

CRISIS IN SYRIA: THE U.S. RESPONSE

HEARING BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

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CRISIS IN SYRIA: THE U.S. RESPONSE

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2013

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:52 a.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Edward Royce (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Chairman ROYCE. This hearing will come to order, and today we meet to review the Syrian crisis.

It was 2 years ago last week that on the nightly news we saw those protestors walking through the street chanting, "Peaceful, peaceful." And the thing the world saw next was that the Syrian forces opened up with small arms fire on the marchers. Over the ensuing weeks that was followed by artillery barrages, followed by tanks flattening villages, followed eventually by aerial bombardment, and finally by Scud missiles into cities.

We are now 2 years into that Syrian uprising, and for 2 bloody years U.S. policy has been adrift. Initially, the Obama administration saw Assad as a reformer in their words. Once the revolt started, it backed U.N. diplomacy, and then bet on Moscow to play a constructive role. Predictably, none of this has worked. Yet even today, Secretary Kerry talks of Assad coming to the table.

This is the Assad who is bombing villages in Syria. This is the Assad who is ordering teenagers tortured and, frankly, is engaged in murdering his populace.

The ancient city of Homs is now in ruins. Seventy thousand Syrians are dead. A million refugees have spilled into neighboring countries, destabilizing those countries. And there are troubling reports that Assad may be moving to unleash chemical weapons.

The U.S. has been generous in supporting suffering Syrians, but perhaps naively so. Much of our humanitarian aid has been funneled through the U.N. and through other international organizations that are largely restricted to areas controlled by the Syrian regime. Now, that is absurd.

Only recently has the U.S. begun to push food aid directly to the Syrian opposition. That shift, frankly, should accelerate and accelerate dramatically. I really wonder about providing any humanitarian aid through the U.N. that ends up going through the regime at all because it indirectly helps Assad and, therefore, presumably prolongs the conflict and prolongs the human suffering.

Syria is today a humanitarian nightmare. It's also a great strategic challenge. At the end of the day, it might be an opportunity

for reform in society in Syria, but it's also an opportunity with Assad gone because then Iran would lose a key ally, one critical to its terrorist operations, including against Israel. And that's why Iran and Hezbollah are massively stepping up their support of the Assad regime providing a lifeline of weapons and providing fighters on the ground. Much of this weaponry, by the way, flows through Iraq, and that can't continue without consequences.

Unfortunately, jihadist groups are gaining strength and popularity in a portion of Syria. They've been able to convince too many Syrians that they are on their side. Al-Nusra and aligned radical groups fighting to remove Assad are also preparing for the day after his fall. They are competing with the civil society groups behind the free Syrian Army. Syrian extremists are translating their battle success into authority over society as a whole influencing courts, schools, and mosques, but I should say that most of those extremists are from outside Syria. This is something very vexing to civil society in Syria who have shared with us their concerns about the influx of these foreign fighters. Their concern is that these extremists are making inroads.

To avoid such a hostile future Syria armed with chemical weapons, we need to help better organize and empower the Syrian opposition—those Syrians who began the revolt by chanting, "Peaceful, peaceful." We have let them down, and let our strategic interests down.

Some believe that it is time to provide arms to vetted opposition groups. Others worry about a potentially lengthy and deepening engagement and note that many weapons are already flowing into Syria. But the British and French have come to realize the biggest winner in the arms embargo has been Assad. Everything should be considered, but the U.S. could have the greatest impact through training, intelligence, and logistics.

It has been said that the U.S. has no good options in Syria, and that's probably true. Stay away, as we mainly have, and bad things are guaranteed to happen. Get more involved, as some are calling for, and good things might happen. All of it is incredibly unpredictable. The best we can do is know what we can, realize what we can't, and make decisions as we must.

I'll now turn to Congressman Ted Deutch, who fills in for Ranking Member Engel. Big shoes to fill today, especially given Mr. Engel's efforts on Syria over many years, which has helped move the administration to more actively consider the range of U.S. options in recent weeks. Mr. Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Ambassador Ford, Assistant Secretary Richard, Assistant Administrator Lindborg for being with us today. And I'd also like to take a moment to recognize my friend, the ranking member Eliot Engel, who couldn't be here today as he is in Israel for President Obama's visit, but he's long been one of the most engage Members of Congress on Syria, and on this conflict.

The uprising in Syria is about to enter its third year. Over 70,000 Syrians have been killed, there are over 1 million registered refugees, 2½ million internally displaced persons.

Our partners in the region, Turkey and Jordan, are sheltering nearly 200,000 and 400,000 refugees respectively. International aid

to refugees has been slow to reach countries in need of support. In fact, of the \$1½ billion of refugee aid pledged at the Kuwait Donors Conference held in January, only 20 percent has been distributed. We have to do more to insure that our humanitarian aid is reaching those critical populations.

We can no longer look at Syria as a self-contained conflict. The implications on regional stability are too great. As the fighting rages on, the potential for spillover into the Golan Heights or into Lebanon is great. As 300,000 refugees seek refuge in Lebanon, there are Hezbollah fighters on the ground fighting alongside Assad's forces. Iranian arms flow through Syria to Hezbollah.

Assad is Iran's closest ally. Iranian Revolutionary Guard members are on the ground in Syria providing training to Syrian forces and raising militias in Assad strongholds. The Iranian regime is providing telecommunications equipment, arms, and money to Assad. The collapse of the Assad regime would deal a devastating blow to Iran and its ability to support Hezbollah and other terrorist groups in the region.

I'm extremely concerned about reports that Iraq is turning a blind eye to the Iranian's use of Iraqi airspace to transport weapons to Assad. This inaction is simply unacceptable. In fact, I'll be sending a letter to Prime Minister Maliki this week urging him to immediately ground and inspect Iranian cargo and civilian planes attempting to access Iraqi airspace.

For the sake of regional stability, we and our partners must cooperate with urgency in order to bring this conflict to an end. So, the obvious question remains what more should or can we do?

Secretary Kerry's announcement of direct humanitarian aid to the Opposition was a positive step. We need to engage with the opposition. The people of Syria need to know that they have the support of the United States.

We know that Saudi Arabia and Qatar are providing substantial resources to the opposition. Our European allies led by France and Great Britain are considering ways to get around the EU arms embargo and provide lethal assistance to the opposition.

The arguments for arming the opposition are compelling. It could shift the balance of power and it provides the U.S. influence with those who may eventually govern a new Syria, but what are the chances of success if we don't provide assistance? And is the potential outcome worse for U.S. security and security in the region if we fail to act?

When Assad falls, and it is only a question of when, we have to insure that our security interest will be protected. This means a commitment from any new government that chemical weapons will be secured and will be destroyed. So, as the discussion inevitably shifts toward whether or not the U.S. should provide lethal assistance to the opposition, it is our responsibility to determine whether this can be done in a way that insures that U.S. arms will not fall into the hands of terrorist organizations.

Our ability to vet opposition groups could be seriously improved if Syrian Opposition Coalition leaders can form a strong chain of command, and can unite the various groups fighting across the country.

I'm encouraged that the Syrian Opposition Coalition chose a Prime Minister for its exile government yesterday, but time is of the essence in translating this leadership to ground operations.

There are difficult decisions that must be made in the days and weeks ahead. Do we encourage the Syrian Opposition to establish an alternative government on Syrian territory? Do we continue to push for a U.N. Security Council resolution? Do we provide military advisors and training? Do we provide direct military assistance; and, if so, what kind? And, ultimately, is it realistic to believe that Assad can be pushed to accept any negotiated end to this conflict?

The unconfirmed use of chemical weapons makes this more pressing. The use of chemical weapons by this regime would be horrific, but 70,000 slaughtered Syrians is horrific. The discussions that we have in this committee are interesting, but the fact that this is hard cannot stop us from acting.

Ambassador Ford, you and your colleagues know better than anyone, there are no easy answers. Inaction, however, simply is not an option. I look forward to your testimony and I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Deutch. We'll yield 3 minutes to the chairman of the Middle East Subcommittee, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, for holding this timely hearing as the 2-year anniversary of the Syrian conflict just passed.

After years of violence and internal struggle, the fighting in Syria continues, and the refugee crisis threatens the stability of our allies in the region. With over 70,000 dead and over 1 million refugees, the numbers continue to rise as there is no clear end in sight.

What started as a popular uprising where Syrians took to the streets in protest against the Assad regime's corruption, human rights abuses and brutality has turned into a full-scale sectarian conflict that pits the Assad regime against Islamists who seek to establish an Islamic state in the wake of Assad's removal.

The secular moderate elements have been forced to a periphery, and their movement has been co-opted by the extremists. That is why the United States must take and must take with extreme caution any action that deals with opposition forces in Syria.

While I respect the opinion of my colleagues, I sincerely do not believe that it is time for the U.S. to arm the rebels. Too many questions remain about who the rebels are, and with whom they will swear allegiance. The unknown can be dangerous and the vetting of the opposition is not enough when it comes to providing lethal aid that could be used against our allies, such as Israel, or even the United States in a post-Assad era.

I'm also deeply concerned about Assad's stockpile of WMDs that were they to fall into the wrong hands could jeopardize the entire Middle East region, as well as our own U.S. national security. We must examine also those regimes that continue to help Assad stay afloat.

Last week the Director of National Intelligence testified that,

“North Korea's export of ballistic missiles and associated materials to several countries, including Iran and Syria, and its as-

assistance to Syria's construction of a nuclear reactor destroyed in 2007 illustrate the reach of its proliferation activities."

To address this national security threat, Congressman Brad Sherman and I introduced the Iran, North Korea, and Syria Non-Proliferation Accountability Act, and this bipartisan bill prohibits assistance to any government that has provided assistance to Iran, North Korea, or Syria, or has failed to prevent individuals or entities under its sovereignty from aiding in the proliferation activities of those three states. We welcome cosponsors to our legislation. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you. Let me introduce our panel here, representatives from the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development.

Ambassador Robert Ford is the American Ambassador to Syria. In his 27-year Foreign Service tenure, he has served as Ambassador to Algeria and as the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

Ms. Anne Richard serves as the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau for Population Refugees and Migration at the State Department. Prior to her appointment, Ms. Richard worked for the International Rescue Committee, an agency committed to refugees and internally displaced persons.

Nancy Lindborg is the Assistant Administrator for the Bureau for Democracy Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance for USAID. Before joining USAID, she was president of Mercy Corps.

So, we welcome all of our distinguished witnesses here today, and without objection, the witnesses' full testimony, your full prepared statements will be made part of the record. Members may have 5 days to submit statements and questions for the record. And to our witnesses, I'd just ask you to summarize your testimony within those 5 minutes. We'll begin with Ambassador Ford.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ROBERT S. FORD,
AMERICAN AMBASSADOR TO SYRIA**

Ambassador FORD. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. Thank you very much for inviting me to come talk with you today. I know our time is limited so I'm going to keep my remarks quite brief.

As you noted, Mr. Chairman, what started out as a peaceful demand for dignity and freedom has turned, instead, into a devastating conflict with a horrific human toll. Syrians face a new level of ruthlessness from the Assad regime, which is raining Scud missiles down on residential neighborhoods, bombing hospitals, bombing schools, and sending out its thugs into streets to terrorize and arrest fellow citizens.

More than 70,000 Syrians now have died since the beginning of this conflict, and the number is rising, especially as fighting in Damascus and Southern Syria now is intensifying. More than 1 million Syrians have left their homes in their country to seek refuge in neighboring countries, a number which could quadruple by the end of this year if the increase in refugee flows continues. It's very striking that Jordan's fourth largest city now is the Zaatari refugee camp.

We are working to alleviate the human suffering. The United States is the largest bilateral humanitarian aid donor, and my colleagues, Anne and Nancy, can tell you more about our humanitarian assistance efforts. So, let me talk, instead, about how this can end.

Beyond addressing humanitarian needs, the United States is acting. The United States is helping Syrians who seek a government that will respect the dignity and the rights of all Syrians and that will foster, not threaten, stability in the Middle East.

Since December 2012, the United States along with our international partners have recognized the Syrian Opposition Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. The Coalition has a diverse group of representatives inside Syria as well as outside, and the Coalition is committed to a democratic and inclusive government, free from the influence of violent extremists. And now it needs help providing basic services in liberated areas.

Secretary Kerry in Rome at the end of February announced a new assistance package of \$63 million to help the Syrian Opposition Coalition, to help Syrians on the ground inside Syria, and to provide food and medical supplies to the Supreme Military Command of the Free Syrian Army, and to the Syrian Opposition Council for those in need.

Our aid, along with that of our partners is very important, especially to forestall the complete collapse of state institutions. This is a point which Secretary Kerry has emphasized repeatedly. But, ultimately, we perceive that a negotiated political transition is the best long-term solution to the Syrian crisis.

The Geneva Communiqué agreed upon by the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, Turkey, the Arab League States calls for a transition governing body to be set up with full executive powers, and this is important, formed on the basis of mutual consent between the Opposition and the Syrian regime. We cannot see how Bashar al-Assad and his circle who long ago lost their legitimacy, and whom the Opposition will never accept in a transition government, we cannot see how he and his circle can play any role in that transition governing body. He must step aside.

We need to get to negotiations to establish that transition governing body, but it is not easy, and how are we to get there? As Secretary Kerry has noted, we need to change Bashar al-Assad's calculations because he still thinks he can win militarily.

Therefore, we are working with our partners to strengthen the Opposition and to change the balance on the ground to help give the Opposition the leverage they need to negotiate and to change Bashar's calculations.

Let me note here that the election of Ghassan Hitto as Prime Minister for the Coalition is a step forward, and we look forward to working with him and with the Opposition Coalition President, Muaz al-Khatib in the weeks ahead. And let me also say that we look forward to working with the Congress as we seek to support the needs of the Syrian people in their struggle to create a free, stable, and democratic Syria. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Ford follows:]

AMBASSADOR ROBERT FORD
CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY FOR THE RECORD
HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
March 20, 2013

Chairman Casey and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to present an overview of our response to the crisis in Syria.

This past weekend marked the two year anniversary of the Syrian conflict. The country looks disturbingly different today than it did then. What started out as a peaceful demand for dignity and freedom, when a few, young boys scribbled the fateful words “down with the regime” on a wall in Deraa, has turned into a devastating conflict with a growing human toll.

Syrians face a new level of ruthlessness from the Asad regime, which is raining Scud missiles down on residential neighborhoods, destroying hospitals and schools, and sending its thugs rampaging through the streets to terrorize their fellow citizens. The carnage is appalling. For instance, we have heard that some Syrian parents who still send their children to school now stitch their child’s name on school uniforms. That makes it easier to identify the bodies.

According to the U.N., more than 70,000 Syrians have died since the beginning of the conflict and the number is rising as the fighting in Damascus intensifies. More than one million people have left their homes in Syria to seek refuge in another country – a number that could triple by the end of 2013 if the rise in numbers continues at its current rate.

The increase in refugees – in addition to the potential spillover of ethnic and sectarian violence – has the potential to destabilize the region. Jordan’s Za’atari refugee camp is now Jordan’s fourth largest city. The refugees in Lebanon are now around 10 percent of that country’s population.

OUR RESPONSE

We are working to alleviate the human suffering. The United States is the largest bilateral humanitarian aid donor. And we are working to make sure the rest of the international community plays their part. In January at a conference in Kuwait, over forty countries pledged \$1.5 billion to help the Syrian refugees. We are pressuring the countries that have not yet paid to make good on their pledges – and I have personally asked our partners and Gulf and European countries to give the funds they promised.

The humanitarian assistance from the United States amounts to nearly \$385 million. This money is being spent on emergency medical care and supplies, blankets, and shelter. We are sending flour to 50 bakeries in Aleppo and sponsoring food and sanitation projects for the desperate families in Atmeh refugee camp. Our aid into opposition – controlled areas is often intentionally discreet to protect those delivering the aid, but it is significant.

