

dead, starved for oxygen, exactly like the gentlelady from Wyoming said. The streams are now filling with silt.

Forest Service personnel tell us we will be having to empty that lake for the next 15 years. That's 15 years of dead fish; 15 years downstream facing flooding; 15 years without the drinking water that sustains a community of about 30,000. These are what we face.

Also, the West is starved for jobs because of Forest Service policy. The original Organic Act, the act that created the U.S. Forest Service, said that they should be logging to create local commerce and jobs and they should be protecting the watershed. The U.S. Forest Service is negligent on both of the underlying reasons for their existence. We in the West are suffering lost education opportunities, destroyed habitat, and destroyed forests. Those forests will not grow back for 100 years according to the Forest Service personnel.

It's time for us to pass H.R. 1526. I support it.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. I would like to recognize the gentleman from California (Mr. LAMALFA).

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, every year, rural America, especially the western States and areas like mine in northern California, are in the news. It's not for something good, but for something like we see going on with so many of the wildfires around the country. There's no reason for this. That's why I support this bill here today that would actually make our forests perform for us, instead of being a detriment to us and our health in California and the western States.

We can have either the type of air quality problems that are happening—like in the central valley of California, for example, one of my colleagues was talking about, although we've had challenges there in recent years, they've actually improved things. The air quality right now is much worse because of these fires than anything going on by people or after the improvements that have gone on with other air quality issues. In my own part of the State back in 2008, the whole summer and into the fall, brown, dirty—including the areas close to the fire—kids couldn't go outside because the quality was 10 times above health levels for them to be safe.

We see our small communities that are devastated by an economy that has shifted away due to forest management and Forest Service policies that don't work for them. This legislation would allow our forests to perform for us and help these economies, help the health of the forest, the health of the people, and the health of the local economies to be strong once again, and, as was mentioned earlier, our rural schools.

So let's do commonsense legislation instead of watching our forests burn. I urge you to support this.

POTENTIAL U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN SYRIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2013, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. FORTENBERRY) for 30 minutes.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Speaker, this is an extraordinarily busy week in Washington as we have all returned from a district work period. There are many issues to discuss, including how we're going to fund the Federal budget, get the fiscal house in order, potentially have the right type of tax reform, and deal with a whole host of other issues, but I felt like it would be very inadequate if the evening went by but did not delve into a little bit deeper of a discussion as to the nature of the Syrian conflict and the potential for United States military involvement.

Mr. Speaker, I wrote my constituents last week as they expressed tremendous concern about the potential for U.S. entanglement in the situation in Syria. In fact, it's overwhelming the number of people who have shared deep, heartfelt concerns. It is overwhelming. I'm hearing that from my colleagues, as well.

This is not some sort of populous reaction to the elites of this institution in government. It is an intuition of the American people who are suggesting to us in leadership that we have poured ourselves out as a country, sacrificed tremendously, extraordinarily, to give other people a chance for stability, for human rights, for the right forms of development, for political outcomes that uphold just governing structures.

Where have we gotten for our investment? Basically since World War II, the United States has been cast into the role of the superpower being the proprietor of international stability and we've accepted that arrangement, but there are tremendous pressures upon us as we continue to move forward in the 21st century as we've empowered other people and other economies through appropriate development to take responsibilities for themselves.

The United States has not always done this perfectly, but we've fought multiple wars and we've engaged in many areas of the world in order to try to give other people a chance and to stop aggressive ideologies that are inconsistent with basic and fundamental human rights. I've responded to the people of Nebraska. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to share that with you this evening:

Life in Syria today is, as the philosopher Thomas Hobbes once wrote, "nasty, brutish, and short." An ongoing civil war ravishes the country. The oppressive regime of President Bashar al-Assad wages battle against a nebulous, undefined mix of rebels, who have regularly employed the same brutal violence that the government has. The result is that there are more than 100,000 persons dead, including many innocent civilians—mothers, fathers, and children.

