seeking recognition for 1 minute each. We will hear from our witnesses.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

And without objection, all of your written statements will be made a part of the record and members may have 5 days to insert statements or questions for the record, subject to the length limitation in the rules. And the Chair now recognizes herself for 5 minutes.

It has been over 2 years since the popular uprising sparked up across Syria against al-Assad and his murderous regime. Amidst the backdrop of the Arab Spring, thousands of Syrians demonstrated against Assad, calling for the despotic ruler to step down, to release political prisoners, and institute democratic reforms. These protesters were met swiftly with the harsh hand of Assad as he unleashed his police who doled out brutal beatings upon the demonstrators resulting in many deaths.

Now as we enter the third year of this conflict, the Assad regime has been responsible for the murder of over 80,000 Syrians, and over 1.5 million people have fled seeking refuge in other countries. And this administration had an opportunity to support the demonstrators from the beginning who took to the streets demanding that Assad step down.

Yet just like it failed to voice a full throated support for the demonstrators in Iran after the 2009 elections, it was deafeningly silent and failed to advance the cause for democratic reform. Instead of

supporting the popular uprisings from the onset and immediately calling for Assad to step down, President Obama waited 5 months to publicly call for his removal. The delayed response also allowed for extremist groups and al-Qaeda affiliates to move in to coopt the movement, setting up the bloody conflict that we see every day.

There are tens of thousands dead, millions who have been displaced, and the conflict continues to spiral out of control. It has placed an incredible burden on our allies in the region, like Jordan, which takes in thousands of Syrian refugees daily, and rightfully fears what might come next should the violence spill over into its own area.

But I understand that there are no perfect solutions for this crisis. Each option before us has its risks, and I firmly believe that what we need is a political solution in Syria. We cannot shoot our way out of this mess. We need to work with our allies in the region who fear the repercussions of a protracted conflict in Syria.

And we need to address the serious issue of Moscow continuing to arm the regime. An influx of Russian arms into Syria has escalated this battle and has helped to prop up Assad. If Moscow does not cease arming the regime, the United States should re-evaluate its relationship with Russia.

Together with my colleague Brad Sherman, I introduced H.R. 893, the Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Accountability Act, that would address this issue head on. I have always and will continue to believe that we should not arm the rebels. There is just no way of guaranteeing that they will remain loyal to the United States and would be willing to promote democratic principles and respect human rights post-Assad. The opposition is too fractured, too convoluted to be able to ensure that the arms don't eventually end up in the wrong hands that may one day turn these weapons against us or our allies, like Israel.

What we should be focusing on is breaking the Iran-Hezbollah-Assad link because if Assad falls today, I fear what will happen tomorrow: Syria is the linchpin that holds Iran's strategic influence into the greater Middle East. Should Assad fall, Iran and Hezbollah might quickly move to fill the power vacuum. And should Iran and Hezbollah get ahold of Syria's chemical weapons, not only would this cause greater tensions in the region and seriously endanger our friend and ally Israel, but it could spark an even greater conflict.

The President has repeatedly warned that the utilization or the moving around of chemical weapons in Syria would change his calculus, and it is a red line that should not be passed. Reports suggest that chemical weapons have been used on a handful of occasions, yet the United States has balked at calling it so. In doing so, it sent the message, not just to Assad but to the opposition and to other countries in the region, such as Iran, Egypt, and North Korea, who seek to test our will, that we will not indeed hold our line in the sand.

And with that, I yield for his opening statement to Mr. Deutch, my Florida colleague.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen for holding today's hearing. Syria continues to be one of the most pressing issues before us. I thank our witnesses as well for appearing here today.

I hope today will be a productive discussion on how we can move U.S. policy toward Syria forward and, notwithstanding the title of the hearing, that it does not devolve into 2 hours of political grandstanding.

Let me be clear from the outset, there are no easy answers, and there have been miscalculations in the world's approach thus far. But there are no easy or painless solutions. It should of course be the policy of the United States to pursue a negotiated settlement. Yet even with the seeming endorsement of the Russians, peace talks are proving a long way from reality.

It has now been nearly 27 months since the uprising in Syria began. Over 80,000 lives have been lost. There are 1.6 million refugees officially registered with the U.N., with that number likely substantially higher. There are 4 million internally displaced people. These staggering numbers will only rise more quickly as this conflict worsens. We have talked about the effects of potential spillover in the region, which unfortunately is becoming a reality. There were attacks from Syria on Hezbollah strongholds in Lebanon last week and mortars fired in the Golan Heights.

Iran has fully dug in, sending every kind of support imaginable to Assad. We cannot overlook the seriousness of Syria's impact on the entire Middle East. As I said back in March, when the full committee held a hearing on Syria, the decisions we have to make are difficult; but as I said then, just because they are difficult doesn't mean that we shouldn't be making them. None of us want to see the United States embroiled in another conflict. But I do believe that there are ways the United States can be involved in Syria without putting American soldiers' lives at risk.

For those that argue a more serious strategic U.S. response is needed, one that includes providing lethal assistance to opposition groups, I would say that the fractured coalition we saw last week in Istanbul should warn us that the opposition lacks organization and coherent leadership. Our assistance should be used as a tool to encourage the opposition leadership to get its act together.

But beyond the discussions of whether to arm, who to arm and how to do it, there are real steps that we can take now to address the humanitarian crisis. The United States has pledged \$510 million of humanitarian assistance to those affected by the violence in Syria, committed to providing \$250 million in transition support to the Syrian opposition council. We continue to talk about creating a humanitarian corridor, which would have a significant impact on our ability to provide aid to those in need. There are real steps we can take to help our allies, who are sheltering hundreds of thousands of refugees, including pushing international donors to fulfill their pledges to countries in need.

And in the immediate term, there are very real steps we could take to let our friends in the region know that we will not tolerate efforts to undermine U.S. interests in Syria. Our strategic relationship with our allies in the Gulf is crucial to ensuring their security and regional stability. Reports yesterday indicate the United States will send a Patriot missile battery and F-16 fighters to Jordan for a drill and may keep them there. We have already stationed a patriot battery in southern Turkey.

There must be an understanding that it is in all of our interests to ensure that we are supporting the opposition groups that share our mutual security goals. I would urge the administration to use every bit of leverage with Turkey and Qatar to prevent the arming of extremist groups and to work together with Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE to identify and support moderate opposition forces.

Should the U.S. and Western allies choose to move ahead with the no-fly zone, the Arab League must provide support for these efforts. And Russia cannot obstruct these efforts or for that matter any other efforts to end Assad's reign of terror. Madam Chairman, I appreciate you calling this hearing today because I agree that the U.S. policy toward Syria has not yet yielded an end to the conflict, but I would caution that there is no magic bullet, there is no quick fix. Our focus now must be on deciding the best course of action to prevent the continued slaughter of the Syrian people, to ensure our own national security, and to prevent the conflict from destabilizing the region.

And I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much for an excellent opening statement.

I will now recognize members for 1 minute opening statements, starting with Mr. Steve Chabot of Ohio, who is the chairman of our Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for calling this important and timely hearing this morning.

Let's face it, the situation continues to deteriorate in Syria. The list of innocent victims slaughtered by the Assad regime grows daily. And the Obama administration's Syria policy continues to remain murky at best.

I look forward to hearing from our excellent panel of witnesses here this morning. And I hope they can address a couple of issues of particular concern to me. First, the role of Hezbollah and its future in a post-Assad era: Will it remain the powerful force that it is today? And will its role in neighboring Lebanon, for example, be affected? And how would the fall of Assad affect the future role of Iran in the region?

I am also concerned about how the growing turmoil in the region might affect the stability of Jordan. It is reported that nearly 1/2 million Syrian refugees have registered in Jordan to date, that one camp alone currently has more than 140,000 people.

So I look forward to hearing from our panel and hope that our witnesses today can address some of these important issues. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Chabot.

Now we will hear from Mr. Connolly from Virginia.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you so much, Madam Chairman.

And thank you for your sensitivity on the title of this hearing because it presupposes there is something for us to manage. And I would contend that there are no easy choices for the United States in Syria. And to suggest otherwise is itself misleading. I do think we have four very important concerns, sets of concerns. One is, who

do we support? And you have very ably laid out some of the difficulties in that question yourself, Madam Chairman.

Secondly our concern of the spread of the conflict regionally. It is already sucking in Hezbollah from Lebanon, Iran, and of concern obviously to Turkey in terms of cross-border shelling.

Thirdly, there is Russia's role in blatantly arming the Assad regime. And that has to be a concern in our bilateral relationship and the future of it.

And finally, there is the arsenal of chemical weapons and their possible utilization and deployment as the conflict matures. Those are legitimate concerns I hope we will address in today's hearing.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Connolly.

Mr. Kinzinger of Illinois recognized.

Mr. KINZINGER. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I am just disappointed in everything that is going on. I mean, I think if you talk to our allies, if you look around the world, people are just asking, what is the United States' position? What are you doing?

I am a big believer that when the America retreats from the world, chaos ensues. And so when we see America ceding its role of leadership around the globe, we see what is occurring in the Middle East, which is nobody knows where anybody is at; nobody knows where the United States stands at. And I think this is an extension of something that was coined a little bit ago, a year or 2 ago, the "lead from behind" strategy, which to me is a shocking secession of American leadership around the globe.

I am very concerned with what is going on in Syria. But I am more concerned with the perception that the United States has given up on the Middle East and that the United States is looking for the easy way out. So I look forward to the panel and your discussion and your insight into what is going on.

I yield back the rest of my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, sir.

Mr. Schneider of Illinois is recognized.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Madam Chairman, for the time.

Thank you to the witnesses.

The current conflict in Syria has created an untenable situation which threatens the existence of a future, a unified state, while also compounding the concerns over how this civil war will ultimately be resolved. Many have speculated over the future of Syria and its viability moving forward as an intact entity.

Our national strategy must embrace both certain core principles in evaluating additional engagement in Syria.

First, I believe we have to identify, isolate, and secure the weapons of mass destruction, chemical and biological.

Second, I think we have to diligently act to make sure that we support our allies in the region—Jordan, Turkey, Israel, the Gulf States—to make sure that the situation in Syria doesn't bring them down.

And third, I think we have to seek a viable State with a functional government that maintains the geographical continuity of Syria and avoids the class of the State which would threaten our allies in the region.

These core principles provide a template for evaluating the potential path forward in Syria. I look forward to hearing from the witnesses on their perspective in addressing these critical concerns.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Next, we will hear from Dr. Yoho, my Florida colleague.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Good morning. I look forward to hearing your testimonies today. And I look forward to hearing feedback from you guys and thinking outside of the box of how we can fix this situation or help to fix this situation and what role the United States Government has in this so that we don't repeat the errors of our foreign policies over the last 30 years. And so I look forward to hearing that. Thank you.

I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Kennedy of Massachusetts is recognized.

Mr. KENNEDY. Thank you, Madam Chair, for calling this hearing. I want to thank the ranking member as well and thank our panelists, our witnesses for coming in and look forward to your testimony. I, too, like all of the members have indicated, am very concerned over recent developments, continued support and increasing support for the Assad regime, Russia's recent sale of advanced weapons, and Hezbollah's flood of fighters into the region as well. I think that brings two large questions in terms of the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons and the prospects for wider war in the region.

I know that the United States and Secretary Kerry I believe has done an admirable job trying to bring regional powers to one table. That is going to come in the coming days. And I would be eager to hear about your opinion about prospects for any sort of negotiations that are going to take place in Geneva, and what are going to be the ramifications of that depending on how fruitful those discussions are. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Messer of Indiana is recognized.

Mr. MESSER. Thank you, Madam Chairman, for this opportunity.

I want to thank both you and the ranking member for your foresight in having this hearing. I think the American people see the challenges in Syria as a mess with no clear answers. And probably the most cogent analysis that I have heard of what is happened there was a take on the famous Las Vegas line that what happens in Syria won't stay in Syria. That much is clear. And I look forward to your insights today in helping us figure out what the appropriate policy is for our Nation. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Congresswoman Meng of New York.

Ms. MENG. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, and thank you Mr. Ranking Member for holding this important hearing.

I look forward to hearing from our panelists today about possible new avenues for addressing this conflict. In particular, I would like to explore how renewed efforts in Europe to curtail Hezbollah financing might affect the organization. This presents an interesting opportunity, as Hezbollah will be stretching itself thin both politically and financially by engaging in Syria.

And I would also like to explore our relationship with the Kurds in the Syrian context. The Kurds are organized, well financed, and relatively pro-American. In northeast Syria, they are maintaining control of their territory and battling al-Nusra.

The Kurds are not a panacea to the Syrian problem, but I wonder whether we could be doing more with them, particularly in light of recently improved Turkish and Kurdish relations. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, ma'am.

Mr. Higgins of New York is recognized.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I just also want to caution people not to fall into the trap of believing that there are absolutes here, and everything is black and white. There is a lot of gray. And it is not a question of beating the Assad regime and handing it over to the good guys. They may be a little bit better. They may be a lot worse. And this is the problem that we run into. The opposition is made up of at least eight different groups. In many of the transitions that have occurred there, you have had three different leaders of the opposition in the past 4 weeks alone.

Syria is going to have to figure this out. You know, all nation building, unfortunately, in human history requires some degree of civil war. During the American Civil War, in 1860, the population of America was 34 million people, and there were over 600,000 deaths. In Syria, a nation of 24 million people, you have 100,000 deaths. Not that we want to tolerate that, but we can't get involved in every civil war in the Middle East. That would be number three.

And the lack of an American presence is not radicalizing Syria. Syria is radicalized. And keep in mind, in Iraq, we went in there, took out Saddam Hussein, dissolved the Army and the Ba'ath party, and then, after that, Iraq became radicalized. So oftentimes, the hard reality of this is that these nations have to figure this out. We can't always nation build in the Middle East. We have to build the middle class right here in America.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Cicilline of Rhode Island.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen and Ranking Member Deutch for holding today's hearing on this important conflict and humanitarian crisis in Syria.

I thank the witnesses for being here and look forward to your testimony.

The question before our subcommittee today is how and whether the United States should involve itself in the ongoing civil war in Syria, both our own and with our partners in the region and around the world. And it is a very complicated question. But one thing is clear, I believe the global community must respond.

In the last 2 years, as he has tried to maintain his tenuous grip on power, President Bashar al-Assad and his government have brutally and indiscriminately attacked rebel forces and civilians within Syria. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have been forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries or have been displaced internally. By deploying air and artillery assaults in residential areas, Bashar al-Assad has brutally targeted and murdered thousands of civilians. I hope we will focus today on our response to the ongoing sit-

uation in Syria that provides humanitarian aid, addresses what has become a serious refugee crisis in the region, incorporates a global comprehensive strategy to end the violence, and promotes stability in this important region in the world.

I look forward to hearing the perspectives of the witnesses that we have assembled here today to discuss this important topic.

I thank the chair, and I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

And seeing no further requests for time, the Chair is pleased to introduce our distinguished panelists.

First, we welcome Tony Badran, a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. He focuses on Lebanon, Syria, and Hezbollah as an expert on U.S. foreign policy toward Syria and nonstate actors and terrorist groups. Mr. Badran has written extensively on Hezbollah and has testified before Congress and the European Parliament.

Welcome, Tony.

Next, we welcome Ms. Danielle Pletka, the vice president for foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute. Prior to this, she served for 10 years as a senior professional staff member for the Near East and South Asia Subcommittee on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Ms. Pletka has written extensively on the Middle East, democracy, and terrorism and has testified before our committee on these issues several times.

Welcome back, Danielle.

Third, Dr. Jon Alterman is the director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Prior to this, he served as a member of the policy planning staff at the Department of State and as a Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. In addition to his policy work, he has had a long career in academia, having taught at Johns Hopkins University, George Washington University, and Harvard.

Thank you very much.

And we will begin with you, Mr. Badran.

**STATEMENT OF MR. TONY BADRAN, RESEARCH FELLOW,
FOUNDATION FOR DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES**

Mr. BADRAN. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman and Ranking Member Deutch and distinguished members of the committee.

