

U.S. POLICY TOWARD SYRIA (PART II)

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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2018

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:05 p.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. The subcommittee will come to order. Thank you so much for being with us, our excellent witnesses, the audience, and, of course, the members. And usually I would not think to start without my ranking member, my good friend, Ted Deutch, or without any other Democrats, but they have caucus meetings. They are big shots now, so, you know, we have to pay attention to them. So we are going to start with the staff saying it is okay without them. And whenever they can, they are going to pop right in. So thank you so much.

After recognizing myself and whoever might come for opening statements, I would love to recognize all the other members for their opening statements, if you can keep them brief. And we will then hear from our witnesses. Thank you, gentlemen, for being with us.

Without objection, your prepared statements will be made a part of the record and all of the members may have 5 days to insert statements and questions for the record, subject to the length limitations in the rules.

The chair now recognizes herself for 5 minutes.

This hearing is part II of a Syria hearing that we began in September. And while it took a bit longer than we had hoped, we are very pleased to have two of the administration officials most intimately involved with U.S.-Syria policy here today. Thank you, both of you.

Two weeks ago, Ambassador Jeffrey laid out the administration's latest plan and objectives for Syria. First, the enduring defeat of ISIS. Second, de-escalation of the conflict and removal of the Iranian forces. Third, a political process under U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254. I am glad to have Ambassador Jeffrey in his new position as Special Representative for Syria Engagement and for his more active approach. This hearing is an opportunity for the administration to explain how it plans to achieve those goals.

With at least ½ million killed, millions more displaced, and the security of the United States and our allies on the line, the admin-

istration owes it to the American people to put forth a comprehensive, effective, and, most importantly, achievable strategy in Syria.

After more than 7 years of conflict, I am deeply appreciative of our men and women, both in and out of uniform, who have contributed so much of their time, of their energy, and, in too many cases, their lives in an effort against ISIS and for the Syrian people.

Likewise, too many good Syrians have been taken from us, many of whom were simply families trying to escape the brutality of both ISIS and the Assad regime. And many of whom like the pro-democracy leader, Raed Fares, who refused, despite threat after threat, to give into the murderers and terrorists who took over his country. Raed unfortunately was assassinated. And regime forces continued to prepare an offensive in Idlib, the demilitarized zone hanging on by a thread. And chemical weapons are being used once again just this past weekend.

It is more important than ever that we take a more active approach, like Ambassador Jeffrey advocates—and we thank him for that—to not only prevent another humanitarian disaster and more loss of life, but finally to address the root cause of this conflict, and that is Assad and his cronies. I am concerned that we aren't prioritizing stabilization assistance in areas liberated from ISIS, as well as those targeted by Assad. This does not mean reconstruction assistance, but it does mean the kind of basic services and stabilization needs that would allow local communities to be more independent and to be more resilient and less susceptible to pro-Assad forces.

As Hanin Ghaddar testified at part I of our hearings, Iran and Assad are ethnically and religiously cleansing Sunni communities to create demographic facts on the ground, and if we don't start to help Syrian communities resist those forces, we are having more areas of Syria ripe for Iran and Assad's influence on one side of the spectrum and a resurgent ISIS on the other.

As we learned the hard way in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past 17 years, it is not enough to take out the bad guys and hope for the best. We must, with our partners, create the conditions to ensure the bad guys don't come back. I am sympathetic to the challenges of delivering aid in Syria, especially when it gets diverted to the very people we are trying to defeat. In 2016, the ranking member, Mr. Deutch, and I held a hearing with the Government Accountability Office, or GAO, and USAID's Office of Inspector General, the OIG, on a GAO report that Jerry Connolly and I had commissioned, which found weaknesses in our how humanitarian aid programs in Syria. GAO had found that most of our implementing partners were not assessing the risk for fraud and recommended that USAID and State strengthen their own fraud oversight programs, as well as those of our partners. At the same time, OIG announced that it had opened 25 allegations of fraud allegations. USAID and State have made some improvement in the years since, but we continue to hear about diversion of U.S. assistance in Syria, most notably a recent incident in which according to OIG one NGO's employees knowingly diverted USAID-funded food kits to Syria's al-Qaeda affiliate. I will say that again because it is really mind-blowing. One NGO reported that they had seen knowingly diverted USAID-funded food kits being given to Syria's al-Qaeda af-

