

**U.S. POLICY AND THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS:  
WHO'S CONVERTING WHOM?**

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**HEARING**  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
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## **U.S. POLICY AND THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS: WHO'S CONVERTING WHOM?**

**THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 2008**

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:20 a.m. in Room 2175, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Gary L. Ackerman (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. ACKERMAN. The subcommittee will come to order. Before I get into the substance of this morning's hearings, I just want to use a moment to note and call to the attention of the American people what I consider the bizarre behavior of the Bush administration.

For some time Members of Congress have been asking to be briefed on the situation of the alleged Syrian nuclear reactor that was being built, and reportedly destroyed by Israel. Most of us got no information whatsoever, no member of this committee certainly that is on the committee today, and finally, we have arranged a hearing, a briefing by the agencies, and before any of us was given any information and prior to the briefing suddenly there appears in our nation's premier newspapers this morning information that the administration has chosen to selectively put out, even before Members of Congress and chairmen of committees were able to see this.

This is the selective control of information that led us into the war in Iraq, an administration that thinks it can selectively control information, put out the information it wants to put out, and hide the other information that it has. This is not an identical situation, but yet another example of the kinds of frightening Orwellian behavior that the Bush administration has exhibited, and why Members of Congress in even greater numbers are not even going to classified briefings because after the classified briefing you are told you cannot talk about what you heard in the briefing.

Then sometimes there is a clouding of the mind, did you read that in the morning's paper with everybody else or did you hear it at the briefing? So many members want to be free to criticize the administration and do not attend the briefings, and then we do not get all of the information at the briefings that are even in the newspaper reports that are sometimes a lot more accurate and more comprehensive.

To my knowledge, none of the reporters on either of the papers here in Washington that are reporting the story this morning have

security clearances of any kind, and yet staff members and committee staff members who have top clearances in the Congress of the United States are denied access to the briefings and yet information is given out selectively to the press.

I just thought somebody should note that this morning while all this is happening, and now for the substance of the matter.

Sometime, not too long ago, I asked a United States Ambassador serving in the Middle East about what our Syria policy was. He was a clever diplomat and an honest person, and he chuckled, and he said to me that that answer would have to come at a later date. It is very amazing but a troubling anecdote.

Syria may be an economic backwater and an autocratic desert of cheap concrete and crumbling past glories, but it remains a key actor in the Middle East, and one that has for the duration of the Bush administration been getting away with murder. That is not a figure of speech. During the Bush administration, Damascus has literally been getting away with murder.

Syria has been facilitating the moving of jihadis in Iraq who are killing our troops, and murdering innocent Iraqis. Syria facilitated the movement of jihadis into Lebanon, armed them, and set them to make war against the Lebanese state. Many brave Lebanese soldiers and Palestinian refugees died in fighting in Nahr al-Bared in order to preserve Lebanon's sovereignty. Together with Iran, Syria is responsible for the arming and rearming of Hezbollah, a terrorist group that started a war with Israel in 2006, and then hid behind civilian skirts, leading to billions of dollars of destruction in Lebanon and hundreds of innocent deaths, both in Lebanon and in Israel.

In defiance of U.N. Security Council mandates, Syria is continuing to provide arms and facilitate the movement of arms from Iran to Hezbollah in order to facilitate that group's efforts to undermine Lebanon's sovereignty and independence. In its attempt to restore Lebanon to its previous position as Syria's footstool, Damascus has almost certainly been responsible for the wave of murders of Lebanon's pro-independence leaders beginning in 2005 with Rafik Hariri, and including cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, prominent journalists, and dozens of innocent civilians.

Today, as has been the case since November 2007, Lebanon's Government remains without a President, and unable to resolve its political crisis because too many Lebanese in positions of power, namely, the leaders of Hezbollah, Hamas and the cult of Aoun, are more committed to the interests of Syria, Iran and themselves than they are to their own country.

Syria may be counting on its continued ability to make trouble and to upset the situation in Lebanon as leverage to avoid accountability. They are deluding themselves if they think so. Some, including a prominent United States Senator, have suggested that Syria needs to be appeased by watering down or even neutering the U.N. Security Council mandated special tribunal for Lebanon. Damascus, they say, has to be recognized as a power and then we have to acknowledge their interests in Lebanon. The past is the past, they say. Let the living not suffer for the dead. It is tempting to believe but it is not true.

Peace cannot be purchased by rewarding aggression. There will be no deal with the dictator in Damascus. Lebanon is not for sale, and justice is not a commodity in which the United States should trade. The special tribunal will proceed and the guilty will pay for their crimes. Neither bombs nor threats nor hollow promises of peace will advert the justice that is coming. The Assad regime must know that salvation will not come from well-intentioned American politicians ready to sell the freedoms of others to buy the illusion of security for themselves.

The future of United States-Syrian relations remains to be written. This is because so much of it will change within the next few years. There will be a change of administration in the United States. There will have to be elections in Lebanon in 2009, and the special tribunal will do its work with who knows what consequences. The next President will not start with a clean sheet, but nonetheless will certainly have to make a fresh start. Our current policy is not to have a policy. Instead, we have a shopping list of behaviors we want Syria to change. Yet again the Bush administration has chosen hope and prayer as an alternative to strategy.

So what would the next administration seek from Syria? What is possible? The answer depends chiefly on how the next President decides a key question. Can the marriage between Damascus and Tehran be broken up or are these two parties too committed to a shared vision of Middle East recorded to their liking?

Many analysts believe that the relationship between Iran and Syria is purely tactical and a transactional one. Implicit in this belief is the idea that if only the United States would make Syria an offer of sufficient size and sweetness, the access from Tehran to Damascus could be shattered and the Middle East transformed.

Syria, in this view, might even join our team in exchange for the return of the Golan Heights and the restoration of its overlordship of Lebanon, Syria would renege on its relationship with Hezbollah, give Hamas the boot and slam the door shut on Iran. The Mullahs would be cut off from their Lebanese and Palestinian terrorist proxies and isolated completely in the region. The flow of jihadis from Syria would dry up, perhaps in return for restoration of Saddam's old largess with Iraq's oil, and the situation in Iraq would settle down, further isolating Iran from the Arab hinterland. Faced with a united Middle East, the ayatollahs would set their dreams of hegemony and Islamic revolution aside, and give up their nuclear program in exchange for international security guarantees.

It is a nice story, but I am not convinced. It sounds lovely, and it has a sort of logic to it, but it is a fantasy. The relationship between Iran and Syria is longstanding, durable, and is based on a bedrock of shared interests. This relationship is meant to fulfill each party's deepest strategic aspirations and regional ambitions.

Neither state wishes to live as a second class citizen in a Middle East organized and run by Washington, Cairo and Riyadh. They have bigger dreams, and it is these dreams against which we must struggle. A deal with Syria and Iran may be possible, but I seriously doubt that it can be bought or sustained by sacrificing others or by offering just carrots and no sticks. It should go without saying that a deal would also mean some kind of purposeful and prin-

cipled engagement. We should not expect either Syria or Iran to get on their knees, and there is certainly no need for us to do so either.

Engagement is not synonymous with capitulation. A peaceful Middle East may or may not be possible, but it cannot be achieved solely by holding our breath, demanding obedience, or sending in the marines. It is more than past time for the United States to get back into the foreign policy business. We could start by having a Syria policy again.

The chair recognizes Mr. Klein.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ackerman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE GARY L. ACKERMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK, AND CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

Some time not too long ago, I asked a U.S. ambassador serving in the Middle East, "What is our Syria policy?" A clever diplomat, and an honest person, that U.S. ambassador chuckled, and told me that an answer would have to come at a later date. It's an amusing anecdote, but a troubling one. Syria may be an economic backwater and an autocratic desert of cheap concrete and crumbling past glories, but it remains a key actor in the Middle East, and one that has, for the duration of the Bush Administration, been getting away with murder. That's not a figure of speech. During the Bush Administration, Damascus has literally been getting away with murder.

Syria has been facilitating the movement of jihadis in Iraq who are killing our troops and murdering innocent Iraqis. Syria facilitated the movement of jihadis into Lebanon, armed them, and set them to make war against the Lebanese state. Many brave Lebanese soldiers and Palestinian refugees died in the fighting in Nahr al Bared in order to preserve Lebanon's sovereignty.

Together with Iran, Syria is responsible for the arming and rearming of Hezbollah, a terrorist group that started a war with Israel in 2006 and then hid behind civilian skirts leading to billions of dollars of destruction in Lebanon and hundreds of innocent deaths in both Lebanon and Israel. In defiance of UN Security Council mandates, Syria is continuing to provide arms and to facilitate the movement of arms from Iran to Hezbollah in order to facilitate that group's efforts to undermine Lebanon's sovereignty and independence.

In its attempt to restore Lebanon to its previous position as Syria's footstool, Damascus has almost certainly been responsible for the wave of murders of Lebanon's pro-independence leaders beginning in 2005, with Rafic Hariri and including cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, prominent journalists and dozens of innocent civilians. Today, as has been the case since November 2007, Lebanon's government remains without a president and unable to resolve its political crisis because too many Lebanese in positions of power—namely the leaders of Hezbollah, Amal and the cult of Aoun—are more committed to the interests of Syria, Iran and themselves than they are to their own country.

Syria may be counting on its continued ability to make trouble and to upset the situation in Lebanon as leverage to avoid accountability. They're deluding themselves if they think so. Some—including a prominent U.S. senator—have suggested that Syria needs to be appeased by watering down, or even neutering the UN Security Council mandated Special Tribunal for Lebanon. Damascus, they say, has to be recognized as a power, and we have to acknowledge their interests in Lebanon. The past is the past they say, let the living not suffer for the dead.

It is tempting to believe. But it's not true. Peace can not be purchased by rewarding aggression. There will be no deal with the dictator in Damascus. Lebanon is not for sale and justice is not a commodity in which the United States should trade. The Special Tribunal will proceed and the guilty will pay for their crimes. Neither bombs, nor threats, nor hollow promises of peace will avert the justice that is coming. The Assad regime must know that salvation will not come from well-intentioned American politicians ready to sell the freedom of others to buy the illusion of security for themselves.

The future of U.S.-Syrian relations remains to be written; this is because so much will change in the next few years. There will be a change of administration in the United States; there will have to be elections in Lebanon in 2009; and the Special Tribunal will do its work—with who knows what consequences. The next President will not start with a clean sheet, but nonetheless, will certainly have to make a fresh start. Our current policy is not to have a policy. Instead, we have a shopping

list of behaviors we want Syria to change. Yet again, the Bush Administration has chosen hope and prayer as an alternative to strategy.

So what should the next Administration seek from Syria? What's possible? The answer depends chiefly on how the next President decides a key question: Can the marriage between Damascus and Tehran be broken up, or are these two parties too committed to a shared vision of Middle East reordered to their liking? Many analysts believe that the relationship between Iran and Syria is a purely tactical and transactional one. Implicit in this belief is the idea that if only the United States would make Syria an offer of sufficient size and sweetness, the axis from Tehran to Damascus could be shattered and the Middle East transformed. Syria, in this view, might even join our team.

In exchange for the return of the Golan Heights, and the restoration of its overlordship of Lebanon, Syria would renege on its relationship with Hezbollah, give Hamas the boot, and slam the door shut on Iran. The mullahs would be cut-off from their Lebanese and Palestinian terrorist proxies and isolated completely in the region. The flow of jihadis from Syria would dry up—perhaps in return for a restoration of Saddam's old largess with Iraq's oil—and the situation in Iraq would settle down, further isolating Iran from the Arab hinterland. Faced with a united Middle East, the ayatollahs would set their dreams of hegemony and Islamic revolution aside, and give up their nuclear program in exchange for international security guarantees.

I'm not convinced. It sounds lovely, and it has a sort of logic to it. But it's a fantasy. The relationship between Iran and Syria is longstanding, durable, and is based on a bedrock of shared interests. This relationship is meant to fulfill each party's deepest strategic aspirations and regional ambitions. Neither state wishes to live as a second class citizen in a Middle East ordered, organized and run by Washington, Cairo, and Riyadh. They have bigger dreams.

And it is these dreams against which we must struggle. A deal with Syria and Iran may be possible, but I sincerely doubt that it can be bought or sustained by sacrificing others, or by offering just carrots and no sticks. It should go without saying that a deal would also mean some kind of purposeful and principled engagement. We shouldn't expect either Syria or Iran to get on their knees, and there is certainly no need for us to do so either. Engagement is NOT synonymous with capitulation. A peaceful Middle East may, or may not be possible; but cannot be achieved solely by holding our breath, demanding obedience, or sending in the Marines. It's more than past time for the United States to get back into the foreign policy business. We could start by having a Syria policy again.

Mr. KLEIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I also want to echo your initial comments and the concerns that as Members of Congress representing the American people in order for us to be able to make intelligent decisions on foreign policy we have the necessary information available to us, whether it is dealing with North Korea, which has a great deal of nuclear weapons, or whether it is Syria, which was attempting, apparently attempting to develop a nuclear weapons program, as well as other countries in the Middle East. So it is of great concern that, you know, we read these stories in the New York Times or other newspapers around the country before we even get briefed or before even a classified briefing or any type of briefing arises, because these are essential questions of how we decide to deal with North Korea or how we decide to deal with Syria.

That being said, I am, and I appreciate the chair's comments and his perceptions of how this is playing out and, of course, look forward to the comments of our panel this morning, and thank you for being here to share your information, your perspectives.

My questions, obviously, relate to the nature of the continued responsibility that Syria has for arming Hezbollah and for weapons getting into the northern or the southern border of Lebanon, and how that is going to impact the continuing dealings with Israel. Obviously, what happened there over the last couple of years was

tragic on many levels, but it was fueled by this funneling of resources and weapons just like we have in the Gaza Strip right now.

So I am interested in what your views are in terms of the status of that whole arrangement, and what can and should be done in dealing with that. It continues to be a military build-up, it appears, and there does not seem to be any check and balance to making sure that those rockets do not get into Lebanon.

And of course, as the chairman already pointed out, what is this juxtaposition of Syria's role? How can it be, as has been expressed on the one hand, that Syria can possibly be isolated based on their religious views, and their identity of who they would relate to, whether it is Iran or they can be brought into some type of relationship with other countries to isolate Iran?

Obviously, one big goal we have is dealing with Iran. That is the largest point for many of us in isolating and making Iran feel the brunt of recognition that it is on its own and that its behavior is unacceptable, but Syria, as a continued client state, and the relationship that is there is not changing any of that, and Iran continues to use Syria for dealing with a lot of the other problems in that region.

So I would be interested in hearing, as the chairman already expressed, your views on what can be done and should be done by the United States Government and its relations with our allies in that region to deal with Syria and Iran in that regard.

So, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the comments this morning and appreciate your calling this meeting.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you. Mr. Costa.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you as well, Mr. Chairman, for I think what is an important and timely hearing. I have to be on the floor at 10:00, so I want to defer my time to our witnesses so that they can form us of their position.

I will observe very briefly that in conversations that a number of us have had with former Secretary of State Jim Baker, his comment about the need to continue to have dialogue with the Syrians, as he says 16 visits before he finally was able to reach some breakthrough on issues of interest, I think are important. I think we have to continue to—withstanding the fact that we have tremendous difference—continue to maintain the dialogue.

Certainly what took place last year with North Korea and Syria attempting to develop a nuclear facility that apparently was eliminated continues to, I think, draw the target on the country of Syria as to what their true intentions are in the region, and whether or not they intend to play any sort of constructive role. There are a lot of questions I have about this regime and what continues to keep it sustaining. So I look forward to the testimony and hopefully we will get some additional insight in this area. Thank you very much.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you. We do indeed this morning have quite a remarkable panel of experts, starting with Ambassador Martin Indyk who is the director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution. During the Clinton administration, Ambassador Indyk served two tours as United States Ambassador to Israel; worked as senior director of the Near East,

South Asian Affairs at the National Security Council; was appointed Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs.

Before entering government service, Ambassador Indyk served for 8 years as founding executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He has taught at the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies, Columbia University, Tel Aviv University, and others.

With us also is Ammar Abdulhamid who is the executive director and founder of The Tharwa Foundation, a United States-based 501(c)(3) organization, established to facilitate the process of democratization and modernization in Syria through a variety of educational programs, popular dialogues and grass roots initiatives.

In September 2005, Mr. Abdulhamid was forced to leave Syria due to his political activism. In the U.S., he has served as a fellow with the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution, and at the International Institute for Modern Letters in Las Vegas.

While still in Syria, Mr. Abdulhamid authored a number of literary works, including a novel, and a volume of poetry. He and his work have been featured in Newsweek, the Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor, New York Times and Shalom Magazine.

Dr. Peter Rodman is a senior fellow in the Foreign Policy Program at The Brookings Institution. Dr. Rodman joined Brookings in March 2007, after nearly 6 years as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs in the Bush administration. He has served five Presidential administrations, including in such position as a Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs during the George H.W. Bush administration, and as director of the State Department's policy, planning staff during the Reagan Presidency. He began his government service at the White House as a Special Assistant to Henry Kissinger on the National Security Council staff.

We will begin with Ambassador Indyk. Without objection, everybody's complete statements will be placed in the record and you may proceed as you will.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MARTIN S. INDYK, DIRECTOR, SABAN CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION**

Ambassador INDYK. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is a pleasure to appear before you and your committee again.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Could you pull the microphone just a tiny bit closer?

Ambassador INDYK. I said thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me to address your committee again today. As Mr. Klein and Mr. Costa pointed out, it is a very timely hearing given the way in which Syria has suddenly become in the news. But as you pointed out, Mr. Chairman, the issue of policy toward Syria is something that has not had a lot of attention in the past 8 years.

I think it is fair to say that there has been an intense disagreement between Syria and the United States of a policy toward Iraq, a policy toward Lebanon and a policy toward Israel during the period of the Bush administration, and the dominant view of Syria, one that you have given eloquent expression to today, has devel-

oped in Washington that it is a country ruled by an unreliable leader, expressing its ruthless ambition to dominate its small Lebanese neighbor, harboring Palestinian terrorists and Iraqi insurgents, and, of course, from a strategic point of view, most importantly, maintaining an alliance with Iran, which is a strategic adversary of the United States in the region.

And so I think that the Bush administration's basic approach has been to try to isolate Syria and contain its negative influences in its neighborhood, with Syria subject to a range of sanctions that are designed to try to punish Syria for its untoward behavior.