The humanitarian assistance is vital but there is far more to do. Preserving Syria's national unity and laying the foundation for a free Syria that respects the rights of all its citizens is essential if we are to secure a Syria that helps, rather than threatens, stability in the heart of the Middle East. Collapse or fragmentation of the Syrian state or its takeover by extremists would threaten the region with hugely greater refugee flows, as well as the risks associated with the security of the regime's big chemical weapons stocks, and confront us also with the likelihood of major terrorist bases. Those outcomes would directly threaten our interests.

Therefore, apart from our humanitarian aid, we are providing non-lethal assistance to the Syrian opposition to:

- Solidify the efforts of Syrian moderates who are competing for influence with extremist groups, knitting the national opposition leadership with local councils on the ground inside Syria. The national opposition leadership needs to provide local communities with an alternative source of support to prevent the influence of al-Qaida's affiliates from expanding.
- Curtail the influence of extremists by helping national and local opposition leaders provide vital services such as food, water and electricity. Syrian activists and rebels are working hard to unite the opposition, establish local governing structures, and provide assistance to the many Syrians in need. We need to work with these courageous Syrians – both armed and unarmed – so that they can respond quickly to critical needs.
- Prevent the disintegration of the Syrian state by supporting a unified, inclusive, and effective civilian leadership at both national and local levels – and by retaining the civil servants that can keep state institutions functioning as Syrians struggle to recover from this conflict.

INVESTING IN SYRIANS

Let me offer a few specifics.

Our previous non-lethal assistance, totaling approximately \$54 million, focused on linking disparate Syrian opposition groups across the country to build a network of ethnically and religiously diverse civilian activists.

We supplied approximately 5,000 pieces of equipment, including communications gear, to enable activists to coordinate their efforts. Some activists used these tools to organize a Free Lawyer's Union, which now coordinates with the Local Council for the Governorate of Daraa and has taken responsibility for legal affairs within the local council.

We boosted radio signals, extending the reach of broadcast on FM stations, and funded media outlets. Then we used those media platforms to address sectarian violence and issue public service messages on chemical weapons exposure.

We also trained and equipped 1,500 local leaders and activists – including women and minorities – from over 100 Syrian opposition provincial councils. These graduates are improving the ability

of local committees and councils from Damascus to Deir al-Zour to Idlib to better provide for the needs of all members of their communities. One recent graduate played a critical role in the Aleppo LCC elections last week. He reached out to 240 delegates across Aleppo's liberated areas and broadcast the election – bringing credibility, transparency, and accountability to the process.

All of these efforts build on the work of our international partners in the region and in Europe.

BUILDING A NATIONAL APPARATUS

Since December 2012, the United States, along with our international partners, has acknowledged the Syrian Opposition Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. Comprised of diverse representatives inside and outside Syria, the Coalition is committed to a democratic, inclusive Syria free from the influence of violent extremists.

In the months since its formation, the Coalition has coordinated discussion of transition planning and transitional justice. It has developed technical committees, including an Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU), to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches Syrians in need. The Coalition has the ability to lead but it is directly competing with extremists, and we need to help it build credibility with the Syrian people.

On February 28, Secretary Kerry announced another \$60 million in non-lethal support to strengthen the Coalition's capacity to have a greater impact at the national and local levels. This new funding will tie the Coalition's national efforts to work being done by local groups and councils inside Syria.

The State Department will create a new, small grants initiative that the Coalition can use to help local councils meet the needs of their citizens. This will include supporting the work of these new governing institutions and helping them undertake service delivery projects for their communities.

USAID will build on this effort by providing the Coalition with two programs designed to have immediate impact. The first will provide short-term assistance for urgent needs, such as fuel, heaters, and nutritional and educational supplies for children. The second will support strategic, longer-term needs on behalf of the Coalition, such as repairing schools, local power, and sanitation. USAID will also provide the Coalition with technical experts to help it manage essential services and light infrastructure. These experts will help with assessments, project design, and track multi-donor rehabilitation efforts.

And we are looking to improve civilian security through training and some non-lethal equipment. This is critical to preventing a security vacuum in liberated areas that will be exploited by extremists if we do not help stand up civilian police.

Finally, to ensure that our assistance reaches its intended targets and does not end up in the hands of extremists, we will continue to use formal processes that have been established across various agencies in the government to vet the recipients.

CONCLUSION

We continue to believe that political transition is the best solution to the crisis in Syria. And we support the Geneva Communiqué, which calls for a transitional governing body with full executive powers and formed on the basis of mutual consent. Bashar al-Asad long ago lost his credibility and we cannot imagine the opposition would ever accept his participation in that transition government. He must step down.

We are working with our partners to strengthen moderate opposition and change the balance on the ground to help give the opposition the leverage they need to negotiate. The Assad regime, holding to power through brute force backed by Iran and Hizballah, will be held accountable for crimes against the Syrian people.

As Secretary Kerry said in Rome, “This is a complicated challenge, but the principle that guides us is simple: No nation should live in fear of its leaders, and all people deserve the freedom and opportunity to live in peace, dignity and justice.”

We look forward to working with Congress as we seek to support the needs of the Syrian people in their struggle to create a free, stable, and democratic Syria. Thank you again for the invitation to testify before your committee today. I am happy to take any questions you might have.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ANNE C. RICHARD, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU FOR POPULATION, REFUGEES, AND MIGRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Ms. RICHARD. Good morning, Chairman Royce, Ranking Members, and Mr. Deutch, and members of this committee. Thank you for hosting this hearing today on the humanitarian crisis inside Syria.

I am pleased to be able to appear before the committee with my colleague, Ambassador Robert Ford, and USAID Assistant Administrator, Nancy Lindborg. Our offices work closely together to provide humanitarian aid to those affected by the violence in Syria.

The 2-year anniversary of the Syria uprising coincides with another dark milestone. Over 1 million refugees have fled Syria. More troubling, half of that number arrived in the last 2 months.

I would like to share with you the approach the Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration is taking to address the crisis, and how that complements and reinforces what USAID does. In my written testimony, I describe how the refugee crisis is affecting the neighboring countries, and I won't go into those details here, but invite questions from you on the very different situations we have seen in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq.

Let me just say that we recognize the huge strain that the influx of refugees is currently placing on host countries. It is essential that neighboring countries continue to keep their borders open for those refugees fleeing violence in Syria.

In every meeting with officials from these countries we thank them for allowing refugees to cross and discuss ways to help them uphold humanitarian principles while protecting their own security, and preventing a spillover of violence.

The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration works closely with our colleagues at USAID, and together we lead the U.S. Government's humanitarian response. Nancy Lindborg and I have traveled often to the region, traveled together twice, and on our most recent trip were also joined by Ambassador Ford in Turkey prior to our participation at the January Kuwait Donors Conference.

The State Department is helping to get as much humanitarian aid as possible to Syria's conflict victims. We are providing funding to the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and non-governmental organizations. These aid agencies bring technical expertise and operational capacity to respond to a crisis as large-scale as this. Of the nearly \$385 million provided thus far, the State Department's contribution total nearly \$185 million and meet basic humanitarian needs such as shelter, water, and health both inside Syria, and in host countries.

The delivery of assistance is often undertaken at great personal risk. In recent months, U.N. convoys have delivered aid to Opposition-held areas in Syria where thousands are in acute need of humanitarian help. Such movements are highly dangerous.

Of course, people in need are not concentrated in one area and can be found all around the shifting battle lines. Humanitarian organizations provide aid in a neutral and impartial manner. The United Nations is seeking to get access to all communities in need

on a regular basis. It is unacceptable and a violation of humanitarian principles for the Syrian regime to deny this access.

I should mention that the fighting has also endangered the lives of Palestinians and Iraqi refugees who lived in Syria. They, too, are caught up in this crisis and have been displaced, or have fled the country.

I regret to tell you that even as the crisis explodes, the international community is facing a resource problem. The U.N.'s Regional Response Plan has thus far received only 21 percent of the funds it needs to operate for the first half of 2013. Other donors must quickly provide the funds that agencies need to keep life-saving operations going.

And even if the Assad regime falls soon, humanitarian aid will likely continue. This is because of the widespread destruction of Syria's infrastructure and predicted flows of refugees that would continue to cross borders—likely in both directions. Needs could extend into the long term.

I've got my work cut out for me in terms of convincing other countries to give more, in setting the record straight about the heroic efforts of aid workers inside Syria, in pressing international aid agencies to do as much as they can, wherever they can.

I am encouraging U.N. leaders to take on more risks and push the envelope to get aid into those hard to access parts of Syria where the needs are great. And we are formally requesting that they plan for every conceivable contingency since this crisis has already defied predictions about its likely scale and scope.

We are asking neighboring countries to keep their borders open despite political tensions and economic burdens within their own countries, to work with us to insure international aid reaches the Syrians, and to help us uphold international standards in order to protect and aid refugees.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, my Bureau's primary concerns are providing protection and assistance to those who have fled the violence. The State Department's overall goal, of course, is a return of peace and stability to Syria, and to one day see the refugees return home. And I'll be happy to answer your questions at the appropriate time.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Richard follows:]

Crisis in Syria: the U.S. Response

Testimony of Anne C. Richard
Assistant Secretary of State
Department of State
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration

Before the
Committee on Foreign Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives

March 20, 2013

Introduction

Good morning, Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, and Members of this committee. Thank you for hosting this hearing today on the humanitarian crisis inside Syria. I am pleased to be able to appear before the Committee with my colleague, Ambassador Robert S. Ford and USAID Assistant Administrator Nancy Lindborg. Our offices work closely together to provide critical humanitarian aid to those affected by the violence in Syria.

The two year anniversary of the Syria uprising coincides with another dark milestone: over one million refugees have now fled across Syria's borders into neighboring countries. More troubling news is that half of that number arrived in the last two months. The United Nations (UN) estimates that over 2.5 million people are displaced inside Syria and many more have been affected by the upheaval and fighting.

I would like to share with you the approach my bureau in the State Department is taking to address the crisis and how our efforts and USAID's work are complementary and mutually reinforcing... I shall first briefly comment on how the refugee crisis is affecting the neighboring countries, discuss the challenges we face in delivering humanitarian assistance to those in need throughout the region, and provide some specifics on the priorities of the Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and our diplomatic outreach to other countries.

Refugees in Neighboring Countries

Countries bordering Syria are approaching a dangerous saturation point with refugees. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in January of this year, 2,000 people fled Syria every day. In February, the number climbed to 5,000 a day; and in March, we've seen 8,000 people a day crossing from Syria into Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey. In addition to serving as evidence that life inside Syria has become extremely dangerous for many, the number and the rate are overwhelming the capacity of humanitarian aid organizations to meet the needs of these victims and are sorely testing the limits of host countries' abilities to provide safe shelter. If international borders are closed to Syrians seeking refuge, the awful tally of human destruction will only increase.

Jordan: There are approximately 350,000 refugees in Jordan according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Approximately 70 percent of refugees in Jordan live outside of the refugee camps in cities and towns. Many have been taken in or helped by relatives, friends or even strangers. Only 30 percent live in the Za'atri refugee camp in northern Jordan. The Government of Jordan set up Za'atri in response to the large numbers of refugees crossing the border, and it has moved to set up another camp, as yet uninhabited, and initiated plans for another. Za'atri camp has been plagued by security problems and we have been in active conversations with the UNHCR and the Government of Jordan to improve the safety of refugees there as well as humanitarian workers.

Jordan is allowing refugees to cross its borders but is finding that its resources are stretched to help massive flows of refugees while providing services to its own citizens at the same time. We should note that we are concerned by reports that some Palestinian and Iraqi refugees have been turned around at the border and we have asked the Government of Jordan to let them cross. We've thanked the Government of Jordan for its ongoing assistance to the refugee population, and asked them to keep their borders open to all refugees. Knowing the significant economic cost associated with hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees, the U.S. government is providing Jordan with budget support.

Lebanon: Lebanon is hosting over 354,000 Syrian refugees. Lebanon has also taken in 32,000 Palestinian refugees who have fled the violence in Syria. Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in host communities and are not in camps, which allows for greater freedom of movement, greater possibilities for self-sufficiency and a semblance of a normal life. At the same time, the presence of so many refugees in a country of 4 million people taxes Lebanon's infrastructure and resources and has increased tensions within the refugee-hosting communities. Hizballah's presence in southern Lebanon creates a challenge for UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGO) in providing aid, while its involvement in the Government of Lebanon complicates U.S. efforts to provide help during this crisis. Despite these strains, the Government of Lebanon continues to keep its borders open, though its leaders have warned that Lebanon has reached its saturation point and requires significant international assistance in order to support the refugees.

Iraq: Over 110,000 Syrian refugees have fled to Iraq, and most are now in Kurdistan. Domiz camp in Kurdistan accommodates approximately 54,000 persons, and two camps in Anbar province at Al-Qaim accommodate over 7,500 persons. In addition to those living in camps, there are many who live in villages and communities. In Kurdistan, Syrians are permitted to live and work in the community once they have registered.

Since October 21, 2012, the Government of Iraq has kept the Al-Qaim border crossing with Syria closed, except for medical emergencies and some family reunification cases. Local authorities and the Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement state that the border is closed for security reasons. Syrian refugees in Anbar prior to the closure of the border are restricted to the camps, although some have family members nearby. The main reasons for return to Syria continue to be lack of freedom of movement out of the camp and lack of a way to earn a living.

UNHCR continues to provide support to those expressing interest in returning to Syria but is not encouraging repatriation because conditions are not conducive to a safe return.

Turkey: Since the beginning of the crisis, the Government of Turkey has supported most of the humanitarian needs of the refugees from Syria who have crossed its border. In addition to 186,200 refugees registered in 17 camps set up by the government and 71,000 registered (or soon to be registered) outside of camps, the Government of Turkey estimates that an additional 100,000 unregistered refugees live in urban areas. While the government has previously focused its support for Syrian refugees on the camp-based populations, it is now beginning to address the needs of the out-of-camp Syrians by setting up centers where urban refugees can register for IDs and free health services. Turkey has a strong economy but is experiencing a decline in its once vibrant cross-border trade with Syria.

Challenges in Crisis Response

The challenges before us are many. USAID Nancy Lindborg's testimony discusses access, security and funding issues. Therefore, I will focus on: (1) the need to work with host governments to ensure that they keep their borders open to refugees and have what they need to help the refugees; (2) specific contributions made by the PRM bureau; and (3) ensuring that other countries are contributing to humanitarian aspects of the crisis so that the UN and other humanitarian agencies have more of the support they need to respond.

Working with Host Governments

We recognize the huge strain that the influx of refugees is currently placing on countries that neighbor Syria. In both Jordan and Lebanon, government leaders are concerned about their capacity to absorb so many refugees. Iraq has expressed concerns that al-Qaeda and its Syria affiliate, al-Nusra Front, are sending fighters and weapons across the border. Turkey, for the most part, has maintained an open border policy for all refugees, although each day it limits the number of refugees allowed to cross at border crossings with high traffic. It is essential that neighboring countries continue to keep their borders open for those refugees fleeing violence in Syria. In every meeting with officials from these countries, we thank them for allowing refugees to cross and discuss ways to help them uphold humanitarian principles while safeguarding their own security so that they are protected from a spillover of violence.

It is important that short-term relief programs link to longer-term development aid as part of overall U.S. government aid to the region. This is particularly the case in Jordan and Lebanon. We must leverage other aid and investments and incorporate refugees into the fabric of these countries, in order to minimize the costs that hosting refugees places on communities. This is an important area in which the State Department and USAID are working together.

Department of State Response

The Department and USAID lead the U.S. government's humanitarian response and we work closely together in response to the crisis. Nancy Lindborg and I have traveled together to

the region twice and were also recently joined by Ambassador Ford in Turkey, prior to our participation at the Kuwait Donors Conference in January. Our communications teams are taking advantage of maximizing every opportunity to get the message out to domestic and international audiences about the dimensions of the crisis and to highlight our government's leadership role in responding.

