

U.S. POLICY IN SYRIA POST-ISIS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS UNITED STATES SENATE

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U.S. POLICY IN SYRIA POST-ISIS

THURSDAY, JANUARY 11, 2018

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:05 a.m., in room SD-419, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Bob Corker, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Corker [presiding], Risch, Rubio, Johnson, Flake, Gardner, Young, Barrasso, Isakson, Cardin, Menendez, Shaheen, Coons, Udall, Murphy, Kaine, and Merkley.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BOB CORKER, U.S. SENATOR FROM TENNESSEE

The CHAIRMAN. The Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

We thank our distinguished witness for being with us today. We regret the Defense Department was unable to send a witness.

This is the committee's second hearing of the Congress on the Syrian conflict, but it is an issue that has been raised during many of our other meetings.

To date, more than 400,000 people have been killed in the Syrian conflict. More than 12 million people, roughly half of all Syrians, are displaced. And the Assad regime bears overwhelming responsibility for this destruction and extremism it has spawned.

However, none of this would have been possible without the support of Iran and Russia, both of which intervened on Assad's behalf to extend influence in the region and counter the U.S. and its partners. With the support of the U.S. and coalition partners, the Syrian Democratic Forces succeeded in sweeping ISIS out of the capital of Raqqa in October. Of course, despite losing much of its territory in Syria and Iraq, ISIS remains a major threat. And there is also the ongoing danger posed by Al Qaeda Syrian affiliates, which maintain significant influence in opposition-controlled areas.

So it is worth highlighting two recent developments.

First, the U.S., Russia, and Jordan signed a memorandum of principles on November 8th maintaining the administrative arrangements in opposition-held areas in southwest Syria. Yet Iran and its proxies have deepened their foothold in southern Syria, potentially exacerbating the conflict's sectarian nature and risking further instability by threatening our ally, Israel.

Second, for the past 2 weeks, the Assad regime has pummeled Idlib and the Damascus suburb of Eastern Ghouta, which are the

so-called de-escalation zones. These attacks have killed at least dozens of civilians and displaced tens of thousands so far.

I hope Ambassador Satterfield will provide details of what the U.S. is doing to counter Iran's activities in southern Syria and assess the current prospects for resolving the Syrian civil war diplomatically.

With that, I will ask our distinguished ranking member, Ben Cardin, and my friend, if he wishes to make any opening comments.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN,
U.S. SENATOR FROM MARYLAND**

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for calling this hearing on the U.S. strategy in Syria after ISIS. We could not have a more distinguished witness before us.

Mr. Satterfield, it is wonderful to have you here. We look forward to our discussion today.

There are many issues involving Syria for which this committee has primary responsibility and oversight. The use of force, the fact that we are using a 2001 AUMF, many of us question whether that really applies to ISIS, but what happens after ISIS is defeated? Where is the authorization to maintain U.S. troops in Syria?

We see a rapid increase in the number of U.S. troops. I believe the number now is close to 2,000. At least it has been reported about that.

What is the role for U.S. development assistance working with other countries? As we all know, there is no military-only solution here. How will American diplomacy play out?

What is Russia's role here? In the future, will it be effective in preventing Mr. Assad from being held accountable for his war crimes?

Where is our concern about Iran and developing a land bridge between Tehran and Beirut, which certainly affects Israel's security?

On each of these issues, the Trump administration appears to view Syria through a military lens, making decisions on troop levels and military missions in a policy vacuum.

For example, at a Pentagon press briefing last year, the American public was informed that the United States will sustain a conditions-based military presence in Syria after the defeat of ISIS. However, the administration has provided no information to Congress or to the American people about the conditions under which U.S. forces will leave Syria. Are those conditions political or military?

I hope to gain insight into this issue during the hearing today, because our young men and women in uniform and their families deserve to be fully informed as to what they are fighting for and when the fight will be over.

I am deeply disappointed, and I share the chairman's concern, that the Department of Defense declined this committee's invitation to testify. This committee has jurisdiction over the authorization for the use of military force and has already spent significant time debating whether the 2001 AUMF covers successor entities like ISIS, given that the authorization drafted almost two decades

ago was intended to provide authority to target Al Qaeda in Afghanistan.

Now the administration is arguing that even after ISIS is defeated, our forces will still remain in Syria to make sure that ISIS cannot return. At the same time, U.S. forces have significantly increased without any public explanation.

Considered together, the notion that the U.S. forces must stay in Syria to mitigate against ISIS's return while simultaneously ramping up U.S. forces seems like the prelude to another forever-war with no congressional authorization.

If we have learned anything from the experiences in the last decade, it is that the military fight is not even half the battle. Long-term, sustainable ends to conflicts demand political agreements, international donors, stabilization activities, reconciliation initiatives, development expertise, accountability of local leadership, and, above all, patience, constant diplomatic and political engagement.

There is no sustainable solution in Syria, even after ISIS is defeated, without a long-term political solution.

Now the people of Syria, so many of whom risked their lives and livelihoods to challenge the Assad regime, are forced to look to Sochi and Astana for help, rather than Washington and Geneva. This is yet another arena where the Trump administration is willingly ceding ground and influence to Russia.

I hope the report I released yesterday on Russia's challenges to democracy and egregious tactics it uses to destabilize other countries is not lost on those committed to a stable, prosperous Middle East. Working through Moscow, we only bring further instability, more malign Iranian influence, increased human suffering, and the same old top-down corruption.

Meanwhile, Russia is enabling Iran and Iran's militia to make themselves at home in Syria and setting the stage to exploit lucrative reconstruction contracts. Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, the man who ensured Bashar al-Assad's survival, is flying around the Middle East completing deals for base access and weapons sales.

With the United States absent from the scene, governments across the region are rolling out the red carpet for Mr. Putin. This is not a situation that benefits the United States or the people of the region who want to look to the West but are compelled to look East.

So I hope, Mr. Chairman, that today's hearing will help us clarify some of these points so we have a better understanding of a winnable strategy in Syria.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. It is rare that I would make comments after yours. I will say that there is a lot of progress being made on the AUMF, and I think we are going to be in a place really soon to have a markup. And we are doing it in a way to engender support and input from Members on both sides of the aisle.

As it relates to what has happened in Syria, to me, after watching our people in action, I think what we saw here was a seamless handoff between one administration to another. Obviously, the generals were given a little more flexibility with the new administra-

tion. But what I saw was a seamless handoff where we were very successful in doing away with the caliphate.

So to me, thus far, as it relates to ISIS, this has been something that has been successful. Now we are left with a country that we have to figure out how to deal with.

I want to thank the Ambassador for being with us today. He is the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Ambassador David Satterfield. He is one of our most distinguished diplomats. He most recently served as director general of the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai Peninsula and previously served as U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon.

We thank you so much for being here. We look forward to your testimony and, I know, vigorous questions.

Thank you so much.

STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID SATTERFIELD, ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cardin, and members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today.

We have made significant progress since 2014 when ISIS first emerged, swept across Iraq and Syria that summer, inflicted suffering on thousands of civilians in the region with impact far beyond.

However, despite the advances made, our job is not yet done. We remain focused on the enduring defeat of ISIS and other terrorist organizations; countering Iranian influence and malign behaviors; preventing the use of chemical weapons; ensuring the safety of Syria's neighbors; and, ultimately, resolving the Syrian conflict and humanitarian crisis through the de-escalation of violence and a political resolution. And there must be a political transformation and resolution that is in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254.

As of today, coalition-backed efforts have liberated over 98 percent of the territory previously controlled by ISIS, with over 7.5 million people now free from ISIS domination in Iraq and in Syria.

While Russia may deem and announce that the fight against ISIS in Syria is over, the U.S. and our coalition partners do not regard this as a finished effort. The U.S. is committed to the total and enduring defeat of ISIS, Al Qaeda, other terrorist groups in Syria and the region, ensuring that they cannot regenerate and return.

Thanks to the generosity of the Congress and the American people, the U.S. has provided nearly \$7.5 billion in humanitarian assistance since the start of the Syrian crisis, about \$1.5 billion over the last year. Now, this critical aid assists at least 4 million Syrians in need every month inside that country.

In eastern Syria, with support from our colleagues in the Department of Defense, the State Department and USAID lead recovery efforts designed to help consolidate our military gains, provide life-saving assistance to conflict-afflicted civilians, and stabilize the liberated areas.

As this committee well knows, unlike in Iraq, we do not have a trusted government partner to work with. We are not working with, and we will not work with, the Assad regime. Until there is a credible political process—and by “credible,” we mean supported by the Syrian people—that can lead to a government chosen by the Syrian people, without Assad at its helm at the end of the process, the U.S. and our allies will not support large-scale efforts to reconstruct Syria.

On July 9th, over 6 months ago, the U.S., Jordan, and Russia made an arrangement, the memorandum of principles in its initial form, to reduce violence in southwest Syria.

On November 8th, the U.S., Russia, and Jordan signed a formal memorandum, codifying principles that built on and strengthened this earlier effort. This memorandum further defines our efforts and, most importantly, enshrines the commitment of the U.S., Russia, and Jordan that non-Syrian foreign fighters, including Iranian and Iranian proxy forces—Hezbollah—must withdraw from areas within the ceasefire lines delineated by this agreement.

On November 11th, President Trump and President Putin issued a joint statement on Syria in Da Nang, Vietnam. They endorsed this memorandum of principles, and they reaffirmed the U.S. and Russian commitment to a pluralistic and free Syria. They also reaffirmed their commitment to Syria’s sovereignty, unity, independence, territorial integrity, and nonsectarian character, and they urged all Syrian parties to participate genuinely actively in the Geneva political process.

On November 29th, Russia had to coerce the Syrian regime to attend meetings in Geneva. The opposition, however, came prepared and ready to discuss matters.

All of these efforts are fully in line with the implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254, which calls for a new Syrian constitution and for parliamentary and presidential elections under U.N. supervision, in which all Syrians, including those displaced outside Syrian borders, can participate.

A stable Syria absolutely requires the departure of President Assad and his regime. They have inflicted suffering and countless deaths on the Syrian people, including use of chemical weapons. This regime is a magnet for terror. It is incapable of democratically leading the whole of Syria.

We, our allies, have come to Russia with a path toward a Syrian political transition, toward a political solution, on many occasions. And we call on Russia again today to pressure the regime to work seriously toward a political resolution to this conflict.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am welcome to take your questions.
[The prepared statement of Ambassador Satterfield follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR DAVID M. SATTERFIELD

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify. We have made significant progress since 2014, when ISIS first emerged, sweeping across Iraq and Syria, inflicting suffering on thousands of civilians in the region and beyond. However, our job is not done, and we remain focused on defeating ISIS and other terrorist organizations, countering Iranian influence, preventing the use of chemical weapons, ensuring the safety of Syria’s neighbors, and ultimately resolving the Syrian conflict and humanitarian crisis through the de-escalation of violence and a political resolution in line with U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254.

