

HEARING TO RECEIVE A BRIEFING ON THE SITUATION IN SYRIA

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 2013

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 1:58 p.m. in room SH-216, Hart Senate Office Building, Senator Carl Levin (chairman) presiding.

Committee members present: Senators Levin, Reed, Donnelly, King, and McCain.

Committee staff member present: Peter K. Levine, staff director.

Majority staff members present: Michael J. Kuiken, professional staff member; and William G.P. Monahan, counsel.

Minority staff members present: John A. Bonsell, minority staff director; and Thomas W. Goffus, professional staff member.

Staff assistants present: Kathleen A. Kulenkampff, Mariah K. McNamara, and John L. Principato.

Committee members' assistants present: Carolyn Chuhta, assistant to Senator Reed; Chad Kreikemeier, assistant to Senator Shaheen; Marta McLellan Ross, assistant to Senator Donnelly; Steve Smith, assistant to Senator King; Christian Brose, assistant to Senator McCain; Michelle Schmitt, assistant to Senator McCain; Lenwood Landrum, assistant to Senator Sessions; and Todd Harmer, assistant to Senator Chambliss.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CARL LEVIN, CHAIRMAN

Chairman LEVIN. I thank all for returning from this extensive lunch hour of ours. We welcome back our Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, for an update on the situation in Syria.

Reports emerging from Syria continue to grow worse by the day. The death toll grows and is nearly 75,000, according to the latest reports. The refugee and internally displaced populations are growing rapidly with estimates of their combined population in the millions. The internal battle between moderate and extremist elements of the opposition is not currently moving in the right direction, and the security of Syria's chemical weapons stockpile can only deteriorate.

In addition, President Assad and his increasingly small inner circle are resorting to the use of Scud missiles, air strikes, and other indiscriminate and brutal capabilities more and more and the employment of proxy militias to terrorize and kill his fellow Syrians.

Assad's military operations are enabled by two international actors: Iran and Russia. Iran's financial and materiel support have been critical to helping Assad's military to remain operable, and Russia's support to Syria's more advanced military weaponry is critical to Assad's continuing ability to project power into areas of the country that he no longer controls.

Syria's political and military opposition have introduced their own set of problems. Internal disagreements have prevented them from unifying their political and military chains of command. This has made their efforts fragmented at best. Secretary Kerry is again working with the opposition to try, yet again, to bring them together, and these efforts are also complicated by the increasingly capable al Nushrah Front, an al Qaeda offshoot that has used the security vacuum in Syria to spread its influence. Its growing presence is of concern and countering its spread needs to be a priority as we move forward.

The President has been cautious in employing the capabilities of our National security architecture, while contributing to the humanitarian efforts to provide relief to the Syrian people. I believe that time has come for the United States to intensify the military pressure on Assad.

Senator McCain and I recently wrote the President urging him to consider supporting a number of efforts, including the creation by Turkey of a safe zone inside of Syria along their border, the deployment of our Patriot batteries closer to that border in order to protect that safe zone, and to neutralize any Syrian planes that threaten it, and increasing support to vetted elements of the opposition in Syria. The committee will be interested in hearing from our witnesses on the feasibility of some of those proposals, as well as the feasibility of urging members of the Arab League and/or the Gulf Cooperation Council to authorize its members and other willing states to take needed steps to protect civilian life. Any or all of these actions would send the critical message to Assad that it is time for him to go.

We are assured that the Department is postured to respond to a full range of contingencies in Syria. We look forward to hearing from our witnesses regarding the situation in Syria, the efforts that they have directed, their assessment of the options available, and the potential effects and consequences of exercising any or all of those options.

Senator McCain.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Levin follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN

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

I want to thank the Secretary and General Dempsey for their patience. I know this has turned into a very long day for them, and I am sure they may feel that their time could be more usefully spent. But we thank you for being here because this is an issue which has now taken on proportions which are becoming more and more a possible threat to stability in the entire region, as well as the continued slaughter of thousands and thousands of innocent people.

For example, a Human Rights Watch report released last week suggests that more than 4,300 civilians have been killed by air strikes in Syria since July 2012.

The numbers begin to be overwhelming: over a million refugees, somewhere around 80,000 people killed. The neighboring countries, particularly Lebanon and Jordan, are being overwhelmed by the flow of refugees which, despite their best efforts and that of the UNHCR, it is having not only a damaging effect on our ability to care for the refugees, but it is also having a destabilizing effect on the governments of both of those countries.

So this is not just an issue that has to do with Syria. It also has to do with Iran and their continued supplying of weapons, materiel, and personnel. It also has to do with the Russians continuing supplying them with weapons and the Russians continuing to veto in the Security Council efforts to take modest actions against the Assad regime.

And I do not want to go on very long, but I would remind our witnesses and my colleagues that over 2 years ago, when a couple of young people wrote some graffiti and then were taken by Bashar's secret police and tortured, that ignited a fire not unlike that that began in Tunisia with a young man burning himself to death.

Since then, we have seen all of the effects of non-intervention that the opponents of intervention said would happen if we intervened. In other words, the conflict has spread. Bashar al Assad has refused to leave. Torture, murder, and rape continue at an accelerated pace. Surrounding nations are either destabilized or, in the case of Iran, heavily engaged. I will save my comments about the chemical weapons for the question and answer period because, obviously, that is a very, very serious issue of the utmost seriousness, as I am sure the President of the United States has stated his concern and I know the witnesses have.

So I guess, in summary, I say to two distinguished leaders in defense, how much has to happen before we—how many people killed? How many air strikes? How many mass murders? How many weapons from Iran and Russia have to flow in? How destabilized do the other surrounding countries have to be before we realize that we should do more than what we are presently doing?

And I would point out it is very interesting. I have been around too long in the view of many. But I have never seen an entire national security team recommend a course of action as was recommended by then Secretary of State, then Secretary of Defense, now Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and now Director of National Intelligence to take a course of action which was to provide arms to the resistance, and it was overruled somewhere in the White House.

So Secretary Hagel, I am aware—and we discussed some of the really full menu that you have, of issues that you are confronting. But I am not sure—there is another issue where thousands of refugees every night are pouring into the refugee camps and people are being slaughtered as we speak. So I hope that you will gain as informed of an assessment of the situation as you can and then reach a policy decision that you could recommend to the President of the United States. I am not saying you should—obviously, I would like

to see you take the same decision that the other members of the National security team did. But whatever, I would like for you to make a decision as to what course of action you would recommend to the President of the United States and what would be necessary from your standpoint as to how to most successfully achieve that goal.

Again, I understand all of the issues that you have to face. You talked about most of them most of the morning. But I think this is a humanitarian issue that just simply is unacceptable to continue on the path that it is on.

