

**CONFRONTING DAMASCUS: U.S. POLICY TOWARD
THE EVOLVING SITUATION IN SYRIA**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA
OF THE
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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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CONFRONTING DAMASCUS: U.S. POLICY TOWARD THE EVOLVING SITUATION IN SYRIA

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2011

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST
AND SOUTH ASIA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 o'clock a.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Steve Chabot (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. CHABOT. I want to wish everyone good morning. I want to welcome all of my colleagues to this hearing of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia. I am Steve Chabot, the chairman.

As has been well-documented, the human rights abuses being perpetrated by the regime in Damascus are simply horrifying. The Report of the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic documents some of the most appalling and widespread human rights abuses that have been witnessed in recent memory.

The commission explicitly notes extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detention, torture, sexual violence, and, perhaps most disturbingly, the abuse and murder of children. Witnesses interviewed by the commission are reported to have witnessed the torture, rape, and murder of children no older than 15 at the hands of the Syrian security forces.

One military defector, the report noted, stated that he decided to defect after witnessing the shooting of a 2-year-old girl by an officer who affirmed that he did not want her to grow into a demonstrator.

The English language does not have words strong enough to adequately condemn the horrifying abuses that have been committed by the Assad regime and its allies against the Syrian people.

Beyond questions of legitimacy, these despicable acts are proof that the Assad regime is morally depraved and it is my belief that we and all other responsible nations have a moral imperative to ensure that Assad and his ilk are removed from power as soon as possible.

According to Navi Pillay, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, the civilian death toll in Syria now exceeds 5,000 and the number of children killed is more than 300. No responsible nation can sit by and allow this detestable display of depravity to continue.

Today's hearing, however, was called to examine U.S. policy. Several months ago, this subcommittee had the privilege of hearing Assistant Secretaries Feltman and Posner discuss the Obama administration's human rights policies toward Iran and Syria. Since that hearing, the administration has taken a number of steps on Syria for which it deserves credit.

Although it took far too much time and at least 1,900 dead Syrian citizens, the administration has finally come out and called for Bashar al-Assad's departure from power on August 18. It also implemented sanctions against the Government of Syria and various high-ranking Syrian regime authorities, many of which have been mirrored by our allies abroad.

Unfortunately, I fear this is not enough. Syria currently stands on the precipice of full-scale civil war. Recent reports suggest that the ranks of the Free Syrian Army—the main armed opposition—continue to swell, likely fueled by a rise in defections and the intensified violence being perpetrated against the Syrian people by Assad and his band of thugs.

As a result, the number of confrontations between the regime and the armed opposition is on the rise. The longer Assad remains in power, the more likely this conflict is to degenerate into a prolonged conflict that risks splitting the country along ethnic and sectarian lines.

To date, the administration has strongly discouraged all armed opposition in Syria. In his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs, Assistant Secretary Feltman stated that "We do not want to see the situation descend into further violence. The best way forward is to continue support for the non-violent opposition while working with international partners to further isolate and to further pressure the regime . . . While we understand the Syrian people need to protect themselves, violent resistance is counter-productive. It will play into the regime's hands. It will divide the opposition. It will undermine international consensus."

This policy of encouraging non-violence in the face of the brutal tactics of the Assad regime grows more untenable by the day. It is not our prerogative to tell the Syrian opposition to eschew armed resistance against the Assad regime when it is that very regime that continues to torture, rape, and murder the very citizens who comprise the opposition's ranks. It must be pointed out to those who maintain that only non-violent opposition is legitimate that it was the Assad regime and not the opposition which initiated the violence.

The Syrian people, like all people, have the right to defend themselves against the brutality of an illegitimate and repressive regime. Moreover, I challenge any who would defend the Assad regime by declaring that Assad is merely quelling an internal insurrection to show the Syrian people by what free and fair means Bashar al-Assad, or his father, attained and maintain power.

This regime has declared war on the Syrian people and the Syrian people have a right to fight back; we must stand with them in this struggle. As helpful as international consensus may be, the outrageous and indefensible veto by Russia and China of a U.N. Security Council resolution against Syria does not inspire hope that

the broader international community will be galvanized to any kind of consensus in time to stave off more death and the outbreak of civil war.

When this uprising began, many in Washington were fond of pointing out that, unlike his father who murdered over 20,000 of his own citizens to quell an uprising, Bashar al-Assad does not have the stomach for such brutality. They were wrong. It is time for us to face the fact that there are no depths to which Assad and his regime will not resort to remain in power and to crush all legitimate opposition.

Asking Syrian protestors to remain peaceful in the face of Assad's brutal crackdown is tantamount to asking them to commit suicide and I fear that doing so may eventually pit us against a legitimate opposition instead of against an illegitimate regime.

When this uprising began, many in Washington were fond of pointing out that, unlike his father who murdered over 20,000 of his own citizens to quell an uprising, Bashar al-Assad does not have the stomach for such brutality. They were wrong. It is time for us to face the fact that there are no depths to which the Assad regime will not resort to remain in power and to crush all legitimate opposition.

Asking Syrian protestors to remain peaceful in the face of Assad's brutal crackdown is tantamount to asking them to commit suicide and I fear that doing so may eventually pit us against a legitimate opposition instead of against an illegitimate regime.

I now yield to the gentleman from New York, the distinguished ranking member from New York, Mr. Ackerman, for 5 minutes.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you, Chairman, very much for calling this very, very important hearing and selecting our excellent witness today.

I, too, think it is worth considering how far U.S. policy has moved in the right direction since late July when we met with Obama administration officials to discuss the situation in Syria as well as Iran.

Back in July the central policy questions regarding Syria were, when would the United States finally and explicitly call for Bashar al-Assad to step down, when would we finally impose the sanctions available to us, and when would American leadership work to move the international community to recognize and respond to the vast horror of the Assad regime's oppression.

The answer to those questions came in August when the Obama administration moved decisively on all three elements. Later than some of us wished, but with more effect than many expected.

The international sanctions organized by the administration in consultation with allies in Europe and with Turkey, together with subsequent sanctions by the Arab League, have made it clear that the Assad regime's days are numbered.

The Assad gang's rule, which has been characterized at home by unparalleled brutality and endemic corruption, and abroad by support for Iranian hegemony, the subversion of Lebanon's independence, state support for terrorism against Israel, and illicit efforts at nuclear proliferation, is doomed and deservedly so.

Clearly, the people of Syria have embraced their fundamental right to determine not only who will govern Syria, but the form of

government as well. We wish for them what we desire for ourselves; a democratic government circumscribed by law, accountable to the public and bound to respect the fundamental rights of the people from whom its powers are derived.

In Syria today there are sharp divisions between ethnicities and religions, between believers in non-violence and proponents of violent resistance to tear down the Assad regime. There are splits between internal activists and external dissidents, between Army defectors and civil society leaders.

I would say to all those Syrians distraught by the lack of unity and common purpose, welcome to the wonderful world of democratic self-government. Your freedom will not come easily and certainly not without a great struggle to create a common front in throwing off the Assad tyranny.