This administration is making great strides towards the enduring defeat of ISIS. On December 9, Prime Minister Abadi declared the territorial defeat of ISIS in Iraq, and although Coalition and Coalition-backed forces are still fighting ISIS in Syria, we have made significant progress against the terrorist organization's control of territory. Coalition-backed efforts have liberated over 98 percent of territory previously controlled by the terrorist organization, and now, over seven-and-a-half million people are free from ISIS terror in Iraq and Syria.

While Russia may consider the fight against ISIS in Syria over, the United States and our Coalition partners do not. ISIS' loss of physical control over towns in Syria and Iraq does not mean the end of ISIS, nor does it signal the end of the coalition. Hard work remains to ensure ISIS' enduring defeat. We will continue to root out—and destroy—the remaining pockets of ISIS and other terrorist groups that threaten our homeland and our allies. The United States is committed to the total and enduring defeat of ISIS, al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups in Syria and the region, ensuring that they cannot return.

While defeating ISIS remains the reason we need to stay in Syria, our continued presence presents additional benefits. A premature U.S. departure from Syria would enable ISIS to return, place the U.S. strategy in Iraq at risk, increase the risk to Syria's neighbors, and enable Iran to expand its malign influence throughout the region, especially to threaten Israel through Iranian backed proxies like Hezbollah. Our presence enables us to consolidate gains, stabilize liberated areas, alleviate human suffering, prevent ISIS resurgence, and help enable diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict.

In eastern Syria, the State Department and USAID-led early recovery efforts are designed to help consolidate military gains, provide life-saving assistance to conflict-affected Syrians, and stabilize liberated areas. With support from colleagues from the Department of Defense, State Department and USAID programs are addressing humanitarian needs, removing ISIS-placed mines and improvised explosive devices, supporting local early recovery efforts and the restoration of essential services, helping ensure the lasting defeat of ISIS or other extremists, and setting conditions conducive to the voluntary return of displaced Syrians.

As this Committee knows, Syria faces more challenges than Iraq when it comes to stabilizing areas liberated from ISIS. Unlike in Iraq, we do not have a trusted government partner to work with in Syria; we are not working and will not work with or through the Assad regime. Until there is a credible political process that can lead to a government chosen by the Syrian people—without Assad at its helm—the United States and our allies will withhold reconstruction assistance to regime-held areas.

In Syria, our humanitarian interventions save lives while our stabilization efforts seek to address locally identified priorities in areas liberated from ISIS; including clearance of explosive remnants of war, to include thousands of ISIS-laid IEDs, and restoration of essential services and livelihoods. That means re-establishing power and water services, restoring healthcare facilities, and refurbishing schools. State Department and USAID personnel on the ground are working with a variety of local Syrian partners in pursuit of these efforts to enable the safe and voluntary return of Syrians to their homes in the hope that these communities can return to normal life after ISIS.

The amount of improvised explosive devices in Raqqa city is unprecedented. U.S.-funded de-mining teams work with Raqqa residents trained to remove explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices from critical infrastructure in priority areas of the city, while rubble removal teams clear streets. These efforts have allowed water-pumping stations to return to service and schools to re-open, and have paved the way for follow-on stabilization activities. Concurrently, we have supported 110 Syrians in demining training, which will bolster the local capability to support recovery efforts. Because of that work, tens of thousands of civilians have returned to Raqqa already to initiate the city's recovery from ISIS.

Thanks to the generosity of Congress and the American people, the United States provided more than \$1.5 billion in FY 2017 in humanitarian assistance to refugees who fled their countries and those displaced internally by the conflicts in Syria. This funding brings total U.S. humanitarian assistance supporting Syrians incountry and around the region to nearly \$7.5 billion since the start of the Syria crisis. This aid helps at least 4 million Syrians in need every month inside Syria.

On July 9, over six months ago, the United States, Jordan, and Russia made an arrangement to reduce violence in southwest Syria. This ceasefire effort has largely held, resulting in a significant reduction in violence—a necessary condition to increase deliveries of humanitarian assistance. On November 8, the United States, Russia, and Jordan signed a Memorandum of Principles (MOP) in Amman, Jordan, which built on and strengthened this existing ceasefire. This Memorandum further

defines three principles central to this effort. First, the MOP gives greater definition to the rules and mechanisms to monitor and strengthen the ceasefire and related efforts like humanitarian assistance, which are essential to its success. Second, the MOP reflects the trilateral commitment that existing governance and administrative arrangements in opposition-held territory will be maintained during the transitional phase, essential to complement a future Syrian political transition. Third and most importantly, the MOP enshrines the commitment of the United States, Russia, and Jordan that non-Syrian foreign forces, including Iranian and Iranian proxy forces, such as Hezbollah, must withdraw from areas within the ceasefire lines. This last principle is key to determining whether we can work with Russia to deescalate violence in Syria and find a solution to the conflict that honors the will of the Syrian people.

But, this third requirement is meant not only to test Russia, but also to diminish the influence of Iran and its proxies in Syria and protect the borders of our allies, Israel and Jordan. We seek to not only diminish Iranian foreign influence in Syria generally, but to protect our allies from the very real threat Hezbollah poses in southwest Syria to our allies.

On November 11, President Trump and President Putin issued a Joint Statement on the margins of APEC in Da Nang, Vietnam, endorsing this MOP and affirming both the U.S. and Russian commitment to U.N. Security Resolution 2254, to ensure a unified, pluralistic, and free Syria. The Presidents affirmed their commitment to Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence, territorial integrity, and non-sectarian character, as defined in UNSCR 2254, and urged all Syrian parties to participate actively in the Geneva political process and to support efforts to ensure its success. Russia, as a backer of the Assad regime and a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, bears the responsibility to uphold Putin's commitments.

On November 29, U.N.-led negotiations in Geneva restarted for the first time since July with a reformed Syrian opposition representation. Over two weeks, Syrian opposition and United Nations representatives tackled core issues. While Russia had to coerce the Syrian regime to attend the meetings, the opposition came prepared and ready to contribute. Constructive participation by the Syrian opposition delegation contrasted starkly to the obstructionism and procrastination of the Syrian regime delegation. We call on the regime's main supporter, Russia, to pressure the regime to work seriously toward a political resolution to this conflict or face continued isolation and instability indefinitely in Syria.

In the end, these efforts are all in support of full implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254, which calls for a new Syrian constitution and U.N.-monitored elections—elections in which all Syrians, including the 5.4 million refugees in the Syrian diaspora, can vote and have their voices heard.

We believe a stable Syria will require new leadership in Damascus with the departure of Bashar al-Assad and his family, who have inflicted suffering and countless deaths, including the heinous use of chemical weapons, including sarin gas, against their own people. The United States strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, at any time, whether by States or nonState actors. We will continue to press for accountability for the use of chemical weapons by anyone through all appropriate means, including through the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations Security Council.

A meaningful and genuine political transition in Syria would provide better lives for the Syrian people and an end to the brutal 47-year dictatorship of the Assad family. Bashar al-Assad is a magnet for terrorism, and is incapable of democratically leading the whole of Syria. Instability, violence, and displacement will only flourish under his regime. To ensure a peaceful departure of power, it can only occur as part of a Syrian-led political process—one that allows the entirety of the Syrian people, including the millions displaced by this horrific conflict, to determine their future free from threat, intimidation, and all foreign interference. The United States and our allies have come to Russia with a path toward a Syrian political solution many times. Because of its influence on the Syrian regime, Russia must join the international community and support this way forward to end the conflict in Syria.

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, and Members of the Committee, Syria is a complicated landscape with multiple stakeholders in and outside its borders, but our policy is very clear. In Syria, we are working to defeat ISIS, de-escalate violence, and support a political resolution through U.N.-led talks that lead to free and fair elections as stipulated in UNSCR 2254. In doing so, we seek to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people and protect our allies. The Syrian people deserve an end to this conflict. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, I welcome the opportunity answer your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Thanks for being here.

I typically defer to Senator Cardin first, because of the last portion of your statement—we are now not demanding that Assad leave. Instead, as I understand it, we are embracing the U.N. resolution, as Putin has recently done. Is that correct?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. That is correct, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. That would mean that there would then be an election that would take place?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. There would be a constitutional reform and revision process, and then there would be an electoral process. That electoral process would be fully under U.N. monitoring and supervision.

The CHAIRMAN. And it is my sense that people like you and others believe that, if that process occurs as has been laid out and as supported right now by Russia, you believe that the way Assad would go is through a democratic election where he would lose?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Mr. Chairman, we cannot conceive of a circumstance where a genuinely fair electoral process overseen by the U.N. with participation of the Syrian displaced community could lead to a result in which Assad remained at the helm. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Is there any chance it would actually be, in Syria, a real election that people actually had the opportunity to vote, that it was not corrupt?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. This is that goal, exactly what Russia and the international community are formally committed to see achieved. The task to make it real, of course, is the challenge before us all.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you so much.
Senator Cardin?

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador, thank you. Just about everything you said, I agree with. I like the way that you emphasized the importance of Mr. Assad leaving.

But let me just express some skepticism here with Russia's involvement and try to understand how we are prepared to deal with what is likely to come about. And that is Russia's goals of not having a free Syria. They want to have a footprint in Syria. They are comfortable with Mr. Assad. It looks like they are setting him up to be immune from being held accountable for his war crimes.

I agree with Senator Corker's inference, that it is beyond reasonable expectations that Syria would have traditionally free and fair elections in the near future, that that would be extremely difficult to pull off.

So how do we minimize Russia's influence in the outcome of a Syrian-negotiated settlement?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, there are two things that we do to achieve that goal.

And I do not disagree with any of the points that you have just made. They form the basis for our own approach and understanding.

We have an international consensus, at this moment, which is widely supported, that there should be no granting of legitimacy, authentication, to what has happened in Syria minus that credible constitutional reform and electoral process. That is, no certification

of victory, either from Moscow or for the regime, from the international community. That is the first tool.

The second tool is money. Syria needs reconstruction. The bill varies in estimate, but let us say between \$200 billion and \$300 billion plus to reconstruct. The international community has committed itself not to provide that reconstruction assistance until those goals—constitutional reform, U.N.-supervised elections—are realized.

Now that is a powerful incentive, because our assessment is Russia, Iran, the Syrian regime do not have those funds, are not going to be able to contribute, but they want a certain stability, and they want authentication. And that is what we are withholding until we see the progress made.

The second and final comment I would make is, translating everything we do, U.S. and the international community, through the U.N., through the legitimacy of the Security Council and Resolution 2254, this is the counter, or counterweight, to Sochi, to Russian initiatives, which would control and contain a track on their own. It will not have legitimization minus the validation of the Secretary General and the U.N.

Senator CARDIN. Let me add one more point that this committee has been particularly strong on, the United States Senate and Congress have been strong on, and U.S. diplomats have been strong on, traditionally. That is that Mr. Assad must be held accountable for his activities, and that cannot be compromised in a final political settlement.

Are you still committed to that goal?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. We are, Senator.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you. Let me mention another area that has been a major concern, and that is Iran's footprint in Syria. It seems pretty likely that Russia would be sympathetic to Iran having a footprint in Syria moving forward. There is great concern among both Jordan and Israel about their security interests with Iran's presence in Syria.