filiates. Yikes. While USAID correctly suspended this program and others, and I am, as I said, very sympathetic to the difficulty of mission—nobody is saying that it is easy—we cannot allow ourselves to be deterred. It is incumbent upon the administration to put the most rigorous and effective monitoring and evaluation system in place and then ensure that those programs continue. We can't afford to be cutting stabilization assistance, never mind humanitarian aid, when every other player, from Assad to Russia to Iran to Turkey to China is deeply involved and working to shape a new Syria that will undermine U.S. security interests.

So I look forward to hearing from both of you gentlemen about how the administration plans to protect U.S. interests in Syria and exactly how each of our programs, goals, and objectives fit into what I hope will be a strategy for the long term and a strategy for success.

I will now turn to Mr. Kinzinger for opening statements.

Mr. KINZINGER. Well, thank you, Madam Chair.

And, again, thank you both for being here. I sound like a broken record on these. Sadly, this has been going on for 8 years with a lot of deaths, including 50,000 children in Syria which is just absolutely abhorrent.

I do want to start with some good news, though, which is I think this administration deserves a lot of credit for a very improved Syria policy. We spoke a good game in the last administration, but I feel like all too often, there was inaction. Most notably the red line in Syria what I think was the perfect opportunity to basically get rid of Syrian regime and do it in a way that would have ended far better what we see today in Syria.

With that said, I think the administration has made it clear that there is American and humanitarian interests in Syria that we will defend. We don't want to see Iran with a post-whatever-goes-on presence in Syria. We have been clear about the need to stop the land bridge to Israel and all those other things.

I do want to echo the chairwoman's concern about aid, though, as well. I think we need to really take a good solid look at how we are distributing the aid. I think the U.N. does us a disservice in some of that, in terms of legitimizing the regime. I think there are areas maybe we can do aid directly, especially areas in communities near U.S. military troops, as they starve and look 100 feet away and see well-fed American troops, and the opposition uses that, the evil folks use that as a propaganda lens.

So I thank you again both being here, your great service. And, Madam Chair, I thank you for your fantastic service. It has been a pleasure serving with you, and I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Kinzinger. You can have more time if you would like.

I am so pleased to yield time to Ambassador Wagner for her opening statement.

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you, Madam Chair, for organizing this hearing. And I would like to echo the accolades of the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Kinzinger, in saying that your leadership, not just on this committee but in Congress, for so many years will be sorely missed, and we are grateful for that service.

Before we begin today, I would like to honor the memory of Raed Fares, a courageous Syrian activist, who was assassinated just last Friday. When war broke out 7 years ago, Mr. Fares founded a radio station to give the opposition a voice, a voice and highlight the suffering that Assad had inflicted upon his own people. I want to share what Mr. Fares said after surviving an assassination attempt back in 2014, and I quote: When we started our revolution, we broke the barrier of fear. We are not afraid. We just want to reach our aims, dignity and freedom, and we will get them.

So I offer my sincerest condolences to Mr. Fares' family and the people of Syria who have lost one of their bravest voices.

I thank our witnesses for their time and their service. I look forward to hearing more about the work the U.S. is doing to advance dignity and freedom in Syria. I thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. A beautiful statement. Thank you so much. He certainly was a remarkable human being. We are honored to have met him.

And we want to thank Mr. LaHood. I know he doesn't have an opening statement, but he is not a member of our subcommittee, but he is very involved in these issues. So we welcome you, Mr. LaHood.

And now I would like to introduce our two incredible witnesses for today's hearing. We are delighted to welcome back Ambassador James Jeffrey, the State Department's Special Representative for Syria Engagement. We were grateful for his insight at our hearings in his previous role, and I am very glad to see him in this new position. There could be no one better than you, Mr. Ambassador.

