

SYRIA: U.S. POLICY OPTIONS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

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THURSDAY, APRIL 19, 2012

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. John F. Kerry (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Present: Senators Kerry, Menendez, Cardin, Udall, Lugar, Corker, and Barrasso.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN F. KERRY, U.S. SENATOR FROM MASSACHUSETTS

The CHAIRMAN. The hearing will come to order.

Thank you all very much for being here. I appreciate it.

The stakes for American values and interests in the unfolding events, drama, tragedy, whatever you want to call it, with respect to Syria are really important to us. At least 10,000 civilians have died. Hundreds of thousands more have either been displaced or at grave risk of harm. And the humanitarian crisis that has engulfed Syria's neighbors obviously has implications in the region, and we know that refugees and displaced populations can be the spark for large-scale violence.

What happens in Syria will have a direct impact on our regional stability and on the security of our friends and allies throughout the Middle East. We all understand that a full-fledged civil war there would have devastating consequences for Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan.

And increasingly I am concerned about apparent al-Qaeda involvement in Syria and the disposition of the country's biological, chemical, and advanced conventional weapons.

Certainly Bashar al-Assad has lost all governing legitimacy except what he achieves at the barrel of a gun or a tank, and it seems clear that if he succeeds in holding onto the status quo, it would not just be a moral outrage but a severe blow to the democratic aspirations of the Middle East. It would also reinforce the interests of both nations and groups hostile to transparency, to the rule of law broadly shared by the population of a country or to peaceful transition.

Based on two strategic prerogatives—one, avoiding chaos while, two, ensuring that the fundamental aspirations of the Syrian people are met—it is clear that the best outcome would, in fact, be a managed transition. Assad and the current regime under any circumstances, it seems to me—it is very difficult to understand how

they could be doing anything except living on borrowed time. How much time is obviously a serious question. The longer the end game, the messier the aftermath. While our ultimate goal is an open and inclusive political process that paves the way for a new government, it is difficult to see an outcome acceptable to the people of Syria that would involve President Assad remaining in power for a prolonged period of time.

The question now then is, What can be done to send the message clearly and effectively? While it is true that America's influence all by ourselves in Syria is limited in these circumstances, we are obviously not without options, particularly in partnership with the broader international community. Last weekend's U.N. Security Council resolution is a first step that puts the Syrian Government on notice. The time for false promises is over, and the time to end the violence is now.

We need to work with the Russians and the Chinese to help them to understand that while we appreciate the positive involvement in approving a monitoring mission for Syria, their responsibilities do not end with a monitoring mission that is being put in place. Progress will require both steps from all sides.

First, with the creation of the Friends of Syria group, there is now a multilateral mechanism for supporting the Syrian National Council (SNC) and other political groups with humanitarian aid and nonlethal supplies, including communications equipment. I understand that Secretary Clinton is meeting today with a subset of the Friends of Syria in Paris. I urge our colleagues to support these efforts.

Second, there are still serious questions about the various opposition groups, including the Syrian National Council and the Free Syrian Army (FSA). We need to continue to work with these and other groups to encourage them to coalesce into a viable and inclusive political force. It may be that they cannot or do not unify as an organization, but they certainly need to achieve a unity of purpose. They urgently need to present to Syria and the world a coherent vision of a tolerant and pluralistic post-Assad society.

And third, we need to consider how best to support the Free Syrian Army. The administration has committed to provide nonlethal assistance. In addition, we should work with the Free Syrian Army's leadership to promote professionalism and better integration with the political opposition.

And finally, we should weigh the risks and benefits of establishing safe zones near Syria's border areas. Safe zones entail military action and would require significant support from regional powers and, therefore, obviously, require a more significant vetting and strategic work-through. I believe the unity of the council and coordination of the Free Syrian Army must develop significantly before one could create those zones. But our interests and values demand that we consider how they could be constructed and what this might mean for Syria's neighbors.

We also need to clarify what Syria's neighbors, both immediate and near neighbors, need to do here. It seems to me that the Arab League needs to continue to lead. The GCC has provided leadership and they must continue to also. And we obviously need to understand what is achievable by all of us together.

Right now, we need patient, clear-eyed diplomacy, combining elements of political and economic pressure to influence the calculations in Damascus. But given the potential for further sectarian violence and regional destabilization, we need to also think through carefully what comes next, and we need to prepare for the worst even as we hope for the best. That means no option can or should be taken off the table. The Pentagon, appropriately, is drawing up contingency plans for the transition, and obviously one needs plans to guarantee the safeguard of both chemical and biological weapons.

To reach agreement on realistic options going forward, we need to continue the consultation process that is taking place. I might add even the act of developing the contingency plans I think helps to send the right message to all parties involved that we are serious about the prospects of transition.

So there is a lot to discuss here this morning, and to help us explore these issues, we want to welcome our distinguished witnesses. We have Dr. Tamara Cofman Wittes. She is director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution and until recently was the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. Dr. Murhaf Jouejati is a Syrian-born expert in Middle East affairs and professor of Middle East studies at the National Defense University's Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies. And Dr. Jon Alterman holds the Zbigniew Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy and is director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. We thank all of you for taking the time to come today and bringing your expertise to the committee.

Senator Lugar.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD G. LUGAR,
U.S. SENATOR FROM INDIANA**

Senator LUGAR. Well, I join you, Mr. Chairman, in welcoming our distinguished witnesses, and we appreciate their testimony as we consider policy options toward Syria.

Since our last hearing a month and a half ago, the world has witnessed the continued violent suppression of protestors and dissidents by the regime of Bashar Assad and clashes between government forces and the armed opposition, as the people of Syria seek to create their own Arab Spring.

Though the situation in Syria remains fluid, there have been important diplomatic developments. A cease-fire has been agreed to, and this week United Nations cease-fire monitors have arrived in Damascus. Nonetheless, violence continues, underscoring the difficulty of the circumstances in Syria.

It remains to be seen whether this cease-fire is durable and how it contributes to the goal of a genuine transition in Syria. Assad has defaulted on his word in the past. He will be judged on his actions and not his promises.

In the first instance, the Syrian authorities and opposition forces must guarantee the safety of the initial U.N. advance team of observers—and the supervision mission that will follow—so that they may carry out their responsibilities. Their ability to report on ac-

tions on the ground represents a critical step in limiting the bloodshed in Syria.

A sustainable cease-fire, of course, is only the beginning. The international community has called on Assad to withdraw his forces from population centers, to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people, and to implement the other elements of the Annan peace plan.

The situation in Syria presents many challenges for the United States. Even as we are hopeful that the violence will cease and that a political process to address the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people will be put in place, the outcome of events in Syria will have profound effects on its neighbors—including our close ally Israel, and on ethnic conflict and the broader stability of the region.

We must also remain mindful of the security concerns presented by events in Syria. Terrorist groups may try to take advantage of Syria's political instability. Sectarian conflict could expand to draw in Syria's neighbors. And I remain deeply concerned about Syria's substantial stockpiles of chemical and conventional weapons. As it develops United States policy toward Syria, our Government must also focus its policy, intelligence, and counterproliferation efforts on confronting and containing these threats.

But as I have said before, we should not overestimate our ability to influence events inside the country. If the United States or other Western nations insert themselves too deeply into this conflict, it could backfire and give credence to the Syrian regime's claim that outside influences are the source of all their troubles. While the administration should not take any options off the table, we should remain skeptical about committing military forces to this conflict, for both constitutional and practical reasons.

As Congress works with the administration to develop and implement options in this complex situation, I will be interested to hear from our panel what courses of action they would recommend that would advance American national security interests, are most likely to produce an outcome favorable to the people of Syria, and would contribute to peace and stability in the region.

I look forward to your testimony.

And I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks so much. Thank you, Senator Lugar.

Dr. Jouejati, if you would go first, Dr. Alterman, Dr. Wittes. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF DR. MURHAF JOUEJATI, PROFESSOR, NEAR EAST SOUTH ASIA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON, DC

Dr. JOUEJATI. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am truly very honored to be here. Thank you for inviting me.

Almost exactly 1 year ago, teenagers that sprayed graffiti on the walls of their school in Daraa were arrested. And the following day their fathers tried to get them out from the security center, but they were told by Atif Najib, the cousin of Bashar al-Assad and the man in charge of security there, that they should go home, forget about their children, and if they are not men enough to make children, then to bring him their wives so he can make children for

them. This is the kind of relationship that exists today between the state and society in Syria.

Since that time, until the present time, as you said, Mr. Chairman, there are over 10,000 people killed, 1.5 million internal refugees, 130,000 refugees outside of Syria. Since the Kofi Annan plan, 1,500 have been killed, and since the so-called cease-fire on April 12, there have been hundreds of people killed and there continues to be shelling by tanks and artillery of civilian neighborhoods in Rastan, in Homs, in Hama, in Deir-ez-Zor, and in Daraa.

I am going to only speak to the parameters of the questions that were posed to me here.

With regard to the opposition, the opposition is fragmented, but it is not as fragmented as the international media has made it out to be. All opposition groups are united in calling for an end to the Assad regime and for the establishment of a free, pluralistic, and democratic Syria.

Some groups that the media have counted in the opposition include Rifaat Assad's group. Yet, Rifaat Assad has absolutely no credibility inside Syria. Nor does the "National Salvation Front" of Mr. Abdel Halim Khaddam.

Those that do count, of course, are the Syrian National Council, which is the largest umbrella organization of the opposition, and the Free Syrian Army. And I am happy to say that recently the two have been coordinating efforts. There has been the establishment in the Syrian National Council of a military bureau in order to effect this. The Free Syrian Army has recognized that the Syrian National Council as the political umbrella, and the Syrian National Council has pledged to assist the Free Syrian Army.

There are divisions between the Syrian National Council and the National Coordinating Committees (NCC). That is very true. But although the purpose of both is the same, namely the downfall of the Assad regime and the establishment of a democratic Syria, it is in methodology that they differ. The NCC does not want any international intervention. The SNC wants at least an international intervention for humanitarian relief.

The differentiation between internal and external opposition, I think, is also exaggerated. The Syrian National Council meets outside of Syria, and that is because its members are unable to meet inside Syria, lest they be made heads shorter. The Syrian National Council is a coalition of political forces, and many of its component groups operate on the ground inside Syria. This includes the Local Coordinating Committees (LCC) which has, in addition to its representation in the general assembly of the Syrian National Council, a seat on the Presidential Council of the Syrian National Council.

Here again there are some differences: the LCCs have a difficult time understanding that international intervention requires a lot of diplomacy. Given the divisions in the international community, this is an uphill battle.

However, the longer this crisis takes place, the more splintering there will be in the opposition, and, potentially, the more radicalization. We now hear, for example, of a "Free Syrian National Army." This is not good. Again, the longer the crisis in Syria, the more there is going to be the emergence of groups and the more radicalized people become. This would invite all sorts of unwanted

elements, unwanted either by the Western democratic world or the Syrian people themselves.

The Assad regime is cohesive, but it is not as cohesive as it is made out to be. There are fissures that are beginning to appear. Until today, there have been 25 generals that have defected from the Syrian Armed Forces. There are other defections in the Baath Party, in the ministerial cabinet, in the government bureaucracy. And we do have now business groups that are supportive of the opposition, and they are beginning to coalesce under the umbrella of the Syrian National Council. If there continues to be regime cohesion, it is because of the confidence of the regime that the international community is divided and will do nothing to force its collapse.

Sanctions are hurting. Syria has lost around a third of its annual revenue from sanctions against the oil exports. The Syrian pound has lost value. Inflation is increasing rapidly. Unemployment is increasing exponentially. The reserves of the Central Bank of Syria are down by half.

But in and of themselves, sanctions will not bring down the regime, especially that Iran is assisting Syria financially and otherwise. Trade deals with Iraq, the exportation of Venezuelan oil to Syria, these things are propping up the Assad regime and are diluting the effect of sanctions.

