NEITHER APPEASEMENT NOR IMPROVEMENT? PROSPECTS FOR U.S. ENGAGEMENT WITH SYRIA

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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NEITHER APPEASEMENT NOR IMPROVEMENT? PROSPECTS FOR U.S. ENGAGEMENT WITH SYRIA

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21, 2010

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 1:44 p.m. in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Gary Ackerman (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Committee will come to order. There has been a lot of news about Syria lately, but that is not why this hearing was scheduled. Work on this hearing began well before SCUD missiles were once again in the news. In fact, the conceptual roots of this hearing go back to May 2008, when Hezbollah waged a brief, but effective, street war against the legitimate, constitutionally framed, democratically elected Government of Lebanon. We should all remember that event because that was the point when American dreams and illusions about Lebanon should have been laid to rest.

In a region where politics is a deadly business and no quarter is given to the weak, the United States, throughout the period from the Seda revolution to the Hezbollah insurrection pursued a policy ripe with bombast and bluster, but backed only by empty words. Facing vicious, determined foes playing for the highest possible stakes, the previous administration offered only token opposition while maintaining a fierce, hard line, at least in words. Even as U.S. forces turned the tide in Iraq by allying with previously adversarial Suni insurgents to defeat al-Qaeda, our official policy remains fixed for the principle that speaking to our foes was an insufferable dishonor.

As Vice President Cheney put it: We don't negotiate with evil, we defeat it. A very admirable sentiment, but what happened during this period of toughness and ideological zeal? When U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701, which prohibited arms sales or transfers to Hezbollah, was violated almost instantly, what was the U.S. response? Empty words. When the March 14 majority in Parliament and liberal journalists began to be assassinated one by one, what was the U.S. response? Empty words. When the March 14 majority was unable to convene Parliament to name a president of their choosing, what was the U.S. response? Empty words. When Hezbollah took to the streets to challenge the authority of the Gov-

ernment of Lebanon, what was the U.S. response? Again, empty words.

When Saudi Arabia and France changed policy and began to court Damascus, what was the U.S. response? Empty words. When Syria refused to cooperate with the IEA's investigation of the bombed al-Qaeda reactor, what was the U.S. response? Empty words. In terms of U.S. credibility, the Obama administration inherited not a partial failure, but a total collapse. Even as the Seda revolution was progressively swallowed up by insurrection from within and subversion from without, previous administration changed the rhetoric or its belief that speaking directly to Damascus was an unwarranted gift. They certainly believed in the efficacy of coercion from the moral high ground, but somehow never actually got around to doing very much of it when it came to Syria.

Sadly, what counts in the world and nowhere more so than the Middle East, is power, hard and soft, and the will and capacity to use it. During the years from 2005 to 2009, all the bluster, notwithstanding our foes, took our measure and found the United States clearly lacking. Nearly all the reverses Damascus and its allies suffered from the Seda revolution have now mostly been undone. From the policymakers and supporters of the previous administration, who, in decency, ought to have slunk off in shamed silence for having watched fecklessly as this disaster, like Iran's steady march toward nuclear weapons capability unfolded under their watch, what do they have to say today? Appeasement, appeasement, they cry, attempting to evoke the days leading up to World War II.

This charge is grotesque. Apart from the indecency of the comparison with the unique horror and evil of Nazi Germany, the cheap demagoguery of the word utterly fails to capture what the Obama administration is actually doing. Where, one might ask, is the long list of concessions from Americans to Syria? Where is the surrender and the sellout of our allies? Where is the retreat in the face of challenge? A few airplane parts? A few inconclusive meetings? The string of defeats and failures that brought us to the current impasse occurred, let us not forget, during the previous administration. The seeming limits of American power were brutally exposed well before Barack Obama was even elected to his high office.

Appeasement? That is shameless nonsense and more empty words. It is true that the Obama administration is pursuing a different policy than the spectacular failure of its predecessor, but that is just good sense. Everywhere but Washington, not repeating mistakes is considered a good, or even a very good thing. There is one criticism of the administration's Syria policy that I do hold with and hope can be corrected today. The explanation of it has been poor, and the defense of it even worse. Though I have focused heavily on foreign policy during my time in Congress, my professional background is as a public school teacher and as a publisher of community newspapers. From both positions I learned a lot, but nothing more important than these two truths. Nothing explains itself, and nothing sells itself.

If you want to understand that our policy with Syria is not predicated on compelling major changes in Syrian behavior in the short term, that has to be explained. If you want people to understand

that our policy of sanctions and political pressure will be sustained until there are changes in Syrian behavior, that has to be explained. If you want the people to understand that dispatching an American ambassador to Syria is a tool to send and receive messages and to gather political intelligence for our own use, that has to be explained. If you want people to understand that trying diplomacy with Syria is not a betrayal of our values or our friends, that has to be explained. That is why we are here today. Hopefully to make things clear, to make things plain, to give the Obama administration its chance to explain a policy which I suspect will be frustrating and slow, but at least at the very least it will be one founded on more than just empty words. Now I am happy to call upon my friend and partner in the hearing, Dan Burton.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ackerman follows:]

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REPUBLICAN COUNSEL

April 21, 2010

"Neither Appeasement nor Improvement? Prospects for U.S. Engagement with Syria"
Rep. Gary L. Ackerman, Chair
House Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia

There's been a lot of news about Syria lately, but that is not why this hearing was scheduled. Work on this hearing began well before Scud missiles were once again in the news.

In fact the conceptual roots of this hearing go back to May 2008, when Hezbollah waged a brief but effective street war against the legitimate, constitutionally-framed, democratically-elected government of Lebanon. We should all remember that event, because that was the point when American dreams and illusions about Lebanon should have been laid to rest. In a region where politics is a deadly business and no quarter is given to the weak, the United States, throughout the period from the Cedar Revolution to the Hezbollah insurrection, pursued a policy ripe with bombast and bluster, but backed only by empty words.

Facing vicious, determined foes, playing for the highest possible stakes, the previous Administration offered only token opposition while maintaining a fierce, hard line—at least in words. Even as U.S. forces turned the tide in Iraq by allying with previously adversarial Sunni insurgents to defeat al-Qaeda, our official policy remained fixed to the principle that speaking to our foes was an insufferable dishonor. As Vice-President Cheney put it, "We don't negotiate with evil; we defeat it."

A very admirable sentiment. But what happened during this period of toughness and ideological zeal?

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Sadly, what counts in the world, and no where more so than in the Middle East, is power, hard and soft, and the will and capacity to use it. And during the years from 2005 to 2009, all the bluster notwithstanding, our foes took our measure, and found the United States to be clearly lacking. Nearly all the reverses Damascus and its allies suffered from the Cedar Revolution have now mostly been undone.

And from the policymakers and supporters of the previous Administration, who in decency ought to have slunk off in shamed silence for having watched fecklessly as this disaster—like Iran's steady march toward nuclear weapons-capability—unfolded under their watch, what do they have to say today?

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That is why we are here today. To make things clear. To make things plain. To give the Obama Administration a chance to explain a policy which I suspect will be frustrating and slow, but at least—at the very least—one that will be founded on more than empty words.

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Mr. BURTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before I make my formal remarks I would just like to say since the previous administration has been somewhat castigated, let me say the support for Israel and Bibi Netanyahu and his administration has been wanting by this administration. This administration, in my opinion, has shown very little support and respect for Mr. Obama and Israel, and that is of great concern to me today. Let me now get to my statement. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for convening today's hearing to examine future relations with Syria. I find it very important and timely in light of the recent troubling reports surfacing in the media that Syrian President al-Assad is continuing the country's dubious precedent of sponsoring terrorism in the region.

Despite little evidence to suggest that the Syrian Government has actively sought to improve upon its track record as an international sponsor of terrorism, the Obama administration, in concert with its overall misguided policy toward the Middle East, has sought to improve bilateral relations through enhanced diplomatic efforts. This is a terrorist state. Just like the administration's policy toward Iran and Israel, I find these efforts to be not only imprudent, but also extremely counterproductive to U.S. policy in the region. Now we see another of Obama's diplomatic efforts, the engagement with Syria, come back to bite us in the end. I would use stronger language but think you get the message.

Syria has not altered its hostile behavior, nor provided any assurances that they are willing to do so as it continues to undermine Lebanese sovereignty; pursue their own covert nuclear program; support not only Hezbollah, but other Islamist extremist groups, such as Hamas and al-Qaeda in Iraq; stockpile both ballistic and unconventional weapons; preserve its close relationship with Iran; and obstruct the investigations of the International Atomic Energy Agency of their alleged nuclear site that Israel targeted in 2007, among other things. In my opinion, these illicit activities pose a substantial threat to U.S. troops in the region, as well as the security of U.S. allies throughout the Middle East.

In fact, Syria's behavior, like its sponsor, Iran, has become increasingly belligerent and threatening, as evidenced by the recent reports of its supplying Hezbollah with medium-range SCUD missiles. This development comes a little more than a month after U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns met with President al-Assad in Syria and held additional talks shortly afterwards. During these talks, the United States demanded that Syria stop the smuggling of weapons in Syria to Hezbollah. Clearly, the administration's policy of engagement, like in Iran, is not working. According to some experts, as of this past December, Hezbollah was known to possess missiles capable of reaching Haifa and Tel Aviv.

Now, as one recent Los Angeles Times editorial notes, this new acquisition makes the Lebanese militants the first irregular army to possess such weapons and enables them to target virtually every bit of Israel. The administration warned that such a move could destabilize the region, and clearly, such a threat creates yet another setback for the President's Middle East policy, a dangerous course of action that has been one concession after another, rather than

defending our allies, like Israel, and our critical national security interests. It would appear that this administration believes the problem with Syria is an American failure to communicate with or to "engage" the Syrian regime, but the fact of the matter is it is not the American willingness to talk to Syria that is a problem, but Syria's refusal, like its patron, Iran, to halt its hostile actions.

If the Los Angeles Times report is true, Syrian President al-Assad, like Iranian leader Ahmadinejad, is saying one thing, last month, for example, he reaffirmed his commitment to seeking peace with Israel, while his actions indicate another. Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute puts this threat and its broader implications into perspective when he said this past December that Iran may be Hezbollah's chief patron, but Syria is the linchpin that makes Iranian support for foreign fighters possible. While Israel may be the intermediate target of the Iran-Syria nexus, the partnership threatens broader U.S. interests.