And I am sorry for the long statement, Mr. Chairman, but I thank you for allowing me to speak.

Chairman LEVIN. Well, thank you very much, Senator McCain, and thank you for your efforts in this regard. They have been longstanding and consistent. I think they are very important and I hope that they will create a response.

Secretary Hagel, let me start with you.

**STATEMENT OF HON. CHARLES T. HAGEL, SECRETARY OF
DEFENSE**

Secretary HAGEL. Mr. Chairman, thank you. Senator McCain, thank you. Senator King, thank you.

I think the Chairman and I both very much appreciate the opportunity to discuss this issue today, and I would like to make a brief statement to lay out some of the general parameters on what we are doing. And then I think the Chairman has a very short statement. Then we will get into whatever you want to talk about.

Chairman LEVIN. That would be fine. Thank you.

Secretary HAGEL. First, the policy of the United States Government is to work with allies and partners, as you both know, as well as the Syrian opposition, to provide humanitarian assistance across Syria and the region. And it is to hasten the end of violence, to bring about a political transition to a post-Assad authority that will restore stability, respect the rights of all its people, prevent Syria from becoming a safe haven for extremists, and take the necessary actions to secure Syria's chemical and biological weapons.

The best outcome for Syria and the region I think, as we all agree, is a negotiated political transition. The role of the Department of Defense is to support broader U.S. diplomatic efforts while ensuring that the U.S. military is fully prepared to protect America's interests and meet our security commitments to the region.

In pursuit of a negotiated political solution in Syria, the U.S. Government is working to mobilize the international community, further isolate the Assad regime, and support the moderate Syrian opposition. The United States has acknowledged the Syrian Opposition Coalition, the SOC, as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people and committed to provide them with \$117 million in non-lethal assistance, including communications and medical equipment.

The State Department and USAID are providing technical assistance to the opposition which includes training for over 1,500 Syrian leaders and activists from over 100 local councils. The goal is to strengthen these opposition groups that share the international

community's vision for Syria's future and minimize the influence of extremists.

Additionally, President Obama has directed his national security team to increase non-lethal assistance to both the SOC and the Supreme Military Council, the SMC. We are working now how to assess how to allocate and deliver that additional assistance.

The Department of State and USAID, with support from other U.S. Government agencies, are working to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Syria and help the more than 1 million Syrian refugees who have fled to neighboring countries. To date, the United States has provided \$385 million in humanitarian assistance, including emergency medical care and supplies, food, and shelter. The United States is the largest single bilateral provider of humanitarian aid to the Syrian people. The United States is leading efforts to ensure that other countries make good on the \$1.5 billion in commitments made at the International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria held in Kuwait earlier this year.

We are also working through diplomatic and military channels to encourage Russia and China to do more to help resolve this crisis, and I have conveyed the message in recent calls with both my Russian and Chinese counterparts.

Internationally, the United States has worked with the EU, Arab League, GCC countries, and over 50 countries to build a robust sanctions regime designed to pressure the Syrian Government and bring about an end to the conflict. These sanctions are having an impact on the Assad regime's ability to access the international financial system and raise foreign currency revenue.

In support of U.S. Government efforts to respond to the crisis, the Department of Defense has expanded security consultations with key allies and partners in the region and in Europe, ensured that the U.S. military is strategically postured in the region, and engaged in robust military planning for a range of contingencies.

U.S. military leaders are in regular communications with senior allied military leaders. Over the past year, we have synchronized defense planning with several nations, including Canada, the United Kingdom, and France. Following the President's recent trip to Israel and Jordan, on Saturday I will travel to the region and meet with defense leaders of Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the U.A.E. to review our regional security efforts. Secretary Kerry will be in Turkey this weekend discussing Syria with the Turkish Government and other key partners. The President's National Security Advisor has just returned from Russia where he discussed Syria with Russian leaders. And Chairman Dempsey will be in China this week discussing Syria with Chinese leaders.

Last December, the Department of Defense deployed Patriot missile batteries to southern Turkey for the protection of our NATO ally. Since last year, a small team of U.S. military experts has been working in Jordan on planning related to chemical weapons and preventing a spillover of violence across Jordan's borders.

Last week, I ordered the deployment of a U.S. Army headquarters element to enhance this effort in Amman. These personnel will continue to work alongside the Jordanian armed forces to improve readiness and prepare for a number of scenarios.

Through our Cooperative Threat Reduction program, Department of Defense personnel and our interagency partners are also working closely with Syria's neighbors, including Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq to help them counter the threat from Syria's chemical weapons. As part of this effort, the Department of Defense is funding over \$70 million for activities in Jordan, including providing training and equipment to detect and stop any chemical weapons transfers along its border with Syria and developing Jordanian capacity to identify and secure chemical weapons assets.

President Obama has made clear that if Assad and those under his command use chemical weapons or fail to meet their obligations to secure them, there will be consequences, and they will be held accountable. The Department of Defense has plans in place to respond to the full range of chemical weapons scenarios.

The U.S. military is constantly updating and adjusting tactical military planning to account for the rapidly shifting situation on the ground and to prepare for additional new contingencies, not only those associated with the Syrian regime's chemical weapons, but also the potential spillover of violence across Syria's borders that could threaten allies and partners.

While I cannot discuss specific plans in an open session, we have been developing options and planning for a post-Assad Syria, and we will continue to provide the President and Congress with our assessment of options for U.S. military intervention.

The reality is that this is a complex and difficult situation, as everyone on this committee knows. The killing of innocents by the Syrian regime is tragic. The Assad regime is intent on maintaining power, the conflict within Syria has developed along dangerous sectarian lines, and the opposition has not yet sufficiently organized itself politically or militarily.

We have an obligation and responsibility to think through the consequences of any direct U.S. military action in Syria. Military intervention at this point could hinder humanitarian relief operations. It could embroil the United States in a significant, lengthy, and uncertain military commitment. Unilateral military action could strain other key international partnerships, as no international or regional consensus on supporting armed intervention now exists. And finally, a military intervention could have the unintended consequence of bringing the United States into a broader regional conflict or proxy war.

Military intervention is always an option, should be an option, but an option of last resort. The best outcome for Syria and the region is a negotiated political transition to a post-Assad Syria.

Having said that, the responsibility of the Department of Defense is to protect America's national security and to provide the President with a full range of options for any contingency. The United States military is prepared to respond at the President's direction. We will continue to work with our allies and partners to defend our interests, meet security commitments in the region, and support efforts to achieve a political solution to the crisis.

And I will look forward to your questions and would ask now if General Dempsey has some remarks.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Hagel follows:]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Secretary.

General?