And it won't get easier. It just won't. Self-government is the hardest form of government and the most complex. But if you want simple and easy, stick with what you have. Bashar al-Assad and his piggish band of crooks, killers and torturers of children will gladly go back to the way things were.

As we in the United States contemplate the end of the Assad regime, events in other parts of the region are giving many here some pause in their enthusiasm. The Syrians who replace the Assad tyranny may not be Jeffersonian democrats.

As in other Arab countries, the most politically coherent and well-organized forces in Syrian society are apt to be those who are organized around religious beliefs. These men and women are not likely to consider themselves our natural allies. This fact does not necessarily imply that they are, or need to be, our enemies.

In the years to come, a great experiment will likely take place throughout the Middle East to determine whether Islamic and democratic norms can comfortably co-exist. Some may doubt it.

It often seems to me that many of those most insistent that the conflict between mosque and state is irreconcilable seem to also be among the most enthusiastic when it comes to lowering the wall between church and state here in America. Perhaps they know something the rest of us do not.

I believe there is reason for hope as well. Democratic norms that are won by the people who have championed these principles in their own voices, and who have won their freedom with their own courage, may prove difficult to set aside, in the Middle East as much as anywhere else.

Moreover, we see in a number of other Islamic nations outside of the Arab world the development of governments that while not perfect, are recognizably legitimate, democratic and bound by the rule of law.

Just as we cannot assume success, it would be equally unwise to assume that the Arab revolutions cannot ultimately flower into democratic forms. These new Arab governments will likely take different forms than we would desire for ourselves, but may still remain legitimate and acceptable to their owners. It is, at any rate, too soon to tell.

Our role in these momentous events is to lend what aid we prudently can and to remain consistent advocates of the truths declared to the world on July 4, 1776: That all people are born free

and equal; that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed; and that each of us is endowed with inalienable rights.

If we believe these things are as right and true today as they were on that glorious July 4th, we must also believe they are right and true everywhere, and not least where the bloody hand of oppression lies most heavily.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much.

The chair will now recognize members for 1 minute if they would like to make an opening statement in the order that they arrived.

Mr. Rohrabacher from California, the chair of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, is recognized for 1 minute.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. First of all, I would like to thank the chairman, Mr. Chabot, for holding this hearing. I think that we have many jobs as Members of Congress and one is to make sure that the word gets out to the American people about things that are happening overseas that are dealing directly with our values as a people.

As we have just heard from the ranking member, that there is an uprising going on in Syria that goes right to the heart of what our ideals are as Americans. I am anxious to hear the details. This has been one conflict that I have actually been looking at from a distance and have not really been able to determine what those details are.

I am looking forward to the witness. Let me just note that when we talk about the Assad family, the dictatorship they have had, that is a secular dictatorship, something that we oppose. The mullah dictatorship in Iran is also something we oppose even though that, of course, is a totally religious mullah dictatorship. I guess what Americans are all about is that we are against dictators and dictatorships and brutality and want to hear the details. Thank you very much.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you.

The gentlemen from Kentucky, Mr. Chandler, is recognized if he would like to make a statement.

The gentleman from New York, Mr. Turner.

Mr. TURNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I hope that these hearings will encourage a defined and proactive U.S. policy toward the removal of Assad. I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you.

The gentleman from New York, Mr. Higgins.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing. I am pleased to see that President Obama and leaders around the world have called on Bashar al-Assad to step down. The oppressive Assad regime has terrorized the Syrian people for far too long. The brutal actions threaten humanity and they need to be stopped.

Our country, along with the European Union, has the right to issue strong sanctions against Syria to deny them revenues that are used to finance their abuse of the Syrian people. We must remain steadfast in our efforts to give the Syrian people what they want and deserve.

That being a government representative and responsive to the people. I look forward to hearing the testimony of the witnesses today and engaging them in how we can help the Syrians who have been oppressed for too long to finally have the government they want and deserve. I held back.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you.

The gentleman from Nebraska, Mr. Fortenberry.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the interest of time I will yield back but I would like to thank the witness for appearing today and for your willingness to hold this hearing.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you.

The gentleman from Connecticut, Mr. Murphy.

Mr. MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Looking forward to the testimony today. I think we have learned a lot of lessons over the past decade about the difference between unilateral action and multilateral action. With the cooperation and willingness of Turkey and the Arab League to join with us in whole or in part in some of these actions to put pressure on the Assad regime.

Looking forward to comments today from a witness as to how we can move forward with partners in seeking an outcome that is best for the region and best of the people of Syria and the United States.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you.

I will now introduce our distinguished witness here this morning, Frederic C. Hof. He is the Special Coordinator for Regional Affairs. Returned to government service in 2009 to lead the Special Envoy for Middle East Peace efforts to achieve Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli peace agreements, and to advise the Secretary of State and other senior U.S. officials on Levantine political and security issues.

Since early 2010 he has coordinated the Department of State's and broader U.S. Government's response to the crisis in Syria. Mr. Hof previously held senior positions at the Departments of State and Defense before serving as present and CEO of AALC, an international consultancy. He is a Vietnam War Veteran and holds a Purple Heart along with other military decorations and civilian awards.

We want to particularly thank you for your service to our country, Mr. Hof. Without further ado, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MR. FREDERIC C. HOF, SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR REGIONAL AFFAIRS, OFFICE OF THE U.S. SPECIAL ENVOY FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Mr. HOF. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ackerman, distinguished members of the subcommittee. I am deeply honor to have this opportunity to discuss Syria with you this morning and I greatly appreciate the invitation to do so.

You have my statement. I will dispense with reading it. I have a few comments that I hope sincerely will help us frame the discussion we can have this morning.

Nine months ago the President of Syria elected to respond to peaceful protest with violence and brutality. For 9 months he has stayed on course, a course featuring death, incarceration, torture, and terror. Is it any wonder that peaceful protest threatened to morph into violent resistance? Is it any wonder that a regime and its death throes trying to save itself would rather risk civil war than implement the modest steps called for by the Arab League to restore the peace.

In his recent interview with Barbara Walters, the person who slings to the title President of the Syrian Arab Republic disclaimed any personal responsibility for the regime's war on the Syrian people. "They are not my forces" he protested. "They are military forces belonging to the government."

It is difficult to imagine a more craven disclaimer of responsibility. Perhaps it is a rehearsal for the time when accountability will come. For now, however, it is a clear message to all who serve this regime. Your President claims to see, hear, and know nothing. Whether you are a private in an infantry squad or a minister of government, your President will place the blame for crimes committed squarely on you.

In another sense, however, President Assad performed an important, if accidental, service in drawing a distinction between himself and the Syrian state. It is a distinction that the Syrian opposition led by the Syrian National Council is making as it draws up detailed plans for Syria's transition from dictatorship to rule of law. It is the distinction between a corrupt and competent, brutal and, yes, dying regime and the state to which it has attached itself like a barnacle.

