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**SYRIA: HUMANITARIAN AID
MAY NO LONGER BE ENOUGH**

A MINORITY STAFF REPORT

PREPARED FOR THE USE OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

UNITED STATES SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC, September 19, 2012.

DEAR COLLEAGUES: The transitions in the Middle East as part of the “Arab Spring” have been relatively peaceful—except in Syria, where more than 20,000 have been killed in fighting between forces loyal to Bashar al-Assad and those rising up against him. Not only have thousands been killed, hundreds of thousands of refugees have fled across Syria’s borders and more than one million Internally Displaced Persons seek shelter with family and friends inside Syria either as they flee the fighting or because their homes and livelihoods have been destroyed.

Syria’s neighbors are greatly impacted as refugees stream across borders looking for food and shelter. The situation is even more complicated as some nations allow opposition forces to recuperate inside their borders before returning to Syria to re-engage in the fighting. Allegations of arms shipments and possible training of anti-Assad forces muddy the waters further.

Policy makers must recognize that Assad continues in power primarily because he has the full military and financial backing of Iran and the diplomatic support of Russia and China which have successfully blocked any major action against Syria in the United Nations Security Council. With Iraq (which is roughly two-thirds Shiite Muslim) leaning more and more to Tehran as a natural co-religionist ally, Iran’s influence under the current circumstances could create a crescent of power running from Hezbollah in Lebanon to Tehran.

Syria is a majority Sunni state, yet is ruled by Assad who is a Shia-affiliated Alawi. Alawis comprise only 10 percent of Syria’s population. Sensing his weakness, and wanting to aid their fellow Sunnis, both Saudi Arabia and Qatar have begun to send arms to Assad’s opponents. Turkey has demonstrated its willingness to allow the use of its territory as a base for the Syrian opposition, or to at least turn a blind eye. Syria has thus become a proxy war against Iran.

In the midst of this, more than 250,000 refugees have fled Syria to neighboring countries, each of which offers a varying mixture of tolerance, indifference and active assistance either through their own governments or the international community. Providing them food, shelter and security is beginning to strain both the international community and the host countries which have their own economic and domestic political pressures.

Almost all parties agree that bringing the crisis in Syria to a rapid conclusion by removing Assad from power is in everyone's best interest as it will allow refugees to return and hopefully diminish the role of armed groups in forming a new government. Original hopes that he would go quietly into exile have been shattered as the brutality of his forces makes military defeat the only real alternative. One of the biggest unknowns is whether Syrians will refrain from mass retribution against the entire Alawi community for "guilt by association" with Assad and his cronies. Paradoxically, such possible wide-scale violence not only threatens to turn Syria into another faction-riven state such as today's Lebanon, but the fear of massacres is one of the tools Assad is using to convince his fellow Alawis to fight with him to the end.

In order to understand the situation on the ground more fully and to assess the possible options for U.S. policy, I asked Paul Foldi of my Foreign Relations Committee staff to visit the region. He traveled to Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey August 29–September 8. As detailed more fully in the following report, Mr. Foldi found there are three possible courses for future U.S. action, each with risks and benefits.

- *Continue supplying humanitarian aid only.*—This would keep the U.S. out of the conflict. But some argue that, as happened in Bosnia, our decision not to take sides in spite of a clear preponderance of aggression on the part of one side prolongs the suffering and allows the malefactors to commit even greater human rights violations. In this case, Assad long ago threw away any bid for international support with indiscriminant shelling, bombing and killing of civilians.
- *Impose a no fly zone.*—Supporters say it will provide both a humanitarian safe haven for refugees and neutralize the value of Assad's superior fighter planes, bombers and helicopters. Critics point out that Assad's highly capable air defenses would make enforcement costly and potentially lethal and that similar zones in Iraq did nothing to assist Saddam's opponents.
- *Train and arm the opposition.*—Saudi Arabia and Qatar are already providing light arms, but in order to allow anti-Assad forces to succeed, they will need to be able to neutralize his air power with anti-aircraft weapons. The U.S. has provided such equipment to other insurgents in the past with mixed results. In this case, Turkey would be especially leery that such arms might fall into the hands of guerilla groups it is already fighting.