What type of game plan do we have to make sure that we minimize risk factors and that we protect our traditional security arrangements with both Israel and Jordan?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, the presence, the activities of Iran in and through Syria—by “through Syria,” I mean a greater qualitative enablement of the Hezbollah threat in Lebanon—is the primary strategic challenge that we and our partners face over the future in and through Syria, and I would add Iraq as well.

We would hope Russia would recognize that Russia's long-term strategic interests, risk assessment, risk calculus, should not weigh Iran as a positive factor, that Iran poses a challenge and a threat to Russian interests as well.

Senator CARDIN. Do you think we could convince Russia of that? I agree with you. I think it is just the reverse with Mr. Putin. I think he likes having a proxy of Iran in Syria.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, I think the focus has been, right now, from the Russian point of view, on stabilization in Syria, securing the success and victory of the regime, putting an end to the chaos and violence there, which the Russians see as threatening their interests. The question is at what price over the long-

term. And an enhancement in a permanent sense of Iran's role there cannot serve any regional or transregional security interests.

But you asked what we are doing about this challenge.

The first step was the defeat of ISIS. As long as ISIS remained a potent fighting force in Syria, the bandwidth, the space to deal with these broader strategic challenges, including Iran and, of course, Assad and the regime simply was not there. That bandwidth is being freed up now. With the U.N. process, with international support for a credible electoral and constitutional reform process, we see political transition in Syria as a potentially achievable goal.

We do not underestimate the challenges ahead. This is going to be hard, very hard to do. Assad will cling to power at almost every cost possible.

But with respect to Iran, we will treat Iran in Syria, and Iran's enablement of Hezbollah, as a separate strategic issue.

How do you deal with it? You deal with it in all places that it manifests itself, which is not just Syria, but Iraq, Yemen, the Gulf, other areas where Iran's malign behaviors affect our and our allies' national interests.

A difficult challenge, but not an impossible challenge, and it is one we are seized with right now. But having a politically transformed Syria will, in and of itself, be a mitigating and minimizing factor on Iran's influence, and the opposite is also true.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Before turning to Senator Young, the Russian concerns about Assad, do you think Russia cares greatly about Assad himself or just having a Syrian leader, period, that they can deal with?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, I have worked with the Syrian puzzle since 1983. My view is that the Russians, above all, as the Soviets before them, treasure stability and fear chaos. Assad represents in their eyes, I believe, a source of stability at a very high price, and, we would argue, ultimately instability as a generator of further violence, radicalism, and terror.

But I think that is the prime motive. It is not Assad qua Assad, it is stability and an end to threatening chaos.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Young?

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, Chairman.

Good to see you again, Mr. Ambassador. Thanks for being here today.

I think a lot of Hoosiers will be watching this hearing, actually with great interest. On January 2nd, I attended a ceremony for the 38th Sustainment Brigade of the Indiana National Guard. We are sending 250 of our best men and women in uniform into Kuwait to support our operations in Iraq and Syria. And these Hoosiers, all Americans, demand the best possible strategy for our operations there.

I asserted in a letter to Secretary Tillerson back in February of 2017 that my own belief is that, if we are going to, in an enduring way, defeat terrorist groups, we are going to have to address the legitimate concerns of Sunni communities on the ground and governance needs moving forward, something that has already been spoken to.

This will not be easy, I understand. But do you believe the current strategy is optimized and properly resourced so far, in order to ensure that we accomplish those objectives?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, you are quite right in signaling that, without an addressing of Sunni concerns, there is going to be a resurgence of violence. Some of those concerns are being addressed. Others can be addressed better by governments in the area.

But the issue itself very much forms part of our dialogue with every state in the region and with our partners from outside. There are systemic, longstanding generators of extremism and violence in this troubled region, and they cannot be ignored in any instant strategy to deal with particular eruptions. Quite right.

Senator YOUNG. Is there a particular milestone or two that you are watching to ensure that our existing strategy remains on track?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. There is. We watch very carefully Iranian malign behaviors throughout the region. You and I have discussed Yemen in particular, in this regard. But there are other places that we watch.

In terms of our aggressive efforts to constrain, to roll back these efforts, to deny Iran the ability to deploy, proliferate, support these efforts, we are more actively engaged today than at any point in the past 15 years. It is a big challenge ahead of us, and it is a challenge on many fronts. And we need the full cooperation of our partners in the region, as well as in Europe and elsewhere, as we move ahead.

But yes, there is, indeed, a strategy here.

Senator YOUNG. You mentioned Yemen, you opened the door, so I just want to thank you and your team for your excellent diplomatic work on this front. Do you have a really quick update on humanitarian assistance and its delivery or lack thereof?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. I do, indeed, Senator. And we very much appreciate your efforts and those of your colleagues in helping us with this initiative.

We have now full access to commercial and humanitarian goods through Hodeidah and Salif ports. That means, in particular, fuel moving. We have already seen a reduction in the price and an increase in the availability of basic fuels throughout Yemen, as we expected would be the case.

We have engaged with the Saudis. I spoke with the Foreign Minister only yesterday to ensure that there would be no further closures of these ports. And we will continue to work over the days ahead with the Saudis, with the Emiratis, on this issue.

The cranes, the four U.S.-funded World Food Program cranes, should arrive at 10:00 p.m. on this Sunday evening and be installed the next day in Hodeidah.

That is a major accomplishment, and we all deserve, including the Congress, credit for having made this possible.

Senator YOUNG. Fantastic. Thank you.

In your written testimony, you write that Assad has inflicted suffering and countless deaths, including the heinous use of chemical weapons, including sarin gas, against his own people. You also write of the need to diminish the Iranian proxy, Hezbollah, and Iranian forces in Syria.

Is it accurate that Iranian forces and proxies are in Syria, at least in part, to help keep a man in power who has murdered many of his own people with sarin gas?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. That is absolutely correct, Senator.

Senator YOUNG. Okay. I hope the people of Iran heard that. This radical and oppressive regime in Tehran is not only failing to respect the human rights of their own people, the civil rights of their own people, but they are also using the resources that are causing some of this ferment in Tehran and have driven much of these recent protests to keep a man in power who has murdered his own people. And that is, I think, notable in light of the history where Saddam Hussein used gas against Iranian civilians back in the 1980s.

Thousands of Iranian citizens were killed through the use of chemical weapons, inflicting just some horrible scars on that nation, on many families. And I think the people of Iran need to know that their own regime is complicit in, and actually directly involved in, these activities.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, I am glad you raised that, because one of the most interesting aspects of the statements made, slogans used by protesters in Iran over the past 2 weeks, has, indeed, focused on the involvement of Iranian money and Iranian forces outside of Iran. And one of the protesters' slogans was, "Not Syria. Not Iraq. Have a thought for us," that is, Iranian citizens at home.

So I think there is a recognition, perhaps more than we had assumed, of exactly what the nature of Iran's external engagements are and what the price being paid for those engagements really is.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, Ambassador.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Menendez?

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Ambassador. Let me just say, in your opening statement, you noted that last year the State Department announced a memorandum of principles between the United States, Russia, and Jordan that basically included a commitment to "remove Iranian-backed forces, including Hezbollah and other irregular forces."

Now, since then, we have seen Iran maintain its land bridge into Syria through Iraq, increase its own and proxy forces deeper into Syrian territory, pushing up to the border with Israel. Meanwhile, Russia has subsequently described Iran's presence in Syria as "legitimate," insists that they never committed to supporting the withdrawal of Iranian forces.

Last month, National Security Adviser McMaster indicated that as much as 80 percent of Assad's fighting force may be provided by Iran. And Iran seems keen on pursuing a land bridge, continuing a land bridge through Iraq.

So I do not understand. I heard your testimony that we, the United States, did not have enough bandwidth. But is it still the policy of the United States to actively remove Iranian-backed forces from Syria?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, it is absolutely our policy to see Syria able to move forward free of all foreign forces, and that specifically includes Iranian forces, fighters brought in from outside Iran to fight with them, and Hezbollah elements.

Senator MENENDEZ. Some of us are waiting to see the administration's Iran strategy, to be very honest with you. This Congress gave the administration some rather sweeping authorities with strong congressional approval, many of which have not been used yet—many of which have not been used yet.

So we are waiting to see what this strategy is, but how can we effectively counter Iran now after essentially focusing elsewhere? It seems that our forthcoming counter-Iran strategy is a contradiction to what we have been doing in Syria. How do you reconcile? Hezbollah has emerged stronger and has a more viable military force in Lebanon. How is that going to factor into the Iran strategy?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, it was the violence precipitated by ISIS. The chaos that resulted in Syria is a product of that violence, the seizure of territory that allowed Iran, allowed Hezbollah, and other elements allied with Iran, to advance their interests and their physical presence. It is why the elimination of the ISIS threat was the critical condition precedent to being able to credibly deal with Iran.

But with respect to the borders and to the land bridge issue, we see minimal movement by Iran across land borders. And that is in significant measure a product of our own presence, our own activities, not just on the Syrian side of that border but also on the Jordanian and, in particular, Iraqi side.

And Iraq cannot be eliminated as a critical element in our Iran strategy. We have worked very closely with Prime Minister Abadi, with the legitimate forces of his government in Baghdad, to counter Iranian aspirations. This has been a hard struggle, particularly over the period since the Kurdish referendum.

Senator MENENDEZ. Right. Now let me just ask you this. You say there is not much of a land bridge. I would beg to differ that there is not much, or there is not any. The reality is, this is a constant challenge.

But let me ask you, I asked you, specifically, whether it is the policy of the United States to actively remove Iranian-backed forces from Syria. How so? You said you gave me a generic answer. We do not want to see any foreign entities inside of Syria. Well, Russians are a foreign entity inside of Syria, for example.

So specifically, as it relates to Iran, if that is the policy of the United States, to diminish its influence and to remove Iranian-backed forces from Syria, how so? With force? With troops? With diplomacy? Which one of those?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, it is a combination of measures. First and foremost, it is aggressive sanctioning and measures undertaken by the U.S. and our partners to deny the physical tools, the ability to move assets, and the ability to finance Iran's activities.

Senator MENENDEZ. When are those going to happen? Because we have given the administration a whole new host of sanctions that they simply have not used. And so if we did not have the bandwidth then, I certainly hope we have it now because we are engaged here after the fact in a much more difficult set of circumstances to change the dynamics on the ground as it relates to Iran.

So I hope we are going to see the pursuit of the sanctions that we gave. We gave sanctions on ballistic missiles. We gave sanctions on human rights violations. We gave sanctions for the destabilization of the region for promoting terrorism.

I have to be honest with you, I have not seen those used. So it is time to use them.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, I would be delighted to provide you with the list of designations and sanctions invoked by this administration. It is an unprecedented quantity of such sanctions. We will be happy to detail them for you.

Senator MENENDEZ. I would love to see the details, because I think much of what was done was done under previous authorities. There are more far-reaching authorities that the administration has, and I cannot wait for them to use them, so we can actually get to an Iran strategy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator BARRASSO?

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador. We appreciate you being here today.