It is the distinction between a family enterprise that has exploited the labor of over 20 million Syrians to enrich itself and a state structure which at least in theory is suppose to provide basic services to its citizens.

The Syrian National Council is making it clear that the regime, the Assad-Makhlouf family clique, must go. Yet, the state for all of its warts and weaknesses, must stay to provide basic services and to help facilitate the transition.

By drawing this distinction, Syria's opposition is performing two vital services. It is helping to guarantee that if the regime leaves peacefully and quickly there will be no prospect of state failure. No prospect of chaos. It is reaching out to Syria's minorities who fear the prospect of wrenching change even as they despise the corruption, incompetence, and brutality of the regime.

Still, there is scant evidence that this regime has any intention of saving Syria as it tries to save itself. The longer this regime remains in power, the greater the chances are that Syria will dissolve into bloody sectarian conflict. This would be disastrous for Syria. It would be disastrous for its neighbors.

How to avoid it without the voluntary stepping aside of a reckless regime is problematical. No one, least of all the United States, is seeking to militarize the situation. The closest we have to international consensus at the moment is that the regime must implement the steps called for by the Arab League immediately and unconditionally. But it will not likely do so.

One of our most urgent tasks is to work with others to try to prevent this peaceful uprising from morphing into armed insurrection that would discredit the opposition, reinforce the regime's narrative, complicate international support, and most likely lead to a bloody and protracted conflict.

Therefore, my bottom line is this; Bashar al-Assad's policy of violent repression will run Syria's economy off the rails. If he is willing to preside over Pyongyang in the Levant and if he keeps what the Gulf Cooperation Council has labeled his killing machine intact, he may hang on for a period of time. We will certainly keep up the pressure and try to peel away his apologists and enablers in the international community but the nightmare of the Syrian people may be far from over.

Their nightmare will, however end. Our job is to try to ensure it ends sooner rather than later and with as little damage to the institutions of the Syrian state and the unity and the well being of the Syrian people as possible.

Bashar al-Assad and his inner circle can best contribute to the welfare of their countrymen by stepping aside now without delay. When the regime is gone, the Syrian people can be assured that they will have plenty of help in rebuilding and reforming their state and recovering the honor and dignity squandered by those who have served themselves at Syria's expense.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to comments and questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hof follows:]

WRITTEN STATEMENT
FREDERIC HOF,
SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR REGIONAL AFFAIRS,
OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL ENVOY FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND
SOUTH ASIA
"U.S. POLICY TOWARD THE EVOLVING SITUATION IN SYRIA"
December 14, 2011

Chairman Chabot, Ranking Member Ackerman, Distinguished Members of the Committee: thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss the evolving situation in Syria and the prospects for a successful transition to legitimate, democratic governance.

In March of this year Bashar al-Assad abrogated, in a practical if not legal sense, his responsibilities to the Syrian people. By unleashing uniformed security forces and armed gangs against citizens seeking peaceful political change, his regime wrote and signed its own political obituary. In a desperate attempt to preserve itself, his regime is willing to sacrifice the safety of the Syrian people, the unity of the Syrian nation, the institutions of the Syrian state and the stability of the region.

The last six weeks have seen the Syrian regime sink to an unprecedented level of regional and international isolation. The Arab League suspended Syria's membership and, for the first time in the organization's history, imposed comprehensive sanctions against the regime. Turkey suspended strategic cooperation with Syria, adopted tough trade and financial measures, and joined the United States and Europe in calling for Assad to step down. The UN Human Rights Council held its third special session on Syria, drawing the largest number of co-sponsors of any session since the Human Rights Council was created, and passed a resolution strongly condemning the ongoing abuse of Syrian civilians. The message of these developments is clear: the regime's crimes will not be tolerated by the Syrian people or the international community.

Meanwhile, the United States and the European Union expanded our already crippling sanctions, designating more individuals and entities that

have aided or abetted the regime's human rights abuses and repression of the Syrian people. We are working with our international partners to identify and freeze regime assets while taking diplomatic action to ensure that third parties do not help the regime to evade our sanctions. These efforts are working. The regime is in dire financial straits and has angered its few remaining supporters with misguided attempts at economic protectionism. The regime's money is running out, but if given the choice the regime may well elect to hang on, reduced to presiding over a Levantine North Korea.

We are determined not to let this happen. While the regime's situation grows ever-more desperate, Assad himself seems increasingly disconnected from reality. During his recent interview with Barbara Walters, he challenged her to provide evidence of his regime's brutality, yet he will not allow international press or monitors into Syria. He said that he enjoys overwhelming popular support, yet he prohibits peaceful protest and has rigged elections for over a decade. He said he has never given his security forces orders to shoot civilians, yet he will not order them back to their barracks or prosecute those responsible for abuses.

The last six weeks have been the bloodiest of Syria's revolution. November alone brought over 950 deaths and further evidence of regime brutality, including rape and the targeting of children. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights now estimates more than 5,000 Syrians have been killed since March, including more than 300 children. The independent international Commission of Inquiry (COI)'s November 28 report detailed substantial evidence of gross human rights violations by regime security forces and noted that crimes against humanity may have been committed. Consequently the United States, the Syrian opposition and the international community are making the protection of civilians their top priority.

Syria needs credible witnesses throughout the country that can both document and deter the regime's worst excesses. The regime claims to have accepted an Arab League plan to deploy monitors but continues to bicker with the Arab League to buy time, clinging to the misguided notion that it can kill, beat, and torture its way out of this crisis. The Arab League is having none of it and has responded to these delaying tactics with stiff penalties. We wholeheartedly support the Arab League's efforts and would welcome the full and immediate implementation of its plan. In the event it is not, we and the international community will work with the Arab League to

ensure Syrian civilians are not abandoned to a regime that is willing to spill their blood in a futile effort to save itself.

The international community's duty to the Syrian people transcends power politics. If the regime succeeds in its bloody-minded effort to save itself at Syria's expense, everyone will lose. So we ask those states that have opposed UN efforts to protect Syrian civilians to reconsider. We ask that Russia, China, India and others address some basic questions. Does the regime permit peaceful protest? Does the regime allow the political opposition to organize, discuss and deliberate without fear of assassination or arrest? Does the regime, in accordance with the Arab League plan, allow human rights monitors and the press to deploy without restriction to witness what is happening and report to the world? Does the regime permit the COI to enter Syria and do its internationally-mandated work? These are not difficult questions. We ask those governments that are insulating this regime from the will of Syria's citizenry: do not make innocent civilians pay the price for your political calculations.

The Syrian people have displayed remarkable bravery and persistence in the face of the regime's relentless violence. They have carried Syria's revolution past the point of no return. Peaceful protest will not stop until Assad and his inner circle are gone. Nor will international pressure relent until the violence has ceased and Syrians are afforded the dignity and good governance they deserve. But speed is of the essence. This regime will destroy Syria if given enough time. Already it has made clear its intention to hold hostage Syria's minorities as it tries to hang on. Already it has brutalized peaceful protest to the point where violent resistance becomes inevitable, if profoundly regrettable. The United States continues to urge against violent resistance not because we are naïve, but because we firmly believe the effort to extract this regime from the Syrian state will succeed more quickly and bloodlessly if the revolution remains entirely peaceful.