I think the results of this policy are mixed at best. Syria has managed to prevent the election of a new Lebanese President, and in the process has kind of stymied Lebanese politics, to the advantage of its local Lebanese allies, Hezbollah and some Christian factions. It has, of course, facilitated the re-arming of Hezbollah to pre-2006 war levels, provide safe haven to Hamas and Palestinian's Islamic Jihad, or PIJ, Palestinian terrorist groups that are engaged in violent opposition to the Annapolis Peace Process, and as Ammar, my colleague here today can attest, it suppresses all political dissent inside Syria.

But on the other side—there is another side—Syria for the time being seems to be cooperating with the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. It has attenuated its support for Iraqi insurgents, and President Assad continues to assert his interest in making peace with Israel, this week stating again his desire for peace with Israel, and of course, the Syrians turned up in Annapolis for the Annapolis Peace Conference, and he is being very careful not to provoke any confrontation with Israel or even retaliate for what appears to have been Israel's strike on Syria's clandestine nuclear facility.

The question that I gathered you wanted to address today, Mr. Chairman, was what are the options that the next President of the United States is going to face when he or she decides to address the problem of what to do about Syria, and in essence, since Syria is a rogue regime for the reasons I have suggested, the options boil down to three. There are always three.

The first is regime change, try to remove the rogue regime, the second is containment and isolation and sanctions to try to reduce its negative influence and try to induce more positive behavior, and the third is policy of engagement designed to try through negotiations and some mix of positive incentives as well as maintenance of sanctions to try to encourage a better approach.

Now, I think that the next President should actually pursue the third option, and that is the one that I want to focus on today for a few minutes. That is the option of engagement, and there are two essential drivers for this approach. The first is Israel and the second is Iran.

The Government of Israel is keenly interested in engaging Syria in peace negotiations. We have stories in the Israeli press of the last 2 days which indicate that Prime Minister Olmert has conveyed to President Assad through the Turkish Government his willingness to withdraw from the Golan Heights, and he has made clear in his own public interviews recently, but he has been saying this for some 6 months, that he wants to engage in peace negotiations with Syria. The fact that the Syrians are also expressing

similar interest means that there is in fact an opportunity here, and for the United States not to seek to exploit that opportunity puts it in the invidious position of apparently opposing peace between Israel and the last of its Arab state neighbors, large Arab state neighbors with a significant military capability that appears to want to make peace with Israel.

The second driver, as I say, is Iran. Iran has managed to raise itself to the level of a strategic adversary of the United States in the region, and the challenge of dealing with Iran's nuclear ambitions, its efforts to promote its sphere of influence in Iraq, and its interference both in Lebanon and in the Palestinian arena, the challenge of dealing with that multi-faceted challenge to our interest from Iran requires us to look at Syria and to see what we can do in terms of affecting the relationship between Iran and Syria because, to put it very simply, Syria is the conduit, the pipeline by which Iran is able to spread its influence to Lebanon and to the Palestinian arena and interfere in our efforts in both.

To use the peace process as it were to take Syria out of the conflict with Israel and to try to drive a wedge between Syria and Iran is, it seems to me, in the interests of the United States if such an opportunity exists, and certainly, as I suggested, the Governments of Israel and Syria are now making very clear that such an opportunity does exist.

I think the Bush administration has been loathe to engage in this effort to promote an Israeli-Syrian negotiation essentially because it would undermine its policy of isolation and containment, but I think more importantly the Bush administration is concerned that it would in the process end up sacrificing Lebanon's independence on the altar of an Israeli-Syrian peace, and that, as you yourself made very clear, Mr. Chairman, is not something that the United States can be in the business of endorsing. As you said, Lebanon is not for sale, and the great fear is that somehow the Israeli-Syrian deal will undermine our efforts to maintain Lebanon's independence.

I think that we have a different way of engaging the Syrians and protecting Lebanon at the same time, and that a process that is designed to explore Israeli-Syrian peace can with United States involved can actually serve to protect Lebanon's interests rather than undermine them. I say that because the Syrians will not sit down with the Israelis unless the United States is in the room. That is their, as it were, precondition now. But we can have our own precondition, that we will only engage in promoting Israeli-Syrian negotiations if it is understood by Syria and Israel that Lebanon is off the table; that Lebanon is not part of this negotiation, and during the negotiation we are also, by being inside the room, in a position to insist that as part of the peace deal between Israel and Syria, Syria end its support for Hezbollah and the arms flow into Lebanon.

Such an engagement via the peace process has a number of other advantages as well. It would help facilitate Israeli-Palestinian negotiations because it would put pressure on Hamas and Palestine's Islamic Jihad, which is based in Damascus, which are the strongest Palestinian opponents of the peace process that we are now trying to pursue there. It would give greater political cover for the nec-

essary compromises that the Palestinians and Israelis would have to make to reach a deal because the Syrians would be involved in negotiations as well, and it would give the United States, the next President the opportunity, in effect, to play one track off against the other, kind of synergy that we were able to take advantage of during the Clinton years when we had negotiations on the Syrian track as well as the Palestinian track.

But I think the most important reason for the United States engaging Syria via a peace process is, as I said, Iran, and I have no doubt, based again on my experience during the Clinton years, that it would spook the Iranians. I do not believe it is possible simply to flip Syria out of its alliance with Iran. I think you are right, Mr. Chairman, to suggest that there are common interests there, that they are strategic allies, and that it is fascial to imagine that you can somehow through engagement change that reality.

But what you can do and what will be a natural outcome of an Israeli-Syrian negotiation is to create tension between Iran and Syria because the Iranians see Syrian engagement with Israel as advancing a Pax Americana, which they see as threatening their strategic interests in the region, and as the Foreign Minister of Iran at the time in 1990 said, the more a country gets close to the usurp a regime—he, of course, was referring to Israel—the more it will distance itself from us. That is the way the Iranians view this. It is a zero sum gain.

And so I think that the greatest benefit here in engaging in Syria is the tension it creates. Iranians will be concerned precisely that their pipeline to the Middle East heartland will be constricted as a result of this negotiation, and in the broader context of our approach to Iran, it serves our interests to create some uncertainty about its ability to depend on its Syrian ally.

I will end it there, Mr. Chairman, because I know you want to get on with the other presentations, and just emphasize that I think a policy of engagement with our eyes open, with our awareness of the nature and interests of the Syrian regime, with an effort to ensure that Lebanon's independence is maintained, and with a valid skepticism about the nature and intentions of what the Syrians are up to, nevertheless can serve American interests.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Indyk follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MARTIN S. INDYK, DIRECTOR, SABAN  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

“THE FUTURE OF U.S.-SYRIAN RELATIONS”

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to address the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Sub-Committee on Middle East and South Asia.

For the past seven years relations between the United States and Syria have been fraught—the product of intense disagreement over policy toward Iraq, Lebanon, and Israel. The dominant view of Syria that has developed in Washington during this period is that of a country ruled by an unreliable leader, with ruthless ambitions to dominate its smaller Lebanese neighbor, harboring Palestinian terrorists and Iraqi insurgents, and maintaining an alliance with Iran—a strategic adversary of the United States.

In these circumstances, Syria's opposition to American interests has provided ample justification for a policy of containment and isolation. Consequently, Syria remains on the State Department's Terrorism List, our ambassador has been recalled, and Congress has imposed a range of additional, unilateral sanctions on the Assad regime.

The results of this policy are mixed, at best. On one side, Syria has managed to prevent the election of a new Lebanese president and has thereby stymied Lebanese politics, advantaging its local allies (Hezbollah and some Christian factions). It has facilitated the rearming of Hezbollah to pre-2006 war levels. It continues to provide safe-haven and succor to Hamas and Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Palestinian terrorist groups that violently oppose the Annapolis peace process. And it suppresses all political dissent inside Syria.

On the other side, Syria for the time being is cooperating with the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. It has attenuated its support for Iraqi insurgents. President Assad continues to assert his interest in making peace with Israel and sent an official delegation to the Annapolis peace conference. He is also careful not to provoke conflict with Israel, or even retaliate for Israel's strike on what appears to have been a clandestine Syrian nuclear facility.

In short, Syria fits the category of a "rogue regime" but is doing just enough to avoid making itself the target of a regime change policy from the Bush Administration.

With a new American president on the horizon, it is worth considering whether a different approach to Syria would produce a more productive relationship, one that could help graduate it from "rogue" status. A review is in order for two reasons:

- i) The Government of Israel is keenly interested in engaging Syria in peace negotiations but President Assad will only agree to do so if the United States participates too.
- ii) Syria provides the conduit for Iranian influence in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. Restricting that pipeline would constitute a strategic setback to Iran, which has become America's main regional adversary.

An Israeli-Syrian peace holds considerable advantage for U.S. interests in the Middle East. It would remove the last of Israel's neighboring Arab states from the conflict, helping to stabilize the region and enhancing America's reputation as peacemaker at a time when Iran is arguing that violence and terrorism is the answer to the region's afflictions. It would also provide important political cover for other Arab states to normalize their relations with Israel. And it would create a wedge between Syria and Iran that has the potential for shifting the balance of regional power back in our favor after our ill-fated Iraq adventure managed to tilt it in Iran's.

As I understand it, the Bush Administration is unwilling to encourage Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations out of concern that this would reduce Syria's isolation and result in the sacrificing of Lebanon's independence on the altar of an Israeli-Syrian peace. But this puts the U.S. in the unprecedented and invidious position of opposing an opportunity for Arab-Israeli peacemaking even when our ally Israel is keen to pursue it.

My own experience in the Clinton Administration, where I advocated a "Syria first" strategy to achieve a comprehensive Middle East peace, has made me supremely conscious of the likelihood that the Syrian regime seeks a peace "process" rather than to end to its conflict with Israel. Such a process would significantly reduce its isolation, which is a major reason for its insistence on America's involvement in the negotiations. Nevertheless, there could be considerable advantages to the United States in pursuing such a process, even if it does not lead to a peace agreement in the short term.

First, the U.S. could use its agreement to participate as a way of protecting and promoting Lebanon's independence. Indeed, one of the greatest dangers in the Bush Administration's stance is that Israel and Syria may go ahead and negotiate without Washington's involvement. This would surely lead to an undermining of Lebanon's independence since Israel has only one interest in Lebanon these days: the disarming of Hezbollah. If Syria were to promise to do that, Israel would have reason to accept its re-intervention in Lebanon in order to make Damascus responsible for curbing Hezbollah.

Conversely, were the U.S. to agree to sponsor Israeli-Syrian negotiations, it could make its involvement conditional on Lebanon being off the table and, in the course of the negotiations, it could guarantee that Lebanon's interests are not sacrificed. The U.S. could also join Israel in insisting in the course of the negotiations that Syria prevent arms flowing into Lebanon from Syrian territory.

In addition, the launching of Israel-Syria negotiations would create the necessary conditions for launching Lebanon's own negotiations with Israel, in which the disarming of Hezbollah could be treated as a sovereign decision of the Lebanese government in the context of resolving the Sheba'a Farms issue.

Second, an Israeli-Syrian negotiating process could facilitate the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in several indirect ways: Hamas and PIJ would feel under far

greater pressure to go along with the negotiations if they felt their Syrian patron was about to make a deal with Israel and shut down their Damascus headquarters; the Palestinian negotiators would have greater political cover in the Arab world; and the U.S. could take advantage of the competition between the two tracks to advance progress on both.

Third, and perhaps most importantly given our broader strategic interests, an Israeli-Syrian negotiating process under U.S. auspices would spook the Iranians. I do not believe that it is possible simply to “flip” Syria out of its alliance with Iran. This is a multi-faceted strategic relationship that will take time and a considerable effort to break. However, on the subject of what to do about Israel there is a deep divergence between these two allies, captured in the fact that at the same time as Iran’s president was threatening to wipe Israel off the map, Syria’s president was offering to make peace with it. Thus negotiations with Israel will inevitably generate tensions and friction between Damascus and Teheran. This was quite evident in the 1990s when Israel and Syria were engaged in American-sponsored peace negotiations, captured in a statement by then Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati: “The more a country gets close to the usurper regime [i.e. Israel], the more it will distance itself from us.”

Iran’s position in the Middle East heartland is now so much more robust than it was back then precisely because it has been able to exploit the Arab-Israeli conflict to enhance its influence both in Lebanon and in the Palestinian arena. Iran will therefore be loathe to see any reduction in tensions between Israel and Syria and will be particularly concerned about any constriction of its pipeline through Syria to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

I would hasten to emphasize that I am not now advocating a return to the “Syria First” policy pursued by the Clinton Administration. I believe that it is now much more urgent to make progress on the Palestinian track. But there is no inconsistency between making that a priority and launching negotiations on the Syrian track. Indeed they can be mutually reinforcing. One of the lessons of our experience back then is that the U.S. is more likely to achieve a breakthrough on the Syrian track if we focus our energies and attention on the Palestinian track. It is one of the multiple ironies of the Middle East that when the U.S. pushes hard on one door, another one may open instead.

Moreover, sponsoring Israeli-Syrian negotiations does not require the U.S. to drop any of its other concerns, from maintaining the independence of Lebanon, to ensuring the effectiveness of the Special Tribunal, to pressing Damascus to end its human rights abuses and its sponsorship of terrorist organizations. Indeed, if the next president goes down this road toward a more constructive engagement with Syria, the United States would be able more effectively to pursue each of these issues.

There is one caveat that the next president would need to be mindful of should he/she decide to pursue this option of engaging Syria via peace negotiations. Just about every leader that has attempted to deal with President Bashar al-Assad has come away frustrated. The list includes Colin Powell, Tony Blair, Nicholas Sarkozy, Hosni Mubarak and Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah. The cause of their frustration is the disconnect between Assad’s reasonableness in personal meetings and his regime’s inability or unwillingness to follow through on understandings reached there. It is unclear whether this is because of a lack of will or a lack of ability to control the levers of power. Either way, it raises questions about the utility of a policy of engagement.

In my view, however, the Bush Administration has managed through its policy of isolation to get Assad’s attention. Given the other advantages of pursuing engagement, it is at least an idea worth testing by the next president provided he/she enters the bazaar with clear eyes, a wariness about buying faulty goods at too high a price, and a willingness to walk away if the merchant does not live up to his side of the bargain.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you, Ambassador.  
Mr. Abdulhamid.

**STATEMENT OF MR. AMMAR ABDULHAMID, DIRECTOR, THE  
THARWA FOUNDATION**

Mr. ABDULHAMID. Thank you, Chairman Ackerman, distinguished subcommittee members, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to testify here today.

Change in Syria is not a matter of if anymore, but of when, how and who. Facts and factors influencing and dictating change are al-

ready in progress and are for the most part the product of internal dynamics rather than external influences. The dynamics are those of daily life. According to recent reports, 40 percent of Syria's population, that is, 8 million people, live on less than \$2 a day. Unemployment is at an all-time high, and inflation rates are astronomical. Government policies, corruption and mismanagement have exacerbated the situation, forcing people to organize around local issues and begin to agitate, albeit this agitation is not yet anti-regime per se, that is, it is not yet—no one is yet demanding the ouster of the current President, it is indeed anti-establishment, that it is clearly aimed against officialize and impunity.

This phenomenon is still in its embryonic phase. It might take years before it produces a real challenge to the regime, but it is a serious phenomena and the regime is treating it as such. Many local activists are arrested every day. Many communities are seething with anger, and there seems to be a revolution lurking under the cinders in many localities, as one activist put it. At a number of occasions people demonstrated in front of the presidential palace in Damascus, but their concerns were never addressed. As a result, they have grown disillusioned with Bashar al-Assad himself. This talk is expression of this disillusionment came on May 27, 2007, when most Syrians boycotted the presidential referendum. The lavish celebrations that were orchestrated at the time and the massive spending involved caused mass indignation as they coincided with times of great economic hardship for most Syrians.

The referendum was nothing more than an act of a political striptease, at the end of which the President shed his last reformist fig leaf. As a result, the internal popular debate that followed the elections shifted from a discussion of reform to a discussion of which marks the better strategy—challenging the system head on, or indirectly.

For many, the answer lay with the Damascus Declaration, documents woven together by opposition members from various backgrounds back in October 2005. The ranks of the declaration swelled after the referendum, and on December 1, 2007, they elected what amounts to be a shadow government made up of mostly liberal elements.

The ruling regime was quick to respond and over the next few days, proceeded to arrest all 12 members of the Damascus Declaration General Council, among others. The move did not surprise the rank and file. Everyone expected the arrests. The point of the election was not to rebel rouse, but to demonstrate the movement's strong commitment to democratic principles, and to give the world a glimpse of what kind of government would emerge in Syria when she holds free elections one day.

Meanwhile, the ruling regime continues to be preoccupied with its growing shovels with the international community, and decision making continues to be a family affair, for the Assad regime is a multi-headed monster where decisions can only be made by consensus. But as the President, Bashar al-Assad has had the greater influence in shaping the policies of the regime. Bashar's thinking is shared by two major trends: His fascination with the personality of Hassan Nasrallah and his belief in the greatest ideology. This is why he would not come to an agreement with former Lebanese

PM Rafik Hariri, who was pushing for more normal relationship between Syria and Lebanon, and this is why he elevated the status of Hezbollah from a simple card in his hand to a full-fledged strategic partner.

Furthermore, the Assad-Mosolic connection plays an important role in facilitating the continuing development of Syria's relations with Iran's hardliners. Some members of the Assad family are rumored to favor more equal relationship with Iran, but should Bashar continue to have his way, Syria's relationship with Iran will increasingly resemble Lebanon's own relationship with Syria back in the eighties and nineties. In effect, Bashar al-Assad is Iran's Emile Lahoud.

But the main problem that the Assads have to contend with today is still by far the international tribunal. In this regard, the Assads' strategy is to shift international attention back to the issue of the Golan Heights, but they will be conducting peace talks while their eyes are on the tribunal. Only when the tribunal issue becomes moot can peace have a reasonable chance at being concluded. But since no one can afford to sabotage the workings of the tribunal, the desire of the Assads seems to represent a pretty tall order, and might just chomp any attempt at successful engagements.

So what can the United States do especially at a time when many experts are convinced that engagement can work or that it should at least be given another chance?

The answer is simple. By all means, give engagement another chance, but in order for the United States to avoid becoming a partner in the crimes perpetrated against the Syrian people, a clear element of conditionality should be inserted at the very beginning; namely, the release of all political prisoners. In exchange, the United States could send its ambassador back to Damascus, initiate in a series of quid pro quos that could help the Assads break out of their old habits.