**STATEMENT OF GEN MARTIN E. DEMPSEY, USA, CHAIRMAN,
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF**

General DEMPSEY. Thank you. Chairman Levin, Senator McCain, and Senator King, I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the evolving situation in Syria.

The conflict in Syria remains tragic and dangerous for the people of Syria and for the region.

I know you are familiar with testimony by numerous officials who have come up to Capitol Hill from across Government over the past several weeks who have come to discuss this subject with you. So I will focus my brief opening remarks on the subject of the military instrument of power and how it could relate to Syria.

Our military focus has been on preparedness. We have deployed Patriot missiles to defend Turkey as part of a NATO mission. We are sharing information and conducting planning with our close partners, as Secretary Hagel said. We have conducted our own internal planning for a wide variety and range of contingencies, and we are well postured within the region for any contingencies.

When called, our responsibility has and always will be to provide the Secretary of Defense and the President of the United States with options. Some options involve the use of military force. The decision to use force, especially lethal force, is not one that any of us takes lightly. In weighing options, we have a responsibility to align the use of force to the intended outcome. We also have a responsibility to articulate risk, and that is not just risk to our forces, but to the mission we may be assigned and to our responsibilities elsewhere. Some options may not be feasible in terms of time or in opportunity costs without compromising our security elsewhere. So before we take action, we have to be prepared for what comes next. The use of force, especially in circumstances where ethnic and religious factors dominate, is unlikely to produce predictable outcomes.

Now, to be clear, this is not a reason to avoid intervention and conflict, rather to emphasize that unintended consequences are the rule with military interventions of this sort.

In cases where a direct threat to our homeland is unclear or where it is assessed to be a future rather than an imminent threat, we should act, when possible, in concert with allies and partners to shape the outcome and help bear the burden. Now that said, I would note that the armed forces of the United States can do very nearly anything asked of it, provided we have the support of the American people and the resources necessary to accomplish the mission.

Thank you for your support of America's sons and daughters in uniform, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Dempsey follows:]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you both very much.

Let us have an 8-minute first round this afternoon.

Secretary, you laid out the policy of the administration in your opening statement, including to work with allies, hasten an end to the violence, bring about a political transition to a post-Assad authority. Is our policy working in your judgment?

Secretary HAGEL. In my judgment, Mr. Chairman, I start with this, as I have noted in my statement. This, at best, is a complicated situation. You all understand that. I think the chairman's comments about the ethnic/religious dynamics in play, the unpredictability of the region itself—that is where I begin in my own assessment of anything.

Chairman LEVIN. But at the end of your assessment, is it your judgment that our policy is working?

Secretary HAGEL. Well, it has not achieved the objective, obviously. That is why I also said in my statement that is why we continue to look for other options and other ways to do this and continue to deepen our relationships with our allies and coalitions.

Chairman LEVIN. General, are there any additional military pressures that can be placed on Assad that in your judgment should be undertaken with all the risks?

General DEMPSEY. As I sit here today, Senator, I do not see that the introduction of military force would produce the outcome that we seek. I am deeply concerned. It is a sectarian conflict. I do not think it should be left unaddressed. Let me be clear about that. But the introduction of military power right now certainly has the possibility of making the situation worse.

Chairman LEVIN. First of all, would you include in that the—if Turkey were willing to create a safe zone inside Syria along the Syrian-Turkish border, first of all, do you think we should support it if they were willing to do that?

General DEMPSEY. Well, one of the options that we have produced is, in fact, support of both Turkey and Jordan for the establishment of humanitarian safe zones, if you will.

Chairman LEVIN. Might that option include the movement—I am talking now the Turkish-Syrian border—of Patriot missiles to protect that safe zone?

General DEMPSEY. Well, it would have to include some kind of no-fly zone to protect the safe zone. I am not sure that the use of the Patriot in that way—in fact, I am quite sure that the use of the Patriot in that way would not accomplish the task, but could be part of a—could not accomplish the task in isolation, but could be part of accomplishing the task.

Chairman LEVIN. And what else would be needed?

General DEMPSEY. Well, in general, to protect a safe zone, you have got to have some control of the ground beyond it, ideally, artillery range because, as you know, about 90 percent of the casualties in Syria are inflicted by artillery. And so to do this in a doctrinally correct way, you would have the safe zone to extend however many kilometers and then, out beyond that, to have control of ensuring that artillery would not impact it.

Now, the Scuds produce a different kind of problem, but there are things that we could do to deal with that as well.

Chairman LEVIN. And would you support that?

I do not know if that is called the introduction of military force. I guess it is even though we are not talking about the introduction of American troops. We are talking about the introduction of a capability along the border or near the border to accomplish the protection of that zone, if Turkey decided it were willing to do it. I do

not know if you want to label that the introduction of military power. It is but it is not inside of Syria.

Do you think we ought to consider doing that? And if not, is there any military pressure that we can add that might attract Assad's attention?

General DEMPSEY. If I could back up because the question about would I support the use of military power I think really should be predicated by the outcome we are trying to produce. And clearly ending the suffering is a legitimate and important outcome. Preventing the failure of the state of Syria, that is to say, its institutions, ensuring that Syria does not become a safe haven for groups like al Nusra—al Qaeda-affiliated groups, al Nusra, Ahrar al Sham and some others.

And so what I would want to know before I simply establish the safe zone is, as I said in my statement. I mean, I really want to understand what we were willing to do, either by ourselves or partners, when it escalated because it will escalate. This is, again, not a reason not to do it, Senator, but rather to understand the end of the journey before you take the first step.

Chairman LEVIN. And I think we probably would all agree with that.

And are you in the process of trying to reach a conclusion as to what the next steps would be, what the impact of such a protected zone is? Are you in the process of thinking that through?

General DEMPSEY. Yes. On the military side, I am and I am also contributing, to the extent possible, to the discussions inside of our Government both with the intelligence community and with our State Department colleagues.

Chairman LEVIN. I do not want to put words in your mouth, but might you conclude in the near future that such a step or steps might be appropriate?

General DEMPSEY. I cannot predict that, Senator, at this point.

Chairman LEVIN. So you cannot predict it.

General DEMPSEY. I am telling you the work is ongoing, but I just do not know where it is going.

Chairman LEVIN. Secretary, what is the status of our thinking about al Nusra? It is a, in our judgment, part now of al Qaeda or not? We have gotten different statements, depending on whether it is the al Nusra folks inside of Syria or whether it is al Qaeda in Iraq. What is our assessment?

Secretary HAGEL. Well, I understand you have General Clapper coming up here tomorrow, and he can give you a clear assessment of that.