This relationship was further evident in February in a meeting in Damascus less than a week after Under Secretary Burns' visit when President al-Assad, President Ahmadinejad and Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah were the triumvirate, guaranteed their resistance against the U.S.-Israeli alliance, and, as one foreign policy article put it, openly mocked U.S. efforts to distance Syria from Iran and stated that his government is preparing ourselves for any Israeli aggression. Engagement with rogue regimes, like those of Syria and Iran, does not work and undermines every U.S. and international effort for peace and stability in the Middle East.

The United States, and other nations, must hold the al-Assad regime, and others like it, accountable for its continued support of terrorists and subsequent efforts to destabilize the region. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, Assistant Secretary Feltman, as he sheds more light on the issues before us, but I think it is extremely important, Mr. Chairman, that we state as an administration, and as a government, our unequivocal support for Israel in making sure that Israel's right to exist is guaranteed, and we are going to do everything in our power to make sure that Iran and Syria and their actions are not going to be jeopardizing our relationship. Thank you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. You will get no argument from me.

Mr. BURTON. I love you, man.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I would ask unanimous consent that Mr. Issa be allowed to participate in the hearing, speaking and asking questions at the end of each round. So ordered. Ms. Berkley?

Ms. BERKLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think my points of view are very well-known to this committee, and certainly to the Mr. I just want to welcome the ambassador. Anxious to hear what he has to say, less anxious to hear what my colleagues have to say before we hear you, so let me be the first to pass.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Royce?

Mr. ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just when you think that it can't get any worse, it does. Syria has gone from supporting terrorism against U.S. troops in Iraq to political murder in Lebanon. It then collaborated with North Korea to build a nuclear reactor designed for weapons production. Now we have allegations of SCUD

transfers to Hezbollah, which is a significant escalation of the threat that Nasrallah presents to the region, especially given the fact that he could now lob those SCUDs into Israel. I was in Israel in August 2006 during the Hezbollah war and I was in Haifa. I remember at that time the lack of restraint on the part of the rocket attacks into the civilian sector of that town, into the business districts.

At one point the trauma hospital was targeted. I remember going into the trauma hospital and talking with some of the victims of those attacks, and Syria, of course, had manufactured the weapons, the rockets. There were 70,000 ball bearings on each one of them. When those crash into the business district or crash into people's homes, you can imagine what it does. I think there was a presumption in Haifa, because it was such a cosmopolitan town with such a lot of Arab-Jews, Druze, Arab-Israelis, Jewish-Israelis, and Druze-Israelis, that perhaps the civilian sector wouldn't be targeted. It was.

So now, looking back, I remember going into a bunker at one point when we were shelled by rocket fire. I think ahead of the fact that if that was problematic, what is it going to mean when Hezbollah has this option with the SCUDs? Well, it seems the lure of a temperate Syria is a very enduring one because when Bashar al-Assad came to power a decade ago there was hope that his stint studying abroad and his interest in computers would signal openness to the West. That was not to be. More recently, The Economist noted that the increasing popularity of sushi restaurants in Damascus was a sign that different winds are blowing in Syria. That is an interesting theory.

For some time it has become fashionable in diplomatic circles to believe that U.S. engagement with Syria would help to flip Damascus out of Iran's orbit. This remains a theory. Days after the Obama administration announced its intention to return a U.S. ambassador to Damascus, Assad hosted Iran's Ahmadinejad and publicly ridiculed U.S. policy in the region. This was just after Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's leader, joined them for that meeting. Our witness today will present the case that increased U.S. engagement with Syria is key to curtailing Syrian behavior. But it is important to remember that the current debate over the fate of the ambassador designee to Damascus is not a debate of diplomatic presence versus no presence. We currently have a full and functioning embassy in Syria that is engaging in all the things that our embassies around the world do, just without an ambassador at its helm. A full ambassador might get involved to more parties, but I am hard-pressed to see how that would have curtailed the assassinations, the terrorism, the proliferation. I just thought I would take a moment and make that point. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Royce. Mr. Ellison?

Mr. ELLISON. Mr. Chairman, thank you again for holding this hearing. Although I won't exactly follow the fine example set forth by Ms. Berkley, I hope to be close to her in terms of being quick and brief. I want to admire and thank President Obama's efforts to establish dialogue or improve dialogue between Syria and U.S. officials. This is an important step in trying to mend relations, and I believe that both Syrian and American people gain from our two

governments working together. I also applaud the efforts of our witness, Assistant Secretary Jeffrey Feltman, for being the first high level State Department official to visit Syria since 2005. Efforts like this are critical to trying to improve that relationship.

I also want to note that I don't believe that improved dialogue between nations, even where there are clear and legitimate conflicts, precludes efforts by either side to pursue its national security interests. I don't think that dialogue undermines either country's ability to see to the well-being of its own citizens, and therefore, I don't think that the efforts by the Obama administration to improve dialogue in any way undermine U.S. interests. I think they stand a good chance of improving them. Of course, there is no guarantee, but without dialogue, it is certain that things will not proceed on a productive course. So, with that, I thank the witness for being here, and I look forward to the witness' presentation and to the questions.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Ellison. Mr. Rohrabacher?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate you calling this hearing. I think that it is vital for us to understand what is going on in that part of the world because that is, of course, very involved with American security, as well as Israeli security and the cause of peace. I am looking forward to hearing the testimony. Let me just note, I would like to know what will it take, what will it take to turn Syrian policy around? What are we expected to do, and what can we do that will take Syria and perhaps have it come in the same course as Jordan and Egypt? Jordan and Egypt have now made their peace, and they are certainly just as Arab as Syria, and that is one thing that I would like to know.

Also, how do we promote friendship with a government like Syria without sending a message of weakness? What can we do to promote friendship, head them in the right direction, without appearing to be weak? Our goal isn't continued, and shouldn't be, some sort of hostility toward Syria or anybody else in that area. Our goal should be is turning people from enemies, or at least from hostile powers, into friends. During the Reagan administration, let me note, there was nobody who was more aggressive in dealing with the Communist threat than Ronald Reagan, and by the end of his administration we had turned the Soviet Union into a friend, or into a potential friend anyway.

So what is it going to take? Is the Syrian prerequisite to peace with the United States and peace in that region, is it eliminating Israel? If that is it, obviously, there is going to be no peace. We need to know. Are you insisting that Israel as a Jewish nation ceased to exist? Otherwise, we are going to continue having this belligerency. We need to have that answer, we need to study that. We have heard the litany of things that Syria is doing that we disagree with, or not disagree with, but find unconscionable: The supplying of weapons, especially if they are rockets; support for groups that actually target civilians, read that terrorism; support for groups that kill American soldiers in their deployment in that part. These are things that are just unacceptable, but how do we get the Syrians then to stop those things? Not just prove it, but how do we get them to change that policy?

One last note. I would like to know whether or not we have a solution that would encompass the water issue. Very few times do I come to hearings about Syria and this part of the world where water is discussed with the degree that it should be discussed, because I see that as a major factor that is never really dealt with. Now, obviously the Syrians would like back the Golan Heights. My reading of various people in Israel is that the Golan Heights issue really isn't a national security issue as much as it is a water issue. Is that the case? If that is the case, how can we deal with that?

Is there a way to deal with the water issue, thus, the Golan Heights and the security issue? Is there a way that we can actually compensate or in some way mitigate what is going on so that people won't be giving up water rights that they believe are their own in order to have peace? These are some of the questions that I hope we get at today, Mr. Chairman. Appreciate you having this hearing so that we can have a better understanding and better promote peace and stability in that region. Thank you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Good questions, Mr. Rohrabacher. Hopefully we will get some good answers. Mr. Engel?

Mr. ENGEL. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing today. I appreciate it very much. I think it is timely, and I think there are important issues to talk about and be answered. Ambassador Feltman, I am glad you are appearing before our committee today. Often we hold hearings at regular intervals to review U.S. policy toward one region or another, but today things are different. The events are more complicated, the situation is more dangerous and the worst actors are more heavily armed. Early last decade I was pleading with the Bush administration to develop a policy toward Syria. It was unclear what our goals were toward the Assad regime or how we would accomplish them.

Then, its support for terrorists groups, development of weapons of mass destruction, support for guerillas entering Iraq and occupation of Lebanon were the most destabilizing policies coming out of Damascus. You may recall that in 2003 Congress passed into law the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act, which I wrote. It enshrined these factors as conditions for improving relations with the United States. Since the passage of that law, Syria withdrew its forces of occupation from Lebanon. Unfortunately, it continues to develop weapons of mass destruction, and support terrorists, and reports indicate that Syrian influence inside Lebanon is growing. Lebanon once again seems to be held hostage to Syria.

Syria was a charter member of the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism back in the 1970s and remains on that list today. Less than 3 years ago, Israel was forced to destroy a Syria nuclear reactor based on a North Korean design that was the center of a nuclear weapons program, and now we hear that Syria has sent SCUD missiles to Hezbollah. I am not sure how things could be much worse. At the same time, there are indications that the Obama administration has taken observable steps to improve the relationship with the Assad regime, including expediting requests for waivers of sanctions and sending an ambassador back to Damascus. Frankly, I don't know why. Leopards don't change their spots.

Unless there is something I don't know about, unless something has happened behind the scenes, unless there is a wink and a nod by the Assad regime that they want to work with us and cooperate with us to stabilize the area, not destabilize the area, I don't know why we are sending an ambassador at this time. You know, right after we announced we were sending an ambassador, it is an olive branch, what happens? Assad welcomes Ahmadinejad of Iran to Damascus. It is almost like he is poking a finger once again in the eye of the United States. So I don't know why we are doing this. I will ask the same question that I asked of the previous administration: Do we actually have a policy toward Syria, and is it in our best interest, and what are we doing?

I am glad that the State Department has condemned the shipment of advanced weapons, including SCUD missiles, to Hezbollah, but I want to hear what we are going to do about it and how warming up to Syria is going to make things better. As for me, Representative Mark Kirk and I will introduce a resolution today condemning Syria's shipment of SCUD missiles and other advanced weapons to Hezbollah. Our resolution calls on the administration to put additional pressure on Damascus, including imposing all remaining sanctions under the Syria Accountability Act. To this day, I remain unclear as to why the Syria Accountability Act has not been fully enforced. It wasn't fully enforced under the previous administration, it is not being enforced under this administration, and, in fact, I am hearing that some of the sanctions that had been imposed are now being loosened. I would like to know why.

So, Mr. Ambassador, I thank you for appearing today, and I look forward to addressing the basic question: What is our policy toward Syria? I don't think an answer is that we want to make nice with them so they will be our friends. I would like to have as many friends as we can have, but I also like to be realistic. Unless Syria has indicated to us that it is willing to work with us to stabilize the area rather than work with its friend, Iran, to destabilize the area, I don't know what we get out of talking with them and somehow pretending that that is going to make things better. If the Assad regime really wants to change, then I think we should work with them, but if it is going to be the same old stuff, we have been down that dead end before and I really don't think that is a solution for the future. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you. Mr. McMahon?