In time, this process should be managed not to lead simply to the revival of the peace process between Syria and Israel, but more importantly, a launch of two more processes: One is the reconciliation process between Syria and Lebanon for this is indeed the only logical way to stop the tribunal and without undermining the processes of international legitimacy; and two, an internal reconciliation process between the regime and its opponents for this is what is really at stake here. In order for Syria to be at peace with its neighbors, it has really to be at peace with itself, otherwise it will continue to export its troubles abroad.

That will entail this kind of reconciliation, of course, agreeing on a new constitution and free parliamentary and Presidential elections. The Assads may not end up controlling or leading the system, but they will be part of it and they will have evaded the indignity of prosecution.

Should this prove to be insufficient for the Assads, should the Assads refuse to cooperate in such a plan, then they will have earned their continued isolation, and U.S. policymakers would then decide and weigh in the other options, continued isolation or regime change. But for now U.S. policymakers should not be preoccupied with what the Assads will or will not accept since every

iota of evidence we have indicate that they crave something they can never have, and no one can ever give to them. As such, the Assads need a reality check. They need to realize that there is no avoiding the linkage between their internal and external woes, and that they need to reform their ways both at home and abroad in order to ensure their political survival.

In the meantime, the U.S. should not shy away from actively supporting the country's opposition groups and dissidents, especially those with established connections to the grassroots and who are reaching out to the United States. No, this will not mark the kiss of death for them, especially when put in the context highlighted above. In fact, many of the conscious leaders and dissidents, members of the Damascus Declaration itself will be holding a meeting here in this very building tomorrow to ask for your support.

In many ways, what the United States needs to communicate to the Syrians is a message of hope and change, and a message of hope and change, not a message of hope and the status quo, and surely not a message of home and the status quo ante. The good old days are gone. They can never come back. They were never good anyway.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Abdulhamid follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MR. AMMAR ABDULHAMID, DIRECTOR, THE THARWA  
FOUNDATION

THE STATE OF SYRIA UNDER THE ASSADS & PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE

*Chairman Ackerman, Congressman Pence, and distinguished Subcommittee Members, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to testify on the prospects for change in Syria and implications for U.S. policy.*

Change in Syria is not a matter of "if" anymore, but of when, how and who. Facts and factors influencing and dictating change are already in progress and are, for the most part, the product of internal dynamics rather than external influences. Although this assertion seems to fly in the face of traditional wisdom regarding the stability of the ruling regime in Syria, the facts are clear and plainly visible for all willing to see.

The problem has been that most experts and policymakers have always been more concerned with high-end politics to pay any real attention to what is actually taking place on the ground. Issues such as the International Tribunal established to look into the assassination of former PM Rafic al-Hariri, Iran's growing regional influence, the Assads' sponsorship of Hamas, Hizbullah and certain elements in the Iraqi insurgency, escalating international pressures against the regime, and the ongoing cat-and-mouse game between the regime and opposition forces continue to dominate the ongoing international debate over Syria's present and future.

The dynamics of daily life, however, shaped more by inflation, unemployment, poverty, imploding infrastructure, and official corruption and mismanagement might actually be rewriting the usual scenarios in this regard. For as that old adage goes: *"it's the economy stupid!"* And Syria's economy is indeed imploding. The lack of government response in this regard, or, to be more specific, the fact that government policies seem to be making matters worse for most Syrians, is forcing people to organize around issues of local concern, and to begin to agitate. Albeit this agitation is not yet anti-regime per se, that is, no one is yet demanding the ouster of the current president, it is indeed *anti-establishment* in nature, that is, it is clearly aimed against official policies, corruption, mismanagement, neglect, lies, arrogance and impunity. As such, it marks an important departure from the usual docile attitude and an important milestone on the road towards the rise of a popular grassroots movement against the Assad dictatorship, if the situation is properly managed by opposition groups.

This phenomenon is still admittedly in its embryonic phase at this stage, and might take years before it produces a real challenge to the regime's authority on the grounds; it should also be borne in mind here that this phenomenon may not automatically translate into grassroots support for any of the existing opposition

movements or coalitions and might just lead, in the absence of active outreach efforts by the opposition, to the emergence of new more popular forms and figures of opposition, albeit the Damascus Declaration seems to be the one movement with the greatest popular appeal. Still, what is clear here is that the phenomenon is real and does merit observation. And, for those interested in ensuring the emergence of a “positive” democratic outcome eventually, it does merit support as well.

We shall endeavor in the following presentation to expand, albeit briefly, on these points, and we shall conclude by an assessment of the interaction between high-end politics and this grassroots phenomenon.

#### THE ECONOMIC SITUATION:

##### *1) Basics facts:*

According to a 2004 UDNP report, 11.4% of Syrians (that is, 2 millions) live below the lower expenditure poverty line of \$1/day, and 30% (5.3 millions) live below the higher expenditure poverty line of \$2/day. Today, however, experts estimate the figures at 20% and 40% respectively, that is, 4 million Syrians live on less than \$1/day, but 8 millions live on less than \$2/day.

According to official figures, unemployment rates are around 12.5%, albeit, most Syrian and international experts would put it closer to 25% and higher, especially for the 18–30 age group. Every year over 200,000 aspirants enter into the job market, while the state has only been able to produce an average of 65,000 jobs per year in the last three years. As such, the emphatic assertions made by the country’s PM back in December of 2007 to the effect that the unemployment rate is dropping are not simply inaccurate, they are a blatant lie. Unemployment in the country continues to rise at faster and faster rates.

Inflation rates have hovered for the last few years around 8–10%, once again, according to the downplayed official estimates, but things have changed drastically over the last few months, and it is almost impossible to make an estimate at this stage, as the situation is still unfolding. Suffice it to note, however, that in the last two months alone, the price of basic commodities, including basic foodstuffs such as rice, olive oil, vegetables and fruits, rose by a factor of 75–200% in many cases, in comparison to the same period last year. This is a runaway inflation to say the least.

These are very stark realities for Syria. For while some experts would argue that the country has been through a similar rough patch in the 1980s, there is a major difference between the two periods. In the 1980s, the economic hardships faced by most Syrians were more the result of the unavailability of the needed goods due to the international embargo imposed on Syria at the time, than a reflection of cash-flow problems. The Syrians were not rich then, but they were not that impoverished either. A real middle class did indeed exist, and did manage to survive, albeit in a quite bruised condition. Nowadays, however, everything is available, from the latest technological gadget to imported gourmet olive oils, but Syrians can afford none of it. In fact, they can hardly afford to buy the basic foodstuffs they need to last them until the end of the month.

The situation was made even worse by the failure of the government-sponsored campaign against unemployment, and its inability to factor into its economic calculations and policies the huge impact that the influx of over 1.5 million Iraqi refugees into the country have made on all aspects of daily life. More importantly though, certain government policies, such as lowering the interest rates on savings accounts, raising the prices of basic construction materials, including iron and cement, long before there was a global inflation, raising the price of gasoline (already the highest in the region), raising the costs of electricity, and ceasing its subsidy for Kerosene, the basic source of heating fuel throughout the country, all these policies have simply served to further exacerbate the situation. For these measures to have been adopted at a time when corruption is at an all time high is fueling popular anger and discontent.

Even such belated reversals as the recent decision to subsidize the cost of Kerosene for large families were simply too full of loopholes to be effective, or to help appease popular sentiments.

In reality then, and despite a recent report released by the Syrian Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade decrying the current rise in prices and warning that the situation calls for urgent drastic action, seeing that the usual measures have proven ineffective, the Syrian authorities are, in effect, leaving the average Syrian citizen and the average Syrian family to fend for themselves during this crisis. But, and while Syrians in general have long detected that tendency in their rulers, and have gotten used to an extant, the situation over the last two years has deteriorated at such an alarming rate, and the gulf separating the governor and the gov-

erned in Syria has grown so deep and wide, dismay and frustration have finally begun giving way to anger and rebelliousness.

2) *Early signs of grassroots anger:*

As usual in such cases, the first signs of local disaffection express themselves in various attempts to go over the heads of local officials and directly petition central authorities represented by government ministers and, at times, by the president himself. Indeed, in one well-known instance, protestors from the city of Homs in central Syria, whose agricultural lands are scheduled for confiscation on orders of the local governor, a close associate of the president and his in-laws, went to the city of Damascus and demonstrated in front of the presidential palace. Palace officials took their petition and promised to relay it to the president. Unsurprisingly, nothing came out of this move, and the inhabitants continue to be in a rebellious mood. Indeed, there is a “revolution under the cinders,” as one inhabitant put it to one of our field reporters.

This was not a unique incident. Protestors from different impoverished communities in Damascus, Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria, have adopted similar tactics before, and gotten similar results. Different parts of Syria and different segments of the Syrian population have for years now been testing the metal of the Syrian president through these direct appeals to his alleged reformist impulses. So far, the response was quite disappointing. The great majority of interrogations and arrests which are taking place in Syria everyday at this stage are, in fact, aimed against local community activists, despite the apolitical nature of their concerns and demands. Often these arrests go unnoticed not only by international observers and human rights groups but by local ones as well, as everyone tend to focus on the more politicized activists and on dissidents and opposition members. Sometimes, security officials justify these arrests as preemptive crackdowns against Islamic militant cells, but they offer no proof.

When will the cinders of revolution turn to fire remains unclear, but the insistence on dealing with these popular challenges from a security angle is bound to exacerbate the situation. In due course of time, heavy-handed tactics might just engender the very thing that they are meant to contain.

The starkest example of how disillusioned the Syrian people are with their current leaders and the entire system that they constructed can be seen more clearly through the thing that they have chosen not to do, namely: vote. Indeed, despite the massive spending by different candidates during the parliamentary elections, which took place on April 22–23, 2007, and the gargantuan spending during the month preceding the presidential referendum on May 27, 2007, the turnout was less than 5% of eligible voters for the first event, and did not in all likelihood exceed 30% during the second, despite official assertion of over 95% turnout and 97% yes vote. Syrian officials are no strangers to lies in this regard, and have become the butt of joke internationally as a consequence.

Of the two events, the popular boycott of the presidential referendum was indeed the most stunning, as it coincided with opposition calls for boycott. The real story that Syria lived at the time, then, did not unfold in brightly lit public squares where regime officials organized endless celebrations and forced thousands of state employees and college students to dance and sing the praises of Syria’s new “immortal” leader. Rather, the real story took place in those dark alleys and neighborhoods, poor and rich, where electric supply was interrupted for days on end in order to divert power to the main squares. People were not simply unhappy in these neighborhoods, they were downright indignant. The unfolding show was worse than anything Hafiz al-Assad, the father of the current president, has undertaken. The massive spending involved at a time when most people were being forced to tighten their belts was simply disgusting. Bashar al-Assad might have won that day as expected, but he did so at the expense of losing his last reformist fig leaf. The referendum was nothing more than an unwitting act of political striptease, at the end of which everyone knew that their president was nothing more than a card carrying member of the ACLC—the Assad Club for Libertine Corruption. As a result, following the elections, the internal popular debate shifted from a discussion of possible reformist potential still lurking inside the inner folds of the regime and its leaders, to a discussion on which is the lesser evil: challenging the system head-on, or indirectly, and when and how this can and should be done.

The Kurdish enclaves in Syria seem to have resolved this debate years ago, in fact, ever since their March Revolt in 2004. Indeed, ever since that time, prevailing conditions in the country’s Kurdish enclaves, such as Kobani, Efrin, Amude and Qamishlo, became increasingly Gaza-like in nature. The presence of Syrian security forces there these days has all the hallmarks of occupation rather than law-enforcement. Clashes between the local population and security forces take place fre-

quently, and have often resulted in civilian deaths and injuries, not to mention, of course, arrests, which have marred the lives of thousands. Unsurprisingly, the situation is further fueling the separatist tendencies among the younger population of these enclaves. This is making matters well-nigh unmanageable for the more established activists and leaders in the Kurdish community, who prefer to push for a solution that does not bring national sovereignty issues into the mix, allowing room for compromise with the country's Arab population.

Here again, the president himself has played a very negative role. His repeated renegeing on promises to resolve the issue of the country's 300,000 denaturalized Kurds has deprived him of all legitimacy in the eyes of the Kurdish population, setting the scene for continuing escalation. It should not be a surprise then that Syria's Kurdish areas boasted the lowest turnout in the country's farcical presidential referendum.

#### THE RISE OF ORGANIZED OPPOSITION:

The Syrian opposition, especially the internal opposition, has not been oblivious to any of these realities. In fact, they were aware of them long before they became such festering wounds. But in the beginning, and in the hope of avoiding a direct confrontation with the regime, the great majority of opposition figures and movements opted to give Bashar al-Assad a pass regarding the at once macabre and farcical way in which he was selected for the job back in the first referendum on 2000. They hoped that Bashar will indeed live up to the collective wish regarding the implementation of serious political and economic reforms (for opposition elements clearly understood the intimate link between the two within the context of Syrian realities). Bashar al-Assad, however, neither deserved this freely given break nor sought to later earn it. On the contrary, it did not take him long before he embarked on a process of crackdown against the opposition, using the same old tactics that his father did.

Consequently, and following a number of last minute appeals to reason, the Syrian internal opposition realized that they had no choice but to signal their rejection of the regime whole, stuck and barrel, and seek to strip it out of any legitimacy, domestically and internationally, by making their rejection public. This was the climate that led to the emergence of the Damascus Declaration in October of 2005.

For while some observers have tended to see a connection between the emergence of the Damascus Declaration and the increasing international pressures on the Assads regime following the Hariri assassination, in reality, the Declaration came as an expression of complete and utter disillusionment with Bashar al-Assad and the ruling elite, following a final act of reaching out on part of certain dissidents who rallied behind the embattled regime in the aftermath of the US-led invasion of Iraq. Their motivation for doing this came as a mixture of ideology—as leftist intellectuals they basically suspected the United States, and hope—Bashar al-Assad and his ministers had once again begun promising reforms. It did not take long for the dissidents involved, however, to discover that they were being duped. For most, this marked the last straw.

It took many months of hard dialogue between the country's top opposition figures to finally agree on the text of the Damascus Declaration, and, as usual in such documents, many serious issues were left unresolved. Still, there was enough pragmatism and agreement for the text to appeal to all major currents in the field. On board were leftists, nationalists and liberals, conservative Muslims, Alawites and Kurds, among other ideological and ethnic groups. A spirit of defiance also colored the document, as it no longer called for reform but for change. This was a not a petition meant for the country's rulers, but a manifesto aimed at the Syrian people and the international community.

Following the publication of the Damascus Declaration, and as the media and the regime shifter their attention to dealing with issues related to Lebanon and Iraq, many of the activists affiliated with the Damascus Declaration embarked on a mission of reaching out to the grassroots, using the popularity of certain key figures, such as former MP Riad Seif and Dr. Fidaa al-Horani, among other signatories, to expand the size and scope of the Declaration's grassroots network. In the process, the movement became the largest opposition coalition in the country, and its activities seem to have played a key role in ensuring the successful boycott, initiated by the Damascus Declaration, and that took place of the parliamentary elections and presidential referendum back in April–May 2007.

The next step took almost a year to achieve, due to the tight security environment maintained by the regime, and their repeated interferences to physically disperse meetings that took place in the house of Riad Seif.

Still, despite all this, on December 1st, 2007, over 160 members of the Declaration, representing all currents within it, met in the house of Riad Seif and held their first open election. The results were stunning: the most pragmatic and liberal members won. Riad Seif was elected as the head of the Secretariat General, while Dr. Fidaa al-Hornani was elected as the General Council's President. This was, in effect, a shadow government formed not in exile, but right in the lion's den in downtown Damascus.

The world seemed to have missed the implication of this bold move, but the regime definitely did not, hence the wholesale imprisonment of all 12 members of the Declaration's General Council, including Mr. Seif, who suffers from prostate cancer, and Dr. al-Horani, who suffers from a hearing condition, among other active members of the movement.

But this did not mark the end of the movement, as the regime had hoped and as some thought. The Damascus Declaration movement was not a centralized operation or a political party, but an umbrella organization with clear vision for change designed to appeal to the largest number of Syrians inside the country and abroad. By conducting such internal elections, its memberships demonstrated its strong commitment to democratic principles, even under these harsh security conditions, and it gave the world a glimpse of what the future could hold if free and democratic elections were held in Syria.

The General Council of the Damascus Declaration is the closest thing we have to a truly legitimate government in Syria. The onus is now on the Declaration's activists to continue to spread the word throughout the country, and on all those figures and movements outside the country that have endorsed the Declaration to keep international attention focused on the internal situation in Syria, especially the issue of human rights and the continuing struggle by the Syrian people and opposition movements alike to challenge the suffocating hold of the Assad regime and bring about a real democratic change in Syria.

Indeed, we are standing at the very beginning of this new phenomenon in Syria, but it is quite a serious phenomenon, pragmatic, with grassroots appeal and connections and strong commitment to institutional work and democratic principles, and it has already crossed several important milestones. With proper support and endorsement by the international community, this movement could go a long way, in charting a promising future for Syria.

But before we go into a discussion of what the international community in general, and the United States in particular, can do to support this phenomenon, a brief discussion of the political situation and the dynamics of the Assad regime is in order.

#### THE INTERNAL DYNAMICS AND PRIORITIES OF THE ASSAD REGIME:

##### *1) The Family:*

While the Syrian regime is obsessed with keeping the security situation under control in the country, while they might lull themselves into believing that they are doing a pretty good job of it, and while certain members of the family are busy taking direct control of the country's most profitable and promising economic sectors, such as the telecommunication and banking sectors, further enriching themselves and their relatives, the primary focus of the major actors in the regime are back to the familiar, albeit increasingly uncomfortable, realm of foreign affairs. The International Tribunal, strained relations with Europe and the US, the troubles in Iraq, the increasing tensions with Israel, and all other related developments continue to occupy most of their time and thinking, and explain much about their behavior and their policies.