But to answer your question, it is my sense that it is a very clear and potent force in Syria. As you have seen through open sources, they have made an effort to associate themselves with al Qaeda. It is a very effective terrorist group.

Chairman LEVIN. Have we taken up the issue of these overflights over Iraq from Iran carrying equipment to Assad? I noticed in your opening statement, I believe, Secretary Hagel, you made reference through a Cooperative Threat Reduction program that the Department of Defense personnel and our interagency partners are working closely with Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq to help them counter the threat from Syria's chemical weapons. So if Iraq is threatened by

Syria's chemical weapons, yet their airspace is being used to protect Assad, have we taken that up with Iraq in a very firm way?

Secretary HAGEL. As you know, Secretary Kerry recently had met with President Maliki, and the answer is yes. We are engaged in very active discussions with the Iraqis.

Chairman LEVIN. Senator McCain?

Senator MCCAIN. General Dempsey when you and Secretary Panetta testified that both of you recommended the supply of weapons to the resistance, what led you to that conclusion and recommendation?

General DEMPSEY. Well, at the time, the recommendation was based on we felt like we had a clear enough understanding of the moderate opposition and we felt as though it was in the long-term interest of Syria as a nation state, that the institutions would not fail. And at the time, it was proper at that moment to intervene that way.

Senator MCCAIN. Is it proper now to provide them with weapons?

General DEMPSEY. Well, to tell you the truth, it is actually more confusing on the opposition side today than it was 6 months ago. There are more weapons in Syria.

Senator MCCAIN. So if we had made the decision then to supply them with weapons, it would have been less complicated than now.

General DEMPSEY. That is a potential conclusion, yes, sir.

Senator MCCAIN. I do not know about potential.

Let me get this straight. So now you think the situation is too complex to provide the resistance with weapons? You have changed your recommendation?

General DEMPSEY. Well, I have not been asked for a recommendation.

Senator MCCAIN. I am asking for your opinion.

General DEMPSEY. My military judgment is that now that we have seen the emergence of al Nusrah and Ahrar al Sham notably and now that we have seen photographs of some of the weapons that have been flowing into Syria in the hands of those groups, now I am more concerned than I was before.

Senator MCCAIN. Does that mean you do not think we should supply the resistance with weapons, the right people?

General DEMPSEY. If we could clearly identify the right people, I would support it.

Senator MCCAIN. Well, I would remind you I guess it was a year ago last March, you and Secretary Panetta said the fall of Bashar al Assad is inevitable. I am not sure that when you said "inevitable," that it was going to drag on as long as it is. Of course, jihadists are pouring in. Of course, they are coming from all over the Arab world. That is what we said would happen. That is what we said would happen. Does it astonish you that jihadists from all over the Middle East are pouring into Syria?

General DEMPSEY. No, but I would also said I never said inevitable. I actually saw this as a frozen conflict.

Senator MCCAIN. I will get you your testimony, sir, because I remember both you and Secretary Panetta said it is not a matter of whether, it is a matter when that Assad will fall.

General DEMPSEY. Well, that is true. But I thought for some time that whether Assad fell, that there would be a continuing insur-

gency from that point forward because of the way he treated the opposition.

Senator MCCAIN. And because they continue to get the flow of arms from Russia and from Iran. I am sure you are aware of General Mattis' testimony that if Bashar fell, it would be the greatest blow to Iran in 25 years.

General DEMPSEY. I am.

Senator MCCAIN. You are aware that General Mattis and General Breedlove both testified that a fair amount of Assad's operational aircraft could be destroyed on the ground using standoff weaponry. I am sure you are aware of that.

General DEMPSEY. I am and we have done the analysis.

Senator MCCAIN. So it is not as if we are going to have to take out all of the Syrian air defense systems.

All I can say, Secretary Hagel, is that military intervention at this point could hinder humanitarian relief operations. That is so out of touch with the realities of the situation on the ground in Syria. It is almost laughable.

The reason why we are not getting the humanitarian aid in is because we are not ensuring that the humanitarian aid gets in. And for a long time, they were going through Damascus. I think we know where that aid goes.

It could embroil the United States in a lengthy and uncertain military commitment. Unilateral military action could strain other key international partnerships as no international or regional consensus—there is a regional consensus I think you will find on your trip, Mr. Secretary, that they want American leadership. And I think if you visited one of the refugee camps or met with the opposition, which I hope you will, they are angry and bitter because we have not helped them.

And we are breeding a generation of people who will—as was articulated to me by a teacher in one of the refugee camps, these children will take revenge on the people who refused to help them.

So every day goes by. The situation gets worse. A slaughter goes on and we sit by and say, well, if we intervened, it could hinder humanitarian relief operations. It is very hard to understand and it is also hard to understand what this administration is doing when, at that time, every member of the National security team recommended sending arms. As I understand what you are saying, General Dempsey, well, now maybe it is more complicated. Of course, it is even more complicated than the day it started when a group of young people and others rose up against Bashar al Assad. And I would argue that every day that goes by, there are more and more of these extremists coming in and making it more and more complicated.

Do you believe that we have the capability, General Dempsey, to secure these chemical weapons stocks?

General DEMPSEY. As I said in the other session, sir, certainly we have the ability and it would depend on the environment, hostile to a collaborative. But we have got the planning done. But if it were a hostile environment, it would be a significant intervention.

Senator MCCAIN. If Assad fell and left the country, a pillar of the American policy for now well over 2 years, would we have to put troops on the ground to secure those chemical weapons caches?

General DEMPSEY. If we had confidence in the opposition—remember now, the opposition has said publicly they do not want foreign intervention inside the borders of Syria. So if we had confidence they could secure it, then they could secure it. If we were to have to go in there, it would be non-permissive. We have got all that planning done.

Senator MCCAIN. Do you have confidence that we could secure it?

General DEMPSEY. Not as I sit here today simply because they have been moving it and the number of sites is quite numerous.

Senator MCCAIN. Well, I am sure that you understand when I talk to these people, that they appreciate the flak jackets. Meanwhile, the Iranians are pouring in weapons and people that they have trained in Iran and the murders and the torture and the rapes go on while the United States says, well—it is in Secretary Hagel's statement. A military intervention could have the unintended consequence of bringing the United States into a broader regional war. I am glad that you were not in charge during Bosnia and Kosovo.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator McCain.

Senator KING.

Senator KING. First, a specific question. What is Israel's position with regard to what we should do? Are they urging us to take greater action? What is their position on this issue that we are discussing?

Secretary HAGEL. Senator, I have not had a discussion that would revolve around that question on what they may or may not be telling us what to do. I have spoken to my counterpart, the minister of defense, in Israel. I will be there this weekend. We will be, obviously, discussing this issue. What recommendations, conversations their senior leaders have had with our senior leaders on a position on Syria, I do not know.