We talk about the U.S. seeing Assad as chaos, Russia seeing Assad as stability. What, if any, shared interests are there between the United States and Russia right now, in terms of Syria?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. When we discuss exactly this issue, where are our areas of consonance with the Russians, the first thing we come up with is: you want to see stability, you are concerned about chaos and the projection of risk, violence, Sunni extremism to the Caucasus, to Russia proper, all right? We understand that. We can share it. But how does the perpetuation of the regime whose behaviors have provided the fuel for the eruption of that Sunni violence and extremism serve any medium- or long-term Russian interests?

And it is this point that we continue to reinforce with our colleagues in Russia. We do not understand the long-term strategic thinking of Russia, if there is a long-term strategy being applied here.

But whether or not they concur or agree on this, our position with respect to Russia is, we cannot and will not legitimize a Russian alternate political process which is independent of and not supported and endorsed by the Secretary General.

Senator BARRASSO. It is interesting because I think there is a very good story. Voice of America did a report about Russian Foreign Minister defends this Syria peace conference. And you mentioned what is coming up this month in Sochi, the efforts there. I just wanted to have you explain and talk to us a little bit about that.

Lavrov has said, hey, this is going to be great. There is broad support among the Syrian people. We have 40 Syrian rebel groups saying Russia is trying to circumvent the U.N. peace process. They will not attend the Sochi talks. The rebels say a mediator in the peace talks has to be a neutral and honest broker. But yet Russia says, hey, no, that is not the problem. Let us all come to Sochi and solve the problem.

I view this as a way away from the United Nations and not what we are looking at. Can you talk a little bit about what they are trying to do at the end of this month and why we should not change our position?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, what the Russians claim, and they have claimed this to the Secretary General, to the Secretary, to the President, is that they have no intention through Sochi or any other channel of going beyond 2254 and the U.N. process in Geneva. Well, that is fine rhetoric, but it needs to be demonstrated.

And there are significant doubts, reservations, about whether Sochi is a one and done and translate outcomes to Geneva, which is one possible option, or is like Astana, a second track, nominally part of Geneva but, in practice, under Russian control and direction and only informing Geneva and the U.N. as outcomes are derived.

It is that latter option which, I believe, the Secretary General would not and cannot support, and certainly we could not either.

Senator BARRASSO. Because the Voice of America goes on to report the U.N.-brokered peace negotiations in Geneva right now involving Russia, Turkey, Iran made only minor progress toward ending the issues there. And it does seem that there is trying to be a hijacking of efforts by the Russians to turn attention away and maybe even delay, slow down, and prevent the kind of progress that you are looking for in Geneva.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, there is a tactic in other areas of, "You do not have any ability to move your process forward, so only we can take charge." Well, that is a setup because we, Russia, have ensured that the regime will not take a serious position in Geneva. And we see that.

There is a real test before the Russians. And I do not say this in a confrontational manner, just as a factual statement. The Russians have significant influence over the Syrian regime. If they wish to demonstrate their credibility to the United Nations, put the U.S. aside, they have every opportunity to do it in the next few days and weeks in Switzerland by demonstrating that the regime is prepared to seriously negotiate, not just show up, with the opposition.

And we will all see that, and we will be able to make judgments based upon it, but we have not seen it to date.

Senator BARRASSO. So getting back to the first question and concluding with this is, do we, right now, have any shared interests in Syria with the Russians?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. We continue to seek demonstrations that the Russians do recognize that beyond the defeat of ISIS, which is a shared interest and one that we do not challenge, defeat of Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda-affiliated elements, another shared view, that on the big issue, Iran, the political direction of Syria, that we do have a shared view. And that remains to be shown.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you, Mr. President.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Shaheen?

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you for the upgrade.

[Laughter.]

Senator SHAHEEN. I would actually like to begin by adding my concern to those that you and the ranking member have expressed about the unwillingness of the Department of Defense to send a witness to this hearing.

I serve on the Armed Services Committee, and we have heard consistently from Secretary Mattis that he and Secretary Tillerson talk on a regular basis, almost daily, and that they are working closely together to address the conflict areas we have in the world. So it seems to me that it is in everyone's interests to present that united picture before Congress, as well as to do it privately.

And so I think we should lodge a very deliberate—send a letter expressing our concern to the Department of Defense about their unwillingness to be part of this hearing, and I hope you and the ranking member will consider doing that.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator SHAHEEN. Ambassador, thank you for being here.

Do I understand from your testimony and from what you submitted in written form that our strategy in Syria is to defeat ISIS and then to successfully implement the memorandum of principles and the U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254? Is that what we are assuming is our strategy?

And if that is the case, can you help me understand how we think we are ever going to get 2254 implemented without some further action with Russia or on the ground in Syria that will allow us to make progress and force people to understand how we conclude this conflict?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, our strategy in Syria is based on many elements. Defeat of ISIS is, certainly, the first out of the box. It is a necessary precondition.

The second element is basic stabilization: bring down the level of fighting, particularly in the north and the northeast, stabilize the humanitarian situation—

Senator SHAHEEN. Okay, I guess I would stop you there and ask you how we think that is going to happen, because recent reports show that the fighting is actually now moving into Idlib province where there had been, for a period of time, a lack of conflict.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, the northeast is not Idlib. The northeast is the area controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces, partnered by the United States, the north and the northeast. Idlib is in the west or northwest. Idlib is a deeply troubled area with an Al Qaeda affiliate largely in control.

We are working on stabilization in the north and the northeast right now very successfully and with a minimum of U.S. physical presence, about 2,000 U.S. military and seven, soon to be 10, Foreign Service colleagues. This is a highly efficient operation, and it is working on the ground.

But those are only the first steps. The 2254 political process, the process that the entire international community of like-minded states has signed on to, is the key. It is the key to addressing Assad and his departure. It is the key to resolving the question of foreign forces and Iranian influence.

And what are our levers? What are our tools to move that forward? They are denial of legitimacy and authenticity to any claim of victory by the regime or its supporters in Moscow or Tehran and

the withholding of reconstruction funds, which are vital to the regime and, we think, Moscow's interests over the long term. Those are potent levers.

Senator SHAHEEN. I agree that that certainly sounds good, but it is still hard for me to see what progress we have made on the ground other than against ISIS, which I would certainly agree we have done very well, but how we are going to get to that political solution.

And I guess the other question that I have for you is, there was a recent report that shows that a number of top U.S. officials, Brett McGurk, it lists you as one of those, favor a limited approach to Syria that focuses on defeating ISIS, countering Iranian activities, and then winding down our activities in Syria and leaving Moscow's diplomatic efforts to address the remaining challenges.

Do you think that is an accurate report? And why are we interested in leaving the field to Moscow?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, with all due respect to the publication in which that quote appeared, it is not accurate with respect to any of the individuals, myself and my colleagues included. That does not represent our position because it excludes a critical element, the need for a political transition, which requires international as well as strong U.S. backing. It does not take into consideration the detailed exchanges with Moscow at the level of the President, the Secretary, I and my colleagues, which are very much focused on what Russia needs to do, if it is to be seen at all as credible in the eyes of us, the likeminded, and in the eyes of the United Nations. And that is, as I noted to Senator Barrasso, a challenge still out there.

So, no, those are not accurate quotes.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. I appreciate your clarifying that.

I am still not clear on how we think we are going to move Russia to accomplish what you have laid out, in terms of Syria.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Before turning to Senator Johnson, it is interesting, as I listen to questioning, I mean, there seems to be, on one hand, concerns by some members of the committee that we have 2,000 troops there, and then concerns by some members of our committee that we may be leaving the terrain to Syria. I hope as we move along with questioning, we can have more of a central thought here, but I do observe that there seems to be a push and a pull.

And I would say, again, that what I have seen happen in Syria is a seamless handoff from one administration to another and, as a country, tremendous success as it relates to dealing with the caliphate. And to me, that component of it, regardless of how you may feel about either administration, should be something we should cherish and celebrate and now figure out what we do going forward. But it was a continuation of a policy that led to success.

Senator CARDIN. I would just point out, Mr. Chairman, if you would allow me, we need to know what the military mission is. We need to know what the diplomatic mission is. We need to know, now that ISIS is losing its caliphate and its threat has become less severe, what is the military mission, recognizing that we need a

diplomatic and economic solution for the people of Syria? And that does not necessarily require troop levels be increased.

The CHAIRMAN. Again, if you would, as I understand the troops that are there, they are not involved in combat. Is that correct?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, there are still combat activities going on in the middle Euphrates valley. The campaign against the so-called caliphate—that is, the territorially structured presence of ISIS—is not over yet. That campaign continues. The level of fighting has significantly diminished since the days of urban conflict in Mayadin, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, but the fight goes on.

The CHAIRMAN. But most of their efforts are in support of those that are actually on the frontlines.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. They are in facilitation of the SDF efforts, who have consistently carried this fight since the beginning.

The CHAIRMAN. Very good.

Senator Johnson?

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ambassador, first of all, thanks for your service.

I am looking at your written testimony to confirm what I thought I heard you say, that reconstructing Syria is going to cost somewhere in the order of \$200 billion to \$300 billion?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. That is a general international effort, sir.

Senator JOHNSON. So who has that kind of money?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. I can tell you who does not. The Syrian regime, Moscow, and Tehran. Who does? The international community, companies, international financial institutions. They have the money, collectively. But that money is not going to flow into a Syria which has not gone through a political transformation and transition.

Senator JOHNSON. Does the State Department estimate how much it is costing, on an annual basis, Iran and, separately, Russia, to be engaged in Syria?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. We can get back to you in another setting with estimates on those numbers.

Senator JOHNSON. Would that be classified? Or you just do not have them at your fingertips?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Classified.

Senator JOHNSON. Okay. Senator Menendez was obviously talking about potentially new sanctions. I just want to go back in history, the resistance of last administration to impose sanctions on Iran based on their nuclear activities. How long did it take those sanctions, in complete cooperation with our partners, to really take effect, to bring Iran to the table?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, it took some 3 years of concerted effort, first to bring Russia and China, who were critical consumers and thus valuable in the Iranian economy, to come on board, and then to progressively tighten through continuous periodic review of the sanctions against the hydrocarbon sector. That was the hardest of all the challenges, to get full consensus on actively sanctioning, to the disadvantage of members like China and Russia, of hydrocarbons. When we got it, it finally worked.

Senator JOHNSON. So having relaxed those sanctions, allowing—by the way, do we have a final figure, a pretty good estimate of how many dollars have flowed into Iran because of the JCPOA?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. We can provide that to you as well.

Senator JOHNSON. It is an excess of \$100 billion?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. We can provide you that number.

Senator JOHNSON. Okay. Any chance of having the same kind coordinated leveling of sanctions in the next round? In other words, in terms of putting pressure on Iran to get out of Syria, any chance of having that same kind of coordination?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Very frankly, Senator, no. I assess the chances of such coordination to be extraordinarily slim. Russia would not agree to participate.