Sanctions are hurting the people—are beginning to hurt seriously the people, but not the Assad family. And Mrs. Assad has much imagination in continuing to buy Louboutin shoes. So this does not hurt the Assads.

Opportunities for diplomacy. I truly identify with the statement that Secretary of State Clinton said yesterday that the Kofi Annan plan is the last opportunity. It is the last opportunity because it follows a number of diplomatic initiatives to stop the killing, including Turkish and Arab attempts, all of which, as you know, failed.

The Annan plan is the last opportunity although it suffers many flaws. It calls for a political dialogue without mentioning that Assad must step down, although the Annan plan is rooted in the Arab initiative. The Annan plan does not provide a timetable and Assad cannot go on killing indefinitely without consequences. The Annan plan does not define failure although many would contend that it has already failed. There has been no significant pull-back of heavy armor from towns. The regime does not allow international media still. It does not allow humanitarian relief, and it is continuing to shoot at demonstrators. Case in point: Yesterday in the town of Arbine, civilian demonstrators in front of U.N. monitors were shot by security forces.

Nonetheless, the Annan plan is all that we have got, but the Annan mission does need an enforcement capability or else it is sure to fail. And that should be linked to a threat of force. The threat of force has a great psychological effect. Let me remind you that there is one United States Senator who recently said in the media that air power needs to be used, and the same day, four Syrian generals defected. The same day, the Syrian pound to the dollar jumped from 50 to 103. So the threat of force might work.

Now, perhaps this is not the best option. Perhaps Assad, even with the threat of force, might continue to dig in his heels, but I

think allowing the Annan plan to fail without any consequences for the Assad regime would be far worse.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Jouejati follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MURHAF JOUEJATI, PH.D.

The crisis in Syria is part and parcel of the Arab Spring. It is a national uprising against 48 years of authoritarian, single-party rule, and 41 years of family rule.

Thus far, more than 12,000 have died; more than 1.5 million have been internally displaced; there are 130,000 Syrian refugees in other countries; and tens of thousands have been detained and others forcibly disappeared. Entire villages have been reduced to rubble, with entire populations fleeing.

Since the emergence of the joint U.N.-Arab League mission, headed by envoy Kofi Annan, Syrian human rights organizations and the Syrian opposition to the Assad regime have documented more than 1,500 deaths. The number of refugees increased markedly and massacres of those trying to flee government shelling and bombardment continue.

Since the beginning of the so called "cease-fire," on April 12 at 6 a.m. Damascus time, more than 1,000 civilians have died. Although the Assad regime pulled back its tanks and heavy armor from some areas, it repositioned them in others. In some cases, tanks were moved temporarily to neighboring villages, only to return hours later. Eyewitnesses have provided evidence of regime security forces removing their military uniforms only to don civilian clothing before pursuing their missions of death.

Bombardment of civilian neighborhoods in Idlib, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, and other areas has continued in the meantime.

In brief, while it may appear that the Assad regime reduced the level of violence in some areas, it is a fact that this reduction lasted 2 days only, and, given the Assad regime's track record over the 13-month uprising, there is no reason to believe that regime violence against the Syrian people will end any time soon.

Moreover, the Assad regime has been selective in its implementation of the six points in Kofi Annan's plan: it has not released any of the detainees (on the contrary, it has increased the number of arrest campaigns sweeping residential areas, including, but not limited to, Damascus and Aleppo); nor allowed any more journalists than it already had (from countries friendly to the Assad regime)—28 in total (hardly a number appropriate for the Annan Plan's requirement to allow the international media unfettered access). Furthermore, the Assad regime continues to deal with unarmed civilian demonstrators with snipers and gunfire (case in point: security forces shot and killed student demonstrators in Aleppo, among others, last Sunday).

As of this writing, the Assad regime is posing a variety of conditions with regard to the U.N. monitors, their nationality, and their movement inside Syria.

THE SYRIAN OPPOSITION

The Syrian National Council, the largest umbrella organization, was established in October 2011 as a result of the national uprising. It is the political arm of the Syrian revolution and is mandated by the Syrian street with articulating its political demands. The SNC has received its legitimacy from the street.

As is the case with most opposition movements, the Syrian opposition is not monolithic. Other opposition groups have emerged, and there are differences in views among them. Still, the international media has generally exaggerated the Syrian opposition's woes: First, what the media calls "the fragmentation" of the Syrian opposition is problematic: Rifaat Assad's group, for example, should not count as opposition, as Rifaat al-Assad has a highly violent and corrupt past in Syria, leaving him with no credibility among most Syrians. Nor should Abdel Halim Khaddam's "National Salvation Front," or any of the myriad two- or three-person groups calling themselves opposition groups, as they are former Assad regime cronies who, for the most part, are used by the regime in its attempts to put on a reformist face.

Foremost among the credible opposition movements is the "National Coordinating Committees" (NCC). Although the SNC and the NCC are united in their vision for a free and democratic Syria after the collapse of the Assad regime, the two differ on method: whereas the SNC is of the view that the international community must intervene to provide humanitarian relief, and that the international community should assist the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in defending peaceful civilian demonstrators against regime brutality, the NCC objects to any kind of international intervention and to the militarization of the revolution. A third point of contention has to

do with dialogue with the Assad regime: while the SNC is of the view that there can only be a dialogue with Assad regime figures who do not have blood on their hands, this dialogue can only take place in the context of the trial of Assad and other regime elements who have blood on their hands.

Another important group is the Free Syrian Army (headed by Col. Riad al-Asaad) which did not arise in a vacuum but as a result of soldiers who preferred to defect rather than fire at fellow citizen, as per the orders of the Assad regime.

The relationship between the SNC and the FSA has been formalized in an agreement by which the SNC provides assistance to the FSA in its function of protecting unarmed civilian demonstrators, while the FSA recognizes the SNC as the political arm of the revolution. The “Local Coordination Committees” (LCC) are part and parcel of the SNC and the national leadership of that group is included in the SNC’s Presidential Council. However, the LCC, in its capacity as the leader of the civil resistance movement in Syria, has difficulty with the slow pace of international assistance.

Second, the international media have also overemphasized the differences between the “internal” and the “external” components of the Syrian opposition movement. In that regard, it is natural for SNC leaders to meet outside Syria. If they were to meet inside Syria, they would be made a head shorter. Still, what is generally called the external opposition, the SNC, is thoroughly present on the ground in Syria through groups including the LCC, the Damascus Declaration, the Muslim Brotherhood, and others. Moreover, a large number of SNC General Assembly members are inside Syria but their names cannot be divulged for security reasons.

COHESION OF THE ASSAD REGIME

Although the Assad family has seemingly maintained its cohesion, fissures in the Assad regime’s supporters are beginning to appear: an increasing number of major business groups (some in Dubai, some in Europe, some in Saudi Arabia, and still others in Syria) are jumping ship. The SNC is in the process of bringing these business groups under its umbrella. In addition, 25 Generals have thus far defected from the armed forces, in addition to dozens of ranking military officers who defect daily across Syria. Other defections have taken place within the ruling Baath Party, the ministerial cabinet, and the government bureaucracy. The process of defections—which will lead to the unraveling of the regime—can be accelerated if the international community delegitimizes the Assad regime and, simultaneously, recognizes the SNC as the sole, legitimate representative of the Syrian people.

EFFECTIVENESS OF SANCTIONS AGAINST SYRIA

U.S. and other bilateral sanctions against Syria have had a biting effect on the Syrian economy. Sanctions against Syria’s oil industry in particular deny the economy around one-third of Syria’s total annual income. Sanctions against Syria’s Central Bank have also had a crippling effect on business. These measures have caused the Syrian Pound to depreciate, inflation to rise, and unemployment to increase exponentially. These measures have led many business people to jump ship; they have also delayed salary payments to middle-class public servants, thereby increasing their level of fear.

However, sanctions alone will not bring the regime down. Assad and his immediate entourage do not feel the pinch. Iran, Iraq, and, to a lesser degree, Venezuela, have come to the rescue of the Assad regime with financial assistance, trade deals, and oil supplies.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIPLOMACY

Given the existential threat looming over the Assad regime, bilateral U.S.-Syrian and multilateral EU-Syrian diplomacy are exercises in futility. Even Arab diplomacy has failed to convince Assad to stop the carnage. Assad has shown time and again that he will use any and all diplomatic initiatives to buy himself and his regime time—in the hope that his security forces would crush the national uprising before his regime collapses.

That the use of diplomacy is an exercise in futility with the Assad regime holds true with regard to Mr. Kofi Annan’s multilateral diplomacy as well. While the “Annan Plan” may have served to decrease the level of violence for the first 2 days following the announcement of the “cease fire,” Assad’s heavy weapons are back at work against civilian neighborhoods in Daraa, Idlib, Homs, Rastan, Hama, and Deir-ez-Zor.

Moreover, the “Annan Plan” does not specify a timeline: How long should the U.N. tolerate Assad’s violence, even if reduced, against the civilian population? At what

point will the international community declare the “Annan Plan” a failure? How is “failure” defined and who defines it?

FACTORS ON THE GROUND AND U.S. POLICY OPTIONS

A major factor that increases U.S. policy options is the humanitarian calamity that is taking place. How long can the United States watch massacres of unarmed civilians go on before implementing options other than economic and diplomatic sanctions?

Washington has tied its own hands by linking its options to a consensus in the Security Council—although historical precedents demonstrate that the United States need not wait for a U.N. Security Council mandate.

Within this context, and given the challenges and opportunities available to the United States, a middle-of-the-road approach (there must be something that can be done between supplying the FSA with cell phones and going on a unilateral rampage) consists in the U.S. threatening the Assad regime with the use of American force as this has a major psychological effect on Assad regime cronies should Assad elect to dig in his heels. Given the convergence of U.S. values (freedom and dignity of the citizen) and U.S. interests (geostrategic), the United States would be well advised to act in concert with the international community (e.g., France, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia) and lead a humanitarian effort by establishing humanitarian corridors to funnel relief, and safe zones in which the FSA can regroup—inside Syria. In this case, no American “boots on the ground” are necessary. Conceivably, the only boots on the ground operating in the Syrian theater would be those of the FSA.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Doctor.

Dr. Alterman.

STATEMENT OF DR. JON B. ALTERMAN, ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI CHAIR IN GLOBAL SECURITY AND GEOSTRATEGY; DIRECTOR, MIDDLE EAST PROGRAM, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, WASHINGTON, DC

Dr. ALTERMAN. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the committee, it is a great pleasure to be back in this room where I sat during the 99th and 100th Congress with my late boss, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in the days of Dick McCall and Andy Semmel; and of course, Bertie Bowman is an institution in this room. It is a special pleasure to appear before the committee rather than behind the committee, and also a special pleasure to not have to scribble furiously on my lap today.

It is an honor to talk to you today about Syria. In a year of tremendous change in the Arab world, Syria is among the places where change would be most welcome.

The Syrian people drew lessons from the political events in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011 which they watched live on television. The Syrian Government drew lessons too, and I would like to enumerate five of those lessons here.

The first lesson that I think they concluded is concessions do not give you security. When Zine al-Abdine bin Ali and Hosni Mubarak gave concessions to the mobs, they only seemed to fuel the mob’s anger. Moammar Qadhafi held out for months. And I think in the view of the Syrian Government, were it not for NATO air strikes, he would still be in power. So giving concessions does not solve your problem.

Second, militaries still matter. In Egypt and Tunisia, the military decided the President’s time was done. In Bahrain, the military helped decide the king would stay. Bashar al-Assad has been careful to cultivate his military assets, leaving elite brigades under the control of family members and ensuring that members of his

own Alawite minority are in control of the senior officer and enlisted ranks.