That said, allow me to outline the role the State Department has in helping to get as much humanitarian aid into Syria as possible through partners. Over several decades, PRM has developed a privileged relationship with the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and non-governmental organizations. These agencies are a key part of the international humanitarian system that is governed by humanitarian principles. They bring technical expertise and operational capacity to respond to this large-scale crisis. Of the nearly \$385 million in humanitarian assistance that USAID and the State Department are providing in response to the Syria crisis, the State Department's contributions total nearly \$185 million. Our contributions provide life-saving emergency assistance to meet basic humanitarian needs, such as shelter, water, sanitation, and health both inside Syria and in host countries.

The delivery of assistance is often undertaken at great personal risk to those distributing the aid. For example, in the past couple of months, two UNHCR convoys and one UN interagency convoy have delivered aid into north-west Syria, where thousands of internally displaced people are in acute need of humanitarian help. The operations were carried out in collaboration with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the local community. Once the convoys moved across battle-lines into areas controlled by the opposition, the missions were facilitated by the Syrian Opposition Coalition. Such operations are dangerous and difficult, which underscores the need for unhindered and safe access for those providing humanitarian assistance inside Syria. We will continue to encourage the UN to do more such cross-line assistance deliveries, counting on the Syrian Opposition Coalition to help coordinate and negotiate safe access. While these convoys are good, much more is needed to ensure supplies consistently and safely reach people in need.

Of course, people in need are not concentrated in one area and instead can be found on both sides of shifting battle-lines. Humanitarian organizations provide aid in a neutral and impartial manner. The United Nations is seeking to get access to all communities in need on a regular basis. It is unacceptable and a violation of humanitarian principles for the Syrian regime to deny this access.

I should also mention the plight of the 525,000 Palestinian refugees who were living in Syria prior to the start of the conflict. They, too, have been caught up in the violence in Syria. Fighting has engulfed many Palestinian refugee camps and neighborhoods, including in Yarmouk, causing over half of Syria's Palestinian population to be displaced. For the most part, the Palestinian population has kept away from taking sides in the conflict. Those refugees who remain in camps are the poorest and most vulnerable. Some Palestinians have fled Syria, but most remain inside the country, having heard that they will be turned away at the borders with neighboring countries. The U.S. is the largest bilateral donor to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the UN agency responsible for

assisting Palestinian refugees. There are also approximately 63,000 Iraqi refugees inside Syria. In recent months, many other Iraqis who were living as refugees in Syria have chosen to return to Iraq or flee for a second time to other countries.

Contributions of Other Countries

With no end in sight, we are facing a resource crisis. The UN's Regional Response Plan to assist up to 1.1 million Syrian refugees in the region has thus far received only 21 percent of the funds it needs to operate for the first half of 2013 and, as of mid-March, refugee arrivals have already nearly reached June 2013 planning figures. Despite our own budget constraints, the United States continues to make every effort to continue to provide funding to meet the increasing needs. However, it is vital that other donors quickly honor the pledges they have made and provide the cash that agencies need to keep life-saving operations going.

Even if the Asad regime falls soon, displacement and the need for humanitarian aid will continue. This is because of the widespread destruction of Syria's infrastructure and predicted flows of refugees that would continue to cross borders – likely in both directions. If refugees are not able to return for years, host countries will need to continue to help host Syrian children in schools, and help families with medical facilities, and provide other public services.

Using diplomatic channels, we are using every opportunity to ask other donors to follow through on the pledges they made at the Kuwait Donors Conference in January in order to raise the promised \$1.5 billion. The Secretary and other Department principals have reached out to other governments to ask them to do more for the Syrian people, including Syrian refugees. Funding is urgently needed if UN agencies and others are able to continue to operate.

Coordination of the international humanitarian response is complex and must occur on multiple levels. The United States participates in meetings in Geneva of the Syria Humanitarian Forum that bring together senior officials from key donor governments, countries affected by the crisis and UN leaders to discuss the humanitarian aspects of the crisis, and to coordinate our collective response. We also actively participate in UN coordination meetings in the field. In addition, we are deepening our coordination with the Syrian Opposition Coalition's Assistance Coordination Unit. We have also encouraged UN agencies and other partners to do the same, and are pleased with the initial results.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, I would like to say that my bureau's primary concerns are providing protection to and aiding those who have fled the violence. The State Department's overall goal, of course, is a return of peace and stability to Syria and to one day see the refugees return home.

I am grateful for the generosity of Congress and the American people who make our assistance possible, and for the excellent collaboration with the State Department's Near East and European bureaus, and USAID colleagues. Thank you once again for the opportunity to highlight PRM's role and some of our concerns regarding the Syrian humanitarian crisis. I would be happy to answer any of your questions.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE NANCY E. LINDBORG, ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. LINDBORG. Chairman Royce, members of the committee, thank you very much for having us here today.

We are 2 years into this conflict, and we are in the midst of a grim and escalating humanitarian crisis. We've heard the grim statistics; behind each of these statistics are profound stories of loss and particular impact on the women and children who are always the most affected by conflict.

We heard these stories in January when the three of us traveled to the region, and it really hits home how profoundly brutal this war is when you stand at the border of Syria and Jordan at night and literally watch thousands of families walk across that border, mainly women and children.

I want to just cover a few key points today. First, our humanitarian mandate is one of the most important expressions of who we are as Americans, and the U.S. Government is helping those in need throughout Syria. Since the conflict began 2 years ago, our aid has been a lifeline to more than 2.4 million people, including those in areas affected by the worst violence, in Idlib, in Aleppo, in Daraa.

We are working through all channels, through the United States, international organizations, NGOs, local Syrian groups and networks to reach all who are in need throughout Syria. We are working closely with the Syrian Opposition Coalition's Assistance Coordination Unit or ACU, which is now playing a vital role in coordinating international aid going into Syria. USAID has a full-time liaison working with the ACU to build that relationship, to share information, coordinate the assistance, and help the ACU have greater capacity to do more.

Our assistance is reaching all 14 Governorates and approximately 60 percent of our aid is reaching those in contested and Opposition-held areas. We've prioritized food, basic medical, and trauma care relief supplies. In Aleppo Governorate 50 bakeries were reopened with enough flour from USAID to bake daily bread for 210,000, and working with a cadre of very brave doctors, mainly Syrians, we're supporting 144 hospitals, health clinics, and mobile units who are providing essential care, and especially looking at the needs of women and children who are affected by this conflict.

My second point is that all of this is not enough. The growing crisis is outpacing the international response capacity. We have a problem of access. The single greatest factor limiting humanitarian aid is that we need more access across battle lines; we need cross-border access. We are simply not able to reach everyone in need.

There are not enough resources. Simply put, there is not enough money to reach the scale of this need. We continue to urge all countries to follow through on the generous commitments they made at the Pledging Conference in Kuwait in late January. It is imperative for all countries to step forward to share the burden. We invite you to add your voices to that call.

Security is a constant concern. Every day I get reports of humanitarian aid workers who have been kidnapped, targeted, and clinics

and bakeries bombed. Just last month, three USAID-funded medical clinics were bombarded, one was destroyed by a mortar shell, 10 people were killed. So, to protect our humanitarian partners, to insure the aid can continue and reach those in need, we are not branding much of our assistance, which goes to my third point.

We are working hard to insure that the Syrian people know the United States is the largest donor, and that the American people are standing by them in this hour of need. We're working with our partners to find ways to safely and selectively brand, when they can, in one of the most dangerous and complex humanitarian environments on earth right now. They are engaging intensively with local leaders at every level to make sure they understand where the aid is coming from. We're amplifying our support through official visits to the region, intensive regional media engagement, and making a full government-wide push to communicate directly to the Syrians. This hearing today is a wonderful opportunity to further that message. So, again, our thanks.

My fourth and final point is that in addition to humanitarian assistance, as Ambassador Ford has detailed, the U.S. is investing in Syria's transition to help the Syrian Opposition deliver. We recognize they need to deliver on meeting Syrian needs now, so we are working with them through offices like the Office of Transition Initiatives to identify priority projects both immediate and longer term that can help the Syrians.

Our continued assistance and support for the Syrian people is a vital investment in the stability of a region that's at the heart of our U.S. national security interests, and our humanitarian help is a crucial expression of our American values and our solidarity with the Syrians at this tragic time.

We know our humanitarian assistance will not end the bloodshed but it is saving millions of lives, and preventing a tragic situation from becoming worse. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Lindborg follows:]

**Testimony of U.S. Agency for International Development
Assistant Administrator Nancy E. Lindborg to the
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
March 20, 2013
Crisis in Syria: the U.S. Response**

Chairman Royce, Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you about the U.S. response to Syria's crisis to date. Thank you also for your continued support for our assistance programs around the world, which are making a positive difference every day in millions of lives around the world.

Introduction

We have just passed the two-year anniversary since the onset of the Syrian conflict. Sadly, the country continues to face a grim situation and an escalating humanitarian crisis. The dreams of those who first began with hopeful demonstrations on the street of Damascus are far from being realized. The statistics are numbing: more than 70,000 dead; more than 4 million people inside the country in need of assistance; and more than 2.5 million displaced from their homes. We have already reached the somber milestone of more than one million refugees in neighboring countries, with greater numbers of refugees fleeing the violence each day.

The United States is fully committed to standing with and supporting the Syrian people. I traveled to Turkey and Jordan with Ambassador Ford and Assistant Secretary Richard in late January to underscore that message of support. I met with young activists who have been yanked from their dreams of college, braved arrest and in some cases served brutal jail time, and who are now dedicated to organizing their generation for a better future. Several of them sent me text messages on March 8th as part of their "I Am She" Campaign, urging people to wear white on International Women's Day in honor of the many Syrian women who have suffered violence during this conflict. And we met with refugees who have fled bombardment and attack. One man and his three young sons all had fresh shrapnel wounds as we talked in the camp in Jordan. And in a tragic twist of technology, more than one woman showed me photos on her cell phones of dead children or lost husbands.

I will highlight today several of the ways in which the United States is providing assistance, including support for the democratic transition, help for the neighboring countries reeling under the influx of refugees, and urgently needed humanitarian help, as well as underscore the magnitude of the challenge ahead.

Investing in Syria's Democratic Transition

The United States is investing in the future of a democratic, prosperous Syria and has committed nearly \$115 million in non-lethal assistance to support Syria's Opposition Coalition (SOC), its Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU), and emergent democratic institutions at the grassroots level. We are working from the ground up by supporting the efforts of the local councils and civil society groups and from the top down by helping the SOC build its capacity to administer opposition-held areas and provide urgent and essential services to the people of Syria. Newly

announced program commitments will support the SOC/ACU's ability to manage and implement donor funds both to meet urgent needs and for strategic initiatives that support rehabilitation and restoration of basic services for the Syrian people.

We know from prior transitions the importance of providing basic services and meeting the fundamental needs of a community – from fuel to schools to trash collection. In conflict and post-conflict environments, this is especially vital as communities need reason to believe in the possibility of a better future and establish trust in opposition leadership. At USAID we are working quickly through USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives to provide the SOC with support to respond rapidly to immediate requests from local councils -- including the provision of emergency power, clean water, heaters, and educational supplies for children in strategically selected areas -- as well as support strategic transition initiatives that restore basic services.

As Ambassador Ford has detailed, \$54 million in non-lethal assistance, of the \$115 million committed, is already at work through State and USAID-supported mechanisms to support, train, equip, and connect a network of civil society activists, civilian opposition leaders, and emergent democratic institutions. USAID has prioritized help for Syrian women to play a meaningful role in the country's transition through training and support for coalition-building. Working with the State Department, USAID recently co-sponsored a workshop for Syrian women that resulted in the development of a formal Syrian Women's Network and the drafting of a Charter for Syrian Women.

Support for Syria's Neighbors

We fully recognize the toll of this conflict on the neighboring countries that have so generously taken in the thousands of refugees that flee each day. Assistant Secretary Richard has noted the extensive efforts underway to support Syrian refugees. We are working as well through our USAID missions to help alleviate the potential tensions and impact of a growing Syrian refugee burden on host communities and stressed country systems.

In Lebanon, Syrian refugees now comprise more than 10 percent of the population, comparable to more than 22 million refugees suddenly coming to the United States. We have shifted existing programming to focus on mitigating conflict in particularly affected, vulnerable Lebanese communities, primarily in the North and the Bekaa Valley. Programs are focused on reducing strains on resources by improving service delivery and expanding economic and education opportunities. We are working to support Lebanon's leaders in their efforts to bridge sectarian and ethnic divides, with a particular focus on youth to encourage their participation in resolving community concerns.

In Jordan, the United States has responded vigorously to support the Government of Jordan (GOJ) as it copes with the influx of 350,000 Syrian refugees to-date, as well as help the Jordanian people who are hosting Syrian refugees in their communities. We have used the Complex Crisis Fund to help mitigate potential conflict in northern Jordanian communities where water supplies, never abundant, are stretched thin by arriving refugees. The USAID Mission has realigned existing projects and cash transfer assistance (\$284 million in FY 2012) to cover gaps in the GOJ budget that are, in part, due to increased costs related to the arrival of the Syrian refugees.

The U.S. Humanitarian Response

Finally and most urgently, the United States has fully mobilized to provide humanitarian assistance in Syria. We have provided nearly \$385 million in humanitarian aid to date, \$215 million of which is helping those in need in all governorates inside Syria. Our aid is reaching all 14 governorates in Syria, and an estimated 60 percent is working to help those in contested and opposition-held areas. And I want to be clear: our funding is not just a pledge; every dollar counted is already at work on the ground every day, in some of the worst violence-affected areas, including Idlib, Aleppo, and Dar'a.

We are working through all channels to enable our assistance to reach people throughout Syria: the United Nations (UN), international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and local Syrian organizations and networks – and thousands of dedicated aid workers and Syrians who risk their lives daily.

Medical care, food aid, relief supplies

We have prioritized the provision of food aid, basic medical care, trauma care, and relief supplies. Working through partners, including a cadre of very brave Syrian physicians, we are supporting a life line of essential medical supplies and drugs, trauma training for doctors and support for hospitals and mobile clinics. This assistance is saving lives every day. Right now in Syria, the United States is providing support for 144 hospitals, health clinics, and mobile medical units. This includes providing medical supplies and equipment, paying doctors' salaries, and training additional first responders and medical staff. USAID-supported field hospitals are providing emergency care and emotional support for children, women and men who have suffered sexual- and gender-based violence. The hours and days following rape are critical to treat injuries related to the assault, prevent infection, and receive the basic emotional support that will allow survivors to recover and resume a full life.

The U.S. is the largest donor for emergency food assistance for those affected by conflict in Syria, including those who have fled to neighboring countries. World Food Program (WFP) activities supported by the United States currently provide monthly rations to nearly 1.5 million within Syria and approximately 300,000 refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. WFP targets for these programs are set to increase in coming months to 2.5 million people inside Syria and 755,000 in neighboring countries.

In Aleppo Governorate, the U.S. is providing enough flour to more than 50 bakeries to provide daily bread for 210,000 people. Some of these bakeries had been shuttered for nearly three weeks before this program began, and they are now able to operate. Syrian families in these areas have bread, and the bakery owners and workers are once again earning income.

Throughout the winter, we pushed hard to ensure warm blankets, winter clothes, plastic sheeting and mattresses for over one million internally displaced Syrians who had fled their homes, many of whom have been displaced two or three times already. Now, as winter becomes spring, we face a new set of warm weather challenges, and we will shift greater focus to providing clean

water, improving sanitation and stepping up hygiene supplies and education to thwart the onset of waterborne disease.

As makeshift camps have sprung up along the Turkish border, such as the Olive Tree Camp in Atmeh, near the Reyhanli border crossing in Turkey's Hatay Province, we are responding with assistance to improve basic personal hygiene—including hygiene kits for each family—also essential to preventing disease. At Olive Tree, U.S. assistance has also established 120 garbage collection points and trash removal services, repaired the water pump, established water trucking, installed pipe for a sewage system, and constructed 140 latrines.