Senator JOHNSON. So we can talk about all these sanctions that the Congress has provided this administration to level against Iran to have some kind of magic effect of getting them out of there, but the fact that we entered the Iran nuclear agreement, we relaxed those sanctions. Iran has not used that money to benefit its people, obviously, based on the protests. They have instead used that to fund their adventurism in places like Syria. Correct?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, Iran has always demonstrated an aggressive attempt pre-JCPOA and post-JCPOA to project its influence, to support its proxies, to conduct what we would call malign activities throughout the region. It is not a factor of the JCPOA.

Senator JOHNSON. My point being is sanctions against Iran is not going to get them out of there. Correct?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Unless one was capable of assembling the kind of unified international sanctions regime, which means Russian full participation, to affect hydrocarbon flow, something that cut and hurt Iran deeply at the level of the Guard Corps and the clerical regime at the top, I believe, while we are obliged to sanction, to designate as aggressively as we can Iranian actors and activities and institutions to get the kind of effect that we saw on the nuclear enrichment program, that is going to be a very difficult goal.

Senator JOHNSON. So Russia's pretty well in control of the situation there with Assad in place. Only with Russian cooperation are you going to get rid of Assad. Only if we get rid of Assad is any kind of money going to be flowing into Syria. I do not see any of those things happening anytime soon. Do you?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. As I said, this is a difficult challenge, but you talked about the factors involved here. We believe that Moscow wants to see more than a transitory faux stability under the fist of Assad established in Syria. To get that, if that is really what Moscow wants, then they are going to need international support for reconstruction and legitimization. That is not going to come under the present circumstances.

Senator JOHNSON. We will need Russia to cooperate with us to get Iran out first.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. We are going to need Russia to put pressure on the regime to abide by Security Council Resolution 2254 and participate in political discussions in Geneva. Yes, Senator.

Why should Russia do that? Because minus such engagement, there is going to be no money coming into Syria. There is going to be no legitimization from the broad international community, either for Russia or for Syria. And we believe that is meaningful to Russia.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you for your insight.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Merkley?

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Ambassador.

I note that you have referred several times to the U.N. Security Council 2254. When I take a look at article 4 of that, it has this wonderful vision of a Syrian-led process that will produce a new constitution, free and fair elections that would be held within 18 months. Eighteen months has long expired. It would be administered by the U.N. It would include the diaspora in the voting. It would meet international standards of accountability and transparency. All wonderful and beautiful.

But we have now a Geneva process sponsored by the U.N., and we have this Astana process that is sponsored by Russia with Iran and Turkey involved. The cooperation of Syria in the Geneva process is minimal, to say the best. The U.N. is not involved in Astana.

It just seems like there is no real traction toward the vision laid out in 2254. There is a lot of chaos and messiness, I guess.

How do we get from kind of this goal of cooperating to assault ISIS, which was kind of a clear objective, now that that is largely accomplished, how do we actually get traction toward the vision of 2254?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, it is a mix of approaches. The first is to try to engage, both in a positive and in a negative sense, with the Russians to undertake the responsibilities that they have committed to, committed to in Da Nang with the President, committed to in their own support for Resolution 2254, and committed to directly at the highest levels of the Russian Government to the Secretary General of the U.N. That is a positive exhortation.

The negative side of this is what does not happen, what does not come if they do not cooperate. No international support for Syria. No international recognition or legitimization of what Russia and the regime are doing.

And with respect to the U.N., we are not leaving the U.N. alone. And the "we" here is not just the United States. It is a collective we of critical countries in the region, in Europe, in the international community, working side-by-side with the Secretary General, with his special representative for Syria, to make of Geneva more than the, as you correctly say, place for minimal, at best, progress.

And all these tracks are in place simultaneously.

Senator MERKLEY. You say that Russia has committed though, and you say that with an emphasis that sounds like they have really committed, and yet why would we have the Astana process, for example, if they were really committed to the U.N. 2254 Geneva process? I just find I am somewhat cynical.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Astana was intended, and with the recognition of the United Nations as an observer, and we were ob-

servers as well, to do a different thing. It was to bring down the levels of fighting last year and to establish de-escalation zones. That was it. That was the goal for Astana.

And the moment it became clear to the United Nations and to us that Astana was moving beyond that very tightly focused objective to broader quasi-political or outright political steps that challenged Geneva, we ceased our participation, lowered the level. So did the United Nations.

Senator MERKLEY. I think you have described in part where my cynicism on this comes from, just the fact that this set of circumstances about international negotiations in which the U.S. found it necessary to withdraw because it was headed in a direction that did not really make sense within 2254.

Let us turn to those de-escalation zones. The U.S. agreed to a zone in the south near Jordan, in the southwest near Jordan, and the goal was to protect from foreign influence. But in various reports, it has allowed Iran and Hezbollah to funnel weapons into that area, for a pocket of ISIS to remain, and for Al Qaeda forces to entrench.

This does not sound like the vision of a zone free from foreign influence is being realized. Is there a way to correct the misdirection of the goal of this de-escalation zone?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. The goal of bringing down the level of violence, which was extraordinary and threatening both to Jordan and Israel at the time the initial zone was established before the memorandum of principles was signed, was largely achieved.

I will note, with the recent exception of a small pocket to the northeast of that zone called Beit Jinn where there was extraordinary levels of violence and presence of Al Qaeda-associated forces, by and large, fighting and violence in the de-escalation zone came to a close.

There is an ISIS pocket or an affiliate of ISIS in that area, which is not covered, not protected by, not shielded by that zone. And there have, indeed, been activities conducted against the leadership of the ISIS affiliate in that small zone.

With respect to foreign forces, at the time the memorandum of principles was signed, all of us involved—and the “all of us,” I must say, for the record, were Jordan, the United States, Israel—recognized that we had a key objective here, which was to get a commitment on the part of the Russians to a goal which was extremely important for all of us, the displacement of both Revolutionary Guard Corps, Quds Force, and Hezbollah positions.

Not all that many in terms of people, but challenging because we saw no reason for those forces to be there associated with the conflict in Syria. We believed they were there to prepare for an enduring presence and an enduring threat to Jordan and Israel on the Golan front.

We, Israel, the Jordanians have repeatedly noted to our Russian colleagues that many of those positions remain in place. The Russians acknowledge that that is, in fact, the case. This is not a satisfactory outcome. And all of us in our separate and collective dialogues with Moscow continue to reinforce this is a commitment by Russia, and we expect it is a commitment that will be fulfilled. It has not been, comprehensively, to date.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Isakson?

Senator ISAKSON. Thank you, Chairman Corker.

Thank you for being here, and thank you for your commitment to the United States and our future.

I have to admit, I am frustrated. It is kind of like watching reruns of the news for years. Assad has always been a bad guy. Russia has always used Syria and has always been a driving force in Syrian policy one way or another, as far as we are concerned, as far as the Middle East is concerned.

If I am hearing right, and I want you to correct me—and I am very correctable. My wife will tell you that in a heartbeat. Russia is the problem to get to a point of a solution in Syria. Is that not correct?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Both Russia and Iran have the fundamental support for the Assad regime that has allowed that regime to survive. Each of them presents a unique challenge: Russia from the standpoint of the ongoing support militarily and politically for the regime, Iran because of its behaviors in and through Syria.

Senator ISAKSON. You say Russia and Iran, as if they are two different countries, and they are, but they are basically the same player in terms of their interests in Syria. Is that not correct?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Well, Senator, we certainly hope that that is not correct. We hope and we base our approach to Russia on the assumption, which we do not hold out there as a vague concept, but pointedly note to them that their interests should not be the same as that of Iran. We cannot imagine how Russian security interests over the long term for the region, for Russia itself, match the ambitions and hegemonistic drive of Iran over the long term.

If there is a short-term coincidence of interests here, that is something for Russia to justify and explain. We do not see how it can be a long-term interest.

Senator ISAKSON. What does hegemonistic mean?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Seeking domination.

Senator ISAKSON. You learn something every day. I never heard that word. That is helpful.

Well, my comment is this. When I say Russia and Iran are the same, they have parallel interests, if not uniquely aligned interests. I know we do not want a two-track process. We do not want Astana and 2254. We would like to see one process. Until we get to one process, you can never hope to have one solution, is the way I look at it.

Is there a catalyst that we can cause to take place, an action of some type, that might prompt the necessity of making the decision to stick with one or the other and not both?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. As I noted, we have lowered, significantly, the level of our participation in Astana, as has the United Nations because of our concern recognition. Astana has moved well beyond the purposes for which it was created and which we supported.

But you ask, how do we bring this to a single track, which has to be Geneva? And the answer is, the Secretary General, not the U.S. Government, the Secretary General of the United Nations, has

the power to legitimize or not, support or not, any purported process or track said to support the Geneva 2254 process.

The Secretary General—and I am not putting words, I think, in his mouth—is deeply reserved with respect to the Russian assurances regarding Sochi. Without U.N. validation for this track, the Russians really are on their own, and I am not sure that is a place they want to be.

They are gaming this, but our position has been clear to them. The U.N.'s position has been made very clear to them.

They have an opportunity in the days ahead in Switzerland to demonstrate a different, credible intent, which can give some credibility to their assertions about Sochi, not in our eyes, but in the eyes of the United Nations. Whether they do that or not is up to them. But the challenge has been posed.

Senator ISAKSON. Well, it would just be my observation, based on the hearings we have had and this whole process on Syria during the tragedy over the last 5 to 6 years, and particularly the last 2 years, that the Russians have always been the other factor. No matter what the issue was, they were on the other side of whatever issue we were on as far as Syria was concerned, whether it was for Assad and we were against Assad, or whatever it might be.

Until the Russians are committed to a one-track solution, there is not going to be a one-track solution, in terms of Syria. Is that a fair statement?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. I think that is a very fair statement, Senator.

Senator ISAKSON. I will amend what I said earlier, which you corrected me on. Russia is the key to getting to a one track to get us to a solution.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. It is, indeed, sir.

Senator ISAKSON. If we elevate their role and responsibility of carrying that out, we might have a chance to get to one negotiating point for a future for Syria.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, we have been trying at every level of this government and the U.N. and the international community to put Russia squarely in front of exactly that responsibility.

Senator ISAKSON. Thank you for your work.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Coons?

Senator COONS. Thank you, Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin. Thank you for this hearing, and thank you for your leadership, along with Senator Rubio, in passing the Syrian War Crimes Accountability Act through this committee in June. I think it is important that we continue to make clear to the world community that we intend to hold accountable Assad and his regime for their horrific crimes against humanity, and that we do not step back from a commitment to human rights and accountability as we try and untangle this incredibly complex, difficult strategic situation in Syria.

Thank you, Senator Cardin, yesterday, for releasing an important report that details Russia's malign actions to undermine democracy throughout the Western world.

And, Ambassador, thank you for your long service and for helping us better grasp some of the contours of administration policy.

I, too, am struck that the Department of Defense declined to be represented in this conversation.

I will agree with Chairman Corker that there was a seamless handoff from one administration to the next, but qualify that by saying, with regard to the fight against ISIS, specifically the caliphate, that piece seems to have gone remarkably well.