I hope you will find this report useful as we attempt to address this crisis.

Sincerely,

RICHARD G. LUGAR,
Ranking Member.

SYRIA: HUMANITARIAN AID MAY NO LONGER BE ENOUGH

SUMMARY

More than an estimated 250,000 Syrian refugees are now testing the stability of its neighbors Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. While each country has its own strains, Jordan is the nearest to an actual breaking point both financially and on the humanitarian front. Turkey has valiantly tried to handle the issue on its own but it must now ask for more and more international assistance. Somewhat surprisingly, Lebanon, with its already chaotic sectarian issues, seems the least impacted by the refugees for now. Nonetheless, if allowed to continue, governments in Jordan certainly, and Turkey possibly, could fall if refugee waves continue.

Foreign Relations Committee staff traveled to each of these countries to meet with local political leaders, international aid workers and NGOs, and American State Department officials to assess the crisis. Visits and meetings were held in Beirut, Lebanon; Amman, Jordan, Za'atri and Cyber City Refugee Camps in Jordan; Istanbul, Turkey, Turkish Refugee Camps in Hatay Province next to the Syrian border, and Ankara, Turkey, from August 29 to September 8, 2012.

With Saudi Arabia and Qatar supplying arms for Assad's loose-knit opponents known as the Free Syria Army and Iran fully supporting Assad with weapons and funds, this civil war has, de facto, become a proxy war against Iran. U.S. policy makers must now decide if the potential for regional destabilization as a result of unabated refugee flows will be less costly in long run than greater U.S. military involvement in the short run—either through a NATO No-Fly-Zone (originally requested by Turkey) or more significant arms and training to the FSA than they currently receive. Risks are inherent either way. A prolonged war, in addition to the mounting humanitarian costs, will also permit the increased entrenched factionalization of both the military and political opposition. NATO involvement will be costly in terms of armaments expended and possible casualties or prisoners. U.S.-provided weapons and training may drag other nations into the conflict and could result in arms falling into the wrong hands.

BACKGROUND

(in millions)

	Total Population	New Syrian Refugees/IDPs	Existing Iraqi Refugees	Palestinians
Syria ¹	21	1.2	1.0	0.5
Lebanon	4.3	0.070	0.1	0.450
Jordan	6.2	0.087	0.4	2.0
Turkey	0.75	0.080	nominal	N/A

¹Figures come from USAID Syria Fact Sheet # 3; September 5, 2012: http://transition.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/countries/syria/template/fs_sr/fy2012/syria_ce_fs03_09-05-2012.pdf

August saw the highest monthly outflow of refugees from Syria—over 100,000. The actual number for each country fluctuates wildly (“official” numbers come from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) list of registered refugees, but because there are no visa requirements for Syrians to enter these three countries, these numbers are undoubtedly low; some say as many as 140,000 are currently in Jordan). Many refugees arrive wounded, either because they were fired upon by Syrian security forces as they attempted to escape or because they are wounded combatants. Border crossings open and close with great irregularity, forcing many refugees to use as active or abandoned smuggling routes, gaps in fences where fences exist, or just crossing miles of trackless desert. There are even reports of refugees wounded in minefields along parts of the border.²

Depending on the security situation, many Syrian refugees return home temporarily to check on family (or fight) and depart again when the situation deteriorates. This transient aspect of the refugees can result in double or even triple counting. In addition to this recent influx, Lebanon and Jordan are host to large number of Iraqis displaced in the last decade and Palestinians who arrived decades ago and who have remained for the multiple generations that have been born since.

Most Syrian refugees in Lebanon are not in camps but live with family members, friends, or rent housing. In Turkey, refugees are mainly in well laid out camps (some tents, many in converted/subdivided warehouses) with older camps near the border, newer ones farther away. Jordan has a mix, though almost all new arrivals are going into camps (the largest of 25,000+ is a dusty, desolate U.N. camp called Za’atri that staff visited). Roaming Syrian populations inside their own country (Internally Displaced Persons “IDPs”) cluster near the Turkish border awaiting entry or seeking protection or shelter with relations in other parts of Syria.