In response to the suspected use of chemical weapons by Assad, President Obama is now advocating U.S. military intervention, although, of course, the situation is now fluid. In the past, he has stated that the use of chemical weapons is a "red line" that Assad could not cross without a serious rethinking of American involvement in the conflict, which to this point has included a significant amount of humanitarian aid—and properly so—targeted to those caught in the middle of this violence. The President, to his credit, has rightly asked for a vote of Congress prior to taking military action, and some in Congress are signaling their support.

In recent days, however, I have clearly stated my opposition to this idea. I oppose this action of unilateral military strikes. The United States should not bomb Syria in the name of stopping violence in Syria. While quick, unilateral military strikes might satisfy the President's "red line" rhetoric, the collateral damage and further risk of destabilization is very high.

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Now, as Congress has returned to Washington this week, there are hard questions that are in the process of being asked: What will be the consequences of this bombing? Who's on the other side of this? And how much do we really know of this rebel movement that we will be implicitly aiding if we attack Assad's government? What happens following the military strike? Why not expend the energy of this debate over military involvement on solidifying international outrage and holding particularly Russia, a longtime ally of Syria who's entangled in this situation, holding them accountable?

The international community must work together creatively to stop the savagery of Assad, but it cannot hide behind the United States military might. No longer can it be assumed that the United States is responsible for fixing all aspects of global conflicts, and no longer should the United States accept that framework. For the sake of global stability, a new construct must instead take its place, one in which the responsible Nations of the world are serious about their own defense and stabilization of conflicts within their regions.

In light of the increasing brutality in Syria, the United States should continue to advance its support for the innocent victims of this civil war. Meanwhile, we should also aggressively use this opportunity to facilitate new international partnerships that seek lasting solutions to complicated situations of mass violence.

Until such a united front is achieved, unilateral military action may only introduce further chaos to an already disastrous problem and, as I have said, implicitly put us on the side of a rebel movement who has also shown willingness to murder innocent civilians. And it is not clear whether or not the more

moderate elements of that very movement have any capacity to implement governing structures that are just and lasting. So then what happens? Syria, this area degrades into a vast, ungovernable space, ripe for jihadists with no protections for innocent persons or the ancient peoples who call that place home.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of other aspects of this that I have written about that I would like to share momentarily, but I would like to turn to my good friend, Congressman CHARLIE DENT from Pennsylvania, as he wishes to share a few concepts and perspectives on this conflict.

Mr. DENT. I thank the gentleman from Nebraska for organizing this Special Order this evening to discuss the crisis in Syria. In my view, it is really indisputable that Bashar al-Assad is a villain who has committed heinous, mortal crimes with the use of chemical weapons against his own people.

What is debatable, however, is America's policy on Syria and the broader Middle East. I have raised the issue of Syria with this administration at numerous hearings as a member of the Appropriations Committee. I have also worked with Syrians in my own community, and I have the largest population of Syrian Americans of any Member of Congress in the United States. I have met with them. They have brought to my attention issues of abducted Christian archbishops who have been abducted in Syrian and whose whereabouts, unfortunately, are unknown. There is a lot of work going on to try to secure their release, but that said, you can understand their concern for that part of the world.

I have spent time, too, in meetings with America's wonderful friend, King Abdullah of Jordan, who has also shared his perspective on the plight of the Syrian people. But what I have observed most of all is a very sad observation, and that is the friends of the Syrian regime—Iran, Russia and Hezbollah—are far more committed to President Assad than the friends of the Syrian people—and that would be the West and the Arab League—are to these moderate opposition forces.

I had asked Secretary Hillary Clinton—former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton—back in February, 2012, if the administration was prepared to provide some type of material support to moderate secular opposition groups given that it looked like Assad's government was very weak, there was a popular uprising, and it seemed there might be a better outcome. She was pretty clear with me at the time that she thought providing light arms would be of little help to the opposition in the face of Assad's substantial military, with all his air assets, artillery and armor. To put it bluntly and short, she really didn't want to get too involved at that time. We really didn't have much of a discussion about the benefits to America, its friends and allies and their interests, if Iran's influence in the region

were substantially weakened through the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad.