But I do not see a seamless handoff—if anything, the opposite—when it comes to refugee policy and support for refugees and for democracy and governance. The resources needed by the Department of State and USAID in order to do very difficult work, not just in Syria and the region, but globally, and the sorts of decisive actions, the willingness to use the sanctions authority this committee and this Congress gave this President, strongly bipartisan, new sanctions authority to push back against Russia for its malign interference in our election and their interference with our allies, and their actions in Syria, and a refusal to use new sanctioning authority against the ballistic missile program, human rights violations, and regional support for terrorism.

There have been some designations, and I welcome them. I only hope there will be more, because I think the situation in southwest Syria, which you were just discussing with Senator Merkley, by which Iranian proxies now have a dozen positions just over the border from our vital ally Israel and Jordan, is not just untenable, it is unacceptable.

And I appreciate the optimistic view that has been laid out about a positive path forward through which there might be U.N.-sanctioned and supervised free and fair elections involving the millions of Syrians outside of Syria and displaced within Syria, and a credible process for free and fair elections. But there are moments when aspirational seems delusional.

And I am concerned by some of the things we have discussed today that there are clear signals that this administration intends to declare victory against ISIS and remove itself from the Syrian conflict.

We seem divided on this committee, in terms of our views about the importance of remaining engaged on the ground. I think this is a valuable conversation for us to have with you, sir, as well as with senior representatives from the Department of Defense and other entities within the executive branch that are vital to our real understanding the situation.

But I am alarmed that Iran has successfully injected Hezbollah and succeeded, with Russian support and sponsorship, in sustaining Assad and in transforming some of the Shia militias in Syria. They are beginning to turn them into a Hezbollah in Syria for the long haul.

I would be interested in your view, sir. Let us just assume that there is a real chance that Russia is not acting in good faith here and is not going to meet its commitments, and let us just assume that our leverage, which I respect, of withholding a commitment for reconstruction dollars is insufficient. How do we prevent a situation in Syria that mirrors the tragic situation in Iraq where ISIS emerged because there was a vacuum? How do we prevent that from happening?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, we absolutely contemplate the kind of alternative outcome that you just laid forward. And the President has committed, as a matter of strategy, that we will not leave Syria. We are not going to declare victory and go. That is not my opinion. That is the President's strategic judgment.

We are going to stay for several reasons: stabilization and assistance in the vital north and northeast; protection of our allies, the Syrian Democratic Forces who have fought so valiantly against ISIS in the northeast; try to work to help transform the political structures in that area to a model for the rest of Syria and capable of being credibly represented in a new Syrian state. But for other reasons as well, including countering Iran and its ability to enhance its presence in Syria and serving as a weight, a force, able to help us achieve some of those broader objectives that we have been speaking about during the course of this hearing.

Now, your posit of what happens if all of these approaches fail to see success, I rarely comment, for reasons you will understand, on hypotheticals. But I will say this: Any meaningful strategy toward Iran's malign behaviors, whether in Syria, Iraq, or elsewhere, will require a full toolbox spectrum of measures involving all of the agencies and assets of the U.S. Government and, ideally, active support from critical allies in the region and outside. And I will not go beyond in my commentary on that, but that is what will be needed.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

I might just, in conclusion, say that I really appreciate the great and strong work of the chair and ranking. I only hope that the President uses the tools given him by Congress to demonstrate engagement against Iran and does not leave the Iran nuclear agreement, the JCPOA, which I think would further distance us from our vital partners in that work. There is a constructive path forward here. We will know within days whether he is choosing to take it.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Risch?

Senator RISCH. Thank you.

In response to Senator Coons, I am not so sure that the committee is divided on engagement on the ground. I think, rather than that, I think the frustration here is that—people are willing to do that. We want to know what we are doing, where we are going. What is the objective? What is the strategy to get there?

And I have been listening to this for years and years on this committee. Nothing ever changes. I mean, it is just murky. Before you can resolve a problem, you have to understand it. You have to have some clarity on it. And it is just not here.

I have listened over and over again, and I appreciate your candid statement that you and your colleagues have approached the Russians on, "What do you people want? Where are we going here?"

And it is confounding. It really is. I mean, the longer you deal with the Russians, you conclude how inept they are.

As you know, on the Intel Committee, we are doing a long-standing deep dive into what the Russians did, as far as our elections are concerned. Without going into the classified stuff, in the

most recent public hearings we had, the Russian ineptness was stunning. If, indeed, they were trying to affect the elections, they were running ads that ran against each other, that were counter to each other.

And again, it leaves you with, what do they want? What is their objective? What is their strategy?

And so I guess I would ask you, can you give us, in a short, clear statement, what you personally believe that the Russian strategy is, as far as Syria is concerned?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, in a different setting, I would be happy to elaborate on the multiple layers of what we assess to be Russia's objectives and interests. But in this open hearing—

Senator RISCH. But you would agree with me that until we understand that, we cannot really get our arms around a strategy to move forward on our behalf?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. We tried to reflect in our dealings with the Russians all of the assessed interests that they have in Syria. But in this open session, I can simply say that I believe and note the Russians want to be able to present to their own people a victory in Syria, a political victory that is clean and nicely tied and wrapped, and a military victory that is equally clean and comprehensive.

Neither of those two objectives, frankly, are reflected in the reality of Syria at this moment, neither that military victory nor a political victory. The best course for Russia, I say this in a hortatory fashion, would be to work in active support of Geneva, of 2254, where they will have allies, colleagues, and support to achieve a meaningful political resolution in Syria, which, at the end of the day, does not threaten Russian interests at all, actually, we would argue, supports them over the long term. But I can only note that as a hortatory point.

Senator RISCH. Well, surely the objectives that you have just described that are aspirational, certainly they cannot be so inept as to understand that those are transitory. They are not achievable in the near future, in the long future, or anything else, given the state on the ground right now.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. We try to point that out to them.

Senator RISCH. Thank you. I appreciate that. Good luck.

Once ISIS came into the picture in Syria, it gave us an opportunity to have a clear objective and to do something about ISIS, and we did it. And there is a lot of people that are concerned about slippage as we shift gears going somewhere else. I think that is a legitimate concern. I do not know how that plays out.

The one thing that we do know is that certainly ISIS is going to rear its ugly head somewhere else. Where do you think that is going to be?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. It is not a matter of speculation. What we have seen in northern Iraq and in northern Syria, central Syria as well, is ISIS has suffered tremendous defeats, not just loss of territory and assets, but also loss of fighting cadre in many of the urban battles that were fought.

But many of its core leadership and cadre avoided the fight, left, moved to areas that were not as directly challenged, the Euphrates valley, the Mosul campaign in Iraq. And they remain present, and

they remain coherent. And we have seen both in northern Iraq and we are seeing in northern and central Syria reassertion, episodic, but reassertion nevertheless, of an ISIS challenge.

I would note that some weeks ago six small towns along the middle Euphrates valley were retaken from pro-regime forces on the southern or western side of the Euphrates by ISIS elements. This fight is not over, and I am speaking about the real combat fight here.

We are convinced that, with time, they can, indeed, be enduringly defeated, to use that rubric which I think is quite appropriate. But not yet.

Senator RISC. My time is up. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, sir.

Senator KAINE?

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thanks, Ambassador, for your enlightening testimony. I agree with the comments the chairman made earlier that it is a good thing for us to step back and sort of celebrate the battlefield successes of U.S. military and coalition partners against ISIS, and I do view that as somewhat seamless between the two administrations with continuity of military leadership, continuity of the basic on-the-battlefield plan. It is hard to celebrate too much because the scale of the humanitarian disaster is so great, and we know ISIS continues to create problems. They are going to just do things differently than try to control real estate. But it is important to recognize the good work done by our troops and coalition, and also the good work done by USAID, State Department, the U.S. humanitarian commitment, NGOs, Mercy Corps, one that has done a lot of work. The Syrian American Medical Society has done tremendous work providing medical care, Syrian-American physicians in Syria.

So a whole lot of folks, both our defense, our diplomatic, but also our American NGO community have done yeoman's work, and it is important to recognize that.

As we are entering into somewhat of a new phase in Syria, I have a set of concerns, Mr. Satterfield, that I will just put on the table—I am not going to ask you about them—about sort of legal authorities for military action going forward.

The missile strikes against Syria in April of this year, I inquired formally of the administration about legal justification for the strikes, and they eventually provided a letter giving a domestic justification, but no international justification.

And we had a wonderful hearing recently, and one of the witnesses, John Bellinger, and I went back and forth a little bit. I did not think the domestic justification was sufficient; he asserted that it was. But he did point out that the letter gave no international law justification for the U.S. military strikes, and we are still waiting for an answer for that 9 months later.

And I am additionally concerned when I read reports that the 2,000 troops that we have in Syria, their mission may morph to be sort of a counter-Iran mission. I wonder about the legal authority to remain in a country, against the will of the government of that country, for a mission that deals with another country. We are going to have some additional legal questions about that.

I wrote a letter to both the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense on December 19th raising a series of questions. I would just like to introduce it as an exhibit for the record, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection.

[The information referred to is located at the end of the hearing]

Senator KAINE. And I am likely to pose some of the same questions in QFR follow-ups.

The one question I wanted to ask you about was the Kurds. The Kurds in northern Iraq have been some of our best partners. They are having their own sets of challenges with the Iraqi central government. Your expertise and your jurisdiction encompass a pretty wide swath. The Kurds in northern Syria have been excellent partners with our military and others, but the work that we have done with the Kurds in northern Syria has created all kinds of tensions with our NATO ally Turkey.

And I wanted to get your sort of big picture, forward-looking thought about the way we handle a continuing partnership with the Kurds, in honor of the work they have done and their place in the next chapter of Syria, with this challenge that we have with Turkey's suspicion of any partnership that we have with Kurds in northern Syria.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, we very much understand the Turkish Government's and security forces concern with the PKK association of many of the elements of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

As we deal with stabilization in the north and northeast with the SDF, part of that stabilization is the emergence of a different kind of local governance-based political structure which cannot be labeled Kurdish in an ethnocentric or ethnic-dominated sense, but a multiethnic mix, Turkmen, Kurd, Arab, because there are many areas of the northeast which are majority Arab population, not Kurdish at all.

We see receptivity, significant receptivity, in terms of leadership of the SDF in how they transition and move beyond what they have been in the past and the associations, many of them have had in the past, which Turkey finds so objectionable, in order to be able to participate in the future of Syria. Now that participation of the peoples of the north and northeast of Syria, there is a big swath population, of assets, both hydrocarbon and agricultural, and people. They need to be part of the future of Syria. They want to be part of the future of Syria.

But on this point, there is a coincidence between Secretary General's concerns, Russian concerns, and our own. It is, how do you see this political transition in the north and northeast take place in a manner that mitigates the Turkish concerns about Kurds qua Kurds, and the more specific and understandable concern about a PKK terrorist connection?

We are very much focused on this, but this is a work in progress, and I am not going to be able to tell you that a month or two are going to see a resolution. But what is good is that the SDF leadership understands it is an issue and are working on it aggressively.

Senator KAINE. I appreciate that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Rubio?