In 2010, Ambassador Jeffrey was appointed to the highest rank in the U.S. Foreign Service, career ambassador, and has served as the United States Ambassador to Iraq, to Turkey and Albania, as well as the Deputy National Security Advisor and a U.S. Army Infantry officer in Germany and Vietnam.

Thank you for your service. We look forward to your testimony, sir.

And, secondly, we are delighted to welcome Mr. Robert Jenkins, who serves as Deputy Assistant Administrator for a terrific agency: USAID. And he works in the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance. Previously, Mr. Jenkins served as the Director of USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives, as well as its Deputy Director and Operations Coordinator. Prior to joining USAID, Mr. Jenkins designed emergency relief programs with World Vision International, a terrific organization, and was a Thomas J. Watson fellow.

Thank you for your service. We also look forward to hearing your testimony.

And as I said, gentlemen, your complete statements have been made a part of record. Feel free to summarize and then we will ask you some questions. Thank you.

Ambassador, you are recognized.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JAMES F. JEFFREY, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR SYRIA ENGAGEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Ambassador JEFFREY. Thank you very much, Madam Chairwoman. It is very good to be back here with you and thank you very much for those kind words. It has been an honor to be working with you over the years.

Madam Chairman, you and other members of this committee have summarized very well the 7 years of horror brought about by the Assad regime enabled by Russia and Iran's maligned influence—not just, but particularly—in Syria and what it has brought us to in this horrific situation.

This administration is committed to a way forward. Again, Madam Chairman, you have laid it out. I will repeat it for the record: We are here, first of all, to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS in Syria, particularly in the area where we are, but throughout the whole country. That is important. And that is the mission we have given to the U.S. military there.

Secondly, the United States with all of our elements of power is committed to the withdrawal of all Iranian-commanded forces from the entirety of Syria and an irreversible political process that will change the nature and the behavior of the Syrian Government because, without such a change, we are not going to see an end to this conflict. This is not regime change, per se. It is not related to personalities. It is related to the policies of that regime.

As Secretary Pompeo stated on October 10, these three goals are mutually supported. And I would like to spend a few minutes talking about how we are going to try to weave these goals together to answer the question that you and others have raised of what is our policy going forward? First of all, you cannot ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS—that is what we experienced, including me personally, in Iraq in 2010 to 2012—or any terrorist organization if you don't deal with the root causes of it.

Well, the root causes of ISIS, mainly in Syria, but to some degree in Iraq, have been first of all the horrific behavior of the Assad regime against its own people, giving those people no other chance but to turn to whomever would take up arms against Assad, and that was unfortunately including terrorists.

Secondly, it is the role of Iran, spreading its tentacles around the Arabic Sunni world. This is an outside force that creates malignant antibodies if we—that is, the international community—do not respond in a proper way. We did not respond in a proper way to Iran's encroachment into these areas, so the peoples of the area in desperation fell victim to the false claims, the false promises of ISIS and other terrorist organizations. So we do have to do all three. We cannot just rely upon the military defeat of the caliphate right now along the Mesopotamia—the Euphrates, along the Iraqi border. We have to go after the root causes, and our policy is aimed at that.

In terms of the way forward to execute these other two more political goals of an irreversible political process and the removal of Iran, what we are looking at, as President Trump laid out in the U.N. General Assembly back in September, is a de-escalation of the conflict and a reinvigoration of the political process.