One major truth that we should accept about the Assad regime is that it is, in fact, a multi-headed monster and that decisions in it are literally a family affair. This is not a new situation by any means, it's just that family dynamics under Bashar are quite different than they used to be under his father. Bashar came to the position with very limited leadership experience and was, in effect, a compromise candidate. As such, he is always expected to prove himself. More importantly, he is never allowed to run things on his own. A family consensus needs to be reached on every major issue. This is at once the source of the regime's strength, and its Achilles Heel. For while all members of the family are interested in preserving their rule, and share, for the most part, similar ideological predilections, they tend to exhibit different temperaments, and sometimes clashing visions for how things are and how they should be. As a result, it takes them a relatively long time to reach consensus, and their consensus have often favored the status quo and/or falling back on familiar patterns of behavior—the very troubling patterns that so many in the international community and the United States want them to abandon.

Still, Bashar does have a certain edge in this situation, because, in the final analysis, he is the one who carries the title of “president” with all the “legitimacy” and recognition that this does bring him inside the country and internationally. For this reason, Bashar’s own quirks of mind have had a greater influence in shaping the policies of the regime.

These quirks have manifested themselves from the very beginning of his rule in two major trends: his fascination with the personality of Hassan Nasrallah and the concept of national resistance, and his belief in the greater Syria ideology rather than pan-Arabism. Indeed, if Bashar has any Arab nationalist spirit in him, it can only be discerned in the manner in which he treats Syria’s Kurdish population, and the way he regurgitates the same worn-out resistance rhetoric in connection to the Arab-Israeli Conflict. In everything else though, his nationalist sentiments and credentials are clearly missing in action, even after eight years in office.

The two trends also go a long way in explaining why Bashar could not come to an agreement with former Lebanese PM, Rafic Hariri, who was pushing for a more normal relationship between and Syria, the kind that exists between two sovereign and independent yet friendly states. Such relations would have gone against the ideological convictions of Bashar. Furthermore, they would have necessitated a reorganization of the family business in Lebanon in a manner that would have involved some losses and cutbacks. In the mind of Bashar, and other members of the family, there was no reason to accept such a loss. They could not fathom that things have drastically changed on the ground in Lebanon, as well as across the region and internationally, and that, for this reason, new ways, styles and visions were now needed to manage the complex relations between the two countries.

On the other hand, Bashar’s fascination with Hezbollah’s leader, Hassan Nasrallah and the entire discourse of national resistance was noted by observers from Bashar’s early days in office. True, Bashar had to deal with a collapsed peace process from the very beginning, and as such, his recourse to reviving the rhetoric of national resistance may not have seemed surprising, but this does not in itself explain his elevation of the stature of Hezbollah from a mere card in Syria’s hands, to a full-fledged strategic partner. This change seems to have been mostly related to the personal dynamics that developed between Bashar and Hassan Nasrallah. But this situation did not simply give Nasrallah a greater influence over Bashar’s thinking, Nasrallah’s hard-line backers in Iran had an advantage here as well. As such, the Bashar-Nasrallah connection has played a major role in facilitating the continuing development of Syria’s relations with Iran, which seem to be reaching their zenith at this stage, to the extent that Iranian influence in Syria today is quite visible and quite reminiscent of Syria’s own influence in Lebanon in the 80s and 90s, with the caveat that the Iranians are far more subtle in this regard, or at least they try to be.

By insisting that the above situation was mostly the product of Bashar’s own quirks of mind, we do not mean to suggest that the other members of the family are necessarily in disagreement with him on these issues. On the contrary, there seems to be a family consensus at work here. The problems in the Assad family are all about personal temperament, differing styles, and clashing ambitions and personalities. But, in families, as every human being on this planet can attest, such problems are far more dangerous and destructive than ideological differences. That’s the nature of the Assads’ predicament, and the nature of the world’s predicament with the Assads.

## 2) *The Establishment:*

While the Assads continue to dispute and spar among themselves, the second tier of leadership in the country, especially in the security apparatuses and the army, are engaged in a continuous and dizzying process of alignments and realignments, with each figure and each group trying to position himself or itself with this or that camp: Bashar’s, his brother’s, or his brother’s-in-law. The third tier of leadership is witnessing a similar phenomenon with regard to the second tier, and son on, down to the last person involved in the power structure in the country.

In this continuous jockeying for power and profit, some people get promoted, others demoted, and still others arrested or referred to trial on corruption charges, some simply retire, by choice or imposition, and a few have left the country, or were forced out.

Meanwhile, the gate is wide open for competing Iranian and Saudi influences and dabbling, with the upper hand going to Iran, since it can operate openly and with the regime’s support and blessing. Other Gulf countries, especially Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE, are also entering the fray buying influence and property in many parts of the country. There is a growing Turkish influence here as well, especially

in Syria's northern parts, with Erdogan's government seeing potential political and economic benefit for Turkey.

But if there are any economic benefits to be derived by the average citizen here, they remain to be seen. For now, the voracious appetite of regime officials are not allowing for any trickle down effect.

In the meantime, many players seem to live in anticipation of a near future power vacuum that will need to be filled. No group or figure is necessarily plotting a coup, but no one seems to think of Bashar as being the "final solution" to the leadership crisis generated but his father's passing. Bashar's only real backers at this stage seem to be the hardliners of Iran, that is, the very people some international observers want him to divest himself from.

And so the jockeying goes on.

### 3) *Conclusions*

On the basis of the above analysis, the following assertions can be made:

- Weaning the Assads out of their reliance on Iran at this stage will not be an easy task by any means, and might, in fact, be an impossible one. Those who want to pursue such a strategy should be aware of the intricate relations that exist between the two counties, and of how deeply Iranian fingers have slipped into the fabric of the Assad regime. For this reason, they are better advised not to invest everything they have in this endeavor, and to pursue other possibilities and options in tandem with their efforts in this regard. They should also bear in mind that convincing Iran's leaders to divest themselves from the Assads might be an easier task, since they are the real puppet-masters in this show. At this stage, the family squabble seems to center on Iran's growing influence in the country, something that not all members seem comfortable with. Some were hoping for some kind of a strategic partnership with Iran, not subservience to her. But, should Bashar's opinion and style continue to prevail, Syria will be effectively transformed into an Iranian protectorate, if it's not already.
- Killing the International Tribunal is the key concern for the Assads, as they seem to be clearly implicated, judging by their behavior. In this regard, the Assads seem to think that their best strategy is to shift international attention back to the Arab-Israeli Conflict, and the issue of the Occupied Golan Heights. Hence the various signals they continue to send regarding their willingness to sit with Israel, and their willingness to "forgive" the recent Israeli air raid in northern Syria. But it is exactly this willingness of theirs that makes it clear that the Assads are more interested in the process than in reaching an actual accord. For the Assads will conduct peace talks with their eyes on the Tribunal: only when the Tribunal issue becomes moot can a peace deal have a chance at being concluded. But the only way for the International Tribunal to become moot is for there to be an international will in this regard. But there is no visible evidence that this might take place at this stage. Even Russia has paid its dues regarding financing the Tribunal. No one, then, seems to be willing to undermine the processes of international legitimacy for Bashar's blue eyes, and I seriously doubt that the Congress or any future administration would want to do that. As such, the Assads' hopes and concerns here are quite a toll order, and they might just preclude and trump any attempt at successful engagement of any sorts.
- The familial nature of decision-making in the regime, with regard to key and sensitive issues, considering the existing differences in temperament and styles and the clashing ambitions, means that decisions can only be reached by consensus, a matter that can take a lot of time, especially when the issues involved are regarded as existential. Time, however, might prove an increasingly scarce commodity in this day and age. In families, temperament and styles count more than ideological differences in family feuds. When ambitions are also involved things tend to become even more complex. This means that decision-making within the family will always be problematic and difficult. Meanwhile, stalemate rules the day. Breaking the stalemate might require breaking the family, which is no less problematic and thorny an issue than contemplating regime change. But so long as the Assads are left to dictate the rules of the game, this is the dilemma with which the world will be presented. The only way out of this corner is to go over the heads of this multi-headed monster, and address the Syrians in general. The real choice when it comes to the kind of relations that Syria want with the world and its neighbors should be given and made by the Syrians. More below.

## THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES

So, what role should the United States play at this stage?

Well, for starters they should not make the same mistake that the Assads made in Lebanon. The Assads dabbled in Lebanon as if they were back in the 1980s and 90s again, and, as a result, they got burnt. The United States should realize that a return to the real politick of the Cold War with regard to the Middle East, or even those of the 1990s, is simply not feasible anymore. The wave of change is reaching the Middle East, for better or worse, and it has clearly reached Syria, otherwise there would not be a Damascus Declaration.

Indeed, doing business with Syria's rulers at this stage, regardless of the questionability of their legitimacy (the way they manipulated the elections and popular reactions in this regard should be always borne in mind), and regardless of how they continue to treat their people, is a veritable recipe for disaster, not just for Syria, but for America as well. For it will make the United States once again be perceived as a partner in the crime of oppression and corruption being perpetrated by the Assad regime. Clearly the interests of the United States will better served if it managed to avoid getting caught supporting and engaging a regime at the very time when its people are rejecting it. The miscalculations that the United States made in 1979 with regard to Iran are still haunting it to this very day. There is no reason for this scenario to be repeated with Syria.

As such, the first act of support that international and American policymakers can provide is to measure their words and statements regarding Syria very carefully, for they could be sending the wrong message to the Syrian people. If US policymakers want to speak of engagement with the Assads, a clear element of conditionality needs to be clearly added and emphasized here each time the subject of engagement comes up. America should require that the Assads regain some much needed legitimacy internally, before they are treated with any credibility and respect. For the US, or anyone in the international community, to simply ignore the infractions of basic rights committed by the Assads through their security officers on a daily basis, or brush aside the way the Assads manipulated the results of the presidential referendum, is nothing less than a slap to the face of the Syrian people. And the Syrian people are just tired of being slapped around. I know I am.

The best way for engagement to take place, in a manner that is respectful of the Syrian people and their aspirations, is for it to take place at a time when no political prisoners are around anymore. The first act of legitimization that should be demanded from the Assads is, therefore, quite simple and straightforward: the release of all political prisoners, including the members of the Damascus Declaration General Council, and their colleagues, Michel Kilo, Aref Dalilah, and others, as well as the young members of the Syrian Youth for Justice, a group of twenty year-olds sentenced to 3-7 years in prison just for publishing some critical articles on a website, among others.

When the Assads choose to respond positively to this call, the United States could send then its Ambassador back to Damascus initiating a series of quid pro quos, acts of good faith and trust building measures that could help the Assads break out of their old habits. In time, this process should be managed to lead not simply to the revival of the peace process between Syria and Israel, but, more importantly, to the launching of:

- 1) a reconciliation process between Syria and Lebanon, for this is indeed the only logical way for the Tribunal to be stopped without undermining the processes of international legitimacy; and
- 2) an internal reconciliation process between the regime and its opponents. For this is what's really involved here: in order for Syria to be at peace with any of its neighbors, it needs to be at peace with itself first. This will logically entail reaching agreement on a new constitution, and conducting new and free parliamentary and presidential elections. The Assads may not end up controlling or leading the system leading, but they will be part of it and will be immune from prosecution.

Should the Assads refuse to cooperate in such a plan, which is, admittedly, the more likely outcome, then, they will have earned their isolation in the eyes of their people, the American people, and the international community. US policymakers should not be preoccupied with what the Assads will or won't accept, since every iota of evidence we have suggests that they crave something that no one can actually deliver. As such, what they need is a reality check. I believe that the proposal elaborated above provides just a check, especially when delivered by both the White House and the Congress.

In the meantime, the US should not shy away at all from actively and openly supporting the country's opposition groups and dissidents, especially those with established connections to the internal opposition and the fledgling grassroots network. Contrary to what some might think, assigning international legitimacy to Syrian dissidents and opposition elements is not a kiss of death, especially when it is put within the context elaborated above: an over the board deal offered to all.

In many ways, then, the United States needs to enunciate a message of hope and change for all actors involved in the region: a message of hope AND change, not hope and the status quo, not hope and the status quo ante. This message is as relevant abroad as it is here.

*Thank you for your kind attention, I will now answer any question that you may have.*

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you.  
Dr. Rodman.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE PETER W. RODMAN, SENIOR FELLOW, FOREIGN POLICY, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION**

Mr. RODMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee. Thank you for the invitation. Thank you for your courtesy this morning.

You have my prepared statement, and I would just like to make a couple of key points if I may. Syria is in the news, of course, for two reasons. One is the nuclear business with North Korea, the second is a wave of recent press accounts which Martin Indyk eluded to, of Syrian and Israeli diplomatic contacts, and these diplomatic contacts have been essentially confirmed by both sides, and that is what I would like to focus on in my remarks.

My main point is that we and Israel should not forget that Syria has a regional importance. I do not think that is likely to be forgotten, but Syria is an essentially weak country that has made itself a major factor in the Arab world by its unholy alliance with Iran, by a pattern of behavior that is menacing. It has given itself leverage and regional status by this disruptive behavior, and this is a strategic problem. It goes beyond the Middle East peace process. It certainly goes beyond the bilateral issue of Israeli-Syrian relations, and it goes beyond—I think the importance goes beyond that of the Golan Heights.

The chairman's opening statement correctly listed a lot of the examples of Syrian misbehavior. The chairman is absolutely right that in Iraq the Syrians are actively colluding with Iraqi extremists who are killing Americans. That may have subsided somewhat but my understanding is that the Syrians are cracking down on Islamist forces within Syria, and what we see along the Iraqi border may be some fallout from this rather than any kind of Syrian strategic decision to stop its mischievous behavior in Iraq.

Lebanon has been alluded to everyone. Syria, even as we speak, is playing the same disruptive role, attempting to regain its dominance that it had lost, and most importantly, the alliance with Iran.

So the question we and Israel need to think about if there were to be a negotiation over the Golan Heights, we need to ask ourselves a number of questions. What is the effect of such a negotiation on these regional interests that we both have?

Now, there are serious arguments or good arguments for eagerly pursuing a Syria-Israeli negotiation. Ehud Barak has been quoted recently as saying, "Well, Israel wants to pin down stability on the

northern front which helps isolate the Palestinians. It helps consolidate one part of Israel's security while Israel turns to other more difficult issues."

That is a good argument. I have heard Yitzhak Rabin make the same point 15 years ago when there was an earlier phase of Syrian-Israeli diplomacy. But I have some questions. I mean, if there were to be a deal or a negotiation, what does it mean for Lebanon? Martin mentioned that too. What assurances do we have that Syria will not continue to wage war against Israel by proxy via Lebanon, which it has been doing? Will that be part of the discussion? What effect will it have on Syria's behavior in the region and will it loosen its ties with Iran or not?

I am not so sure. To put it in a nutshell, the Gulf Arabs, who are our allies with respect to Iran, are very angry at Syria right now. Syria is isolated in the Arab world and my concern is that one of Syria's motives for these peace overtures with Israel is to break free of its isolation, complicate our relations with our Gulf Arab friends, which is a strategic cost to us.

In fact, Israel has relations, improving relations with a number of the Gulf Arabs, and the question is, Is this consistent? and will it have the strategic benefit of separating Syria from Iran, or will it be a clever device by Syria to break out of its isolation while feeling free to continue its hostile actions in Lebanon or Iraq or with respect to Iran?

So my bottom line is, first of all, that the United States and Israel need to coordinate closely if there is to be a Syrian diplomacy. But secondly, the United States and Israel, as they coordinate, need to keep the broader regional context in mind—Iran, Lebanon, Iraq—and we must not lose sight of what we want Syria to do. We know what price Syria is asking for. They want the Golan back, but we need to keep in mind the price we have a right to demand. What we want from Syria is a change of behavior on the range of things that the chairman discussed, and before we lift a finger on Syria's behalf, I would like some assurance that we are going to get some of the things we want out of Syria.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Rodman follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE PETER W. RODMAN, SENIOR FELLOW,  
FOREIGN POLICY, THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

Mr. Chairman, members of this subcommittee:

Thank you for the invitation to testify on the important topic of U.S. policy toward Syria.

The idea of splitting Syria from Iran seems like a no-brainer. This is the most important strategic argument that is often made for trying to improve the U.S. relationship with Syria. The idea has been around for a long time, however—25 years or so, in fact, since the Syrian-Iranian alliance took shape during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980's. The obstacle to actually accomplishing this strategic coup is that no one has figured out a way to do it consistently with other important strategic interests or without risk to other strategic interests of the United States.

It is reasonable to look at this question again, however, in the current context—especially in light of recent rumors of Syrian-Israeli contacts.

#### THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT UP TO NOW

The main problems lately have been Syria's role and actions in Iraq, in Lebanon, in the Palestinian diplomacy, and in the nuclear dimension.

**Iraq.**—Syria's President Bashar al-Asad sided with Saddam Hussein just before the 2003 Iraq war. Then, after the war, he opened Syria to Ba'athist extremists trying to undermine the new Iraqi government and to kill Americans. The Bush Administration sent senior officials on several visits to Damascus to meet with President Asad to try to persuade him to stop these activities: Secretary of State Colin Powell went in May 2003; I had the privilege of visiting myself in September 2004 as part of an interagency delegation with Assistant Secretary of State William Burns; and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage had a similar meeting with Asad in early 2005.

In each case, the Syrians' response was that destabilizing Iraq and killing Americans were the furthest things from their minds; they did confess to having trouble controlling the Syrian-Iraqi border, and asked for our technical assistance. The concern that the American side expressed, however, was that the main problem was not border control but the evident policy of the Syrian government to allow sanctuary inside Syria for political organizing by Iraqi extremists directly involved in those hostile activities. We even gave them names of senior Iraqi extremists who we knew were operating out of Syria. As we told President Asad, we had a hard time believing that the Syrian government did not have control over these kinds of activities on its territory. In response, they turned over one Iraqi radical, if I recall correctly.

And the Syrians are masters of spin. Each of these visits by senior Americans was meant to convey a serious warning and to ratchet up pressures on Damascus to reverse its disruptive and destructive policy. Our talking points, I recall on my own visit, were as blunt and tough as any talking points I have seen in many years (and we let President Asad know they had been cleared by President Bush). But the Syrians always publicized the *fact* of the high-level meetings as a sign that U.S.-Syrian relations were excellent. This conveyed a wrong impression to everyone, including our friends in the region. In other words, while our tough talking points were meant to ratchet up pressures, the Syrians spun the visits into relief from pressures.