I thank you again for inviting me here today to testify on today's very important hearing. As the United States has struggled to define its Syria policy over the past 2 years, the Syrian war has metastasized regrettably along very predictable lines. The debate in Washington about U.S. policy has been largely framed in terms of either staying out of the conflict or an Iraq style intervention.

Before we discuss specific tactics, I suggest that we should start by asking, what are our strategic goals in Syria? The primary problem with Washington's current policy is not that it has been too reluctant to get involved; it has been that it is reading the strategic map incorrectly.

As it stands today, Syria is effectively divided. The rebels are in control of much of the north and the east, with some regime pockets in those areas. And the regime meanwhile controls the coastal

mountains in the northwest, much of central city of Homs and most of the capital of Damascus.

Recently, the regime, with direct support from Iran and Hezbollah, launched a campaign to secure the corridor from Homs to Damascus and to recapture the strategic town of al-Qusayr on the Lebanese border. News this morning actually is that the town has fallen into their hands.

The plan is of consolidating the regime in a reduced but clearly defined enclave. And this is Assad's plan B in Syria, but it is also Iran's plan B in Syria. Iran has signaled very clearly that it considers the toppling of the Assad regime to be a red line that it will spare no expense to prevent from happening. Therefore, to safeguard its core interests, Iran seeks to ensure the regime's continuity in the reinforced canton, with access to the Mediterranean and territorial contiguity with Tehran subsidiary in Lebanon, Hezbollah.

This explains the battle for al-Qusayr as you can see on the map, the town lies across the border from Hezbollah's north stronghold in northeastern Lebanon. Securing al-Qusayr aims to protect the corridor along Lebanon's eastern border down to Damascus and also secures the land bridge from the Syrian ports on the Mediterranean as well as from the Damascus airport further south and to ensure supplies to Hezbollah-controlled territory in the Bekaa. This enclave is a vital island of influence for the IRGC on the Mediterranean, adjoined and flanked by Hezbollah and Lebanon.

In effect this is what the Assad regime today is, an IRGC protectorate. Assad is relying on the Iranians for funds, arms, hardware and personnel. Hezbollah is spearheading operations on various fronts. And other Iranian assets from the pro-Iranian-Iraqi militias are as well deployed in Damascus and elsewhere.

Iran views the battle for Syria in strategic terms. Unfortunately, current U.S. policy does not, and that is the problem. More than 2 years after the Syrian uprising, the U.S. policy remains unclear.

What is our primary interest in Syria? Do we want to see the Assad regime toppled or not? Washington's position is ambiguous. If the regime in Tehran is our principal foe—and I submit that it is—then U.S. policy should proceed from this basic starting point. We should begin by clearly and credibly defining the goal of U.S. policy to be the removal not just of Assad personally but of his regime. U.S. policy should explicitly state that the maintenance of the structures of Iranian influence in Syria is antithetical to U.S. interests.

Currently, the policy seems more focused on the faith of Assad himself but that misses the larger strategic context. Worse still, the perception in Damascus is that in contrast with Iran's commitment to the survival of the regime, the U.S. lacks such commitment and such strategic clarity.

The current U.S. posture is not cost-free, both on the moral and strategic level. Aside from the horrific toll in human life, the policy as it stands now is on course to preside over the division of Syria into an IRGC island in possession of chemical weapons and advanced Russian strategic weapons system in one part of the country and a patchwork of militias in the rest. The U.S. must devise

a twofold strategy: Prioritizing the threat to be first to break the Iranian archipelago of influence in the Mediterranean.

To deny the Iranian victory, the U.S. must target the avenues of Iranian support to the Syrian regime. That would mean striking the Damascus airport and various airfields in western Syria using standoff weapons, if necessary, to achieve these results.

In tandem with this measure, the U.S. should exercise leadership, bringing together allies that have been eager from the beginning for more robust action, and use their resources and their intelligence channels to the various rebel groups, using a two-pronged position approach. One on the border with Turkey in the north, using Turkey's excellent relations with some of the rebel groups fighting there, and a similar policy in Jordan in the south.

To conclude, openly stating that handing Iran a strategic defeat in Syria is a priority for the U.S. is where it must all start. Exercising credible U.S. leadership to rally already eager allies around that stated objective should follow and the rest will flow from there. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Badran follows:]

Congressional Testimony

Hearing Title:
A Crisis Mismanaged
Obama's Failed Syria Policy

Tony Badran
Research Fellow
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Hearing before the
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa

Washington, DC
June 5, 2013



1726 M Street NW • Suite 700 • Washington, DC 20036

Tony Badran

June 5, 2013

Madame Chairwoman, Ranking Member Deutch, and distinguished Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing.

As the Syrian uprising enters its third year, the terrible cost of the Assad's regime war against the people of Syria is by now well known. Over 80,000 Syrians are dead, more than 1.5 million are refugees outside Syria, with an even higher number internally displaced. As the United States has struggled to define its Syria policy over the past two years, the Syrian war has metastasized, regrettably along predictable lines.

For two years, the debate in Washington about US policy toward Syria has been largely framed in terms of either staying out of the conflict or an Iraq-style intervention. Before we discuss specific tactics – be it a No-Fly Zone or arming the rebels – I suggest that we should start by asking: what are our strategic goals? The question we need to ask is: are we reading the strategic map correctly? The primary problem with Washington's current policy is not that it has been too reluctant to get involved in Syria; it is that it has been reading the strategic map incorrectly.

Where We Are Today

As it stands today, Syria is effectively divided into several parts. The countryside in the north on the Turkish border and the east along the border with Iraq are in rebel hands, with important persisting pockets of regime presence in and near the major urban centers of those regions. A similar situation exists in the south, on the border with Jordan. A Kurdish majority area effectively controlled by the Syrian affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has also emerged in the northeast.

The regime, meanwhile, controls the coastal mountains in the northwest, much of the central city of Homs and most of the capital Damascus. Recently, the regime, with direct support from Iran and Hezbollah, has launched a campaign to secure the corridor from Homs to Damascus and to recapture the town of al-Qusayr in the Homs countryside near the border with Lebanon. It has also used its paramilitary forces to launch sectarian attacks on Sunni villages in and on the edges of the Alawite coastal mountains.

The regime is further pursuing the objective of securing the highway leading from Daraa in the south to Aleppo in the north, allowing freedom of movement for reinforcements and resupplies between the major cities in western Syria, and protecting against rebel assaults on Damascus from the north and south.

As for the other parts of the country, which have fallen outside its grip, the regime continues to rely on its air power and on ballistic missiles to deny the emergence of safe areas controlled by an alternative, opposition government.

Tony Badran

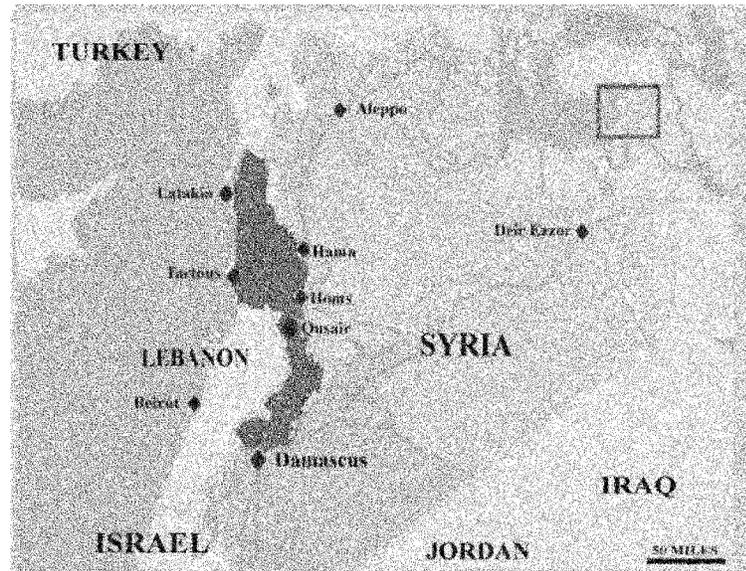
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This plan of consolidating the regime in a reduced but clearly defined canton represents Assad's Plan B in Syria. His Plan B is, of course, also Iran's. Tehran has signaled very clearly that it considers the toppling of the Assad regime to be a red line. It is an outcome for which it would spare no expense to prevent from happening. However, Assad's limited manpower constrains his ability to recapture and hold all the lost terrain in the north and east.

Therefore, to safeguard its core interest, Iran seeks to ensure the regime's continuity in a reinforced canton, bolstered by Russian weapons systems and stockpiles of chemical weapons, with access to the Mediterranean and territorial contiguity with Tehran's subsidiary in Lebanon, Hezbollah.

This explains the ongoing battle for al-Qusayr, across the border from Hezbollah's stronghold in Hermel, in northeastern Lebanon. Securing al-Qusayr aims to protect the corridor, along Lebanon's eastern border, down to Damascus. It also secures the land bridge from the Syrian ports on the coast and the Damascus airport into Hezbollah-controlled territory in the Bekaa.

Securing this canton is of strategic importance to the Iranians. It ensures the preservation of a vital island of influence for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) on the Mediterranean adjoined to, and flanked by, Hezbollah's fortress in Lebanon.



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In effect, that is what the Assad regime already is today: an IRGC protectorate. Assad is reliant on the Iranians for funds, arms, hardware (particularly surveillance drones) and personnel, including IRGC cadres and advisors.

Moreover, Hezbollah is spearheading operations on behalf of the regime on various critical fronts, from Aleppo to Hama, Homs and Damascus, all the way to Daraa. In April, before the assault to recapture al-Qusayr began, Hezbollah's secretary general, Hassan Nasrallah, traveled to Iran and met with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Quds Force commander, Qassem Soleimani. It is believed that during this trip, Nasrallah received the go ahead from Khamenei to throw Hezbollah's full military weight in Syria, "no matter the cost."¹

In addition, the Iranians have been training a large sectarian paramilitary force in Syria. Aside from perpetrating acts of ethnic cleansing, these paramilitaries supplement the limited manpower of the regime's regular forces. Similarly, Iran has created a militia led by Hezbollah cadres and manned by Shiites, mainly from pro-Iranian Iraqi groups like Kataeb Hezbollah and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq. This militia operates in Damascus and its surroundings, especially in the Sayyida Zaynab neighborhood, the location of a famous Shiite shrine.

In other words, Iran is leading the fight in Syria. The Iranians, therefore, view Syria in strategic terms, and are going "all in" to safeguard their power base there. Mehdi Taeb, the head of Khamenei's think tank, expressed the centrality of the battle for Syria in Iranian strategic thinking, describing it as territory under Iranian sovereignty. "Syria is the 35th district of Iran and it has greater strategic importance for Iran than Khuzestan" he said, referring to one of Iran's provinces. "[I]f we lose Syria we will not even be able to keep Tehran," he said.

Whereas Iran views the battle for Syria in strategic terms, current US policy, unfortunately, does not. Herein lies the problem. More than two years after the Syrian uprising, US policy remains unclear. What is our primary interest in Syria? Do we want to see the Assad regime toppled or not? Washington's position is ambiguous on these questions.

If the regime in Tehran is indeed our principal foe in the Middle East, and I would submit that it is, then US policy needs to proceed from this basic starting point. We should begin by clearly and credibly defining the goal of US policy to be the removal of not just Assad personally, but also his security regime, which has served as Iran's strategic partner for more than 30 years. Furthermore, since today the Assad regime is effectively an Iranian satrapy, US policy should explicitly state that the maintenance of the structures of Iranian influence in Syria is antithetical to US interests. Currently, the policy seems more focused on the fate of Assad himself, which misses this larger strategic context.

Worse still, the perception in Damascus today is that, in contrast with Iran's commitment to the survival of the regime, the US lacks both strategic clarity as well as the necessary resolve. In a meeting with a delegation of Lebanese supporters in April, Assad reportedly

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told his guests “The Americans have been pragmatic since the beginning of the crisis. They will not go all the way. In the end, they will go with the winner. And we have no other choice but to win.”²

Assad believes the US is edging closer to the position of Russia, which is pushing for a negotiated settlement that leaves open the possibility of a political role for him or some of his government.

This initiative came just as the Iranians made their push to recapture al-Qusayr and consolidate the regime’s enclave in the coastal mountains, Homs, and Damascus. In other words, with its insistence on a negotiated settlement and aversion to altering the military balance against Assad, the inadvertent impact of US policy is to allow the Iranians to consolidate their gains and preserve their core interests in Syria.

A Way Forward

Where do we go from here? Washington’s decision to stay on the sidelines for two years while pushing for negotiations with the regime, under Russian auspices, is itself a form of intervention that has, unfortunately, benefited the regime and its patrons and undercut our allies. In other words, the current US posture is not cost-free, both on the moral and strategic levels.

Aside from the horrific toll in human life and the massive flow of refugees, our policy, as it stands, is on course to preside over the division of Syria into an IRGC island in possession of chemical weapons and advanced Russian weapons systems in one part, and a patchwork of militias, some aligned with al-Qaeda, in the rest of the country, that continue to remain vulnerable to regime terror.

This means that the US must now devise a two-fold strategy based on sound threat prioritization. The top priority for the US in Syria should be to break the Iranian archipelago of influence in the eastern Mediterranean.

Seeing Iran emerge with its interests unharmed in Syria will be nothing short of a humiliating defeat for the US, with major geopolitical consequences on our position, and that of our allies, in the region. As one former senior US official recently put it, “They have decided to win, and we have not.”³ Our allies and our enemies are both watching and drawing conclusions about our strategic posture and willpower vis-à-vis Iran. If Iran secures its interests in Syria, it will affect the regional balance of power against the US-led bloc in the region. This is to say nothing about the conclusions Iran will draw about our seriousness to stop its nuclear drive, having witnessed the US President draw a red line in Syria only to later back down. Our regional allies have expressed concern about precisely this issue.

A lesson can be drawn from our Israeli allies’ prioritization of threats in Syria. The Israelis have made three major incursions in Syria, all three of them targeting Iranian strategic weapons. While keeping a weary eye on Sunni Islamist militias, the number one

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strategic priority in Jerusalem remains to deny the Iranians the positioning of strategic weapons on Israel's borders.

To deny Iran a victory, the US must target its avenues of support to the Syrian regime and Assad's strong points. Currently, much of the military aid to the regime arrives via Damascus airport. Targeting that airfield and other runways in western Syria still under regime control would go a long way toward degrading Assad's military power. It would effectively ground his air force and deny him a critical logistical port. Targeting ballistic missile sites, as Israel recently did, will also limit Assad's ability to strike at areas outside his control.

There has been an arduous debate in Washington about whether the US should impose a No-Fly Zone (NFZ) in Syria. This is a label that covers a wide range of options, and it's important not to get stuck in a narrow debate or with false dichotomies, presenting our options as an Iraq-style war or doing nothing.

For instance, strikes on the regime's major airfields and strategic installations in western Syria using stand off weapons could achieve desired results. The important thing is for such measures to have clear objectives integrated in a broader strategy. In this case, the tactical objective is to seriously degrade critical capabilities and a major resupply line of the regime, thereby altering the balance of forces on the ground. This will not deny all of the regime's firepower. However, it would deplete it significantly while also obstructing its replenishment.

In tandem with this measure, the US should exercise leadership and bring together a group of allies – Britain, France, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey – that have been pressing us for a more robust policy and who want to see the Iranians defeated in Syria. Pooling their resources, as well as their intelligence channels to various rebel groups, we should build a rebel force following a two-pronged approach on the ground.

In cooperation with Turkey, we should help organize, train and equip local forces in northern Syria to better execute specific tactical missions, such as storming the remaining pockets of regime bases and airfields, cutting logistical supply routes between Homs and Aleppo, and pushing back any counteroffensives by Hezbollah in places like Idlib and Aleppo. A similar approach would be adapted with Jordan on the southern border in and around Daraa, preparing the way for the rebels to close in on Damascus.