Syria's political opposition understands this and is working against the clock to preserve the prospects for a peaceful transition. I recently joined the Secretary of State in Geneva for a meeting with senior members of the Syrian National Council (SNC), a leading and legitimate representative of Syrians seeking peaceful, democratic change. Given Syria's only-recent emergence from a 40-plus year political coma, the SNC and broader opposition have made impressive strides, winning the support of Arab, Turkish, European and American leaders. In their meeting with the

Secretary, SNC leaders described their efforts to protect civilians and preserve the Syrian state. First, they are working to counter the regime's divide-and-conquer strategy that cynically seeks to pit Syria's ethnic and religious groups against each other. They are working to include more Christians, Alawis, Kurds and other minorities into the SNC's leadership and making the case that all Syrians will be better off when this regime is gone. The United States agrees with them. Second, they are planning for a peaceful transition and the establishment of legitimate, democratic and pluralistic governance. Third, they are making clear that they seek to salvage the Syrian state and its institutions from the regime's downward spiral. They recognize that the state belongs to its 23 million citizens -- not to one family -- and must be preserved and reformed.

In the end Syria's nightmare will give way to a new era reflecting the enterprise, generosity and unity of the Syrian people. We will not support the replacement of one form of tyranny with another. We share the opposition's vision of a Syria governed by the consent of the governed in accordance with a Syrian formula for democracy. We want citizenship to rule over distinctions of ethnicity, sect and gender. We want a Syria where everyone, from the president to the pupil in school, is protected by and subject to the rule of law. We want a Syria where majority rule is tempered by minority rights. We want a Syria in which the state, to borrow from the words of Turkey's prime minister, is secular and equidistant from all faiths.

It will take time to achieve these results. The terrible costs of delay can be minimized if Assad and his inner circle cede power quickly and quietly, as even their former friends and allies have urged them to do. Those currently trying to serve the Syrian state with dignity and honor should persuade the regime to leave while it can. Upstanding officers, soldiers and officials should be joined by business and religious leaders in demanding that the regime release its grip on Syria. Those who act to protect the Syrian people and state will earn the gratitude of millions of Syrians and will be on the right side of history. By contrast, those who aid or abet the regime's predations should know that they will face certain justice. They must choose between serving Syria and serving a murderous and ultimately doomed criminal enterprise.

In the end we are confident that the number of Syrians willing to stick by Bashar al-Asad and his ruling clique to the bitter end will be few in number. This regime is already part of the past. Syrians and their

international partners are already hard at work building Syria's brighter future.

Thank you. I would be pleased to address your questions.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much, Mr. Hof. We appreciate your testimony here this morning. We will now each have 5 minutes to ask questions and I recognize myself for 5 minutes for that purpose.

In my opening statement I had raised my concern about the administration's continued calls for all opposition to remain peaceful. There is a logic to the administration's policy which I do understand. By resorting to violence the administration fears that the opposition may lose some international consensus and also give the regime fuel with which to drum up support.

I do not, however, agree with the logic. First, it supposes that countries like China and Russia, the latter which recently delivered over 70 antiship cruise missiles to the Assad regime, would ever break with the regime. My sense is that given the brutality we have witnessed, if they have not already broken with Assad, they are unlikely to be swayed by more dead bodies.

Second, this puts us in a difficult position insofar as it brings into question whether we could continue to support the opposition if it were to fight back against the regime's brutality.

In your written testimony you state that we "Urge against the violent resistance not because we are naive but because we firmly believe the effort to extract this regime from the Syrian state will succeed more quickly and bloodlessly if the revolution remains entirely peaceful."

My question is why? One recent report suggests mass attacks on army defectors and pro-democracy activists. Do we honestly expect the opposition to stand there and be murdered? Has the administration met with the free Syrian army and, if not, why not?

And does it have any plans to? If, indeed, the wider opposition decides that it can no longer remain nonviolent in the face of the regimes onslaught, will we abandon support? At what point would the Obama administration reconsider its policy of eschewing support for armed opposition?

Mr. HOF. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Neither you nor the members of this committee, nor the members of the Syrian opposition, nor the Syrian people, are going to hear any sermons from me or anybody in this administration about self-defense.

It is clear what the strategy of the Assad regime is. It is to attempt to channel peaceful resistance which it cannot handle. It has no clue how to handle peaceful resistance. Channel it as best it can in the direction of insurrection because it believes it knows how to handle insurrection. This is the kind of language that regime understands quite well.

What we are hoping may still happen mainly by virtue of the Arab League initiative and there is going to be a key meeting this weekend. Somehow the Arab League will be able to persuade the Syrian regime to accept monitors, witnesses on the ground. Our view is that it is much less likely that this regime will do its worst if there are witnesses present.

Our view is that the best scenario for Syria's future, the best scenario for a stable transition that preserves stability in the region is one that would be peaceful. But, Mr. Chairman, this regime has a vote in how all of that turns out and I am not about to tell people trying to defend their houses and their families that they shouldn't

do it. I am not about to tell Syrian soldiers who are ordered to commit crimes that they should follow those orders so it is a real dilemma we face here and there are no easy answers to this, sir.

Mr. CHABOT. I hope you are right. I fear you may not be. Certainly when you have opposition who is being peaceful and they are being gunned down and their children are being tortured, there is a natural inclination, of course, to fight back. I guess you could look at Egypt as one example where violence wasn't necessary.

The regime did come down. Libya, on the other hand, was a different situation and had there not been an armed uprising, I don't see a clear way that Gaddafi could have been overthrown so only time will tell. We certainly appreciate your insight and you are certainly an expert in this area. Thank you again for your service to our country.

I will now recognize the gentleman from New York, Mr. Ackerman, for 5 minutes as well.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I thank the chairman. I just wanted to personally recognize the witness myself inasmuch as he grew up on Long Island and Port Washington, very much a part of my constituency. He is also a graduate of Shriver, one of the most prestigious public schools that we have. Is there any chance that the Assad regime survives?

Mr. HOF. Congressman, our view is that this regime is the equivalent of Dead Man Walking. The real question is how many steps remain. I think it is very, very difficult to predict or project how much time this regime has. The more time it has, the worse for Syria, the worse for the region. That is very clear. No, I do not see this regime surviving.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I would strongly agree with you. My view has always been in the end the street wins but how long it takes to get to the end is sometimes measured in a lot of blood. What is there that we or others could be doing to speed up the demise of the regime that we are not doing right now?