Mr. MCMAHON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary Feltman, it is an honor to see you again, and thank you for being here. As we know, examples of civil unrest throughout the Middle East, the Gulf States, Iraq, and even Bosnia, have been tied to Iran, yet these examples are of autonomous states sort of battling extremism within their borders. Unfortunately, Syria's partnership with Iran stands out against these examples and seems to be one of the most direct and mutual alliances. In fact, President Assad at the Trilateral Conference even referred to the Iran-Syria partnership as a circle of cooperation that is expanding. Unfortunately, with the most recent news of Syria transferring SCUD missiles that have been modified to be fit with chemical warheads to terrorist proxies,

like Hezbollah, Assad is right, this relationship is definitely expanding.

Syria's support for Hezbollah, an Iranian-controlled entity in neighboring Lebanon, leaves Lebanese Christians and moderate Muslims in fear of raising their voices against the Syrian hegemony over Lebanon reversing the gains made in the Seda revolution that resulted in the end of Syrian occupation of Lebanon. I hope that increased engagement will eventually bring about a Syrian Government that is not compelled toward violence and belligerence by Iran and one that decides to finally move toward peace with Israel and its neighbors. Secretary Feltman, I would appreciate your insight into the administration's vision for Syria going forward, particularly after the most recent revelation, and also your views on Syrian influence on Lebanon given your previous position as the U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon. I cannot help to think that we almost needed to include Iran in the title of this hearing given its hand in these disturbing matters, and look forward to probing the Iran-Syria relationship further with you under the chairman's leadership. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you, Mr. McMahon. Mr. Green, did you want to make a statement?

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this particularly timely hearing. I would like to welcome Ambassador Feltman to our committee. Five years ago the U.S. removed its ambassador from Damascus in protest to the Assad regime's presumed role in the assassination of Lebanon's Prime Minister. Now, as the administration prepares to reinstate diplomatic ties, we must once again reassess the situation in order to move forward with a policy toward Syria that also meets our regional goal of a safe and secure Middle East. While it has been no easy task addressing the challenges posed by the Syrian Government, it is in our national interest to seek the change to these troubling policies. Unfortunately, the Obama administration's first year of engaging with Assad has yielded few substantive achievements.

While Syrian facilitation of insurgents in Iraq has slowed, top U.S. generals and senior Iraqi officials say the problem still remains. At the same time, an increasing body of evidence suggests that Damascus has provided the terrorist organization Hezbollah with a new generation of sophisticated weaponry that changes the equation along the Israeli-Lebanese border. Therefore, Ambassador Feltman, I hope you will share with us whether the President is ready to renew the sanctions on Syria under the Executive Orders, or whether there is consideration in allowing the Executive Orders to expire. Is the administration considering lifting any of the sanctions on Syria, including those imposed pursuant to the Syrian Accountability Act? While I appreciate the steps of the administration to normalize U.S. relations with Syria, in absence of any tangible changes in the Syrian Government, we must continue to be steadfast and insist in order to achieve serious bilateral relations. Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding the hearing. I look forward to the testimony of our witness.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Green. Mr. Issa?

Mr. ISSA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. After my long absence and my current leave of absence, it is good to be back. Mr. Chairman,

I want to thank you for holding this hearing. I think nothing could be more timely than to have an Assistant Secretary whose experience as the Council General in Jerusalem, and then during perhaps the worst of all times to be Ambassador in Lebanon. Like an earlier speaker, I was in Israel during the 2006 war. Unlike the earlier speaker, I was also in Lebanon. I saw that because of the actions of Hezbollah, paid for and funded by a combination of Iran and Syria, both Israel and Lebanon suffered greatly in that war. We could push blame toward the Lebanese for not doing enough to secure their borders or we could push blame toward Israel for using cluster bombs on areas of Lebanon, including civilian areas, but neither would have occurred without Iran's constant support and use of its proxy in Damascus.

I do support engagement. I even go so far as to support that after this long hiatus, I was with Ambassador Scobie just before she was withdrawn, I do support it could be time to send an ambassador back. Mr. Chairman, Secretary, it is very clear that ambassador must go back with the kind of tough language and plan that will make a difference in the behavior. I believe in engagement, I believe in meetings, I have met with Bashar Assad from the first meeting after he was President through perhaps one of the last to be made, but a little bit like our former chairman, Mr. Lantos, I believe we need to walk in and say we could perhaps be your best friend, and then give them hell.

We need to make it very clear that Syria's behavior, both in their support of al-Qaeda fighters going into Iraq to the detriment and the loss of American lives and their continued relationship with Iran, they have put us in a position where we cannot ease sanctions, we cannot support that government in its current form. Nothing stops us from having constructive engagement, nothing should stop us from recognizing that there are Americans who have families in Syria, and, of course, conversely, Syrians who have families in America. We have deep ties in the region. They are long. We even have a period of time in which Syria was our ally, but that period is now long ago.

Mr. Secretary, I have known you, I have known you to be a fighter, I have known you to be a survivor, I have known you to care about these people and their well-being enough to tell them what they don't want to hear. I hope that with your guidance the new ambassador, if confirmed, would, in fact, go with the kind of understanding that we must change Syria's behavior, and that the Obama government must recognize that engagement should not turn into a simply blind eye toward the behavior of one country, particularly when this country has a history of turning a blind eye to Syria's occupation of Lebanon, and their continued support of Hezbollah for a long time in the country and a very, very clear movement by the current, well, by the same Syrian regime now to reassert itself in Lebanon.

I do have to note that we left Syria because of the assassination of Rafic Hariri. Saad Hariri has gone to Damascus in order to try to improve relations between these two countries. That is a brave move for a man who truly believes he went to meet with somebody who had a hand in the assassination of his own father. We need to be as brave, but we also need to support the bravery of the peo-

ple of Lebanon and the people of Israel who have put up for too many years with the kind of attacks in violation of international law by a country who enjoys full diplomatic status around the world. So, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to hearing Ambassador Feltman's statements, I look forward to working with him in his current position, as I have in the past, but I join all the rest of the speakers—the opportunity to speak last is actually very good because I got to hear and agree with every statement made before. With that, I thank the Mr. and yield back.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Issa.

Mr. BURTON. Can I make one comment real quick, Mr. Chairman, before we go further?

Mr. ACKERMAN. Absolutely, Mr. Burton.

Mr. BURTON. I just want to say that he is Lebanese.

Mr. ACKERMAN. In that case, I want to reconsider my——

Mr. ISSA. I was born in Cleveland. Let us make that perfectly clear.

Mr. BURTON. Yes, I understand, but he is of Lebanese descent, and so is my wife, so, you know, I have to be real careful about what I say around this place.

Mr. ACKERMAN. The record will so indicate.

Mr. BURTON. My wife is better looking.

Mr. ACKERMAN. The gentleman was not recognized for that purpose. I am delighted to welcome back to the subcommittee a very distinguished diplomat and dedicated public servant, Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman, who was sworn in as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs on August 18, 2009. A career member of the Foreign Service since 1986, Ambassador Feltman served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs from February 2008 to his present assignment, serving concurrently as Acting Assistant Secretary for the Bureau since December 2008. From July 2004 to January 2008, Ambassador Feltman served as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Lebanon. Prior to his assignment in Lebanon, he held posts in Iraq and Israel at both the U.S. Embassy and the Consulate in Jerusalem and Tunisia, among other countries. It is always a pleasure to welcome you back, Mr. Ambassador. Your entire statement will be placed in the record. You may proceed as you will.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JEFFREY D. FELTMAN, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE (FORMER UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR TO LEBANON)

Ambassador FELTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Ackerman. Mr. Ackerman, Ranking Member Burton, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss U.S. policy toward Syria, and thank you for allowing me to submit a longer statement for the record. In holding this hearing on Syria, the committee is examining a policy area where the United States faces a number of challenges and adverse conditions. Syria is a nation with which we have grave concerns and a number of serious disagreements ranging from human rights practices to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

We also believe, however, that we should test the proposition of whether we might find some long-term interests in common through the practice of clear eye diplomacy. After all, Syria has said, just one example, that it wants to see a stable, sovereign, secure, prosperous Iraq. That is our goal. And unlike the Iranians refusal to acknowledge Israel's right to exist, Syria's leaders have also said repeatedly over the past 16 years or so that they view a comprehensive peace in the Middle East as being in Syria's interest. To that end, the Syrians have pursued a number of rounds of peace negotiations with Israel. We, of course, want to see a comprehensive peace in the region, and that would, of course, have to include Syria.

You know, I share what all of you have said today, the feelings that you have expressed today. Syria's actions fall far short of its words in favor of peace in the region and a stable and prosperous Iraq. Syria's Government also denies its citizens many essential rights and freedoms. It maintains an alliance, as you have all noted, with Hezbollah, one of the most dangerous and destabilizing elements in the region. It facilitates many of Iran's aggressive policies. For many years, the United States has sought changes to these and other Syrian policies. The question is what are the tools that we should use when seeking changes to Syrian policies? What tools might lead to a more constructive U.S.-Syrian relationship to the benefit of both of our countries?

You know, I know that by virtue of my tenure as Ambassador to Lebanon I am sometimes, often, personally associated with the period when the United States was a leading member of a coalition determined to isolate and to pressure Syria into withdrawal from Lebanon. I believe that the tools that we used at the time were appropriate and effective. After all, Syria did withdraw from Lebanon. That approach worked in a particular context. There was an extraordinary unity of purpose at the time among the majority of Lebanese in the aftermath of the murder of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, and that same extraordinary unity among the key regional and international players. Such remarkable unity of purpose among so many different players is not sustainable indefinitely. Today, the Lebanese are pursuing a number of different, often conflicting, agendas, including reproachment by many with Syria.

The international consensus of not talking to Damascus has dissipated. The French, the Saudis, the Turks, many others, have all moved to have more robust dialogue with the Syrians. For over a year the Israelis engaged Syria in several rounds of proximity talks facilitated by Turkey. Clearly, the intense regional and international consensus that made our isolation approach so effective back in 2005 no longer exists. We must find the tools that are going to work today. I believe that the United States must have principal engagement with Syria as one of our tools, though let me add that engagement with Syria does not come at the expense of our friends in the region, such as Lebanon and Iraq. We are moving cautiously. By using incremental steps focused on areas of mutual interest, we are gauging the Syrians' sincerity.