Once the US has signaled its intent to exercise leadership on the ground, the prospects for a proper rebel command will improve dramatically. Turkish and Jordanian intelligence, for example, have built good relations with many of the rebel formations, and the Saudis and Qataris have their own channels as well, including, in Riyadh's case, with the tribes of eastern Syria. These channels can go a long way to properly vetting and communicating with these fighters. Many of Syria's rebels have made it clear that their migration to more extremist groups was, in large part, due to these groups' better organization, commitment and access to ammunition. The appeal of a strong sectarian

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identity is also a factor, but that will only increase the more we leave Iran's explicitly Shiite offensive unanswered.

To be sure, many of the fighting forces with whom the administration today is dealing embrace an Islamist identity of one shade or another. That has to be acknowledged. However, not all Islamists can be grouped under the Al-Qaeda label. Proof is that some of these same Islamist formations – and in other cases, tribal-based formation – have clashed with Jabhat al-Nusra in northern and eastern Syria.

The idea that “there are no good guys in Syria” is not only unhelpful, but also runs counter to how the US has made policy choices in the past. In World War II, for instance, no one applied that logic to allying with Stalin's Soviet Union against Nazi Germany. There was a strategic prioritization. We first tackled the first threat, and then proceeded to devise policy to counter the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

Al-Qaeda will fight hard to safeguard its gains in Syria, but leaving the field open to them, or pushing the opposition to negotiate with Assad as his forces led by Iranian assets slaughter Sunnis, will only play into Al-Qaeda's hands and enhance its appeal. The creation of a credible, US-backed rebel force, taking full advantage of regional allies' intelligence channels and drawing on the local fighters in the various districts, will at the very least offer a powerful alternative. The inherent regionalism and fissures in Syria's Sunni community will play to our advantage in that case, denying Al-Qaeda the ability to present itself as the vanguard of the country's Sunnis.

In the end, it's important to recognize that there is no solution to the Syrian problem without getting rid of Assad and his regime. Our current policy assumes that the regime, if not Assad himself, can be a valid interlocutor. This is a mistake. There can be no “managed political transition” in Syria.

As Ambassador Frederic Hof recently put it, “This is a war Iran and Hezbollah, and arguably Russia, have decided not to lose; they are committed to a regime victory, while the administration has shown no such resolve or commitment to a rebel military victory.”⁴

Openly stating that handing Iran a strategic defeat in Syria is the priority for the US is where it all must start. Exercising credible US leadership to rally already eager allies around that stated objective should follow. The rest flows from there.

¹ Tony Badran, "Hezbollah slips in Qusayr," NOW, May 23, 2013.

<https://now.nmedia.me/lb/en/commentaryanalysis/hezbollah-slips-in-qusayr>

² Tony Badran, "Assad reading the signs", NOW, April 25, 2013.

<https://now.nmedia.me/lb/en/commentaryanalysis/assad-reading-the-signs>

³ Elliott Abrams, "The Brezhnev Doctrine, Iran-Style," The Weekly Standard, June 3, 2013. http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/brezhnev-doctrine-iran-style_728993.html?nopager=1

⁴ Frederic Hof, "Syria: Is a No-Fly Zone on the Table?" The Atlantic Council, May 30, 2013. <http://www.acus.org/viewpoint/syria-no-fly-zone-table>

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you Mr. Badran.
Ms. Pletka.

**STATEMENT OF MS. DANIELLE PLETKA, VICE PRESIDENT,
FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY STUDIES, AMERICAN EN-
TERPRISE INSTITUTE**

Ms. PLETKA. Thank you, Madam Chairman and Mr. Deutch.

I am honored to be back before the committee. And I thank you for holding this enormously important hearing. I think we have gone over a lot of the history behind how we have got to this moment in Syria.

What we see right now on the ground is the Iranian forces that Tony talked about, not just IRGC, but also Iranian ground troops. We see Hezbollahis fighting on the ground. We see al-Qaeda forces fighting on the ground. We see Russia. We see Qatar. We see Saudi Arabia. We see Iran. We see all these countries in the mix.

And of course, the one country or the group of countries that you don't see are Western democratic nations. That means that anybody who shares our values, our ambitions on the ground is disarmed, under-armed, and under-represented. Basically, everybody else is coming to the fight, and we have not.

That is my view, and I do believe that we have a firm interest, not simply because Syria is a linchpin for Iran, as you said, Madam Chairman, not simply because this is Iran's most important ally, but because we have a humanitarian, a moral, and a strategic interest in Syria.

I think what we need to do is pretty straightforward. It has been said time and again, and I think there are reasonably good arguments to make for how we can step forward. We shouldn't forget that upwards of 80,000, perhaps even as many as 120,000 people have been killed. If you have seen the pictures of the children that were killed over this last weekend, buried in mass graves along the Syrian coast, I can assure you that the notion that we somehow have no interest would be abhorrent to us.

We also have an interest because of the credibility of the President of the United States. We may like him. We may not like him. We may agree with him. We may not agree with him. We may have voted for him, and we may not. That doesn't matter.

He is the President of the United States. He said that Assad should step down. Assad hasn't stepped down. He said that chemical weapons were a red line for his administration, a "game-changer." He said it. In fact, chemical weapons have been used. The U.N. confirmed that it believes they have been used. France and England have both suggested they believe, as have our intelligence community.

In fact, if this was a red line, what does this say about the credibility of the President of the United States? Forget about Syria. Let's assert that we don't care about Syria. What does this say to the Iranian Government about our credibility on its nuclear program if in fact on the question of Syria we are not serious? It suggests to the world that the United States is, in fact, a paper tiger, and I believe we are behaving as one.

What we need to do is vet and arm those rebels who embrace democratic norms, have a demonstrated distance from al-Qaeda

and related groups, and who have committed to turning over Assad's illegal weaponry, chemical weapons, missiles, and other weapons of mass destruction. We should use standoff weaponry, such as the Tomahawk missile to disable Syrian airfields and render inoperable the Syrian air force and its resupply hubs that are now facilitating Assad's advance.

We should consider with our allies in NATO and in the Arab League the imposition of a no-fly zone. I don't believe that this is the demanding exercise that some have suggested. In fact, Syria's Russian-supplied air defenses are probably at less than 50 percent. Some have suggested even at 10 percent capacity. They have not been used. The notion that we could not take those out, we, the United States, could not take those out is almost unthinkable.

And we should immediately impose new sanctions on Hezbollah, including broad travel sanctions, freezing accounts of Hezbollah-owned companies, related banks, isolating families, and supporters of Hezbollah. We should ban the entry into the United States of all Hezbollah officials, their immediate families, officers, and relatives of banks and companies with substantial Hezbollah holdings.

Without his air force, Assad will be far more vulnerable; without Hezbollah on the ground or at least if Hezbollah is hobbled, Assad's forces will be far more vulnerable.

The reason we need to tip the balance should be pretty obvious. What should we do once Assad falls? Also a vital question. And we need to answer that question now and not dither tactically while groups alien to us take over. What do we support? What do we support? Democratic rule, equal rights, secularism, the protection of minorities, women's rights, and free markets.

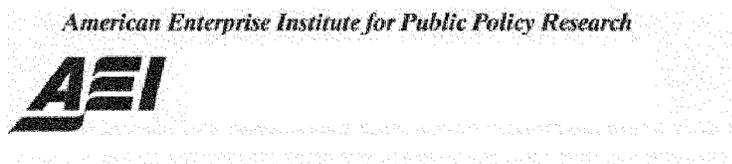
Throughout the Middle East, countries have moved away from these values, and we have done nothing.

Throughout the countries of the Arab Spring, we have seen as each of these countries has moved away, and we have continued to give aid a pace. We have not emphasized these values. We haven't rewarded people who share those values.

You, this committee, Members of Congress, have an enormous say in how we give our taxpayer dollars to these countries, to these governments, and to NGOs. And we have to change the way that we administer our assistance.

Just a last word, for those who ask why America should care, remember, when we allow extremism and tyranny to flourish without counterbalancing it, we pay a heavy, heavy price. We may not pay that price immediately, but we will ultimately. We have an important strategic choice. We have an important moral choice. And we should do the right thing. If the President doesn't want to put a strategy in place, I suggest that you should.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Pletka follows:]



Testimony of Danielle Pletka, Vice President, Foreign and Defense Policy Studies,
American Enterprise Institute

Before the

U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Middle East and
North Africa on "A Crisis Mismanaged: Obama's Failed Syria Policy"

Wednesday, June 5, 2013

Madam Chairman, Representative Deutch, Members of the Committee, thank you for including me in this important hearing on the question of Syria. I will be brief, as I believe the imperative for the United States regarding Syria is clear.

It is in our nation's vital national security interest to intervene in Syria.
It is also in our nation's vital national security interest to ensure that a post-Assad Syria is neither governed nor exploited by terrorist groups.

In March of 2011, during the so-called Arab Spring, the Syrian people took the streets in peaceful demonstrations against the dictatorship of Bashar el Assad. Those demonstrations were met with violence, which escalated to the point that the opposition needed to respond or retreat. After decades of brutal oppression under the Assad family, it should have come as little surprise that the Syrian people would choose to fight. On August 11 of that same year, Barack Obama called on the Syrian dictator to step down, but did little by way of practical measures to ensure he would do so.

Since that time, the situation in Syria has deteriorated dramatically. A fight that once belonged to the people of Syria – including moderates, democrats and local Muslim Brotherhood groups – has now spilled over and includes groups affiliated with al Qaeda fighting on the rebel side with arms from Saudi Arabia and Qatar. On Assad's side, there are reports that Iranian regular army and IRGC forces fight alongside Syrian troops, and significant numbers of Lebanese Hezbollahis are also on the ground supporting Assad. They are armed and regularly resupplied by Iran and Russia. In fact, the only group left out in the cold is the very moderates the United States should support.

The war has spilled over to Lebanon, to Israel and Iraq. The government of Jordan is overwhelmed by hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees; Turkey too has taken on a large refugee population. Regional war is not unthinkable.

On the ground, a battle that has cost upwards of 80,000 and perhaps as many as 120,000 lives has turned once again, with the advantage to Assad. The key town of Qusayr has been the scene of terrible fighting and its loss is a significant blow to the rebels. In addition, Assad has once again reportedly used chemical weapons to attack his own people. The reason he does so is simple: He wishes Syrians – including many women and children -- to pay a terrible price for supporting and harboring rebel forces. Chemical weapons accomplish that job for him.

Where is the United States in all of this? We are providing humanitarian assistance. There are reports we are also providing covert lethal assistance, though I have no reason to credit such reports as true. There are also reports that the CIA is on the ground, already vetting groups in preparation to arm them. Again, I cannot confirm those reports. Secretary John Kerry has taken time off from the urgent diplomatic exigencies of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process to meet with his Russian

counterpart, and a peace conference that was slated for this week will now possibly take place in July.

As for the question of President Obama's demand that Assad step down, and his August 2012 insistence that any use of chemical weapons by Assad would be a "game changer" and a "red line" for the United States, Mr. Obama's approach appears to be to do nothing. This has major implications for the credibility of the President of the United States, not just in Syria, but worldwide. We can only imagine to ourselves how the Iranian regime appreciates the President's failure to act on his own threats.

What we should do now is straightforward:

- Vet and then arm those rebels who embrace democratic norms, have a demonstrated distance from al Qaeda and related groups, and who commit to turning over Assad's illegal chemical weaponry, missiles and other weapons of mass destruction.
- Use stand-off weaponry such as the Tomahawk missile to disable Syrian airfields and render inoperable the air force and resupply hubs that are now facilitating Assad's advance.
- Consider the imposition of a no-fly zone in cooperation with NATO allies and the Arab League. I believe this is not the demanding exercise some have suggested, and many analysts assess Syrian air defenses as far less than their specs would suggest.
- Immediately impose new sanctions on Hezbollah, including broad travel sanctions, freezing accounts of Hezbollah owned companies, related banks and isolate families and supporters of Hezbollah. Ban the entry into the United States of all Hezbollah officials, their immediate families and officers and relatives of banks and companies with substantial Hezbollah holdings.

Without his air force, Assad will be reduced to using far more vulnerable rotary wing aircraft, which the rebels have a demonstrated capacity to bring down. It will also slow the inflow of weaponry from Iran and Russia. And should Russia deliver S300 air defenses, it will be clear to both Moscow and Damascus that the US and our allies have the means and the capacity to take it out.

The reason we should seek to tip the balance in this conflict should be obvious: The collapse of a central nation in the Middle East, the rise of an al Qaeda state, and/or the continued spillover of this conflict into the neighboring states of Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon and Israel is an undesirable outcome. Anyone who believes that a conflagration throughout the Middle East will have no implications for the United States is ignoring history.

There are those who suggest we do not have a dog in this fight. I could not disagree more. The United States has had an interest in the Middle East for more than five

decades. We have allies, troops, resources and interests at stake. Syria is Iran's most important Arab ally – indeed, it's ONLY Arab ally. It is Iran's conduit to the Levant, to the world's most dangerous terrorist group, Hezbollah, and the route through which it arms and manages much of Lebanon. And while some may look at the "stability" of the Assad regime with nostalgia, we should not assume there is any means of stuffing the genie back into the bottle. His regime will never rule all of Syria again.

What we should do once Assad falls is also straightforward, and should reflect lessons learned from Iraq, Egypt, Yemen and other Arab Spring countries. The United States must act to reflect its values, and implement a policy consistent with those values and ideals. What do we support?

- Democratic rule
- Equal rights
- Secularism
- Protection of minorities
- Women's rights
- Free markets

I suspect that as we move away from some of those values here at home, it will be more difficult for us to press for them abroad. Nonetheless, these are the pillars of our nation, tried and true. These are the foundations of opportunity, prosperity and peace.

In each of the countries where a dictatorial ruler has fallen, either by force as with Iraq, or through popular revolutions as in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen, we see a leader similar to the previous secular dictator in his place. Can we stop the popular election of an Islamist? We cannot. But we could have and still can work to support liberals and moderates. We can direct our assistance to benefit those who share those values. We can deny assistance to any regime that fails on these standards. We can support the private sector and starve the public sector. We can end cash transfers. We can vote with our feet and our taxpayer dollars. In each case I have mentioned, we have not.

Congress has an enormous say in who gets what aid, how policies are implemented, who and what we reward and what we punish. Yet in the case of Egypt, just for example, we have failed to follow our own moral compass.

It may be that Syria, like Egypt, will not end well. Had we intervened sooner, it would have been more likely that the better among the Syrian rebels would have prevailed. Now the odds are slimmer. But abdication of American leadership is wrong.

For those who ask why America should care, remember that when we allow extremism and tyranny to flourish without counterbalancing it, we pay a heavy price. For those who believe Syrians should just kill each-other, for shame – both morally and strategically.

The United States still has a chance to help tip the balance in Syria. But if we do not intervene soon, on our terms and without boots on the ground, we can bet on having to intervene later, on terms dictated by others.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. Thank you.
Dr. Alterman.

STATEMENT OF JON ALTERMAN, PH.D., DIRECTOR, MIDDLE EAST PROGRAM, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Mr. ALTERMAN. Madam Chair, Ranking Member Deutch, distinguished members, it is an honor and a pleasure to appear before you again today, this time to talk about U.S. policy toward Syria. It is hard for anyone to look at Syria and be satisfied, least of all U.S. Government officials. There is an important difference though between being dissatisfied with conditions in Syria and terming U.S. policy a failure. There is an even bigger difference between being dissatisfied with policy and implementing one that will actually work better.

As we discovered all too well in Iraq, not all alternatives to a troubled policy are an improvement. Indeed, from George H.W. Bush's policy of engagement with Iraq in the late 1980s to a policy of diplomacy in the 1990s to a policy of invasion and reconstruction in the 2000s, we have seen several decades of U.S. policies that have failed to meet even modest expectations set for them.

Iraq is a reminder of our limited ability to shape outcomes in complex and polarized situations and a reminder that the quality of outcomes sometimes has only a distant relationship to the level of effort and resources that we put into them.

Six years ago, the full Foreign Affairs Committee held a hearing with a somewhat more sober title than the present hearing entitled, "Iraq: Is The Escalation Working?"