I thought at the time that the President was maybe more concerned about maintaining his reputation as a Nobel Peace Prize winner antiwar candidate than actually developing what I thought would be a more practical response for Syria. It just seemed that inaction and indecision were, and frankly today, remain the order of the day.

In the meantime, let's fast forward from a year and a half, 2 years ago to today: al-Nusra and other radical Islamist terrorist organizations have rushed into this vacuum and filled the void, so to speak. So really today there aren't any good public policy outcomes for the United States. The time for the United States to more constructively intervene and to reach a more efficacious resolution, the time for that has long passed.

So here we are, over these last 2½ years, this Syrian civil war has descended into both a sectarian and proxy conflict, and these events have moved well beyond the United States ability to control with Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia fully committed to the Assad government.

I think we all know, as Mr. FORTENBERRY knows, we know we have a very war-weary population which is not going to support a half-hearted, poorly thought out military strike which will only expose the United States and its friends to greater risks, including the possibility of a broader regional conflagration. This could include more chemical weapons attacks against the Syrian people and possibly Israel, potential cyber attacks on American critical infrastructure in both the financial services and energy sectors, an unleashed Hezbollah, and other unforeseen, asymmetrical responses.

I am deeply concerned about this, as we all should be. But we can't just look at Syria in isolation; we have to look at it in the much broader context of the Middle East. Unfortunately, and I'm going to have to be a bit critical of the President at this time, witness how President Obama turned his back on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 2011 after 2 weeks of uprisings. Whatever his faults, whatever his shortcomings, Hosni Mubarak was a loyal, 30-year friend of the United States—a lesson learned by our friends and our allies throughout the region and throughout the world.

Of course, prior to that incident there was the Green Revolution in Iran where we saw a lot of very brave people in Iran stand up to the Ahmadinejad regime in Iran. We witnessed that, and it seemed this administration could barely utter words of support to these very brave people who stood up to a tyrant, Ahmadinejad, who made all sorts of reckless and inflammatory and hateful statements against the West and particularly Israel, and so I was just astounded that the administration could barely utter words of support.

Then, of course, we learned about leading from behind in Libya. Actually, leading from behind the French and the British in Libya, to be precise. I was one of only a handful of Republicans in the House to support the authorization for force in Libya—after the fact, but I supported it. So I'm not an isolationist. I believe that we have an important role internationally with the United States, and we have to be constructively engaged.

But let's move forward to 2013. Bashar al-Assad's government launches chemical attacks against his own people. I believe the intelligence is clear that he did it, or his government did it, so I'm not debating those facts, what appear to be facts. But we witnessed these chemicals attacks in both the late spring and again just a few weeks ago in August, these chemical attacks. We witnessed the trampling of the red line set down by the President not once but twice, maybe more than that for all I know. And now over 100,000 Syrians have been killed. What is the President's strategy for Syria? I couldn't explain it to anybody if they asked. He talked about pinpricks or his administration has talked about pinpricks, shots across the bow, a military action of days not weeks, and no intention to topple Assad or to degrade his military capacity to make war on his own people, for that matter. I'm learning a lot about what we will not do, but I'm not really sure what we're trying to do or trying to accomplish. So a very limited air strike to punish Mr. Assad is not going to alter the outcome of the Syrian civil war. What is the point or purpose? What is the clarity of mission?

In my view, America's national interest is really twofold in Syria. One, we want to limit Iranian influence in the region, and, two, the other issue deals with securing those chemical weapons, frankly, from both the Assad government and the radical elements of that opposition who would probably be just as inclined to use them. So much so that King Abdullah of Jordan came to Members of Congress to express his real concern about al-Nusra forces getting too close, dangerously close to a chemical site in southern Syria, and that was just a few months ago.

So now we also witnessed, too, there really is not a coalition of the willing to tackle Mr. Assad's crimes. It seems more a coalition of the unwilling. The United Nations really doesn't seem anywhere to be found, although in recent days, in the last 24 hours we're hearing there might be some discussion with the Russians about some kind of a resolution on securing those sites, but the U.N. is really nowhere to be found. NATO does not seem to be fully engaged at all, although maybe some members are supportive. And, of course, we've witnessed what the British Parliament did to Prime Minister Cameron in rebuking him. And so the British, our beloved friends and allies, are not going to be engaged in this one,

and so we're pretty much on our own. Again, I've called this a coalition of the unwilling. And so I think it would behoove the United States not to move in what appears to be almost a unilateral manner.