**Lebanon.**—The murder of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri took place in February 2005; the war between Israel and Hizballah occurred in July 2006. One important consequence of these two events was to isolate Syria in the Arab world. The Arabs, particularly the Gulf Arabs, were furious at Syria—Hariri was a close friend of the Saudis, and the Gulf Arabs saw Hizballah's aggression as an Iranian power play. At an Arab summit, there was the unusual occurrence of many leaders condemning Hizballah for provoking the conflict. The Syrians chose that period to float another peace overture to Israel. But we and the Israelis and the Arabs correctly saw this as a ploy—as a device to break out of their isolation, indeed as a way to split us from the Gulf Arabs. At a moment when we and the Gulf Arabs were intensifying our security cooperation—in an important U.S. initiative called the Gulf Security Dialogue—prompted in large part by concern over Iran, for us to have taken the bait and launched into a rapprochement with Syria would have caused considerable confusion in the Arab world about our strategic judgment.

Arab anger at Syria is a recurring phenomenon—usually short-lived. In recent years, however, given the growing threat from Iran, the unholy alliance between Syria and Iran is likely to remain a big issue in Syrian-Arab relations. We should not forget which side we have the bigger stake in.

**The Palestinian Issue.**—On the Palestinian issue, too, Syria has long played a negative role, backing rejectionist forces. Today it is solidly backing Hamas and harboring its leaders. President Carter's efforts notwithstanding, this is a way of obstructing the peace process, not advancing it. Syria has long played this kind of role—to maximize its leverage over Israel and indeed its regional leverage.

**The Nuclear Dimension.**—None of us on the outside can know the full ramifications of the reported Israeli strike last September against a North Korean-related nuclear facility in Syria. It was interesting that both Israel and Syria perceived an interest in minimizing the public political fallout from that event. The incident probably has more immediate relevance to our present diplomacy with North Korea, but it is also a reminder of the potential dangers of a Syrian-Israeli conflict. Syria already possesses other forms of WMD if not nuclear weapons.

#### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Some might say these are all reasons for the United States to reach out to Syria. But, if Syria really wants to make a deal with us (and Israel) in good faith, and if that's what Syria is really after, it has been going about it the wrong way. It is not in our interest to take the bait (on the Golan) in a context that complicates our Arab relations or seems to reward the killing of Americans. Some make the argument a little differently, saying that our current difficulties show we need Syria and

need to reach out to them. But Syria's collusion in the killing of Americans in Iraq has made it unattractive for the United States to take any such initiative. Yielding to blackmail, or approaching them as demandeur, would be the wrong approach.

Thus, Syrian policies have made it harder to visualize any kind of rapprochement—assuming that's what they are interested in. My conclusion is, on the contrary, that the Syrian government has behaved like a government that has made a strategic decision to continue to play the spoiler—to cling to its alliance with Iran in order to maximize its regional position and leverage. Syria is an essentially weak country that has made itself a major factor in the Arab world by its alliance with Iran and by being disruptive and menacing in its behavior. It is not self-evident the Syrians will give all that up, just for the Golan Heights. Their strategic priorities do not seem to be limited to the Golan.

Is there some "grand bargain" to be had between us and Syria? If so, what would it be? What else could we give them, apart from helping them recover the Golan? We can't "give them Lebanon," or seem to. In 1991, the inclusion of Syria in the Madrid peace process was seen by some (including the Syrians) as giving them a green light to step up their bullying in Lebanon. That's not in the cards today.

In other words, it's not only Syria that has a price; *we* have a price:

- Will they leave Lebanon alone? The continuing deadlock over the Lebanese presidency and cabinet shows Syria still playing a bullying role and trying to regain by other means the dominance it lost in Lebanon after it took its troops out.
- In Iraq, there seems to be some recent reduction in the flow of extremist fighters from Syria, but it may be the result of a crackdown on Islamists within Syria—for Syria's own domestic purposes—rather than a strategic decision to stop trying to weaken Iraq and bleed the United States.
- Will Syria still play the role of spoiler on other regional issues—supporting extremists, maintaining its strategic alliance with Iran?

In short, the conditions do not exist for an improvement of relations with Syria so long as Syrian policies remain hostile to important interests of ours in the Middle East. It is appropriate to continue sanctions and pressures on Syria so long as this is the case. And, based on the experience of past meetings with President Asad, I am skeptical of the value of further diplomatic overtures in the absence of significant improvements in U.S. leverage or in the overall balance of forces in the region.

Lately there have been fresh reports of Syrian-Israeli diplomatic contacts. I can only speculate, but I can see some benefit to the Israelis in playing the Syrians and Palestinians off against each other, or in nailing down a stable situation on the Syrian front while they continue to wrestle with the agonizing Palestinian problem. Perhaps now is an opportunity for the Israelis to be creative in this area. But I have two concerns.

One is whether Israeli domestic politics can absorb a Syrian negotiation at the same time as the (already difficult) Palestinian negotiation. It has long been an axiom of the Middle East peace process that the Israeli political system cannot handle major concessions on more than one front at a time. But that, of course, is for the Israeli government and people to decide.

Second, it is essential that Israel and the United States coordinate their respective strategies toward Syria, in light of the broader regional significance of Syrian policies. Israel and the United States also need to keep in mind the broader Arab context—and the Iran context—and the stake we both have in cooperation with the moderate Arabs, including in the Gulf. Ultimately there will have to be a Syrian-Israeli peace settlement—everyone knows that—but it should be in a strategic context that strengthens the forces of moderation in the region rather than weakening them. Syria will be thinking strategically if it pursues a dialogue with Israel; so should we.

My bottom line is that Syria has to pay a big part of the price—in Iraq, in Lebanon, in the Arab-Israeli diplomacy, and in its ties with Iran—if it wants the United States to lift a finger in its behalf.

Thank you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you. Thank the entire panel for your testimony.

If Syria's big ask is the Golan, what is the trade? What is it that we can reasonably expect? Do we have a long list, a short list, a comprehensive list? Ambassador?

Ambassador INDYK. Well, if you allow me, I am not sure that is the extent of its ask in the first place, so if we are going to look at what the trade is, I think the ask includes the Golan and all of the Golan, but it also extends to Lebanon. I think that if you go back to the negotiations that we conducted in the 1990s when the circumstances were very different, Lebanon was indeed part of the deal. Syria was in those days in Lebanon, was exercising some kind of control. It had been invited into Lebanon by the United States as a way of preventing the civil war or was stopping the civil war from going on there. So it had a position of dominance in Lebanon, and the assumption in those days when we had—the last time we had intensive Israeli-Syrian negotiations with American participation was that as part of the Israeli-Syria deal, Syria would disarm Hezbollah in Lebanon using its troop presence there to do so, and would oversee an Israel-Lebanon peace agreement that would be the outgrowth of the Israeli-Syrian deal.

In other words, in those days, it was accepted by all parties involved that the deal would involve all of the Golan in return for Syria ending its conflict with Israel, normalizing relations with Israel, and getting recognition and a fix for its control of Lebanon.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I am sorry. Could you repeat that?

Ambassador INDYK. For its control of Lebanon, that would be as part of the deal. The Israel-Lebanon peace deal would have been done under Syrian auspices.

Now, we are in a very different situation today, as I said and you said it much more clearly. Lebanon cannot be part of this deal. So what they want is Lebanon and the Golan Heights. What they can get, the Israelis' not just this prime minister but five previous prime ministers have offered Syria, full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan, so they can get that.

What we need in return is Lebanon off the table and end to Syria using its territory as a through-point for arming Hezbollah and other groups in Lebanon as well, and a shutting down of those terrorist organizations which Syria hosts in Damascus, which most important is Hamas and Palestine's Islamic Jihad, which have their headquarters there. So I think that is the trade that we would need to see there.

I do not think that it makes sense to add to that requirement that it break its relationship with Iran. I rather believe that that will be the natural outgrowth of a peace deal between Israel and Syria under American auspices.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Abdulhamid?

Mr. ABDULHAMID. I actually did not hear the word tribunal, so I have to say it is not the Golan, it is nothing. They want the end of the tribunal. This is their major, major concern, and everything they have been doing over the last couple of years has really pointed in this direction.

So as such, you can conduct peace, you can demand whatever you want from them, but you really have to think can you give them what they want in this regard, and the only way you can actually promise them that is to actually get them to sit with the Lebanese and to get, as I said, some kind of agreement between the Syrians and the Lebanese. So the reality is you cannot just think anymore

of the Golan separately of or of this entire dynamics of Israel and Syrian talking separately from Syrian and Lebanese talking also.

There are three processes of national conciliations that have to be taken or peace processes that need to take place. One between Syria and Lebanon because if Lebanon then are satisfied, if they get what they want, which is diplomatic exchange for Syria, less interference by Syrians in their internal affairs, so on, they might be able to, you know, then go to the—and demand from the United Nations a new resolution ending this whole investigation. That is the only legal way really out of this.

But they are not going to do it at this stage with Syria holding the gun and with Hezbollah basically parading in the streets and establishing a state within a state. So all of these issues are interconnected—the Golan, the internal situation and Lebanon—and what I am trying to also insert here into the discussion is something that is always missing from the discussion is the question of human rights and the troubles within Syria itself because it can erupt at any moment. The situation is that tenuous.

People, you know, when they walk in the street or when I read some of the press reports on Syria these days, they look at the surface. They do not really see what is happening on the ground. They look and say, hey, we can buy an I-phone in Syria, so the situation must be good. But what they do not miss is the fact that—or a cellular phone basically, or whatever technological device. Everything is available indeed in the country, but those who can afford it are less than 10 percent or 5 percent of the population.

On the other hand, the basic food stuffs have risen by a factor of 200 and 300 percent over the last couple of months alone. People, as I said, 8 million live below the poverty line. They are in dire need and they are seething with anger, and troubles have already begun taking place in different parts of Syria as a result of that.

So what you might end up having is you might end up having a situation—and of course, activists and dissidents are being interrogated and jailed every day and tortured. There was a reported death under torture a few days ago, and also there were demonstration in Kurdish areas a couple of weeks ago that led to gun fire by the authorities and several people were killed.

So the situation is pretty tenuous in some areas, and what you can end up having at any moment is a collapse of the situation. So therefore you have to think of that third dynamic, which is Syria has to resolve its internal problems as well. So these issues are connected, the internal situation, the Golan and the tribunal—

Mr. ACKERMAN. Is economic unrest in Syria a good thing or a bad thing?

Mr. RODMAN. It is both in the sense that it is a good thing because people are beginning to listen to the opposition for the first time in a long time, and the opposition is beginning to develop a grassroots support. So in that sense it is good because democracy is getting now a chance and people are beginning to think that we need to challenge the regime and look for alternatives.

The bad thing about it, however, is that even when the system change it is going to take many, many years until we rectify the disaster that has been created to us by the Assads due to their mis-

management and corruption, and a lot of people are suffering in the meantime.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Dr. Rodman?

Mr. RODMAN. I would like to answer the chairman's question—

Mr. ACKERMAN. Yes.

Mr. RODMAN [continuing]. With three points very bluntly.

One, I do not see Syria giving up what has been up to now the essence of its whole foreign policy for almost 40 years; namely, playing this spoiler role, holding hostages in Lebanon if you will, holding Lebanon as a hostage, using Iraq as leverage against the United States, and of course this alliance with Iran, which gives it leverage over its Arab brothers.

Without this foreign policy, Syria is a weak, little country, and a very ordinary country, and I do not see Syria having any interest in giving up this leverage it has.

Second, I believe Syria's motive now is to use the United States and Israel to break out of the isolation which it is now feeling the Arab world. As the Arab-Iranian rivalry heats up, Syria is under pressure from the Arabs, and this Israeli overture is a way, I think, to use us to break free of that, and to drive a wedge, in fact, between us and our Gulf Arab friends.

And three, just the bottom line, I am very skeptical about the strategic benefit now of taking the bait and pursuing a Golan negotiation.

Mr. ACKERMAN. So if the current culture question was deal or no deal, you would say no deal?

Mr. RODMAN. I think we should be very, very cautious and we should have a long list of the demands we make on Syria before we expose ourselves to the risks that I have described.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Let us say we put together a comprehensive list of what our demands are starting with everything that everybody has said from ending their relationship with Iran to not meddling in the Middle East, to not running guns in jihadis from Iran to Iraq, to human rights within Syria, economic reforms within Syria, no longer supporting terrorist organizations and Hezbollah, taking Lebanon off the table, what do they get for all of that?

Mr. ABDULHAMID. Basically I will say they get immunity from prosecution in the tribunal. They get a new lease on life, that is what they get. I mean, because right now—

Mr. ACKERMAN. You are giving them Lebanon.

Mr. ABDULHAMID. No, not Lebanon. We are giving them their political survival inside Syria.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Ambassador?

Ambassador INDYK. I disagree with my friend Ammar here. I do not think it is any of our business to be offering deals on the tribunal or going along with deals on the tribunal. Tribunal is a judicial process and U.N. resolutions, and our position should be we do not have anything to do with that. We do not have any control over that. That is something that is judicial process which we will not interfere in, and it will have to play itself out according to the evidence and the indictments and the prosecutions and the findings of the tribunal.

So I do not see that that is something that we should be giving on, but I wonder if I could just prolong the conversation with Peter

Rodman about the dangers of the deal that you are exploring here, because I think there is no doubt that the downside here is that the Syrians break out of their isolation, but I think that he misinterprets the Arab concern here.

The Arabs, particularly the Saudis, are very upset about Syria's policies in Lebanon, but the Saudis and the other Arab states insisted that we get the Syrians to come to Annapolis. Why did they do that? Because they want Syrian political cover for their own engagement with Israel, and I think their strategic interests is very similar to ours in order to—their interest is to bring the Syrians over from the Iranian side of the equation to the Arab side of the balance of power.

Now, they are very realistic about how that can be done but that is their long-term objective, so I do not see that we are at loggerheads with them here, but we do place ourselves at loggerheads with our Israeli ally if we are not prepared to help it when it wants to explore the potential for peace with Syria.

The last point I would like to make, Mr. Chairman, is it is important to understand that peace is not about to break out between Israel and Syria. The deal is not about to be done in which we put our list out and they say, yes, sir. This will be, because it is the Syrians involved, it will be a prolonged negotiation. They have much more interest in a process, precisely because, as Peter says, they are trying to break out of their isolation, than they do in actually reaching an agreement.

But what I am trying to write you is that we have an interest in the process as well. The process can enable us to put those kinds of things on the table, enable us to engage with the Syrians in pressing those kinds of issues. With Ambassador Beck there, we can press, I think, more effectively the human rights agenda that Ammar talks about, and most importantly of all, we can protect Lebanese independence because the great danger here of our standing back in the course of isolating Syria is that Syria will break out of its isolation via Israel anyway, because of the Israeli interest in doing this.

The Israelis are really using the Turks instead of us to engage with the Syrians, and if the Israelis and the Syrians go off and make their own deal, there is a good chance of Lebanon's independence will be sacrificed.

Why? Because the Israelis do not have a pony in the race in terms of Lebanese, presidential politics, and so on. What they care about is Hezbollah, who is going to disarm Hezbollah, and solidify the security arrangements on their northern border, and in order for that to be achieved, if Syria is going to do the job, the Israelis will be satisfied with that.

So I think there is a real downside to standing back at a point where the Israelis and Syrians want to engage.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I was going to move to Mr. Fortenberry, but I just want a clarification of what you are saying. The Israelis do not have the ability to deal anything on Lebanon, but they do have the ability to make a deal over the Golan, that they do not have a horse in the race vis-à-vis Lebanon as you have described, that that does not mean that they can give Lebanon away, but are you suggesting that a deal with Israel and Syria should not be made sans

our participation so that we can leverage in a guarantee for Lebanon's independence? Is that what you are saying?

Ambassador INDYK. That is correct, Mr. Chairman. I think just one point is imagine yourself a fly on the wall in an Israeli-Syrian negotiation with the United States not present there. The Israeli demand to the Syrians will be you have to shut down the Palestinian organizations and disarm Hezbollah, and the Syrians will say okay, but to do that, we have to be able to move into Lebanon, and if you want us to disarm Hezbollah, then that is going to be the requirement. We are going to have to have the ability to operate in Lebanon to disarm Hezbollah. That is the way I see it.

Mr. ACKERMAN. So your cautionary note is not to be too encouraging of an independent absent United States assistance agreement between Israel and Syria?

Ambassador INDYK. Look, there will not be an Israeli-Syrian deal without American involvement, so we don't need to be too nervous about this. The Syrians are the ones insisting on our presence there, because they want to break out of isolation, as Peter says. But the Israelis will need our involvement as well because they can't do a Golan deal without the kind of security assistance and underwriting that the United States, only the United States can provide and has provided in every other deal that Israel has done with its Arab neighbors and the Palestinians. So we will be in the room if there is a real deal to be done.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I have, as you might know, a strong interest in Lebanese independence and do not want to leave that to chance.

Ambassador INDYK. And I say the best way to do that is to make it clear by being in the negotiations. We cannot put ourselves in a position of opposing Israeli-Syrian peace or not being involved in it. You know, it is an extremely awkward situation, and it is, Mr. Chairman, unprecedented. There has never been a case where we have not been willing to support Israel when it is making peace. But the way to protect Lebanon's independence is through the negotiations, is making clear that our involvement comes with that primary requirement.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I thank the committee's indulgence for the chair's overburdening use of the time. Mr. Fortenberry.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. No, Mr. Chairman. It was very helpful. Thank you. And thank you all for appearing today. I am sorry I didn't have the benefit of your earlier testimony, but let me try to catch up here. What would it take to leverage a change in Syria's internal calculus? Now a primary motive that I have heard you say is its desire to end its isolation. We just heard in response to Dr. Rodman's assertion that we should be very cautious into entering any negotiations without a clear set of demands or important outcomes that we would like to achieve. And as we tick through those demands, it is obviously clearly very complicated and would be a very heavy lift. So what would motivate a change in the internal calculus that would allow Syria to end its isolation, become a part of the responsible community of nations and achieve some of the key elements that were just listed there?

Mr. RODMAN. All right. I will start. I think Syria will calculate what the balance of forces is in the region, what the pressures are,

what the incentives are. One of the factors, not the only factor, is American credibility and American strength.

I think a big key to that is what the situation is in Iraq. If we look like we are being driven out of Iraq, our leverage collapses and others will see advantage. If we look like we are succeeding in Iraq, that does a lot to restore our credibility regionally. I mean, American credibility is not divisible, and I think our position in the whole region depends significantly on that. Now, that is just one factor.

