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Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman**
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing:
“Syria After the Missile Strikes: Policy Options”
April 27, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

This hearing will come to order. This morning we consider options for Syria in the wake of this month’s renewed chemical attacks by Bashar al-Assad and the bold Administration response.

On April 4th, facing an opposition offensive against key infrastructure, the Syrian regime launched a sarin attack in southern Idlib Province. At least 85 people – including many children – died. The effects of sarin gas are immediate: the nose runs, eyes water, the mouth drools. This can progress to convulsions, paralysis and death in less than 10 minutes. There is a reason indiscriminate killing and chemical attacks cross a “red line.” It’s abhorrent.

Assad was sending a demoralizing message: “I can kill with impunity – with some of the worst weapons of war – *and no one will help you.*”

But in a matter of days, the Syrian regime *did* pay a price. Two days later, nearly 60 Tomahawk missiles – fired from U.S. Navy ships operating in international waters – targeted the Syrian airfield from which the sarin attacks had launched. In a limited and targeted response, U.S. forces destroyed approximately 20 Syrian warplanes and supporting infrastructure.

This use of force was proportional, *legitimate*, and *welcomed* by our allies in the region and around the world. For after six years of unrestrained murder of Syrians, Assad was finally on the receiving end. Finally, ‘redlines’ mattered. Finally, the United States was leading. And this week, the Treasury Department sanctioned over 270 individuals involved in Syria’s production of chemical weapons.

Now, having taken military action, the United States has a chance to take Syria policy on a different path. As one witness will testify today, “determined U.S. leadership backed up by the credible and now proven threat of force presents the best opportunity in years to strong-arm actors on the ground into a phase of meaningful de-escalation, out of which eventually, a durable negotiation process may result.”

A good place to start this forceful diplomacy would be to make Russia and Iran pay a price for supporting Assad. So far, they have had *no* incentive to negotiate an end to the conflict in Syria, as they have been able to pursue their goals with little cost. That calculus would surely change if Mr. Engel’s *Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act* was passed, signed into law and vigorously

enforced. This sweeping sanctions bill is guaranteed to get attention in Moscow and Tehran, and give the U.N.-backed process aimed at finding a political solution a chance.

And while the Administration sticks to an "ISIS first" strategy, this too can push the political process along. As U.S.-backed forces gain ground in the east, Assad could be confined to the west, opening up sanctuaries in which Syrians might find refuge and establish basic governance. From there, the United States and our allies must work together to advance a plausible vision of a post-Assad Syria.

This won't be easy. But Syria can't go keep going *on* and *on* like this. That's not in our humanitarian interest, the interest of the region, or *America's* national security interest. This has to change.

I now turn to the Ranking Member, who has long been focused on this conflict, for any opening comments he may have.