I have read, too, recently, that some of the Arab governments, Saudi Arabia and others, would be willing to help pay for some of this mission should we strike. You know, on the one hand, I appreciate that. On the other, the United States military is really not a mercenary force for anyone. A lot of folks may be encouraging us or cheering us on, but it doesn't seem they are willing to put people in harm's way. So I think we have to keep that in mind as we talk about this.

I'm going to conclude in a moment, but I was one of the folks who said it is always important for the President to consult with Congress prior to taking any kind of military action. It's important in our system, although I don't believe the President necessarily needs a congressional authorization for what he has called a very limited airstrike. But now that he has asked me to engage in this debate, I owe the President fair consideration of his policy in Syria, whatever it may be.

Again, I said call me skeptical; now you can call me outright opposed. I have said from day one that the President didn't seem to have his heart in this impending military action. He was looking for a way out after the U.N., the U.K., and NATO, a lot of our friends were just not willing to go along, and then the President turned to Congress as a last resort for an authorization where he has, of course, run into very, very heavy skepticism. I just did see any Churchillian resolve in our Commander in Chief. Our men and women in uniform deserve a Commander in Chief who is full-throated in support of what is likely to become a very dangerous military operation and could possibly spiral out of control. But more importantly, we have to be cognizant of the potential consequences and ramifications for that action.

I think the President of the United States owes that to the American people, to make it clear what his policy is, what his mission is, not what he's not going to do, but what he intends to do. After the President really threw this issue to Congress, we witnessed President Assad's jubilant supporters celebrating in the Syrian streets, and I'm sure the corridors of power in Tehran and Moscow, and it seems now that America's friends and allies watched this mystifying failure of Presidential leadership unfold with dismay.

So have our constituents. We have all received these calls. In my view, and I am really sad to say this, Barack Obama may have diminished his own Presidency in the process, but more problematically, diminished America's standing in the world among both friend and foe alike, and that's a real tragedy.

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You know, in this upcoming vote in Congress, if it's to come at all at this point, it is really not so much a vote on authorizing a military strike or military intervention in Syria. The stakes have grown beyond that. It's much more a vote of confidence on the President's Syrian and broader Middle East policy. On that score, I have no confidence.

And I just wanted to say one last thing. I mentioned I have a very large Syrian population in my community, Syrian Americans. They're great Americans. They've been part of my community for a long time, largely Christian, Antioch Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Presbyterian and other denominations.

They are scared. I think they know what Bashar Assad is, and many are very uncomfortable with what he is. And on the other hand, they have seen al-Nusra and al Qaeda, and are absolutely terrified of that operation.

And so they're caught in this sectarian crossfire. They don't want to be there. They're worried about atrocities, grievous atrocities being committed against the Christian people of Syria.

We just witnessed the other day, there was a story of a small village, I believe not too far from Damascus, where the language of Aramaic is spoken; I guess one of the few places in the world where it is still spoken.

Why is that significant?

Well, if you're a Christian, you know that Aramaic was the language that Jesus Christ spoke. And to know that this ancient community—and of course much of Syria's an ancient civilization—to know that these people could be under attack when you find out that al-Nusra forces had entered and intervened, and I hope they've been cleared out.

But that said, you think about this, and we worry about the history of mankind and the history of the Christian tradition is at risk here, and potentially a great risk of extermination.

And we've witnessed this in Egypt too. I mean, there are lessons to be learned from Egypt. When Mubarak fell, the Christian population, the Coptic Christian population of Egypt, became very vulnerable. We know that—extremely vulnerable. Atrocities committed against Christians, desecration of the churches, burning, other terrible things have happened, and I fear that we might see similar, if not worse, things happen in Syria.