Third, allies matter and P5 allies matter the most. Assad has been careful not to make the mistake that Moammar Qadhafi made, utterly lacking any Russian or Chinese support. Assad has been careful to cultivate Chinese and Russian support.

Four, minority rule is a resource. We often see minorities as a source of cleavages in a society, but if you have minorities, they often cleave to the Government for protection, and Bashar al-Assad has been very careful to play on the feeling of vulnerability among the minorities to stay in power.

Five, the nature of the opposition matters. And of course, Bashar al-Assad has worked very hard to try to split the opposition, goading them to abandon the pursuit of a peaceful resolution of this conflict.

What Bashar al-Assad is thinking is unknowable, but to the outside observer, it appears that he believes he can withstand the current challenge, much as his father stood down the Islamist opposition in Hama in 1982. Reports continue to surface that Assad is obsessed with comparisons to his father's leadership, with siblings and even his mother unfavorably comparing his resolve and his ruthlessness to that of his father.

In my judgment, though, Assad has made fundamental miscalculations, particularly with regard to the outside world, which make his long-term survival unlikely.

First, he has alienated Turkey, which is incredible because Turkey actually reached out to Assad and tried to embrace him. The strategy of zero problems with the neighbors has been cast aside. It would have been an asset to Assad, and he threw that card away.

He has alienated Qatar and Saudi Arabia, two countries that decided that a cornered Bashar al-Assad was much more dangerous than one they engaged with, and yet they have given up hope on Bashar al-Assad and have decided he must go.

I think he has failed to create durable alliances with China and Russia. When I speak to Chinese and Russian experts, what I hear is the sense that they have interests in Syria, but all of those can be managed. There is not the same vital interest in the survival of Bashar al-Assad.

And I think he has failed to create a viable economy. It is an economy which 20 or 30 years ago relied on subsidies from outside powers and continues to rely on subsidies from outside powers. In my judgment, the Iranians are going to be preoccupied this summer. They are not going to want to throw him a lifeline. I think the Russians and the Chinese will negotiate. I think as the sanctions really start to bite over the summer, and he is going to have bigger problems.

The timeline of ultimate change in Syria, though, remains a mystery. If there is a long war of attrition between the Government and the opposition, it could well drag on for years, as wars of attrition do. And I was in this room any number of times talking about the Contra war, which lasted for 10 years. It is worth remembering that sanctions isolated Saddam Hussein for more than a decade but were unable to remove him from power.

Over the next year, Syria may tilt sharply toward civil war. With a ruthless government, a range of outside powers willing to support proxies, the possibility of staging attacks from neighboring countries, and a widespread perception that the alternative to victory is death, antagonists are likely to dig in. Levels of violence could escalate from what we have seen so far and approach what we saw in Iraq in 2006–2007, with a similar sectarian flavor.

For those who seek change in Syria, it is worth noting that the more militarized this conflict becomes, the more the advantage accrues to the Government. Militarization puts the conflict into an area where the Government is likely to enjoy a permanent advantage in fire power and also legitimizes brutal attacks on civilian populations that radicalize segments and authenticates the narrative of a patriotic government fighting against foreign-financed brigands. The Syrian Government is at its weakest when other Syrians question its legitimacy, evidenced most clearly by massive peaceful protests. I draw one chief lesson from Tunisia and Egypt, two states with legendary internal intelligence services that had a reputation for both effectiveness and brutality: police can be effective against hundreds, but they cannot be effective against hundreds of thousands. The quick scaling of protest movements swiftly undermines the legitimacy of these governments. It is worth pointing out, though, that the immediate transition in these cases was not to a civilian government, but instead to some remnant of the former regime that acted in order to preserve its own institutional legitimacy.

So I cannot give you a three-point plan on how to fix Syria this month or even how to avoid disaster in the next year. We need to be realistic, as the ranking member said, about how much we do not know in Syria and how much we cannot even begin to predict. Even so, I think several policy conclusions follow from the foregoing.

One, as the chairman said, we have to plan for a long engagement. This is not likely to be a 1-month crisis, and we have to pace ourselves and appreciate that.

Second, I do not think we should expect the opposition to sweep into power. As I think back over the last 40 years, I have not seen a lot of democratic opposition movements inherit the mantle of power after a dictator has been swept aside.

Third, remember that militarization helps Assad. The more the protest movement looks like an armed insurrection, the more it will play into the hands of a relatively well-armed and well-trained Syrian army.

Four, as Murhaf said, remember that diplomacy remains vital. In particular, keeping Russia and China open to the possibility of a change in government in Syria is essential.

Five, be ready for nonlinear change. In my judgment, the most likely outcome, not necessarily the most desirable but the most likely, remains some sort of military coup which the neighbors see providing their best opportunity to preserve their interests at the lowest risk. Surrounded by neighbors that have the means, the resources, and the interest to make such a coup take place, I suspect that Bashar al-Assad will succumb to their actions.

Last week, I chaired a panel with two former national security advisors, Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski. There is something they both agreed on, which I agree fully. We cannot do this alone. We share strategic objectives with both Turkey and Saudi Arabia, and perhaps surprisingly there is a lot we agree on with both Russia and China. If we seek to fine-tune a solution to the problems of Syria, we not only almost certainly lose Russia and China, but I think we are unable to be able to sustain Turkish and Saudi support. If we seek to avoid the worst outcomes in Syria, we are more likely to have their support and the support of others as well.

The Syrian people have suffered and continue to suffer, but we cannot be their liberators. We will best serve their interests, as well as our own, if we work broadly with others to limit the most damaging outcomes that lay before us.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Alterman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JON B. ALTERMAN, PH.D.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, it is an honor to talk with you today about Syria. In a year of tremendous change in the Arab world, Syria is among the places where change would be most welcome and where its ripples may have some of the most profound effects. As I see it, events in Syria are linked to those happening in the rest of the Arab world, although sometimes in surprising ways.

The Syrian people drew lessons from the political events in Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011, which they watched live on television. Yet, while they drew lessons from those events, few recognize the lessons that the Syrian Government drew from those same events. I would like to enumerate five of those lessons here.

(1) *Concessions do not bring security.* After watching President Zine al-Abdine bin Ali forced from power after 6 weeks, and President Hosni Mubarak in only 18 days, Bashar al-Assad likely concluded that those leaders gave in too soon, and the public saw their willingness to negotiate as a sign of weakness. Assad surely noticed that Moammar Gadhafi held out for months, and would likely still be in power were it not for 6 months of NATO air assault.

(2) *Militaries still matter.* In Egypt and Tunisia, the military decided the President's time was done. In Bahrain, the military helped decide that the King would stay. Bashar al-Assad has assiduously maintained control over the military since he first came to power in 2000, and he has been careful to cultivate his assets there—leaving elite brigades under the control of family members, and ensuring that members of his own Alawite minority are in control of the senior officer and enlisted ranks.

(3) *Allies matter, and P5 allies matter most.* Moammar Gadhafi mistakenly thought that his concessions to Western powers in 2003 and after would help secure his rule, and he never sought close ties with either China or Russia. When the U.N. Security Council voted a year ago to authorize the use of force in Libya, China, and Russia abstained. Syria has made no grand gesture to the West in the hopes of winning protection, and it has actively sought to cultivate support from both Russia and China. While neither country fully supports Assad, each has been a bulwark against collective international action that would remove him from power.

(4) *Minority rule is a resource.* We often see minorities as a source of cleavages in a society, but the anxieties of minority groups can make them cleave to ruling governments. The 12 percent or so of Syrians who are Alawite, the 10 percent or so who are Christian, and the smaller Kurdish, Druze, and Armenian populations, are all a source of strength to Assad, for they fear dominance by the Sunni Arab majority. In many cases, they will fight to the death for the ruling government, because they fear ruin if it is deposed.

(5) *The nature of the opposition matters.* The easier it is for the public to imagine a better alternative to the status quo, the more attractive that alternative will be. A confused and chaotic opposition that encompasses radical voices and includes supporters of violence is an asset to the ruling government, especially when it comes to maintaining the loyalty of urban elites who have the most to lose. While the Assad government has only indirect influence over the opposition, its interest is de-

cidedly in encouraging splits in the opposition and goading the opposition to abandon the pursuit of a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

What Bashar al-Assad is thinking is unknowable, but to the outside observer, it appears that he believes he can withstand the current challenge, much as his father stood down an Islamist opposition in Hama in 1982. Reports continue to surface that Assad is obsessed with comparisons to his father's leadership, with siblings and even his mother unfavorably comparing his resolve and his ruthlessness to that of his father.

While most regional observers also believe the younger Assad compares unfavorably to his father, he appears to have several advantages that make him less susceptible to overthrow than some of the other regional leaders who have lost their posts in the last year. He has indeed managed to learn from the mistakes of others, and he seems committed not to make them. He has been able to maintain loyalty within his inner circle, in part through sectarian ties. He is also blessed with an opposition that, by many measures, is one of the weaker ones in the region. Even after a year of organizing, many who have worked with the oppositions in Libya and Syria believe that the Libyan opposition was much more organized than its Syrian counterpart. The Libyan opposition also had the benefit of controlling territory from the earliest days of the uprising, and it enjoyed the prospect of tens of billions of dollars in oil revenues to distribute annually. The Syrian opposition has none of those advantages.

In my judgment, however, Assad has made fundamental miscalculations, particularly with regard to the outside world, that make his long-term survival unlikely.

(1) *Alienating Turkey.* This is his biggest mistake, especially since Turkey had been assiduously courting him as part of its "zero problems with neighbors" strategy. After a long period of Turkish-led courtship, Turkey turned against Assad last August after what the Turks saw to be an insulting meeting between Assad and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. Turkey's instinct in regional affairs in the last decade has been heavily oriented toward mediation and conflict resolution, but it has decided to pivot against the Syrian regime and, in their words, on the side of the Syrian people.¹ Turkey now hosts much of the Syrian political opposition as well as the Free Syrian Army. Turkey is large and powerful enough that it can provide both a buffer for Syrian refugees and a base for antiregime operations. Little remarked, but equally important, Syria cannot use an alienated Turkey as a bulwark against global isolation. Were Turkey in its traditional role, it would be harder for the United States and its allies to squeeze Syria; with Turkey in a more hostile position, it is harder for Syria to escape the squeeze.

(2) *Alienating Saudi Arabia and Qatar.* For much of the last decade, these two countries have often sought to protect Assad, or at least to buy him off. After Syria's forced withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, Qatar and Saudi Arabia put money into Syria in order to secure peace and out of a conviction that, if cornered, Bashar would be ferocious. That conviction has yielded to a determination that he should—and must—go, in part driven by the GCC's sense of accomplishment for having helped drive the loathed Moammar Gadhafi from power. Some view GCC hostility as an outgrowth of the gulf leaderships' efforts to weaken their perennial nemesis, Iran, through weakening Iran's Syrian proxy. The dispute has more personal roots as well. Bashar seems to hold special disdain for the hereditary rulers of the gulf, seeing them as wealthy Bedouin with neither education nor culture, and blessed only with deep pockets. They see him as the callow heir to his father, with neither the wisdom nor the resolve to guide his country successfully. Neither side sees the other as a worthy peer.

(3) *Failing to create durable alliances with Russia and China.* Neither country seeks Assad's demise, and each is alarmed at the prospect of a popular revolution giving rise to a potentially pro-Western state in the Eastern Mediterranean. Still, neither country appears to share a vital interest in Bashar's survival, each is confident a successor regime can meet all of its needs, and each is cautious of ending up on the wrong side of another popular revolution.

(4) *Failing to create a diversified economy.* Syria has been a client state for decades, first of the Soviet Union, and then of a combination of Iran, Iraq and the GCC states. After relying heavily on support from the outside, that support is no longer coming. By summer, international sanctions will be biting hard. The Iranians are unlikely to be a savior, as they will have their own priorities and preoccupations.