Again, Arab pressures on Syria are another factor. So I think Syria will calculate, as most countries do, you know, what the pressures are on it, and that is one of the things that makes me nervous. I think in the present environment of the last few years I am not sure the Syrians and Iranians think they are under a lot of pressure, and that is the worst context in which to undertake a negotiation.

Ambassador INDYK. I think actually that Peter should be claiming more success in the current administration's approach than he does. I think the Syrians are feeling already the cold wind of isolation, and they are not feeling particularly comfortable. In other words, I think their calculus has already been affected by our approach, but in terms of the situation Iraq, I think the Syrians have come to the conclusion that it is in their own interests not to let that situation get out of control. They are not going to exert a lot of energy to help us there, but whereas they wanted us tied down and facing difficulties because they fear that if we succeed in Iraq we would turn our military power on them, I think they have come to understand that it does not serve their interest to keep on fueling the insurgency there.

So in other words, in some ways we have already impacted their calculus. Their desire to break out of their isolation now is, I think, generated by an awkwardness that they feel as an Alawite regime, which is a small sect, kind of break-away sect of Shias, sitting atop a Sunni population in Syria, and as this sectarian rivalry between Shias and Sunnis spreads itself across the region, the Syrian regime finds itself in a somewhat awkward position aligned with Shia Persian Iran against the emerging block of Sunni Arabs, and it creates—and Mark can speak to this better than I can, but it creates a certain uneasiness that feeds already the indignation and anger that he has described.

So for that reason I think they would like to find a way to distance themselves somewhat from the embrace of the Iranians, and it is very interesting to see the way they have built their relationship with Turkey, their northern neighbor. They used to have very bad relations with Turkey. Part of the way that they have tried to break out the isolation that we have imposed on them is to build this relationship with Turkey, an ally of the United States, an ally of Israel, but it is Sunni as well, and it gives them a kind of relationship with a major Sunni power to reduce their sense of awkwardness.

So how do you affect their overall calculus? I think that by engaging with them now you have the opportunity to say, okay, we are ready to open the door to you. We are ready to give you a way out of the situation so that they have an alternative, but make it

very clear, as the chairman has suggested, that there are a whole range of requirements before they can be graduated from their rogue status to having a normal relationship with the United States.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. And you believe the moment is ripe for that type of engagement—

Mr. RODMAN. Yes.

Mr. FORTENBERRY [continuing]. Given there is a reasonable probability of an outcome that would lead to—

Mr. RODMAN. I would say the moment will come with a new administration here, which is what the Syrians are essentially waiting for and positioning themselves for. But yes, then I think that there will be an opportunity.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Well, I think your comments are helpful in trying to—because I have always found it a peculiar dynamic because of the reasons you are stating, the sectarian dynamic within the country and yet a friendship, partnership, alignment with Iran given all those other internal dynamics. So I appreciate your comments. It is helpful.

Yes, sir?

Mr. ABDULHAMID. I would just like to point out here something, a complicating factor that I think need to be taken under consideration. I think Syrian relations with Iran at this stage is not that of a partnership, but that is a self-serving, and I think the Iranians have a lot of influence not only to dictate politics on Syria, but to undermine the regime if it went in a direction that is undesirable by them.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Can I stop you for a moment? How did that dynamic occur? What were the choices that led to that reality now?

Mr. ABDULHAMID. Well, the relationship are longstanding, and at the same time I think there is something that is very peculiar about Bashar's personality, Bashar al-Assad, the President, and his relationship with Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, and that allowed him to come into contact early on with the Iranian hardliners, and I think as time went on and Syria found itself more and more in trouble, the Iranians sort of gave them something to lean on, and the economic relationships have grown tremendously between the two countries, and Iran began advising, especially over the last 3 years, the President of Syria on a lot of issues related to handling the crisis, the situation in Lebanon. So these last 3 years in particular have really been very important in the way Iran have managed to spread its influence in Syria.

They have also manipulated the different members of the ruling family in a sense. I know we are a republic, and yet we speak about the ruling family, and this is part of the tragedy we live in Syria, but that is, in essence, what happens. The President relies on his brother, his brother-in-law, his sister, and his maternal cousins to run the country, and I think the Iranians—but there are differences also between them. There are differences in temperament, visions, ambitions, so the Iranians have manipulated these things and have really indeed themselves to each member of the family. There is an agreement and a consensus that the relationship with Iran is important, but some members in the family want sort of a more equal relation, the kind that existed under Hassan al-Assad

where, you know, he was independent to make his decisions, but he also maintained this relationship with Iran.

Bashar, on the other hand, is more under the sway of Ahmadinejad basically, and the Iranian hardliners, and he favors more—I think he felt really much comfortable when he sort of let the Iranians advise him and dictate the foreign policy over the last couple of years, and I think he felt that his serious position in a sense have had an edge over the United States over the last 2 years.

So for all the talk about this isolation inside their mind really, there is a perception that they have actually managed to sort of reach some kind of a detente with this administration, and that this is a result of Iranian influence, and this is the result of their cooperation with Iran.

As a result, Bashar favors more such policies, and I think at this stage what they did not realize, I think, is that Iran at this stage have really infiltrated the security apparatus of the republican guard, and as such, they really hold a sway over the Assads.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Chairman, if you could indulge me for a moment more.

There is an irony in what you are saying in that there is a growing willingness, desire to create certain distances from Iranian entanglement, yet it is the Iranian influence that has allowed for the United States to become concerned, giving the Syrians a certain degree of leverage in terms of building perhaps a new relationship with us. There is a real irony there.

Mr. ABDULHAMID. It is a very strange relationship, indeed.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. If I understand what you have said correctly.

Mr. ABDULHAMID. You are quite right. There are certain members of the family who feel this relationship has gotten too strong, and of course, the popular sentiment is completely uncomfortable with this relationship simply because of the sectarian dimension it adds. There is a lot of talk on Shiism. In fact, even official Muslim figures, you know, and this is something that is unprecedented. They signed a letter complaining about the growing influence of Iran in the country. Even though they are not opposition, they are completely subservient to the regime. Yet because they are Sunni and they were very sort of uncomfortable with how much leeway Iranians have to now spread their influence in the country, they have complained to the President publicly.

So indeed this relationship is problematic for the regime, but at the same time it has—you know, they have sort of allowed it to take place for 3 years, and they did not realize how powerful the Iranians can actually, and how savvy they are. They have actually infiltrated different layers of society, businesses, the security apparatus. So it is not exactly now a question of Syria simply saying we do not want that relationship anymore. I have made a comparison here between the relationship between Iran and Syria is rapidly becoming similar to the ways the Syrian relationship with Lebanon had been during the 1990s and before.

And as such, we might expect that if Iran's influence is going to be tamed or contained, that they might do what the Syrians are now doing in Lebanon, which is supporting all acts of mayhem inside the country. So that is the kind of dynamics that really needs

to be taken also under consideration. It is not difficult. It is not that easy to think that this is something that—you know, the relationship can be sort of put on a back burner, and that while all these peace talks are taking place, that the Iranians will not be aware of the implications for their interest, and that they will not actually try to destabilize the regime or play one Assad against another in order to get their way.

In fact, this might have just taken place. A few weeks ago there were a lot of rumors about the brother-in-law of the President who was a very important person in the family, and who holds the security in his hand in a sense, being sort of sidelined, and I think all of this relates to the fact that Iran might be trying to sort of sideline a powerful figure within the Assad community so they can maintain their control over the more pliable figure who is the President and his brother.

So all of these dynamics are there, and need to be taken under consideration.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing. I assume our Syrian counterparts would be watching this and would clearly understand that we are embracing a serious dialogue here as to clearly understand some of the problems, difficulties and dilemmas, and leading to what we all hope for, a more peaceful type of relationship that can build upon something positive and hopeful in the Middle East.

Yet at the same time there are serious dilemmas and difficulties here, but I think, again, the hearing itself sends a clear statement that we look forward to potentially opening a door to address some of these internal dynamics to address some of the external dynamics and potentially lead to a new day here. So thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Carnahan.

Mr. CARNAHAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to also add my thanks to you for holding this hearing and to the gentlemen here on the panel, thank you for being here.

I wanted to ask a couple of questions with regard to the Syria-Lebanese relationship, and it has been clear that Syria has resisted efforts to clarify Lebanon's status, refusing to delineate borders, refusing to name an ambassador to Beirut and refusing to negotiate with Beirut on the status of Lebanese being held in prisons.

Is this just hard bargaining positioning, or is there real deep-seated resistance to acknowledging the reality of Lebanese sovereignty and independence?

Ambassador INDYK. I think deep-seated resistance captures it quite well. The Syrian view of Lebanon is essentially is part of greater Syria, that it was taken away from Syria by the imperialist powers, the British and the French after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and it has been continuous Syrian policy since then not to recognize the independence of Lebanon in exactly the way that you have suggested.

There is an historical reason for that. There is a strategic reason for that. There is an economic reason for that. Syria views itself as a regional power and it regards Lebanon as part of its sphere of influence, and it had to withdraw its troops essentially because the

Lebanese people came out into the streets and demanded that they go, but ever since then the Syrians have used whatever means necessary, and I use those words purposefully, whatever means necessary to exercise, promote their influence in Lebanon with an intention to control the situation there, and we should have no illusions that they consider that a vital national interest for which they will be prepared to spend considerable political and, if necessary, military capital to maintain that interest.

Mr. CARNAHAN. Other gentlemen care to comment?

Mr. ABDULHAMID. Indeed, I think the idea of simply not defending Lebanon is something that goes against the grain, the ideological grain and also their financial interest as a family and as an elite. For this reason, I think this is the battle and the front on which they are going to fight the hardest. They are not going to give up that easy on Lebanon.

In many ways, it is an existential issue because of the issue of the tribunal as well, and in many ways it has something to do with pride, the way they have been driven out. It has something to do with how much they have lost in terms of financial investments, in terms of prestige, and these issues do count a lot, and the culture.

So this is going to be a tough fight, and this is why I suggested from the very beginning that the only way you can actually manage the situation is if you accepted that it is not simply one peace track that you have to have, but there has to be a parallel peace track also, not simply between Syria and Israel, but also between Syria and Lebanon because no one can stop the tribunal, and no one can sort of dictate a normalized relationship and how they should be from outside. The actors on both sides have to accept some kind of a compromise if that is indeed possible. It may not be possible with the Assads, but we are saying perhaps we should try it before we make that conclusion.

But the Lebanese are the only one who can decide if they wanted to, if they got what they wanted from The Assads, which is full diplomatic recognition and an end of interference in their affairs, and curbing Hezbollah. If they got that, they might be swayed therefore to ask the United Nations Security Council to reverse its decision regarding the tribunal. They are the only ones who can do that. No one else can do it. But they will not do it now, of course, and under these conditions.

So this is therefore a parallel process that needs to take place, otherwise the situation will continue to be untenable, but it is not going to be easy. It is definitely not going to be easy. I doubt very much that the Assads will cooperate. In a sense, I am very cynical about the possibility of success in any kind of engagement with the Assads, but I say we have to give it a final shot, and we have to lay out an element of conditionality.

Martin has been very clear in making the sovereignty of Lebanon one condition, and I think by suggesting this parallel peace process between Syria and Lebanon, I am sort of saying how this could be taken further in order to achieve that, but the other conditionality I put is the internal situation, which is human rights improvements in the country, because the situation is really sizzling. Ev-

everything looks quiet at the surface, but underneath there are fires really about to erupt.

So in order to also maintain the processes and the viability, somehow the internal situation needs to be put under control, and some kind of an internal reconciliation process need also to be sponsored.

So we have three processes to worry about with regard to this affair: The Syrian-Israeli peace process, the Lebanese-Syrian peace process, and the internal Syrian national reconciliation. And if they do not go hand in hand, I think nothing will be achieved by any kind of engagement.

Mr. CARNAHAN. Thank you.

Mr. RODMAN. I agree with my colleagues. I would just add that Lebanon remains a cloud, a big cloud over any potential Golan Heights negotiation because I think, as we have discussed earlier, it is hard to imagine that Israel could get any assurance that Syria will not continue to use Lebanon subtly or unsubtly as a pressure point on Israel even after a Golan—a potential Golan agreement, and it is very hard to imagine dealing with all these issues comprehensively and getting any agreement in the present situation. So I am not sure how you get out of this complexity.

Mr. CARNAHAN. I wanted to talk about the related issue, the special tribunal that many expect to implicate top Syrian leaders for the murder of Former Prime Minister Hariri and potentially other Lebanese political figures. If this happens, what implications do you think that has? Do you think Syria would cooperate? Do you think the international community would rally behind some kind of sanctions or group pressure?

Mr. ABDULHAMID. If you ever get to this point, I think almost all bets are off in terms of engagement because the regime will be presented with a set of names perhaps of people to be tried, and they will be expected to offer them, so we might end up having a situation like the ones we had with Libya at one point. There will be a certain expectation by the international community for cooperation with the Assads, but the Assads will not be able to do so because that might represent an existential threat for them.

In fact, the situation is far more complex than the one we had with Libya where the people involved in the case of Libya were—you know, they were not so close to Gadhafi. On the other hand, here we might be talking about members of the family, if not the family in its entirety, so it is definitely an awkward situation.

So we have to wait and see what kind of evidence that the tribunal will have and what kind of witnesses or suspect that they are going to indict before we can even comment on that, but because if they named high-level people or ranking people or one of the family members, I think the situation will call for isolation at that time, if not even confrontation, and it might even happen if the next report in 6 months come up with more concrete things to say and made the names public than even before there is a next administration in the White House we will have to deal with this situation.

So this is the element of unpredictability here that really no one can do anything about.

Mr. CARNAHAN. Thank you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you.

Is Syria capable of divorcing itself from Hezbollah?

Ambassador INDYK. The short answer is no. I think that the relationship between Syria and Hezbollah has moved from what was a tactical alliance under the former President Hafez al-Assad, who used Hezbollah as a means of both promoting Syria's influence in Lebanon and more importantly I think at that time, keeping the pressure on Israel via Lebanon to negotiate over the Golan.

Syrians have never wanted to have a conflict over the Golan since the last war in 1973. The disengagement agreement negotiated by Henry Kissinger in 1975 essentially created a status quo that has existed with, I think, only one minor violation since then, and over 30 years is an extraordinary reality, and that is because the balance of military power has always been in Israel's favor and the Syrians, especially have each had made peace with Israel, and after Saddam Hussein's military capability was significantly reduced, Syrians did not have a military option so they were not prepared to fight over the Golan. That remains true to this day. But they were using Hezbollah against the Israeli army which was in southern Lebanon to put the pressure on Israel to negotiate over the Golan. So it served a tactical purpose for Hafez al-Assad.

Of course, just before he died, the Israelis pulled out unilaterally from Lebanon, and then, as we know, the Lebanese people came out in support of Lebanese independence, demand the Syrian troops withdraw, and Bashar al-Assad, the son, took them out of Lebanon. As a consequence, Hezbollah has become far more important both for maintaining Syria's influence in Lebanon. Since it is not there itself, Hezbollah's proxy capabilities are very important to Syria.

And on a strategic level, as the military balance between Syria and Israel has grown even more imbalanced in Israel's favor, Hezbollah has served as a useful kind of strategic ally in terms of holding up an Israeli conventional advance on Damascus through the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, and so Syria has a strong interest in maintaining Hezbollah's military capabilities in a situation where it has to contemplate the potential for conflict with Israel.

Peace between Israel and Syria could change both of those calculations, in particular, the military calculation, because the security arrangements would and the peace commitments themselves would take away the concern that Israel might use military force against Syria, but there is still the desire to control the situation Lebanon would make Hezbollah continuously important to Syria, especially if as part of the deal we demand Lebanon's independence is protected.

Mr. ACKERMAN. If I could probe that just a little further. A deal between Israel and Syria would require United States stewardship. It would seem to me that on the part of the Israelis for the return of Golan would be the disappearance of Hezbollah from the Syrian agenda, and the insistence of the Syrians that Hezbollah no longer share the address of the Damascus—of the government in Damascus.

If that is part of the ask and give, would not the lack of support of Hezbollah accrue to the benefit of Lebanon and reduce Syria's ability to exert influence and control in Lebanon?

Ambassador INDYK. And therefore why would it accept the deal you are saying, and I think you are right, that this is a complicating factor. I do not think it is a deal breaker because there is a difference between the disarming of Hezbollah, which is required under the Tiaf Accords and all of the U.N. Security Council resolutions on Lebanon since 1559 was passed. It is not an Israeli demand; it is a demand of the international community that Hezbollah be disarmed.

But there is a difference between the disarming of Hezbollah and the removal of Hezbollah as a very important player in the politics of Lebanon, and what is happening is that Hezbollah has been able to use its military capabilities to promote its political influence in Beirut. It has one other particular advantage in the sense that it represents the Shia community, which is by now the largest community in Lebanon.

But what I am trying to say is that I could imagine a peace deal between Israel and Syria in which Hezbollah no longer has the ability to secure arms through the Syrian pipeline. The Syrian pipeline is cut, and there is a process within Lebanon of implementing that part of the Tiaf Agreement that has never been implemented, which is the disarming of all militias, but now it means disarming Hezbollah. That would nevertheless result in Hezbollah retaining considerable influence in Lebanese politics which would still play to the advantage of Syria, so that the maintenance of the military relationship between Syria and Hezbollah is not a necessary requirement for Syria to maintain its influence in Lebanon via Hezbollah. There is a political dimension which is already becoming more important and which could then be the most important way that they would promote their relationship.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Dr. Rodman, can you divorce the two?

Mr. RODMAN. Hezbollah and Syria, no, we talked earlier about how the context has changed from 15 years ago when Syria and Israel were talking. I am not sure Syria could deliver on promises with respect to Hezbollah, and at the same time I am not sure how Israel and Syria could have a Golan negotiation without some discussion of Lebanon, and I am not sure what is realistic to expect. Even with best of good will on both sides over the Golan, I am not sure how you realistically give Israel some assurance that Lebanon will not be used as a weapon against it.

I agree with my colleagues that this is—it is a very complex thing; I am not sure Syria has total control or if Syria for its own national or ideological reasons can separate itself from Hezbollah.

Mr. ABDULHAMID. I think you have to factor in here also that the ability to disarm Hezbollah may not be something that Syria has without Iranian approval, so Iran is going to win on this. It is not just simply a relationship between two sides. There is a third party that in fact is a puppet master that is the stronger part at least that is dictating things to both Syria and Hezbollah, and their input into this have to be factored into the calculations.