Let me talk first about the de-escalation of the conflict. We now have, other than the fighting against ISIS, a near cease-fire informal and shaky, throughout the country, with us in the northeast, with our partner forces, the SDF, and in Al-Tanf, in the south, again with partner forces, the MAT, the Turks in the northwest. That is about 40 percent of the country; almost half of the population is not under Assad's control. They are either in those areas, or they are across the border. And we are going to work with the U.N., work with the Russians, work with the international community to, to the extent we can, solidify these ceasefires. That is called for in the relevant U.N. Resolution 2254 and then try to use that to leverage the political process. The political process has not done well, including, today, the last effort to try to form a constitutional committee of opposition, government, and neutral representatives failed in a meeting held by Russia, Iran, and Turkey in Astana, Kazakhstan, but we are not going to give up on that path forward. There has to be fundamental change in the way that this regime works with its own people to avoid the threat that the regime and the state make toward its own population and to our allies and friends in the region; that is first and foremost. Israel, but also Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, and other states. This is an international situation. We have five countries, outside states, with military forces right now in Syria: Iran, Russia, the United States, Turkey, and the Israeli Air Force. There is a real danger of collisions, military actions between the two, as we saw with the shoot down of Russian IL-20. And so the situation is quite dangerous in terms of state-to-state conflict. We are working to avoid that while at the same time building on the cease-fire to set forth a legitimate political process that is worthy of the name of the U.N. vision for Syria being at peace with itself and at peace with its neighborhood.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Jeffrey follows:]

Testimony

Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee

Sub-Committee on the Middle East and North Africa

U.S. Policy Toward Syria (Part II)

Statement of

Ambassador James F. Jeffrey

Special Representative for Syria Engagement

November 29, 2018

Chairmen Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, distinguished Members of the Sub-Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify. The Syrian conflict has raged for over seven years, fueled by the Assad regime's despotic treatment of its own citizens, Russia's enabling of Assad's brutality, and Iran's malign influence in the region. The war and the many people impacted by the regime's ongoing horrific treatment of its citizens contributed to the most serious global terrorist threat since 9/11 – ISIS. The war has driven over 11 million of Syria's approximately 20 million people from their homes, killed more than half a million men, women, and children, and witnessed repeated use of horrific chemical weapons—despite Russia's pledge to guarantee Syria's elimination of these weapons. The regime continues to devastate its own country.

The United States is pursuing three mutually supporting strategic objectives in Syria. The military's specific mission in Syria is to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS – and our civilian agencies are working closely with the military to consolidate these efforts. The United States is also using a whole of government approach to achieve other strategic objectives in Syria, such as countering Iran in Syria and resolving the Syrian crisis in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2254. As the Secretary said in his speech at JINSA on October 10, we see these as mutually reinforcing objectives, and the State Department is engaged in the diplomatic processes aimed at making headway on each of these simultaneously.

Such a strategy if successful will help create a Syria that meets minimum standards for international normalization – one that surrenders its chemical weapons, no longer poses a threat to its neighbors, including Israel, severs its ties with the Iranian regime's forces and their military proxies, no longer sponsors terrorism,

holds accountable those guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and creates the conditions for the safe, dignified, and voluntary return of refugees. In support of that strategy, on October 29, the Syria Small Group, consisting of Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom met in London and discussed recent developments in Idlib, the need to move forward with convening the constitutional committee as soon as possible, and continuing to push for progress in the political process in line with UNSCR 2254. We hope to meet again soon.

Today, major combat in the conflict has largely abated, but the regime controls only half the country's population. Military forces of five outside states, the United States, Turkey, Israel, Iran, and Russia, along with Syrian and various opposition forces, are operating in close proximity, raising the risk of accidental conflict, such as on September 17, when Syrian regime forces, responding to an alleged Israeli attack on Iranian assets in Syria, shot down a Russian aircraft.

In Syria, Russia seeks to keep the Assad regime in power to preserve its own military and economic interests, undermine U.S. influence in the region, assert Russia's role as a global power player, and reduce Moscow's international isolation. Although our objectives and Russia's are not aligned, we seek common ground with Russia in order to resolve the conflict in Syria. Our confidence in Russian promises is greatly weakened after Russian and Syrian regime forces violated the southwest de-escalation area this summer, needlessly disrupting a successful ceasefire to which President Putin publicly committed with President Trump in Da Nang, Vietnam. Such breaches have strategic consequences. Despite our low level of trust, we must engage with Russia to come to political solution in Syria. This is a challenge best managed by assessing their actions and follow-

through on their commitments, starting with UN Security Council Resolution 2254, while urging Russia to press both Damascus and Tehran to remove all Iranian-commanded forces and proxy forces from the entirety of Syria, and therefore removing a major spoiler to stability in the region.