¹ Foreign Minister Davutoglu told a CSIS audience February 10, 2012. "We have problem, yes, with Syrian administration, but [not] with the Syrian people. And in the future, after a process, I am sure we will be having excellent relations with the new Syria, established by the people of Syria, with the free choice of Syria. In order to avoid the existing crisis, we cannot sacrifice for our future relations with Syria."

Syria relies heavily but not completely on imported fuel, and that fuel will become harder to obtain. Syria is, in many ways, both economically isolated and economically dependent, and that will create significant problems going forward.

(5) *Becoming less preferable to many than the unknown.* Assad's behavior has become so noxious that a faceless leader is preferable to virtually all of Syria's neighbors, as well as to many Syrians. While all of Syria's neighbors seek to avert chaos in the country, none has a particular urge for democratic governance there, either. The conservative GCC states would be concerned by the precedent of a popular revolution, and Israel would be concerned by the prospect of another Islamist state on its borders. Many Lebanese seek stability of any kind, while Iraq maintains a grudge against Bashar for what he did facilitating the passage of Sunni extremists into Iraq (although they certainly do not want those extremists to run post-Assad Syria, either). In many ways, a military coup, whether led by Alawi or Sunni officers, meets all of their needs. It is unclear how such a coup could arise—which is not to say one would not.

The timeline of change in Syria remains a mystery. If there is a long war of attrition between the Government and opposition, it could well drag on for years, as most wars of attrition do. It is worth remembering that sanctions isolated Saddam Hussein for more than a decade but were unable to remove him from power. Saddam had more assets than Assad does, but he also had more enemies. They were not enough to do him in.

Some argue that social media is a game changer here, making long-term and large-scale repression impossible. I am less sure. Certainly, social media makes it easier for the outside world to see what is happening in Syria. Yet, social media also makes it possible for the Syrian Government to track networks and understand how the opposition works. I also do not know how long the world will continue to care about Syria if it seems like events there have fallen into a stalemate. Syrians are not heavily wired, and the Government controls all of the mobile phone networks. Secure communications on a broad level is difficult. U.S. law has made the export of encryption technology to Syria illegal for many years, although some encryption is freely available on the Internet. I have no idea how many Syrians have been able to obtain such technology through smuggling and circumventing government censorship; I am not sure anyone has a much better idea.

Over the next year, Syria may tilt sharply toward civil war. With a ruthless government, a range of outside powers willing to support proxies, the possibility of staging attacks from neighboring countries, and a widespread perception that the alternative to victory is death, antagonists are likely to dig in. Levels of violence could escalate from what we have seen so far and approach what we saw in Iraq in 2006–2007, with a similar sectarian flavor. For those who seek change in Syria, it is worth noting that the more militarized this conflict becomes, the more the advantage accrues to the Government. Militarization not only puts the conflict into an area where the Government is likely to enjoy a permanent advantage in firepower. It also legitimizes brutal attacks on civilian populations that radicalize segments and authenticates a narrative of a patriotic government fighting against foreign-financed brigands. The Syrian Government is at its weakest when other Syrians question its legitimacy, evidenced most clearly by massive peaceful protests. I draw one chief lesson from Tunisia and Egypt, two states with legendary internal intelligence services that had reputations for both effectiveness and brutality: police can be effective against hundreds, but they cannot be effective against hundreds of thousands. The quick scaling of protest movements swiftly undermined the legitimacy of these governments. It is worth pointing out, however, that the immediate transition was not to a civilian government, but instead to some remnant of the former regime that acted in order to preserve its own institutional legitimacy.

I cannot give you a three-point plan on how to fix Syria this month, or even how to avoid disaster in the next year. We need to be realistic about how much we do not know in Syria and how much we cannot begin to predict. Even so, a number of policy conclusions that flow from the foregoing:

(1) *Plan for a long engagement.* Tunisia and Egypt created an expectation that change could be fundamental and swift. Bashar has learned those lessons. Even though I think political change is quite likely, the odds of it happening this month, next month, or even in the next several months, remain low.

(2) *Do not expect the opposition to sweep into power.* I do not think it is likely that the opposition will constitute a viable alternative government in the near or even intermediate term. It remains too divided, too feckless, and too torn by jealousy. Over time, successful donor coordination—for both humanitarian relief and more lethal assistance—can help forge chains of command and create incentives for

greater cooperation. I do not think a putative government in exile is any more likely to come into power in Syria than was the case in Iraq.

(3) *Understand that militarization helps Assad.* The more the protest movement looks like an armed insurrection, the more it will play into the hands of a relatively well-armed and well-trained Syrian army. Armies have proven relatively ineffective dealing with massive protests of hundreds of thousands of people that deny legitimacy to the ruler and ultimately threaten the legitimacy of the army if it confronts the people. Sustaining a focus on legitimacy rather than armed confrontation will save lives and harm Bashar much more than a guerrilla war would.

(4) *Remember that diplomacy remains vital.* In particular, keeping Russia and China open to the possibility of a change in government in Syria is essential. Full coordination with Saudi Arabia and Turkey and other friendly states will make both their efforts and our own much more effective. Maintaining order as refugee flows into neighboring countries increase will also require extensive diplomatic efforts on all aspects of donor coordination. The chief strength of the Annan Plan, in my view, is not in its effect on Syria. Instead, it is in its effect on the countries outside of Syria, providing unity and a sign of resolve.

(5) *Be ready for nonlinear change.* With no territory to control, and no country seemingly willing to cede a buffer zone, it is hard to imagine a Vietnam- or Afghan-like insurgency that eventually takes over the country. I am also extremely pessimistic that Bashar al-Assad will make any meaningful concessions under any circumstances. While Assad has talked a language of compromise, his instinct, revealed in a personal conversation with me as well as in other venues, is that compromise is a sign of weakness, and resistance is a sign of strength. Because he is consumed with his own sense of weakness, he would see compromise as threatening his power (as it ended the rule of Ben Ali and Mubarak). In my judgment, the most likely outcome remains some sort of military coup, which in the estimation of the neighbors provides the best assurance of a relatively positive outcome with the least risk. Surrounded by neighbors who have both the means, the resources and the interest to make such a coup take place, I suspect he will succumb to their actions.

Last week, I chaired a panel with two former national security advisers, Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski. They were extremely cautious about Syria, arguing that we lack both the instruments and the understanding to effect positive change there. While I have a healthy dose of humility about our ability to shape outcomes in Syria, I am a little less pessimistic than they are about our ability to play a positive role. There is one thing they both agreed on, and on which I agree fully: we cannot do this alone. We share strategic objectives with both Turkey and Saudi Arabia, and perhaps surprisingly, there is much we agree on with both Russia and China. If we seek to fine-tune a solution to the problems of Syria, we will not only lose Russia and China with certainty, but we are unlikely to be able to sustain Turkish and Saudi support. If we seek to avoid some of the worst outcomes in Syria, we are more likely to have their support, and the support of others, too. It is not hard to imagine how continued turmoil in Syria could reverberate broadly throughout the Middle East and even into the Caucasus. There is a wide variety of contingencies that many are quite eager to avoid.

The Syrian people have suffered and continue to suffer, but we cannot be their liberators. We will best serve their interests, as well as our own, if we work broadly with others to limit the most damaging outcomes that lay before us.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

You are battling clean-up there, Dr. Wittes.

**STATEMENT OF DR. TAMARA COFMAN WITTES, DIRECTOR,
SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY, THE BROOKINGS
INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON, DC**

Dr. WITTES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Lugar, members of the committee. I am delighted to appear before you today.

As we have noted, the tentative cease-fire is already breaking down, but the cease-fire was only ever a single component of a six-point plan, and the other five points have fallen by the wayside.

At this point, the world cannot allow Syria to waste time wrangling over every preliminary element of implementing a cease-fire. Without a rapid start to a political process that will lead to mean-

ingful change, including Assad's departure from power, there is no way forward for diplomacy to reduce human suffering and promote lasting stability for Syria and the region.

Now, diplomacy still remains preferable to an escalation in violence on the ground that carries dire human costs and risks of regional consequences. But there is not much time and diplomacy must be forceful to be effective.

I believe international diplomacy must, therefore, focus relentlessly on bringing about a political transition and the establishment of a Syrian Government accountable to its people, and I would outline several key components of such a strategy.

First, sustain and scale up sanctions, accountability efforts, other measures that apply pressure on the Syrian regime and those who support it. Over time, such steps can help to erode the unity of Assad supporters in the country and facilitate a transition that puts Assad out of office. The Annan plan's dialogue process is one means, but not the only means, by which that could happen.

Second, I think we must focus diplomatic efforts with Russia not on specific words or actions in New York, but on helping them achieve the fundamental realization that my colleague just discussed, that Assad faces a permanent challenge to his unaltered rule and that they need to seek a way now to preserve their relationship with Syria but not with Assad himself.

Third, I think it is important that we not try to impose an arms embargo through the United Nations. We cannot halt or reverse the militarization of the Syrian uprising. It has happened and it is happening. An international arms embargo will not stop Iran's resupply of Syria. It will simply freeze in place a dreadful imbalance of forces on the ground. Instead, I believe the United States should lead in managing militarization, working with other governments to try to shape the activity of armed elements on the ground in a manner that will most effectively increase pressure on the regime and contain, as much as possible, the spillover effects on Syria's neighbors.

I do not believe militarization inevitably advantages Assad. He does not need a rhetorical justification to resort to violence. He is already perfectly willing to do so. His military so far has not been particularly strained in dealing with this uprising. They have been able to choose their battles, fight them largely one at a time.

Fourth, I think it is important to scale up support for the political development of the Syrian opposition to help them improve their internal cohesion and their ability to represent the Syrian people. The factionalism that is evident among opposition activists is an unsurprising outgrowth of the severe repression and political stagnation of the Syrian context. This is a legacy that can be overcome but not by fiat, and the international community, including the United States, must invest strongly in helping opposition activists build a vision for the future that can be used to unify and build support. And we need to help them improve their communication, especially with Syrians inside and outside the country.

But even with all these steps in place, coercive diplomacy may well fail. Assad only acts under extreme pressure. We have seen that already. Demanding his removal is an existential challenge. So dithering over diplomatic measures while ruling out more coer-

cive options is the quickest path to irrelevance for U.S. policy. If international pressure slackens, if the opposition fails to present an effective alternative, then key Assad constituencies will stop thinking that abandoning him may be their wisest path to self-preservation. A weakened Assad still in place would be even more dependent on Iran, and the Syrian people would suffer not only from his continued rule, but from sustained isolation and economic hardship, along with the insecurity wrought by an ongoing insurgency. The other alternative outcome is a protracted and bitter civil conflict possibly leading to state failure with all of the attendant dangers not only for the neighborhood, but for Syria's longer term future.

Neither of these outcomes are palatable to the United States. That means we must do more now to prevent these outcomes from coming to pass. Early consultation, planning, and preparation for more robust steps would enable the United States to maximize the extent to which others might participate in or even take the lead in some of these actions.

Now, some would argue that this might begin a slippery slope to direct intervention. I would argue instead that anticipating the possible failure of diplomacy, preparing for more coercive options is not only realistic, but it is also necessary to create the pressure that will give diplomacy its best chance of success.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Wittes follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF TAMARA COFMAN WITTES, PH.D.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Lugar, thank you for inviting me to appear today before the committee to discuss policy options for the United States in Syria.

The tentative cease-fire established a week ago is already breaking down, with human rights groups suggesting that about 20 Syrians have died each day since last Thursday. Syrian forces continue their shelling and refuse to withdraw from urban areas, and international monitors are facing stiff challenges to beginning their work on the ground. And yet the cease-fire was only ever one, initial component of U.N. and Arab League Envoy Kofi Annan's six-point plan. The ultimate goal was to begin a political process that would include the opposition and would lead to meaningful change. Thus, the facts so far do not bode well for a diplomatic strategy.