Madam Chair, at that hearing, you quite correctly said, "Before writing off Iraq as lost, we must ask ourselves what alternative policy there is and what are the consequences for the safety of our troops and for the United States' strategic interests in predetermining defeat."

I totally agree. And it is that constructive spirit that you brought to the task then that I would like to bring to the table today.

As you suggested at the time, the proper measure of a policy is the prospect of its alternatives. In order to judge that, one must first decide one's interest that the policy is seeking to preserve and the tools at hand to protect those interests.

To me, the starting point is that Syria is strategically important because of its effects on its neighbors and neighborhood. By both geography and design, Syria is a hub state. All five, all five, of Syria's neighbors are important to the United States.

The second aspect that needs attention is the rise of jihadi groups in Syria who feed on the conflict to recruit worldwide.

The third aspect is the malign efforts of Iran, Russia, and others to shape a status quo in the Middle East that is deeply unfavorable to American interests.

The written testimony goes into considerably more detail than I could do so here, but I have five basic recommendations for U.S. policy going forward, which represent modifications of our current policy rather than its abandonment.

The first is safe havens. I share the American public's caution about committing troops to Syria, and I fear that we could be

drawn into actions that we neither intend nor desire. But the first point I made about the fragility of neighboring states straining under the flow of refugees needs attention. It seems to me we should be actively considering the creation of safe havens. The key is to have limited objectives in doing so and not to provide a base for people in those areas to try to overthrow the regime because ultimately, that just puts us into the fight.

Second is weapons. I see wisdom in providing limited weapons for self-defense with the desire of helping civilians protect their homes, rather than with the hope that weapons can tip the balance in the war.

And diplomacy, as many of you have said, we have been pursuing diplomacy with friends and foes alike. But from the outside, it looks to me like there is too much agreeing to disagree. We can't care about everything, but we should care deeply about the diplomacy surrounding Syria and make clear that it affects the core of our relationships. This is true for our allies. This is true for our relations with Russia. And I think that we have to be more creative as we deal with Russia, finding potential future courses of policy that are more agreeable to us than they are to the Russians.

And intelligence, the jihadi networks are notoriously hard to penetrate, but given the fact that they have to recruit so much, this should be a bonanza for friendly services to infiltrate al-Qaeda and its affiliate networks and try to understand them. We should also look for ways to share intelligence with carefully vetted fighting groups in order to help compensate the superior aerial coverage of the Assad regime.

In terms of a settlement, I agree with you, Madam Chair, that as odious as the Assad regime is, there is little question that even more odious characters lurk in Syria. A settlement that arises from a negotiated transfer of power stands a far greater chance of improving Syrians' lives than building from the ashes of even deeper sectarian killings and ethnic cleansing.

I don't suggest this path because it is a perfect one but because it seems to me to be the best out of a series of really bad choices. We could clearly dislodge Basahr al-Assad with enough time, money, and lives, but it is unclear we want to pay that price or how we might shape the aftermath. There isn't a simple solution to the problem of Syria and even with a commitment of much greater funds, the battle is likely to last for many more years.

When I worked on the Hill myself with Congressman Connolly, the U.S. Government supported decade-long insurgencies in Afghanistan and Nicaragua and helped defend the Government of El Salvador in its own decade of war. Regardless of what happens to Bashar tomorrow, the problems of Syria will be with us for years to come.

We all have hopes for Syria, and I would argue that sentiment in the United States is relatively unified as to what a positive outcome in Syria would look like. Yet, rather than focus on our hopes, we have to focus on our needs. We must pursue a policy that meets those needs for Syria while being attendant to the other demands placed on our military and our Government. Our interests call for focus and not for hopes.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Alterman follows:]



**Statement before the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Middle
East and North Africa**

***“BAD OPTIONS AND HARD CHOICES
IN SYRIA POLICY”***

A Statement by

Dr. Jon B. Alterman

Zbigniew Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy &
Director, Middle East Program
Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

June 5, 2013

2172 Rayburn House Office Building

Madame Chair, Ranking Member Deutch, distinguished members:

It is an honor and a pleasure to appear before the subcommittee once again, this time to talk about U.S. policy toward Syria. The ongoing humanitarian crisis is heart-rending, and the ongoing political struggle is engrossing. Yet, both sometimes distract from the very real stakes for the United States in Syria, and the likelihood that what happens in Syria will prove of strategic importance to the United States and will have a profound impact on U.S. interests throughout the Middle East.

It is hard for anyone to look at Syria and be satisfied, least of all U.S. government officials.

- The ongoing bloodletting in Syria is a tragedy to all who seek peace and security. As a country that has sacrificed blood and treasure to improve others' lives across the globe, it is difficult for Americans to watch the devastation unfolding.
- The cooperation between the Syrian government, the government of Iran, and proxies such as Hezbollah harms U.S. interests. Their actions together help them coordinate their efforts, build networks for future cooperation, and give more battlefield experience to a range of malign actors.
- The resurgence of jihadi groups on the back of the Syrian insurgency not only threatens the future of Syria, but also threatens the lands from which the fighters have come—which extends to Western Europe and even China. While jihadis in no way own the uprising against Bashar al-Assad, they have grown and profited from it, and a reinvigorated jihadi movement may be the most enduring residue of it.
- Syria's neighbors are already groaning under the price of the war for their ailing economies and fragile populations, and many more refugees may come. Jordan and Lebanon in particular are small countries already hosting large refugee populations from earlier regional conflicts, and the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees stresses everything from utilities to basic employment.

There is an important difference, however, between being dissatisfied with conditions in Syria and terming U.S. policy a failure. There is an even bigger difference between being dissatisfied with our current policy and implementing one that will work better. As we discovered all too well in Iraq, not all alternatives to a troubled policy are an improvement. Indeed, from the George H.W. Bush policy of engagement with Iraq in the late 1980s to a policy of coercive diplomacy in the 1990s to a policy of invasion and reconstruction in the 2000s, we have seen several decades of U.S. policies that have failed to meet even modest expectations set for them. Iraq is a reminder of our limited ability to shape outcomes in complex and polarized situations, and a reminder that the quality of outcomes sometimes has only a distant relationship to the level of effort put into them.

Six years ago, the full Foreign Affairs Committee held a hearing with a somewhat more sober title than the present hearing, entitled, "Iraq: Is the Escalation Working?" Madame Chair, at that hearing you quite correctly said, "Before writing off Iraq as lost, we must ask ourselves what alternative policy is there, and what are the consequences for the safety of our troops and for the United States strategic interests of predetermining defeat." I agree, and it is the constructive spirit that you brought to the task six years ago that I would like to bring to the table today.

As you suggested at the time, the proper measure of a policy is the prospect of its alternatives. In order to judge that, one must first decide one's interests that the policy is seeking to preserve, and the tools at hand to protect those interests.

To me, the starting point is that Syria is strategically important because of its effects on its neighbors and its neighborhood. By both geography and design Syria is a hub state, with influence that reaches into the Levant, into the Gulf, and into the Caucasus and Central Asia. Most worryingly for the United States, all five of Syria's neighbors are important to the United States. One is Israel, with which the current government of Syria has reached a tacit understanding but which would face escalating threats if a genuinely hostile government—or no government—were to arise in Syria. A second is Jordan, a steadfast ally of the United States, facing a dismal economy and already reeling from influxes of Iraqis and Libyans from previous conflicts, who added to what is probably a majority Palestinian population that fled Israeli rule in 1948 and 1967. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have fled to Jordan in the last two years, adding to several hundred thousand Syrians already in the country. A third is Lebanon, a fragile state of eighteen distinct religious groups and no majority. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have fled there, too, and sectarian violence threatens to disrupt Lebanon's delicate balance. Fourth is Iraq, whose memory of a jihadi insurgency in Anbar—which borders Syria—is still fresh, and which fears that a renewed jihadism in Syria will spread back into Iraq across the border. Fifth is Turkey, a NATO ally of the United States that has also accepted hundreds of thousands of refugees, and which fears for the stability of its already restive southeastern region.

Preserving Syria's neighbors' security is no easy undertaking, and it takes more than money. It will take training, intelligence, and technical assistance to governments, and investment, education and infrastructure support to populations on the other. While the United States is the largest contributor to humanitarian assistance to Syrians, I worry that we see things too programmatically and insufficiently holistically. The holistic picture is especially important in the wake of Arab uprisings, with our enhanced awareness of the fragility of the status quo. I understand that budget authority is necessary to preserve U.S. interests, but it is not sufficient. As a government and as a nation, we need to do a better job understanding how these governments work and how their stability can be preserved.

The second aspect that needs attention is the rise of jihadi groups in Syria, who feed on the conflict to recruit worldwide. As we know from our successes battling al-

Qaeda, fighting jihadism requires a multi-pronged effort that combines law enforcement and intelligence, but perhaps with the largest role reserved for friendly governments. It is here that some of the most important work needs to be done—in law enforcement, in intelligence cooperation, and in delegitimizing the jihadi cause. In point of fact, an overwhelming majority of the jihadi fighters coming into Syria come from friendly countries. Further, almost all of the external funding for the jihadi fighters comes from friendly countries, and sometimes directly from friendly governments.

Because this task necessarily involves intelligence, I am unsure exactly what the U.S. government has already done to stem the flow of jihadi fighters into Syria and to block the funding going to jihadi groups in the country. I would argue, however, that the rise of a jihadi block in Syria is not merely a troubling matter but a threatening one. I would favor making efforts to stem the spread of jihadism in Syria a core focus of our bilateral relationship with relevant countries, and to hold close bilateral relations at risk if good faith efforts are not made. A jihadi core in Syria is far more threatening to U.S. interests than such a core was in Afghanistan, and it should be intolerable to U.S. officials that U.S. allies acquiesce, let alone abet, the growth of such a movement in Syria.

The third aspect is the malign efforts of Iran, Russia and others to shape a status quo deeply unfavorable to U.S. interests. This ranges from boosting the power of anti-American groups around the region to destabilizing friendly governments. Syria is a clear conduit for Iranian influence—while not being the only one—and part of the importance of Syria for Iran is to stave off Iranian isolation and to give it tools to affect other countries in the region. While some of this is intended to be defensive, it is in the interest of the United States to thwart these efforts.

There are a number of proposals floating around for how a different U.S. policy might lead to different outcomes than we have had, but I am not persuaded that their results would necessarily be better than our results have been thus far, or that they wouldn't cause grave harm to U.S. interests. The most obvious of these is to arm the opposition heavily. In my own lifetime, I have seen foreign-funded insurgencies go on for many years, and their outcomes have been quite mixed, if not even negative. There is a seductive argument to be made that people are loyal to those who armed them, but as I look at examples from Iraq to Afghanistan and beyond, it's hard to see much evidence that the loyalty is anything but transient. What we have seen in many of these cases is that the weapons go missing or are sold, and local political agendas quickly replace any ties of gratitude or loyalty to the United States. That is to say, the weapons last decades longer than any presumed ties of obligation.

There are other arguments for a vigorous U.S. military presence to guarantee the safety of Syrian civilians and to disable troops carrying out attacks on them. I am skeptical that we can fight a limited war in this environment. Further, I am concerned that we would be entering into an open-ended and ultimately growing

military commitment at a time when our military is seeking to redefine its global priorities to meet the budget that Congress and the American people are willing to commit to the military. People talk loosely about a “no-fly zone,” but in fact the term is so broad in terms of commitments and rules of engagement as not to be meaningful.

I fear that much of the talk of a no-fly zone stems from the perception that it represents a low-cost way to wage war. One danger of a no-fly zone is that it could in fact broaden the conflict, unleashing a war on the region that has no borders. Because of Iran’s relative weakness in conventional forces and strength in unconventional forces, it is hard to imagine another kind of response. Such an outcome would likely lead us to a conventional war with Iran, but not one that would guarantee a favorable long-term outcome any more than our war in Iraq has done.

One could talk about recognizing the Syrian opposition and treating it as a government in exile, which would provide benefits to the opposition and free the hands of those who seek greater force to attack Assad. In essence, this approach would make the opposition into the sitting government and Assad’s forces into the insurgents. The prospect is attractive because it could dramatically alter the legal framework governing the world’s interaction with Syria. Yet, the Syrian opposition is far from constituting a single government. The opposition has been riven by tensions—both between outside groups with different donors, and between those inside Syria and those outside. The paucity of donor coordination has made this problem worse, and there are few signs it is getting better. The prospects of recognition and greater aid flows would actually exacerbate the opposition’s dysfunction, because it would abruptly raise the stakes for competing factions while compressing the timeframe in which they would seek to compete. The winners are unlikely to be those seeking a more moderate Syria.

Instead of the more ambitious gestures outlined here, I would propose a more modest course of action that is largely consistent with administration policy but represents some tweaks to it.

- **Safe havens.** I share the American public’s caution about committing troops to Syria, and I fear that we could be drawn into actions that we neither intend nor desire. However, the first point I made above, about the fragility of neighboring states straining under the flow of refugees, needs attention. I am not sure how to stem the refugee flow without providing some greater security for civilian populations in harm’s way, and for that reason we should look at creating and enforcing havens inside Syria that can provide refuge without population displacement. The key to the success of such an effort is to ensure that U.S. and allied objectives are limited, and that the safe havens remain genuine refuges rather than protected guerrilla bases. At least initially, this may create conflict with rebel groups, who are likely to seek to use the havens for their own advantage. Our interest in creating the bases

should be to protect civilian populations on both sides of Syria's borders rather than winning Syria's civil war.

- **Weapons.** I also see wisdom in providing limited weapons for self-defense, with the desire of helping civilians protect their homes rather than with a hope that weapons can tip the balance of the war.
- **Diplomacy.** While reports suggest that the U.S. government has been pursuing diplomacy with friends and foes alike, from the outside it looks to me like there is too much "agreeing to disagree." With many of our Gulf Cooperation Council allies, reports of support for jihadi groups are numerous, persistent, and deeply troubling. While we cannot care about everything, we should care deeply about this, and also make clear that it affects the core of our relationship. In our negotiations with Russia, we need to be more creative finding outcomes that we find more congenial than the Russians do, and we need to be willing to pursue them unilaterally if we cannot get Russian support for a joint alternative.
- **Intelligence.** Jihadi networks are notoriously hard to penetrate, but networks' need to recruit new fighters provides opportunities for friendly intelligence services to infiltrate these movements. While we need to try to weaken these movements in the future, understanding how they work and why is an opportunity we should seize now. We should also look for ways to share our intelligence with carefully vetting fighting groups, in order to help compensate for the superior aerial coverage that the Assad government and its allies are gaining from a stepped up drone effort.
- **Settlement.** Odious as the Assad regime is, there should be little question that even more odious characters lurk elsewhere in Syria. A settlement that arises from a negotiated transfer of power stands a far greater chance of improving Syrians' lives than building from the ashes of even deeper sectarian killings and ethnic cleansing. A massive wave of post-Assad killing would put an even greater strain on neighboring states and further radicalize the remaining population on both sides.

Pursuing the course of action outlined here will not eliminate Bashar al-Assad anytime soon, nor will it strip his government of power. It will not liberate millions of refugees from their misery, or spare millions more from conflict. It may even, in the short term, mean that the killing in Syria will continue.

I suggest this path not because it is the perfect one, but because it seems to me to be the best out of a series of bad choices. We clearly could dislodge Bashar al-Assad with enough time, money and lives, but it is unclear we want to pay that price, or how we might shape the aftermath.

There is no simple solution to the problem of Syria, and even with the commitment of much greater funds, the battle is likely to last for many more years. When I worked on the Hill myself, the U.S. government supported decade-long insurgencies in Afghanistan and Nicaragua, and helped defend the government of El Salvador in its own decade of war. Regardless of what happens to Bashar tomorrow, the

problems of Syria will be with us for years to come. This is a wicked problem with no clearly positive outcome in sight, and embracing ambitious goals is far more likely to cause us to conclude that our policies are failing than to lead us toward success.