After the brutality they have suffered and witnessed, children and adults alike need psychosocial support to help them through this crisis. From helping to form women's groups that encourage discussion to providing vital psychosocial support for children by providing a safe space for them to play and interact with their peers, we are helping to provide ways for Syrians to work through the trauma. With U.S. government support, UNICEF continues to provide psychosocial support to more than 32,000 children in Damascus, Rif Damascus, Homs, and Aleppo governorates, including in conflict locations. In 2013, UNICEF aims to reach 300,000 children throughout the country.

Coordination

In complex crises, coordination with international partners is imperative to ensure the greatest effectiveness of humanitarian contributions. The UN-led coordination effort for Syria enables the humanitarian community to collectively identify and meet immediate humanitarian needs without duplication. Meanwhile, the SOC's ACU has assumed a vital role in coordinating efforts to reach Syrians, especially in opposition-held and contested areas. The UN, UK and USAID each have full time liaisons in Turkey to work with the ACU, which holds a weekly coordination meeting with all donors and implementing partners to share information and map out delivery of assistance to priority areas. Thanks to the determination of ACU leadership, it has grown quickly since its inception in November, and we continue to help the ACU build its capacity to coordinate and leverage international assistance inside Syria.

Key Challenges

Despite our efforts, Syria's humanitarian crisis is quickly outpacing current international response capacity. As violence escalates, three critical challenges are impeding the international humanitarian system from more effectively meeting the urgent needs of the Syrian people. First, **access** remains greatly constrained, especially to the seven northern governorates. In late January, the UN had a breakthrough in delivering assistance across battle lines and has since completed three cross line missions. These efforts are making a tangible difference—but these cross-line operations are logistically complicated and dangerous, underscoring the need for direct, cross-border delivery. This is essential if we are going to be able to reach those in need more quickly.

Secondly, **security** remains a critical concern. We receive daily reports of aid workers being targeted, arrested and kidnapped, of bakeries and clinics being bombed. Our priority is providing life-saving aid, so we provide our assistance in a way that maximizes the potential for protecting the many courageous aid workers and those who receive the aid. This means U.S. humanitarian

assistance in Syria is currently provided without branding. We continue to work however to find ways we can safely let the Syrian people know that the United States is the leading donor and the largest, most proactive provider of humanitarian assistance, including media campaigns, trips to the region and branding where possible.

Finally and importantly, resources are running short. It is imperative that all countries help shoulder this burden. The Emir of Kuwait hosted an international pledging conference on January 30 that raised \$1.5 billion in pledges for the UN Appeal, but unfortunately only about 20 percent of these pledges have turned into funding for programs on the ground. We continue to urge all countries to follow through with their generous pledges and, as the current appeal only covers operations through June, they need to begin looking at next stage funding, especially as the worst-case scenario quickly becomes the current case.

Conclusion: A Pivotal Moment

Our continued, full-throttled humanitarian response is a vital lifeline to millions of Syrians. And our support to help build the Syrian opposition's capacity to provide accountable leadership is crucial as Syrians seek to build a new democracy even as conflict continues.

But we also know our humanitarian aid is not enough to meet the growing needs. And we know our humanitarian aid will not end the bloodshed. We are seeing a shift in the level of violence, in numbers of Syrians fleeing into neighboring countries and collapse of basic systems inside Syria that is outstripping response. Without a political solution, no amount of aid will turn the tide.

After two brutal years of conflict, the Syrian people have more than earned the chance to achieve their democratic aspirations.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you very much, Ms. Lindborg.

I want to ask a question of Ambassador Ford, and it goes to the Director of National Intelligence's comments here to Congress quite recently. He said, "An increasingly beleaguered Syrian regime might be prepared to use chemical weapons against the Syrian people."

I'd note that, you know, many of us doubt that the Syrian Government would risk triggering foreign interference by deploying chemical weapons, but there are reports yesterday of chemical weapons use, as you have seen. And I was going to ask you, Ambassador, what could you tell us on that?

Ambassador FORD. Mr. Chairman, so far we have no evidence to substantiate the reports that chemical weapons were used yesterday, but I want to underline that we are looking very carefully at these reports. We are consulting with partners in the region and in the international community.

More broadly, we have been very clear from the beginning about our concern that as the Assad regime's military situation deteriorates, and it becomes as the Director of National Intelligence said, it becomes ever more beleaguered, that it might be tempted to use chemical weapons. And the President has been very clear in saying that if Assad and those under his command make the mistake of using chemical weapons, or if they fail to meet their obligation to secure them, then there will be consequences, and they will be held accountable.

Chairman ROYCE. What would those consequences be, Ambassador?

Ambassador FORD. Mr. Chairman, in a hearing like this, I absolutely do not want to go into hypotheticals. I do want to underline that we take these reports and these possibilities very seriously, and we are using all of our available means to determine exactly what has happened.

Chairman ROYCE. Let me raise another point, and that is to the transfer of weapons going through Iraq, either over airspace, or by land into Syria. Last week we had a report in Reuters that the Iranian regime was increasing its assistance to the Assad regime. And, clearly, the observation has been that this is the lifeline. It's not just the foreign fighters, but it's also the munitions that are being flown in, and it's being flown in by civilian aircraft. Personnel are flying in, by the way, through airspace, as well as the weapons, so we see that, we see at the same time Hezbollah on the ground now in Syria.

This has been raised, as I understand it, several times with the government in Iraq, but still the government there is ramping this up. If we really grasped the strategic opportunity here, it seems like one of the easiest things we could do would be to lean on the Iraqis and get this process halted.

So, I was going to ask, how hard has the administration weighed in with the Iraqis? What has been tried to get them to cease and desist? And how might Congress help make this job a little easier for the administration, if that's what's necessary here?

Ambassador FORD. Mr. Chairman, thank you for that.

A couple of things I'd like to note first. The Iranian relationship to the Bashar al-Assad regime is not new, but as you noted, their assistance to the regime in this conflict has grown substantially.

I could just cite, for example, that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps lost a general in Syria. And they have lost other personnel, as well. And, of course, I don't want to fail to mention that Lebanese Hezbollah is also playing a very pernicious role. And there are even reports we are seeing now, Mr. Chairman, of Iraqi Shia extremists going to places like the Sayyida Zainab neighborhood of Damascus, and even up to Homs. So, this is a serious problem, and it is absolutely prolonging the conflict.

We have raised on multiple occasions with Iraqi officials, and I have done so myself when I visited Baghdad at the end of last year. We had a senior Iraqi official here in Washington 2 weeks ago, and we raise it during visits here in Washington, and as well out in Baghdad. We will keep pressing the Iraqis.

We want the Iraqi Government to understand that it has no interest in having an extremist government in Syria, and the longer the conflict continues, the greater the influence of extremists on the ground. Iraq should be working with us to get to that negotiated settlement that I talked about.

Chairman ROYCE. You know, it seems to me that with our capacity to put pressure on other governments with respect to trying to bring change in Syria, we are certainly missing an opportunity here given that the flow of these fighters are over Iraqi territory, and they are not assisting. We're missing the opportunity in terms of a direct conversation about the security assistance we've provided, and the means whereby we could frankly force Iraq to at least be part of the solution, rather than part of the problem here.

Again, can you think of anything definitive that has been shared with the Iraqis on that front?

Ambassador FORD. Mr. Chairman, let me assure you we have had very direct conversations with the Iraqis. I have, our Ambassador in Baghdad, Stephen Beecroft, has, and officials here in Washington, the White House and the State Department have. As I mentioned, we had a senior official here from Baghdad the week before last, and we have been very direct with them about the importance of not allowing Iran to exploit the crisis in Syria, and how it is not helpful to Iraqi interests, nor the region's interests.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you. Mr. Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll just follow-up on this line of questions.

You've pressed the Iraqis, you've been direct with the Iraqis. The fact is that the transfer of Iranian arms is subject to U.N. embargo. There is so much at stake here. Let me try this a different way.

What specific leverage might the United States employ in those direct discussions that are taking place with the Iraqis?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, I don't want to go into great detail here about our diplomatic discussions with the Iraqis, but you mentioned the arms embargo and the United Nations resolution, and we have discussed that with the Iraqis.

In a sense, in the end what matters is that the Government of Iraq understand that its own interest is going to be best served not by facilitating Iranian efforts to prolong the crisis in Syria, but

rather in bringing about a transitional government that would have good relations with the government in Iraq.

Mr. DEUTCH. Understanding by the Iraqi Government would be helpful. Action by the Iraqi Government is what's necessary to insure that that actually takes place.

I'd just like to focus on the two kinds of aid that are widely discussed. One is, obviously, military.

Ambassador Ford, there's a difference of opinion here on Capitol Hill about whether or not to provide direct military assistance to the Opposition. The argument is made that it's really hard to know where these weapons are going, that they might wind up in the wrong hands, and that as we assess this, it's just too difficult for us, ultimately, to be able to decide how to get this into the right Opposition group's hands.

Do you agree with that, and the fact that it's hard? Does 70,000 now dead Syrians, does that make it easier for us to assess the possibility of doing this?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, first let me say that all of us working on the Syrian issue are incredibly saddened by the human toll in Syria. I was there, and I visited the people in Hama, and they were certainly peaceful. What's happened to them is atrocious; what's happened to other Syrians is atrocious.

With respect to direct military assistance, our policy now is not to provide military assistance to the Supreme Military Council and the Free Syrian Army. We do regularly review this, be very clear about that, but our policy is not now to provide such assistance. We are, above all, focused in our efforts in convincing both sides of the importance of a political solution and getting them to that negotiated political deal.

We have taken a major step in terms of our relations with the Supreme Military Command of the Free Syrian Army by now for the first time providing food and medical assistance to it for those in Syria in need, but we are not providing direct military assistance.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Ambassador, I understand that, and I'm not suggesting an immediate change. I'm suggesting that this is an important conversation for us to have, and it needs to take place right now.

I'm asking if you agree that it is too difficult for us to identify who should receive those arms if the policy were to change.

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, as we review whether or not to provide direct military assistance, we do it within the context of trying to decide if it would help us get to the political settlement that we think is the only way to get to the long-term crisis. So, the question you asked is one question, but it is not the only question that we take into consideration.

Mr. DEUTCH. I appreciate that. Let me just turn to Ms. Lindborg for a second in my remaining time.

Ms. Lindborg, I want to thank you. I want to thank you for the work that you do. I want to thank you for the work that USAID does.

At the end of your testimony, you commented this hearing is a wonderful opportunity for you to further your message. I hope that people will focus on your message. I hope that in all of the discus-

sions that take place here about whether or not to provide military assistance, and working with the Opposition, and doing all the things that we need to, to ultimately push Assad out, that there is a very clear understanding about the work that you and the agency does every single day, the work that you do every day to address this humanitarian crisis. And, most importantly, your efforts as you describe them, to make sure that the Syrian people understand that even as we have all of these other discussions, that the United States of America is committed to working to address this humanitarian crisis in a very serious, and in a very concerted way.

I want to pass on my sincere thanks, and I hope that you and the work gets the attention that it deserves perhaps as a result of this hearing. Thank you, and I yield back.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to all of the panelists.

I wanted to ask three questions, first on the rebels, who are these guys? WMD, and thirdly, on the countries that are aiding Assad, Russia, Iran, North Korea among them. On the rebels, the Syrian rebels lack a cohesive command and control structure, and they continue to expand their operations, but to what end? Ambassador Ford, do you believe that there's great cohesion in the Opposition forces? And, if so, will that stick.

In the last few months, some Syrian rebels have been designated as foreign terrorist organizations linked to al-Qaeda. They've captured and detained U.N. peacekeepers after later being released, so the U.S. must take necessary precautions to conduct proper oversight and due diligence regarding any aid to these rebels.

Can you give us more information about the Opposition? They're not just Syrian Nationals, as you point out. You said that they're foreign fighters who also have Islamic militants from neighboring countries, so who will govern in a post-Assad Syria?

And on weapons of mass destruction, are the reports correct that the Syrian regime may possess up to 50 tons of weapons-grade nuclear materials in its stockpile? And to inspect, if those reports are true, will the U.S. call for an emergency meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency to discuss this? And if Assad does not grant IAEA inspectors immediate access to all nuclear facilities and stockpiles so that they can be protected and sealed, will the U.S. impose immediate comprehensive and painful sanctions? Will we do so acting with the European Union? Will we do so only through the U.N. Security Council?

And, lastly, on the countries that are aiding the brutality of Assad's regime, these countries continue to provide military assistance, weaponry. These are North Korea, Russia, Iran, and they seek to further the illegal weapons program and supporting these foreign terrorist organizations.

What can we do to hold these regimes accountable for supplying the Syrian regime with arms, helicopters, military equipment during this human rights crisis? In light of Russia's policy in Syria, I believe that the Obama administration's string of concessions to Moscow must stop, and I wanted to hear your thoughts on the

rebels, WMD, and what will we do with countries that are helping Syria?

Ambassador FORD. With respect to the rebels and who they are, I divide them into two categories. There's a political opposition, and there is a military opposition. Both are not entirely unified; although, on the political side the Coalition headed by Sheik Muaz al-Khatib, the Coalition that chose Ghassan Hitto yesterday as Prime Minister, are becoming more and more unified. And they have representatives from both inside the country, as well as outside the country.

On the armed opposition side, they have established a Supreme Military Command headed by a man named General Salim Idris, whom I have met several times. He has said to us and to others that he will respect a political deal worked out by the political opposition; that is to say, he does not perceive that the Free Syrian Army should have a political role in the future of Syria.

To be very frank, Congresswoman, that is one of the reasons we decided to provide direct food and medical assistance to Idris and his command to help him within the context of the broader Syrian opposition.

Let me add, also, with respect to your question on weapons of mass destruction, even when I went out as an Ambassador several years ago, this was a huge issue for us. And it has, if anything, become even more of a concern given our worries about the regime in its desperate military situation using chemical weapons. So, let me assure you, we continue to talk regularly to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. We continue to urge that the Syrian regime be completely transparent with the IAEA about what it has been doing with respect to its nuclear program.

With respect to access, we have long wanted that. We argued for it consistently. I think now with the fighting in the area, we would have to figure out if the IAEA itself would want to go.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. And you can address that at another time, the other question. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the time. Thank you, Ambassador.

Chairman ROYCE. Thank you. We'll go to David Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for convening this important hearing. Thank you to the witnesses for your testimony.

I have two questions, one for Ambassador Ford. Secretary Kerry has said that the policy of the United States is to change Assad's calculations so that he will cease the killing, and agree to some negotiations, and some cease fire. And I'd like your assessment as to whether or not there's any evidence that Assad has begun to change his calculation in that direction, and whether or not there is a set of individuals that the Opposition might be prepared to negotiate with, and whether the Geneva Framework makes any sense, or is still something that has some prospect for resolution?

And the second area, I also want to thank Ms. Lindborg for the work you and your agency are doing, as Ranking Member Deutch referred to. I really hope that people understand the value of it, and thank you for your testimony.

I am particularly interested if you would share with us some of the work that's being done to protect Syrian women and girls.

There have been reports both from a recent U.N. report, and the general media about the really devastating consequences of this conflict on women and the rape of Syrian women who are fleeing Syria to host countries where they're not finding any better conditions, and incidences of rape, forced marriage, and child marriages and the like. If you could share with us some of the work that's being done to protect Syrian girls and women, I'd be grateful. Ambassador Ford, we could start with you.

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, with respect to changing Bashar al-Assad's calculations, I'm not a psychiatrist, and I have seen his press statements where he said he would never leave Syria. We've seen that. Maybe he's telling the truth. I don't know.