If Annan sought to end the violence and begin a political dialogue, we have so far seen only shaky progress toward the former, and no move toward the latter at all. The relative reduction in violence this past week did open a small window for the United Nations. The insertion of international monitors, if they can work with autonomy and freedom of movement, could help to keep violence down and encourage renewed peaceful protests. But the world must not allow Syria to waste time wrangling over every preliminary element of implementing a cease-fire. Without a rapid start to a political process that will lead to meaningful change, there is no way forward for diplomacy alone to reduce human suffering and promote lasting stability for Syria and the region.

Still, the path of coercive diplomacy remains the only alternative to an escalation in violence on the ground that would have dire humanitarian consequences, and would present the danger of spiraling instability in Syria's already-volatile neighborhood. It remains, therefore, the preferred path to achieve the goal shared by the United States and many other governments, the same goal clearly and consistently articulated by the Syrian people over more than a year—the removal of Bashar al-Assad from power.

Today, then, international diplomacy must focus relentlessly on bringing about a political transition and the establishment of a Syrian Government accountable to its people. Any diplomatic effort must be backed by equally relentless pressure, focused on key pillars supporting the Assad regime: the military, the commercial elite in Aleppo and elsewhere, and the Alawi community. Sanctions, efforts at human rights accountability, and support to the Syrian opposition are all useful forms of pressure, but more can and must be done. In the end, more coercive options must be planned

and prepared for—not only in case diplomacy fails, but in order to give it the best chance of success.

The role of Russia remains crucial, and the time has come for a clear decision. The Russian Government, which finally and belatedly threw its weight behind the Annan Plan, faces a challenge to its international credibility if it cannot use its leverage effectively to compel Assad to maintain the cease-fire, to allow international monitors to operate freely, and to fulfill the other elements of the Plan, including most importantly allowing a political dialogue to begin. It should be obvious to Russia by now that Assad faces a permanent challenge to his unaltered rule—that Syrian military forces cannot decisively crush either the armed insurgency or the peaceful protest movement. Continued brutality at this scale is thus both futile and, as the economy buckles and the military tires, increasingly unsustainable.

It is difficult, but not impossible, to envision Russian policymakers under these circumstances seeking a way to preserve their relations with Syria, but not with Assad himself. The United States and others should focus their engagement with Russia, not on specific words or actions in New York, but on a realistic assessment that will lead Russia at last to acquiesce in efforts to move toward a Syria without Assad. This shift would dramatically increase pressure on the Syrian regime, and itself might help induce key Syrian actors to seek a way out, and make political change possible. The Russians should not waste any more time or any more Syrian lives in making their choice.

On sanctions, the United States has successfully worked with allies and partners in the region and globally to apply unprecedented pressure on the Syrian regime and on figures within it who are directly responsible for human rights violations. These sanctions are slowing eroding the regime's ability to fund and sustain its repression and insulate its supporters from harm. The new Sanctions Working Group that met this week in Paris is a good way for governments to share information needed to maximize the application and impact of their sanctions. Given time, this pressure may help to erode the unity of Assad's supporters in the military and commercial elite of the country, and could facilitate a transition that takes Assad out of office.

Accountability measures are also important, because they increase the incentives for regime supporters to disassociate themselves from the vicious brutality now being practiced on Syrian citizens, and from those who order it and carry it out. The new accountability initiative launched by the Friends of the Syrian People can offer further positive impact, in that its efforts to train and equip citizens for human rights monitoring also improve their ability to communicate and organize, helping those within Syria to strengthen their efficacy and their ability to engage as part of the opposition and shape their country's future. But although many assume human rights documentation is directed toward enabling a referral of violators to the International Criminal Court, this step may not be consistent with political efforts to loosen Assad's grip on power. In the current phase, it does not make sense to restrict the options for a negotiated transition by demanding that Assad be tried for his crimes, no matter how heinous they undoubtedly are.

It's also important to recognize that certain actions, which might potentially be seen as increasing pressure on Assad, could, in fact, be counterproductive. An international arms embargo, for example, might be seen as a logical next step in enforcing and maintaining a cease-fire. However, an arms embargo would not reduce violence—at best it would simply freeze the deep imbalance in armed capability currently evident on the ground, leaving the Syrian Government with a massive advantage and denying Syria's scattered insurgents the basic tools they need to slow down the regime's onslaught against civilians and sustain pressure on the Syrian military. Moreover, an embargo is unlikely to work—even if Russia could be convinced to support such a measure at the U.N. Security Council, the Iranians would be highly unlikely to comply, making the move fruitless as a way of constraining the regime's repressive capacity.

With Iran resolutely supplying the regime, and with Gulf States already providing cash for salaries to the Free Syrian Army's soldiers and talking about lethal aid, the militarization of the Syrian uprising is proceeding apace. But while an armed opposition might be able to fight an effective insurgent campaign, it's not at all clear that they would be able to bring down the regime. At worst, uncontrolled militarization will turn the Syrian uprising into a wider conflict that could draw in jihadis and other extremists from across the Muslim World, offer up tempting ungoverned spaces to terrorists and organized criminals, and produce refugees and other ripple effects that could destabilize Iraq, Lebanon, and possibly other neighbors.

But this possibility must not deter clear thinking: the United States cannot halt or reverse the militarization of the Syrian uprising, and should not try. What the United States can usefully do is manage this militarization by working with other governments, especially Syria's neighbors in the region, to try to shape the activities of armed elements on the ground in a manner that will most effectively increase pressure on the regime—to drain the Syrian military's ability and will to fight, to help induce a political transition, and thereby to bring an end to the violence as quickly as possible. Without a strong lead driven by the strategic logic of weakening the regime's pillars, disparate actors both inside and outside the region could provide lethal support in ways that would exacerbate spillover effects and increase the damage militarization will cause to the goal of restoring order in a post-Assad Syria. To do this, the United States should drive the international planning and engagement necessary to identify key armed leaders and elements, improve coordination and communication, build effective fighting units, and shape an effective insurgent strategy. At the same time, Syria's immediate neighbors will need extra support in border security, refugee relief, and other areas to ensure that the effects of militarization in Syria do not destabilize them as well. Working to manage the uprising's militarization, focus its impact on the Assad regime, and contain its impact on the neighborhood, is essential to ameliorate the instability that Assad unleashed by choosing to declare war on his own people.

In this context, it's absolutely crucial that the United States and other governments continue to scale up their support for the political development of the Syrian opposition. The opposition activists most urgently need to improve their internal cohesion and their ability to effectively and authoritatively represent the Syrian people in any political process—without this, it is hard to see how a political transition can lead to a better or more stable future for Syria. The factionalism and mutual mistrust evident amongst the Syrian opposition activists are unsurprising outgrowths of the severe repression and political stagnation of the Syrian context. This legacy can be overcome, but not by fiat, not through exhortations, and not overnight.

To become a more effective and unified force, the Syrian opposition activists need to focus on three key goals: inclusion, a shared vision for the future, and consistent communication with Syrians both inside and outside the country. Some in the opposition may wonder what the utility is of planning for a post-Assad Syria, when Syrians are under assault today. In fact, developing and marketing a vision for post-Assad Syria that demonstrates organization and a commitment to inclusion and democratic accountability is perhaps the key means through which the activists can overcome their existing differences, mobilize wider support, and represent something beyond factions and personalities. The international community, including the United States, must invest strongly in helping opposition activists—inside and outside Syria—communicate and plan jointly for the future.

The current moment poses challenging questions for the United States, and for all those governments who are working for consensus in New York and through the Friends of the Syrian People contact group. Assad has already demonstrated his willingness to use as much violence as he deems necessary to preserve himself in power. However, the regime that a few months ago appeared to be at a tipping point may hold on, weakened but still viable. If the international pressure slackens, or if the opposition fails to present an effective alternative, key Assad constituencies will stop thinking about the possibility of abandoning him as a path to self-preservation. A weakened Assad would be even more dependent on Iran, and the Syrian people would suffer not only from his continued rule but from sustained isolation and economic hardship along with the insecurity wrought by an ongoing insurgency.

If, as is increasingly likely, Annan's plan fails to produce a path to political change, and if increased pressure from steps like sanctions, militarization, and a more effective opposition do not coerce the Syrian regime's internal supporters into removing Assad and opening up to the opposition, then two outcomes are possible: either protracted civil conflict, with all the attendant dangers both for the neighborhood and for Syria's future; or a weakened Assad who continues to rule, but with fewer constraints on his behavior, including his support for Iran or Hezbollah and his hostility to his neighbors. If, as I believe, neither of these outcomes are palatable to the United States, then we must take heed now of what more must be done to prevent these outcomes from coming to pass.

Some would argue that pursuing the above set of recommendations begins a "slippery slope" to direct intervention. I would argue instead that anticipating the failure of diplomacy and preparing for more coercive options is not only realistic, it is also necessary to create the pressure that will give diplomacy its best chance of success. It's quite clear that Assad only acts under extreme pressure, and that demanding his removal is an existential challenge. Dithering over diplomatic measures, while ruling out more coercive options, is the quickest path to irrelevance for U.S. policy.

Furthermore, early consultation, planning, and preparation for more robust steps would enable the United States to maximize the extent to which others might participate in or even take the lead in those actions. This, too, would strengthen our diplomatic muscle, and increase the likelihood of a swifter, less costly, more satisfactory resolution to the Syrian crisis.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you very much. All of these views are very helpful, and I think they sort of set the stage for us to probe the thinking here a little bit.

I mean, just as an overall comment, my reaction is that we have had purposefully different sort of views about where we are going to go here, but that does not make a policy. We have got to kind of pull it together into something coherent. And it strikes me that you have really got to sort of decide what our strategic interest is and what is, obviously, achievable and how do you go at this.

Now, do you all agree that—I mean, the rhetoric has been really clear by leaders here and elsewhere that Bashar al-Assad cannot stay and that one way or the other, he is going to go. I mean, it may be a prolonged, messy, bloody process, but ultimately most people are suggesting that there is an end. Is that correct? Are we all in agreement on that?

Dr. ALTERMAN. Sir, I think it is likely that he will have to go because of his own failures in leadership. I am not in the certainty business, and I cannot predict with certainty. But I would say there is more than 70, perhaps more than 80, percent likelihood in the next 3 years—

The CHAIRMAN. What is the implication if he did not go? If he succeeds in putting this down and he stays on, what are the implications for American policy for the Middle East?

Ms. Wittes.

Dr. WITTES. Well, Mr. Chairman, I think first of all, he would be weakened. That would make him fall back increasingly on that Iranian support. That would be his only lifeline. He would have absolutely zero incentive to refrain from the kind of troublesome behavior that we have occasionally intermittently seen from the Syrian regime over the years.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, let us be more explicit. So support for Hezbollah, threats to Israel, movement of Scuds, arming of people that we do not want to have arms, a whole bunch of other things, I assume you make the judgment, they would then be empowered and be more threatening to our interests. Would they not?

Dr. WITTES. I think that is the likeliest possibility if he hangs on.

The CHAIRMAN. Would not Iran take very, very significant confidence-building sense of whatever empowerment, et cetera if he did? What would it mean to Iran, Dr. Jouejati?

Dr. JOUEJATI. It would become even more formidable of a power. It would have a tremendous psychological boost and also a military boost in the area as it continues to have a reach into the Arab-Israeli conflict through the Syrian conduit. It would be emboldened vis-a-vis Gulf Arabs. If Bashar al-Assad survives, this is a major victory for Iran. It is a major victory for Hezbollah. If, on the other hand, Assad falls—and I never like to be clear-cut, but I think it is inevitable because there is simply no going back to business as usual—if he falls, that will greatly weaken Iran as it would no longer have that reach into the Arab-Israeli conflict. It would weak-

en Hezbollah, and I think then the Lebanese people can breathe freely.