We all have hopes for Syria, and I'd argue that sentiment in the United States is relatively unified as to what a positive outcome in Syria would look like. Yet, rather than focus on our hopes, we must focus on our needs. We must pursue a policy that meets those needs for Syria while being attendant to the other demands placed on our military and our government. Our interests call for focus, and not ambition.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much for three excellent panelists.

I wanted to ask on two issues. The use of chemical weapons and the role Russia. You have all referred to that.

In April, as you pointed out, Ms. Pletka, the White House sent a letter to Congress that said that intelligence agencies assessed chemical weapons had been used in Syria with varying degrees of confidence. And yesterday, as you said, France and Britain announced that they have confirmed that sarin had been used several times in the Syrian conflict. What should the United States and other responsible nations do to ensure that Assad's chemical weapons aren't used further, if these reports are true? How can we prevent the theft or transfer by or to terrorist groups? How can we approach the difficult task of securing and safely dismantling the stockpile? How can we receive assurances from the opposition forces to allow us to do this if they succeed in ousting Assad? And turning to Russia, as we know, Russian arms have helped lead to the escalation of violence and bombings. And the addition of Russian weapons, whether they have been used totally or not to the theater, heightens tensions across the region, fearing that these advanced weapons systems could fall into the wrong hands, and be turned against the U.S. or Israel.

Russia clearly has a financial interest in arming Syria, has no interest in seeming to stop selling arms to Assad, and the latest sales announcement not only caused harm in Syria but harms the diplomatic relations between U.S. and Russia to try to broker a peace between the warring parties. How can we leverage our power to convince Russia to stop arming Assad and his forces, to stop its support for the regime, to try to negotiate a peaceful settlement that will bring this bloody conflict to an end? And if Russia continues to arm Assad despite our best efforts to get Moscow to stop, would sanctions against Russia be an effective tool in our diplomatic toolbox to facilitate this? We will start with Mr. Badran. If you would keep the answers brief, so we can get to the three of you.

Mr. BADRAN. Thank you. With regard to the Russian weapons system, it is important to understand what that means for Russia. On the one hand, the Russian position on Syria has not changed. They have an interest in the survival of this regime. It is a foothold for them in the region, and it is an opportunity to sabotage U.S. interests as well. But now what happened also is that they are giving these advanced strategic weapons, be they the S-300 anti-aircraft or the anti-naval missiles that they gave, those things now are effectively in the hands of an IRGC base on the Mediterranean. And this is something that we have to look at, when we look at Israel's reaction to these things, it is important to draw the lesson from their actions.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Let me just interrupt you and just get to the other two because we only have 2 minutes.

Mr. BADRAN. Sure.

Ms. PLETKA. So, briefly, on the question of chemical weapons, there is no way to secure those chemical weapons through any of the steps that I advocated. A no-fly zone is not going to secure chemical weapons, neither is taking out Assad's air power, neither

is arming the opposition. The only way to secure chemical weapons 100 percent is if we put troops on the ground and we take them ourselves. And we don't want to do that. None of us have recommended it. I didn't hear anybody on the dais recommend it either. Nobody thinks this is a good idea.

That means that if you preclude that option, you require somebody on the ground to win. Assad wins. Iran, as Tony said, Iran, Assad have these weapons. Of course, they have had them all along. It didn't concern us this much 2 years ago. If the opposition wins, if the wrong guys in the opposition continue to prevail—and they are right now the best armed—when you talk about arms getting into the hands of bad guys, let me promise you, arms are already in the hands of bad guys. Arms are in the hands of the worst guys. It is the better—and I appreciate Jon's statement because of course there is no good here. But the better guys are the least well armed. The bad guys are the best armed. The only way that we can secure these is to look for an outcome in which we can work with a party that is responsible and committed to the same or similar ideals as we.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

Let me just give the last 30 seconds to Dr. Alterman.

Mr. ALTERMAN. Madam Chair, on the Russia issue, as I said, I think we have to, first, as we negotiate with the Russians over this, we have to find alternative future courses of policy they like less than what we are doing. Appealing to their higher sensibilities I think isn't going to work. There are things we can offer that are will make the Russians unhappy. There are things we can probably offer to make them happy. The Russians have a serious concern with terrorism and jihadism in the Caucasus. We may have things we can help them with. And I think that ultimately we have to be negotiating better, not appealing to their higher instincts but to their interests, and understanding what those interests are.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Thank you. Mr. Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And thanks to the panel for excellent testimony.

Dr. Alterman, I will start with you. I continue to be frustrated with the actions of our allies that continue to undermine our security in the region. The United States shares security responsibilities for the Gulf with our allies. In fact, the United States spends a lot of money and sells a lot of arms to ensure that security. And while some have been supportive, there are those that continue to strengthen extremist groups. What leverage do we have to convince Qatar and Turkey, for example, that supporting extremist elements ultimately threatens regional security?

Mr. ALTERMAN. Thank you very much for that question.

It is hard to say what we should be doing that we are not doing, and it is hard to figure out exactly what we are doing. The emir of Qatar was just here. I don't know the nature of those conversations. I don't know the extent to which the President spoke to him, quite frankly, about it. I think the nature of our deep relationships with these countries means that there are things we can both hold at risk and things we can reward. And there are many, many common interests that we should bring to bear. I think the key issue

is elevating it, making it clear that this is very important to us, that there are things that we will not continue to do, things we will do less of because we can't have people undermining what we consider a vital interest.

Mr. DEUTCH. What are those things, Dr. Alterman?

Mr. ALTERMAN. Well, we have a very active air base at Al Udeid. The Qataris remind us all the time that this is their sovereign territory. They make sure that we respect that. There are many places we could put an air base in the Gulf. And we have other air bases in the Gulf. I think one of the things that I would suggest that we talk with the Qataris about if we haven't already is that our reliance on Al Udeid so heavily may be something we have to reconsider.

Mr. DEUTCH. Ms. Pletka, you are nodding?

Ms. PLETKA. I couldn't agree more. I think Jon is exactly right. I think the Qataris have basically been allowed cost-free to play both sides. They do the same thing with Iran. They do the same thing with the Salafi groups. And the fact that that has continued is because they play both sides with us as well. On the one side, we have Al Udeid and they use that as leverage over us. We need to take that leverage away, and we need to ensure that they are more isolated. I think the Saudis to a slightly lesser to extent are also at fault here. Any time you subcontract your foreign policy to the likes of Saudi Arabia and Qatar—which is what we have done in Syria—you end up with an outcome that isn't very happy. Look at Afghanistan.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Badran?

Mr. BADRAN. I actually disagree on that last point. Because Saudi effort in arming the rebels through Jordan has been through groups that have been very much vetted and the United States has been actually quite pleased with those types of groups. They have a great close working relationship with Jordanian intelligence. The thing you will have to keep in mind, though, is that the reason why these groups, the more hardcore groups thrive, these hardcore groups thrive when there is especially a sectarian environment where you see an Iranian explicitly Shiite offensive happening, and there is nobody else coming to the aid. So they pose as a vanguard to help the Syrian people. To deny them that ability is I think what should be the U.S. role in Syria.

Mr. DEUTCH. Just looking ahead, let's assume that there is a willingness on the part of the Russians to engage in a meaningful peace process. Let's assume that all of the parties that would need to participate would be willing to participate. Ultimately, what does a resolution look like in Syria? And I guess the fundamental question is, do the borders remain the same? Number one. If not, what would a breakup of Syria or a redrawing of the boundaries look like? And is that something that we should even be entertaining?

Dr. Alterman.

Mr. ALTERMAN. The borders in the Middle East, given that they were sort of drawn rather artificially on a map, have proved remarkably resilient. The only two places they have moved are in the Arab-Israeli conflict and in the two Yemens uniting. And otherwise, all these other countries that were just put together have been

pretty durable. My guess is that de jure, the borders of Syria will remain in tact. De facto there may be some diffusion of power, the government may not either care to exercise control or be able to exercise control over the whole country. I think what we are looking at either way is a multi-year effort. And the biggest mistake we can make about Geneva is assuming that Geneva is going to have a solution. And if it doesn't have a solution, it is a failure, and we will have to find something else to do.

We are going to have to work on a process of dealing with the issues in Syria. When I was at the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan a couple of weeks ago, the assumption there was that they would have a large multi-hundred-thousand refugee problem in Jordan for at least 2 more years, and that is if the problem gets solved tomorrow.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Deutch.

Great questions. Mr. Chabot is recognized for his time for questions.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I had mentioned in my opening statement a couple questions that I had. And those are the ones I wanted to go into. One was about Hezbollah, its growing role, and what difference it is making, and what sort of role do you think it will play once this whole thing plays out, whatever it might be. And I will open it up to any of the witnesses that might like to speak on that.

Mr. BADRAN. Thank you. Yeah.

As I mentioned, Hezbollah's role right now in Syria is really as the shock troops for the Assad regime. I mean, they are very much leading on all major critical functions. They are the ones who took the al-Qusayr down. They have been deployed there for several weeks now. They have taken losses, though, losses that they didn't expect. And the ratio is very high. So I think if they continue to be stretched this thin along other fronts in Syria, they may encounter problems. But the thing is, they have a State, like Iran, that is banging them with material and everything, whereas the other side is pretty much, they can put up a fight for a while, but then they have to pull back.

Mr. CHABOT. Okay. Thank you. Yes?

Ms. PLETKA. I am curious whether anybody thinks that there has been any additional price imposed upon Hezbollah for the role that it is playing in Syria or whether there has been any additional price that has been imposed on Hezbollah for the escalation and the quality and quantity of armaments that have been transferred to them via Syria for use in Syria and for use on the Lebanese-Israeli border. I am not aware of any effort to impose any additional meaningful sanctions. There have been some few on the edges.

But that is it. There is a Hezbollah-backed government in Lebanon. We continue to provide assistance to Lebanon. Tony and I can probably fight this one out afterwards about whether this is a good thing or a bad thing. Nonetheless, these are options that remain for us. I sat here at this table and I said that Hezbollah was the best armed, most sophisticated, most dangerous terrorist group in the world. And I take that, fully understanding the capabilities

of al-Qaeda. And the truth is we don't take them seriously in any way.

This is meaningful, even if you couldn't give a darn about Syria. If you care about what is going to happen in Iran if you care about maintaining a military option, the fact that we are uninterested in de-fanging Iran's most important proxy that exists around the world and raises millions of dollars here in the United States every year is a problem. We need to do something about it.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much.

Dr. Alterman.

Mr. ALTERMAN. If there is a small silver lining, it is that the more Hezbollah does things that are away from its core principles, the more Hezbollah weakens its legitimacy inside Lebanon. All right? Hezbollah was used to fight other Lebanese; that took them down a notch. Hezbollah is being used as the shock troops of Bashar al-Assad in Syria against Syrians. That is not what Hezbollah is supposed to be for. I think that there is a possibility playing the diplomacy the right way to help use this episode to discredit Hezbollah in Lebanon, which could ultimately help to serve American interests.

Mr. BADRAN. Instead of just discrediting, I would say to use this episode to help beat Hezbollah in Syria as well.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you.

And also on stability in Jordan—and King Abdullah was here recently. What impact would you say this is having on his reign and reforms there and the rest?

Dr. Alterman.

Mr. ALTERMAN. Jordan is under tremendous pressure. I think what I worry about is not Jordan this month but Jordan for the next several years dealing with another huge refugee population. I was talking to somebody yesterday who speculated that more than half the population of Jordan is now refugees of one kind or another. It is a horrible not only financial problem, but also an intelligence problem, a law enforcement problem, an infrastructure problem. The Zaatari refugee camp, which has somewhere between 120,000 and 170,000 residents, depending on who you are listening to—the Jordanians tend to give larger numbers. It is all electrified. I saw hardware stores with electric fans and all kinds of things. All the electricity is stolen. They have people who wire into the electrical grid, and the camp had electricity shut off because there was a \$1 million unpaid electrical bill. Well, the guys from the U.N. said we have to find electricity or people become totally unruly. But somebody has to pay the Jordanians for the electricity. Just on the water and electrical problems, it is a huge pressure on the country in terms of employment, in terms of food, a huge set of problems for Jordan. As I say, not this month; this is going to be going on for a while.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you.

Ms. Pletka, did you want to say something?

Ms. PLETKA. It is the reason, what Jon just outlined is a danger to the regime and to the government in Jordan I think is something that isn't talked about often enough. We all look at Syria in a vacuum, as if it is somehow an island on the moon. Consider the countries that are around Syria—Turkey, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan,

Iraq. Maybe we don't care about what is happening in Syria—I do, but maybe we don't writ large. If you consider that the governments in each of these countries could be destabilized to the point of falling, that war could be taken to Israel, these are things that are going to embroil the United States, whether we want it or not.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Chabot.

Mr. Connolly is recognized.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you to our panel.

Mr. Badran, you showed us a map. Were you implying or stating that we should understand from that map that the Assad regime has already conceded large swaths of territory and in the future intends to concentrate on that swath in red you showed us?

Mr. BADRAN. I believe that if they could take the other parts back, they would. The thing is they have limits in their manpower and hardware that prevents them from doing so. However, what they have done with these other parts that have fallen out of their control is use Skud missiles and their air power to deny the rise of an alternative government, which a lot of people, especially like Ambassador Frederic Hof says after leaving government, has advocated the no fly option precisely so that we can start an alternative government in these areas.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And in your view, were they to do what you suggest they are probably going to do, and this morning's fall lends some credence to your theory, is it your view that they could make that viable?

Mr. BADRAN. I think if they can consolidate in that area with the Hezbollah, Iraqi militias and Iranian personnel on the ground, Russian weapons systems and chemical weapons, they can pretty much deter people from trying to storm it. And look at what the world, the United States is offering them in return, a negotiated settlement, a negotiated settlement that allows them to consolidate this ground, not firepower to the other side to be able to challenge it.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I listened to your testimony, and I particularly listened to Ms. Pletka's testimony.

You will forgive me, Ms. Pletka, but hearing you, I hear echoes of NeoCon arguments about Iraq not a decade ago, and I want to give you an opportunity, but you use phrases like "we have done absolutely nothing." I beg to differ. The United States most clearly has done something in the Arab Spring with limited options, but it is hard to argue we did nothing in Libya. I know for a fact, having been there, that we have been pretty engaged in Egypt. I know we have been supportive of the very values you extol in Tunisia.

But I would suggest one must not confuse the limited ability to influence events with therefore construing it as doing nothing. I wonder if you would comment.

Ms. PLETKA. I am a big supporter of the Iraq war. This committee—

Mr. CONNOLLY. I guessed that.

Ms. PLETKA. You are very astute. I am a big supporter of the Iraq war. I think the Iraqi people are pretty grateful to have been liberated.

But I want to remind this committee and you, sir, of something that happened in 1991. At the encouragement of President George

H.W. Bush, the Iraqi people rose up against Saddam Hussein. We had a choice before us at that moment. We could have supported them, and we never would have entered Iraq at all. We chose not to do so, and ultimately, we went to war. Whether you like it or not, the fact is we did go to war. Had we thought differently about it at the outset, perhaps things would have ended differently.

I am suggesting that on the question of Syria, we have a proxy military, people who are willing to fight and die in order to oust Bashar al-Assad, not American soldiers, not American men and women. We should be supporting those people—

Mr. CONNOLLY. And it is very clear in your mind who those people are. And we can single them out, and we can disaggregate providing weapons to them from providing weapons to extremists and jihadists.

Ms. PLETKA. Of course, I would always defer to the President and his officers in making those decisions, but certainly the CIA has suggested and is already vetting people on the ground, and they believe that that is a capability that they have.

Does that mean that we can distinguish perfectly among them? Our track record isn't ideal. But I would also suggest to you that had we been a little bit more proactive at the outset, none of these groups would have been present on the ground. They entered into Syria when Syria spiralled out of control. A little bit of proactive thinking is a good policy for America.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank you. And that proactive thinking has certainly arguably not paid off for us in Iraq either. You say people feel liberated. Well, there are lots of other much more complex aspects to our involvement in Iraq, and I am not sure all of the outcomes that we see in Iraq are to our liking.