Mr. HOF. Congressman, one of the tasks that has been assigned to me by the Secretary of State is outreach to the Syrian-American community. Outreach to Syrian-Americans of various faiths, various political beliefs. I think one of the things that members of this committee can do, I am sure each and every one of you has Syrian-American constituents. Each and every one of you is aware of what Syrian-Americans have contributed to the United States of America to the extent you are willing and able to reach out to these communities, to engage them in dialogue and, if necessary, point them in my direction.

Mr. ACKERMAN. What do we tell them to do?

Mr. HOF. I think what we tell them to do, particularly in the case of what are in Syria minority communities, Christians, I think we need to assure them, Number one, change is coming and, number two, their government, the United States Government, is absolutely committed to seeing Syria's minorities playing a central role in the new Syria.

This is part, a big part, of our ongoing discussion with the Syrian opposition. The need to make absolutely sure that all communities in Syria are (a) comfortable with the fact that change is coming, and (b) knowing that they are going to play a central role in this.

The Syrian opposition holds very strong cards and is really the determinant factor of what is going to happen ultimately in Syria. I think it was very important that Ambassador Ford did return so that among the many things he has to do is build our ties with the next generation in Syria with the Syrian leaders.

Mr. ACKERMAN. What can you tell us in our very public setting here about contacts that we have made with the Syrian opposition that would assist them in their struggle and are we doing everything that we can specifically with regard to determining what the attitudes are and helping shape those attitudes under a new regime, specifically toward the Christian community which seems to be in grave danger in so many parts of the Arab world?

Mr. HOF. I think, Congressman, that is an extraordinarily important point. We are not shy about the fact that we reach out to the Syrian opposition. It is a major part of Ambassador Robert Ford's mission in Damascus. It is a major part of my mission on the outside. It is a major part of the mission of the Assistant Secretary Jeff Feltman.

We have sustained contacts with the opposition. The opposition, obviously, is not a creature of the United States of America. It is very independent. It is made up of a coalition of extraordinarily independent people. They have their own thoughts on how to proceed. They have their own thoughts on what the transition from dictatorship to rule of law should look like.

One of the points we have made to the opposition, and I must say they get it, is that they really do need to do a more sustained steady job of outreach to Syria's minorities, to Christian, Alawis, Kurds, Druze. The list goes on because it is the concerns of these minorities, particularly Christians and Alawis, I think, that the regime is hiding behind right now.

It is probably the key reason why the central parts of cities such as Damascus and Aleppo have remained quiet while the rest of the country is experiencing protests on a daily basis making sure that Syrian Christian and other minorities understand that they are part of the solution here. That the Assad regime is not only part of the problem, it is the problem.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired.

The gentleman from California, Mr. Rohrabacher, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I didn't quite get the point that you were just making. Why is it that those areas are quiet? Because what? You were just saying areas in Damascus are quiet and that was some sort of success of something. I wasn't quite sure what point you were making.

Mr. HOF. No, Congressman. My point is that to a very large degree this regime is both stalking and hiding behind the fears of minorities in Syria. Fears about what their role would be in the future of Syria. And that this tactic, this, if you will, strategy on the part of the regime helps account for the fact that central parts of Damascus and Aleppo have been relatively quiet.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Does that mean—

Mr. HOF. One more point. By the same token what our Embassy is seeing is a great deal more in the way of security presence in

downtown Damascus so the regime is clearly worried about what the future holds.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. And you are saying about these neighborhoods that they are the Christian and the minority neighborhoods? Is that what you are saying? I am just trying to get the understanding.

Mr. HOF. Yes. These are areas where there is a heavy minority population.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So you are suggesting that perhaps the minority communities, the Kurds, the Druze, the Alawis, the Christians in this insurrection may be attracted to support the Assad regime?

Mr. HOF. What I am saying, Congressman, is that there is virtually no one in Syria who has any illusions about the corruption, the incompetence, and the violence, the brutality of this regime. No one. Not even the people in the inner circle of the regime have those illusions. But minorities in Syria do have some concerns about what comes next. A major mission for the opposition is to address those concerns and do it satisfactorily.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. How does the opposition address those concerns?

Mr. HOF. It is coming along, Congressman. It is a work in progress.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You have a regime that is supposedly a secular regime. The greatest ally of Syria is the most religious of all the regimes, the Mullah regime in Iran. They are the most fanatical and you have this alliance so you are suggesting that perhaps the insurrection hasn't made it's position clear on whether or not people of other faiths will have more freedom under a democratic government?

Mr. HOF. Congressman, the opposition is saying all the right things. If you read the statements, you read the proclamations, you read the text of speeches that have been given, it is all fine. What we have suggested to the opposition is that its messaging into Syria needs to be more disciplined, more sustained, more powerful.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I would hope that if there is any ambiguity about whether or not the minorities' rights will be respected under a new democratic government I would hope that would be cleared up.

Let me ask you about one point that seems to be a central point that you are making here today, and that is we in some way are opposing an insurrection. I don't know. Maybe the State Department burned their history books over there. I don't see where tyrants have ever gone down without a fight and, if they are, I mean, the United States we had an insurrection. I mean, our revolution was an insurrection.

Mubarak and these others that we have seen where there weren't insurrections, these people were tied to the west. Yes, they were less than free governments but they weren't the brutal dictatorship that we see in the countries that do require insurrection to get rid of.

Frankly, from what you are saying, I think we are sending the wrong message. We should be sending the message that yes, we

support the brave people who are struggling for their freedom. If guns come to play, which they will, we hope they win.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired. You may go ahead and answer the question if you wish.

Mr. HOF. Thank you, Congressman. I take your point. I take your point. What we have seen from the beginning is this regime as its central strategy pushing events in the direction of insurgency. That is what we have seen. It appears that they may be succeeding.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you.

The gentleman from Kentucky, Mr. Chandler, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CHANDLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Hof, for your testimony. I think this is an incredibly important subject. Nobody, I think, in this country is a fan of the Assad regime and I think we would all like to see it leave.

If you look at the history of the regime, they have done a number of things to maintain power. I know what you are saying about the minorities. They have for many years caused the minorities to live in fear of rule by the Sunni majority. I know that they are continuing to scope that sort of feeling amongst the minorities.

They have also, of course, used Israel as a boogie man for a long time to, again, maintain their position at the top of a country as a minority, the Alawite minority. With all of that in mind, what leads anybody to believe that they would agree to some kind of settlement or to leave voluntarily? What is in it for this regime to leave voluntarily? They are guilty of a lot of crimes obviously so there is going to be a desire to prosecute leading members of the Assad regime.

I have a hard time seeing that this thing will go anywhere but the direction of a fight to the finish because I don't see that there is anything in it for Assad and for his henchmen, who are in charge of the regime, to leave without a fight and no benefit for them to leave.

The second thing that I would like for you to address, if you don't mind, give us some idea where Turkey is. I know that they are sheltering some of the opposition, but just how far along in that effort are they? Are they looking at the possibility at some point of armed intervention across their border? What is going on with Turkey's efforts to remove the Assad regime?