We also know, Congressman, that the military balance is turning against the regime. They lost a provincial capital at the end of February, the regime's governor and other senior officials were actually captured. They've lost control of the border along Turkey and Iraq. There is heavy fighting now in Damascus, itself. In fact, we've been getting messages from Syrians inside Syria and Damascus that there was heavy fighting right up close to where the President lives. Certainly, it would have been rattling his windows.

Will he then decide to negotiate and to save himself? We want a negotiated political deal as the best means to get a sustainable new government. That has to be, in a sense, agreed upon by the different sides to the conflict. That does not mean we will ask the Supreme Military Command to implement a cease fire, but we would like to see negotiations.

I was struck that the regime has now offered to send a delegation headed by the Syrian Prime Minister, but I don't know if that is serious, and it has to be to discuss not a Bashar al-Assad reform program, but rather the Geneva Framework for a transition government in which Assad has no part.

Ms. LINDBORG. Congressman, thank you very much for your question. I will start by just saying when I was there in January, I met with a group of young activists, including young women who have now had to give up their dreams of being lawyers and finishing their college education.

On International Women's Day, I got a series of text messages from them to promote a campaign they had organized called "I am SHE," that we had supported, very much focused on bringing to attention the special needs of women in conflict. This is an issue we take seriously globally.

In Syria, through the hospitals that we're supporting, we've also brought in rape kits, and counselors. It is in the immediate aftermath of a sexual assault that it's so important to get treatment. We are also working with partners to provide special counseling for the many, many children who are affected by this, who are traumatized now.

This has impact for the rest of your life—to go through this. Many children are being caught in the crossfire, as are the women, and it is brutal.

And my colleague, Anne, might want to say something about the particular plight of women in refugee camps.

Ms. RICHARD. We are working with UNHCR in Jordan, and UNFPA in Turkey to insure that aid is provided to women and

girls who have suffered as they fled from Syria. We've heard very credible reports that one of the things they're fleeing from is the threat or actual rape.

In the Zaatari refugee camp, we are giving funding to NGOs so that they can meet the needs of Syrian women and children. So, we take the issue very, very seriously, and thank you for raising it.

Chairman ROYCE. We'll go now to Mr. Steve Chabot.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

There was an article which appeared in, I believe, National Review recently. It was entitled, "The Silent Exodus of Syria's Christians." And it started out 2 million or so, and it's to some degree similar to Iraq when there was the war taking place there. Christians were being targeted, murder, kidnapping, rape, you name it, all kinds of horrific things happening. And, of course, there's been a relationship to some degree between the regime and some in the Christian community, as well, so that clearly exists, and is somewhat of a complicating factor, as well.

There are particular threat from Islamic groups, and my question would be what has the administration been doing about that, what should we be doing? One quote in the article was, "The ethno religious cleansing taking place could soon see Syria emptied of Christians," for example. And, apparently, it hasn't been getting a tremendous amount of coverage in the media overall compared to a lot of other things. Ms. Lindborg, would you want to touch on that particular issue?

Ms. LINDBORG. Yes. Thank you for your question. I think this underscores the fragmentation that's happening in Syria, and the ways in which so many particular groups are being targeted and threatened.

We provide humanitarian assistance on the basis of need regardless of who you are. We are seeking to get into all the 14 Governorates. Many of the Christian communities are concentrated in what's called the Christian Valley between Homs and Tartus, and Aleppo, and we are definitely insuring that assistance is getting there through our partners, as well as in a few pockets in the suburbs of Damascus.

This is something that we're definitely watching along with all the groups that are particularly vulnerable.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. Either one of the other witnesses want to touch on this? Ambassador?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, a couple of things I would like to emphasize. First, I was in Iraq for almost 5 years, and I saw what happened to the Iraqi Christian community, and it was terrible. Even now, they're still often under threat, those who remain. So, I'm very sensitive to that. The administration is very, very sensitive to that.

A couple of things I just want to highlight. First, we are deeply concerned about the threat of Islamist extremists within the Syrian Opposition. That is why the administration designated the al-Nusra Front in December 2012 as an affiliate of the al-Qaeda organization in Iraq. And we did that specifically to warn others in the Syrian Opposition of the risks that they take by working with al-Nusra Front.

And I'm encouraged, Congressman, that there have been instances now where other Syrians who want a tolerant society, other Syrians who believe that all Syrians should be treated equally without respect to their religion or their ethnicity, are starting to push back in some instances against al-Nusra on the ground. But there is a great deal of concern.

Second thing, I just want to assure you, I mentioned I have met people from the Free Syrian Army, from the Supreme Military Command, and we have highlighted the worries of minority groups, Alawites and Christians, not that we are against the Sunni Majority of Syria, we are not, but the minorities are nervous, and their rights must be protected and respected. And we hear good things from them. And I can tell you, for example, that they have met Christian leaders from some of the communities in Syria, and have told us afterwards that their meetings were positive. We have to keep pushing in that direction.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. In the short time I have left, if you could just, Mr. Ambassador, touch on the chemical weapons issues. The administration's called it a red line, and there have been reports, you know, as recently in the last 24 hours about what's actually happening on the ground, whether they have been used, whether they will be used. If you could just talk about what the administration is doing to prevent the transfer of these weapons to groups like Hezbollah, and others? Thank you.

Ambassador FORD. We view this issue with extreme seriousness, Congressman. It is incredibly important to us, so we approach it on several fronts.

Right now, we are trying to verify the reports that we have seen recently about the use. There are reports of their being used both in the North, and in the Damascus suburbs, the Eastern suburbs of Damascus. So, we're trying to verify those reports with our means. We're talking to our partners about what they have been able to find out.

In addition, we have had regular discussions with other countries that have interests in Syria, who have influence with the Syrians to (a) urge that the Syrian regime not use these weapons and, instead, maintain tight control over them. And (b) to pass the warning that there would be consequences, and there would be accountability for those members of the regime that would ever think of using these things and would deploy them.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROYCE. We'll go now to Mr. Albio Sires.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ambassador, I listen and I read all the comments regarding Syria, and I always read about these key words, that we want to negotiate, we want to talk, we want a political solution, dialogue is the best way to go.

My concern is that this man is a criminal now, what he's done to his people. So, if you come to a solution where there's dialogue, where somehow he says all right, let's talk, somewhere along the line he has to be held responsible for what he's done to his people, I mean, brought to court. So, I hope that in this idea of dialogue and conversation, and those key words that I read all the time on

all these articles, that somewhere along the line he is held responsible for the criminal act that he's portrayed on his people.

Ambassador FORD. Several things on that, Congressman. First, we don't say dialogue because for us this is not about having a conversation between the Opposition and the regime. This is about negotiating—

Mr. SIRES. Well, it's the same thing.

Ambassador FORD. To me, they're very different meanings, and they matter here.

Mr. SIRES. Well, we've got to negotiate him into jail.

Ambassador FORD. They matter here because we're talking about him stepping down, not dialoguing but him stepping down, and setting up a new transition governing body.

Now, with respect to accountability, we have said he should be held accountable, and that members of his regime with buckets of blood on their hands also should be held accountable. We are actually helping train Syrian investigators to prepare dossiers. We are showing them—this is ongoing activity that we are doing, the State Department's Democracy and Human Rights Bureau is undertaking this along with Stephen Rapp, our Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes. We are training Syrian investigators so that they can prepare dossiers to be used at an eventual court proceeding. The Syrians, themselves, ultimately will have to decide by what mechanisms they will hold people accountable. That can't be something that we dictate to them. But we are anxious to provide them the capability to pursue people in this way.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you. Can you talk a little bit about the role of Russia? They seem to be coy. I know they're supportive and, you know, yesterday I think the Ambassador said that the people who first used chemical were the rebels. Can you talk a little bit about the usual coyness?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, we saw the Russian statement that the rebels, Free Syrian Army, yesterday used chemical weapons. I just want to say we have no evidence to corroborate that, and we're very skeptical of it. We'll look at it, but our initial impression is we're very skeptical.

With respect to the Russian position, they say that they are not attached to Bashar al-Assad, and they say they would accept a transition governing body. They signed up to the Geneva Framework that I have talked about. However, we would like Russia to go far, far beyond that.

We would like Russia, first of all, to stop delivering arms systems to the Syrian Government. And this is an ongoing conversation that we have with them. We would also like the Russians to join the rest of the international community in the very tight economic sanctions regime which we have developed with the Europeans, with countries in the Middle East, with the Japanese and other countries. We would welcome the Russians joining that, all with the goal of getting to a sustainable political solution.

Mr. SIRES. And can you talk about the issue of branding a little bit? It seems that we can't put our name on some of the food or whatever material that we deliver to Syria for various concerns. How would they know that we are the ones assisting them?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman—

Mr. SIRES. My—
Ambassador FORD. Sorry.
Mr. SIRES. No, go ahead.

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, I'm happy to share a little bit. I would encourage Assistant Administrator Lindborg to talk about this since it's more her people and her programs. But we understand the utility of Syrians seeing \$385 million in American assistance going in to help Syrians in need. We are the largest bilateral donor. And there are some places where we have been able to do branding, but in other places there are security issues. Nancy, do you want to say more?

Ms. LINDBORG. Yes, I would just simply add that we evaluate this every day and look at every opportunity to see where we can brand safely. Ultimately, we need to provide assistance in a way that insures that it gets to the people, and that we are able to save lives in this really, really difficult crisis.

If we do so in a way that further endangers the aid workers, it threatens not only our very brave colleagues, but it also will shut down the overall enterprise. So, it's a delicate balance, and as a result, we're also looking at all the other ways to get the word out, all the other ways to communicate directly to the Syrian people that the American people are standing with them.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
Chairman ROYCE. Adam Kinzinger.

Mr. KINZINGER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you all for coming and being here.

Mr. Ambassador, I understand that you are not the President, but you've probably been in some conversations that I haven't. One of the reasons this hearing is so important is because I can kind of take you on a journey right now. I want to ask you to go on that journey with me. This journey is trying to figure out what our foreign policy is, because I've had a very hard time doing that.

I've been stumped. I'm stumped on the answer in Syria, I'll be honest. I don't know what the answer is, and part of the reason is that we've waited so long to really do anything.

To an extent, it reminds me of how we were reactive in Iran in 2009 when we saw a really good opportunity to support a popular uprising against the regime. So, we find ourselves in a situation now where I feel, maybe I'm wrong, but I feel like we're reacting to the situation. And I wonder, if we go back to the beginning of this conflict, we go back to the initial uprising against Assad, where you have Iran basically supporting the Syrian regime on one end, and you have theoretically Freedom Fighters on the other end.

Now, I understand that we didn't know at that time who the rebels were, and there were some questions. But, at that time you can pretty much assume that extremism did not have the ability to organize to the great extent that they're probably organized now, which gives us the concern in the Opposition on what we have.

So at the beginning, and I'm asking you because you were hopefully in these conversations, what were our reasons for not supporting an uprising with lethal aid, or non-lethal aid against a regime that is supported by Iran, and continues to cause problems in the Middle East? And I'll ask you to keep it short because I actually have a lot here I want to ask, so go ahead.

Ambassador FORD. To be very brief, Congressman, I personally don't agree that we waited so long, on the ground there. We were helping democracy activists when I was in Syria in 2011, and we were doing a lot to help.

Mr. KINZINGER. What was the reason for withholding lethal aid at that time?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, for a long time, Syrians themselves didn't want outside interference in their uprising, what they called the revolution. For a long time, through 2011, the Syrians themselves wanted their demonstrations to be peaceful. They did not want foreign armed intervention. In fact, they were bitterly criticizing Hezbollah and Iran for their intervention.

Mr. KINZINGER. Respectfully, I understand that. I'm talking about when it went to a shooting war. And again, as I'm saying this, I am literally trying to figure this out because I don't know the answer today. This is a difficult quandary.

Let me ask another question. When we talk about the red line, and we talk about the use of chemical weapons, I know this has been hammered especially by the chairman, but we're going to find out what happened. It's just a matter of time. We're going to find out if chemical weapons were used, and who used them. I feel like we have a red line that is supposed to be exactly that: A red line; a point you don't cross. I heard what I assume the President was saying is that if you use chemical weapons, that is the red line. Now, I hear that there is a kind of a shifting red line to no, no, no, we're talking about the transfer of chemical weapons, and not necessarily using them against your own people. So, it seems more like a cyan line, or a yellow line.

I think in my mind, a red line is to make it very clear; if you use chemical weapons against your own people, we will devastate your ability to use chemical weapons. The result of that will be a deep, deep thinking about whether we'll use chemical weapons against our own people, because we know our ability to do so will be devastated.

Let me ask you just one or two more questions. How does Russia and Iran specifically see our policy in Syria? Are they frightened of our involvement of Syria because it will affect their interest, or are they happy with our situation in Syria right now, and the approach we're taking, Mr. Ambassador?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, I'm not the spokesman for the Russian or Iranian Foreign Ministry—

Mr. KINZINGER. Well, you probably have a gut feeling.

Ambassador FORD. Let me just say a couple of things. First, the very nature of the Iranian actions in Syria now suggest to me that they're very nervous about the Assad regime's long-term prospects. They are plussing up their assistance, they're plussing up their people on the ground, they're plussing up what they're sending in. That doesn't sound like a confident stance, to me. That sounds like they're nervous, and they ought to be nervous.

I mentioned before about how the military balance has shifted strongly against the regime in a war of attrition.

Mr. KINZINGER. But, is it a nervousness because of the situation on the ground, or because of specifically what we're doing? I'm asking, are we helping that nervousness, or are we just kind of not?

Ambassador FORD. Absolutely, we help that nervousness, Congressman. Let me give you an example. You know, a lot of this war is being fought on video.

Mr. KINZINGER. Right.

Ambassador FORD. And much of the equipment that provides the YouTube videos that you and I see, that actually comes from us.

Mr. KINZINGER. Good.

Ambassador FORD. We are the ones that are helping the Opposition both get information from the outside world through the internet, and also to upload stuff back to the rest of planet Earth.

For example, the chairman in his opening remarks talked about the devastation to the City of Homs.

Mr. KINZINGER. Right.

Ambassador FORD. We have worked very closely with the Homs Provincial Revolution Council to make sure they can stay in touch with planet Earth.

Mr. KINZINGER. Thank you. And again, I do appreciate your service. One thing that I want to add though, as I close, is that I hope that this is not an extension of what was made famous a few years ago, the lead from behind strategy. I think when America retreats from the world, chaos ensues. So, I hope this is not an extension of that. I'm not saying it is, but that's something I wanted to say.

Thank you all for your service, and I yield back.

Chairman ROYCE. Bradley Schneider.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to the witnesses for joining us here today.

Ambassador Ford, I'll to you again, initially. As you stated, our goals currently are to see the Assad regime leave as soon as possible, to have a negotiated settlement, retaining Syria's national unity, and fostering an emergence of a new Syrian Government that enhances, rather than lessens the security within Syria and around the region.

As we look at that, and we're developing our strategy, what events, trends, or other developments might be indications that our desired or stated objectives aren't achievable? And if we start to see those, what are our best alternatives if national unity isn't achievable?

Ambassador FORD. We worry, Congressman, about the collapse of the state. And I don't mean the government of Bashar al-Assad, we think he's going to go in any case sooner or later, but collapse of the state institutions. We have seen that in other places, including in the Middle East, and we do not want to see the Syrian Government disappear. The institutions of state, the judiciary, a police force that is able to maintain law and order, banks, financial systems, et cetera, so infrastructure, electricity.

Where we see that degrading further, that would be a sign that things are going even worse, will create more refugee flows, will help extremists. And that is why we are increasing our assistance to these areas which have been liberated from government control, and where state institutions, frankly, are failing. So, we are directly now helping local administrative councils, which have been set up by the Syrian revolution.