We have discussed a number of the areas where we believe we may be able to make progress. In return for positive steps on the parts of Syria, we are prepared to consider steps we might take

consistent with reciprocity, consistent with our principles and consistent with our commitments to our allies in the region. The most important part of engagement is to discuss directly, firmly and at authoritative levels those parts of Syrian policy that most trouble us. When President Obama directed that American officials engage Syria's leaders directly, he was under no illusion that face to face dialogue would instantly, from one day to the next, overturn Syrian policies with which we disagree.

Indeed, the most disagreeable and dangerous of these policies is not likely to be fully reversed unless, and until, Syria and Israel resolve the differences that separate them, a process that we are trying very hard to facilitate. Now, to those who would point to periodic visits of senior American officials to Damascus, who would cite continued Syrian support for Hezbollah and Hamas and then declare engagement a failure, I would say the following: The United States and Syria have been substantially at odds for several decades. The decision of our President to draw on a full inventory of diplomatic tools at his disposal does not anticipate instant success. Rather, it marks the initiation of a sustained effort to succeed where in the past we have failed to make progress.

We need, I think, to proceed with patience and persistence. If confirmed by the Senate, Ambassador Robert Ford should soon be posted to Damascus, enabling him to proceed with his work as the President's personal representative. As we try to minimize the prospects of war and maximize the chances for peace in a region where our national security is defended by American men and women in uniform, we have no choice but to use all the tools of state craft at our disposal. In closing, I would like to recall President Obama's words last December in Oslo when he said that engagement lacks the satisfying purity of indignation.

He said,

> "But I also know that sanctions without outreach, condemnation without discussion, can carry forward only a crippling status quo. No repressive regime can move down a new path unless it has the choice of an open door."

We simply must make sure that the leaders in Syria and elsewhere understand fully and accurately the position of the United States before they act. This is not something to be left to rumor, or left to second or third-hand knowledge, or to others. This is our job, and to do less would amount to negligence. It would amount to unilateral diplomatic disarmament. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to taking any questions you and the committee may have.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Feltman follows:]

TESTIMONY OF
AMBASSADOR JEFFREY D. FELTMAN
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE
MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA
APRIL 21, 2010

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Burton, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this Committee today to discuss United States policy towards Syria. As you know, our agenda in the Middle East includes some of the most challenging and urgent policy issues facing the United States today: countering terrorism, stabilizing Iraq, preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, facilitating Middle East peace, stopping the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and expanding respect for human rights and democracy. The United States remains a strong supporter of Lebanese sovereignty and independence. Syria figures prominently in each of these issues – often as part of the problem, and potentially as part of the solution. The circumstances and challenges we face in the region require us to use all of the tools of statecraft at our disposal.

Just over a year ago, I traveled to Syria for the first round of high-level talks between our countries in several years. That trip reflected the Obama Administration's decision to pursue a policy of principled engagement with the Syrian government. Not surprisingly, on my visit I found significant differences in our respective approaches. On subsequent trips I have found that the gaps between us on many issues of serious concern remain wide. At the same time, I identified a few areas of mutual interest, big and small, that are integral to achieving U.S. objectives in the region, and where I hope we will begin to see progress.

Over the past year, we have continued our dialogue through nine high-level diplomatic meetings in Syria and the United States, including last February's meeting between Under Secretary of State Bill Burns and Syrian President Asad. After several years without these direct communications, a significant amount of time has been spent clarifying our respective positions and probing for opportunities to make progress in areas of mutual interest. For our part, we have used these meetings to directly address those unacceptable Syrian policies that threaten our national interests.

Direct bilateral engagement is only one component of our larger diplomatic strategy to address areas of concern with respect to Syria. For example, while we discuss the ongoing investigation of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) into Syria's nuclear activities with the Syrian government, we are also actively working with other states to ensure the IAEA has the tools, resources, and information necessary to serve as an effective and credible investigative body. As we push bilaterally for positive Syrian action towards respecting Lebanese sovereignty, we are also working with UN Security Council partners to implement the resolutions addressing the flow of weapons across the border. And we have found that our bilateral engagement with Syria has strengthened our credibility with other states, both in the region and in the broader international community, whose support is essential for generating and maintaining political will in multilateral institutions like the IAEA.

Syria's Continuing Policies

Those Syrian policies that work counter to U.S. interests have led previous American administrations and the Congress to impose a range of sanctions programs against Syria, from designating Syria as a State Sponsor of Terrorism in 1979 to imposing Executive Orders 13338 and 13441. President Obama renewed these penalties against Syrian individuals and entities in May and August of last year.

For years, Syria has been among the chief patrons of Hizballah, a terrorist organization and one of the most dangerous sources of instability in the region. Whereas the late Syrian President Hafez al-Asad seemed to view Hizballah as a point of leverage he could use with Israel, President Bashar al-Asad's unprecedented political and military support for the organization speaks to a different and even more troubling relationship. The Syrian Army's 2005 withdrawal from Lebanon and Hizballah's 2006 conflict with Israel deepened the strategic interdependence between the Syrian state and Hizballah. Hizballah's actions in Lebanon and abroad contravene Security Council Resolution 1701, are inconsistent with Lebanon's democratic processes, stoke sectarian tensions, and threaten to spark renewed conflict in the region. Time and again, we have seen that Hizballah's weapons and Syria's support for its role as an independent armed force in Lebanon are a threat, both to Israel, and to Lebanon itself, as well as a major obstacle to achieving peace in the region.

Syria is also involved more directly in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, specifically, by providing political support for the leaderships of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other Palestinian terrorist groups that oppose our objectives for a comprehensive Middle East peace. These groups have offices in Damascus and have operated there for decades with significant latitude. Furthermore, Syria encourages Hamas not to accept the Egyptian-brokered plan for Palestinian reconciliation, particularly terms that include the recognition of Israel, renunciation of violence, and acceptance of previous peace agreements, which could help the Palestinians to achieve statehood through good-faith negotiations with Israel.

Officials of the former Iraqi Ba'ath Party reside in Syria, including several who are wanted by Interpol. These elements of the former Iraqi regime based in Syria have worked to destabilize the constitutional and duly-elected Iraqi government.

Syria's international obligations include those under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty not to pursue nuclear weapons and to provide the IAEA the cooperation and transparency necessary to confirm Syrian compliance. Syria still refuses, however, to allow the IAEA access to all the sites and equipment the Agency has deemed necessary to determine the full scope and nature of Syria's nuclear activities. The onus remains on Syria to cooperate fully with the IAEA, and to satisfy the international community that it is indeed living up to its obligations.

The Syrian government has, without justification, imprisoned 12 political opposition leaders for the past three years. More recently, the regime began arresting human rights attorneys who were representing prisoners of conscience -- including a 78 year-old attorney named Haitham Maleh in October 2009. The White House issued a statement at that time condemning the arrest, and we remain concerned about the Syrian government's suppression of public debate and expressions of dissent. We are also disturbed by the treatment of the Kurdish minority in Syria, who perform obligatory service in the Syrian military, but are denied Syrian citizenship. Teaching, or even speaking, the Kurdish language is prohibited by Syrian law.

While the United States is working with our international partners to mitigate Iran's destabilizing influence in the region, Syria stands out for its facilitation of many of Iran's troubling policies. Syria's relationship with Iran seems primarily based on perceived political interests, rather than cultural ties or complementary economies. But as with most partnerships, there are clear policy differences. With respect to Israel, the Syrians have a clear interest in negotiating a peace agreement

for the return of the Golan Heights, whereas Iran opposes any form of peace with Israel. Syria has a secular government, whereas Iran has a theocratic one. U.S. policy therefore does not operate from an assumption that these two countries are a permanent bloc. The goal of U.S. policy is to press both governments to adopt policies that advance regional stability and security. One way to do that is to demonstrate to Syria why it is clearly in Syria's national interest – as well as ours – for Syria to have better relations with its neighbors and the West and to end its support for terrorism and other actions that undermine peace and prosperity.

Syria currently has a chemical weapons program and a domestic missile production program, and it is a principal source and conduit for weapons flowing to Hizballah. Just this week, we reiterated to the Syrians our grave concern and alarm over the reports that Syria may have provided SCUD missiles to Hizballah. Such an action could create a dangerous escalation in regional tensions. In the latest United Nations report on the implementation of Resolution 1559, the Secretary General noted the growing alarm that these allegations raise, and appealed to all parties to halt all efforts to build paramilitary capabilities outside the authority of the Lebanese state. The Secretary General also expressed the concern that such actions have the potential to destabilize Lebanon and could lead to another conflict.

U.S. Strategic Interests

We are under no illusions as to the difficulty or seriousness of the challenges posed by Syrian policies, as well as the difficulties in dealing with the Syrian government. U.S. national interests dictate that we must seek to change those troubling policies. In Iraq, we must help to protect the progress toward stability and success that has come at such a high cost to both our countries. Facilitating a durable and comprehensive Middle East peace is clearly in our national interest and the interest of the peoples of the region; similarly, our interests and those of Middle East citizens demand that we work to expand democracy and respect for human rights. We must support the democratically-elected government of Lebanon and strengthen its institutions. And we must maintain the credibility and effectiveness of the IAEA. Preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is a global priority. Given these various interests, we must try to shift Syria's role in the region in a positive direction.

Different Circumstances Require Different Policies

Since 2005, the United States has had no ambassador in Damascus and limited contact with decision-makers in the Syrian government. Given political events in Lebanon in 2005 and early 2006, the international community could clearly see the role Syria played in Lebanon, and called just as clearly for the promotion of Lebanese sovereignty and the retrenchment of Syrian interference in Lebanon's domestic affairs. The U.S. approach, seeking to increase Syria's international isolation was a product of these circumstances. International disapprobation, supported strongly by the United States, combined with heavy popular pressure within Lebanon itself, registered with the Syrians and contributed to Syria's withdrawal of its forces from Lebanon in 2005.

Since that time, however, European states, such as France, and other nations, including Turkey and Saudi Arabia, to name a few examples, have moved to engage extensively with the Syrian government. Pursuing its own national interests, the previous government of Israel conducted several rounds of indirect peace negotiations with Syria under Turkish mediation that only ended in late 2008. We recognize that given Syrian policies and behavior, some would argue that our approach should be to isolate Syria further. Isolation, like engagement, is only a tool and one we should use when it will produce the results we want. If we were today to attempt to isolate Syria, refusing to deal with it through diplomacy, we would find such an approach actually inhibiting, not enhancing, our ability to pursue our interests.