Ambassador INDYK. Could I add one thing, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Ambassador.

Ambassador INDYK. I think again in terms of principles here the disarming of Hezbollah should be a Lebanese issue. The army of Hezbollah is a Syrian issue because the arms are coming in

through Syrian territory. So as part of Israel-Syrian deal there should be an end to that process of arming Hezbollah, and that is required by U.N. resolutions and that would necessarily be part of the Israeli-Syrian deal because of the threat that Hezbollah poses to Israel's northern communities via Lebanon.

But the disarming of Lebanon needs to be an internal Lebanese affair backed by the international community, and the resolutions for that, the U.N. resolutions already exist for that.

But if the pipeline to Hezbollah was cut, the disarming of Hezbollah would be easier than in circumstances where it continues to enjoy that support from Syria and, of course, from Iran.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Mr. Inglis.

Mr. INGLIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I am here. I am really here. It seems like a long way away at the moment. And I have missed much of this, but it occurs to me to ask about a more general question than maybe we have been discussing so far, and that is, how do you assist a group with terrorist backgrounds and terrorist tendencies and terrorist expertise in its transformation, if possible, to a reasonable participant in a democratic process?

So in Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein went from, I guess, through some process, isolated the terrorist elements and said, you cannot participate, but we took the people who were, whoever we is, some collection of people, wisely got the other part to become part of a reasonable discussion in a democratic system.

Hamas comes to mind in that way and perhaps Hezbollah has some similar kind of possibilities in the future of isolating out the terror elements, the unhelpful folks, but capturing the passion with the political side, and if that is possible, if that is a desirable goal, how would the United States assist in that effort? Do you have any thoughts on how we might Sinn Fein—if that is a verb—the other similar groups that have bad histories but could be brought into the political process if they laid down their arms and if they decided to change the *modus operandi*?

Mr. ABDULHAMID. The interesting thing about this comparison with Sinn Fein is that Hezbollah or Hamas for that matter have actually conducted—they represent both the military arm and the political arm. There was no division between—in Sinn Fein, you had the division between the Irish Republic Army and Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein conducted politics, and they said we have nothing to do with sort of what is going on in terms of the violence. They tried to create a distance.

In the case of Hezbollah, no. They participated in politics in Lebanon. They ran candidates for elections. So they already know the political habit. The same thing as Hamas. They ran an election; they won the election, so they can do both things. They can do the military struggle and they can do the politics, so they already have the political savvy. What they do not have is the vision or the will or what they do not see is that they have achieved what they wanted from the military aspect of their operations. If they can come to the point where they can see, okay, we have achieved what we wanted from the military operations, then that decision can be—you know, they do not need to learn politics. They are already involved in it. So it just becomes a position of relinquishing their arms.

In the case of Hezbollah right now, the reason they keep, and they keep saying we need our arms is because they claim that we have not liberated all of the occupied lands by Israel yet. But if there was peace between the three, Lebanon, Syria and Israel, then that claim will be completely meaningless, and if there is a signed agreement between Lebanon and Israel—I mean, it is already meaningless on the ground, but they are using it as an excuse, but if there is an agreement between Lebanon and Israel, then, frankly, the reason to have arms will become null and void, so as such they will have to relinquish it, and as I said, meanwhile they are already picking up the political habits. They are already participating in elections. They are already—they have ministers, they have members of Parliaments, so for them and for Hamas is the same situation.

So if they can get to an agreement with Israel, then they will be—I do not think they will disarm themselves in the sense that there will not be a policy in military, but they will join the regular military at some point. But for now because the political goals have not been achieved, they operate on both levels.

Ambassador INDYK. I think the other side of that coin is that when we promote elections, as the Bush administration has done, in this part of the world as a way of promoting democracy, we need to be very clear about one democratic principle that, unfortunately, the Bush administration has ignored, and it goes to the heart of your question.

That principle is that there has to be a monopoly of force in the hands of the elected government. If terrorist organizations with their terrorist cadres and militias are allowed to compete in elections, then they enter the political process with their military capabilities intact, and that has a devastating impact on the ability of the government to actually control its territory.

We saw it in Iraq, exactly that thing happened. The problems we face in Iraq today are all about militias that have political parties, that are in the government. We saw it in Lebanon where the U.N. Security Council resolutions required that the Syrian troops withdraw and Hezbollah give up its arms, and we decided instead to go for an election first instead of insisting that Hezbollah disarm according to those Security Council resolutions, and as a result Hezbollah has moved into the political process with its military capability intact, can provoke a war with Israel and take the Government of Lebanon into a war with Israel that it did not even deliberate about.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Okay.

Ambassador INDYK. And paralyzed the Lebanese political system, and we saw it again with Hamas where we insisted on election even though the Palestinian authority and the Government of Israel thought it was a bad idea, we insisted on it. We did not insist that Hamas disarm if it wanted to run in the elections, and it took power with its militia intact, and then used its militia to launch a pogrom against the Palestinian leadership in Gaza. So that is point number one in terms of answering your question, is what we have to do is insist on that democratic principle.

Number two is that there has to be the will on the part of the leadership of these organizations as there was with Sinn Fein, to

give up the route of violence and to pursue their objectives by political means. We have allowed them to do both, and so, number one, we have got to change our stance, but they have got to be prepared to renounce violence, which Hezbollah is not yet willing to do.

And the third thing is a process that takes place within these organizations that is in a sense inevitable. If they actually take government, then they do have to rule. Now Hamas has taken control by force of Gaza, but it is in a dilemma now. Is it going to turn Gaza or maintain Gaza as a failed terrorist state, which is what it is now, or is it going to try to meet the needs of the people there? In which case it is going to have a cease fire with Israel and get the passages open and that process in itself has the potential, if the other factors are there, to move them from violence to politics, but the most important thing is we cannot allow them to continue violence and politics at the same time.

Mr. INGLIS. Thank you.

Mr. RODMAN. I agree with what Martin said about elections, but I would emphasize—I would answer the question a different way. You are right, there are a few successful examples of the domestication of an insurgent group, Sinn Fein is one, maybe Anbar Province is another, Central America 20 years ago, but I think the key in every case was military pressure to demonstrate the futility of the military option, coupled with the political strategy that splits moderates, you know that coops moderates.

If Hezbollah is the focus of your question, then we are a million miles away from demonstrating the futility of their military option. I mean, they think they won the war a couple of years ago, and they are arming themselves to the teeth for the next go-around, and I mean, the good news in Lebanon is that there are a lot of other political forces in Lebanon that are very tenaciously and courageously resisting the blackmail pressure and so on, but I think without a change in the balance of forces, military balance, Hezbollah is going to be a problem. I mean, they think they are on a roll, and if I were in their shoes, I would not be making a whole lot of concessions.

Mr. INGLIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Inglis.

As far back as the 1990s, Syria participated in the United States-lead coalition against Saddam Hussein, and for a time appeared to be willing to cooperate with the United States in our fight against al-Qaeda, but every time the United States concludes that Syria may be ready for a different kind of relationship, just like Lucy pulling the football away from Charlie Brown, Damascus proves unwilling.

What do you suspect is behind this pattern of flirtation and rejection? Are these episodes of communication and failure to exploit opportunity or are they more substantive reasons for the apparent breakdowns?

Ambassador INDYK. I think there is a simple explanation and a more complicated one. The simple explanation is they are just damn difficult to deal with.

Mr. ACKERMAN. An explanation of anything would be refreshing.

Ambassador INDYK. They are just very difficult people to do a deal with. The bizarre negotiations, I think, were probably in-

vented in Damascus. It has got the oldest sukkah in the world, and doing deals with the Syrians is very difficult, complicated negotiation. Having said that, they do have a record, a track record of living up to the requirements of the deal once the deal is made, but you can talk to Henry Kissinger or James Baker or Warren Christopher, all of whom had the dubious pleasure of making these multiple trips to Damascus to argue about the most minute details, and it took an incredible effort on the parts of our most senior statesmen to get the deal.

Now, part of that—now it becomes a little more complicated—part of it is because the Syrians like the process. They get something out of the process itself, which is the recognition, the prestige that comes from having the secretary of state make 16 visits to Damascus. Damascus becomes the center of attention, and that is very important to them I think precisely because as somebody put his finger on it, is they are essentially playing a weak hand in terms of their resources, their capabilities. This is the way that they put themselves on a par with the other regional powers, so that is why the process itself has advantages to them.

Secondly, I think a better relationship with Syria often eludes us because they have other interests. For example, the United States-Syrian relationship in the 1990s, when we were heavily engaged with them, of peace negotiations with Israel, the bilateral relationship between the United States and Syria really never went anywhere despite their desire to see an improvement in the relationship and our willingness to go down that road. There was one huge rock in the road which they were never willing to remove and that was their sponsorship of terrorist organizations, and I could never really understand what the advantage was.

I mean, if you put a relationship with the only super power left in the world and they once had a super power patron to protect them, the Soviet Union, it was gone. You put on one side of the scales, you know, a relationship with the United States and on the other side of the scales a relationship with Hamas and Palestine's Islamic Jihad, or in those days it was PFLP and PDFLP and Hamas and so on, why would they want to maintain those relationships, and yet they were never prepared to act against them, and that I think is because the Syrians see themselves, have a self-image as the beating heart of pan-Arabism, the supporter of national liberation movements, the opponents of occupation, whether it be Israeli or American, and that is an important part of their identity and their ability to promote themselves both within Syria and beyond Syria in the Arab world. It served both purposes.

And do not forget, you are dealing with a minority regime that in a sense has to be more Sunni than the Sunnis in terms of promoting the Sunni Arab cause precisely because they are not Sunnis, and more Sunni than the Sunnis because they have this relationship with Iran which serves their interests as well, and so—we could go in and talk again about the relationship with Iran, but we have already dealt with that—as another constraining influence on the ability to have a normal relationship with the United States.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Alternative views or—

Mr. ABDULHAMID. No, I think that is really very good. The last point of the explanation when he looked at the minority issue and in a sense that the Assads really have to be more Sunni than the Sunnis, and more Arabs, even though they are maintaining, or because in fact they are maintaining this relationship with Iran and because they are not Sunnis themselves. I think that is really a key factor.

The other thing is that they are in the process of establishing a dynasty in a republican system, and throughout the 1990s that transitional issue was very important and key. So Assad Senior did not want to do anything to jeopardize his son's chances of succeeding him in power, and a lot of his focus was on that really, and I think everything else was filtered through this prism, and this is sort of an important issue to note, and this is why it is so difficult for any kind of engagement to be successful with the Assads.

You can present them, and as Martin said, with the best case scenario of everything, and yet they will still drag their feet simply because they want to maintain an unattainable situation, which is their control over a country that is growing gradually restless onto them, and that is really about to reject them, and they want to find a way of trying to keep that thing under control, and the best way is to export their problems. The best way is to keep on playing the nationalist cause and to keep on supporting these groups out there.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Dr. Rodman.

Mr. RODMAN. No, I agree with what my colleagues have said. I think this spoiler role is the essence of Syria's foreign policy. It enables them to play a major regional role way beyond what their inherent resources and strength would warrant. It is what got them Soviet weapons for many years, and even now Russian weapons, and it is their ability to intimidate their Arab brothers. So I mean, it is hard to imagine them giving all that up and then becoming a very ordinary little country, even with the Golan Heights.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Should we be drawing red lines in the sand and announce what consequences might be of crossing those lines, or is that too dangerous a proposition, especially if there are no consequences? And if it was appropriate to do that, what would those red lines be?

Ambassador INDYK. I am not sure what you exactly have in mind. I think that there are certain red lines that have been drawn that the Syrians respect, and they are very—in fact, there the upside of dealing with them. They do respect red lines. They do calculate, sometimes they miscalculate, al-Assad is more prone to miscalculation than his father, but they do calculate the balance of power like computers, you know, and they have a real sense of how far they can go. Sometimes they will test it, but they do—they certainly respect Israel's red lines, and that means, you know, not creating problems in the Golan and not provoking conflict with Israel.

By the same token, Israel respect the Syrian red lines. The Syrians appear to have crossed an Israeli red line when they appear to have built this clandestine nuclear reactor and the Israelis took care of that, but the Israelis were very careful not to embarrass the Syrians, and have been very careful to signal Syrians that they are not interested in a conflict with Syria, and the Israeli-Syrian understanding of red lines has, I think, developed in the last couple

of years in a quiet, sophisticated way, a way that existed under Rabin and Assad.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Was there any embarrassment or humiliation on the part of the Syrians? You say the Israelis were careful not to do that but.

Ambassador INDYK. Well, the answer is no because the Israelis did not expose them, and the Israelis are very concerned that this briefing today that has appeared in the newspapers this morning will cause the Syrians to feel embarrassed and the Israelis are very concerned that this is going to lead to an increase in tension. I suspect it is part of the reason why you have the leaking of the story that the Israeli Prime Minister has offered to give up the Golan Heights because that is a way—you know, if the Golan Heights were on the table through negotiations, why do we need to respond to a Israeli attack.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Would you think they would be more concerned that the Syrians would be embarrassed or more pleased that the Iranians would be forewarned?

Ambassador INDYK. I think the Iranians got the message without having to—

Mr. ACKERMAN. Suffer the consequences.

Ambassador INDYK [continuing]. Embarrass the Syrians, yes, to expose the Syrians. I mean, the word came out but the Israelis were not responsible for exposing it whereas what is happening in the stories, the press stories today, are stories about Israeli intelligence that is being provided to the United States, and there the Israelis are put in a position of appearing to have broken the code of silence in this regard.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Let me ask you a different question. The administration has clearly made a decision to leak this, and was so determined to do so that they could not trust Congress to do it after our briefing. What is the benefit to the administration of doing this now? Is there any speculation at this point?

Ambassador INDYK. Yes, it is speculation, but I think that the answer lies in the North Korean fire rather than the Syrian fire, that there is clearly a discussion going on within the administration about what is required of the North Koreans in terms of full disclosure, and whether they can accept a statement from the North Koreans, which is, we did not do it but we will never do it again as opposed to coming clean on what they actually did, and so that is my speculation is that those who are insisting that the North Koreans come clean are taking advantage of the Congress's desire to know what the hell happened here to put out the word about what the North Koreans were up to.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Should one suspect that this is a mechanism of the neocons within the administration which do not want to see the administration moving forward with North Korea on something that might be reasonable, or Clintonesque?

Ambassador INDYK. Maybe Peter should answer this.

Mr. RODMAN. I wish that were the case. I think this is just the intelligence community. I think it just sort of reflects action to put the stuff out. The intelligence community is not responsive to political pressures of this kind certain. I mean, I believe there are people—

Mr. ACKERMAN. But you would not say that they are not politically motivated?

Mr. RODMAN. But I do not think the intelligence community shares the skepticism about the North Korean negotiation. What is puzzling to me, I mean, I am very skeptical of the North Korean negotiation, but I suspect the people leaking it are not of that stripe, so I find it puzzling, and my speculation is that this may have more innocent motives, you know, and it just—it may be too much to read some devious motivation in there because I think the people responsible for the leaking are not the kind of people who would be opposed to the North Korean negotiation.

I am not sure there is anybody left in the government that is opposed to this North Korean negotiation.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I think they have secret cells.

Mr. RODMAN. I am not commenting on that.

Ambassador INDYK. But just to finish your red lines question, I got diverted and talked about Israeli-Syrian red lines, but I think that we have tried very hard to put down a red line on the Lebanese-Syrian border, and to tell the Syrians you have no business interfering in Lebanon or we will not accept it.

Mr. ACKERMAN. What does it mean when we say we will not accept? I have heard that so much from the administration—

Ambassador INDYK. Yes.

Mr. ACKERMAN [continuing]. When they say this is not acceptable, and there are no consequences. Are they really saying this is not acceptable but we do not know what to do about it?

Ambassador INDYK. Well, there are consequences. They are saying it is unacceptable. The consequences are coming through U.N. Security Council resolutions, reports to the U.N. Security Council, efforts to bolster the Lebanese Government, efforts to keep Arab leaders from going to an Arab summit in Damascus, but what is happening here, Mr. Chairman, is that there is basically a tussle going on, a conflict going on between the United States, Saudi Arabia, and more broadly the U.N. on the one side, and the Syrians, Iranians, Hezbollah on the other for the future of Lebanon, and so the red line has not yet been established or accepted.

But I think you can understand that that is what is going on here, and the Syrians—I mean, the strange situation where the Syrians actually should have been satisfied with the Lebanese candidate that the government put up, the May 14 movement put up a pro-Syrian candidate in General Suleiman, and the Syrians have blocked that, and I do not think there is any—they are really making any attempt to hide the fact that they are blocking that because, number one, I think they felt that their opponents in Lebanon blinked—

Mr. ACKERMAN. They what?

Ambassador INDYK. They blinked, and now they need to relieve the pressure on them, and number two, and more importantly because this has the effect of paralyzing Lebanese politics, and so as long as there is no President it becomes very difficult for the political system to function there, and of course, we are doing everything we can to get the Syrians to go along with the appointment of what in effect would be a pro-Syrian President.

So in that respect, I do not think the red lines have yet been established, but I do not think it is fair to say that, or it is accurate to say that there have been no consequences for Syria. The international community, particularly the United States, France and Saudi Arabia, have tried to impose a price on Syria, but the Syrians have a willingness to absorb the costs, partly because they are not that great, and partly because they have an intense interest, as we have already discussed.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I suppose you make those kinds of decisions when the benefits exceed the costs.

Mr. Abdulhamid.

Mr. ABDULHAMID. I do not know. Will it be too naive of me to propose human rights or political dissidents as a red line? In a sense, the current regime is already trespassing against this red line, and in a way we are in a good position because seeing how bad the relationships are between the United States and Syria, a mere act of sending the Ambassador back and therefore a resumption of normal relations, or you know, semblance of normal diplomatic relations might in itself be a reward should the ruling regime in Syria, you know, release the political prisoners, abide by that red line.

So normal diplomatic relations will be based on knowing that you are dealing with a regime that is trying to at least maintain semblance of legitimacy with its own people by not imprisoning human rights activists and opponents and dissidents. This is really what I am hoping to achieve and what my colleagues tomorrow who will be speaking here in the conference are hoping to achieve is a message that human rights should be a red line in the case of Syria, that dissidents should be a red line.