Mr. Alterman, did you want to comment?

Mr. ALTERMAN. One of the very troubling things I find about Syria, I think it is useful to remind the committee, is that not all Syrians want the end of the Assad regime. It is partly for sectarian reasons but also for class reasons. For many Syrians, especially the middle class and upper class in cities, they look at the rebels as Vandals coming in and eating the organs of government troops on YouTube and all sorts of things.

There is a part of this, as we look toward a solution, that we don't have unanimity of the people that the regime has to go. As we look at options, we have to take seriously the view that Syria remains a divided population, not a unified population rising up against a tyrant.

Mr. CHABOT [presiding]. Thank you, the gentleman's time has expired.

The gentleman is recognized for 30 additional seconds.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I was simply going to concur with Dr. Alterman that that is an important piece to this very complex puzzle. I can tell you in my own district, Syrian minorities have very mixed feelings about what is unfolding in Syria. It is not the Manichean world Ms. Pletka would have us see. Thank you.

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

The gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Kinzinger, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KINZINGER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was just shocked by the last 5 minutes of what I have heard. So I guess evidently the new thing is when America stands up for oppressed minorities, when America stands up for freedom, when we see 80,000 innocent people murdered by a regime that is supported by Iran, the new argument is to say, well, if you support doing something, then you are an extension of NeoCon arguments.

And I didn't hear anywhere in Ms. Pletka's testimony, which, by the way, was to me an incredible 5 minutes of what we need to do, I heard nowhere in there you say that we should send 150,000 troops in. I heard nowhere in there did you believe that—did you even compare that to any activity that we did in Iran. But yet being involved to stand for an oppressed minority or an oppressed people by a regime supported by Iran has now become a new NeoCon argument. Shocking to me.

And this is the bigger problem. The bigger problem is we have now accepted that since we went through a decade of war, part of which was brought on in Afghanistan by somebody that killed thousands of American people, innocent American people, since we are now a little fatigued, we can't do anything around the globe now but retreat and not be involved. That is what I am hearing, and it is actually pretty scary to me.

So I didn't intend to go off into that minute and a half, but let me—and first off, I would love for those who are saying that America is already very so involved in Syria, please tell that to our allies, because our allies have begged us to get involved in Syria.

The Turks, you know, other allies around the region have begged us to be involved. They say we need American leadership. So, please, if you think we are already involved enough in Syria, tell them because they need to hear that then.

All right. There we go. Let me just say I was actually a supporter of the President's policy in Libya. I was one of six Republicans to vote for it because I believe that a strong United States is a stabilizing force around the globe.

But I believe now we have two messages that are coming out of the administration. There is the message that is domestic, which says, hey, just trust us, you know, we are actually doing something in Syria, but we can't really talk about it. And, by the way, if we do anything we can't control the outcome anyway. I mean, it is just a fait accompli. And then, again, there is the international message where the international community is bewildered because for the first time in history, America has done absolutely nothing really in a big situation like this.

My question is, and it was to Ms. Pletka's statement, I think one of the biggest issues—basically the last 10 years has almost been a proxy war to some level against Iran. Iran is the big issue in the area. What message, especially when it comes to the issue of denuclearization that we are going to be very concerned with, what message has the United States policy in Syria sent in a larger case to Iran? I want total start with you, Ms. Pletka. I will let the other two answer, but please keep it short because I have a whole bunch of other stuff.

Ms. PLETKA. I think I said in my statement, and thank you for defending the values that I think we should stand for, by the way,

the message that we send to Iran is very clear and the inference that the Iranians have drawn is very clear. The United States is not serious. We are not serious about our red lines. We are not serious about imposing our will and that we will not in fact do what it takes to stop them from proceeding toward a nuclear weapon.

Mr. KINZINGER. Let me add to that, the red line situation. Look, what should we do if chemical weapons are used, I am not going to advocate one way or another right now. But I will say if you are the President of the United States and you ever, ever utter the word “red line,” I don’t care if you are in the middle of a campaign, I don’t care if you are in the middle of a crowded theater on fire and the only way to evacuate it is to say the word “red line,” you never use that unless you even intend to follow through, because you are the President of the United States. And when you need to use a red line now, like in Iran, they are going to laugh. And you actually make war much more likely when you give the impression that you are not going to stand behind your word, because your enemies don’t take you seriously.

Dr. Alterman, about the message we are sending to Iran right now.

Mr. ALTERMAN. I think the Iranians are looking at a lot of things. They are looking at what we are doing in North Korea. They are looking at a whole series of issues. I think the Iranians, quite frankly, are looking at our budget situation. And I would argue that the greatest threat to our standing in the world is not an individual policy or two; it is the fact that we seem unable to make decisions about what our priorities are. We are unable to rebalance what our commitments are. And I would argue that distinguished members of this committee and this House need to take seriously the fact that how we resource what we do in the world will determine what we can do in the world and what people think—

Mr. KINZINGER. Let me cut you off there. I agree with you. I don’t disagree at all. I am sorry, sir, I don’t have enough time to give you an opportunity.

But let me just say, we snatched—I am worried that we snatched defeat from the jaws of victory in Iraq. I am worried that we are about to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory in Afghanistan. And I look at this administration’s policy in Syria, and I wonder if we are about to make the same mistake.

I thank you, and I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you.

The gentleman’s time has expired.

The gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Schneider, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Alterman, you referred to Syria as a hub state, critical to the entire region, its bordering countries, and as I have talked about this, I see it as a corkscrew. Whether we turn left or we turn right, we risk bringing all the states around it into the conflict.

Ms. Pletka, you talked about forces on the ground, and I am interested to know are you aware of any of the states in the region that have forces on the ground, Ms. Pletka?

Ms. PLETKA. Forgive me, I apologize, I was talking to my colleague, and I thought you were directing a question to Mr. Alterman. Forces on the ground?

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I was talking about hub states—the Syria being a hub state in the region. Are any of the bordering states to Syria, do they have currently forces on the ground? You said there were foreign troops on the ground.

Ms. PLETKA. Yes. In fact, one of the most interesting and troubling things that we have seen, we, AEI, together with the Institute for the Study of War, just put out a paper on Iranian activities in Syria, and one of the things that we saw is that the Iranians are not just arming and supporting or—

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I am aware of the Iranian troops on the ground. I am talking about our allies.

Ms. PLETKA. Oh, our allies on the ground? There have been reports that we have Special Forces. I can't confirm, obviously. There are reports that there are the other troops there covertly even from the Gulf. I am not aware of any. I haven't seen them on the ground.

The point I wanted to make to you, though, that is very interesting, and I hope you will appreciate it, is that the Iranians don't just have IRGC on the ground—

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I understand. But you had said in your opening remarks there are forces on the ground, fighting, supporting the rebels. I am not aware of that. So I was asking—

Ms. PLETKA. There are forces on the ground? I am sorry—

Mr. SCHNEIDER. You said evidence of foreign troops.

Ms. PLETKA. There are Iranians on the ground.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. But not foreign troops fighting the Assad regime.

Ms. PLETKA. Oh, foreign troops fighting the Assad regime? There are certainly foreigners affiliated with al-Qaeda who have entered the conflict.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. We have got al-Nusra. We have got al-Qaeda. We have got the rebels—

Ms. PLETKA. Forgive me for misunderstanding you.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. But as we look to the foreign troops coming in fighting the regime, they are not troops that we would look long-term strategically to be allies of the United States or our allies in the region.

Ms. PLETKA. No, those are the only ones who are being armed.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Let me finish, please. As you advocate reaching out and arming those rebels who embrace democratic principles, what rebels are we talking about that embrace these democratic principles?

Ms. PLETKA. Well, in fact the Free Syrian Army embraces those democratic principles. Those are the forces on the ground with whom we have been working already, but we are not arming aggressively. Those are the forces who hold out some prospect for a better future for the Syrian people. They are not working with Jabhat al-Nusra. They have explicitly rejected working with Jabhat al-Nusra and with any other group that swears fealty to al-Qaeda.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. But what I have seen is that rebels are fighting each other as well. To your point that the Free Syrian Army and

al-Nusra are as much in conflict with each other as they are with the Assad regime, long term, and this is to all of the witnesses, to topple the Assad regime without a plan and then to have the rebels fighting each other, whether we arm the Free Syrian Army or not, if we put arms in, and then they then lose those arms to al-Nusra, the consequence to our allies are the same, isn't it?

Mr. BADRAN. This is why, Congressman, I mentioned that we work with this two-pronged approach, with Turkish intelligence, which has excellent intelligence penetration in the north, and Jordanian and Saudi intelligence, which have excellent penetration in the south, to use them as the conduit to set up these local forces, and therefore, you can have an intelligence channel to these guys, and you know who they are, and you know how to deal with them.

Second, sir, sending arms isn't just sending any type of arms. Not everything can be found on the black market. There are certain things, there are certain very specific tactical systems that you can send for very specific tactical missions and you control the flow of ammo, and that way, you can control—you can mitigate against unwanted outcomes.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Dr. Alterman?

Mr. ALTERMAN. Is there a specific part of that question?

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Well, you talked about arming people to defend their homes, but the other conversation we heard before you was that we should arm the rebels.

Mr. ALTERMAN. We have seen this game before. I mean, when there are lots of weapons floating around, people have a temporary loyalty to us. They will tell us what they know we need to hear or what we want to hear. And then situations change, and they have forgotten their loyalty. We used to arm Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in Afghanistan. Now we fight Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. We had Stingers come out of Afghanistan. We had MANPADS come out of Libya. I mean, we have seen this time and time and time again.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. My time is limited so I am going to ask one quick question. Do you see a scenario where we can arm rebels that we won't see that scenario, or is arming the rebels going to lead to the same story over again?

Mr. ALTERMAN. It depends on what we arm them with. Certainly, if there are more rifles or smaller things I am less worried than large sophisticated systems that can harm infrastructure, airplanes and those kinds of things.

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

The gentleman from Arkansas, Mr. Cotton, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. COTTON. Thank you.

Thank you all for your time and coming today and for your efforts to you put into your testimony. I want to thank Ms. Pletka as well in particular for her defense of freedom. I don't know whether you consider yourself a NeoCon or not. I am quite sure that you are not a socialist who grew up in New York City in the 1940s and 1950s, which some of the historically limited knowledge colleagues of ours might not know is the original term for neoconservatives. I could call you a Reagan Republican, or I could call you a Truman Democrat or a Kennedy Democrat, but I will just let you define yourself as you choose.

I am worried that the two most likely outcomes in Syria right now are both highly unacceptable to the West and the United States: Assad remaining in power or an al-Nusra-led rebel front toppling Assad and taking power. Could we just go down the row and get your assessment of which one of those two is more likely and which one would be worse for U.S. and Western interests? Mr. Badran.

Mr. BADRAN. Thank you so much. The idea of no good guys in Syria I think is unhelpful. In the past the United States, in World War II, for example—

Mr. COTTON. No, I am aware that there are good guys, and I wish that we had supported the good guys earlier, but given the state of play right now—

Mr. BADRAN. In terms of strategic prioritization, I think the defeat of Assad and all the structures of Iranian influence in Syria is a top priority. Then you develop another strategy to mitigate against whatever other undesirables that can emerge. I do believe that the inherent fissures in the Syria Sunni community, its regionalism and its internal divisions are going to mitigate against the ability of Nusra to take over in the sense that we consider it would.

Mr. COTTON. Is that assessment where the Gulf states stand? Let's topple Syria, let's deal Iran a blow, and we will worry about what happens afterwards?

Mr. BADRAN. Yes, sir, and I think that they also have their own channels, not to al-Nusra, they have a multiple to the tribes, to businessmen and so on and so forth, that I think to just sort of condense everything to Jabhat al-Nusra is misleading.

Mr. COTTON. Ms. Pletka, what is more likely, what is worse?

Ms. PLETKA. First, Mr. Cotton, thank you. I like to refer to myself as an American.

What is worse is clearly Assad's return to power. I think that the balance has tipped slightly toward him in the last few weeks and that is very worrisome. The problem is that I think that the premise that many bring to this is that somehow we can get back to status quo ante; Assad looks a lot better now that we see what the possible outcome is. And the answer is there is never going to be another solid Syria under Assad, whether you liked it or not.

We need to get rid of him, and we need to have a follow-on policy. It is that that worries me most, frankly. We can talk a lot about arming, who to arm, whether we can vet. But what we do after Assad fall is going to be decisive. If we abdicate our responsibility, if we forget about places, as we have forgotten about parts of Libya, frankly, then we end up with a situation in which bad guys control half the country, and we cannot allow that to happen.

Mr. COTTON. Dr. Alterman.

Mr. ALTERMAN. I think there is a possibility of some sort of mid-point where Assad has control over part of the country; other forces have control over another part of the country. We try to make the other parts of the country successful.

I think the key to me is not thinking about this as a moment of decision, not thinking about this as the point in which we decide whether this is going to be won or lost, but the changes in the Arab world are going to take more than a decade to work themselves

out. The changes in Syria are going to take themselves more than a decade to work out.

I think we have to take a more incremental approach, preserving our interests, trying to keep radicals from seizing more control, putting ourselves in a better position so that when changes continue to work through the Arab world, we can continue to try to use them to an advantage to further American values, American interests, and, very importantly, the interests of the very vulnerable neighbors, who are all allies of the United States.

Mr. COTTON. Ms. Pletka, I want to discuss now an op-ed that you and General Keane have written about a no-fly zone. Most people when they think about a no-fly zone think about what we had in Iraq in the 1990s or elsewhere, where aircraft are fighting aircraft if they are in the air. There are also effective ways of making a no-fly zone, for example, destroying airfields or support facilities.

Can you estimate how many airfields Syria has today, not a precise number, but are we talking dozens, scores, hundreds?

Mr. BADRAN. I think the total is 25 or so, but a lot of them are decommissioned, a lot of them are outside the control of the Assad regime.

Mr. COTTON. There are 25 airfields in all of Syria?

Mr. BADRAN. Between civilian and military, something approximately around that number. But a lot of them are in the east and the north of the country. They have fallen outside the regime's control or have been decommissioned even in the past.

Mr. COTTON. So 25, even if you say it was 50, that is both airfields that Syria's fixed-wing aircraft would have to use, but also any fixed-wing aircraft coming in from Iran for resupply as well.

Ms. PLETKA. As well as Russia.

Mr. COTTON. As well as Russia. And can you estimate if it would take the United States military with our NATO allies minutes or hours to destroy those airfields?

Ms. PLETKA. I never want to put myself forward as a military expert. You of all people should know that I am not one.

General Keane, working with him and discussing with people whom have done serious analysis, believe that this is a matter—that this is an operation that would certainly take not more than days. But we need to underscore that the Syrians will be able to repair these airfields. This is something we will need to keep at. If we make a commitment, we will need to keep at it. It won't be cost-free. And we do have the best capabilities in the region. Yes, the Arab League should join us; yes, NATO, especially Turkey, should join us. At the end of the day, however, we do still at this moment have the best capability.

Mr. COTTON. Thank you all for your time and your insights.

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

The gentleman from California, Mr. Vargas, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. VARGAS. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak.

And also I want to thank the people who are testifying today.

When I think of the region, I do think of a good guy. I think of Israel. They are good guys. They have our values. They are great allies, and I do see them as good guys. But I imagine like most

Americans, I am listening to the discussion here trying to find the good guys here. I mean, you find the victims, you find the people who are being killed, the internally displaced people, the refugees, but then it just seems like all bad guys. I mean, the other guys—these are the guys that it seems like if you arm them, they are going to turn around and use the weapons against the good guys in the region. And that is my concern. I have been trying to pick sides here and done a lot of reading, and they all seem like pretty bad guys to me.

So how do we pick? Who do we want to end up there? Do you want to deal a blow to Iran and Hezbollah, and I think that that is great, but then who do you end up with? Do you end up with people that are going to start lobbing bombs into Israel? I mean, who do you end up with?