We saw this change demonstrated in May 2008, for example, when Syrian-backed Hizballah took to the streets to use violence to impose its will on the Lebanese government. The U.S. position was and remains clear – the United States supports the Lebanese people in their goal of a fully sovereign, independent, and democratic state. At the time, however, we had few means at our disposal to reinforce that policy and engage in frank discussions with Syria about our concerns over its continued support to Hizballah and its destabilizing actions inside Lebanon. Our former approach, seeking to isolate Syria in the international community, inhibited our ability to forge international consensus and speak with one voice. France and others were actively pursuing their own dialogues with Syria at the highest levels, leaving the United States on the periphery of these exchanges. As such, generating international consensus and pressure on Syria with the goal of supporting a sovereign and stable Lebanon for the Lebanese -- found so readily in 2005 -- was difficult to obtain.

Having an ambassador in place who is able to advance some of our most pressing foreign policy objectives is certainly not a reward to Syria. Returning an ambassador to Damascus enables a level of sustained diplomatic contact, as we have in other capitals in Arab states and around the world. As Ambassador Ford, President Obama's nominee to serve as ambassador to Syria, stated last month, "unfiltered straight talk with the Syrian government" will be his mission priority.

Given the web of intersecting and overlapping international interests in the region today, we need the tools of diplomatic engagement at our disposal in dealing with Syria. Those tools often require significant time and energy in order to pay dividends, and in Syria's case that is particularly likely.

Prospects for Engagement

Ultimately, only significant changes in Syrian policies will lead to a fully normal, productive, and positive relationship with the United States. High-level contacts enable us to press our requests and the expectations of the international community on a range of issues. But we have seen evidence that sustained and principled engagement with Syria *can* lead to progress in areas where we can define mutual interests. Diplomatic engagement, in fact, helps us to discover and enlarge areas where our interests overlap.

Our conversations with Syria about Iraq, for example, have led to increased cooperation. Over the past year, for example, the flow of foreign fighters transiting Syria into Iraq has diminished considerably. Nevertheless, the Syrians must still do more on this front. Syria also continues to host and provide access to health and education for hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees, although the government places restrictions on humanitarian organizations that limit their ability to assist the refugees. We support some of the organizations which have experienced restrictions, and have made clear to the Syrian government that these organizations play an important role in meeting the needs of the refugees. We believe we share an interest with Syria in a secure and stable Iraq, and that diplomatic engagement may enable us to make additional progress together toward that goal.

For 16 years, Syrian leaders have stated that a comprehensive resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict that includes the full sovereignty of Syria over the Golan Heights is in Syria's interest. Israel and Syria have pursued a number of rounds of peace negotiations to explore potential for resolving their differences. We believe

we have a role to play in helping to explore the prospects for successful negotiations, and the conditions that can foster peaceful relations among Israel, Syria, Lebanon, and other neighboring states and this has been a large part of U.S. Special Envoy for Middle East Peace Senator Mitchell's efforts in the region.

Our engagement with Syria is aimed at achieving big changes, particularly in Syria's relationship with Hizballah and Syria's role in helping resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as improving the Syrian government's respect for the rights of its own citizens. Today, the prospects for successful engagement with Syria face some serious challenges. First, Syria's relationship with Hizballah and the Palestinian terrorist groups is unlikely to change absent a Middle East peace agreement. Consequently, Syria has remained designated a State Sponsor of Terrorism – which limits us from using most of the diplomatic inducements normally at our disposal, such as development assistance, military training and technology.

Given these challenges and realities, we are employing a carefully calibrated, incremental approach. As stated above, the Syrian government has made some progress in suppressing networks of foreign fighters bound for Iraq, and we will continue to encourage the Syrian government to do more in this area. We are also engaged in discussions with the Syrians about other concrete actions Syria could take that would support U.S. goals of promoting peace and security in the region. Particularly, we would like to continue work with the Syrians to increase the protections and safety for our Embassy and American personnel in Syria. At this stage, it is too early to tell whether our efforts will bear fruit, but it is critical, in our view, that these efforts be given a chance to succeed. We will continue pressing the Syrian government on its problematic policies.

We must be realistic about how fast diplomatic engagement can effect change - indeed, whether diplomatic engagement will be able to generate far-reaching changes in Syrian policy is yet to be seen. In response to Syria's continuing policies, we will continue our efforts with international partners to constrain Syria's ability to obtain the technology necessary to pursue WMD and missile programs, to raise the economic and political costs of pursuing destabilizing policies, and to persuade Syria's leaders of the substantial economic and political benefits of pursuing the path towards regional stability.

Conclusion

We are determined to sharpen the choice for Syria. As President Obama said last December in Oslo, "I know that engagement with repressive regimes lacks the satisfying purity of indignation. But I also know that sanctions without outreach – condemnation without discussion – can carry forward only a crippling status quo. No repressive regime can move down a new path unless it has the choice of an open door." The United States will continue to strive to bring Israeli-Arab peace closer to hand, and we will continue to contribute to the strength of sovereign Lebanese government institutions, so that Syria can discern a clear choice – one path leading toward participation in a Middle East of greater openness, prosperity, and peace, and another leading to continued stagnation and instability.

In Cairo, last June, President Obama pledged that the United States would confront squarely tensions with the Muslim world. He put forward a vision for U.S. foreign policy based on the principles of mutual respect, mutual interest, and mutual responsibility; of a shared commitment to universal values; and a broader engagement with governments and with citizens. These principles not only reflect American values, they also reflect the reality America faces in the 21st Century, in regional and global challenges are dealt with most effectively through international cooperation. Pursuing the potential for cooperation with Syria serves our interests – clarifying Syrian leaders' strategic view, creating the space for diplomatic resolution of Syria's unacceptable policies, or, failing that, demonstrating to the people of Syria and to our partners in the region that Syria's problems are not due to the United States or any outside power.

When President Obama directed that Syria's leaders be engaged directly by American officials, he was under no illusion that face-to-face dialogue would instantly overturn Syrian policies with which we disagree. Indeed, the most disagreeable and dangerous of these policies is not likely to be reversed unless and until Syria and Israel resolve the differences that separate them - a process we are trying hard to facilitate.

To those who would point to periodic visits of senior American officials to Damascus, citing continued Syrian support for Hizballah and Hamas, and declare engagement a "failure," I would say the following: the United States and Syria have been substantially at odds over a broad range of issues for some six decades. The decision of our President to draw on a full inventory of diplomatic tools at his disposal does not anticipate instant success but the initiation of a sustained effort to succeed where we have failed to succeed in the past.

We need, I think, to proceed with patience and persistence. If confirmed by the

Senate, the administration intends to post Ambassador Ford to Damascus, enabling him to proceed with his work as the President's personal representative. As we try to minimize the prospects of war and maximize the chances for peace in a region where our national security is defended by American men and women in uniform, we have no choice but to use all the tools of statecraft at our disposal. We simply must make sure that leaders in Syria and elsewhere understand fully and accurately the position of the U.S. before they act - this is not something to be left to rumor, to second- or third-hand knowledge, or to others. This is our job. To do less amounts to negligence; to unilateral diplomatic disarmament. This is not the option we will pursue.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you very much, Ambassador. I have not seen you that animated for a while. I suppose you feel pretty strongly about this. I guess if you don't have an ambassador, then you don't have an ambassador that you can recall. I suspect there are quite a few that I have seen that I wish we had an ambassador just for that purpose. Let me ask you, there have been reports in the media that the President of Israel while on a trip overseas, I believe, proclaimed that Syria has had some traffic over missiles intended for Hezbollah. What can you tell us about that?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Mr. Chairman, the specific issue, reports in the press on SCUD missiles, I need to discuss in a different setting than this one, but let me make some comments on this area. We have been concerned about the provision of weapons to Hezbollah for some time. It reinforces the point about needing to sending an ambassador back to Damascus. We don't normally say everything that we are doing behind the scenes publicly, but I need to make a couple of references here. On February 26, I asked the Syrian ambassador, Imad Mustafa, to come see me in my office because we were so concerned of information we had that Syria was passing increasingly sophisticated ballistic weapons to Hezbollah.

On March 1, a couple days later, the NSC delivered a similar message to the Syrian ambassador. On March 10, Bill Burns delivered a similar message to the Syrian ambassador, who then has gone publicly and said we have never delivered such message. Either he is not listening, or he is not delivering the message to his castle, or something else, but it reinforces the point that when we have an issue of this urgency, we need to be having access to the leadership in Syria to express our concern.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Let me get a clarification. You said that you said to the ambassador that we had information about the transference of ballistic missiles. You did not say SCUDs, is that correct?

Ambassador FELTMAN. That is correct.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Okay.

Ambassador FELTMAN. But a general point here. President Assad is making decisions in a very volatile and dangerous region. Syria has made mistakes before, and Syria has, in fact, paid the consequences for those mistakes that they have made before, but not only Syria, it has affected the region. He is listening to people like Hassan Nasrallah, he is listening to people like Ahmadinejad, you know, people made reference to the February so-called summit he hosted. We need to be making our message to him loud and clear and directly. It is not the same to have an embassy without an ambassador. I know. I have been in the diplomatic service for well over 20 years.

You go in in the Arab world, and many times at a lower level if you are not the ambassador, and that lower level official is not going to give bad news higher up. When President Assad is taking decisions that could affect war and peace in his region, he needs to have a clear understanding of what the implications are, what the U.S. positions are what the red lines are. That is one reason why we are sending an ambassador back to Damascus, assuming the Senate confirms Ambassador Ford.

Mr. ACKERMAN. We have spent a large part of the time discussing the sending back of an ambassador. There are no votes in

this House to confirm an ambassador or otherwise. Could you give us an understanding of where you think this sits in the Senate?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Of course. It has been voted up the Committee of the Ways, confirmation by the full Senate. There are consultations ongoing with many of the same questions that some of the members of this committee asked about it. We would like to see him confirmed and in place as soon as possible. We would like to have had him in place now.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Is there a question that he won't be confirmed? Is that why you are that concerned?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Well, you remember it took me a few months to get confirmed, so I could be talking from my own personal experience. I think we need to make the case firmly to everybody about why it is that having an ambassador in Syria allows us to be effective in our diplomacy. It is not a reward to this or that party.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Well, my time is just up. I am going to keep other members to the time, so I will call upon Mr. Burton.