As with all refugee situations, children are the most vulnerable and stressed, both in terms of missing parents and inadequate edu-

²See the State Department’s Humanitarian Information Unit’s map from September 12, 2012 at the end of this report for more information. Updated maps and information can be found at <https://hiu.state.gov/pages/home.aspx>

cational/recreational opportunities. Bored children, especially adolescents, trapped inside walled or fenced facilities are particularly prone to venting their frustration through violence when cajoled or provoked by a few malcontents. Soccer balls and school books are just as necessary as food and shelter.

FINANCIAL SITUATION

To date the U.S. has offered \$103 million in regional assistance, primarily to the World Food Program (WFP) and to the U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). The U.S. also just finalized \$100 million in Direct Budget Support to Jordan.³ Jordan, always cash-strapped, has still not received the \$1 billion in direct support it gets every year from Saudi Arabia, and the government, in conjunction with the U.N., issued an international appeal at the beginning of September for \$700 million to help with the crisis.⁴ Turkey has spent more than \$300 million of its own resources on the refugees. It is unclear when Assad will run out of money. Estimates fluctuate wildly, and some speculate he will be broke by the end of the year due to a burn rate of up to \$1 billion/month, but these figures are pure guesswork at this point. Others contend he has money squirreled away or that Iran might be willing to fund him.

LEBANON

Lebanon's capital Beirut remains relatively calm due in part to the government's official policy of "disassociation" with the Syrian crisis—a policy brought about because Iran's client Hezbollah forms part of the Lebanese government. This policy has not prevented sectarian fighting from spilling over into Tripoli in the north as rivals mirror the fighting just across the border. Occasionally, cross-border firing and even shelling has taken place, so far with no major consequences. Lebanon's politics are so chaotic that the Syrian refugees are actually a boon to business. An earlier spate of kidnappings of Lebanese inside Syria resulted in tit-for-tat kidnappings inside Lebanon. This led most Gulf countries to urge their citizens to flee or to avoid tourism-dependent Lebanon. Well-off Syrian refugees have filled much of that void, renting vacant apartments with year-long leases, to the point that rents are escalating. For those without such funds, Lebanon was able to convert many empty schools into temporary shelters, yet school is about to start and it is not clear where those families will move to once displaced.⁵

Lebanon's multi-racial/multi-ethnic nature resulting from intermarriages between tribes and sects has created safe-havens for those Syrians who are able to stay with family. Depending on the level of Syrian military/police checkpoints—some of which require a bribe to pass and some which do not—as well as Hezbollah check-

³ http://jordan.usembassy.gov/pr_100_million_asst_072212.html

⁴ "Jordan, U.N. Appeal for \$700 Million To Help Deal With Refugees" Washington Post; September 1, 2012: http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/jordan-un-appeal-for-700-million-to-help-deal-with-influx-of-syrian-refugees/2012/09/01/d544891c-f431-11e1-b74c-84ed55e0300b_story.html

⁵ "Aid Agencies Scrambling to Relocate Refugees from Schools" Voice of America; August 31, 2012: <http://www.voanews.com/content/aid-agencies-scrambling-to-relocate-refugees-from-syrian-schools/1499528.html>

points in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley, Damascus to Beirut is but a short, 50 mile car ride. This proximity has allowed many Syrians to return temporarily to their capital or nearby towns.

Palestinian issues continue to plague Lebanon. Funds are still lacking for the final rebuilding phase of a large section of an UNRWA "camp" (no tents, but an entire urban neighborhood) that was destroyed by the Lebanese army in 2007 in a firefight which displaced 30,000.⁶ Palestinians had limited property and work rights in Syria; they have far fewer in Lebanon. Housing options for them are limited absent the rebuilding of the destroyed neighborhood and as Palestinians, according to treaty, can only receive assistance from UNRWA, not UNHCR.