We know this is somewhat naive or idealistic, but we are trying to say that the situation in Syria has grown so bad in this regard that not doing something about it is going to make it grow worse to an extent where the situation could actually erupt in violence, and we do not want to see that. So it is could be establishing this as a red line and beginning the process of engagement to the Syrian regime with this precondition and promise a return of an ambassador in exchange for releasing the political prisoners, that might be the beginning of an engagement that could help legitimize the Syrian Government somewhat in the eyes of the international community, and the eyes of its own people, and as such it could help engagement down the road on all of these other issues as well.

Mr. ACKERMAN. You mentioned naive and unrealistic which brings up the topic of President Carter. His visit to Damascus, did that have a positive effect on human rights, a negative effect on human rights, or was it totally insignificant?

Mr. ABDULHAMID. Like every visit by former—by actually congressional people sometimes or by, you know, foreign delegates, it is really sort of played—it had a negative effect because the regime saw in this attempt at reaching out sort of a legitimization of its own position, and instead of rewarding their demands, because I know President Carter did ask for—privately—for the release of certain people from prison, and I do not think it is going to go anywhere because the usual response is that has always been given, that they have to ask for pardon and we will release them.

In other words, they are telling the opposition members and the dissidents that they have to actually beg for forgiveness, we have made a mistake by insisting on our rights, we want to be forgiven, and of course the dissidents are not going to do that, so they remain in prison. In fact, every visit was oftentimes followed up by even a more tightening of the security conditions and more arrests.

So unfortunately for all the good intentions that I know President Carter had, and I know a lot of—Congresswoman Pelosi had, and among others, I do not really think that the visits send a good message at this stage.

I prefer to see, first of all, an element of conditionality before these kinds of attempts at reaching out develop. And as I said, there is something the Syrians want from this, and so long that you are saying we are willing to engage but you have to make yourself somewhat more legitimate in our eyes in order to do so, then this will be a starting point. But to engage before you even—in the hope of obtaining some concessions from them with the Assads it does not work because they will see it as a reward and a justification of their hard line position, and you know, we can point to all of these previous incidents in this regard so this is not a speculation on my part.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I would just say for the record that there have been many visits, including that of the Speaker, and Former Chairman Lantos, and such as several that I have made myself to Damascus, we are basically to deliver strong messages which included the message of human rights, and we thank you especially, Mr. Abdulhamid, for injecting that in today's discussion.

Dr. Rodman, did you want to add something?

Mr. RODMAN. You asked about red lines. I think the missing ingredient has always been effective pressures on Syria. I remember Lebanon diplomacy 25 years ago. You are looking around, what pressure points do we have on Syria, and we never have enough to really impose our will, and right now after the Hezbollah war of 2006, even Israel, which has the most leverage on Syria, is in a mixed position as far as having leverage.

I mean, the balance of forces is what is key here, and that we have strengths and weaknesses, and that will determine the outcome of negotiations.

I agree with you about the engagement or the visits. I mean, I can testify again from personal experience. I was in a high-level delegation in 2004 with Bill Burns of the State Department. We went to meet with President Assad to talk about Iraq, what they were doing in Iraq, and what they were doing in Lebanon, and so on, and we delivered what I thought were very ferocious talking points, but the Syrians are masters of spin, and the Syrians used the fact of these visits as evidence, they say, ah, the Americans, we have excellent relations with the Americans. Look at all these high-level visits. So it does not matter how blunt you are in conversation, they will publicize it and spin it as showing that they are free of pressure.

What we may think is a way of ratcheting up pressures by delivering a tough message, they will spin it into a form of relief from pressure. So again, the balance of forces is going to convey a message more effectively than talking points.

Ambassador INDYK. Could I?

Mr. ACKERMAN. If I might follow up on that. I actually have a written staff-prepared question that talks to that very point that might be appropriate here, and it goes like this.

In your testimony you contrast the tough talking points when you went to Damascus, talking points that in your testimony you noted were cleared by the President himself, with the Syrian spin that what matters was the high-level delegation. The question is, What was the follow-up when the Syrians ignored your tough talking points? Was the problem the high-level visit or the lack of consequences for Damascus failing to heed the warnings of your delegation?

Mr. RODMAN. There really was no "or else." I mean, Donald Rumsfeld always used to say "what is the or else," and there was not any, and the Syrians figured this out.

Now, ironically there was some fratricide among different objectives when the U.N. Special Tribunal was created. I think that inhibited us—we were ratcheting up American sanctions on Syria, but for a couple of years we held back thinking, ah, there was a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, there would be international sanctions as a result of this investigation, and therefore we did not want to do anything to screw that up, so we held back. So we were paralyzed for a few years by this inhibition.

Now, I am glad to see—in the last few months I think the administration has resumed the process of ratcheting up economic sanctions on Syria, because the U.N. process, even though we support it, is glacial in its progress, but I think that has always been the problem, that you put your finger on it. What is the follow up? What is the or else? What is the price they pay? And that has been the missing ingredient, not engagement. I mean, the missing ingredient is not that we have not had enough dialogue or not that we have not talked to them enough, it is pressures.

Ambassador INDYK. You know I have a lot of sympathy for Ammar's approach as a way of getting human rights onto the agenda of the bilateral discussion, but how do you get it on the agenda if you do not have the discussion is the conundrum here, and it is a difficult one.

Ammar suggests that this be the precondition for sending our Ambassador back, but the purpose of having an ambassador there is precisely to deliver these kinds of messages, and to maintain relationships with Syrians who are advocating for human rights, and to report on the conditions in Syria. So to condition our having an ambassador there on the change of their behavior in this regard is, I think, to use the wrong lever. It is much too small a lever to make a difference, but the presence of the Ambassador could actually, I think, help the agenda more.

Mr. ACKERMAN. You would send an ambassador?

Ambassador INDYK. Yes, I think we should send our Ambassador back. I think we should make a big deal about having an ambassador there. I think we need an ambassador there precisely because an ambassador can press this agenda as well as give us a better sense of what is going on.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Does that argument apply to Iran as well?

Ambassador INDYK. Well, the Iranians will not allow us to have an ambassador there, but I will tell you, Mr. Chairman, it is a real problem with Iran. We have not had any kind of official relations with Iran for more than three decades. We do not have a direct feel for what is going on there, and if we do not have a good feel for it, how can we develop an effective policy?

Mr. ACKERMAN. I guess we have to have an ambassador who could clear his calendar for 444 days.

Ambassador INDYK. Yes, also to be prepared for congressional visits.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Well, does anybody have anything brilliant to say that has not already been said because you have exceeded certainly my expectations, and that of the rest of the committee?

If not, we will reserve our right to delightfully invite you back on another day to continue to help us during our deliberations and with our education and trying to answer some of our probing remaining questions to these difficult problems that we see.

So I thank this very distinguished panel for your patience, your participation, and your expertise. Thank you very much. The hearing stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:47 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

## A P P E N D I X

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### MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MIKE PENCE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF INDIANA

Chairman Ackerman, I thank you for calling this important hearing and welcome to our witnesses.

Mr. Chairman, the problem of the terrorist state of Syria is as fresh as this morning's headlines, all of which reference a video we will reportedly see in closed session this afternoon of North Koreans inside the suspected Syrian nuclear reactor site that was destroyed by Israel last September. According to Administration sources quoted in every major newspaper this morning, this video convinced Israel and the White House that Syria was receiving help from North Korea to build a nuclear reactor.

Mr. Chairman, this is a very ominous admission both for our North Korea policy but more importantly, today's problem state: Syria. Since the late 1970's, Syria has been officially designated a state sponsor of terror. Since Israel's birth 60 years ago, Syria has been an avowed enemy. And after the 1967 Six Day War, Syria broke off relations, for a time, with the United States for our support of Israel.

Syria is an unrepentant terrorist state with its malevolent hands in all manner of mischief in the Middle East-whether it is Iraq, Lebanon, the West Bank, or dealing with its ally, Iran. This is a dangerous and destabilizing country, all under the dark leadership of the Assad family which has dominated Syria for nearly four decades now.

Mr. Chairman, in this light, I find it an absurd statement that the road to peace leads through Damascus. In reality, the road to terrorism leads through Damascus. Hamas has had its operational headquarters in Damascus for well over a decade, and this is far from the only terrorist entity which finds safe haven there.

Last week, former President Carter made an unfortunate and misguided visit to Hamas where, I should note, he has consistently misreported what he was told in advance by our Department of State. And now Hamas says it made no concession to recognize Israel as Carter had "reported." Only to a jaundiced eye could this entity and this country look like a peace partner.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to the testimony from these distinguished witnesses.

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#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE SHEILA JACKSON LEE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF TEXAS

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening today's important hearing. The Syrian government has been involved in many of the actual or potential conflicts on which this subcommittee has focused in recent weeks, including Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran. I would like to welcome our distinguished panelists: the Honorable Martin S. Indyk, Director, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, the Brookings Institution; Mr. Ammar Abdul Hammid, Director, the Tharwa Foundation; and the Honorable Peter W. Rodman, Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, the Brookings Institution. I look forward to your informative testimony.

Mr. Chairman, Syria continues to play a destabilizing role in the Middle East. Our relations with Syria have been strained for decades; Syria was placed on the State Department list of countries supporting terrorism in 1979, U.S. aid terminated in 1982, and the U.S. Ambassador was briefly withdrawn in 1986. Relations have been particularly precarious in the last eight years, following the collapse of the Arab-Israeli peace process in 2000, the terrorist attacks of 2001, and the 2003 Iraq

war. Following the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri, an attack widely attributed to Syrian agents, the U.S. ambassador was again withdrawn, and has not been replaced. Syria maintained a military presence in Lebanon until finally withdrawing in 2005.

Syria continues to play a key, but complicated, role in the Middle East peace process. At times, Syrian involvement has been positive, engaging in substantive negotiations with Israel in 1999 and 2000. Syrian representatives recently participated in the latest round of peace talks, held in Annapolis late last year, though both sides subsequently concluded that the time was not right to reach a peace. However, Syria has also acted the part of a spoiler, sponsoring Palestinian militants and aiding the Hezbollah terrorist group. Tensions between the two countries were heightened by the September 2007 Israeli air strikes on an alleged nascent Syrian nuclear facility. Also still the source of tension is the Golan Heights region, captured by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War, and annexed by Israel in 1981. Return of the Golan Heights is likely to be part of any peace accord between Israel and Syria.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that ending Syrian interference in Lebanese political affairs is a key element to any effort to deal with Syria in a regional context. In the historic elections of 2005, an unprecedented anti-Syrian majority was brought to power and has struggled to break the hold of an entrenched Syrian and Iranian backed Hezbollah; however, Lebanon's government remains in crisis. Though the new government, also known as the March 14 coalition, has continued to promote democracy and to challenge extremism, it has faced cabinet resignations, assassinations, labor strikes, war with Israel, militants, and a protracted political struggle. According to many experts, Syria has had a hand in these crises. Lebanon's presidential selection, following the expiration of pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud's term in November 2007, has been repeatedly postponed.

Today, Lebanon's pro-Western democracy is in peril. Following what they perceived as a victory in the summer of 2006 war with Israel, an emboldened Hezbollah now poses a greater threat than ever. The governments of the controversial regimes in Syria and Iran have reportedly provided money, arms, and support to the terrorist group within Lebanon. Though these claims are nearly impossible to quantify, most experts, including the Government Accountability Office and the United Nations, believe that the governments of Iran and Syria are working to ensure the rearmament of Hezbollah.

A myriad of governments and international organizations have cited and provided evidentiary support of the existence of a Hezbollah-Syria-Iran connection, with Syria allowing the transit of Iranian weapons *en route* to Hezbollah caches in Lebanon. The threat posed by this collaboration cannot be overstated. According to a former UN peacekeeping official, it would be "humanly impossible" to cut off the flow of arms to Hezbollah without Syrian help. In March 2007, the government of Israel presented the United Nations Security Council and foreign governments with evidence and pictures of trucks crossing from Syria into Lebanon and unloading weapons. Hezbollah has made no effort to mask its intentions, but rather is actively informing the world of its antagonism and its increased rearmament. Hezbollah leader Shayk Hassan Nasrallah stated, "We are not lying to the world. We say: We have weapons. You bet we have weapons." A further investigation of the issue by the United Nations led the U.N. assessment team to conclude, "The present state of border security was insufficient to prevent smuggling, in particular the smuggling of arms, to any significant extent."

In addition, Mr. Chairman, Syria is tied up in the ongoing question of Iraq. There are now an estimated 1.4 million Iraqi refugees living in Syria, a nation that, like its neighbors Lebanon and Jordan, does not recognize the 1951 Refugee Convention. These refugees are primarily in urban areas, further complicating the delivery of much-needed humanitarian aid. Most are unable to work, and the Syrian government, which has estimated the annual cost of accommodating Iraqi refugees to be \$1 billion, is finding its resources stretched increasingly thin. UNHCR has estimated that the number of vulnerable Iraqis will swell as existing coping mechanisms fail, savings are exhausted, assets sold, and the generosity of host communities reaches its limit. Harsh living conditions may lead to the spread of child labor, prostitution, and dropping out of school, as well as the potential for impoverished and disenfranchised refugees to join fringe or extremist groups.

This flood of refugees has severe humanitarian consequences; it also carries the potential for causing long-term disruption of the geopolitics of the Middle East. Many displaced Iraqis have indicated their intention of never returning to their home country, raising serious questions of what their status and participation will be in their new countries. Even those who do return, according to a UNHCR survey released in November 2007, do so for financial or visa reasons, rather than a sense that the security situation in Iraq has improved.

Mr. Chairman, I support a policy of constructive engagement with Syria. The 2006 report by the Iraq Study Group recommended that the United States engage Syria in a regional dialogue on Iraq, in hopes of staving off further sectarian warfare. I would also like to see the United States encourage the resumption of peace talks between Israel and Syria, which, if successful, would have extraordinary implications for the security of the region. Positive engagement by Syria could minimize the influence of more malevolent actors, such as Iran and Hezbollah. News reports of the past several weeks have indicated the possibility of a resumption of talks, through the good offices of the Turkish government.

Mr. Chairman, Syria continues to play an important role in Middle East politics. I look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses, particularly regarding how we can encourage the Syrian government to constructively engage with its neighbors and the international community.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back the balance of my time.

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STATEMENT SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE AMERICAN-ARAB ANTI-DISCRIMINATION COMMITTEE (ADC)

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) the nation's largest organization dedicated to promoting the civil rights and the rich heritage of Arab Americans, welcomes this opportunity to submit a statement to the Congressional Record for the April 24, 2008 hearing on, "The Road to Damascus: Who's Converting Whom?" before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia.

ADC, a nonpartisan and nonsectarian grassroots organization, has members in every state, forty chapters, and five regional offices. Our diverse membership includes Christians, Muslims, Jewish members, Sikhs and others. We are proud Americans representing a rich immigrant history from every country across the Middle East and North Africa. Some of us arrived recently and others of us put down roots in America generations ago. But all of us appreciate this opportunity to share our objective, experienced and researched view.

ADC calls for increased diplomacy between the United States and Syria since it is in our national interests as well as our longer term strategy in the Middle East to do so. We join Congressional Leaders who have called for diplomacy with Syria. This does not mean that we will agree on all, or even most, matters but diplomacy is needed. To facilitate this goal, ADC calls upon our government to restore the position of the US ambassador to Syria. And just as ADC applauded the bipartisan congressional delegation led by Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the late House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Tom Lantos and others, to Syria, we encourage more contact between Members of Congress and the Syrian government. In the words of the late Chairman, "It is infinitely better to confront in a firm but civilized way those with whom we disagree, than simply to give them the silent treatment."

The United States' relations with Syria, the subject of today's hearing, are complicated, difficult and quite strained at the moment. This relationship is one part of America's broader foreign policy strategy with the Arab world. We are no closer to understanding and having a better relationship with the Arab world than we were when terrorists heinously attacked our nation on September 11th, 2001. Those vile attacks of a few shaped our nation's relations and opinion with millions of Arab people who shared their ethnicity and religion, but not their hatred.

Changing and improving our relations with Syria is a key component to developing a better relationship with the Arab world. Declaring Syria an enemy state of America has led to the increased tension between Syria and our country. ADC and the Arab American community support increased and dedicated dialogue and diplomacy between the United States and Syria. Dialogue does not equate approval, but it can mean positive influence. People will not feel that influence with our silence.

Syria, unlike most other Arab countries, is a secular nation. Separation of church, or mosque, and state is a key element of the Syrian government. In Damascus, one can readily attend a church, a synagogue, or a mosque. Syria's religious tolerance is not shared by many of its neighbors. We should acknowledge this similarity between our nations and appreciate how this influences a country's political culture and national outlook.

The United States must acknowledge that the instability in Iraq is having a tremendous affect on its neighbors, most notably Syria. The United States and its allies in the Middle East cannot afford more political instability in the region. The infusion of 1.5 million Iraqi refugees into Syria is the visible expression of this instability. The Iraqi refugee crisis is placing a considerable financial, security, social and political burden on Syria and Iraq's other neighboring countries. They have ac-

cepted into their borders, what some say is a problem created by our country's invasion of Iraq. As the Subcommittee's members know, these Iraqi refugees are an increasingly vulnerable population. According to international relief organizations that have testified before this Subcommittee, many families are running out of savings and taking increasingly desperate measures to survive including prostitution, selling children to traffickers and accepting resources from extremist and terrorists' organizations. ADC appreciates the efforts of the Subcommittee's members to draw attention to the plight of Iraqi refugees as well as the encouraging words by some members that we need to work with Syria on this important issue.

Increased dialogue with Syria is also vital to our efforts in Iraq. In his most recent testimony before Congress, US General David Patraeus relayed that Syria has been increasingly aggressive at turning foreign fighters back from its borders with Iraq. Curtailing the flow of these fighters in their attempts to assist insurgent attacks against US and Iraqi forces has had tangible results. We need more of this cooperation between US forces in Iraq and Syria, not less.

ADC believes Lebanon needs to settle its own varied and complicated internal issues without influence from any outside country or group.

To better understand the current violence in the Middle East, American leaders in Congress and the Administration must acknowledge that factors such as occupation, repression of political rights and poverty drive vulnerable populations into the arms of extremist organizations.

In conclusion, ADC supports increased diplomacy between the United States and Syria. We call for restoration of the position of US ambassador to Syria. We join the many voices of congressional leaders who have called for discussions with Damascus. And finally, ADC applauds past travel to Syria by congressional leaders and encourages more contact between Members of Congress and the Syrian people.