Mr. BURTON. You know, I have great confidence in the Mossad. They are pretty good. They tell me that their intelligence gathering capability is about as good as the CIA, which, incidentally, is under assault right now which is kind of unfortunate, but nevertheless, the Mossad, I am sure, told their top officials that they had information that SCUD missiles were being transported through Syria to Hezbollah. So I know you want to do this in a closed meeting, and Mr. Chairman and I have just talked about that and I am sure we will probably do that, but just assuming, assuming that is the case, why in the world would we want to reward Syria with an ambassador? You know, this kind of thing smacks of appeasing somebody that is kicking you in the teeth or someplace else even more severe.

I remember in my history that Lord Chamberlain went to Munich trying to pacify Hitler by saying, you know, if we sign an agreement, we will, you know, maybe give you an ambassador or whatever it is, that you won't expand beyond the Sudetenland, and we ended up with 60 million people getting killed in World War II. I just don't understand that. Maybe you can explain to me why you think this is a positive step. Now, I don't have any problem with Syria getting an ambassador if they show some real reasons why they should have diplomatic relations with us, but they are still labeled a terrorist state, they have been supplying Hezbollah, and Hamas and possibly al-Qaeda, and that really troubles me.

Then, I just said in my opening statement, I want to read this one more time, it said this relationship was further evident, talking about the Syria-Iran relationship, in a February meeting in Damascus less than 1 week after Under Secretary Burns' visit between President al-Assad, President Ahmadinejad and Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah where the triumvirate guaranteed "their resistance against the U.S.-Israeli alliance," and as one foreign policy article put it "openly mocked U.S. efforts to distance Syria from Iran," and stated that his government "is preparing ourselves for any Israeli aggression." This was just not too long ago and right after we had Under Secretary Burns visiting and talking to them.

I mean, it is like they just spit right in our face, the three of them together. So, you know, I understand that the President has a different approach to foreign policy, you know, he has a softer approach saying he wants to reach out and try to make, you know, the world a safer place because we are having, at least attempting to having relations with everybody, but these guys are continuing to give aid and comfort to the enemy of Israel, our strong ally, they are giving them weapons, SCUD missiles that can reach any part of Israel, at least this is what I think, and we are going to go ahead and confirm an ambassador over there?

Now, you know, I have talked to the Syrian ambassador here and he seems like a nice guy, and he has got a lovely wife, and I would like to see us have a positive relationship with Syria, but I don't see how in the world we can take steps in that direction if this kind of crap is going on. Pardon my vernacular, but I just would hope that you would take that message back to the administration, and I certainly will convey it to my colleagues in the Senate saying, hey, you know, let us let them know that we would like to have relationships, but we certainly don't want to reward them when they are kicking us in the teeth or spitting in our eye. You can comment, if you would like.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Representative Burton, with all due respect, I disagree that sending an ambassador is a reward. President Assad, as I said, he is making decisions. He is making decisions that could send the region into war. He is listening to Ahmadinejad, he is listening to Hassan Nasrallah. He needs to listen to us, too.

Mr. BURTON. Excuse me. Let me interrupt. I want to read you this one more time. This is important. President Ahmadinejad, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah and Assad said they guarantee their resistance against the U.S.-Israeli alliance, and, as one foreign policy article said, openly mocked U.S. efforts to distance Syria from Iran and stated that his government is preparing ourselves for any Israeli aggression. That doesn't sound like he is willing to start talking. Now, go ahead. I am sorry. Go ahead.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Engel?

Mr. BURTON. Can we let him just respond real quickly?

Mr. ACKERMAN. Yes, but you are going to have to keep it brief or allow us each extra minutes to tell whether we have a lovely wife.

Mr. BURTON. Okay. Well, you can respond later then.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Go ahead, Ambassador.

Ambassador FELTMAN. I would just like to make a comment on that awful meeting in Damascus that took place because it is interesting. If you watch the sort of travel politics of the Middle East, you will find there is a pattern that as Western visitors go to Damascus, you know, the French, the Americans, even the Saudis in some place, you soon see the Iranians showing up, and it is interesting. It may be telling that, in fact, there is the sudden sort of summits after there has been a U.S. visitor, or a French visitor, a Saudi visitor. It suggests to me that there is more going on, and it is not all negative, behind the scenes.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ambassador Feltman, you have had a long and distinguished record that I have admired,

other people have admired, so I mean no disrespect to you, but I listened to your words very carefully in your opening statement and you said, "engagement with Syria will not come at the expense of our friends in the region, such as Lebanon and Iraq." Does that also include Israel?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Yes. Absolutely. Unequivocally.

Mr. ENGEL. Okay. I am glad it does because sometimes I wonder if the administration still considers Israel a friend.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Absolutely. Our desire to get the comprehensive peace is because it stems from our commitment to Israel's security.

Mr. ENGEL. Okay. You know, I am glad to hear it. You have heard a lot of consternation here on both sides of the aisle about Syrian transfer of missiles to Hezbollah. I know you said you couldn't really say a lot of this publicly, but what can you tell us publicly? What did the Syrians actually transfer to Hezbollah and when did they do it?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Congressman, I really am sorry. I am just not able to give you a very satisfactory answer in this setting on that. I hope that we would be able to in other settings, or perhaps in the future.

Mr. ACKERMAN. If the gentleman would yield?

Mr. ENGEL. Yes. Certainly, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. We will be inviting the Ambassador, the Secretary, to meet with us in a different setting.

Mr. ENGEL. Okay.

Ambassador FELTMAN. I mean, what I can say is this is a really, really serious concern of ours. If these reports turn out to be true, we are going to have to review the full range of tools that are available to us in order to make Syria reverse what would be an incendiary provocative action. You know, I think the United States has shown in the past that we are able to act when there has been actions like this. I expect that all options are going to be on the table looking at this, but this is a serious allegation. If this proves to be true, I would argue that Syria has made a mistake. Syria has made mistakes in the past, Syria has paid the consequences for mistakes in the past.

The trouble is it is not just Syria that pays for the consequences of Syria's mistakes when we are talking about this volatile region. It is an argument, Congressman Engel, why I think it is so important that we have an ambassador who is explaining all this to the senior leadership of the Syrian Government. An ambassador is not a reward, it is a tool for us, among other tools, to advance our policies. Not a single one of these waivers that you have mentioned has been lightened, has been canceled, has been set aside. They are all still in place. We are talking about taking an additional tool out of the toolbox to use.

Mr. ENGEL. But with all due respect, Mr. Ambassador, I mean, I understand the logic of, you know, everybody else is talking to them, why shouldn't we be there, why shouldn't we do it? You know, that is really great, but, you know, what are their responsibilities? I don't think it should be a reward that we send an ambassador. I think we should send an ambassador when it is in our best interest. Now, you and I are going to disagree about whether

it is in our best interest because I think that if Assad thought that there was any real chance of any kind of a reproach moment with the United States, he wouldn't have welcomed Ahmadinejad shortly thereafter, I think it was the very next week, in Damascus and made all the statements that Mr. Burton mentioned.

I agree with what Mr. Burton said. You know, the SCUD missiles are the last in a long line of egregious behavior by Syria. Several years ago we all remember Israel and Lebanon, Israel and Hezbollah, actually, fought in a war that everyone was mortified that such a war would happen, and as part of the agreement ending that hostility, there was not supposed to be any kind of a rearming of Hezbollah. Now, I am told, and again, the SCUD missiles is just the last straw that broke the camel's back, but I am told that in the past 3 years Syria has been facilitating rearmament of Hezbollah in Lebanon, which undermines the Lebanese Government, and that Hezbollah is, in essence, stronger than ever before. I would like you to comment on that.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Three years in which we didn't have a U.S. ambassador able to even make the point——

Mr. ENGEL. Surely you don't think having an ambassador or not having an ambassador had anything to do with that. Assad cannot be trusted, and what are we doing—you know, when you sleep with the dogs, you get fleas.

Ambassador FELTMAN. You know, it is——

Mr. ENGEL. Could I get an answer, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. ACKERMAN. On the next round. Members may ask their questions in one round and get an answer in the next round, but they are going to receive their 5 minutes. I can give the witness a chance to testify, but that is up to the members.

Mr. ROYCE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Syria has had a chemical weapons program for many years, and according to the Director of National Intelligence, it has the capability to deliver chemical agents either by plane, ballistic missile, or by artillery rockets. Keeping in mind my opening comments about the fact that I saw the results of those, of the transfer from Syria of the Katyusha rockets with 70,000 ball bearings in every one of those and they were coming down like rain in Haifa, here is my question: Would Syria hesitate to transfer such weapons, given what they have transferred in the past to Hezbollah?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Congressman, I don't know. We have to make the case for them not to do it. We have to make the case internationally, regionally. It is not like we are sitting around here passively just saying, huh, will they do it, will they not do it? I have had a long conversation this morning with the Foreign Minister of Syria, with Walid Mouallem, who categorically denied it, by the way, and said I could share that more publicly. We are not being passive as we wait and analyze will they, will they not do it? We are trying to find all the ways to show the Syrians why it is firmly not in their interest to carry through with such transfers, trying to show the Syrians why it is not in their interest to permit or to facilitate giving of weaponry to Hezbollah, transferring weaponry across the Lebanese border.

Mr. ROYCE. The international community is engaged as well. I am thinking of the IAEA——

Ambassador FELTMAN. Exactly.

Mr. ROYCE [continuing]. And their engagement with Syria. But Syria has continued to stonewall the IAEA with respect to their reactor, right? What is our assessment of the Syrian nuclear program? We have had the destruction of that reactor, but is the program continuing?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Well, I mean, we would share the concern that the IAEA has expressed, that the international community has expressed about Syria's intentions. Syria is a signatory to the NPT. Being a signatory provides certain obligations onto Syria not to develop nuclear weapons and to provide the access to IAEA inspectors to show, with confidence, that they are complying with the NPT. Clearly, that hasn't happened. I have seen reports about Syria permitting access to another previously declared facility, but it is not related to the Alkhabar one that you are referring to. In order for Syria to be able to restore confidence by the international community in the nature of its nuclear program, in its compliance with its NPT obligations, it needs to give full access to the IAEA. You know, we await the next reports of the IAEA, but we understand, you know, the concerns right now.

Mr. ROYCE. Have we seen any further North Korean/Syrian contact, by the way, to your knowledge?

Ambassador FELTMAN. To my knowledge, no, but I may not be the——

Mr. ROYCE. Okay. Let me yield the balance of my time to my colleague from New York who wanted to have his question answered and he ran out of time. I am going to do that at this time. If you would like to respond to Mr. Engel's question.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Engel?

Mr. ROYCE. Mr. Engel?