We will work very closely with Prime Minister Ghassan Hitto to funnel assistance into these local councils so that they can prevent

the full collapse of state institutions. I think that is our biggest concern in terms of maintaining unity, and keeping Syria from being an operating base for terrorists, extremists, helping maintain security. That's the main thing.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. But if unity is not achieved, or achievable, what is our best alternative?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, I think today, March 20th, we can get to a solution that maintains the unity of Syria. The different groups in Syria represented in this Coalition that I talked about all want to maintain Syria's unity, even the people, the foot soldiers of Bashar al-Assad's ruthless army are not calling for the division of the country. I don't think Syrians are looking to divide their state. So, we have to figure out a way to get a negotiated agreement where everyone feels safe within a unified Syria.

It could be that the government is going to look entirely different from how this last government did. It certainly has to with respect to its treatment of citizens in terms of dignity and respect for human rights. But I can imagine lots of political scenarios where you can work out deals between the groups.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. And taking it a little more regionally, as was mentioned before, we have refugees, I'm looking to the whole panel now, refugees in Turkey, 200,000, 400,000, overwhelming in Jordan, we're seeing in Lebanon. Long-term this becomes not just a financial burden, but a political risk to these countries in the region, and the region as a whole.

What do we need to make sure, and how can Congress help make sure that we do everything necessary so that that does not happen?

Ms. RICHARD. Thank you for asking, Congressman. In our conversations with these neighboring countries, they have explained to us the strains and the burdens that this is putting on their societies. There are economic strains, and they are also sometimes tensions between the groups in those countries, like in Lebanon, for example. We were talking before about Christians, I was thinking about how Christians and Muslims live together in Lebanon, but when you have these extra burdens put on a country, it can really provoke tensions among different communities.

So, what Congress can do is continue to provide assistance so that we can support these countries. In some cases, such as Jordan, we have a bilateral assistance relationship. In the case of Lebanon, we really prefer to work through international organizations. And even in Turkey can do discreet things by providing assistance through non-governmental organizations, or have technical experts from the international organizations provide assistance, even though the Turks are very much in the lead of their own camps.

I realize that asking for more money at this current time and this environment on Capitol Hill, I don't have to tell you that that sort of goes against the grain, but that is the key way that we can convert our good intentions to real live aid, and make a difference in people's lives on the ground.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. If there's time.

Ms. LINDBORG. Well, I will just add that I detail out in my testimony some of the ways in which we're working to help the communities who are stretched and strained by the influx of refugees, and working directly with the governments of these countries to provide

additional support. So, it's an important question, and one that we're deeply focused on.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you.

Chairman ROYCE. Mr. Scott Perry.

Mr. PERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you folks on the panel for your attendance and your testimony. Probably most of my questions will be addressed to Ambassador Ford. Thank you, sir.

I'm wondering regarding the red line, and I know we've kind of kicked this horse a bit, but I want to get some specifics, if I could, if you know them. What are the possible consequences? I share your skepticism of the current reports, but let's say that they are true, or let's say they become true at some point, what are the ranges of possible consequences that the American people can expect from the administration as a response?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, I really do not want to speculate here about hypothetical situations. What I do want to underline is that the President has said there will be consequences, and that we will seek strongly that the people who use chemical weapons be held accountable. Exactly what those consequences would do today, I cannot speculate on.

Mr. PERRY. Have they been discussed? Have consequences been discussed that you know of?

Ambassador FORD. I am very certain, Congressman, that they have been discussed. But, again, I don't want to speculate on what the hypothetical possibilities are. I just—I do not want to go there. I do want to underline how seriously we take the reports.

Mr. PERRY. I appreciate that, but I think it is important for the world to know, for Congress to know, for Americans to know what we can expect to see, at what point, so we can have that discussion, because if it happens, and when it happens, it will be very quick, and we don't want to be in a position of Monday morning quarter backing after-the-fact, and making sure we got it right. I understand your reluctance to provide that information, but I think it's important for the American people to know.

And I'm not talking about hypothetical situations. I mean, we have to have a plan, and we should know with the caveat that there are certain security requirements, to know what those plans are, what those possibilities are.

With that, do we know with any certainty what kind of WMDs, if that's what we're discussing, whether it's sarin gas, or whether it's choking agents, or blister—what are we talking about? Do we know?

Ambassador FORD. Syria has, the Syrian Government has the largest stocks of chemical weapons of any country in the region, and it includes the things that you mentioned. So, because we cannot yet state with certainty that chemical weapons have been used in the last days, I cannot tell you what happened.

I can tell you that we have a large team of people working on it right now. And I understand your concerns about explaining to the American people, but I think first we need to understand what exactly has happened, if anything.

Mr. PERRY. I would agree with you. However, right now we're looking at the anniversary of Iraq, and a lot of folks are ques-

tioning what happened there, and why did we do that, and what did we get out of it? And it's topical because we don't want to end up there again, and we should learn from those mistakes. And right now I'm not sure that the American people have the confidence of what the plan is.

Of course, having no clue what the plan is, we don't want the current administration to make the mistakes of any of the past administrations. With that, and with your characterization of the stockpiles that Syria has, I think the American people, and I think the world see two outcomes here.

I mean, Assad has very little impetus to do anything but stay there. If he leaves willingly, he's going to be tried for war crimes and spend his life in prison. I think that's a fait accompli at this point. Maybe I'm wrong, but that's what I see. So, I'm wondering what safeguards are being put in place regarding cross-border material transportation of the things that we've discussed?

Ambassador FORD. We understand the risk you're talking about, Congressman, in terms of leakage of materials, which is why we have underlined to the Syrian authorities, and to their friends that these materials have to stay in their sites, and they have to stay secure.

Mr. PERRY. And let me just clarify, the Syrian authorities you're talking about are the ones that are currently in power?

Ambassador FORD. Correct. But I would also say, I mentioned that I have met General Idris, and we have also told him that we would view their using these kinds of weapons also as completely unacceptable.

Mr. PERRY. But just one last question, Mr. Chairman, with all due respect.

What safeguards—have you discussed any safeguards regarding border control of these agents, other than telling the current regime don't do anything with them, don't move them. What are we doing proactively to make sure they don't end up in the wrong hands, or on our shores, or affecting our interests around the globe?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, they have the neighboring states, Iraq, Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. We have different kinds of bilateral programs with Iraq, with Jordan, with Lebanon. Certainly, with Turkey, again, we have a regular conversation on the question of the Syrian chemical weapons stock, and what is to be done about it. So, what I can tell you here is that all of the countries are sensitive to the risks.

We are looking to be helpful with them to address those risks, and each government is taking different responses according to its differing needs.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN [presiding]. Thank you very much, Ambassador. Thank you, sir. Mr. Faleomavaega.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Thank you, Madam Chair. And I want to thank the members of our panel for their testimonies this morning.

I just wanted to ask Secretary Richard, with the depth of your understanding of refugee issues, and in your capacity as the Assistant Secretary, what is happening in Syria? Do you see a similar pattern in terms of what took place also in Rwanda and Darfur in terms of the crisis that we're facing in Syria today? Are we dealing

with the same situation that we found ourselves in with Rwanda and Darfur?

Ms. RICHARD. The difference between Syria and Rwanda is that Rwanda was carried out by large numbers of people using very simple implements, machetes, and they set upon their neighbors and they slaughtered them over a very quick period of time.

In Syria, we see months and months going on that people are being killed by their own government, and that they are being killed from the sky. Some of the refugees we spoke to in Jordan were talking about barrel bombs that would be dropped, so they weren't killing face-to-face. The barrel bombs would come down, explode, and take out large groups of people. The shrapnel would go sideways, they would maim and injure children, the elderly, ill people. And then, also, as Robert has discussed with me, Scuds are now being used to just destroy whole city blocks.

So, it's probably more efficient to use that kind of awful weaponry from the sky. And the results then are the same: Lots, and lots, and lots of innocent lives lost, and a very completely senseless waste of life.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. Ambassador Ford, you mentioned earlier that our current policy is that no military assistance is to be given to the Syrian Opposition forces. However, it's okay for Russia, Iran, and even North Korea to continue to supply the Syrian Assad's regime with all the military equipment, things that they needed so that he can continue killing his own people.

Do you see somewhat of a contradiction here in terms of the U.S. just being an observer in all this, while the killing continues because of countries like Russia and Iran?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman—

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. And, by the way, Iraq allows Iran airspace to transfer so-called medical supplies, and I'm told it's not. It's all military hardware that Assad needs to continue his killing spree. Can you help us figure this out?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, our policy is not to give military assistance. That is, actually, exactly factually right. However, it is not factually right to say that the United States thinks that it is okay for other countries to provide assistance to the Assad regime.

I did say already that we have urged the Russians not to send military equipment to the Assad regime. I have said already that we've asked the Russians to join us and the rest of the international community in putting pressure on the Assad regime.

We, Congressman, have been at the forefront of countries denouncing Iranian behavior in Syria. It was the United States that first started talking about it publicly. And the same with North Korea. We have had sanctions in place on Iran and North Korea, as well as on the Syrian regime precisely because of this kind of behavior which we find destabilizing not only in Syria, but to the broader Middle East region.

Mr. FALEOMAVAEGA. To follow up on Chairman Chabot's question on the chemical and biological weapons, I'm told, at least according to reports in July of last year, that the Syrian officials had given every assurance that the stockpiles of the chemical weapons—primarily nerve gas and mustard gas—are fully secured under the su-

pervision of the military, and will never be used unless Syria faces external aggression.

I'm sure you're quite familiar with that. Does that sound like an invitation from the Assad regime? Just make my day, go ahead and attack us and see what will happen. Does that seem to be the danger that we face ourselves if this should ever take place?

Ambassador FORD. We've studied those remarks very carefully, Congressman. And you have hit exactly what concerns us, is that as the military balance shifts steadily against the regime, and it grows more beleaguered and more desperate, that they will try some ruse and end up using them themselves. And that is why we take the reports the last couple of days very seriously, and we're trying to determine what's happened.

Mr. FALCOMVAEGA. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Faleomavaega, Ambassador. Mr. Weber is recognized.

Mr. WEBER. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I missed much of the hearing because I had another one I had to be at, so forgive me if some of these questions are redundant.

Ambassador, would you outline for me whether it's Hezbollah, al-Qaeda, whether the external forces that are working in Syria to overthrow Assad, kind of in order of their strength, if you will, in your opinion. And then let's go a step further than that and outline for me what you see a post-Assad Syria looking like. Who has the most—who winds up with the most power after he leaves?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, there is a variety of external actors now in the Syria crisis. Some are trying to help the government—

Mr. WEBER. I've got time, go ahead and describe it.

Ambassador FORD [continuing]. And there are some that are trying to get rid of them, like the al-Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra. We think the Jabhat al-Nusra still is a minority within the armed Opposition, maybe 10, 15 percent.

Mr. WEBER. Who's the number one external influence, al-Qaeda?

Ambassador FORD. Against the regime, yes, it would be.

Mr. WEBER. Okay. Number two?

Ambassador FORD. And then there are other countries that are also involved in the fight against Assad's regime, but what concerns us are the extremists at the top of that list. There are others, but at the top of that list.

Mr. WEBER. Okay, enumerate the extremists for me.

Ambassador FORD. There are a variety of groups fighting in different cities against the regime. I'll just throw out some names. One of them is called the Hawks of Syria, Saqur al-Sham, one is called—

Mr. WEBER. How strong are they?

Ambassador FORD. Smaller than Jabhat al-Nusra, but their strength varies location to location. A lot of these are very localized groups, Congressman.

Mr. WEBER. Okay.

Ambassador FORD. What's interesting about Jabhat al-Nusra is it has a national command, and it's more dangerous that way.

Mr. WEBER. Okay.

Ambassador FORD. You asked what would a post-Assad—

Mr. WEBER. The influence of those groups on a post-Assad government.

Ambassador FORD. Yes. The Supreme Military Command of the Free Syrian Army, General Idris and his people, did not allow al-Nusra and extremists groups to join that military command. We think that they will resist the influence of those groups after Assad departs. And I mentioned already that in Syria we see some places where extremist groups have tried to impose religious courts, and generated a very negative reaction near Aleppo, and also down in the Damascus area, for example, most recently in Eastern Syria in a place called Mayadin.

We have seen places where Jabhat al-Nusra has tried to impose imams in mosques replacing them with foreigners instead of Syrian imams. And, again, it's generated a very negative reaction.

Mr. WEBER. In your opinion, is that a good thing for American sentiments?

Ambassador FORD. What I think is important, Congressman, is that in this Syrian uprising, in this revolution there are two competing visions of a future Syria. One is an Islamist extremist vision supported by this al-Qaeda affiliate and others, and there is a vision promoted that would be of a tolerant Syria which respects the rights of all Syrians equally.

We want to weigh in strongly on behalf of those who advocate that second vision, and that is what we are—

Mr. WEBER. Well, I get that. That goes without saying. What is the percentage chance that that's what's going to happen? What we don't want to happen is for any arms—we don't want them to wind up in anti-American hands, let's face it.

Ambassador FORD. We understand that, Congressman.

Mr. WEBER. Go ahead. So, what's the percentage of likelihood in your opinion of that happening?

Ambassador FORD. Secretary Kerry during his visit to the Middle East recently highlighted that we are increasingly confident that countries that are providing assistance can do so in ways such that arms do not get in the hands of extremists. This is something that, frankly, we talk to them daily about.

Mr. WEBER. Does Assad know that?

Ambassador FORD. Oh, absolutely he knows that.

Mr. WEBER. Okay. Would you call him and tell him, in case—you know, make sure that he knows that?

Now, let—

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, I think today he has not yet decided that his days are numbered, and that he's going to have to leave.

Mr. WEBER. What advice would you give us to expedite that decision?

Ambassador FORD. I hope the Congress will work with us to strengthen the Syrian Opposition. I hope that Congress will support our efforts. We've talked about Iraq and its role. We need all the pressure we can get on the Iraqis to get them to see where their long-term interests are best found.

We need, also, to show political support to the vision of Syria that I mentioned, that is of a tolerant society where there is coexistence—

Mr. WEBER. We will certainly be doing that.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

Mr. WEBER. Thank you. My time is expired. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Randy. Ms. Bass of California is recognized.

Ms. BASS. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to follow-up on a couple of the points that the Ambassador was just making. And forgive me for also being in and out. You might have answered some of these questions, but you mentioned that Congress could be helpful by helping to strength the Syrian Opposition. That's where I wanted to center my questions, because you describe two centers of power, the military, and then we have this interim Prime Minister who, I guess, was voted in yesterday with 35 votes out of 63 members of the Coalition.

So, with these centers of power like this, just want you to elaborate a little more. My concern would be—and I know a lot of my colleagues would like to see us arm the Opposition, but I'm definitely concerned as to who this is we would be arming, since some of these folks are from Assad's military who've defected, and correct me if I'm wrong.

But what do you think about whether the military will be willing to subordinate itself to political leadership? And then this leader who was just elected, it just reminds me of Karzai. He hasn't been in the country for a couple of decades, and he seems pretty weak by everybody's account.

Ambassador FORD. A couple of things. Thank you, Congresswoman. A couple of things.

I understand the concerns about arming and our policy, again, is today—

Ms. BASS. I know.

Ambassador FORD [continuing]. Not to provide armed assistance.

Ms. BASS. At this point, I'm glad.

Ambassador FORD. With respect to the political side, we think—let me say a couple of things about the Prime Minister that they selected yesterday, that was elected. He was happily in Texas, and gave up his work there to go and work on behalf of Syrians, and in particular to help organize humanitarian assistance efforts, in fact, and Nancy's people in Turkey worked with him there. And he made a very favorable impression. He is a capable manager.

Ms. BASS. Isn't that Karzai's background? Wasn't he happily in Texas, too?

Ambassador FORD. I'm not an expert about Afghanistan, so I can't address that question.

Ms. BASS. Okay, I'm sorry.

Ambassador FORD. But what I would say to you is, in the end, the Syrian Opposition itself has said that a transitional government will have to be established. So, whether or not Ghassan Hitto has a role in that, I think is not determined. We view this as a short-term step to help provide services, to help provide humanitarian assistance into areas of Syria liberated from regime control. And that's how he defines his role. He spoke yesterday to the press in Turkey about that.