JORDAN

U.S. Embassy officials praised the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) for doing all it can to assist Syrian refugees. The JAF welcomes them at the border, and in the beginning, men and officers fed refugees out of their own rations. The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) is now providing JAF with additional humanitarian equipment to assist with refugee management. Wide-scale allegations of Jordanian authorities seizing refugee travel docs are denied by the government. Such allegations are no surprise and indeed may have occurred early in the crisis as overwhelmed border officials quite conceivably tossed passports/ID cards into boxes with the hopes of sorting them out later. However, the matter now needs to be redressed quickly—both to return rightful property but, more importantly, to allow Syrians needed documents to return home.

Jordan's scarce water resources are strained under any conditions and many have long blamed Syria for stealing more than its share from the Yarmouk tributary of the Jordan River that forms the north-west most portion of the Jordan's border with Syria. Hosting 100,000+ Syrians will only compound this, especially as many Syrians appear not always sympathetic to the demands of water conservation required in Jordan's more arid environment. Additionally, Jordan's sluggish economy and allegations of high-level economic corruption are straining domestic forces. This could easily lead to either 1) the refugees rioting themselves over mistreatment or 2) inflame popular protests against a king and government that is perceived as aiding refugees while ignoring the plight of its own citizens. While the King seems to understand the message behind the Arab Spring, he has not been able to make sufficient reforms to quell growing unrest. To compensate, or, as his domestic critics would charge, curry favor in order to prop up his rule, King Abdullah has been extremely accommodating to U.S. requests during this crisis.

Even Jordan, with its long history of tolerating large foreign-born populations, has its limits. Thus some six weeks ago it began planning a massive camp to house the latest influx of refugees. Called Za'atri, and located near Jordan's north-west border with Syria, the

⁶Reconstruction of the Nahrel-Bared Camp & UNRWA Compound: <http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2011042974549.pdf>

camp has ballooned to well over 25,000 refugees with upwards of 1,000 arriving daily. Administered by UNHCR with help from UNICEF, the World Food Program (WFP), Save the Children and a host of other donors, the tented camp quickly got out of hand. Conditions in the older half of the camp are particularly dire as well-meaning engineers graded the ground to allow for flat surfaces, but this only displaced the thin layer of topsoil and created a desolate and dusty environment instead. The U.S., particularly DoD, was able to apply some rapid funding to procure truckloads of gravel which are now being used in the newer portions of the camp (called Za'atri 2, 3, etc.) and keep the dust down quite well. Many of the refugees are from Syria's upper and middle class. Staff spoke with lawyers and doctors who fled with nothing but who are beginning to chafe at their conditions.

At Za'atri, the food and water demands of the camp are insatiable and are straining relations with nearby towns and villages which fear that scarce resources will soon disappear. Communal kitchens are being constructed in Za'atri to alleviate the current dietary monotony, but establishing a food voucher system to allow camp residents to purchase what they want to cook will take time. Refugees are provided with a solar powered lamp, mattresses, blankets and a few other household items. Latrines and showers use gravity tanks and are surprisingly hygienic given the environment and constant usage. Security is an issue as an earlier riot injured several police officers (who, with great discipline, refused to attack the mob), but the police now refuse to patrol the camp.

A lucky few families have small 9x18 single room trailers instead of tents. While these provide better living than tents, it is a matter of scale. The trailers are more permanent, and could be transported back to Syria if needed; however, for the price of one trailer, UNHCR can provide 4–5 tents. The approach of winter—bitterly cold in the desert—also means additional resources will have to be spent for heaters and extra tarps to winterize tents.



Dust covered UNCHR tents in the original Za'atri camp



(left) Container housing in Za'atri (right) Za'atri 2 Camp with U.S.-provided gravel keeps the dust down

TURKEY

Turkey's huge population means the actual number of refugees (or "guests" as they are officially called; "refugees" is a loaded word for the Turks and verboten) is statistically insignificant. Turkey has spent \$300 million thus far supporting these guests (MFA officials quoted \$10 million to build a camp to house 10,000 and \$3 million/month to operate it). Meanwhile the opposition party goads the government daily either for not doing enough to help the refugees or for questioning the abrupt about face on the country's formally cozy ties with the Assad regime. (Some observers believe Turkey's current stance against Syria is personal and comes from the rebuff Assad gave to Turkish PM Erdogan's suggestions to Assad for democratic reforms following the Arab Spring.)