General DEMPSEY. Can I point out, Senator, that that question hints at the real challenge we have got with this issue, which is that there are multiple players and each of them has a bit of a different concern with the situation? So if you are Turkey, you are worried about a safe haven for the Kurdish PKK. If you are Jordan, your principal concern is the flow of refugees and, as they describe them, jihadists. If you are Israel, you have a sense that the chemical weapons could eventually be turned on them. The heavy air defense weapons could get into the hands of Lebanese Hizballah. They have a sense that these jihadist Salifists could turn on them. If you are Iran, you want your surrogate to prevail. And if you are some of the Gulf countries, they have selected groups who they believe will eventually adopt their form of government and Islam. I mean, this is what makes this situation as complex as any on the planet, and there is no simple solution to that kind of complexity. That is exactly the problem.

Senator KING. As compared with Libya, for example, where—

General DEMPSEY. As compared with any place.

Senator KING. I could not help but think as you were talking and having the colloquy with Senator McCain, one of my favorite quotes from Mark Twain is history does not usually repeat itself, but it

often rhymes. And there are so many rhymes going on here. You just cannot hear this.

General Dempsey, you have long experience with the use of our force, and I take it, from what you are saying, that there is no way to predict where this would lead. There is no clean way to say, okay, we are just going to do a little air power. We are just going to do a no-fly zone. And then it becomes one question after another. Is that your concern?

General DEMPSEY. That is exactly my concern, Senator. I want to understand the outcome that we believe we are trying to encourage, not produce because that has to happen inside of Syria and with regional partners. And once I understand the outcome, I can take the toolbox I have got and I can probably provide an option or two or three. But in the absence of understanding what we want Syria to—I mean, we have said we want it to be a transactional government that is representative in nature and all parties come. But show me how that happens.

Senator KING. Everybody wants that.

General DEMPSEY. Right.

Senator KING. But with the question of arms, I mean, in Afghanistan we armed the insurgents against a government that was not in our interests and they ended up using the arms against us 10 or 15 years later. You cannot tell where those arms are going to end up. Is that not correct?

General DEMPSEY. It is, sir. And that is why this issue of arming, which on the surface of it seems to be pretty clean, is anything but. I mean, look, you have lighted on exactly the challenge we face in that issue in particular, arming the opposition.

Senator KING. Yes. We only want to arm the good guys, if only we could tell for sure who they are.

I would like your thoughts, Secretary Hagel. This case presents one of the most difficult issues of American foreign policy. Even before Syria, I have wrestled with this thought of when do we get involved in an atrocity going on within someone else's country. I mean, that is a very tough question. Would we have intervened in Germany in 1938 if we had known precisely what was going on? I think we all would like to say we would have and that we would have stopped it. But it is not an easy question, and it presupposes—the implication is that we have a right to do that anywhere in the world if there is an atrocity going on. Could you reflect on that a bit?

Secretary HAGEL. Well, thank you, Senator. You have just defined one rather significant issue and that is the legal basis of military intervention in a country. Certainly every nation has the right to protect itself in their own interest of self-defense.

But to answer your question, you take some of the dimensions of this that you laid out, as did Chairman Dempsey. You amplify on the complications. Then cut that back to your question, when do we do this and on what basis and is there a framework that we can follow. My answer is you start with the reality these are each imperfect, different situations.

Chairman Dempsey laid out, I think, rather clearly some of the dimensions of each of the countries in that region, their own self-interests. You have others who have self-interests in this whether

it is sectarian or tribal or historic, national. And then you try to assess all of this with what General Dempsey was talking about. What then is our objective here? How much risk are you willing to bear? How much cost are you willing to bear? Because there is a cost. There will always be a cost. In General Dempsey's opening comments, he talked about if you get involved, however way it is, in a military intervention, there will be a cost to that. It could be a pretty deep cost, a pretty high cost.

I have always taken the approach in my own sense of these things is you better always ask the end game questions. Where is this going? Where is it likely to end, and how is it likely to end? We look at Iraq and Afghanistan. I was in the U.S. Senate at the time both those wars began, as the two distinguished colleagues of yours sitting in front of me were. And I do not recall a time when anyone came and testified before the United States Congress that this was going to be an enduring effort and occupation.

Senator KING. As a matter of fact, as I recall, someone in the administration was fired for saying it would cost \$200 billion in Iraq, and it ended up costing well over a trillion.

Secretary HAGEL. That is right. 12 years later, we are still in Afghanistan with higher numbers than anybody would have predicted, 8 years in Iraq. Now, whether that was the right thing or the wrong thing is a different issue.

But the point is where I start to answer your question is you have to play this thing out a little bit in your own mind. It is imperfect and imprecise. But what Chairman Dempsey said—and it is his responsibility; it is my responsibility—if the President asks for a recommendation on any of this, yes, we will be prepared, but we have also got to factor into that at what cost is this going to be for the men and women having to fight that war. Some will die in that war no matter what. It is always easy to talk policy. It may be worth it. It may be the smart thing to do, but you better be damn sure, as sure as you can be, before you get into something because once you are into it, there is not any backing out, whether it is a no-fly zone, safe zone, protect these, whatever it is. Once you are in, you cannot unwind it. You cannot just say, well, it is not going as well as I thought it would go, so we are going to get out.

Senator McCain's point about one of my comments in my statement about making it worse for humanitarian. I think we could if we are not careful. If we did not get into this the right way, if we get into it, there could be more bloodshed. There could be more humanitarian disasters. Maybe not.

Senator KING. If we went in and the other folks who are funding the other side, Russia or Iran, decide, okay, they are in, we are going to get in in a more major way, we have got a significant conflict.

Secretary HAGEL. That is another element.

I would end this way. There is no consensus here. Libya, some of these other countries—there was a consensus. We had some kind of consensus, whether it was a U.N. resolution or something. But we do not have a consensus here on this issue. It makes it even more complicated, which gets us into legal issues and so on. But just a consensus of what we should do, what America's role should be, there is no consensus on it.

Senator KING. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary HAGEL. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator King.

Senator Reed.

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen.

General Dempsey, a year ago, there was a discussion, a debate about the introduction of arms. Again, you were much more tuned into the specifics, but my impression was they were essentially small arms, assault weapons, individual weapons. Is that fair?

General DEMPSEY. Yes, Senator.

Senator REED. In the subsequent year, have the Sunni opposition—principally the Sunni opposition—received a significant number of small arms from sources other than the United States?

General DEMPSEY. It has. That is reported in an open source, but it has.

Senator REED. So the lack of arms has not been a decisive issue in terms of the conflict on the ground in Syria.