The CHAIRMAN. So if you have an Alawite minority of about—what—11 percent of the population that is continuing to run the country with a Sunni majority and then a mix of others making up the rest of the population, what does that portend once this—I mean, this has been unleashed now. And it is not purely sectarian. I do not want to define it in that term, and I think you would all agree. It is not purely sectarian.

But if you have this awakening, spring, whatever you want to call it, this desire for change, desire for something different and the fact that you have a million and a half people displaced internally, 130,000 who are refugees outside, people with weapons who are going to continue to arm and fight, and 10,000 people to date killed, and as you have said, five of the six principal components of the Annan plan not being implemented and the sixth kind of viewed by most people as a delaying tactic as people are obviously being killed right in front of monitors, it seems to me that you have almost got a certainty guaranteed that struggle is going to continue. Does anybody here disagree with that?

Dr. JOUEJATI. I think when the Assad regime collapses, things will get worse before they get better. I think there will be many vendettas, a lot of vengeance killings. I think there will be many remnants of the regime who would want to show that there was stability under Assad and instability now through car bombs and IED's and so on.

The CHAIRMAN. But that is assuming they were in utter collapse. What I talked about in my opening, that conceivably diplomacy and pressure efforts with China, Russia—and if the Russian attitude on this changed and the Chinese attitude on this changed, I rather suspect that a lot of attitudes are going to change in Damascus and elsewhere. And then the question is could you conceivably have a more orderly transition process that is, in fact, negotiated and structured, not unlike Saleh in Yemen or some other examples we have seen in the past. So does it have to be a choice between an utter collapse and civil war or the continuation of the regime?

Dr. ALTERMAN. Mr. Chairman, my understanding—you have met Bashar al-Assad many more times than I have, although I have met him and he strikes me as somebody who is a little bit insecure, who has siblings and other family members who keep saying, “Why can you not be a man?” And I think under that circumstance, it is unlikely for him to make the kind of honorable deal to leave, because he does not have the confidence to make that deal.

Whether there could be some part of the regime which would agree to open up in the absence of Assad, some sort of split within the regime to lead to a more orderly transition, I think that is very feasible. I just do not know how to make it happen. But I think it is certainly feasible.

The CHAIRMAN. But as you move towards that, if the economic pressures were to be increased and you changed the dynamic with respect to the Free Syrian Army and the National Council, and you have this unity of purpose between the Turks, the Jordanians, the Emiratis, the Qataris, the Saudis, et cetera, plus the West, you have a pretty significant dynamic beginning to develop. Then the

calculations. I mean, you have already talked about the numbers of generals who have defected. I know for a fact there are a lot more colonels who have defected and a lot more people at lower levels.

So, I mean, the people's calculation begins to shift depending on how determined the outside world is. If the outside world is feckless and casting about and kind of, "oh, my gosh, we do not know what we can do, we cannot do much," et cetera, et cetera, boy, is that a message to them to go kill a few people and continue to do what they are doing. Is it not?

Dr. WITTES. Senator, I agree completely. I think that is precisely why diplomacy needs to focus on how effectively to maximize pressure on all of the supporters of the regime, whether it is military officers, people within the Alawite leadership, people within the business elites. All of these are important pillars of the regime, and you have got to start to chip away at their cohesion. I think if we can be successful at doing that, the likeliest outcome is not necessarily a negotiated transition but some kind of power grab or coup. And that would allow an opening for engagement with the opposition. But we would have to remain on guard to ensure that what follows is an open process.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, there are more questions. Let me turn to my colleagues. My time is up, but I think we have to start getting into a sort of reality track here rather than bouncing around the way everybody has been a little bit here.

The National Council is going to be here. Next week, this committee will be meeting with its members and I hope all our members will take the opportunity to come and meet with them and have this kind of discussion, and I think we can learn a great deal in doing so.

Senator Lugar.

Senator LUGAR. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As some of you have recounted the history of Arab Spring in recent months, in Tunisia essentially the regime resigned without much intervention from anywhere. When we came to Egypt, fairly early on the administration made statements to the effect that Mubarak must go. Of course, this situation was even more pronounced with regard to Libya. And for nearly 1 year, our President and our Secretary of State have said Bashar al-Assad of Syria must go.

As Dr. Alterman has pointed out, maybe the differences are that in Egypt essentially the military did not proceed to support Mubarak and, as a result, he did go. And largely the military took hold. Some would argue the military still maintains control despite the procedures toward election of representatives and maybe a president.

In the case of Libya, not only did Qadhafi not go very fast, but it really took extraordinary intervention by NATO countries to finally drive him out.

And now we come to the Syrian question, and the administration has indicated that Assad must go. The military in Syria still appears very strong despite desertions of some, and the military is pretty large in comparison with all of the potential opponents, even if they were consolidated and armed by people from outside. And so the military is probably in a position to defeat these folks. I

would say that the relationship between the leader, therefore, and the military is fairly critical, and perhaps there will be some who want to desert but others may see that as life-threatening for them as military officers and others. We received some reports questioning whether there are divisions between Alawites and the Sunnis or the officers and the enlisted personnel, but these reports are not very well developed at this point.

My point is that, as you pointed out, the military has not really been strained to date and probably will not be unless a lot of people are armed and somehow better organized, and that could take quite a long while if there is to be that kind of military conflict with or without Assad. Maybe he goes and the military fights it out with whoever else is there to maintain the status quo in the country.

Now, I mention all this because there is, I think, almost an illusion that our overall goal is somehow to formulate a government that is acceptable to the Syrian people, the implication being that there will be some degree of citizen participation and democratic procedures, yet I see no conceivable evidence that this is likely to occur within the next 5 years or the next decade. What could occur with or without Assad is a military dictatorship of people trying to pursue their own interests, and these may be sectarian interests quite apart from the military's interests as an institution.

Now, under those circumstances, we talk about diplomacy to bring about something, conceivably a cease-fire. But as I understand from press accounts, the administration as we speak is talking about some sort of a pivot to plan B in which maybe we talk about zones, zones on the border, in Syria, or elsewhere that offer relief or possibilities of organization or training to various elements. However, there is the implication that would create the need for somebody in our military or somebody else's military to guard the zones to make certain that the Syrian army did not simply mop them up. In essence, it may be not a full-scale military operation, but it does have implications of military involvement, I hope not our own.

Having just heard this sort of the analysis, why at the present time, first of all, have we been so intent on the fact that Assad must go? And second, if that continues to be our policy, are we prepared really to try to deal covertly with the Syrian military as the most likely reason why he would go? And if not, what other military? How do we organize this military? This is a real challenge to a very large army that is there now and that may fight for its existence.

Dr. Wittes, do you have a thought about this?

Dr. WITTES. Well, Senator, let me start by saying one general word, which is that fundamentally the American interest here is in stability. This crisis is deeply destabilizing. The longer it goes on, the more destabilizing it will be for Syria, for its immediate neighbors, and for the region as a whole. And I think the longer it goes on, the more likely it is to become intensely sectarian in a way that will be deleterious to our interests over the long term.

The second aspect of stability and the quest for stability here relates to the fundamental lesson of the Arab Awakening, which is that lasting stability in the Arab world is only going to come when

citizens feel that they have governments that are responsive and accountable. And until that happens, you are going to see these forms of dissent continue to emerge with all of the attendant consequences.

So having recognized those two realities on the ground, if you will, I think our interest is in finding a resolution to this that brings that new foundation for stability about as quickly as possible. And when it comes to the options for using coercive force to put more pressure on the regime and bring about a quick transition, we should not be thinking about acting alone. Syria's neighbors are the ones who are already suffering the consequences of this instability. They have the most direct stake. We are in very close contact with them, and we need to be sure that that conversation includes these types of options which they would have to be very directly involved in.

Senator LUGAR. Could I ask Mr. Alterman for a comment?

Dr. ALTERMAN. We have a hard time fine-tuning the outcome of political changes in other countries. We do not have very good instruments to do it. I think that we can have a broader coalition the less we try to fine-tune.

I was cautious about calling for Bashar al-Assad to go not because I do not want him to go, but because that then invites the question of "What are you doing?" And then, "OK, that is what you were doing last week?" What are you doing this week? And you start getting into a situation where the expectations of your abilities exceeds your abilities.

As I say, in my career I have seen several times when we have locked in to try to create change and we have often been moderately successful over a long period of time. Everybody at this table just lived through a year of fundamental change in the Middle East in which we played a very small role. So I think just in terms of the forces at work, we have to be modest about our ability to understand them, to steer them, and perhaps what we have to do is to find opportunities to work with them because we cannot generate them on our own.

Senator LUGAR. Yes, sir?

Dr. JOUEJATI. We have to be cautious and moderate, but every day of moderation and caution costs hundreds of lives. The Syrian people seek freedom, something that we stand for.

Assad must go because he is a mass murderer. There is a difference, of course, between Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria in that in Egypt and Tunisia historically the army has been at least semi-autonomous. In the case of Syria, the army is an instrument of regime power and that is because the ranking officers, whether in the Syrian army or in the Syrian intelligence services, are family and cronies and so on. When Assad goes—and he will go—this top layer will go with him, so that this powerful Syrian Army will be no more powerful. And we are seeing this by the defections of hundreds of soldiers on a weekly basis. The army will collapse.

Really there is no room to sit and negotiate with Assad for a transition toward democracy because the mind set in Damascus is not there. The mind set is that of security. And we see this very evidently through the cosmetic reforms that Assad has tried to put in place, whether it is a new constitution that takes, albeit, one ar-

ticle away, the dominance of the Baath, but gives all the authority to the President. Or in his party law in which the establishment of political parties is contingent upon the approval of his minister of the interior. So the mind set is that of security, and you cannot negotiate towards a transition to democracy with a mindset like this.

Syrians want freedom. They want democracy. And they have been ruled for the past 48 years with an authoritarian fist, single party, and for 41 years with family rule. Syrians, after independence, did taste freedom. They know what it is and they want to go back to the days of democracy. God knows we at the Syrian National Council are experiencing how democracy is messy, but that is good and we want it.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Senator Menendez.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for your testimony.

Dr. Wittes, I look at the Russians. I see that they are supporting the Annan cease-fire and the U.N. observer mission, but then I see the Russian Foreign Minister say that the Friends of Syria as a group should have no say in the evaluation of the process. I believe that to some degree the Russians are still supplying the Assad regime with arms.

So the question for me—I heard your comment about we have to bring Russia into the fold. They have to have a relationship or some type of position with Syria but not with Assad. What is the end game for them from your perspective? And how is it that we get their support? How do you bring them into the fold to do what we want to do which is to see the slaughter stop and at the same time get their support in a way that can help us do that since they are one of probably only two countries left that are really significantly supporting Assad at this point?

Dr. WITTES. Thank you, Senator. It is an excellent question and a challenging one.

But when I think about Russian interests in Syria, I think there are a couple of key points. One is the naval base at Tartus, and I think they would look for some assurance that they would be able to maintain access as a base for their Mediterranean operations.

More broadly, I think they want to know that it is not the intent of Western powers or of the other Arab States to shut Russia out diplomatically, economically of a future Syria, a Syria that is re-integrated into the Arab region. And I think it is partly through dialogue with us, partly through dialogue with the other Arab governments in the region, and partly through dialogue with the Syrian oppositionists that these assurances can be given.

Dr. ALTERMAN. Senator, one other component of this is that Russia and China, which have their own restive regions that are arguably in rebellion, and who have deep concern about regions that go into rebellion that displace sitting governments. One of the concerns they have is that if there is an independence movement that arises that is spontaneous, is able to bring the population together and throw off the existing government, that precedent is bad for Russia and it is bad for China. And one of the things that we will have to manage is the fact that while that may be very much our

desired goal, it is very unlikely we will be able to get them to sign on to support that goal.