Turkey originally created a Cadillac of a camp when the refugee waves first hit. This is understandable for several reasons. Turkey's economy is booming, and the country wanted to show off its wealth and prestige accordingly.

As the refugees continued to pour in, the Turks scaled back subsequent efforts, but compared to Za'atri, the camps in Turkey are still upscale. Staff visited an abandoned two-story warehouse that had been subdivided using sheetrock/drywall into multiple units, each with a door and window facing a common hall, with a stove and water jug, as well as an operating electric fan. While not paradise by any means, it is miles above Za'atri. Refugees are allowed to leave camp from 8am-8pm and local press reports said they were a boon to the Turkish agricultural industry. Those with money they brought or from friends were able to outfit their rooms as needed and one had even purchased an air conditioner.

Turkey's initial go-it-alone attitude has begun to waver, and the government let it be known that 100,000 refugees was a red-line for the government. Turkey recently asked UNHCR to become more involved in planning future sites, which UNHCR contends must be farther from the border—at least one day's walk—as this deters those inside from using a camp as a base of operations. UNHCR told staff that one current camp in Turkey was even found to have a tunnel under the border into Syria, it was so close.



A Turkish warehouse converted to house Syrian “guests”

Keeping camps for refugees and not as an R-and-R spot for opposition fighters will not only allow better internal controls, but ensure the safety of non-combatants in the camp, according to UNHCR. Turkey’s most recent efforts to move those refugees living in rented homes near the Syrian border into camps reflects Ankara’s desire to know exactly who is inside their borders.⁷ However, any Turkish attempts to restrict young males from popping in and out of Syria—whether to fight or to check on family—will no doubt increase tensions inside the camps.

In hopes of limiting the number of Syrian “guests,” Turkey has begun a novel approach known as “Zero Point Distribution.” Food and basic hygiene necessities are left right at the Syrian border (i.e.—the Zero Point) with the hope that Syrians will be able to subsist off this assistance yet remain in Syria. Staff visited a Zero Point distribution center located only a mile from the border and run by the Turkish Red Crescent which stockpiled bottled water, prepackaged boxes of food, even bags of American rice purchased on the local market. The aid is dropped off along the border, but not near official crossings where it might fall into Syrian government hands.

SYRIA

The U.S. must decide the extent to which it wants to participate in the on-going proxy war against Iran, which is what Syria has become thanks to assistance from Saudi Arabia and Qatar to the Free Syria Army (FSA) versus Iranian⁸ (some add Chinese, possibly Russian) assistance to Syria. Defeating Assad is beating Tehran. With Iraq leaning ever more towards its Shiite neighbor to the East, it is in no one’s interest to allow Tehran to have a geopolitical and actual terrorist crescent running from Tehran to Hezbollah/Hamas.

⁷“Turkey Shifts Syrian Refugees From Borders” Voice of America, September 13, 2012: <http://www.voanews.com/content/turkey-shifts-syrian-refugees-from-borders/1507286.html>

⁸“Iran’s Revolutionary Guards Commander Says Its Troops In Syria” Reuters, September 16, 2012: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/09/16/us-iran-syria-presence-idUSBRE88F04C20120916>

The U.S. so far has engaged officially only in humanitarian assistance (though some press reporting suggests otherwise.)⁹ However much the current levels of humanitarian and financial assistance are appreciated by senior politicians in the region, the populace little knows of U.S. efforts because it comes either as direct bilateral budgetary support or is diluted with other funds through U.N. agencies. Even though they have delivered only a few, the Saudi's promise of thousands of temporary trailers to shelter refugees has earned them wide praise in the Jordanian street.