Mr. ENGEL. Yes. I thank the gentleman. I was asking about, you know, engagement. You know, you just said that you picked up a phone and you spoke to Walid Mouallem, a former Ambassador here, Syria's ambassador to Washington, who is now the Foreign Minister, and you argue that only by sending an ambassador to Syria could we have top level discussions with the Syrian Government. Well, you just said that we currently do not have an ambassador, he is being confirmed, and you were able to pick up the phone and speak to the Foreign Minister. Who is more top in the Assad government than the Foreign Minister? So I don't understand why you keep saying that only by having an ambassador can we have communications with them.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Congressman, I am sorry if I implied only by an ambassador. What I am saying is that it enhances our ability to get our message across. The way that it works in the Arab world in a lot of the places, I hate to generalize, is that, you know, you go in and a message doesn't go very far, particularly a negative message, a bad message. An ambassador can go in at a very high level on a regular, continual basis. When we have issues of such national security concern, as we have with Syria, I think it is ever more important that we maintain a dialogue at the top level, particularly if we know who else is——

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Royce's time is now up. I would ask the Ambassador if he could conclude. If the members want, we will do

more than 5 or 10 minutes or 15, but I think we have to try to be consistent. Ambassador, please continue. Finish your thought.

Ambassador FELTMAN. No. It is just, my thought was that—I am repeating myself, Mr. Chairman, and I apologize, but when we know where President Assad is getting his information, which is the constant contact with the Iranians, with Hezbollah, with Hamas, he needs to be able to hear from us directly and continually as well. That is my argument. We are not doing engagement because it is a pleasurable experience with the Syrians. We are doing engagement because it is in the U.S. national interest.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Costa?

Mr. COSTA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Ambassador, I mean, I think we get what is in our national interest, but are you telling us that we have no other contacts with the Syrian regime? I mean, no intermediaries, no third channels, no indirect conversations that are currently taking place?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Representative Costa, you are absolutely right. We have other channels to the Syrians. When I meet with any of my colleagues in Europe, for example, we often talk about Syria, compare notes, because we all recognize the challenges that Syria poses. We have a variety of ways. These issues are so important to us that the Syrians shouldn't always hear from second party, from third party, from whatever their ambassador in Washington may tell them we are saying, they shouldn't hear about rumor, read about it in the paper. They need to understand from us what are the implications of what they are doing, the potential dangers of what they are doing.

Mr. COSTA. But through these, and I am not talking about through third parties, but I am talking about Americans that are conveying either through, I mean, we have had Americans visit Syria and others, that there is any ambiguity as to what this administration's policy is toward Syria and what the possible consequences are, you think that President Assad doesn't understand that there is consequences to his actions?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Maybe I could use a positive example. We have had several references to Iraq. Iraq is something that was high on my list when I went to Syria in March, and May and then later last year. Now, I think you will hear U.S. generals will talk about the number of foreign fighters that are coming through the pipeline through Syria into Iraq to do really bad stuff in Iraq has dropped. It was, you know, like over 100 a couple years ago, it is less than 10 a month now.

Mr. COSTA. Has that dropped because of our efforts or because——

Ambassador FELTMAN. It is in part of our efforts, it is in part the Iraqi efforts, but it is in part the Syrian efforts as well. The Syrians have shut down some of the foreign fighter pipelines that go through Syria that exploit Syrian territory. I believe firmly that they have done that because we are talking to them about it. We are talking to them about, you know, where we see our interests, where we see their interests, and of something that perhaps could have been done more quickly had we been able to have the continued high level dialogue that we now have when we have visitors but we aren't able to sustain on a continual basis. You know, one

of the members mentioned about how would we define progress. Well, if I could, speaking of Iraq, I would like to borrow a line from one of our most esteemed diplomatic colleagues whom we all respect, Ryan Crocker. Ryan Crocker was once asked how do you define progress in Iraq? He said, well, it is not going to be linear. You know, you are going to see some progress here, you might see some progress here, and then some stagnation, then something else here. I think that is what we are talking about. We are not talking about that we are going to see just because we have sent an ambassador back to Damascus, that just because we are sending visitors, a line that goes from A to B to C to D. I think we are going to see a nonlinear reaction.

Mr. COSTA. Okay. I get that. I get that response. Okay. So let us put a little more meat on the bone. When Under Secretary of State William Burns traveled to Syria in February, I guess he was questioned afterwards candidly. We can discuss areas of which we disagree, but we also identified areas of common ground on which we can build on. So if we talk about it not being linear and something here and something there, then what are the something here and something there that we can build on, in your opinion, that would I guess at some stage include an ambassador to Syria?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Well, frankly, I think that the Iraq portfolio is extremely important.

Mr. COSTA. The what?

Ambassador FELTMAN. The Iraq portfolio is extremely important. Not only the issue of security of our forces in Iraq and the foreign fighter pipeline, but also the situation of Iraqi refugees. Syria hosts hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees. They have provided them healthcare, education. We would like to see them open up the labor markets so they can provide income, loosen up on some of the NGO restrictions to be able to help them, but it is an area where I believe that we have a national interest in working with the Syrians, and I believe that is optimistic. This may sound minor to the committee, but I am always concerned about the safety and security of the NEA family, our Americans and Syrians, Americans and anyone who are working overseas. The Syrians have been very responsive to our request to try to find new property to build a safe and secure working facility. This has happened since we have started talking to the Syrians. It didn't happen for years before. As I said, it is not linear. We are not talking Hezbollah weapons progress right now, but there are areas where talking to the Syrians have led to some positive developments.

Mr. COSTA. My time has expired. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Costa. Mr. Rohrabacher?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You know, with all due respect, Mr. Ambassador, I don't think your approach has any significance at all in the major issues to be solved there. Making it a little easier on the Syrians this way or that way and how they can deal with some influx that came in from Iraq, I am sorry, that is not what is keeping us in a belligerent relationship with Syria.

Ambassador FELTMAN. And what have we eased up on, with all due respect, Congressman? There are four Executive Orders in place. The Syria Accountability Act remains in force, the Iran-

North Korea-Syria Nonproliferation remains in force, the Treasury rulings remain in force. Where have we given them a gift?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I got your point. You are saying the stick doesn't work, and I am trying to tell you that the let us make things here easier, give you some sweets at the end, doesn't make it better as well. What I would like to ask you is the questions I asked in the beginning. What are the central issues, the central issues that need to be solved in order for us to take Syria, which is now in a belligerent position, there is—all these egregious behavior things that have been detailed today are absolutely accurate. I will tell you that in the Soviet Union that long list existed, but we turned the Soviet Union into at least someone wasn't belligerent anymore toward us. What are those specific things that we can do that need to be solved?

Do the Syrians demand that they are not going to be friends with the West until a Jewish state of Israel no longer exists and the Palestinians are able to go home? Is that a prerequisite? If it is, what the hell are we even worrying about them for, because that is never going to happen. If it is short of that, what are those issues? I mentioned the Golan Heights. I have talked to Israelis, I have talked to Syrians, and they tend to think that the actual security element of the Golan Heights is not something that is the biggest stumbling block. Their reasoning Israelis don't want to make the deal is because it is also the water issue, which is vital to the Israelis as well, I might add. Is there something? Okay, the Golan Heights. That is an issue that needs to be solved. What else? Is that the only issue? If it is, let us try to solve that.

Ambassador FELTMAN. No, I agree with you, Congressman, that it is the peace issue that is going to take away the worst problems that we have.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Right.

Ambassador FELTMAN. It is the peace issue. You know, the disarming of Hezbollah, the hosting of Hamas, all these issues are going to be probably solved most easily through a comprehensive peace. That is why we are pushing so hard.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Correct. Correct. If you take them from a belligerent country into a country like Jordan or Egypt, all of those issues will be solved. So how do we do it? We don't do it and just say we are going to send an ambassador and rah, rah. No. What is the specific issues the ambassador has to solve? Golan Heights is one. We know that, right?

Ambassador FELTMAN. You know, Senator Mitchell has been going to Damascus because of the very issues that you are identifying here. We want to get to a comprehensive peace. The Syrians are different than the Iranians. You talked about the question about are they going to remain belligerent until Israel disappears? That is not what they say, that is not how they are negotiating, history has indicated. They have said they want to live in peace in the region. They have gone through a number of rounds of talks, direct and indirect, with the Israelis on how you get to that peace.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Right.

Ambassador FELTMAN. So it is a different stance than Iran has.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So you are convinced that with Syria at least, they have not made an ultimate demand about the nonexistence of

Israel by permitting the right of return of all the Palestinians, they haven't made that as part of their demand of being nonbelligerent. Okay.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Their acts don't suggest that.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. So thus, we should then proceed knowing that that is a possibility, because peace is not a possibility if that is their position. So there are specific things that we need to tackle. First of all, talk to me about the Golan Heights.

Ambassador FELTMAN. The first thing is how do you get the Syrian and Israeli track started again? That is extremely important. Senator Mitchell has been spending a lot of time on it. The Israelis and Palestinians right now are, I am sorry, the Israelis and Syrians right now are starting from a different perspective. The Syrians are saying we want to start from the presumption that the territorial issue, the Golan Heights, is going to be solved, we are going to have all the land restored to us in 67. The Israelis are saying we want to start without such preconditions, we want to explore where we can go. So we have differences in how they want to start, but both sides do want to start. Senator Mitchell has been working on how we bridge that gap. It is extremely important to get to that process.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. And if we bridge that gap, you think that we could actually make that turn from belligerency into possibly nonbelligerency——

Ambassador FELTMAN. It is not going to be like a light switch. It is not going to go from one side to the other overnight. It is going to be a long process.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I am not sure you are right about that. I have seen other countries do light switch changes, so thank you very much.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you. Ms. Jackson Lee?

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Chairman, thank you for this hearing. It has been an interesting day, Ambassador. We first had a hearing at Homeland Security with former Senators Graham and Talent who are on the committee that dealt with weapons of mass destruction, and today, this morning, two of your members from the State Department were here on the Nonproliferation Treaty and the nuclear summit that was held last week. By coincidence, our brilliant Mr. has a hearing on Syria. I take no connection, but it allows you to think carefully on some of these very important issues that we have. First of all, do we have an ambassador from Syria to the United States?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Yes. He has been here several years, something four, five, six. His name is Imad Mustafa.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. And has he been consistently here for those 6 years?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Yes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. So he has been through the Bush administration. To your knowledge, the previous administration was engaging that ambassador? He was not blackballed? He was moving around in the country?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Well, he was moving around the country, certainly. He is a very active blogger, if anyone follows his blog. The previous administration minimized contact with him.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. And so he was here, present, but had minimal contact.

Ambassador FELTMAN. That is correct.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Even though I had chances, I believe, to interact.