Ms. PLETKA. Sir, you ask a very hard question, and it is not one that any of us will be able to answer to your complete satisfaction. You know, in World War II, we worked with Stalin's Russia, Stalin's Soviet Union, to defeat the Nazis. I can assure you that Stalin was not a nice man, for those who have forgotten. And these are the choices that face us in the Middle East as well.

You are right, there is only one good guy. Israel is a good guy, and it has many, many enemies. And if we are a friend to Israel, we won't abandon them to the predations of the countries around them and say, you know what? I can't decide who is a better guy and who is a worse guy. I am just going to let them all kill each other and hope for the best.

We have an opportunity to help, not to resolve an outcome, but to help to secure a better outcome that will help our ally Israel. It is going to be a difficult decision.

Mr. BADRAN. I think that the Israelis themselves have given us a very important indication as to how they calculate the situation. They have made three incursions into Syria, strikes. They all have been against Iranian targets. Because the way I was recently there and an official there told me that the way they prioritize the threat is Iran is the existential threat; Hezbollah is a strategic threat; and whatever Islamist groups that may emerge in Syria are a tactical threat.

Israel's number one priority is to prevent Iran from deploying strategic weapon systems on its borders. Now Syria, by becoming an IRGC base, in addition to Hezbollah, armed with Russian strategic weapons, is going to be precisely the outcome that Israel has been striving to prevent.

Mr. VARGAS. Dr. Alterman.

Mr. ALTERMAN. One of the problems with these long-ranging military insurgencies is the people who tend to win at the end are the people who fought the most, and the people who fought the most are not the nice guys. They are not democrats. They think that they won their spoils, and now it is time to rule.

One of the certainly daunting prospects is that you have a future government in Syria which does not have the experience of having been deterred by the Israelis the way the Assad government has, because for all the Assad government shoots its mouth off about Israel, the fact is the Assad government knows exactly what Israeli capabilities are and is very cautious about challenging Israel.

One of the things we have to consider is the possibility that a future Government of Syria would have to be re-deterred by the Israelis. That is not a reason to not work for a different government in Syria. That, I think, is one of the reasons why we might want a more extended process of transition of power.

But certainly when you talk to Israeli intelligence and military people, as I have, they are not euphoric about the fall of the person who tries to portray himself as Israel's greatest foe in the region because he is a foe that they are not particularly worried about.

Mr. VARGAS. Thank you very much.

Speaking out of school, we heard something very similar very recently also that in fact Syria doesn't seem to be much of a threat to Israel as it is today, but the threat could come about. Thank you again.

I guess I am like most Americans. It is hard to keep score on this one. It is hard to keep score when everyone is the bad guy on one side and you have a great guy and friend on the other side, so how do you protect that friend. I guess that is what I am looking for, and again, Israel being that great friend. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN [presiding]. Thank you very much, Mr. Vargas.

Mr. Weber of Texas.

Mr. WEBER. Thank you.

I have got 5 minutes. I am going to give my time to you all. Three things that America can do to change this. Prioritize them for me.

Mr. Badran, start.

Mr. BADRAN. I think the first thing that we should do is to take out the supply lines that the Iranians are bringing to the regime because that is really the core of his ability to continue this war. That means the airfields, specifically Damascus airport being a priority. Once you take those things out, work with the Turkish and Jordanian intelligence and Saudi intelligence in Jordan to start working with the local groups on their borders and start making incremental assaults to deny the ability of the regime to consolidate itself in a little IRGC base in western Syria.

Mr. WEBER. That was two. That was take out the supply lines, work with the Turks, Jordanians and Saudis. You have got one more.

Mr. BADRAN. And make sure that we state openly that the idea of a managed political transition is a fantasy, that this thing is not going to end until the regime is out.

Mr. WEBER. Okay.

Ms. Pletka.

Ms. PLETKA. Both Jon and Chairman Ros-Lehtinen said that there has to be a political solution. And I agree, there does have to be, at the end of this, finally some political solution. No one is going to be amenable to a political solution—

Mr. WEBER. And you said we needed to vet. Let me just give you a little bit of a—to vet pro-American forces, how do you do that?

Ms. PLETKA. Well, first of all you are not going to get rid of bad guys unless the other side thinks they are winning. So I do think we need to pick winners, and I am a big believer. How do we vet them? That is the job of the CIA and our Special Forces. That is

what they are supposedly doing on the ground. That is what they told the Congress they are capable of doing.

Mr. WEBER. Pick the least onerous.

Point number two.

Ms. PLETKA. We need to impose costs on those who are aiding and abetting bad guys.

Mr. WEBER. Get world opinion to work against Iran.

Ms. PLETKA. Iran, Russia, Qatar.

Mr. WEBER. Point number three.

Ms. PLETKA. We need to have a policy. We need to have an actual policy that desires an outcome—

Mr. WEBER. Have you applied at the White House?

Ms. PLETKA. I haven't, and I suspect I am ineligible in their eyes. But having a policy and seeing it through, not just for now but for post-Assad and for the region, will be very important.

Mr. WEBER. Okay.

Dr. Alterman.

Mr. ALTERMAN. Very quickly, we have to pay an awful lot of attention to our allies, both protecting our good allies, and making sure other allies are not undermining us.

Second, we have to be attendant to the jihadi threat in Syria. That could be with us for years and years and years to come. It could affect a whole range of allies from Europe and Asia and beyond.

Third, we have to be focused on Iran, but not over think the issue on Iran. One of the problems that we have fighting Iran in this scope is that in many ways, this is their home turf because they are used to fighting asymmetrically, and we are used to fighting symmetrically. And we have to be more creative about limiting Iranian influence, Iranian efforts to disrupt. And in many ways, this is where they feel they have a comparative advantage. We have to deny the comparative advantage.

Mr. WEBER. Do you think the Iranians are a credible serious threat to Israel's continued exist fence?

Mr. ALTERMAN. I think the Iranians are a potential threat to Israel's existence. They are not currently a likely threat. And it is unclear how that might unfold. But Israel has, in terms of conventional forces, in terms of unconventional forces, Iran is a relatively weak country that can create lots of mischief. And we have to be sure we don't make Iran into something it is not, because actually that makes it easier for the Iranians to succeed, because even when they get a tiny victory, they can—

Mr. WEBER. Let me interrupt. I am running out of time. So without Iranian support, does the Assad regime stay atop the government in Syria?

Mr. ALTERMAN. I think with Russian support—

Mr. WEBER. No, without Iranian support.

Mr. ALTERMAN. Without Iranian support, provided there is continued Russian support, I suspect that because of Russian help in the U.N., preventing international action, and Russian weapons and money, I think they probably could.

Mr. WEBER. So Assad stays in power without Iranian support in your opinion, if they just completely withdrew support?

Ms. PLETKA. I don't think so.

Mr. ALTERMAN. Okay, in my judgment, Russian support is necessary.

Mr. WEBER. Okay. And earlier, you said in your comments that this is a scenario that will play out in 10 years, right? What do you mean by that? You have got 15 seconds.

Mr. ALTERMAN. I don't have 10 years. This is not about a single battle.

Mr. WEBER. You think he stays in power 10 more years?

Mr. ALTERMAN. I am not sure he stays in power. I think there will be elements of the regime that will have large influence in Syria—

Mr. WEBER. A divided country?

Mr. ALTERMAN. Certainly de facto, if not de jure.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. You have made excellent points in those 5 minutes and got great answers. Thank you.

Mr. Higgins of New York.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would just say that I think it is a fair question to raise, that is Syria the way it is because Assad is the way he is, or is Assad the way he is because Syria is the way it is?

Syria clearly contains a volatile mix of ethnic groups and sects. And you know the best we can hope for in any American military intervention is to provide, as we did in the latter stages of Iraq, provide a breathing space from which the various factions within these countries, be it Iraq, be it Syria, can reconcile politically and form some kind of functioning government toward a constitution and toward some kind of civil existence.

I would say that in Egypt, on January 25th, 2011, an 18-day protest that was very organic was lodged against a brutal dictator in Egypt. The greatest influence in that was a retired English professor living in his apartment in north Boston, Massachusetts, by the name of Eugene Sharp. He wrote a book 20 years ago called, "From Dictatorship to Democracy." And because of the power of the Internet, and the two most powerful forces in the Middle East today are youth and technology, that book was taken, translated into 20 different languages, including Arabic. And in the last days of the protest in Tahrir Square, 8 million people were on the streets of Egypt, the largest pro-democracy demonstration in the history of the world.

I think there is a lot of emphasis today at this hearing, which I think is disappointing, about whether or not we should intervene militarily. I think that smart power is needed. I think strong diplomacy is needed. Meaningful sanctions are needed, and the exportation, the exportation of the American idea. And that is based on a strong prosperous America that takes care of its own people, because the Internet and social media today are used not only effectively for organizational purposes in places where demonstrations could never take place before, but because of these great tools of collaboration we have, they can now, but also, also, in addition to organizational purposes, aspirational purposes, because the young people in that part of the world see how Westerners live. They want the same freedoms that we enjoy for our people.

Ms. Pletka, you had said that the U.S. has done nothing: \$2 trillion out of the American economy, \$160 billion in interest pay-

ments, because of course the two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were deficit financed, that is not nothing; 2,235 U.S. casualties in Afghanistan; 4,486 U.S. casualties in Iraq, that is not nothing.

It is very, very important to remember here that the United States does in fact have a role. The humanitarian disasters that are taking place in that part of the world collectively and individually are of a great concern to us, and as a government, as a country, I think we are doing a lot.

But there always is, there always is limitations to a super power and what it is we can impose on a certain people. There has to be a balance between what we can do to help them achieve what they want and what they truly want for themselves.

And as I said at the outset, this is really not about the good guys and the bad guys. These are about a lot of people whose motivations are highly questionable, and what these places will become, not tomorrow or next year, but in the next 5 to 10 years as well.

I yield back.

Mr. WEBER [presiding]. Thank you, Mr. Higgins.

We will now turn to Mr. Yoho of Florida. He is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate your input here today. It has been interesting to hear talks on both sides here. And I agree with both of them, Mr. Connolly talking about our interference as NeoCon, and I heard Mr. Kinzinger, and I agree with him, too.

Dr. Alterman, I would like to start with you because you were talking about our willingness to intervene is unclear, and it is because of our policies and what policies we should pursue and that we have created a paper tiger.

And I agree with you, Ms. Pletka.

But I think the reason that we have this kind of confusion is because we are not following this book here, and this book is the Constitution of the United States of America. And I don't believe anywhere in there it says about a foreign intervention, and I believe our Founding Fathers said honest and open trade and commerce with all nations, honest and true friendship with all nations, intermingling with none.

Unfortunately, our policies of the last 50 to 100 years have gotten away from this.

Ms. Pletka, you kind of scare me in your willingness to say that we just need to do a fly-over. We did that in Libya. Libya didn't have an advanced air force. Syria has a more advanced air force backed by the Russian Army.

I look around this room, and I see these young men and women in here, and for us to do that, can you guarantee me that it won't open up to an all-out war with Iran and Russia involved, maybe China, to bring in other people into this conflict?

Because I would like for you to come to the House Chambers after we get done voting and look at the young men and women there that are the wounded warriors that have gone to Afghanistan and have gone to Iraq.

And you say we have done nothing, and I agree with the gentleman down here. America has paid a heck of a price for the conflicts we have had, and yet you talk about the freedom and libera-

tion in Iraq. But yet we have to fight for our air space over Iraq, but Iran can fly over-over Iraq. And we have paid a serious price. And I think our interventionist policies have been a dangerous thing, and what I am hearing is the same thing.

And I have asked you to discuss things outside of the box, and I think as the gentleman talked about building and sending information about freedoms and the ideals of America are the things we need to talk about.

But it scares me to think that we just take it flippantly to say we will just do a fly-over. Because if somebody did that to this country and did a fly-over, I think we would all view this as an act of aggression, if not an act of war. Are we not doing the same thing over there?

I would just like to hear you guys' thoughts because I don't like the solutions I am hearing here, and that we are going to have to vote on some appropriations down the road. So I look forward to hearing what you have to say.

Ms. PLETKA. May I? If I may go first, I believe our Constitution was written by people who believed in the principles that animate our country and that they believed that those principles were not simply for Americans alone and that we have something to stand for in this world and that we do right by standing by it. So I think that if our Founders were sitting here today, they would agree.

Mr. YOHO. I disagree with that, but you can have your opinion.

Ms. PLETKA. I realize that, and you made that very clear.

Second of all, yes, I think I can guarantee to you that if we create a no-fly zone or arm the rebels in Syria, that we will not be involved in a regional war with Iran, China and Russia. I think I am willing to go out on that limb there, yes.

As far as our wounded soldiers, I want to defer to Mr. Cotton, who fought in Iraq and I think can speak for the people who he saw on the ground there. He knows much better than I do how our men and women in uniform feel about defending the values and principles that bring us all here today.

Mr. YOHO. Dr. Alterman.

Mr. ALTERMAN. Sir, I agree that the Constitution has to animate it. The Constitution, of course, provides for Congress to declare war, and sometimes we do have to fight wars.

As I suggested, I don't think this is a time when we should be fighting a war. So I think we are in agreement there.

I wish that this were a simple matter of providing some pamphlets and books to a civil uprising that would end an odious regime. I don't think we are there. We may have been there 2 years ago. I don't think we are at that point now. I don't think it would work.

My reading of what happened in Egypt is not simply that some people read Gene Sharp and it inspired them and the regime fell. I think what happened was the military made a decision. It was the military that decided Hosni Mubarak was gone.

And one of the things that has puzzled me, quite frankly, and that I was wrong about when I testified about Syria before the Senate a year ago is that the military hasn't risen up against Bashar al-Assad. The government has not split, despite overwhelming pressure.

But the idea that we can simply get a mass movement and get a dictator with blood on his hands to step down is I think sadly wishful thinking.

Mr. YOHO. My time has expired.

Thank you.

Mr. WEBER. Thank you, Mr. Yoho.

We will now turn to Mr. Cicilline for 5 minutes.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to begin by saying I am disappointed in the title of this hearing because I think it does a serious injustice to the seriousness of this question and particularly the complicated nature of this civil war in Syria.

Of course, from listening to some of the discussion this morning you might think this is a choice between being fully engaged in civil war in Syria, which entitles you to describe yourself as a patriot and as an American and someone who cherishes American values, versus people who are weak, interested in retreat and undermining American values.

Of course, that is not the question.

This is a complicated question about a very difficult region of the world and the best way that the United States can both protect our national security interests and honor our values as a Nation.

The question is whether the United States should make considerable financial investments and investments of U.S. military personnel to advance the national security interests of the United States over an indefinite period of time at the same time that we are drawing down from our involvement in Afghanistan and earlier from Iraq.

These are hard and complicated questions.

And I must say that I was equally disappointed to hear Ms. Pletka say that we have done nothing in response to authoritarian rule or antidemocratic actions. We have just spent over \$100 billion after more than a decade of war, lost thousands of American heroes.

I have had the honor of meeting families who have lost loved ones in those conflicts, thousands, tens of thousands of Americans who have been maimed by war.

And I have my own view on both the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, but there is no question that our brave men and women were told the same things, they were defending American values.

And I think the notion that America has done nothing to vindicate those values does great offense to the families who have been impacted by those conflicts.

The administration in response to the civil war in Syria began first by denouncing the regime, expanding U.S. sanctions against government officials, insisting that the Assad government embrace reform, ultimately as the repression continues, called for Assad's resignation, has been working in a multilateral way in the U.N. to sanction the regime, to reach a cease-fire, to endorse a political transition plan, to expand humanitarian and refugee assistance, and to providing limited nonlethal assistance to the opposition.

So I think the question is, what more should the U.S. do or can do that will effectively protect the national security interests of the United States and help bring stability to that region of the world?

And I had hoped we would spend time on that, rather than challenging each other about who is really a patriot and who is really American.

So what I would like you to focus on specifically is the suggestion—your first suggestion, Ms. Pletka, is to vet and arm the rebels. It seems like it would be a sensible thing to do. If the world were so simple, we could pick out the good guys and bad guys and cheer the good guys on and give them tools to win.