General DEMPSEY. No, not in my military judgment. There is no shortage of arms in Syria.

Senator REED. What is the problem and perhaps was not as evident a year ago is the—and I must say the surprising durability of Assad, but also the continued incoherence of the opposition. Is that a fair statement?

General DEMPSEY. Yes.

Senator REED. And our policy priority has been, I think, even back then and going forward for this year and continuing forward, is to try to build a coherent, inclusive opposition as the key strategic element in resolving the situation. Is that a fair judgment?

General DEMPSEY. It is fair and it is even more important now with kind of the coalescing of these extremist groups. So now you have got—the moderate opposition becomes more important.

Senator REED. And there is another aspect of this issue, just the level of conflict. That is, it is not just simply supplying the opposition, it is somehow interdicting support for the Assad regime. The chairman mentioned the overflights from Iraq, but that support is coming from, most noticeably, Iran. So positing even an increase maybe in the sophistication of arms we provide, the assumption would be that that would be matched unless we took proactive steps or someone took proactive steps via further escalation to support Assad.

General DEMPSEY. I am not sure I understood the connection there, Senator.

Senator REED. Well, the connection is this. There is already public reporting that the Iranians and others have a vested interest in the success of the regime. They are providing support, et cetera. Again, if you are looking at sort of both sides of the conflict, supplying one side while the other side continues to draw resources may have no effect. So part of the calculation has to be—and it goes sort of diplomatically to our relationship with Iraq—is somehow interdicting, suppressing the supply and support of both money, arms, political support for the Assad regime. Is that a fair point?

General DEMPSEY. It is.

Senator REED. It strikes me, too, that talking about a safe area, that somebody—and it is probably not us—has to be able at least to publicly state that they would physically, if necessary, control the ground. Is that a fair judgment too?

General DEMPSEY. Yes, it is. And I should also mention that the two countries we have been in touch with, notably Jordan and Turkey, are more interested in having the safe area outside their borders so that they do not have this influx inside.

Senator REED. But that effectively means that even if they do not take actions immediately, when they declare the safe area, simply to stop mechanized vehicles from Assad moving in as they do, they would physically have to control the ground either through air strikes or through artillery strikes or through introducing force on the ground.

General DEMPSEY. That is correct. The safe zone is only safe if you ensure its safety. And you have to control the terrain at some distance beyond it in order to do that.

Senator REED. And that would require, given the predisposition of the Turks and the Jordanians, basically declaring some part of Syria's territory to be controlled by another country.

General DEMPSEY. I think that is right.

Senator REED. And again, we try to search for analogies, and there many that have been offered. We did, in fact, provide—and you are much more knowledgeable than I and Secretary Hagel also. We did provide sort of an arrangement with the Kurds in Iraq after 1991. But it strikes me that there we had defeated the government. We had imposed conditions on them, a coalition of forces. There was no need to provide kind of that control of the ground because the Peshmerga was pretty good, that we had a simple tactical operation just to ensure what the Iraqis already agreed to. They would not fly. But that was a result of an armed intervention by the United States, not by a unilateral declaration by the United States or anyone else. Is that a fair recollection?

General DEMPSEY. Yes, sir, it is.

Senator REED. You know, again, I think you have to continue to plan for every contingency, and the Secretary has made that point. But the planning has to be, I think, comprehensive and very thorough. The resources have to be considered. And also I think what we have learned, to our chagrin, is that you have to hope for the best but plan for the worst. And the worst could involve a serious engagement of U.S. forces which is hard, as the Secretary said, to reverse, and second, extraordinarily expensive.

Have you put any numbers to a situation in which we were asked for sort of a modest troop level to support our allies or air operations over several months?

General DEMPSEY. A dollar figure? Not a dollar figure, but we have got—in each of these options that we have been developing, we understand the resources required, aircraft, munitions, manpower.

But if I could add, we have said, both the Secretary and I, that if we are asked to do something in Syria, it will require a supplemental. There is no question.

Senator REED. Mr. Secretary, just any comments that you might have on this line.

Secretary HAGEL. No, Senator. I think your dialogue with the Chairman starts to really get to some of the dynamics here that have to be thought through. As the Chairman said, we look at these plans every day. The joint planning staff, our commanders, we are constantly refining that based on the realities. Some of those issues have been brought up today, al Nusra and the different issues.

But the point here I think that you started with is really a key component of all of this: coherent opposition. That is a very difficult base to start from when the intent is to try to help in some way and provide arms to someone. It is easy to say, well, the anti-Assad forces. Well, the anti-Assad forces is al Qaeda. It is al Nusra. You go through it. So who exactly are we talking about? Who leads that. I know we have a military coalition group and so on. But at least in my opinion, as Secretary of Defense, it is still not clear enough to make any conclusive adjustments to a policy recommendation on, Mr. President, this is exactly what we should do.

Senator REED. I have used two terms which I think are important, "coherent" and "inclusive," because as I think as General Dempsey suggested, should there be an immediate collapse of the Assad Government, there is a potential for civil strife unless the opposition is not only coherent but it embraces the three major traditions in the country, Shia, Sunni—well, four—Christian and Kurd. In other contexts, in Libya—and again, I will stand to be corrected—there were tribal rivalries, but there was not quite such a traditional distinction, a sectarian cleavage, in other areas also. And that is a very elusive objective.

But I thank you very much.

General DEMPSEY. If I could just add, Senator. Do you mind, Mr. Chairman?

Chairman LEVIN. Not at all.

General DEMPSEY. Because it is important to mention, I think, that you will hear some folks say we have to act now or we risk this becoming a sectarian conflict. I just want to give my view of this. It is a sectarian conflict. And the question now is how do regional partners resolve that so that when it collapses, it does not turn into a Lebanon-like experience which, as you know, was 15 years and 100,000. And that is a country of 4 million. Syria is 20 million.

Senator REED. And it is a country we did introduce forces and had to withdraw them under very dire circumstances. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

Let us have a second round, maybe 5 minutes.

I do not think anyone would disagree with either of you about the need to have an end game idea, what are the effects of our actions if we act more forcefully, if we use some additional military pressure or contribute to it because it would not be us acting. It would only be, in my judgment, if Turkey decides to act along that border, that we would be supportive of Turkey. That is for me having very important allies in the region.

But I think we also—is it fair to say—not only have to figure out the consequences of any actions, but we also have to figure out consequences of not acting.

General DEMPSEY. Yes, I agree with that, Senator. You know, what we have been doing with the Israelis, with the Turks, and with the Jordanians is trying to help them lower the risk of spill-over effects. That is kind of in the category of inaction, if you will.

Chairman LEVIN. How many refugees are there now?