So whatever this country chooses, whatever course of action this country chooses to pursue, I don't believe that a military intervention right now by the United States would advance America's policy objectives; and frankly, I don't think it would change the trajectory of the Syrian civil war.

People have said, well, doing nothing at all is the worst of all possibilities, the worst of all options. Well, I would argue that if we're not certain what

this limited, so-called limited military intervention will bring, if we're very unclear about that, then I would argue that no action is better than a limited action which may not do much of anything to alter the course of this civil war. So I think we have to be very cautious and very restrained.

I do appreciate the gentleman from Nebraska allowing me this opportunity to speak on this issue, and for his leadership, and for allowing me this time.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Let me thank you, as well, the gentleman from Pennsylvania, my good friend. I've heard you speak behind the scenes in this body, particularly today, with great passion, particularly for the people who are directly impacted by this, people who you represent and are directly connected to the conflict, the ancient Christian community, as you said.

I appreciate your clarity and your resolve on this issue because I know you, as I do, have great respect for the institution of the Presidency. He is our Commander in Chief.

But we also have a responsibility to render to him our judgment in this case; and so my judgment is no, that a unilateral military strike is not going to accomplish an objective of potentially stabilizing, punishing, preventing Assad from doing further harm and stabilizing that situation, versus pulling the United States, as a coalition of one, into a conflict where we are very unclear as to what the collateral damage and destabilization outcome could actually be.

In addition to that, the American people are intuiting that there is a serious, serious problem here with us being drawn into another conflict where the options are all bad, where our hearts are with the innocent victims, and we will continue to provide humanitarian aid.

But we must not allow the international community to simply hide behind our military might; and I think that that is what the people are sensing, that we are being drawn into something that has much broader implications for the entire international community to respond in a constructive, creative way.

And if we would have expended this energy, as I said earlier, on trying to get underneath the problem and perhaps point the finger and lay it at the footsteps of the Russians, who are completely entangled in this situation, maybe we would have had better movement on this question prior to now.

Now, we'll see what the President says tonight. We'll listen with an open mind. I don't know whether he is going to pull back from his intention to potentially strike Syria or not. But I think it is prudent to allow some diplomatic actions to potentially take their course, even though that might be a bit farfetched at the moment.

But, hopefully, that new diplomatic momentum has some good creative elements and stops the situation, pressures Assad, brings about a collective

international response that stabilizes the situation and protects innocent people. I think that's the best outcome that we could potentially hope for here.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. FORTENBERRY. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. It seems that the policy of the United States and Syria, since the beginning of the uprising in Syria, has largely been one of inaction and detachment. And, in many respects, we outsourced the arming of the opposition forces to many of our good friends: the Turks, the Qataris, the Saudis, and others. And whether we like it or not—and we don't like it in many respects—many of the folks who were armed were people who don't share our interests and values, the al-Nusra forces in particular.

But there are moderate forces, and if the United States had demonstrated some leadership early in this, during that conflict, to help identify moderate secular opposition forces, there probably could have been multi-ethnic again and secular, it could have been Kurdish and Christian and moderate Sunni, that might have helped bring about a more legitimate or a better opposition force that the international community would be rallying around.

But that, unfortunately, has not happened, and now you read about large swaths of territory in Syria dominated by some opposition forces that have been rather radicalized; and that's unfortunate because there are many elements of the Free Syrian Army, of course, who really do want to try to bring about more representative government and, I think, would embrace the values that you and I hold dear.

But, you know, time has passed. Time has passed, and I just don't see a good outcome, as I stated earlier, at this point. And I just wish—I think the American people understand this intuitively.

And it also speaks to NATO. What's happening with NATO?

It's a great organization. I believe in NATO. It's a collective defense organization. I believe in its military value and its political value. But it seems, since the end of the Cold War, maybe it's gone a little bit adrift.

And Turkey has been a loyal friend and NATO ally for decades. They are directly affected by this conflict in Syria. They may make demands of us and NATO at some point, and we're going to have to think that through, as policymakers, what we would do if our good friends, the Turks, make a request of us, and certainly our good friends in Jordan.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Reclaiming my time, it's a good question you raised, and one that I pointed to earlier, new international constructs that might be using templates of old international constructs, but that are revitalized so that we can have collective operations, if necessary, to engage in this type of stopping mass violence.

