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Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA)**, Chairman
Committee on Foreign Affairs Hearing:
“U.S. Policy Toward a Turbulent Middle East”
April 18, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

In announcing military strikes against Syria last week, the president made clear the people of the Middle East must shape their own destiny. He’s right. But that doesn’t mean that we don’t have vital national interests in the region or a reason to promote stability, tolerance and respect for human rights.

The U.S. and our allies were justified in taking limited military action against Bashar al-Assad in response to his barbaric use of chemical weapons. Hopefully the Syrian dictator gets the message. If not, I have no doubt there will be more military strikes. The world has enough security challenges without the breakdown of the 100-year norm against the use of chemical weapons.

That said, military force cannot be the only means of responding to these atrocities. We need a strategy to get a political solution that moves beyond Assad to secure a lasting peace. The Obama administration didn’t have one. That’s part of the reason why we’re confronting this crisis today.

The stakes in Syria are high: this chaos goes far beyond its borders, threatening allies and partners. I again commend Ranking Member Engel for his steadfast, years-long commitment to addressing this conflict. There’s no excuse for the Senate’s failure to act on the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act. This bill, passed twice unanimously by the House, would make those supporting Assad’s killing machine – and its barrel bombs and gas attacks – pay a real cost. The committee also recently passed the No Assistance to Assad Act, which prohibits the regime and its allies from profiting from any reconstruction. Both these bills would give our diplomats real leverage.

If the U.S. isn’t engaged in the Middle East, Iran will certainly take advantage. Tehran is already aggressive and capable, as this committee has highlighted. The regime is using its bolstered position from a windfall of cash from the nuclear deal to help Hezbollah amass missiles along Israel’s borders, shore up the Assad regime and threaten U.S. forces in Iraq. And remember, Iran is also fueling the humanitarian disaster in Yemen with its support for the Houthis. Our closest partner in the region, Israel, is increasingly threatened by this Iranian expansion.

The Iran nuclear deal has serious flaws. This committee has closely examined them. The administration is rightly working to address Iran’s ballistic missiles, strengthen inspections, and fix the deal’s sunset problem. The British, the French and the Germans need to stand with us.

Meanwhile, the list of the region’s other challenges is long. Our relationship with NATO ally Turkey is strained as never before. Its military offensive against the Kurds in Syria has benefited

ISIS. The Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces we back now have to divert their operations from offensives against ISIS to defensive actions against Turkish military attacks. Turkey's increasing engagement with Russia and Iran is very concerning.

In Libya, radical jihadists remain strong. Neighboring Egypt is a critical partner in the fight against ISIS, and should be supported, but its repression of civil society risks backfiring. And Hamas terrorists are inciting violence in Gaza.

As tempting as it is to say "enough" and retreat to our shores, smart, focused and determined engagement in the Middle East must be our approach. We need to talk strategy with the administration today.