Senator RUBIO. Thank you. Thank you for being here. Just on the outset, I was watching some of the hearing on TV before I came here, I am encouraged to hear that, irrespective of JCPOA, there seems to be a strong consensus that that does not grant Iran immunity from sanctions on non-nuclear activity, of which there is no shortage of things to go after them on, and under which there are already existing authorities, on human rights violations, on ballistic missiles that can target Israel and other regional allies of ours, on giving missiles to Hezbollah and now the Houthis, and the sponsorship of terrorism, cybercrime and attack.

And so I think it is really important. And by the way, I think it is also important for us to make clear, Mr. Chairman, and this committee I think has talked about this in the past, those Shia militia in the region, and Hezbollah in Syria, they are agents, asymmetrical agents under the direct or indirect control of the Iranian regime. If we were to ever be attacked by any of these forces, we should make abundantly clear on the front end that we hold Iran directly responsible for the loss of life or property of the United States, our citizens, our personnel abroad, whether in the military or at the State Department and our facilities.

This little game they play where they use other people to attack us, that one degree of separation, it is something we should make clear on the outset, we will hold them responsible for it. So I think that is important to lay on the record.

Now, on this issue of Syria, it is good news. You see the map of the ISIS territory held 2 years ago at this time and what it is today, and that is great news that ISIS's territorial control has rapidly eroded over the last year under this administration.

Here is the bad news. It has not been replaced by things that are much better. Al-Nusra, the Al Qaeda affiliate, whatever they changed their name to recently, they are still around, under pressure, but they are still around. We know that Hezbollah now has a very vibrant presence in Syria and continues to have one. We know that Assad forces are reinvigorated and appear to be victorious in many parts. Of course, we have already talked about Iran's presence there both directly and indirectly.

But there also has been a lot of questions, and I think Senator Risch asked, what are the motives of these two countries?

Iran's are pretty transparent. They want that Shia arc and, more importantly, that land bridge to Lebanon and over to Hezbollah, which, by the way, would be a major contributor to the next Hezbollah-Israel war, which sadly appears to be a question of if, not when, given both the indigenous capabilities that Hezbollah has developed and their history in the past.

But on the issue of Russia, I think their motives are pretty easy to understand in any setting. You do not have to read classified stuff to know that one of the things they seek to achieve is to present themselves as a better, more reliable, and more predictable regional partner and power-broker than the United States. It is an argument they have made to Egypt, Libya. We have seen it in Iraq, even in Jordan, even in Turkey, which is a NATO member. Even Syrian Democratic Forces have been, to some extent, seduced by this promise.

And I guess my question is, as you look at all of this and we talk about it, a fundamental question is, what is our seat at the table in Syria? What gives us a seat at the table in any future conversation about the future of Syria?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Our presence in a significance piece of Syria, our military presence associated with the SDF in a critical and very significant piece of Syrian territory is a factor.

Senator RUBIO. Hence the problem. And we are grateful that you are here today, but hence the problem with this. You just said that what gives us a seat at the table in a negotiated settlement or some negotiated path forward in Syria is our Department of Defense presence, and they are not here today.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. In part, Senator. What also—

Senator RUBIO. What is the other part?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. The other part is our role in the international community. We lead, we shape, we direct, and I use those terms advisedly, the likeminded community. And it is that leadership—

Senator RUBIO. Like the United Nations?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. No. I am speaking of the likeminded nations on Syria, some dozens of countries which hold in their hands the potential resources to rebuild, reconstruct Syria, and who politically hold the power to deny or to grant legitimacy for any resolution in Syria.

Senator RUBIO. So our seat at the table is the Department of Defense, from whom we did not hear from today on an issue where the guys with the guns matter. So that is number one.

And number two is, our ability to get other nations around the world to join us as leverage on the Syrian regime. Okay.

My other question is, so what is our argument both to those within Syria and in the region? What do we say to Saudi Arabia, to Egypt, to Turkey, to Jordan, to these countries? What do we say to them? What is our argument that the United States is a more reliable, more predictable, and more decisive regional partner than Vladimir Putin? What do we say to them when we reach that test?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. It is the United States that protects the Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf with our systems, with our technicians, with our military personnel against the threats which Iran's malign behaviors pose every day to many of those states. It is our commitment, not Russian importuning, not Russian sales, which determine where a country places its strategic confidence and trust where it matters, which is defense of their homelands and their interests. And that trust, and I would include Egypt as well on this, resides squarely with the United States.

Russia would like to present a different picture. They play a weak hand very well, but it is a weak hand. And we should not overreact to the fact that, at the end of the day, we are the party looked to for fundamental defense, fundamental support, not Moscow.

Senator RUBIO. So I know I am out of time. So in closing, the core of that argument we make to our regional allies is, we sell you weapons systems and we provide, in some cases, basing capabilities in your countries.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. We help them defend themselves against a very real threat in a fashion which no other party can.

Senator RUBIO. Through the Department of Defense.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Through the combined efforts of the U.S. Government, including the military.

Senator RUBIO. Who is not here today. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Murphy?

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Ambassador, for being here and giving this testimony.

Very briefly to the chairman's comment about some members of this committee being uncomfortable with an increased military presence, more involvement in Syria, while also raising concerns about a decreased diplomatic presence, I think, to many of us, those are two very consistent worries in the sense that, to the extent we have additional troops on the ground, the worry would be that they are placed at greater risk if we are, at the same time, withdrawing from the diplomatic and political conversations that are most relevant, that if those conversations result in the place becoming more rather than less dangerous, and we have thousands of troops on the ground, it endangers those troops. And so I think some of us can do a better job of trying to marry together those concerns.

To Senator Rubio's line of questioning, I just do not think it is credible to suggest that our seat at the table right now comes through any means other than our military presence. We have signaled in so many different ways that we are no longer interested in being in the lead with respect to the political and economic future of Syria, whether it is these diplomatic talks that are happening without the United States, or the State Department's insistence on a 30 percent cut to the funds that they are appropriated to try to do big reconstruction and stability deals around the world. I think we have telegraphed to the region that we are not going to be a player in the way that we have been in the past, diplomatically and politically. And thus, our primary leverage there comes through the insertion of more and more troops, which continues to beg the question as to why we do not have a representative from the Department of Defense here.

In their absence, let me just ask you a question about the future disposition of our troops. How do you explain what the conditions for the withdrawal of American military presence is there? We are in a combat role. We have 2,000 troops in the middle of the most dangerous place in the world. Regardless of whether they are on the frontline shooting the guns, they are in combat, given how close they are to very, very dangerous places.

So what are the conditions by which we bring those troops home? Is it the military defeat of ISIS? Is it the withdrawal of Iranian and Iranian-backed forces? Is it free elections and political stability? How do we communicate to our constituents what the endgame is for the U.S. military presence there?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. The President, as I noted, is committed to remaining in Syria to achieve all of our strategic goals there. Now, remaining means in a political, diplomatic, military sense, not based on calendars, but based on assessment of condi-

tions. The enduring, genuine defeat of ISIS is one of those conditions. Stabilization efforts moving forward successfully in the north and northeast in that major piece of Syria is one of those conditions. And one of them is our broader assessment of where the political transition, where the Iranian projection of influence in and through Syria, stands.

There is no specific calculus for this. There is certainly not hard, quantitative numbers that can be attached. It is something, these conditions, that we will review on a progressive basis over the time ahead.

Senator MURPHY. So I would argue that you are operating under a flawed premise, which is that there is any future for Syria that does not involve a substantial role for Iran. And so it worries me that you are telling the committee that our military presence in Syria will run until all of our conditions are met, including the withdrawal of Iran and Iranian forces.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, what I said is, among the assessments we will be making is where broader issues in Syria stand.

Senator MURPHY. So what is the functionality of military presence vis-a-vis our non-ISIS priorities in Syria?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Senator, that would have to be provided in a different setting.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, wait a minute.

Senator MURPHY. Why cannot you—

The CHAIRMAN. Wait a minute. That will not pass muster, I am sorry. You can generally state what the purpose of our military is beyond ISIS without getting into any kind of classified material.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. We are deeply concerned with the activities of Iran, with the ability of Iran to enhance those activities through a greater ability to move materiel into Syria. And I would rather leave the discussion at that point.

Senator CARDIN. I would just interject here. The chairman did.

It is hard to understand your response with even the most broad use of an AUMF covering anything close to what you are saying.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. I take your comment, Senator.

Senator MURPHY. I would share those concerns to the extent that your answer suggests that the future role of the U.S. military in Syria will be aimed at addressing Iranian and Iranian-backed military presence there. I think that is an important conversation for this committee to have.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Udall?

Senator UDALL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And let me also say that I think that one of the things that would have added to this discussion and inquiry that we have had here is to have the Department of Defense here. And I hope that you will take that back. I know that you and Secretary Tillerson and Secretary Mattis have these discussions all the time. I think it would be important to have them here and have them with the American people.

Now, in Senator Murphy's question about seeing where the end is in this, you talked about, we have to make sure that all of our

strategic goals are accomplished. Can you tell me what those strategic goals are?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. They are, first and foremost, the enduring defeat, elimination of ISIS as a threat, not just today, but into the future.

Senator UDALL. Let me stop you there because I think everybody who has discussed this believes that ISIS is going to morph into one thing or another over time, and so how does this not become an unending war?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Through the next step, which is stabilization and a political transformation in Syria, which is the only measure that is going to prevent, Senator, exactly what you described, the re-emergence under a different name of another Sunni Islamist challenge or violent extremist movement.

Those are the critical goals for Syria, but the goal with respect to Iran is the progressive constraint, diminishment of Iran's ability to project in and through Syria its malign behaviors and influence.

Senator UDALL. Could you explain for us what you believe Iran's interests are in Syria, why they are in Syria, and what their reasons are for doing what they are doing in Syria?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. First and foremost, to have a platform from which they can more aggressively and competently support in a qualitative fashion Hezbollah and the Hezbollah missile challenge, which is both a threat to Israel and also, in the Iranian regime's view, a defensive asset for the regime in Tehran to build a greater and more permanent presence in Syria itself that will endure beyond any transition in regimes, so that Iran is in a position to wield influence or threat of influence over regional parties outside of Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia. It is a platform for behaviors not confined to Lebanon.

Senator UDALL. Shifting in another direction, we have also opened up a genie by supporting Kurdish forces in the region. Does the State Department or the Pentagon have a plan to ensure that arms provided to Kurdish forces do not end up in the hands of the Kurdistan Workers' Party or the PKK, a recognized terrorist organization?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Yes, Senator. We have been extremely attentive to that issue, but I will remind that, at the time the Kurdish forces, the SDF, stepped forward as partners in this fight, they were the only ones to do so. No other state, no other party, despite our offers and importuning, were willing to take up this battle. But we fully understand and appreciate the issue of the PKK and the terrorist threat to Turkey, to others in the region.

Senator UDALL. And how do you expect Turkey to react if arms do end up in the hands of the PKK?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. I would expect Turkey will make its own conclusions with respect to its own defense interests, which is why we are as attentive as we are to the issue of weapons re-provision to Kurdish and other elements, Arab, associated with them in the north.