So, his long-term prospects politically, I just can't speak to. I don't think that's what they're thinking about now. They have much more urgent problems with respect to the outflow of refugees into the neighboring countries, and the dire circumstances of Syrians inside Syria.

Ms. BASS. You also mentioned that what we—so I do want you to tell me what we can do as Congress to help in terms of strengthening the Syrian Opposition. But you mentioned that what we were concerned about, too, what we didn't want to see happen was the collapse of the state. And hasn't the state collapsed? Does the state have any legitimacy?

Ambassador FORD. I make a distinction between legitimacy and the collapse of the state. There's still large—

Ms. BASS. It's still functioning.

Ambassador FORD. Damascus, for example, is still—Central Damascus is very much under government control.

Ms. BASS. I see.

Ambassador FORD. Fourth largest city. Hama is still very much under government control. But in areas where the government's control has receded, in the North, and in the East, for example, their court system, financial institutions, et cetera, in large part have stopped working.

Ms. BASS. Okay.

Ambassador FORD. And this is what I was talking about. These were huge problems in Iraq 10 years ago.

Ms. BASS. In my last few seconds, one, I want to thank Ms. Lindborg for all of the work that USAID does. I didn't want to you ask you a question, though.

You mentioned the rape kits and sexual assault. And I was just wondering what the capacity is to deal with that? Meaning that, I mean, we even have trouble in our cities, some of our cities in terms of putting a woman through that and then nothing happening.

Ms. LINDBORG. It's limited, but it's important that through the training, through the provision of those supplies and also, by the way, just a lot of regular supplies that women need.

Ms. BASS. Yes, I understand.

Ms. LINDBORG. For those who have been forced from their home, and then those who experience the violence. It's limited, but it is definitely a part of how we train those who are participating in the clinics and hospitals that we support.

And you are such a wonderful champion of women, I want to make another comment.

Ms. BASS. Sure.

Ms. LINDBORG. And that is, part of supporting this tolerant secular vision is also supporting the many strong, powerful Syrian women to have a voice, and to be a part of that future.

Suheir al-Atassi is a very strong, wonderful woman who's heading the Assistance Coordination Unit. We've worked closely with her, and along with our State colleagues we are providing support and training for a group of women who have put together a charter for Syrian women. This is part of a long-term commitment that we have to support women's voices to be at the table during negotiations, and to be part of the future.

Ms. BASS. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. Thank you, Ms. Bass. And Mr. Messer is recognized.

Mr. MESSER. Thank you. I'll start with a question for the Ambassador.

Coming from Indiana, a couple of kind of homespun wisdoms are you can judge people by their actions, and you can judge them by their friends. That's a couple of pretty good ways to judge folks. And when it comes to Assad, as you guys have laid out very clearly, he's got a lot of the wrong friends. And when you look at the actions of the murder of 70,000 people, the displacement of millions of folks, and the atrocities that you guys have described, obviously, the actions there are terrible.

Following up on the questions of the last couple of questioners, the challenge that we face as policy makers when looking at the opposition and judging their friends, al-Qaeda and others, some real challenges there, as well. And I know you've tried this a few times, and you focused a little bit on the less savory folks, so I would ask you to expand a little bit upon, people use the phrase moderate rebels, the folks we would like to see. And then I mean this with great respect, as policy makers trying to figure out how we help, a shot at what can we do? What, if anything, can we do to try to help those who would be closer to the kind of government that we would like to see post-Assad?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, let me tell you a little bit about the head of the Syrian Opposition Coalition. We talked with Congresswoman Bass about the gentleman that they elected yesterday as Prime Minister, but let me talk about the President of the Opposition Coalition.

He is an imam from the largest mosque in Damascus, actually the Umayyad Mosque. I've met him many times. I think what most impressed me about him was after we designated the al-Nusra Front as a terrorist affiliate of the al-Qaeda and Iraq group, there was a lot of criticism of us inside Syria. That is not a secret.

In a very public speech broadcast throughout the Arab world at the Friends of Syria meeting in Marrakesh in mid-December, Muaz came right out directly and said, "The kind of ideology that al-Nusra espouses, the extremists, the intolerance, even imposing a special tax on Christians," which hasn't been done in the Middle East in hundreds and hundreds of years, "these things are rejected," he said. "That is not what we are about." He talked, instead, about reaching out to Alawites, who are the backbone of Assad's remaining support. He said, "Join us. Don't fight us, we're not fighting you. Join us." This is what I'm talking about with the kind of tolerance.

Sheik Muaz wrote an open letter to the Syrian Christian community. We'd be happy to get you a copy of it. And I know it has had a big impact, because Syrian Christians have talked to me about it. But this is a vision of respect for the dignity of all Syrians. This is a vision of tolerance, of coexistence, and I think, frankly, the vast majority of Syrians really want to believe in that vision.

So, the extremists that we've talked about are a minority, but I have to be honest and say as the violence goes on, those extremist voices are getting louder.

Mr. MESSER. Okay. With the remaining time I have left, thank you for the humanitarian work that we're doing. Obviously, very important.

If you could expand, you'd mentioned briefly the efforts that we're making to make sure that those that are being helped there recognize the role that America has played in providing the help, which I think has some long-term impact toward our earlier question. If could you just detail that a little bit, I would appreciate it.

Ms. LINDBORG. As I said, we're examining on a case-by-case basis when and where we might be able to safely brand, but we're also looking at what are the other ways in which people get their information. So, we recently, the three of us took a trip to the region, did intensive regional media, Arabic language thanks to Ambassador Ford's Arabic.

We are using all ways that we can to get through the media, using things like Twitter, Skype, broadcasting into Syria. We're doing weekly calls with the Diaspora community here in the United States. So, it's really a full-on campaign of all the ways that we can let the Syrian people know that the American people are absolutely with them in their time of need. And this hearing is actually a very good opportunity, as well, so thank you.

Ms. RICHARD. The High Commissioner for Refugees is in town for a few days, so he and I went to the studio part of the State Department yesterday and spoke to the lead correspondent from Syria Deeply, which is a group of journalists in New York who are trying to get information into Syria. And we do that sort of thing all the time. The day before I'd been on CBS News. We're trying to get our messages out however we can, so we really appreciate your putting a spotlight on the humanitarian pieces of this crisis.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Messer. Mr. Vargas is recognized for 5 minutes. Thank you, sir.

Mr. VARGAS. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

You know, when I was young, I was always disgusted when I saw one of these dictators, one of the murders go into exile. I always thought that that was very unfair, that they would take someone who had done all these atrocities, and they'd allow them usually to go to France, usually Paris, you know. You know, you think of him living a very luxurious life with his family. I always thought that was very unfair, and certainly seems like we've changed those laws.

As I've gotten older, however, I think of this situation now, and I wonder the thought process of someone like, you know, the President, Bashar al-Assad. I wonder what he's thinking. I'm wondering, and this started to happen when he's looking over in Egypt, and he's looking at the former President there in prison, and potentially going to be executed, and you said, Ambassador, he's going to think it's time to call it quits and go. Where?

I mean, it's very interesting because now we've gotten so tough on these people. We don't allow them to exile. We try to hunt them down. We try to put them in jail. We try to do all these things to them, and it's appropriate, of course, with all the horrible things that they've done. But what do you think is—if you can get into his head, or someone like him, you're an Ambassador, what is the thought process going on his head? Oh, I should just give up. This

would be better if I just give up. I've been a dictator this whole time. Or do you think hey, roll the tanks? What do you think?

Ambassador FORD. I'm not a psychiatrist. I've met Bashar al-Assad twice, but I wouldn't say that I understand his psychology perfectly. I think today he still thinks he can win militarily with help from Russia, from Iran, from Lebanese Hezbollah, but I think he also must understand as his windows rattle because the fighting is getting closer, he must be thinking about whether or not his calculations are correct.

We think, Congressman, that Syrians will have to decide how to hold him and his ruthless circle accountable. It is ultimately a decision for Syrians to make. What we have sought to do is help them develop the capabilities so that they can hold trials, if that's what they want to do, so that they can assemble evidence packages up to international standards. And we actually are helping a center which we set up in Lyon, France to do that with Syrian investigators.

Mr. VARGAS. I guess, how realistic is that? If you're a dictator who—you became the dictator because your father died, so you've always been in charge. Your father was a ruthless person. Do you think then he's going to think well, you know, I think I'll take my chances here and let all these people that I've ruled very cruelly for all these years take me to court, because I think they're going to be very generous in their dictates? Or do you think he's going to kill 70,000 people, do you think he's going to murder people, as many as he can, and run a war of attrition?

I think this is one of the issues that we really have to rethink. I mean, I know it's not political to say that but, you know, is it really worth the murder of 70,000, 100,000 people, tanks mowing them over, being bombed from the air, mostly children. In a war, children always lose. Or do you let one really nasty, terrible, horrible human being potentially escape? I don't know. Maybe they had it right for centuries before we had our more strict dictates in law.

I put it out there, because I've got to tell you, I thought that this is probably what Hosni Mubarak was going to do, also. I thought he would roll the tanks. He seemed to be more of a human being at the end and didn't do that, but this guy, of course, did. I don't know where else would he go? If he's going to be tried by his own people—Ambassador, go ahead. I'm sorry.

Ambassador FORD. I don't—two things I would say on this, Congressman. First, I don't know where he would go either, if he decided to flee. I mean, I just—I do not know. There are going to be a lot of countries that wouldn't take him because of all of the awful things that he is responsible for. I would also comment, he has a family, and he's got to think about them. He has young children. He has a wife, so what's going to happen to them?

And then, finally, in the end, Congressman, I don't think these are decisions that Americans have to make. These are decisions that Syrians are going to have to make, because they're going to have to live with the results. So, what we have tried to do is to give them options, to give them capabilities to deploy if they decide to follow a particular option. And I'm very proud that we have given them those options, and I know that they appreciate it.

Mr. VARGAS. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Vargas. Judge Poe is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you all for being here.

I was recently in Turkey and saw our Patriot batteries, the Dutch batteries down on the border with Syria. I went to the refugee camp there in Syria where 150,000 Syrians are in Turkey. I could tell you, I was quite impressed with the way the Turks are handling the thousands of people that they're taking care of.

I had the opportunity to talk to some of the folks from Syria, including the women. I got the impression that the persecution of women, specifically, is not really confined to Assad's forces, that it's anybody. It's criminals from foreign countries, it's so-called Freedom Fighters, it's revolutionaries, it's just bad guys, and it's the government, which I think may indicate—it indicates to me that there are a lot of bad things happening to the civilian population by the people who are involved in the military conflict.

Quick question, Ms. Lindborg, Ms. Richard. Is that what you understand, or do you think it's confined to the government forces alone?

Ms. LINDBORG. First of all, thank you for taking the trip. It's an important symbol to have you visit. And you are absolutely right, this is—this goes far beyond one side. And I think it more than anything else is really emblematic of a global epidemic of violence against women. We see this—this goes far beyond the borders of Syria.

And if you noted on Valentine's Day, there was a wonderful event called, "A Billion Rising," which is women around the globe taking to the streets with music and poetry, but making the strong assertion that there's no longer a place on this planet for violence against women.

We are working in all the ways that we can to address the symptoms, to provide treatment, counseling, medical care, but at the end of the day, there are deep norms that need to be changed around the world.

Mr. POE. Okay. Well, I appreciate you all's work on that. You know, if I had my way, when we rounded up Assad and his bandits, we'd take all those criminals and just give them a trial together, put women on the jury, and let them decide.

But, Mr. Ambassador, I want to come back to you on another issue, because my time is limited. I appreciate your work, and people in the diplomatic field. I've been called a lot of things, but a diplomat is not one of them.

I want to talk about Assad. I met him. I didn't like him when I met him. I don't like him now. He's a bad guy. Is the scenario playing out, though, that Assad is going to retreat to his domain, his regime around Damascus, and maybe cede the area outside of Damascus, and then hold his ground? Could we see maybe a smaller Syria, a smaller Assad regime, and whoever gets the rest of it is maybe in the way that it plays out? Do you see that happening, is that his plan?

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, first, can I just add one point to the women, because this is important. We have in the Congres-

sional notification, the way we intend to use some of our assistance monies in Syria, we will spend approximately \$5 million to help the Syrian Opposition Coalition and these local councils that I talked about in liberated areas to develop their police forces, because law and order as you heard in Turkey is a big issue. So, we need—working with partners. I think the Germans are going to help us with this. We need to help get the police force—

Mr. POE. Excuse me, Ambassador. I only have a minute left.

Ambassador FORD. Yes. Oh, on the—

Mr. POE. Could you just answer my question?

Ambassador FORD [continuing]. On the question about Assad, there's two possibilities. We see him pulling forces in. Will he hold out in Damascus at the end? Maybe, but a lot of observers think he might, instead, retreat to the heartland of the Alawaite base of his support, which would be up along the coast in Northwest Syria. We're not quite sure which he would do.

Mr. POE. The other question—

Ambassador FORD. We think he—

Mr. POE. Let me reclaim my time. I'm sorry, Mr. Ambassador. The Opposition, when Mr. Weber was asking you questions, the leading Opposition movement, is that an al-Qaeda affiliate? Is that what you said?

Ambassador FORD. No.

Mr. POE. Okay.

Ambassador FORD. Absolutely, it is not. The al-Qaeda affiliate is a small part of the Opposition. It's a small minority, but his voice is getting louder.

Mr. POE. This Ghassan Hitto, the new Prime Minister, what's his affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood? We've heard reports about his affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood. What's your opinion? That's my last question.

Ambassador FORD. I've met him twice, Congressman, and he struck me as more Texan than Muslim Brotherhood, frankly.

Mr. POE. So, you don't think he's affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood?

Ambassador FORD. I don't know what his political affiliations are, but I do know that he also has a tolerant vision of Syrian society. He is not a religious extremist, far from it. And that he has at some self-sacrifice gone over to help with the humanitarian crisis in Syria. He did not have to do that. He was comfortable in Texas.

Mr. POE. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. Yes, you had him at he's a Texan. Mr. Marino is recognized.

Mr. MARINO. Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning, folks.

Ambassador, you can leave your microphone on. All right? And I saw on the news today—I have two main concerns, the innocent people in Syria, and our good friends, Israel. And I saw today the President getting off the plane, and meeting the President and Prime Minister. And it kind of reminded me of my daughter's first prom date, bringing him to the house to meet me. It was a little tense situation there.

But be that as it may, what are the chances that Hezbollah will remain a potent force in Syria? And, if that's the case, will Hezbollah's role in Lebanon be affected?

Ambassador FORD. I think Hezbollah wants to remain a potent force in Syria. There's no question of that, and that's why they are increasing their presence now, and they're increasing their assistance. But I have to tell you, Congressman, that when I talk to Syrians across the spectrum, those who do not support the government, the anger at what Hezbollah has done to help the regime is palpable. So, I think the transition government, when it comes, and the government after that is not going to want a relationship at all with Hezbollah, like what the Assad regime had.

Mr. MARINO. What is the status of arms transfer to Hezbollah today? Can you respond to that question?

Ambassador FORD. I can't go into details here in an open session on the intelligence, but what I can say to you, Congressman, is that arms continue to reach Hezbollah from Iran. But I think, also, Hezbollah's actions in Syria suggest to me, as do Iranian actions, that Hezbollah is very nervous about their stakes in Syria, and it will have an impact, also, on their position in Lebanon.

Mr. MARINO. Okay. And, historically, Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas compromised an access of resistance. Inimicable to the U.S. interest in the Middle East, how will the ultimate fall of Assad affect Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas?