Russian support for our three goals has been mixed, with the most positive coordination being our mutual de-confliction of the battle space against ISIS. We have made significant progress against ISIS since 2014, when the terrorist group swept across Iraq and Syria, causing violence and chaos, inflicting suffering on millions of civilians, and threatening the region and beyond. The U.S.-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS has been instrumental in clearing the terrorist organization from almost all the territory ISIS once controlled in Syria and Iraq.

I would be remiss not to mention the tensions that have spiked between our partner forces in northeast Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and Turkey in the midst of this mission. Turkey points to links between the SDF and PKK, and these unfortunate incidents detract from our efforts to defeat ISIS and coordinate other elements of our overall Syria policy.

Turkey is a NATO Ally and a key partner in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. The United States remains committed to working with Turkey to address Turkish security concerns, including along its borders, and we support Turkey in its fight against the PKK, while attempting to reduce tensions.

And as we have said before, uncoordinated, unilateral military action into northeast Syria by any party, particularly where U.S. personnel are present, is of great concern, and any action that endangers U.S. personnel is unacceptable.

Right now, the SDF are working to liberate the last ISIS-controlled pocket of territory in Syria and operating throughout northeast Syria to clear ISIS cells. Although we are nearing the end of ISIS's territorial control in Iraq and Syria, our job is not done, and we remain focused on the enduring defeat of ISIS and al-Qa'ida, ensuring they do not return. However, an enduring defeat cannot be achieved as long as Syrians continue to suffer from regime oppression, which contributed to the rise of ISIS in the first place.

On behalf of the State Department, I want to take this opportunity to thank my Department of Defense colleagues for the extraordinary efforts of the U.S. military in bringing the fight to ISIS and in ensuring the safety of the diplomats and civilian assistance experts working to stabilize the communities no longer under ISIS's control. I also would like to express our appreciation for the 79 members of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.

Russia has de-conflicted its operations in support of the regime from coalition combat operations against ISIS. Russia has exchanged information with the Coalition about its support to limited regime operations against ISIS -- although that has not been the central priority for Russia, Iran, or the regime. At the same time, Russia also presses for a premature withdrawal of U.S. and Coalition forces from Syria.

Such an untimely U.S. military departure from Syria would enable ISIS to return, allow Iran to fill the vacuum, place Iraq's stability at risk, and increase the threats to Syria's neighbors such as our key allies Israel, Jordan, and Turkey. Our presence enables us to prevent ISIS's resurgence, consolidate gains, stabilize

liberated areas, and alleviate human suffering. It also indirectly helps galvanize diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict. Our presence also has the ancillary effect of blocking further Iranian expansion. By virtue of our presence, we are making progress toward these goals, foremost among them the enduring defeat of ISIS.

The Russians have provided only intermittent support to our second goal – a political process in line with UNSC resolution 2254 to resolve the underlying causes of the Syrian tragedy. Russia has worked in the “Astana Group” with Turkey and Iran on drawing up lists of participants for a constitutional committee, an important step in the Syrian-owned, UN-led process to implement UNSCR 2254. In the past, Russia has delayed the convening of the committee in order to appease the Syrian regime, apparently in response to Assad’s refusal to cooperate with the UN process. However, the Russians have now stated their support for the meeting of the Constitutional Committee before the end of the year. Therefore, there should be no reason not to convene the UN-organized constitutional committee imminently. We believe that convening this committee will help strengthen and prolong the de-escalation in Idlib.