Mr. HOF. Thank you, Congressman. First of all, on the scenario of the fight to the finish, there is plenty of historical precedent that substantiates your view on this. I think Syrians across the board recognize that the cost of a fight to the finish will be really prohibitive. It will be prohibitive for the country. It will be prohibitive for the region.

Nevertheless, we cannot discount the strong possibility that this is the direction the regime is going to choose to go in. The Syrian opposition in coordination with the Arab League is trying to pull out all the stops as we speak to try to prevent that scenario from taking place. The opposition will be going to Cairo with a transition plan that it will discuss in some detail with the Arab League.

It is a plan that involves deep Arab League involvement in offering some kind of protected asylum to the regime. I think from the

point of view of the opposition it owes itself. It owes the Syrian people the opportunity to try to run that to ground. It may not work but they are going to try and I think they should.

With respect to Turkey I think the big thing that has happened over the past several months is a basic change in how Turkey analyzes the central nature of the problem here. Turkey has gradually but irreversibly come to the conclusion that Bashar al-Assad is not part of the solution. He is part of the problem. He poses an unbelievable national security threat to Turkey.

As you mentioned, Turkey has provided shelter to the free Syrian army. What the Turks tell us, and we have no reason to disbelieve them, is that they are not arming these folks and sending them across into Syria. That is their position and we have no reason to disbelieve it.

I am sure that Turkey is examining many, many, many different options and contingencies right now based on a variety of scenarios that could come up. I am not aware of any near-term plans to establish safe zones, or whatever, on Syrian territory.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired.

The gentleman from New York, Mr. Turner, is recognize for 5 minutes.

Mr. TURNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think this regime is a lot closer to Libya and Iraq of 10 years ago. I don't think either of these there would have been a regime change without some outside help, clearly in Iraq. Do the insurgents or rebels hold any territory? Is there any method or support they are getting in terms of arms or equipment? Is there any outside help? Would we be, the United States, adverse to supplying some of that, or NATO?

Mr. HOF. Congressman, as far as we are able to tell, the Syrian opposition does not hold territory in Syria. Of course, there are opposition people located in various urban neighborhoods. There are opposition people who move back and forth across various borders.

I think the key thing right now before we try to determine how we are going to relate to all of this, the Syrian opposition it self, particularly in the form of the Syrian National Council, is still trying to figure out how it relates to the free Syrian army and to Syrian army defectors.

I don't think we want to jump ahead of that. I think we need to see how things play out with the Syrian National Council and its own relationship building and the Syrian National Council in relation to the ongoing Arab League initiative.

Mr. TURNER. Is the pre-Syrian army anything more than a name? Are there actual units?

Mr. HOF. You know, it is very difficult, very, very difficult for us to get a good handle on this, Congressman. You know, it does appear that several thousand Syrian soldiers have in essence voted with their feet. They have decided that they no longer want to be put in a position of having to support criminal activity against their own citizens.

It does not, however, appear that the free Syrian army is the kind of organization on which one would do a sort of formal order of battle analysis in terms of battalions, brigades and so forth. It

does not appear to be organized at this point in a conventional military way.

Mr. TURNER. Thank you. I would yield back.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman yields back. The gentleman from New York, Mr. Higgins, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just to follow up, unlike Libya, the Syrian rebels don't appear to control any defined or strategic territory. Nor have there been any major defections from the Assad government. Who are the leading forces in the rebel opposition and who are they aligned with?

Where is this thing going? If you are an insurgent effort and you don't have momentum, you are not winning. Would you characterize the opposition here as having momentum and able to sustain momentum?

Mr. HOF. Congressman, that is an extraordinarily difficult question for me to give a definitive answer to from my perspective. If you had asked me a couple of months ago would there be the level of defections we are seeing now, I frankly would not have known the answer to that question then.

It is difficult for me to speculate what things are going to look like 60 or 90 days from now. The main thrust of the Syrian opposition today remains that part of the opposition that is absolutely committed to peaceful transition in Syria. We are talking about mainly the Syrian National Council and other organizations.

These are organizations that are absolutely determined to do their best to avoid civil war. That is the main event right now. It is those organizations and it is their relationships with the ongoing Arab League initiative. This is the main game in town right now.

Mr. HIGGINS. So this went from peaceful calls for reform to a growing earned insurgency into what could eventually evolve into a civil war. The allies of Assad are Russia and China and they have blocked U.N. Security Council condemnations of Damascus.

However, the United States is aligned with the European Union and the sanctions imposed on the Syrian Government seem to be having somewhat of an impact in terms of oil revenues, in terms of foreign investment that's been halted, in terms of deterioration of the tourism economy of Syria. Do you care to comment on that?

Mr. HOF. Yes, Congressman. I think when we are talking about sanctions, first of all, truth in advertising. My colleagues in the Department of the Treasury are the real experts on this. We have identified over time basically seven categories of sanctions; Central Bank of Syria, Commercial Bank of Syria, other financial institutions, government officials, other individuals involved in repression, governmental entities, and non-governmental entities.

These are the general categories of things to target. In those seven categories over time the United States is seven for seven. The European Union is six for seven including perhaps the most significant of the sanctions which is the cut off of imports of Syrian oil. The Arab League if it goes through with sanctions will at this stage be three for seven.

Turkey will be three for seven so I think in the future much of our effort will be in working with Turkey and with the Arab League to see if additional work can be done in that area. But it is having an impact but I hasten to add the impact of sanctions is

dwarfed by the impact of Bashar al-Assad driving that economy straight off the cliff through his policies.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired. Thank you very much.

The gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Marino, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MARINO. Thank you, Chairman.

I so appreciate you being here and I thank you immensely for your distinguished military service. Correct me if I am wrong. I apologize for walking in a little late but did you say that you were hoping that the Arab League has influence on Assad to the point where if not stepping down he will change his attitude and his mind as to where things are going at this point?

Mr. HOF. Congressman, it is difficult for me to measure the precise amount of influence the Arab League is going to have on Bashar al-Assad calculations. Clearly the steps the Arab League has taken to date has sent this regime into a state of shock because the message is rather clear. Syria itself is a founding member of the Arab League. Syria has always been a central part of Arab League deliberations. The message from the Arab League is Syria is important. Syrian people are important.

Mr. MARINO. Let me interject here.

Mr. HOF. This regime has divorced itself from the Arab world.

Mr. MARINO. You aren't suggesting that Assad be granted immunity for all the murderous criminal acts that he's committed, are you?

Mr. HOF. Congressman, this is not my suggestion. It's not the suggestion of the United States Government.

Mr. MARINO. How about the Arab League?

Mr. HOF. The critical vote here will be cast by those who will replace this regime and manage Syria's transition to something better. They are the ones who are in charge, not us.

Mr. MARINO. But certainly I would hope that we would more than suggest that this man be punished for the crimes that he has committed in the name of humanity. I see that the United Nations Human Rights Commission wants to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Practicing criminal law for as many years as I have I have found that the International Criminal Court is probably not the most aggressive court and certainly cannot implement any type of punishment that would be satisfactory. Where do you see the International Court coming in on this and to what effect would they have?