What we can get them to sign onto is to avoid the Somali-ization of Syria, the fact that Syria would be a base for terrorism that would spread out because Syria is connected to the Caucasus, which has its own problems with terrorism. The Russians certainly have interests that we can build on, but one of their interests is not creating the kind of open, democratic Syria that Murhaf described.

Senator MENENDEZ. Let me ask one other set of questions, and that is, I look at our arsenal of peaceful diplomacy tools and largely it is the use of our aid and our trade as an inducement to countries to react in a certain way. It is the movement of international opinion when in fact there are regimes or governments who are subjective to international opinion. Many are not obviously. Then the only other element of peaceful diplomacy tools seems to me is the denial of aid or trade, which we generally refer to as sanctions. And while I do not revert to sanctions automatically, in a limited arsenal of peaceful diplomacy tools, it is sometimes the most significant thing you can do.

So I look at what we have seen so far at the impact sanctions on Syria, which has reportedly lost half of its assets which are valued at a bit over \$20 billion by the World Bank in 2010 as a result of sanctions.

This week, the French Foreign Minister called for additional sanctions to counter the authoritarian solidarity being provided to Assad's regime.

Do you support that view of the French Foreign Minister? Do you think that tighter sanctions, particularly by non-Western states, could significantly tighten the noose and force Assad into relinquishing power? I think, Dr. Jouejati, you mentioned in your testimony some of the elements of sanctions.

Also, as we are sanctioning Iran for a different set of purposes, obviously an economic squeeze on them continues to create less and less likelihood that they can help the Syrians at the end of the day.

So give me a sense of what more either we or our leadership in the world could seek to get other countries to do that would be meaningful in moving to our ultimate goal here.

Dr. JOUEJATI. Tightening sanctions would be a good thing and especially when it is done in concert with other nations so that there are no loopholes. Targeted sanctions are very good. The bad news is that by doing these targeted sanctions, this layer of people that have been targeted now will want to resist, will not want to defect anymore, therefore increasing the cohesion of the layers at the top.

But those who are really feeling it now are the people and the regime is justifying this by saying that the United States is the enemy. "It is the United States that is impoverishing you. And anyway, we in Syria, according to the regime, who have been in the axis of resistance for a long time and have been paying for our principal foreign policy—we are used to sanctions. And so let the U.S. and let Western powers impose sanctions. That is fine with us." Again, the Assad family does not feel it. It is the people.

Sanctions alone will not work, and there really needs to be a diplomacy, but a diplomacy backed with teeth.

Senator MENENDEZ. Do you think that if we had not had the sanctions, that those elements would have ultimately defected?

Dr. JOUEJATI. Well, I am very happy for the targeted sanctions against Bashar al-Assad and his wife and mother and so on. Some of the generals, however—and again, they need to be punished because they have blood on their hands. But I think this made a difference for them between defecting and not defecting. Those who have not had sanctions imposed on them I think are now in that area and considering if they can defect if this does not hurt their families.

Dr. ALTERMAN. Sir, if I may. One of the problems we have sanctioning Syria is that we have been sanctioning Syria for so long, there is not much left for us to sanction. One of the things that we have done is we have made it illegal for Syrian Arab Airlines to land in the United States. They do not have a plane that can make it across the ocean. So we are getting to that sort of level of sanctions.

So I think the important component of sanctions is not just to punish but also to hold out the promise that the pain can end when the policy ends. And I think one of the things that we have had a problem with is it easier to put on sanctions than take them off. But clearly for a lot of people, what we have to do is say this: “Yes, this is going to hurt, and we know it is going to hurt. But when this situation changes, it will stop hurting.” That is an inducement to change not an inducement to have the regime control the economy even more, which is one of the short-term effects of sanctions. But it can provoke a split in the leadership that could be very, very helpful.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Corker.

Senator CORKER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for having this hearing and the witnesses for being here.

Dr. Wittes, I appreciated your comment about stability is in our national interest in Syria. And that is counter to saying regime change. I mean, that is a very different thing. I just would like to ask all three of you for a brief response, not long. I have some other questions. But is it in our national interest that we have stability or is it in our national interest that we have regime change?

Dr. WITTES. Senator, my argument would be that until there is a change at the top in Syria, there will not be stability.

Dr. ALTERMAN. Sir, I think our interest is in stability and there are lots of ways to get there, but we are not on the course to there right now.

Dr. JOUEJATI. The Assad regime thrives on instability, and if it were to collapse, then there could be a real chance for stability.

Senator CORKER. Well, I appreciate that.

As I listen in the hallways and talk with other Senators and as we attend briefings together, you get a sense of sort of the tea leaves and what people are beginning to think. I know the administration is looking at a plan B. But one of the things that seems to be in conversation—this is not necessarily my point of view at all, but I think people are beginning to say, well, there are a couple things that need to happen.

No. 1, there needs to be these zones or a zone, whether it is in Turkey or whether it is inside of Syria, where at least the opposition groups can train and have a place to organize.

The other piece is that we should be arming the opposition groups because over time people are beginning to say, well, you know, Syria is going to collapse because of sanctions, because of other things, and what we need to do is give these opposition groups time. Obviously, they are outmanned. Syria has a 330,000-person army and the opposition group is small. But that seems to be the drift. That is what I think the center focus is becoming, at least in the United States Senate.

I would love for you all to respond to that. Obviously, the diplomatic efforts would continue, but I think the arming of the rebels is now becoming something that is more mainstream in thinking, and I would love to have your response to that.

Dr. ALTERMAN. Senator I think that the challenge of creating these safe zones is they have to genuinely be safe, and that is not a small achievement. It could mean either a significant military commitment by the United States and a whole series of allies, or the possibility the Syrian army would shell the zones creating a humanitarian disaster. I think it is an option that, if we consider it, is essentially amounting to war, because we are putting troops on somebody else's sovereign territory. We should do that with eyes open, not saying it is just a sort of temporary measure.

My concern about arming the groups is that as I think back to examples of armed opposition groups, it generally takes a decade, and they do not always win. I remember the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. I remember the Contras in Nicaragua. There have been examples of our efforts to create these armed groups, and I cannot think of a lot of examples where they have been successful in 6 months, 9 months. My recollection is that they often take a very long time and are not always successful.

I think where this regime is vulnerable is precisely what we learned from Egypt and Tunisia. When the institutions at the top of the regime feel that all of their legitimacy is being compromised because hundreds of thousands of people are in the streets, that is when the regime shakes because the institutions break apart. I think we have to be looking for that kind of split. That is the faster split. That is the cleaner split. I think that is the split that leads to a better outcome for Syria. I worry that the context may change before Syria changes. I do not know what the situation is going to be with terrorism in the Middle East over the next 5 to 10 years. I do not know what anything is going to be in the Middle East for the next 5 to 10 years. And if we are investing in a 10-year process of military-led change in Syria, the whole context could change dramatically in the next 2 years, and I do not know where that leaves us, and I certainly do not know where it leaves Syria.

Senator CORKER. Dr. Wittes.

Dr. WITES. Thank you, Senator.

I guess two things. On the issue of safe zones or humanitarian corridors, I think it is important for us to have firmly in mind what is our goal in doing this. Is our goal to provide an arena in which armed opposition can organize and train? Is our goal to provide humanitarian relief and a way in which refugees can get out of en-

dangered zones? Is our goal to ensure the security of Syria's neighbors in the course of the spiraling instability of this conflict?

And I would argue that the third is probably the most important function for any moves along these border areas. If nothing else, we must contain the impact of this conflict on the region. We must contain the possibility for ripple effects. And that means that I think we want Turkey, we want Iraq, we want the other neighbors to lead here. What is most important to them? What are they willing to have on their territory and what are they willing to do in order to ensure the security of their own borders?

Senator CORKER. But they are not going to do that without us being involved. If we keep going down the path of the armed rebels base and just how that ends up—so for that to happen, our military is going to be involved in some form or fashion. Arming rebels obviously is the opposite of what Russia is now doing. They are arming Syria. So play that out, if you will. You know, where does that go? Because it would involve us having, I would think, some type of boots on the ground or something else happening in that regard in direct conflict to another P5 member.

Dr. WITTES. Senator, first of all, I do not think that direct American involvement, certainly not in the form of boots on the ground, is necessary. I think in the other cases that Dr. Alterman mentioned, we did not have military boots on the ground as we were arming these insurgencies.

What I would say, though, is that insurgencies very rarely succeed in overthrowing governments. The goal here would not be to arm oppositionists so that they can overthrow the regime. The goal would be to help these oppositionists use military pressure to fracture the regime. And so it is less a question of—

The other point I think it is important to make is that they are getting weapons. They will get weapons. If we do not organize the means by which they get means to use force and the ways in which they use it, others will do that, and they will not necessarily do it in a way that is going to be helpful to stabilizing the situation or achieving the goals we seek.

Senator CORKER. So you would, though, support arming the opposition groups, Americans, the U.S. Government being involved in arming the opposition groups.

Dr. WITTES. I think we need to be dealing with those who are already very interested in doing that and maybe even already doing it and trying to corral their efforts.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Corker.

Senator Cardin.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to follow up on Dr. Wittes' point.

But let me thank you for these hearings. We have had a series of hearings on Syria, and I have found them all extremely helpful, including the panel we have here today.

There is, I think, a growing understanding of the dilemma that we face. We need to see a regime change in Syria. I think that is not just the assessment of the United States, but the international assessment.

And, Dr. Alterman, you make an observation which I share. Having met Assad, I agree that the likelihood of President Assad step-

ping aside voluntarily is rather remote. That is probably the least likely way that we would get a regime change.

We could get a regime change by the opposition becoming so strong that it overthrows the Government. We have been talking about that now for several months, and there is no indication that that could happen anytime soon for many reasons, a lot of which we have talked about before.

So it seems to me the most likely scenario for a regime change in the shortest amount of time is that there is a fracturing of the regime, as Dr. Wittes points out, where there is an acknowledgment among the rulers that we better cut our losses and do the best we can and Assad has got to go. I mean, I think that is the most likely scenario in the short term.

What worries me, Dr. Alterman, by your observation is that we have to pace ourselves. I think that is the term you used. To me that sounds like a frozen conflict, and that is not good for the United States. That is not good for the international community. Misery will continue. People will be killed. And we have not even talked about the displaced people, the tens of thousands that are no longer living in their homes, some of which are in surrounding countries causing a problem within the surrounding countries.

We have talked about that a frozen conflict helps Iran. They become more relevant, and they very much would welcome the instability in Syria.

And of course, it promotes fear and instability in the region, all of which are against U.S. interests.

So a frozen conflict is not in our interest. We need to get things moving, which brings me to how do you bring about a change as quickly as possible. And I think, Dr. Wittes, you pointed it out. The stronger the opposition becomes, the more likely the Government will recognize that they have a serious problem that has to be dealt with and the more likely it is that they will get rid of President Assad. I think that is what we are all saying.

Now, the challenge here—and I think that Senator Corker pointed this out—is that as long as the level of opposition is manageable, President Assad can likely maintain his control in the country. But as the level gets to a point that really challenges the ability of Assad to keep control, we will, I think, reach that tipping point where we have the best possible chance for a regime change.

So it comes back to the point we have all been sort of tiptoeing around. It seems like the United States has been very timid in its helping of the opposition. Now, we all understand we do not want to get involved in a military conflict. We know that. We are not talking about boots on the ground. But there are a lot of options short of that that the United States could take a stronger leadership position in order to facilitate the opposition, making it more likely we can get to a regime change sooner rather than later.