Senator UDALL. As you are very familiar, President Trump recently recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and there are plans to start moving there. This is a very contentious issue, again, among all Muslim-majority countries, including our ally Jordan. In

your opinion, has this decision helped or hampered our relationships with countries in the region? And how are terrorist organizations in the region using this U.S. action to recruit new members?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. I believe virtually all of the states in the region have made at a formal governmental level clear their concerns with this decision, and I would not characterize their position beyond the eloquence with which they have already presented it.

Senator UDALL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Just a follow-up on the Murphy-Udall questioning, I do think we should have a classified briefing to talk more fully about what our military may or may not be engaged in.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Absolutely.

The CHAIRMAN. I would say, I do not think you view us as not being diplomatically involved, is that correct, in Syria?

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Absolutely.

The CHAIRMAN. So I do not think Secretary Tillerson feels that either. And so I think any allegations to that end is felt differently, at least by the State Department. Maybe people think we are not robust enough.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Mr. Chairman, if I may, briefly, on this exact point? We are deeply involved diplomatically at every level, with every player in this situation. There has been no diminution of our engagement or its effectiveness.

And so, yes, I certainly agree with your conclusions, but I would make another statement. You measure efficacy of diplomatic performance by the quality of the engagement, not by the number of shoes on the ground. That is a lesson learned from Iraq during a difficult period. I believe we are quite effectively deployed in Syria in terms of our partnering with the U.S. military force in the north, as well as our engagement with the Jordanians and in Jordan in the discussions that take place there, our Vienna channel, Geneva channel, discussions with the U.N., with the Russians. This is thoroughly engagement of our diplomatic assets around the world.

Thank you for the opportunity to make that statement.

The CHAIRMAN. Listen, just again to follow up on Senator Murphy's line of questioning, we do need to sit down privately and talk more fully about what may be contemplated. The Defense Department, with all due respect, did give us tremendous runaround as it relates to this hearing. The reason that was given for them not being here is they had not yet briefed the Senate Armed Services Committee nor their counterpart in the House, and until they had done so on Syria, they did not feel they could come here. But it also may sound like, just based on your answers, there is maybe a little contour change in what their efforts are on the ground, and I think we need to, certainly, hear more fully on that.

And I would agree that if it is what you said—and I am not sure exactly what you said—but if it is what you indicated, certainly the authorizations are not there for that kind of activity.

So thank you so much for being here. There will be follow-up questions hopefully you can answer. Those will come in by the close of business. Hopefully, you will answer those promptly.

The CHAIRMAN. We thank you for your service to our country and your great testimony today.

Ambassador SATTERFIELD. Thank you, Senator.

The CHAIRMAN. The meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:50 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF AMBASSADOR DAVID M. SATTERFIELD TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR EDWARD J. MARKEY

The Trump administration just terminated Temporary Protected Status for El Salvador this week, leaving 200,000 beneficiaries stuck between going home to a violent country, or staying here illegally. Likewise, the TPS designation for Syria is up for review by January 30. This affects only 7,000 Syrians, who already live here and who were already vetted under the “strict” vetting rules set up by Trump’s administration. The conditions described in Syria show a country that’s been ravaged by Assad, Russia, Iran, and violent extremists. Even if the Assad regime wasn’t targeting areas in Idlib and East Ghouta, it is impossible to believe that returning TPS holders would not be targeted for arrest (or worse) for having fled the country.

Question. What is the State Department’s recommendation in regard to TPS for Syrians? Will TPS be extended and re-designated for Syrians living in the United States?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is consulting with the Department of State to determine whether the conditions for Syria’s TPS designation continue to be met; we do not discuss internal and interagency deliberations.

Under Section 244 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, the DHS Secretary has the sole authority to designate, extend, or terminate TPS after consultation with “appropriate agencies” of the government.

Question. What is the administration doing to help end the attacks on civilians in Syria, and deliver aid to these communities?

Answer. The war in Syria has devastated the country and reverberated far beyond its borders. The images and narratives we see and hear from Syrians remind us of the continued suffering of the Syrian people under Assad’s brutal regime. As a part of our strategy to end the seven-year conflict, we are working to de-escalate the violence in Syria, provide humanitarian assistance in the country to alleviate human suffering, and support U.N.-led efforts in Geneva that lead to a political transition as stipulated in U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254.

On July 9, 2017, the United States, Jordan, and Russia concluded an arrangement to reduce violence in southwest Syria. This ceasefire effort has largely held, resulting in a significant reduction in violence—a necessary condition to increase deliveries of humanitarian assistance. In addition to this effort, we continue to press for an end to attacks on civilians by the Syrian regime and its allies. In our engagements with Russia, we condemn the Assad regime’s horrific tactics and Russia’s own role as a supporter of the regime. This includes in besieged areas such as East Ghouta. We have continually messaged to the regime and the Russians that unhindered humanitarian assistance, including immediate medical evacuations, must be provided to all besieged areas, including from Eastern Ghouta in which there are no fewer than 500 patients in critical need who will likely die if not evacuated.

The United States is the largest single country donor of humanitarian assistance for the Syria crisis. The U.S. has provided nearly \$7.5 billion for those displaced inside Syria and the region since the beginning of the crisis. This assistance is helping more than four million Syrians every month across all 14 governorates, as well as the millions affected by the conflict in neighboring countries. In addition to needs-based humanitarian assistance, the USG is providing stabilization assistance in non-regime held areas, including in liberated areas, to allow the voluntary return of displaced Syrians and serve as a counterweight against extremism. The United States also has provided more than \$32 million to the Syrian Civil Defense (SCD), also known as the White Helmets, an impartial group of volunteer emergency responders who provide lifesaving support to civilians and help document chemical attacks by the regime and airstrikes by its Russian allies. To date, these teams of SCD volunteers have saved over 99,000 lives. The SCD continues to serve as a vital

organization that enshrines the values of nonviolence, impartiality, and non-discrimination in its principles. The international community must vigorously continue to pressure the regime and Russia to support unhindered humanitarian access to all of Syria and pressure the Assad regime to credibly negotiate a lasting political resolution to the conflict through the Geneva process in accordance with UNSCR 2254.

The U.N.-led Geneva process under UNSCR 2254 is the only credible way forward to achieve U.N.-supervised presidential and parliamentary elections involving all Syrians and constitutional reform, as jointly acknowledged in November of last year by President Trump and Russian President Putin in Vietnam. The United States is deeply engaged in this process and its goal to produce a political solution to this conflict in Syria. Implementation requires that all parties—including Russia—support the U.N. process fully and exclusively.

In Syria, we are working to defeat ISIS, de-escalate violence, and support a political resolution through U.N.-led talks. In doing so, we seek to end the violence and alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. The Syrian people deserve an end to this conflict.

LETTER TO HON. REX TILLERSON AND HON. JAMES MATTIS FROM
SENATOR TIM Kaine

TIM Kaine
VIRGINIA

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN RELATIONS

COMMITTEE ON
THE BUDGET

SPECIAL COMMITTEE
ON AGING

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December 19, 2017

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St, NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable James Mattis
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
100 Defense Pentagon,
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretaries Tillerson and Mattis:

I write to seek clarification and additional information on the counter-ISIS campaign in Iraq and Syria following the submission of the December War Powers notification, statements from a recent Pentagon press briefing and troubling news reports on the changing U.S. mission in Syria. I am concerned that the United States will soon find itself lacking domestic or international legal standing for operations in Syria based on official statements that our presence, intended for a narrowly-scoped campaign to fight ISIS, might now be used to pressure the Syrian government, target Iran and its proxies, and engage other entities not covered under the 2001 AUMF.

The December War Powers Act notification to Congress does not specify the number of U.S. troops in Iraq or Syria, but at a recent Pentagon press conference, a DOD spokesman stated that there are approximately 2,000 troops in Syria, a 397% increase from the 503 troops cited six months earlier in the June notification. He further stated that, "We will be in Syria as long as it takes to make sure that ISIS is not afforded the ability to re-establish safe havens and conduct attacks."

Following this press briefing, Russia's military announced on December 7 that it had accomplished its mission of defeating ISIS in Syria and that there were no remaining settlements there under ISIS control. On December 9, Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi declared victory over ISIS in Iraq and the end of more than three years of battles to regain control over areas that had been under ISIS's dominion. Abadi stated, "Our forces fully control the Iraqi-Syrian border, and thus we can announce the end of the war against Daesh." That same day, the State Department agreed with Prime Minister Abadi noting, "The Iraqi announcement signals the last remnants of ISIS's self-proclaimed 'caliphate' in Iraq have been erased and the people living in those areas have been freed from ISIS's brutal control."

However, while welcoming Abadi's announcement, additional Administration statements have suggested that a military presence in Syria could be open-ended to pursue objectives unrelated to the counter-ISIS mission. The original mission relied upon an expansive legal interpretation of the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs detailed in the December 2016 White House report: "Legal and Policy Frameworks Guiding The United States' Use Of Military Force And Related National Security Operations."

Additionally, on December 13, the *Wall Street Journal* published an article quoting an unnamed U.S. official who said, "Our leadership has set as an objective not to allow Iran and its proxies to be able to establish a presence in Syria that they can use to threaten our allies or us in the region." The article also states that the Administration is considering whether to make "confronting Iran an explicit new goal for the more than 2,000 American forces currently in Syria." If these reports accurately reflect your intentions, the actions you are likely considering far exceed the counter-ISIS mandate and lack domestic or international legal authority to support the continued presence of U.S. forces absent host nation approval or evidence of an enemy that poses an imminent threat to the United States.

As such, I request answers to the following questions:

- Is the Administration contemplating a policy that makes "confronting Iran an explicit new goal for the more than 2,000 American forces currently in Syria?"
- Has the Administration previously targeted, or is planning to target Shia militias operating in Iraq that are aligned with the Iraqi government? If so, under what legal authority?
- Does the Administration have any plans to target Shia militias or Iranian proxies in Syria? If so, under what legal authority?
- Does the Administration intend to retain a military presence in Iraq or Syria to combat Iran? If so, under what legal authority?
- Do you agree that ISIS is defeated in Iraq? Syria?
- How does the Administration define the "defeat" of ISIS? Please describe the conditions being evaluated for a "conditions-based" withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria.
- Please clarify what reporting changes you made, if any, that could have resulted in the stark difference in U.S. troop numbers in Syria between this month and last.
- Do you believe the 2002 AUMF authorizing the war in Iraq is still necessary? What operations in the past 5 years solely relied on the 2002 AUMF for legal justification?
- Secretary Mattis, you announced that the U.S. military would remain in Syria to fight ISIS and to propel Bashar al-Assad into participating in political negotiations in Syria. What would be the legal basis for using military force to compel Bashar al-Assad into participating in political negotiations?
- The December 2017 War Powers notification to Congress states "the Defeat-ISIS campaign in Syria have undertaken a limited number of strikes against Syrian government and pro-Syrian government forces." Have you deemed that Syrian government and pro-Syrian government forces are Associated Forces of ISIS pursuant to the 2001 AUMF?

Sincerely,



Tim Kaine