The most recent report I have seen, which was May 13th, in an article in the Washington Post reported that there were a few hundred armed groups currently fighting in Syria. So my first question really is, is arming the resistance, vetting them, as you say, practical? And it is not enough to simply say, oh, the CIA can do that. I am asking this panel whether or not that is a sensible policy to pursue. Do we have the ability to actually vet several hundred armed groups? And then even if we are able to do that, do we have the capacity to provide enough resources so that they prevail, and then after they prevail, to be sure they remain in a post-Syria Government? Because without those assurances, we are back to the same question of do we simply invest additional American resources or potentially American personnel without any reasonable assurance that we will be successful at the end?

I apologize, I only have 45 seconds, but do your best.

Ms. PLETKA. I would like to answer your question about vetting, and I know my colleagues would as well, but I do want to take issue with something you said about something I said.

First of all, when I said we have done nothing, I was referring to Syria, not referring to tyranny and dictatorship. And while I didn't interrupt or correct any of the previous members who suggested that I had made that statement, I think it is time that I do so now because I made no such statement and I resent the implication that I did. So there we start.

On vetting, absolutely. The choice is we either don't arm the rebels and do nothing; in other words, we don't support a proxy that wishes to overthrow Assad, a goal that the President has articulated for himself. Okay, we don't have to do that, or we arm the rebels. If we want to arm the rebels, I would suggest that it is important that we figure out who they are. I do believe it is within our capacity. I trust the CIA when they say we can do it. We should have done it when we armed the rebels in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and I believe we can do it now.

Mr. BADRAN. I think this is why I mentioned having this two-pronged approach, working with regional allies to do that, to help us do that, and I don't think that is necessarily going to be a major sort of costly operation on the one hand.

On the other hand, I mean, what kind of weapons are we talking about? We are talking about a very specific—there has to be an integrated mission here. And this is something where we tell them that these are the very specific weapons they are going to get for very specific missions, two words, squeezing the regime out of the areas that they are operating in, in the north and the south, while, for instance, targeted strikes on the ports of entry of resupply for the regime from the Iranians will diminish its ability to continue

fighting, and it becomes an incremental policy toward that end. So it is without much resource commitment at all, as a matter of fact.

Mr. CICILLINE. I yield back.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WEBER. Mr. Alterman, did you want a brief time to respond to that?

Mr. ALTERMAN. No.

Mr. WEBER. Okay, thank you.

We will now turn to Congresswoman Frankel from Florida for 5 minutes.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the panel.

I had the privilege of joining Mr. Joe Wilson this past week and some of my colleagues on a CODEL, where we went to a few countries, but one of the stops we made was at the Combined Air Operations Center in Doha. And one of the opportunities I had was they took us to an area where they had a screen where we were told there was a tracking of the missiles being fired within Syria every single day. I mean, lots. And one of the things that was most concerning was how close that they would be coming, for example, to Turkey.

My question to you is, and I think you might have touched on this before, but what do you think is the risk of the conflict, which now we consider a civil conflict, expanding to Turkey or Jordan, which might cause the United States more pressure to be involved in the conflict?

Mr. BADRAN. I mean, the Turks have suffered, as you mentioned, not just these kind of shellings but also terror operations in Turkey sponsored by assets of the Assad regime that are operating in Turkey as well.

But it is not just a civil conflict anymore. When you have Hezbollah leading the fight on the ground on behalf of the regime with pro-Iranian Shi'a militia from Iraq, for instance, this is no longer a civil conflict. This is a foreign state that is coming to defend its strategic interests in Syria.

So the question is not just whether this is going to spill over, let's say, into the neighboring countries, which potentially it could happen. I am not sure if it is going to escalate to the extent that is being suggested. But the problem is that if you leave the Iranians to win at the end of it, then what is going to be the repercussion on all of our allies that are around Syria? What will be Turkey's position then? What will be Jordan's position then? What will be Israel's position then when you have an IRGC-controlled base on the Mediterranean in possession of strategic Russian weapons systems, for instance?

I mean, we talk a lot about weapons not falling into the wrong hands of the rebels, and we are talking about RPGs and really tactical weapons. Here we are talking about strategic weapons systems, and are we suggesting that the Assad regime and IRGC are the right hands? I don't think that is right.

Mr. ALTERMAN. We have already seen fighting spilling over into Lebanon. We have seen violence in Turkey. I think there are two ways in which this violence could spread. One is that either regime elements or elements friendly to the regime carry out attacks

against people fighting the regime across borders. As I say, we have seen that in Lebanon. We have seen that at least against civilian targets in Turkey.

The other possibility is that foreign fighters who have networked and trained in Syria go back to their homes of origin and continue a jihad against whatever target. And that could affect a whole range of countries, not necessarily bordering, but it may affect most of the countries bordering Syria. And either one of those events would be tremendously destabilizing, polarizing, and for, especially I think the most vulnerable and small countries, Lebanon and Jordan, over the next 5 to 10 years, that could prove to be an existential threat.

Ms. FRANKEL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WEBER. Thank you.

Mr. DeSantis.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to the witnesses. I really appreciate you guys coming.

Just as kind of a way of background just so I can put what you have said in context, can you just tell me real quick, and I am going to insist on some quick answers, Egypt. Do you think that Egypt is better off today than under Mubarak? Do you think that Egypt is better in terms of our strategic interests in the region and in terms of Israel's security?

I will start with you, Mr. Badran, and go down.

Mr. BADRAN. I think Egypt's problems would have been just as terrible had it been under Mubarak or now because they are in a terrible economic situation that I don't think either administration could have solved.

But I do think in terms of the strategic positioning of Egypt, I don't think much has changed, to be perfectly honest with you. So the idea of the liberties of the Egyptian people domestically, how have these things changed for the Egyptians, I am not so sure. I think there is much more robust participation now.

Mr. DESANTIS. What about Islamist influence in the government? Greater or less than under Mubarak, do you think?

Mr. BADRAN. Clearly greater, of course.

Mr. DESANTIS. Ms. Pletka?

Ms. PLETKA. I think the Islamists have more influence as well. Do I think it is better for the United States? I think, ultimately, it probably will be better for the United States, but I think right now we are facing a very difficult situation in Egypt, internal problems, as Tony suggested, and also growing problems in ungoverned areas of Egypt that are going to have implications for Egypt's neighbors.

Mr. DESANTIS. Camp David Accords, more secure, less secure?

Ms. PLETKA. The Camp David Accords remain secure in my estimation.

Mr. DESANTIS. Doctor?

Mr. ALTERMAN. I think Egypt is probably in the worst condition now that it has been in its modern history. The question is whether it can use this to bounce into a more resilient place, and I think the jury is out. I certainly have been troubled by many of the things that the government has done, but I don't think the game is over in Egypt.

Mr. DESANTIS. And I don't necessarily think so either. I don't mean to cut you off, but I want to go and then just basically kind of the same thing about Libya. You know, you look and after Gadaffi fell, a lot of these weapons have gone with Islamic fighters. There is a lot of jihadism in North Africa. And I guess is North Africa a safer place now that Gadaffi is gone or not? Because I am concerned with what I have seen there. Whoever wants to take it.

Ms. PLETKA. Thank you both for throwing me under the bus on that one. Remember what Gadaffi did, PanAm 103, so Gadaffi was not a nice man. The arms that have been in Libya have absolutely traveled outside of Libya. And I think a big part of the problem is that the United States sees the conflict as an isolated incident that doesn't require further management.

Would we have been able to stop it? I am not certain we would have. On the other hand, I think we need to remember that Gadaffi was a very destabilizing influence in Africa, spent a lot of time working to destabilize other countries and to support—and money, absolutely, to destabilize other countries. And right now, what we see is that there is a more democratic government in Libya, but they do not fully control all of the territory of Libya, and that remains a threat to the region and to us.

Mr. DESANTIS. Anyone else on that? Okay.

I appreciate that.

So I guess a lot of people would look at Syria and would say, well, obviously Assad is not somebody who we like, Hezbollah, Iran. You guys articulated that well, the problems there.

But on the other side, you see a lot of Sunni supremacist fighters, a lot of Islamic fighters, foreign fighters.

You mentioned the foreign fighters coming in to support Assad. There are also foreign fighters coming in to support the other side and to wage jihad. These are people who were fighting us in Iraq. So I guess people look at that and say, why do we want to referee that? Neither of those outcomes would be good if either of those—one of those sides were to ultimately win. They are basically fighting each other and weakening each other. Why would we want to then go in and then become kind of the focus of them? Because I think most of them are not going to be pro-American, even the people who are not as Islamist. You know, they may want our aid now, but the idea they are going to be pro-American, I am certainly not convinced of that. So what would you say to that kind of argument?

Mr. ALTERMAN. First, I would just reinforce your point. The French estimate is perhaps 400 French citizens are fighting in Syria right now. It is terrifying if you are a French security person thinking about the security of France into the future, especially a few weeks after two bloody attacks in London and Paris on military personnel.

That is not to say, though, that we have no stake in how these battles are resolved. I understand there are evil forces on both sides. They are not all evil forces, and I think what we have to do is find a way, consistent with our interests and our resources, to try to influence these movements in positive ways. They are not all negative on the rebel side. There may be some people affiliated with the regime who we may be able to work with. And the question is whether we can, over time, work toward some better place

which is less threatening to us, the immediate allies and even more broadly our allies in Europe and Asia and elsewhere and ultimately at home as well.

Mr. DESANTIS. My time has expired.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WEBER. Thank you, Mr. DeSantis.

We will now move to Mr. Meadows.

Mr. MEADOWS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank each one of you for being here on this critical topic. I want to give a little bit of opportunity I guess for a few of you to expand on some of the things we have already talked about, one of those being the arming of rebels and specifically how do you think—what is the best way for us to identify those rebels that would not have extremist views, and how do we come about that? I know that is a complex question. It is not something that is easily answered. This is a complex situation.

What is the best way for us to do that and as Members of Congress or the administration or the State Department, whomever, how do we give the tools to make sure that that gets done properly? So you threw him under the bus.

Mr. BADRAN. The United States has been sending nonlethal aid. And some of it has some military function. So if we are capable of vetting people that we are sending that type of assistance to, I think we can look to other groups that we can send tactical weapons to. And it is important here to also remember that we are not talking here about scud missiles or nuclear weapons. We are talking about tactical weaponries, you know—rifles, rocket launchers, mortars, very basic things to achieve—

Mr. MEADOWS. So things that can't come back against us in a real and powerful way.

Mr. BADRAN. I don't think it alters the balance of power in the region in any way. But also, I mentioned in my testimony that we should harness sort of the resources of allies in the region. We have very close working relationships with some of these groups, be they the Turks, be they the Jordanians, be they the Saudis, be they the Qataris. And then you can look.

But the idea that we cannot give weapons to any Islamists of any shade is unrealistic, I think. There are various Islamists. Some of them are one shade; some of them the other. Some of them are Islamists and are fighting—Jabhat al-Nusra, for instance. They are also Islamists. But more the al-Qaeda end of the spectrum.

So I think that shouldn't be a constraint. We should acknowledge there are people—this is a sectarian war. A lot of people take on the religious identity precisely because of the nature of the fight, especially when they see an onslaught of sectarianism from the other side, from the Iranians, purely Shiite sectarian force that is fighting them. So we have to take all of this into consideration I think.

Ms. PLETKA. I fully agree with how Tony laid that out. And I think it is very astute. You are right, and all the other members who have suggested that there are no angels fighting in Syria, they are all right. But despite the fact that there are no angels, there will be an outcome.

Mr. MEADOWS. Sure.

Ms. PLETKA. And somebody will prevail. There may be a long-term, low-intensity conflict but somebody will come out on top. There will ultimately be a government, and we do have an interest in trying to ensure that the better among them do this.

As for vetting, I think a number of members have fixated on this idea. And while none of us should downplay the notion that we will be lied to, people do absolutely don the mantle of pro-Westernism or secularism when they are neither. On the other hand, we do this everywhere. We give billions of dollars to Egypt. We vet who that goes to. We give millions of dollars, tens of millions and have given billions to Lebanon. We make sure that they do not go to the many terrorist groups that are part of the Lebanese Government. We do that everywhere. We do it in Russia. We do it everywhere in the Middle East—

Mr. MEADOWS. So how effective do you think we are at that? And on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most effective, are we a 7 or an 8? Where are we on that?

Ms. PLETKA. I think we are a five.

Mr. MEADOWS. Okay. So we are missing it half the time?

Ms. PLETKA. We are not great at it. And it is hard, and it is challenging, and we don't have a lot of people. We need to work with allies on the ground for their help. They are going to know better.

The point here is, this is a binary sword. We either do something, or we don't do something.

Mr. MEADOWS. I am one running out of time so let me finish in with this last question because we had in this very room Ambassador Sherman here talking about a number of things as it deals with Iran. We talked a little bit about Russia and Iran in that plight. Can the role of sanctions, ramping up those sanctions on Iran, play a more critical role on the influence of Iran in Syria with regards to their support?

Mr. BADRAN. Unfortunately, I don't think the sanctions have deterred Iran from putting in all its weight in Syria. I mean, they have been sending—

Mr. MEADOWS. I guess my question is, can we, if we ramp it up—

Mr. BADRAN. I think definitely anything that hurts the Iranians is good, but I think also we have to think a little bit outside that box and look on the battlefield in Syria. If the Iranians are playing an asymmetric game, let's play the asymmetric game. There are assets on the ground that we can use. Hezbollah was dealt a very severe blow in Syria. It sustained a really serious casualty rate. Why not help the rebels to defeat what we consider the number one terrorist group in the world?

Mr. MEADOWS. Okay. I thank the chair's indulgence, and with that, I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. WEBER. Thank you, Mr. Meadows.

That concludes this hearing of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa.

We are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:06 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X



MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

**SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman**

May 31, 2013

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held jointly by the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, and the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at www.foreignaffairs.house.gov):

DATE: Wednesday, June 5, 2013

TIME: 10:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: A Crisis Mismanaged: Obama's Failed Syria Policy

WITNESSES: Mr. Tony Badran
Research Fellow
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Ms. Danielle Pletka
Vice President
Foreign and Defense Policy Studies
American Enterprise Institute

Jon Alterman, Ph.D.
Director
Middle East Program
Center for Strategic and International Studies

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202-225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.



COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON the Middle East and North Africa HEARING

Day Wednesday Date 06/05/2013 Room 2172

Starting Time 10:05 a.m. Ending Time 12:05 p.m.

Recesses (___ to ___) (___ to ___)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Rep. Chabot, Rep. Weber

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session

Executive (closed) Session

Televised

Electronically Recorded (taped)

Stenographic Record

TITLE OF HEARING:

A Crisis Mismanaged: Obama's Failed Syria Policy

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

(See attendance sheet)

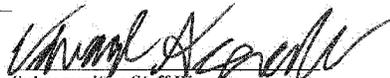
NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: *(Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)*

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes No

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

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

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED _____


Subcommittee Staff Director

Hearing Attendance**Hearing Title:**

A Crisis Mismanaged: Obama's Failed Syria Policy

Date: 06/05/2013*Noncommittee Members*

Member	Present
Ros-Lehtinen, Ileana (FL)	X
Chabot, Steve (OH)	X
Wilson, Joe (SC)	
Kinzinger, Adam (IL)	X
Cotton, Tom (AR)	X
Weber, Randy (TX)	X
Desantis, Ron (FL)	X
Radel, Trey (FL)	
Collins, Doug (GA)	
Meadows, Mark (NC)	
Yoho, Ted (FL)	X
Messer, Luke (IN)	X

Member	Present
Deutch, Ted (FL)	X
Connolly, Gerald (VA)	X
Higgins, Brian (NY)	X
Cicilline, David (RI)	X
Grayson, Alan (FL)	
Vargas, Juan (CA)	X
Schneider, Bradley (IL)	X
Kennedy, Joseph (MA)	X
Meng, Grace (NY)	X
Frankel, Lois (FL)	X