Mr. HOF. Congressman, I don't know whether the ICC plays in this in the long run or not. The only thing I think I know is that these are basic calls that need to be made by the Syrian opposition. I can't rule out the possibility that the opposition itself could come to the conclusion that there is a price to pay.

Yes, a distasteful price. Yes, a disgusting price even. But if it gets this click out of the country before it can take the country down, is it conceivably a price worth paying? Again, it's not a price for us to exact. There are people who are going to be responsible for running that country when this nightmare is over.

Mr. MARINO. I find it quite ironic that of all countries Russia opposes Syria from going before the International Criminal Court. With that said, I yield back my time. Thank you, sir.

Mr. HOF. Thank you.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman yields back.

The gentleman from Florida, Mr. Bilirakis is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for calling this very important hearing, very timely hearing.

Mr. Hof, Syria is in a critical crossroads, as you said, and we have an opportunity to do the right thing and take the right steps. We may have faltered early on in the so-called Arab Spring, in my opinion. I am distressed by what is happening to the religious minorities in Egypt, specifically the Coptic Christians.

Therefore, I would like to know the nature of discussions the State Department may have had with the Syrian National Council and other opposition groups. Have any of those discussions centered on developing a constitutional framework that protects Christian—of course, all religious minorities, and allows the free practice of religion? As that been the case? Have they had discussions? If not, why not?

Mr. HOF. Thank you. Thank you, Congressman. Thank you for your question. The issue you have raised has been precisely the focus of every single interaction we have had with the Syrian opposition. We focused on two points in particular. Again, this is mainly with the Syrian National Council but it would apply across the board to other organizations.

Number one, it is absolutely essential that minorities whether they be Christians, Alawis, Kurds, whatever, be adequately represented on the inside in these organizations. There is significant progress being made in that direction. Number two—

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Could you elaborate a little bit on the progress being made?

Mr. HOF. Well, there are people being incorporated into the organization, particularly the Syrian National Council. The Syrian National Council is actively recruiting people and it is having some success.

Now, in some cases, and I am sure you will understand why this is the case, particularly for Syrian National Council members living inside Syria, it is important that their identities be protected so you are not going to see a great deal of publicity about this.

The second point we have been making is that the Syrian opposition has to be absolutely relentless, absolutely consistent in its messaging do all Syrians, but in particular to minorities because Syrian minorities are indeed worried about the future even as they acknowledge the rottenness of this regime.

The regime is so bad that Syrian Christians have often been at the head of immigration lines to head to places like the United States, Canada, France, Australia, places where there can be actual opportunity, places where there can be political freedom. I think what the opposition is looking for is a situation where Syrian Christians and other minorities don't feel compelled to leave the country.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Thank you very much.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman yields back. Thank you.

We will go through a second round here, although I think it will be relatively brief because most of the members have gone onto other things. I'll recognize myself for 5 minutes.

I guess, you know, one of the things that we are struggling with here is ultimately whether or not physical force is going to be necessary to remove this tyrant from power or not. Certainly your indications are, your hope is that ultimately won't be necessary. There won't have to be armed conflict to get rid of this guy. I ultimately think it probably is going to be necessary.

There are certainly different examples. We have seen examples like Idi Amin, maybe Baby Doc, Ben Ali and others that saw the writing on the wall and ultimately, you know, fled often times into somewhat luxurious exile.

Then you have other examples holding onto the bitter bloody end like Saddam Hussein and Gaddafi to name but a few and it is not clear at this point which direction this is going to go. I see a nodding so you would agree with that, Mr. Hof.

Let me go in a different direction. First of all, Lebanon. Syria has a long history of intervening in the sovereign affairs of the Lebanese Republic and its problems often become Lebanon's. Since the uprising in Syria began, violence and unrest has spilled over into Lebanon to varying degrees.

Recently a number of accounts have surfaced in Lebanon regarding the violation of Lebanese sovereignty by the Assad regime's army, the mistreatment of Syrian refugees, and the kidnapping of Syrian dissidents allegedly with the complicity of the Lebanese authorities.

Given the close ties between the two countries, there is significant risk that continued unrest and sectarian conflict in Syria could spill over into Lebanon. What implications is the unrest in Syria having on neighboring Lebanon and in the Lebanese Armed Forces, the LAF? Is it capable of confronting the challenge posed by prolonged Syrian unrest?

Mr. HOF. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That is an extraordinarily important and difficult question. The Lebanese, of course, are beyond being worried about the potential implications for Lebanon of what is happening in Syria. There has been refugee movement into northeastern Lebanon. There could easily be more in the future.

The capacity of the Government of Lebanon to handle this is limited. The capacity of Lebanese security forces is certainly challenged. All I can say at this point is that this is a major central agenda item for our Embassy in Beirut and its contacts with the appropriate people in the Lebanese Government and the Lebanese military and the internal security forces. You are right, Lebanese are deeply, deeply worried about this and they should be.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. Let me conclude with Russia. Mr. Marino had raised Russia but let me follow up a little more and expound upon that a little bit. Since the unrest in Syria began, I think you would agree that Russia has proven remarkably un-counterproductive.

Not only has Moscow outrageously thwarted efforts of the United Nations to ramp up pressure against the Assad regime, but it has

gone so far as to deliver the regime, as I mentioned before, antiship cruise missiles.

In his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs, the Assistant Secretary Feltman testified that this is a matter that the U.N. Security Council should be dealing with. We would hope that Russia and China in looking at how the Assad clique has just refused all attempts of mediation from others will not realize it is time for the security council to act.

Is there anything that you believe could persuade Russia or is it just simply a hopeless case? If we are not able to get the Russians and the Chinese on board, doesn't this really rule out the U.N. as a realistic option? If so, what are the administration's steps in response to that?

Mr. HOF. Mr. Chairman, if indeed it is a hopeless case, the one thing I know is that we cannot act as if it is a hopeless case. We have to redouble our efforts with Moscow to persuade it. Its backing of this regime is not only helping to facilitate a humanitarian catastrophe but it is manifestly not in the interest of the Russian Federation because change is surely coming to Syria.

I think there is another important element of this. Something that the Russian Federation has to take into account and that is its relationship with the balance of the Middle East, particularly the balance of the Arab world.

What we have now unfolding is a very important and unprecedented Arab League initiative to get Syria to accept a series of very, very, very reasonable conditions to turn the temperature down and create a possibility of a negotiated settlement.

I think Moscow is watching Syria's performance very carefully in all of this. You know, it is one thing for the United States to keep up the effort to persuade Moscow. I think others may have some leverage as well and that may be the soundest most hopeful way forward.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. My time has expired.

The gentleman from New York is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess it was a couple or 3 years ago the Syrian nuclear program in its very nascent form, thanks to a gift from North Korea, was basically destroyed. Evidence seems to indicate that the Israelis might have had something to do with that depriving them of that avenue of further terrorist risk and threat to the region and to the world.