Ambassador FORD. The end of the Assad regime will present us with big, new strategic opportunities to stabilize that part of the Middle East. Iran's losing access to Lebanon through Syria will help Lebanon. In addition, losing the Assad alliance will make it harder for Iran to spread its influence through terror groups that have worked with Syria, and with Iran. For us, it would be definitely a strategic gain.

Mr. MARINO. Ms. Richard, could you respond to—I see that you've written many articles and opinion pieces, and one of the areas is Combating Terrorism. What can we continue to do, or do with more strength to address the issues of terrorism, the relationship with Syria, and how do we curtail this presently, since Assad is still in control?

Ms. RICHARD. Congressman, I've written in the past about countering financial flows to terrorists, so I'm not qualified to answer your question.

Mr. MARINO. I yield back my time. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Marino. And Mr. Lowenthal is recognized. No, sir? Thank you. And now we will go to Mr. DeSantis, my Florida colleague.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. Thank you, witnesses. I've learned a lot. I appreciate it, and I do not believe that Assad should survive. I mean, he doesn't have any legitimacy, but that's an easy thing for me to say because I don't think he really ever had any legitimacy to begin with.

I agree with Thomas Paine on the absurdities of some of these hereditary dictatorships. I think Paine said is indiscriminately, admits any species of character to the very same authority, so I think that there's a problem with that. I think we see that in North Korea, where you now have Kim Jong-Un there. He's like a 25-year

old kid, and now he's in charge of these nuclear weapons. So, not the right way to go.

Ambassador, in terms of the jihadists that are operating in Syria, do you have any idea to what extent these are foreign fighters, are they native Syrians, are they a mixture of both?

Ambassador FORD. The group that concerns us most, al-Nusra Front, started out as largely inspired by jihadists from Iraq.

Mr. DESANTIS. And do we suspect that some of those folks may have been actually fighting American forces when we had a larger presence in Iraq?

Ambassador FORD. I think that is very possible.

Mr. DESANTIS. Now, what type of international support are these foreign fighters, the al-Qaeda type terrorists getting? I know that Zawahiri is favorable to them, but do they have any other source of support, either ideological, military, or economic?

Ambassador FORD. They do, Congressman, and that's one of the things that enable them to attract a lot of recruits. I think a lot of Syrians who fight under their banner are not, in fact, extremists, but they can get food, they can get ammunition from them. And al-Nusra and other extremists have a very well developed network of private finance that moves up to them, and that they are able to access.

Mr. DESANTIS. If it gets to the point where somebody else is going to take over in Syria, somebody like Iran, who's obviously done a lot of business with Assad and is an ally, how would they kind of mediate between some of these groups? I mean, I guess I'm just asking you to just give me your general opinion, but would they be willing to work with a group like JN or some of these groups, or some of these moderate Syrian Opposition groups? I mean, I guess I'm just trying to figure out how this would affect Iran's role in the region.

Ambassador FORD. The groups we're talking about, the jihadists, Congressman, hate Iran, hate it passionately, so I don't think they would ever work with Iran. In fact, I would be concerned that they will actually go out and kill Syrian Shia at the end of fighting. That's a different concern, but they won't have any truck with Iran.

Mr. DESANTIS. What about the moderate groups?

Ambassador FORD. People such as the Supreme Military Council, I think also are going to be so—well, they already are, and they tell us this, they're already so frustrated with Iran, and so angry at the Iranian intervention. In many cases, it's Iranian equipment that's causing them casualties, I don't think they're going to have a good relationship at all with Iran after this crisis comes to a close and we have a transition government.

Mr. DESANTIS. And then I guess the final thing that concerns me, it just seems like in this part of the world when you have different groups potentially jockeying for power, it seems like the most militant and violent tends to take the upper hand, just because they're willing to do whatever. I'm worried that that will happen in this case.

You know, 1) do you think that that's a legitimate fear? And, 2) what can be done, if anything, from our perspective, the United States, to shape that outcome in a way that's going to be better for peace in the region?

Ambassador FORD. That is exactly our concern, Congressman, that my experience in other countries where I've worked, such as Algeria during their civil war, and in Iraq, that as the violence grows, extremists profit from that. They benefit from that. Their loud voices, their hard lined positions, the grandstanding appeals, and so we think it is really important to empower people who have a much more tolerant vision of what Syrian society should be. We need to target, as best we can, resource flows that go into these jihadist groups, and that is one of the impacts of our designating al-Nusra, for example. And we have to find ways to help the Syrian groups that are inside the areas liberated from government control to provide basic services which will undercut a lot of the appeal that the extremists have. That is why we have notified Congress about programs we want to start to enable the local councils and the Syrian Opposition Coalition to provide those services.

Mr. DESANTIS. Thank you. Yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, sir. Mr. Collins of Georgia is recognized.

Mr. COLLINS. Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate it.

Ambassador Ford, you emphasized the need to solidify, and I think your words were solidify the efforts of Syrian moderates who are competing for influence with extremist groups, and to curtail the influence of extremists by helping the national and local Opposition leaders, providing the vital services, food, water, electricity. I heard you, and understood you correctly on that. Correct?

The question comes in is, why are we providing so much of this support through U.N. agencies that rely on the consent of Assad regime for their access. You've talked about crossing lines and there's support for crossing lines, but I see it as strengthening and prolonging the survival of the regime by allowing it to dictate the terms of access. And then, in turn, they're able to claim credit for providing services to their civilians.

Wouldn't you agree that that would be how Assad sees that, and how—

Ambassador FORD. Congressman, I'm making a huge distinction between helping local councils in liberated areas provide basic services. Getting chlorine so that public water taps can be turned back on, buying some generators so that essential buildings will have electricity. That is not the kind of humanitarian assistance provided to people in need in government-controlled areas. That's a different thing. So, there are the programs that we're talking about. This is the \$60 million that Secretary Kerry announced in Rome, and that we just sent notification of to Congress at the beginning of the week. That is to work specifically to strengthen these nascent governing bodies in liberated areas, and to help knit together this national Opposition leadership with people on the street.

Mr. COLLINS. And you're going to be working those through what forms of—through U.N. transfer, NGOs?

Ambassador FORD. No, no, we do that—

Mr. COLLINS. Or we're doing directly?

Ambassador FORD. We do that directly.

Mr. COLLINS. Going to do that directly.

Ambassador FORD. That has nothing to do with our United Nations.

Ms. RICHARD. What I'd like to do is defend the U.N. presence in Damascus, because they're not there to prop up the Assad regime. They're there to make sure that the aid gets in. Now, to get visas, they have to get them from the Ministries that he controls. But once they're there, their intention, which they are, in my judgment, fulfilling, is to get aid out to innocent people wherever they can throughout the country.

Now, in Syria there is not only Opposition on one side, and only regime control on the other side. It's more like a checkerboard, and they are trying to get it to all these hard to reach areas, and they're trying to get to people everywhere.

Let me give you an example. I was talking to the World Health Organization about vaccinations. For 2½ years, there have hardly been vaccination campaigns going on in Syria. Disease won't respect where the battle lines are, so we want to get the aid in wherever we can using every possible legitimate method we can. And the U.N. is playing a very important part of that, think.

Mr. COLLINS. Well, I think the role of the U.N. in Syria and other places be debated, and that's fine and good. I think the issue here is how we are proceeding with the aid that we're sending, and how it's going in.

I want to flip the question back, and I want to associate myself with the gentlelady from California, Ms. Bass, a few minutes ago when we were talking about this issue of the next ruling as we go along. And someone who's been elected again who came from not inside the country. I want to just continue down that thought for just a second.

It just seems to me we're playing out the same format that we have seen many times in many countries, especially in the Middle East, where we're coming in with someone who's been away, maybe on the forefront, who's willing, as I think your words were gave up his work to go help in Syria. That's a noble cause, but the legitimacy factor here, and the weakness seems to be a continuing problem here.

Can you address that a little bit more in detail, and say why are we not just heading down the same road that we've headed down before?

Ambassador FORD. The easiest answer to that question, Congressman, is we aren't heading in. Syrians chose him, we had nothing to do with it. We know him because we were working with him before on getting humanitarian assistance into Syria, into the checkerboard that Anne just described. But we certainly didn't choose him, and he's not—I mean, we stayed out of it entirely. He was chosen, Congressman, by a council of people from both inside and outside Syria to play that role.

Mr. COLLINS. But doesn't it concern you? I mean, I probably—

Ambassador FORD. No, I understand the thrust of your question, but I don't know that he has a long-term political future in Syria. He has been elected for an immediate task of managing—

Mr. COLLINS. We've seen that sort of thought before. We've seen it in Afghanistan, we've seen the, you know, I'll come to help, and then we all of a sudden see consolidation of power. I mean, we've

seen this in other areas, Egypt or other places. I understand we're not "putting him there," but I think there is influence. If we're influencing in other things we can—there is influence that needs to be looked at beforehand in this process. This is not an easy topic. I'm not asking for an easy postcard answer, but I am asking the question, saying I'm afraid we're going down the same path again that will reap the same problems and benefits as we go forward. I think this is too important for us to miss, given the fact that our close relationship with Israel, and Jordan, and the stability in that region, this is not something we can afford to be playing with the next 10 to 20 years. So, I yield back, Madam Chair.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Collins, for excellent observations. Thank you to our panelists on behalf of Chairman Royce for explaining the humanitarian crisis going on. And, Ambassador Ford, the committee looks forward to continuing the conversation with you about the conflicting reports of weapons, chemical weapons being used. Thank you for your clarification.

And with that, Chairman Royce would like for me to say that the committee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:06 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X



MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

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

Edward R. Royce (R-CA), Chairman

March 20, 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 in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live via the Committee website at <http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov>):

DATE: Wednesday, March 20, 2013

TIME: 9:45 a.m.

SUBJECT: Crisis in Syria: The U.S. Response

WITNESSES: The Honorable Robert S. Ford
American Ambassador to Syria

The Honorable Anne C. Richard
Assistant Secretary
Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration
U.S. Department of State

The Honorable Nancy E. Lindborg
Assistant Administrator
Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance
United States Agency for International Development

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 FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day Wednesday Date 3/20/13 Room 2172

Starting Time 9:52 a.m. Ending Time 12:06 p.m.

Recesses 0 (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Royce, and Rep. Ros-Lehtinen

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session

Executive (closed) Session

Televised

Electronically Recorded (taped)

Stenographic Record

TITLE OF HEARING:

Crisis in Syria: The U.S. Response

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See Attached Sheet

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

None

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.)*

SFR - Engel

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or
TIME ADJOURNED 12:06 p.m.



Jean Marter, Director of Committee Operations

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
“Crisis in Syria: the U.S. Response”
 March 20, 2013

<i>Present</i>	<i>Member</i>
X	Edward R. Royce, CA
	Christopher H. Smith, NJ
X	Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, FL
	Dana Rohrabacher, CA
X	Steve Chabot, OH
	Joe Wilson, SC
	Michael T. McCaul, TX
X	Ted Poe, TX
	Matt Salmon, AZ
X	Tom Marino, PA
	Jeff Duncan, SC
X	Adam Kinzinger, IL
X	Mo Brooks, AL
X	Tom Cotton, AR
X	Paul Cook, CA
X	George Holding, NC
X	Randy K. Weber, Sr., TX
X	Scott Perry, PA
	Steve Stockman, TX
X	Ron DeSantis, FL
X	Trey Radel, FL
X	Doug Collins, GA
X	Mark Meadows, NC
	Ted S. Yoho, FL
X	Luke Messer, IN

<i>Present</i>	<i>Member</i>
	Eliot L. Engel, NY
X	Eni F.H. Falcomavaaga, AS
	Brad Sherman, CA
	Gregory W. Meeks, NY
X	Albio Sires, NJ
	Gerald E. Connolly, VA
X	Theodore E. Deutch, FL
	Brian Higgins, NY
X	Karen Bass, CA
	William Keating, MA
X	David Cicilline, RI
X	Alan Grayson, FL
X	Juan Vargas, CA
X	Bradley S. Schneider, IL
X	Joseph P. Kennedy III, MA
X	Ami Bera, CA
X	Alan S. Lowenthal, CA
	Grace Meng, NY
	Lois Frankel, FL
X	Tulsi Gabbard, HI
X	Joaquin Castro, TX

Ranking Member Eliot L. Engel
Statement for the Record for Hearing on "Crisis in Syria: The U.S. Response"
March 20, 2013

I am accompanying President Obama on his trip to the Middle East, and so, regrettably, I cannot attend today's important hearing. However, I want to commend Chairman Royce for calling this hearing, which could not be timelier.

I have been sickened, as I know all of you have, by the ongoing tragedy in Syria, which worsens every day. More than 70,000 Syrians have died; more than a million are refugees; more than two million are internally displaced; and more than four million are suffering severe deprivation. And there is no end in sight.

The US is the number-one donor to Syrian relief efforts, but much more needs to be done. We need to tip the military balance more clearly against the Assad regime, so that the carnage will end and so that Syrians can start down the road to building a Syria that is free, stable, and peaceful, with equal rights for all – and, not incidentally, a Syria that has rid itself of the malign influences of Iran and Hizballah.

It's time to develop a comprehensive approach to halting the catastrophe in Syria. That means not just more humanitarian aid, and assistance for the Syrian Opposition Council -- but also the strongest possible support for responsible elements of the armed opposition, including carefully calibrated training and equipment, both lethal and nonlethal.

US training and arming of carefully vetted Syrian opposition forces offer many potential benefits, but two stand out above all: bringing the humanitarian disaster to an end as soon as possible, and helping ensure that the U.S. has a constructive relationship with a successor government in Damascus that pursues development, democracy, and peace with its neighbors and rejects the regionally destabilizing influence of Iran and Hizballah. If we do not act, we risk not only allowing this stalemate to continue, but also losing the possibility of influencing a post-Assad regime.

Arming the opposition carries risks as well, and I have carefully considered them. Even after carefully vetting the groups we choose to support – making sure these groups are committed to establishing a democratic and peaceful Syria, a Syria that treats all its citizens equally, regardless of religion or ethnicity -- we need to calibrate carefully how we provide lethal assistance. After training their troops, we should initially supply only limited amounts of lethal assistance. We can gradually increase the level of support once these groups clearly demonstrate that they are able and willing to hold onto the equipment they receive. And, even then, there is always the danger that the groups we support could lose some of their arms in clashes with the regime or with extremists.

Secretary Kerry recently said, "There is a very clear ability now in the Syrian opposition to make certain that what goes to the moderate, legitimate opposition is, in fact, getting to them." At the

same time, he acknowledged, “There is no guarantee that one weapon or another might not at some point in time fall into the wrong hands.”

I wish we didn’t have to pursue a policy with this type of risk. But remaining detached from the fighting in Syria is even riskier. Current trends make clear that, without our military support, Syria will either fall under the sway of terrorist jihadists or it will disintegrate into Somalia-like chaos, prolonging the murder and displacement and offering open-ended opportunities to Iran.

I will soon introduce the **Free Syria Act**, which sets out a comprehensive plan for tipping the balance in Syria. It authorizes expanded humanitarian aid, including the protection of women, children and vulnerable populations, and establishes clear humanitarian guidelines. It provides economic assistance to opposition-allied local coordination committees, to help them carry out basic services for their communities. It authorizes the President to train and arm fully-vetted Syrian opposition fighters. And it provides major incentives for the establishment of a peaceful, democratic government following the dictator Assad’s fall.

Ten years ago, I authored, and Congress passed, the Syria Accountability and Lebanon Sovereignty Restoration Act, which marked the beginning of serious American efforts to punish and isolate the Assad regime for its terrorism, its illegal WMD programs, its crimes against its own citizens, and its brutal occupation of Lebanon. Today, my principles are the same, and my commitments are similar. I am committed to ending the slaughter, ending the dictatorship, and ending Iranian-Hizballah dominance of Syrian political life. I am likewise committed to helping Syrians establish a new regime on a peaceful, democratic basis. That is my vision. I believe my legislation, if enacted into law, will be an important step toward realizing that vision.