Ambassador FELTMAN. I think he is very active up here.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. I think he was very active up here. So I want to dispel the myth that the Obama administration is soft on protecting this nation or soft on engagement. I think it was a very bold move for the meeting that was held last week. Obviously, there needs to be an end solution to that meeting, and that would be that we get agreements that would put us as allies against nuclear proliferation. I think the idea of an ambassador to Syria is certainly one that is an obvious, that we have to engage and know what is going on, but at the same time, we have to be firm in knowing what is going on, and our positions need to be strong.

So in our engagement with Syria can you restate for me, and if I missed it in your testimony, what is going to be the firm position of the United States. If this ambassador happens to be confirmed, what will their role be in Syria? Many of us have been in Damascus, we have met with Dr. Assad and we have been told many good things, that I want to work, I want to be collaborative, but what will be our position? Then I want you to answer the question as to, it seems like you had an answer that said I may not be able to speak about it, but the point is we have heard that there is some transit opportunities for Iran to provide resources to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

We see a denial by the Prime Minister of Lebanon. So what is it? Is it unspoken? Whatever the case is, I think we have some challenges with the destabilization of that region. I would like for Syria to be a good neighbor. I frankly believe that there is so much work to be done for the Syrian people in their economic status and otherwise that that is a full plate. So how will we manage our position, and what will that position be with the new ambassador in Syria?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Thank you, Representative. In terms of having a chief admission, an ambassador, back in Damascus for the first time in more than 5 years, he is going to be pursuing, I think, a fairly simple formula. Syria says it wants to live in peace in the region. I think that he will be working to see how we could promote the type of actions that would prove Syria's words. How could we help change the calculus so that Syria would see that it is in its interest to be doing actions that are consistent with those words that they want to live in peace. These are really tough issues. Also, Syria, I would expect, wants to be accepted as a more respected member of the international community. That means living up to international obligations and also having a certain respect for human rights inside Syria, giving respect to its own people. The ambassador is going to be pursuing all those sorts of——

Ms. JACKSON LEE. And what will they be pursuing with respect to Lebanon and Hezbollah and the alleging interaction between Syria and Iran?

Ambassador FELTMAN. I mean, our policy is firm. Lebanese sovereignty is for the Lebanese. The Lebanese should be in control of

Lebanon's fate. That is a message that we deliver to all the parties in the region, but particularly Syria. All of us have an obligation to help in the stability of Lebanon, all of us have an obligation to enforce the arms embargo incorporated in 1701. This is one of the most serious issues that we have got to deal with with Syria every day.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Thank you very much.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you. Well, you guys have changed people in that chair in one hearing more than the Mets change pitchers in 20 innings. Mr. Fortenberry?

Mr. FORTENBERRY. I will just throw strikes, all right?

Mr. ACKERMAN. Throw strikes.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Ambassador, welcome. My best to your Deputy, Michael Corbin. We had a very productive visit in Nebraska, particularly with the Iraqi refugee community. He did an excellent job.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Heads a sports event too, I hear.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Wow! That got back to you?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Yeah.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Well, he was very generous with his time.

Ambassador FELTMAN. He had a great trip. He had a great trip.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Good. Good. I am glad to hear that.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Thank you for hosting him. He is a good guy.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. It was very helpful for him to be here, he was very well-received, so thank you for doing that. Let me ask you to take this to a little bit higher level. What is President Assad's end game? Clearly Syria meddles with destabilizing elements in the region. They have some type of partnership with Iran, they have, at least in the past, sought nuclear weapons capability. Is this to preserve power, is this to cut a bet with those who he perceives are going to have power so that he is protected, or is this some other hegemonic intention?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Congressman, your question is a difficult one. I would make a few comments. First, Syria is not Iran. We don't accept the proposition that Syria and Iran alliance is a permanent fixture in the Middle East. Syria is a secular state. Iran is not a secular state, shall we say. Syria has said it wants peace with Israel and has even engaged in talks with Israel. Iran rejects it. So there is obviously a different calculus at play when President Assad is making his decisions than when the Iranians are making their decisions. I look now at what seems to be a growing reproach, an ongoing friendship between Syria and Saudi Arabia.

That must be putting some tensions in the relationship between Syria and Iran because certainly Iran and Saudi Arabia do not see eye to eye on a lot of issues in the region, including relations with Iraq and the sort of government that would be emerging in Iraq. So far it looks to me as though the Syrians try to hedge their bets a bit, try to keep the door open in one direction while keeping their alliance with Iran. I would argue that it is part of our diplomatic job to try to show the Syrians why it is in their interest to moderate the behavior that we find so troubling in the region. You know, the Syrians aren't going to simply act because the United States asked them to act. The Syrians are going to want to see that

something is in their interest. That is how we all are as countries. Our job is to show them that it is in their interest to have the words that they say about living in peace in the region match by their actions.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. First of all, I think it is important to reflect on this very question in order to get to the mechanisms by which we could potentially invite Syria to join the responsible community of nations internationally, to be a responsible player that does want to live in peace in the Middle East, but what are those leverage points, if you will, that would help turn the relationship to one that is productive, stable and has continuity in the future for the long range goal of peace, and particularly peace with its neighbors?

Ambassador FELTMAN. The most important thing, frankly, is the Israel-Syria peace track. Comprehensive peace, of course, is set on a two state solution between Israel and Palestine, but a comprehensive peace would include Syria because that is where we really have the leverage to show the Syrians that it is in their interest to move in a different direction, when they can see that they could actually achieve some of their goals in a Syria-Israel peace process. That is the big game. That affects Hezbollah, it affects Hamas, it affects everything. I don't think that we should be simply waiting for the breakthrough which we hope happens to tomorrow on a Syria-Israel track. We need to be working with the Syrians on a whole variety of issues. I mentioned a couple where I thought that there was some potential now to move ahead, you know, vis-à-vis Iraq and things like that, but there are a lot of really tough issues where we need to be dealing with them.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. And there is a disposition to do this? An openness?

Ambassador FELTMAN. You know, the Syrians don't like the fact that we have four Executive Orders, the Syria Accountability Act, the Treasury ruling, that they are a state sponsor of terrorism. They don't like any of that, but frankly, the ball is in their court. They would like to see us move away from those things. Well, for that to happen, they have got to take some actions that correct the troubling behavior. We do have some things to talk about, we do have some leverage with them.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Thank you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you. There is a vote on in the House and we are just about out of time. Maybe 1 minute a piece for anther round for those who might want to ask a quick question. I have a very quick question. Not that we need to or seek other people's advice or guidance in determining U.S. policy, especially with the appointment or assignment of ambassadors, but certain of our friends are not very reluctant to express their opinions or objections from time to time. Much has been made of Israel during this hearing this morning. Have we heard any objections from the Israelis or any concerns about us looking to reappoint an ambassador?

Ambassador FELTMAN. In all my discussions with the Israelis, Mr., this has not come up. They have not raised this. I don't think this is a serious issue for them.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Engel, 1 minute.

Mr. ENGEL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will try to do this all. The unanswered question I had was that while we are concerned

about the SCUDs that have come in recently, for the past 3 years, Syria has allowed the rearming of Hezbollah in Lebanon. That is very upsetting, that Hezbollah is now stronger than it was before the war. So, you know, I would like you to comment on that. Many friends of Lebanon, which I consider myself to be one, believe that Syria is exploiting the end of its isolation in order to stage a political comeback in Lebanon. I would like you to comment on that.

Ambassador FELTMAN. I mean, you know, I, too, Congressman Engel, share your concern about Lebanon. I have, you know, deeply felt feelings about Lebanon from the time that I was there, and I am proud of what we all did together under the leadership of the courageous Lebanese people, but what is happening is that Lebanon has some real assets, the pluralism of Lebanon, the openness of Lebanon, and these are being exploited by forces who are using this pluralism of openness to promote an agenda that is not Lebanese. The best thing we can do for Lebanon is to solve these regional conflicts that allow others to make a mess inside Lebanon by exploiting the benefits of Lebanon.

Mr. ENGEL. I will let it go because I know we have a vote, Mr. Chairman. I do look forward, Mr. Ambassador, to that private meeting.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Ms. Jackson Lee, do you have a——

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Yes, I do. Ambassador, we were on the line of questioning about what the forceful position would be for our ambassador. What position or what interaction with Dr. Assad forcefully would we be taking as it relates to Syria's relationship with Iran?

Ambassador FELTMAN. You know, these are not going to be easy conversations that our ambassador has on a subject like Iran. We profoundly disagree with Syria's promotion of Iran's aggressive behavior in the region, and that is going to be clear from day one that our ambassador is on the ground. As I said earlier I don't think we can talk about a light switch turning Syria from one side to the other. This is going to be a long, long haul. We believe that it is important to make the case to Syria why the path they are on is so dangerous for Syria and for the region and how there are other aspects, there are other ways that Syria can go that are more promising.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. That is what I hope I will hear. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ambassador.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you. That was the final word. Ambassador, thank you very, very much. It has been enlightening and more exciting than I suspected.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:20 p.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. 20515-0128

Gary L. Ackerman (D-NY), Chairman

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

April 14, 2010

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 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, April 21, 2010

TIME: 1:30 p.m.

SUBJECT: Neither Appeasement nor Improvement? Prospects for U.S. Engagement with Syria

WITNESS: The Honorable Jeffrey D. Feltman
Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
U.S. Department of State
(Former United States Ambassador to Lebanon)

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* MEETING

Day *Wednesday* Date *4/21/10* Room *2172*

Starting Time *1:45* Ending Time *3:20*

Recesses [ ] (_____ to _____)

Presiding Member(s) *Ackerman*

CHECK ALL OF THE FOLLOWING THAT APPLY:

Open Session [✓]
Executive (closed) Session [ ]
Televised [✓]

Electronically Recorded (taped) [ ]
Stenographic Record [✓]

TITLE OF HEARING or BILLS FOR MARKUP: *(Include bill number(s) and title(s) of legislation.)*

Neither Appeasement nor Improvement? Prospects for US Engagement with Syria

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ackerman, McMahon, Jackson Lee, Berkley, Costa, Ellison, Klein, Engel, Green (TX), Burton, Fortenberry, Inglis, Rohrabacher, Royce

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: *(Mark with an * if they are not Members of HFAC.)*

Issa

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.)*

Ackerman

ACTIONS TAKEN DURING THE MARKUP: *(Attach copies of legislation and amendments.)*

RECORDED VOTES TAKEN (FOR MARKUP): *(Attach final vote tally sheet listing each member.)*

Subject	Yeas	Nays	Present	Not Voting

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *3:20*

Subcommittee Staff Director