

**SECRETARY OF DEFENSE CHUCK HAGEL
STATEMENT ON SYRIA
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 2013**

Chairman Levin, Senator Inhofe, I appreciate this opportunity to discuss the conflict in Syria.

The policy of the United States government is to work with allies and partners, as well as the Syrian opposition, to provide humanitarian assistance across Syria and the region, to hasten an end to the violence, and 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 – 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 (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 those 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 (SMC). We are working now 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 one 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 that message in recent calls with both my Russian and Chinese counterparts.

Internationally, the United States has worked with the EU, Arab League, 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 a significant 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 on Syria. 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 the 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 next 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 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 stockpiles, 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. 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 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, 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 this crisis.

Thank you.

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