That being the case, it does not take away from the fact that Syria is the possessor of large amounts of chemical and biological stuff and ballistic stuff that nobody has publicly addressed right now. Are we talking to the opposition? Perhaps that is why reading the nuance of your statements and responses you have carefully steered away from exacerbating the possibility of a civil war in Syria.

Are we discussing with any of the possible future leaders of Syria what happens with that material and equipment and have we made progress or is this not the venue to discuss that? Maybe the chairman can arrange a different meeting with you in which we could discuss that unless there is something you can tell us openly.

Mr. HOF. Thank you, Congressman. I think a different venue would be appropriate but what I can say in terms of discussions with the opposition, this may well be a subject that could come up sometime in the future. Most of our discussions with the opposition to date have focused on challenges that are right in front of our faces right now in terms of getting this transition started. As to the substance of your question, I would respectfully suggest a different venue.

Mr. CHABOT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. ACKERMAN. I would be happy to.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman yields. We would be happy to work with the gentleman's staff to set up such a hearing.

Mr. ACKERMAN. That would be great.

Mr. CHABOT. Yield back. Thank you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. The international community has been incredibly active on the Syrian issue. Specifically, the Arab League has done things and acted in ways that some of us might not have thought possible at the beginning of this much to their credit unlike their level of activity in some of the other countries that are experiencing shifts in power.

The Russian's and the Chinese's bad behavior seem to have created hopefully an understanding on the part of the Syrian street that those countries and their blocking United Nation's activities puts them squarely in opposition to the street in Syria.

One might assume that there is a fissure that has developed between the future leaders of Syria and the current leaders of those two large powers. I would think that this presents an opportunity for us to take advantage of that. The question is are we so doing?

Mr. HOF. Thank you, Congressman. I must say that if I were given the choice right now I would rather have the full cooperation of the Russian Federation in bringing pressure on this regime. I would rather see the Russian Federation redo the arithmetic on this and come to the conclusion that it's losing the Syrian street and that an adjustment is necessary.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I would agree to you in humanitarian terms because that would bring in much quicker, hopefully, resolution to this situation. Given the fact looking at the long-term prospect, our real competition is going to be China especially.

I would think that if I had my druthers when we don't, we would take a look at what the real world opportunities are and how to take advantage of the fact that this is a very important region, an Islamic region with 22 Muslim countries within the Arab world and others watching very carefully to show that it is we who are more concerned with the people in Syria who are supported by the Arab League to prove our bona fides to the humanitarian concerns and interests and the well being and future of the people in that region.

Mr. HOF. I think, Congressman, that from the point of view of 23 million Syrians there is no question at this point as to who stepped up to the plate and who hasn't.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Keep up the good work.

Mr. HOF. Thank you, sir.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired.

The final questioner here this morning would be the gentleman from California, Mr. Rohrabacher.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again, thank you for holding this hearing. I have often thought about writing a book about diplomacy and I think if I ever do, it is going to be entitled, "The Art of Juggling," because I know that people like yourself have so many factors that you are juggling in the air that it is hard to come up—it is not hard but almost impossible to come up with a definitive position that takes into account all of those things that you have to take into account.

Let me just suggest that you have a lot of other things that you are juggling that I am not. So when I say that I am disappointed, let me just say that I respect and appreciate the job that you and other American diplomats are doing, especially in situations like this.

I am disappointed today in the apprehension that I am hearing about armed resistance to tyranny. I think one of America's greatest assets is that people who want freedom and liberty and justice in this world see America and Americans as their ally. That is one of our greatest assets.

I think it is disturbing to people who are under attack whose children may have been killed and soldiers who were about to change sides to the side of democracy and cast their fate with those who are struggling for a freer society in Syria and other places to hear an American representative being so, how do you say, not opposed to but so conflicted about whether or not violence is justified and violence's way of defending oneself and achieving freedom.

We certainly would not have achieved freedom in the United States, and I don't know many countries in the world that would have achieved their freedom, with this idea that people can go to the streets and face down tanks or whatever and maybe hold hands and sing Kumbaya.

That is not what brings about freedom in this world. It is a commitment that people make when the guns start going off that they will stand firm for their beliefs. Americans did that and others have done that. I would hope that nobody gets the idea from what you are saying today that we Americans are in some way hesitant to support those who are fighting for freedom in their own countries.

Mr. HOF. Congressman, thank you very much. As I mentioned at the beginning, there will be no sermons from me or from anybody else in the administration about people not having the right to defend themselves. This regime has tried from the beginning to produce the result that it is facing today.

The Syrian National Council, the Arab League, and others are trying to pull Syria back from the brink because the consequences of this getting out of hand can be terrible for the country and for the region. Now, it may be inescapable. You have cited some historical precedence.

These precedence may be the guideposts of the future, but I can't blame the Syrian opposition for hoping that this cup passes for hoping that there may be a way to stave off civil war, to see an end to this regime, and to see a transition to something decent. Please, please, I am not a career professional diplomat.

I admire people who are. People in the State Department are working this night and day and they are sacrificing a great deal.

I am a former soldier. I appreciate the right and the necessity of self defense. Please, please don't see in my words any compromise on that principle.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. One that note. Self defense is one thing. Conducting a fight for liberty and justice is another. I think we as Americans do support the right of people to fight for their freedom and to win their freedom against tyranny. Thank you very much.

Mr. HOF. Thank you, sir.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired. Thank you very much.

It was brought to my attention Mr. Connolly is one his way but we were wrapping up here and if he doesn't make it, we are going to have to wrap up without him. All right.

I want to thank the witness particularly for his testimony here today. I thought it was excellent. If there are no objections, members will have 5 days to submit statements and questions for the record. If there is no further business to come before the committee, we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:33 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX



MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia
Steve Chabot (R-OH), Chairman

December 7, 2011

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building **(and available live, via the WEBCAST link on the Committee website at <http://www.hcfa.house.gov>)**:

DATE: Wednesday, December 14, 2011
TIME: 10:00 a.m.
SUBJECT: Confronting Damascus: U.S. Policy toward the Evolving Situation in Syria
WITNESSES: Mr. Frederic C. Hof
Special Coordinator for Regional Affairs
Office of the U.S. Special Envoy for Middle East Peace
U.S. Department of State

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202-225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.



COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON MESA HEARING

Day Wed Date Dec 14 Room 2170

Starting Time 10:05 Ending Time 11:30

Recesses (to) (to)

Presiding Member(s)

Chabot

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session

Executive (closed) Session

Televised

Electronically Recorded (taped)

Stenographic Record

TITLE OF HEARING:

Confronting Damascus: US Policy Toward the Evolving
Situation in Syria

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Manno Rohrabacher Ackerman ~~Boehner~~ Farenberg Higgins
Bilirakis Turner Chandler Murphy Connolly

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes No
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE
or
TIME ADJOURNED 11:30

Kurll
Subcommittee Staff Director