General DEMPSEY. Well, you know, the numbers are a bit elusive. It could be as many as a million. You know, some of them move into camps. Others move into homes. So the ICRC tends to lose track of them. It could be a million.

Chairman LEVIN. Is there a destabilizing impact of refugees coming into Jordan, for instance?

General DEMPSEY. There very well could be. As you know, the Jordanians are concerned about actually having this change their demographic, and so they are especially concerned about it.

Chairman LEVIN. Is that a consequence of not acting perhaps?

General DEMPSEY. You know, it is a consequence—

Chairman LEVIN. It could be either way. It could be a consequence either way.

General DEMPSEY. Sure.

Chairman LEVIN. But could that be a consequence of not acting, that the refugee flows continue into Jordan and that they become more destabilized?

General DEMPSEY. Sure. I mean, as I said, you can argue both sides of almost any of these issues.

Chairman LEVIN. Well, I think it is important, though, that both sides be argued. I happen to agree with that, but not just—the only thing so far that I think you have argued today is we have to look for the consequences of actions, and I think we all agree to that. But we have not heard from you—and I do not know that it is your job, frankly, to look at the consequences of not acting, but it is surely our job to look at the consequences on both sides. Would you agree with that?

General DEMPSEY. I do, Mr. Chairman, but I would say I do not think we are guilty of not acting. I am here today, dressed as I am, talking about military power. But the other instruments of national power are being applied. We can judge how well or not well, but they are being applied.

Chairman LEVIN. And that it has not achieved its policy goals yet. I think you would agree with the Secretary. I think he said we have not achieved our policy goals. We have not achieved them yet. I think you would agree. Would you not?

General DEMPSEY. It has never been our goal to see a prolonged conflict. So on that basis, I would agree.

Chairman LEVIN. Also, in terms of—it is interesting. You said if the President asks for a recommendation. Does that mean there have been no recommendations from either of you to the President on this question yet?

General DEMPSEY. On military power?

Chairman LEVIN. On any additional military pressure.

General DEMPSEY. We have had National Security staff meetings at which we have been asked to brief the options, but we have not been asked for a recommendation.

Secretary HAGEL. We have not been asked. As I said, I have not been asked by the President.

I want to go back, if I could, Mr. Chairman, to a point you made, which I have noted in my testimony, opening statement, for a specific reason.

Not that we do not have broader responsibilities, but my main responsibility as Secretary of Defense, as you know and you mentioned, is the security of this country. And my focus is always on that first. That has to fold into our broader national security objectives. As I said in my statement, it is to support that policy. But I wanted to get back to that because I think your comment and observation, at least from my perspective, was an important one.

Chairman LEVIN. You talk about the lack of a consensus, and that is true. I do not know that there was a consensus in Bosnia. I am trying to remember if there was a consensus in Bosnia.

General DEMPSEY. It might be useful for us to lay out the differences and the similarities that existed. But I will say do not forget that there was a NATO consensus.

Chairman LEVIN. That is correct. There is not a NATO consensus on Syria. I know that.

However, apparently there is among the Gulf Cooperation Council. I believe that they have together decided to remove Assad from his seat and have given it to the opposition. Is that accurate?

Secretary HAGEL. They are funding—some of those countries, as you know—some of the opposition forces. I do not know if there is a formal GCC position.

Chairman LEVIN. In terms of who represents Syria at the Gulf Cooperation Council, I read there is such a decision that has been made. And if there is, that would be some evidence of a regional consensus. Would it not? Some evidence. I am not saying it is compelling, overwhelming, conclusive.

Secretary HAGEL. I am not sure it is regional. I think it is more within the opposition in Syria. It is Syrian opposition, the SOC coalition. And I am not sure they represent any countries there or any governments in that SOC that has taken the place of the Syrian spot there at the Arab League.

Chairman LEVIN. Okay. Well, we will double check that. That was my understanding.

And then I will call on Senator King in just one moment.

There has been a report that the British and perhaps the French are considering additional support to the opposition, military support, lethal weapons. Is that accurate, do you know?

General DEMPSEY. I am not aware of that, although we have been conducting integrated planning with them as our close NATO allies. But I have not heard that they have taken a decision to arm anyone.

Chairman LEVIN. They are not more forward-leaning than we are, as far as you know?

General DEMPSEY. You know, let me just say they share our concerns with having the outcome be established before the action.

Chairman LEVIN. Senator King.

I know that Senator McCain is on his way, and I do have some additional questions.

Can you tell us what your understanding is as to whether or not Syria has actually used chemical weapons?

Secretary HAGEL. Our intelligence agencies are going into more detail on what we know and what we do not know. Again, when General Clapper is before you tomorrow, I am sure he will get into that. I suspect, though, that some of this will have to be done in closed session.

Chairman LEVIN. Secretary Kerry has said that given the current conditions on the ground in Syria, that President Assad is unlikely to leave voluntarily. Do you agree with that assessment, Mr. Secretary?

Secretary HAGEL. I do.

Chairman LEVIN. And that it is only additional pressure on him, physical pressure, that will drive him out.

Secretary HAGEL. I suspect that that is the pressure that does it.

Chairman LEVIN. I think, General, it was you who talked about the opposition having arms and that there has been a flow of arms to the opposition. I think your answer was maybe not exactly that there is no shortage of arms in Syria.

But the arms that the opposition has are not of comparable effectiveness, are they, to what Assad has?

General DEMPSEY. Well, not at the top end. I mean, obviously, the opposition does not have aircraft, though they have actually captured some, and does not have missiles and rockets. But their small arms are comparable.

Chairman LEVIN. Would you say this at the moment an even fight militarily?

General DEMPSEY. I would say that there is a risk that this conflict has become stalemated.

Chairman LEVIN. But would you say that the arms that the opposition has are of equal lethality to what Assad brings to bear? At the top end is fine with me. I will add those words.

General DEMPSEY. Yes, not at the top end.

Chairman LEVIN. So he has—

General DEMPSEY. He has greater capability.

Chairman LEVIN.—greater capability in terms of artillery and other anti-aircraft—

General DEMPSEY. Yes.

Chairman LEVIN.—and so forth than does the opposition.

I just want to go back to that Iranian resupply flights that are going to Syria over Iraqi airspace because it really troubles me a great deal. In your opening statement, again, Secretary Hagel, when you made reference to the fact that we are working with Iraq in terms of their concern about chemical weapons inside of Syria, I do not know how that jibes with their unwillingness to stop those flights. I had the Iraqi Ambassador in my office a week ago or so who told me that they do not approve of those flights and that those flights are not happening. Do we believe that?

Secretary HAGEL. Well, we know that flights are getting into Syria.