And I think that is the point, Mr. Chairman, that we have been all sort of talking about and how can we do that. We know we have heard a lot of reports about the opposition, how they are fractionalized. They have their own little niche. They need to work together. They need to be trained. They need to be able to communicate. They need to be able to do this in a safe environment. And I under-

stand the challenges of maintaining territorial integrity for them to train, but there are other issues that also could be done.

So I guess I am just putting out what I think is the observations here and ask the panelists are there specific areas where the United States could exercise stronger leadership that could embolden the opposition to facilitate a regime change in Syria. Specific areas.

Dr. JOUEJATI. If I may, Senator. Thank you very much for this. Yes. It is not only that the stronger the opposition, the weaker the regime, but I think we should be making the regime increasingly irrelevant and that is by these safe zones and safe corridors. Now, remember, there are neighborhoods in cities like Homs who have not received medicine in over a month and no electricity and no water. If we are able to make safe corridors to funnel to them humanitarian relief, then the Assad regime in this area of Syria would become irrelevant and therefore weak.

With regard to arming the opposition, let us not forget this started as a peaceful revolution and the Free Syrian Army emerged only as a result of defected soldiers who would not accept to shoot at their fellow citizens. Now the opposition is armed. Do we leave them twisting in the wind with a huge imbalance of power? And as you mentioned, Senator, Russia is arming the Syrians, so is Iran, even the Mahdi Army making a presence in Syria, Hezbollah.

I am a man of peace and I wanted this to be a peaceful revolution, but then imagine the perception on the Syrian street of the United States not helping those who are trying to fight for their freedom. Yesterday, literally yesterday, I had a phone call with folks on the ground in Syria, and they asked me if the United States is in cahoots with the Assad regime.

And so these safe zones and safe corridors I think could make the Assad regime irrelevant in those areas. And again, engaging with the opposition, whether the Free Syrian Army or the Syrian National Council, would be a good thing. Let us not forget the Syrian National Council is the product of—it was established only in October, and it is remarkable that the Syrian National Council has crossed the distance that it has knowing that the Syrians have not been able to do politics for the past 50 years.

Senator CARDIN. Dr. Alterman.

Dr. ALTERMAN. Senator, I am cautious about our ability to be more patriotic than Syrians themselves, and I think that the more we visibly support opposition groups, we run the danger of delegitimizing these opposition groups. The fact is there is a diversity of views in Syria about the regime. There is a diversity of views in Syria about the opposition. A lot of the trading families in Damascus and Aleppo, a lot of the urban middle classes feel that if they go the route of regime change, it will be chaos and disaster. It will be everything they cannot stand. And from their perspective, if you respect the rules of Assad, which is you do not get involved in politics and you keep your head down, and if you make money and you pay off the right people, you are fine. Those people have not switched. When we are thinking about what our role should be, our role has to be to persuade those people who are currently in the camp of the Assad regime to switch over.

The way we deal with the opposition should be careful not to do anything to make the opposition less attractive to those people. Instead, we need to be thinking about ways to make the opposition more attractive to those people, because I think when those people go, that will be the fulcrum of change in Syria.

Dr. WITTES. I will just add very briefly I think Jon is exactly right on this point, and this is why I think it is so important that we support the opposition in developing clear visions for what a post-Assad Syria will look like. It is that vision that will help build bridges amongst these fractious groups. They may not be able to agree on ideology or on identity, but they can agree on some things about what Syria should look like. And it is that vision that will provide assurances to those constituencies inside Syria that are right now sitting on the fence, whether it is the commercial elite, ethnic minorities, or others.

The CHAIRMAN. So what will persuade them, Jon, if I can just intersperse with the Senator. What would persuade them? You say we've got to persuade them. What is going to do it?

Dr. ALTERMAN. Partly it is this sense of holding out a vision for what post-Assad Syria looks like. Partly it has to do—

The CHAIRMAN. Supposing you hold out the best vision in the world and Assad continues to kill people and holds the dominant power.

Dr. ALTERMAN. As I say, I think that our goal needs to be to present Syrians with a choice, that there is a choice that is painful, economically painful, to many people, or there is a choice which is less painful. And I think that that means we have to send clear signals about the kinds of people we would be willing to work with and the kinds of people we would not be willing to work with. The precedent we set in Iraq with de-Baathification I think is a precedent that many people in Syria look at.

The CHAIRMAN. How does it matter who we are willing to work with or not work with if Assad is in a position just to sit there?

Senator CARDIN. That is right.

Dr. ALTERMAN. As I say, I think we have to pressure Assad, but what we also have to do is send signals to people that we would not repeat the experience we had with de-Baathification in Iraq where anybody who was a member of the Baath Party was pushed out because there are many people who are close to the regime. What we precisely want is for them to think that they have—

The CHAIRMAN. So basically what you are banking on is just an internal upheaval. You are banking on a coup.

Dr. ALTERMAN. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. That is it.

Dr. ALTERMAN. Well, it is not it. And I think there are probably things we—

The CHAIRMAN. What else are you banking on if you are not banking on that? What else is going to happen if all you do is hold a vision out there and say do this? If there is not a coup, nothing happens.

Dr. ALTERMAN. Or some sort of transition that comes after massive demonstrations in the street.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, OK, massive demonstrations.

How are they going to have massive demonstrations after all of this which has gone on? They cannot have a massive demonstration now. And if Assad is in a stronger position because the only thing held out there is a vision, it seems to me he is going to say, boy, I got the best of this deal. Let us go out and kill them.

Senator CARDIN. And Mr. Chairman, I think we are heading towards a frozen conflict which is the worst of all scenarios with Assad staying in power unless we try to change the equation.

The CHAIRMAN. Anyway, I do not want to go around and around. Senator Udall.

Senator UDALL. Thank you, Senator Kerry, and thank you for holding this hearing. Very, very important and timely and thank you to the panelists.

Sorry to be a little late. I had to bring the Senate in this morning and stay over there and preside up until 11:00.

Let me ask about the situation with the unarmed observers. Are they really capable of keeping the peace? And should the United Nations be considering armed peacekeepers as part of a cease-fire agreement? And would such a plan be feasible given the likelihood that China and Russia may oppose such a plan? Please, any of the panelists on that.

Dr. WITES. Thank you, Senator.

The effectiveness of a cease-fire is entirely dependent on the will of Bashar al-Assad to comply with it. So far, that has proven to be extremely limited. So I think the hope among those who supported the Annan plan was that a cease-fire would allow the resurgence of peaceful protests and generate the kind of pressure that Dr. Alterman has been talking about. That appeared to be a bit in play on Friday when there were many large demonstrations across Syria, but the escalating violence since then I think has proven the limits of that strategy. And the more time we spend arguing with Assad over what the rules will be for the monitors, how many monitors, where they are allowed to go, how they will be protected, and so on, the more opportunity he has to persuade those around him that he is there for good and they just need to accommodate themselves to that fact. So I think if what we are looking to do is fracture the pillars of the regime, banking on a cease-fire and monitors is going to send us in the wrong direction.

Dr. JOUEJATI. Monitors are good only in the sense that they expose the Assad regime. Assad cannot allow peaceful demonstrations. He will shoot at them. He knows of no other way. And so it is good to have monitors there. Yesterday is a case in point as there was a peaceful demonstration in Arbine. The demonstrators were shot at in full view of the six monitors that are in Syria, by the way. There are an expected other 30 monitors. That is less monitors in a state in which there is war than in a soccer match; FIFA sends usually more monitors than this.

At any rate, it is a good thing to have monitors again to expose the Assad regime. It is not only in terms of pulling back heavy armor. We want to see international journalists with unfettered access in Syria. We want to see international humanitarian relief, and we want to see civilian demonstrators peacefully demonstrating without being shot at. And it is only monitors on the ground that would be able to support such a thing.

Caveat: The Assad regime wants to be in charge of the movement of these monitors, wants to be with them, and even wants to impose the nationality of these monitors. Now, the Syrian Government, for example, is very happy that some of the monitors are Russian and Chinese because, according to the Foreign Minister of Syria yesterday, “these are from neutral countries.”

Dr. ALTERMAN. I very much agree the point of monitors is to expose the illegitimacy of the actions of the Government. I think it is very unlikely that monitors are going to actually be able to prevent something, but it can bring countries in because they feel they have a stake because their monitors are there and are put in danger because of the actions of the Government. That helps build this international coalition to build escalating pressure. It helps keep the Arab League pressuring Bashar al-Assad.

Certainly one of the things I worry about—it sounds like there are several people who feel it could not get worse. I think it could get worse. One of the ways it could get worse is if Assad is successful in negotiating a way back into the Arab fold, a way back into mending his relations with Turkey. I do not think any of that is going to happen now, but it may be his 2- to 3-year plan, and I think that puts us in a much more difficult situation. It leaves him much more entrenched in Syria, one of the things we should work to prevent.

Senator UDALL. Now, with the United Nations seeing what is going on—if they, as part of this cease-fire, would begin considering sending armed peacekeepers in, does that change the equation at all? Is it a certainty that both Russia and China oppose something like that?

Dr. JOUEJATI. I think armed or unarmed, the Assad regime will continue to try, as best as is possible, to manipulate these monitors because this is the only game it is used to.

Dr. ALTERMAN. To my mind, the way to leverage the Russians and the Chinese is to persuade them that the route we are on is a route that leads to chaos, which they do not want and which we agree with them that we do not want. I do not think we are quite at that point now, and my guess would be that both Russia and China would oppose armed monitors. I do not think they feel we are at the point of crisis yet, but that point may be coming soon and we should be alert to opportunities to work with them on that.

Senator UDALL. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Chairman Kerry.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Senator Lugar, do you have more questions?

Senator LUGAR. No.

The CHAIRMAN. Folks, this has been helpful in, obviously, clarifying what is unclarifiable. There are some unknowns here, needless to say, and that complicates this. But I think it has been good to vet how there are some very specific things that need to be pinned down more carefully in the near term, and I think that is part of the reason for the meeting with the National Council. That is part of the reason for people now looking very carefully at what the options are, kinetic and otherwise, because if anything is certain, we have to act in a way that does address our interests. And

I think everybody accepts that stability is key and there may be differences as to what will bring stability.

But I think there are things we can do. I think there is more there than meets the eye. I think that there are ways to bring significant pressures to bear and change people's calculations. And I think that is the key thing to kind of work through now very, very carefully. I do not think any of you agree that we should sit there and do nothing or that there should be a status quo, and that is an important message in and of itself. Secretary Clinton is meeting I think right now in Paris, as I mentioned earlier. I think we need to see what the results of those discussions are and other discussions.

I was in Qatar recently. I met with the Emir, the Prime Minister, and they were very clear about what they are willing to do. I have talked to the Foreign Ministers of both Jordan and Turkey. They are very concerned and are prepared to do things. People are prepared to put both money and forces into a place of opposition to this status quo.

And it is also not unimportant at all that the Arab League has taken the steps that it has and that the GCC—they are leading. So nobody should think that this is the United States casting about for how do we something on our own. The Arab world is very concerned about this, and for the League to expel or suspend relations with a member is no small step, and for the GCC, likewise, to have expressed its concerns and need to do something. Now, obviously, there is a lot of geopolitics involved in all of those steps, but they are not inconsequential.

So what is important is we are beginning to really give this the light of day that it needs. There is a lot of thinking going on, and we need to try to pull those thoughts together as rapidly as possible.

So we thank you very much for sharing.

We are going to leave the record open for a week. Colleagues may want to submit some questions in writing and complete the record here.

And we are very grateful to all of you. Thanks for coming. Dr. Alterman, thanks for coming back. Glad to have you on the other side of the table. I think you have a lot wisdom in a lot of things you said here today about past experiences and cautions about what our expectations ought to be. And we need to measure all of that together with Dr. Jouejati's and Ms. Wittes' clear sense of what will make a difference and what will not. So that is our task. Thank you very much.

And we stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:40 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]