Some argue that more overt U.S. assistance for the FSA will counter the perception that we did nothing to help oust Mubarak; these observers also contend U.S. military help would keep the FSA from being too beholden to Saudi and Qatari Wahhabists. Others say that, as recent tragic events suggest, our efforts in Libya have borne little pro-U.S. fruit and that we could expect the same in Syria.

There is no question the FSA is a loose coalition of forces whose only unifying factor is a desire to oust Assad via military means now that it is clear he will not go quietly. The FSA runs the gamut of idealistic students who took up arms after their peaceful demonstrations were fired upon to foreign Al Qaeda fighters looking for action to help their Sunni brethren. In between are Syrian army defectors, shop keepers and every other stratum of Syrian society.

Politically, the opposition is just as splintered. The most prominent is the Syrian National Conference (SNC); however, the SNC is viewed inside Syria as a bunch of ex-pats who jet around the world decrying the situation but who are unable to provide the FSA with either weapons or funds from the Syrian diaspora or donor communities, and at the same time refuse to die in the rubble with the FSA. Given this military and political Tower of Babel, the real danger exists that an Assad-free Syria—far from controlling Lebanon as it used to—will become another Lebanon as those with the guns will make the rules.



A gym near the Turkish/Syria border converted to a warehouse to store items for Turkish Red Crescent's "Zero Point Distribution"

⁹"CIA Said To Be Steering Arms To Syrian Opposition" New York Times; June 21, 2012: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/21/world/middleeast/cia-said-to-aid-in-steering-arms-to-syrian-rebels.html?pagewanted=all>

While staff heard from younger FSA members and some in the SNC that Assad's exit will bring an abrupt peace, most Syria watchers believe that the fighting is now tribal and sectarian. One interlocutor told staff of a comment from a foreign contact of Assad's. "Before Ramadan in 2011, I was speaking to the leader of Syria; after Ramadan, I was speaking to the leaders of the Alawites." While they comprise barely 10% of Syria's population, virtually all military and political power concentrated in Alawite hands. As such, most observers believe they will now fight to the death to maintain power, and that their brutality to date means—regardless of their role—almost all will be rounded up and killed when Assad is defeated. Such a scenario is also used by Assad to sustain the Alawites in their fight against the opposition as he warns fellow clansmen they are in a literal matter of life and death.

To combat the current political fragmentation, the U.S. State Department, through its Istanbul-based OSOS (Office of Syrian Opposition Support—a creation of State's bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO)) is training Syrian activists in the use of secure communications and providing them with Arabic-language laptops and mobile satellite up-links.¹⁰ This training is based upon the Obama administration's policy of "non-lethal aid for non-lethal actors." The training—thus far in groups of a dozen—must be held in Istanbul, a city of 10 plus million, in order to provide both the trainers and the trainees greater anonymity. While it is certainly more expensive to run the training from Istanbul rather than closer to the border, this blending-in allows OSOS to keep a low profile and maintain better security. Trainers switch to another of the city's countless hotels every few sessions; such anonymity would be impossible in the tiny, tightly-knit villages near the border.

Younger trainees (all of whom must be smuggled from Syria to Istanbul), however, want more than the limited data package offered with the computer/antenna. The YouTube generation believes it can win greater international support (and possibly intervention) by continual uploading of graphic videos showing Syrian atrocities. U.S. sponsored trainers stress there are already enough videos out there. They argue, rather, the need is to create nascent political networks using the equipment to link up with fellow activists in neighboring towns (instead of transmitting the large, and costly, video files which the OSOS package will not support). Trainers dangle rewards of increased data packages (which can be paid for in Istanbul) for activists who contact OSOS upon their return to Syria and report on their location, conditions, etc. OSOS will expand training to larger classes and more direct democratic transition activities in the coming weeks.