Chairman LEVIN. Over Iraqi airspace coming from Iran?

Secretary HAGEL. Yes, coming from Iran.

Chairman LEVIN. Over Iraqi airspace?

Secretary HAGEL. Well, I suspect that that is right. As I said, when I made my statement, we are talking to the Iraqis about that.

Chairman LEVIN. Senator McCain.

Senator MCCAIN. I would point out, Mr. Secretary, we have been talking to the Iraqis about this for about 2 years. And it is well known that the Iranians are overflying Iraq with weapons. Honestly, why you just do not say we know that because it is in the public domain, I do not quite understand.

Could I ask, General Dempsey, do you believe that Lebanon and Jordan are less stable than they were a couple of years ago because of the strains on their country? In fact, there are some who have voiced concerns for a variety of reasons about the stability, particularly in Jordan.

General DEMPSEY. Yes, their stability are both affected by the conflict in Syria.

Senator MCCAIN. And the destabilization, obviously, is of great concern to Israel.

General DEMPSEY. It is, and in particular, the chemical weapons and high-end air defense weapons.

Senator MCCAIN. If we were to reposition the Patriot missile batteries on the Turkish side of the Turkish-Syrian border north of Aleppo, would those systems have the capability to take out Scud missiles?

General DEMPSEY. They would. We have the geometry. As you know, the Patriot is like an umbrella. It is a point defense system. But you can tip it forward. It would not probably reach all the way to Aleppo, but it could help.

Senator MCCAIN. Do you have evidence or is it not clear or is it—where are we in the scenario as to whether Assad has actually used chemical weapons or not?

General DEMPSEY. Just before you came in, that question came up, and I think you have Director Clapper—and he may have to take you to a closed session to answer that question. I mean, we have seen open source reporting. We are eager for the U.N. to get in there and do the analysis. But I cannot say more than that in this session.

Senator MCCAIN. And it seems to me that since the President of the United States has made it clear that this is a red line, that would be just about the last act that he might perform in order to avert his overthrow.

And by the way, I know you are concerned, General, about the withdrawal of Bashar al Assad to an area along the coast, largely Alawite, connected to Hizballah. That is one of the scenarios, as this drags out, that really is, it seems to me, a significant concern. Are you worried about that scenario as well?

General DEMPSEY. I actually consider that the most likely scenario.

Senator MCCAIN. And the conflict then drags on for quite a period of time.

Well, I want to apologize to the witnesses for my emotion about this issue except that what is going on is really horrific. And I worry about not only what happens now but what happens in the future in a country that is clearly becoming more and more divided,

more and more casualties, more and more destabilization of the neighboring nations. So I hope that you will not only look at it from the humanitarian side, which a lot of us are deeply emotional about—and I am sure you are too—but also from the aspect of national security.

If the scenario you and I just talked about transpires, if for some reason the extremists that—Bashar al Assad decides to use those chemical weapons, if the jihadists gain the ascendancy in Syria, then obviously they would want to destabilize both Lebanon and Jordan. So I hope we—and General Mattis? testimony that if Bashar falls, it would be the greatest blow to the Iranians in 25 years. The centrifuges are spinning.

So there is a great deal at stake here, and I have the belief that the American people would not tolerate, nor would any of us, boots on the ground. But I think there is a number of ways that we could be of assistance working with countries that are already providing a lot of assistance in the region, as you know, and try to bring this tragic episode to an end as quickly as possible.

And, Mr. Secretary, I hope that you will give it very high priority, your deliberations and conclusions, about the situation, given the human toll that is being exacted every day that this goes on in a, obviously, very elongated fashion.

I thank the witnesses.

Would you like to say anything in response?

General DEMPSEY. No, sir. Just to reinforce that I assure you that I consider and understand the human suffering and the tragedy that is Syria. I spent a good deal of my adult life trying to figure out the Mideast. This one is the toughest of all. But we are putting our shoulder to it in terms of planning, and we will be prepared if asked for options.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you.

Mr. Secretary?

Secretary HAGEL. Senator McCain, thank you.

I would echo what the Chairman said. In addition, I would just tell you, this committee, that I am committed to working with you to try to find some way we can do more responsibly that is effective.

I can also tell you that yesterday Chairman Dempsey and I met with the President. We took a large part of that meeting about this issue, not about this hearing. He sends his greetings, of course. I know you have seen him recently. But about the issue. And I cannot speak for him, nor would I try. But I can tell you he is concerned about it for the same reasons, Senator, you are and we all are, the humanitarian devastation here. So we are committed to trying to find the best way out of this for everybody to help them.

Senator MCCAIN. Well, I thank you for that comment. I am very appreciative of it. I promise you you can count on the cooperation and assistance and support of these two old geezers. So thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. He is speaking for himself in terms of the “old geezer” reference. [Laughter.]

Chairman LEVIN. I just want to clarify one point and then also summarize a bit.

You made reference, in terms of the anti-Assad forces, to now al Qaeda, al Nusrah. At the moment, at least, they are in the distinct

minority. Is that not true in terms of the anti-Assad forces numerically? Is that accurate?

Secretary HAGEL. Well, I would think it is. And my reference there was to just, once again, emphasize, reemphasize what the Chairman was saying about the different forces afoot. I think as you recall, the Chairman noted the sectarian dimension of this. There are a lot of very good people, free Syrians, who want a future for their country, and that is not to be underplayed nor understated or under-appreciated. But my reference was, Mr. Chairman, to all the different groups that are in this opposition crowd.

Chairman LEVIN. And we sure do not want them to grow any further.

Secretary HAGEL. No, we do not.

Chairman LEVIN. The al Qaeda, the extremists, the jihadists, the al Nusrah folks.

The other thing is this. Of all of the factors that have been mentioned—and the last one was humanitarian, but you have mentioned also, of course, the impact of these events on our friends and allies in the region, including Jordan and Israel and Turkey. But the effect on Iran as to whether or not their support for Syria can succeed is perhaps as critical an issue as anything. I do not think we ever really fully understood what would happen if Iraq took the course that it took in terms of Iran being strengthened. So we see in a number of areas Iran getting stronger, particularly in terms of their missile and nuclear systems, and I think if they succeed here in blocking a removal of Assad, that that is just another strengthening element in terms of Iran, which is to be avoided as much as any of these negative factors.

I want to thank again Senator McCain for his determination on this. I have joined with him in pressing to look for additional ways to put military pressure on Assad, sending a message of inevitability, a message of determination, and I think for many, many reasons, the sooner the better.

But again, you have had a long day. We really are very grateful for allowing the scheduling in the way it has been done.

We will stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:18 p.m., the committee adjourned.]