The NATO allocations for many countries, they don't meet them year after year. In other words, the money they're supposed to contribute, they just don't do it.

So who has to pick up the pieces?

We do. There's a "free rider problem" as we call it here. And you deal in a lot of international diplomatic circles and you constantly hear it. Oh, the United States is the only one who has the ability. You're the only superpower. You must act, and it is your—you must be compelled morally, based upon who you are, to do something here.

All of those are fine points. But in the 21st century, you have a shift of the global framework for international stability occurring. We have expended ourselves, as a country, for nearly 70 years, providing that framework for global stability, economically and politically protecting human rights, as I said earlier, not always perfectly.

But the United States cannot single-handedly lift this burden for the entire world, particularly for countries that benefited from our past sacrifice, who have the economic wherewithal, and should have the moral compass to be thinking constructively about regional organizations that stop this type of conflict before it starts and demanding just outcomes of sovereign territories.

That is the long-term strategy. I recognize we're in a difficult moment because we're being pressured to decide unilateral military action or not, but this is the type of long-term thinking that I think will help bring about new models of international, multilateral cooperation to prevent this from happening, or when it does happen, to have the right response in place.

Mr. DENT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. FORTENBERRY. I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

Mr. DENT. I just want to say one more thing. You know, the President has said that this red line that was crossed was not his red line, but the international community's red line. Ninety-eight percent of the world has opposed chemical weapons use and has agreed to the various conventions on chemical weapons.

Unfortunately, 98 percent of the world isn't prepared to help us in this intervention. We're on our own, and I just wanted to point that out.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Well, our time has expired, and I do thank you for the good constructive conversation. I appreciate your insights and clarity on the situation. It's complex, it's difficult; but, again, unilateral military action allows the international community to hide behind our might, and it's simply not the right response at this time.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

THE SYRIAN CRISIS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SMITH of Missouri). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3,

2013, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) for 30 minutes.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the privilege to be recognized to address you here on the floor of the House of Representatives. And I appreciate the presentation that's come forward from my colleagues from Pennsylvania and Nebraska with regard to the Syrian situation and the international issue that's in front of all of us.

I don't always find myself in complete agreement with the wisdom that emerges here from this microphone; but, generally speaking, that's where I stand this evening on the Syrian issue.

And I think that it would be of interest to the gentleman from Pennsylvania that I and a couple of other Members, yesterday morning, perhaps the day before yesterday, in the morning—my days blend together—we sat down with Syrian Christians who were expatriates who had escaped from Syria and are very interested in the cause there. And I understand that the gentleman from Pennsylvania has a good number of constituents that would be representative of the same cause.

It was a very interesting conversation that we had at breakfast day before yesterday at Brussels. And the concern that they expressed essentially came back to it's hard to choose a good side in Syria, in that Assad, of course, he's an evil dictator. We've known that for a long time.

We have the Free Syrian Army that emerged as a force for good that seems to now be taken over by forces that are not so good. So it appears to them, and it appears to me, that whether it would be the Assad forces that prevail in the end, or whether it would be the forces that are taking over the Free Syrian Army, it's not going to be good for Christians in Syria.

And I'm concerned that, for us to find a way forward, the best hope for Christians in Syria is likely to be the moderate groups that began the Free Syrian Army in the first place, those groups that want to have a secular Syria that respects everyone's right to freedom of religion and freedom to associate, and respects the rights of humanity that we all defend here.

So I reiterate the statements that the gentleman from Pennsylvania has made. And we stand, certainly, with the Christians in Syria, but also the secular forces in Syria, however they've been marginalized by the forces of the Muslim Brotherhood, the forces that are Assad, and the anti-freedom forces that seem to want to take Syria over and use it for their own evil aims.

So having traveled, Mr. Speaker, over into that part of the world, not into Syria specifically, but into the Middle East—and we just came back last night from a trip that was to Tokyo. We spent several days there dealing with the top leadership in Japan, including Prime Minister Abe,