As the friction with OSOS's support demonstrates, Assad opponents want more than just tents for refugees and laptops, they want the means to remove him militarily. While it is clear that Saudi Arabia and Qatar are providing arms to their Sunni co-religionists (primarily via Turkey, where U.S. press reports suggest

¹⁰ Antennas provided are the size of dinner plates and therefore easily hidden on rooftops or balconies.

the CIA is also involved in vetting and training), these light arms cannot counter Assad's superiority in artillery and fixed and rotary-wing air power. FSA and other forces want either a no-fly zone or the firepower to create their own.¹¹

Some interlocutors staff spoke with contested the current DC-think which holds that a no-fly zone (NFZ) inside Syria is militarily impossible because Assad's air defenses are too tough. Supporters of a NFZ point out that most Syrian anti-aircraft assets are concentrated near Damascus and while certainly not insignificant, are of an older Soviet quality. Thus, they say, an NFZ in the northwest of the country, including Aleppo, is not impossible. Opponents of a NFZ point to our experience in Iraq where decade-long northern and southern NFZs did little to allow Saddam's opponents to overthrow him. They contend that a NFZ will do little to create a tipping point in favor of the FSA.

The Turks do not want to impose a NFZ on their own for the same geo-political reason they do not wish to intercede alone on the ground to create a humanitarian Safe Zone: fear of allowing Assad to shift the fighting from Syrian-on-Syrian to Arab versus the dreaded Turk/Ottoman Empire of long ago. However, Turkey seems perfectly willing to play a greater role, as long as it has the political cover to do so. With continued Russian and Chinese obstruction in the U.N. Security Council, the only option would therefore be NATO. The June loss of a Turkish reconnaissance fighter over the Mediterranean had the potential to become a Gulf of Tonkin moment as Turkey quickly accepted Syrian claims to have shot it down, but NATO declined to get more involved.¹² The sunken jet was recently discovered by the U.S. deep-sea robot company used to find the Titanic.¹³ Mechanical failure is also a possible cause of the crash, according to American interlocutors familiar with the incident who cautioned about a rush to judgment.

It is unclear if Ankara will continue to look for, or foment, an incident that would draw in NATO, but Turkey clearly has the military power to defeat Assad on its own. However, the military and current government are at odds with one another as hundreds of generals are on trial for an alleged 2003 coup attempt. Given this, Turkish PM Erdogan is more likely to rely on his Turkish National Intelligence Organization (TNIO) instead to be the main contact with Syrian fighters inside Turkey and to work with the Saudis and Qataris to receive the arms shipments mentioned above and to turn them over to the Free Syria Army.

CONCLUSION

With more than 20,000 dead so far in Syria, Assad must go sooner rather than later. In addition to the humanitarian catastrophe

¹¹"Syrian Rebels Get Influx Of Arms With Gulf Neighbors" money, U.S. coordination" Washington Post; May 15, 2012: http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/syrian-rebels-get-influx-of-arms-with-gulf-neighbors-money-us-coordination/2012/05/15/gIQAds2TSU_story.html; "Turkey Calls For No Fly Zone" CBSNews.com; August 31, 2012: <http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-202-162-57504064/turkey-calls-for-syria-safe-zones-u.n-security-council-remains-unmoved/>

¹²"Ankara Vows To Take 'Necessary Action' After Syria Shoots Down Turkish Jet" The Guardian (UK); June 23, 2012: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/23/syria-shooting-down-turkish-jet>

¹³"Exploration Vessel Nautilus Locates Downed Turkish Jet" Ocean Exploration Trust; July 11, 2012: http://oceanexplorationtrust.com/press/20120711_Turkey.htm

he has created, Syria's role as Iran's client has endangered our allies in the area and led to its support of groups actively seeking to kill Americans. America's current policy of only providing humanitarian assistance addresses real needs and is appreciated by our allies in the region. It does not address the issue of shortening the conflict. A NATO-imposed no fly zone might tilt the military advantage in favor of the insurgents, but it may be deemed too costly or risky. Another option is to provide the FSA with arms capable of shooting down Syrian fixed and rotary wing aircraft. However, our own experience in providing MANPADs to various groups over the years has yielded mixed results. In this situation, Turkey could balk for fear that these weapons would fall into the hands of its Kurdish separatist insurgency—the PKK. Our own fears of Al-Qaeda affiliates achieving the same are not unwarranted. Supplying such weapons after careful vetting of the recipients might level the field enough to allow the uprising to succeed.