In Idlib, Turkey and Russia have taken steps to avert a military offensive by the Assad regime and its allies. We hope de-escalation in this area that is home to over three million persons is made permanent. Secretary Pompeo continues to tell Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov that the United States would consider any Syrian regime offensive on Idlib a dangerous escalation of the conflict. As President Trump noted in the UN General Assembly, the order he has given his senior officials is simple: “Don’t let it happen.” If this agreement succeeds in preventing the Assad regime from attacking Idlib and reestablishes a durable cease-fire that the Russians and Assad will honor, it will be an encouraging step forward.

We remain concerned, however, by the pattern of previous behavior by the Assad regime, Russia, and Iran that destroyed earlier de-escalation agreements, and we will be watching developments in Idlib closely to gauge Russia's commitment to this agreement.

Additionally, Russia has undercut the UN-led political process with an intensive diplomatic effort focused on securing recognition of the regime, soliciting reconstruction money, and pushing Syria's neighbors to send refugees home long before it is safe to do so -- essentially sweeping the crimes of the past seven years under the rug.

U.S. policy is steadfast -- there will be no U.S. reconstruction assistance in Syria, nor U.S. support for such assistance from other nations, absent a credible political process in Geneva within the context of the 2254 process that leads unalterably to a new constitution, free and fair UN supervised elections, and a political transition that reflects the will of the Syrian people. Our allies agree on this point.

Concerning our third goal, Iran, the President made clear while we maintain a presence in Syria to ensure the lasting defeat of ISIS, we are also committed to the strategic goal of the withdrawal of all Iranian-commanded forces from the entirety of Syria.

The Iranian regime's malign behavior has left us no choice but to pursue this latter goal. Iran has taken advantage of regional conflicts and instability to aggressively expand its influence and threaten its regional neighbors. Nowhere is this threat clearer than it is in Syria, where the Iranian regime has sought to establish a highly

destabilizing power projection platform and use it against Israel and others. Already Iranian forces have used bases inside Syria to launch attacks against Israeli forces and the Golan Heights earlier this year. We strongly support and fully back Israel's sovereign right to defend itself, including against Iranian threats in Syria. Iran's attitude of reckless hostility and disregard for the laws and norms that underpin the international order makes it dangerous, and the vast majority of the international community agrees. We want to work with our partners to constrain this dangerous influence, for the benefit of international peace and security, regional stability, and the Iranian people.

The President has made clear that the Iranian regime must cease its behavior and policies that undermine peace in the Middle East. The Iranian regime exports violence, terror, and turmoil. It illicitly procures sensitive items to advance its ballistic missile program and proliferates these missiles all across the Middle East. Iran's support of the Assad regime, particularly the use of sectarian militias guilty of abuses against the civilian population, undermines legitimate processes to resolve the conflict in Syria. As Secretary Pompeo stated in his May 21 speech outlining a new security architecture for the region, "Iran must withdraw all forces under Iranian command throughout the entirety of Syria."

If Russia wants to work with the United States to bring an end to the Syrian conflict, as it claims it does, Russia must join efforts to counter Iran's destabilizing actions and influence in Syria to remove all Iranian-commanded forces from the country. Russia continues taking steps to the contrary, such as announcing the deployment of an advanced S-300 air defense system to the Syrian military that could provide military cover for Iranian forces and dangerously escalate the situation.

The United States and our allies have come to Russia with a path toward a Syrian political solution many times. This path is enshrined in UNSCR 2254, which the UN Security Council adopted unanimously in 2015, which lays out a step-by-step political process involving a new or reformed constitution and national elections, as well as UN mechanisms to support and expand ceasefires. Despite our differences, we believe Russia's own interests are themselves not served by a return of ISIS, by a murderous Syrian regime rejected by its people and the international community, or by Iranian power projection with Syria as a platform. Thus, our goal is for Russia, as the regime's protector, guarantor, and enabler, to join the international community to support a political solution to resolve the crisis in Syria.

In my closing, I want to again express my condolences to the families of Mr. Raed Fares and Mr. Hamod Jnaid. Mr. Fares and Mr. Jnaid conveyed to the world the aspirations of the Syrian people in their struggle for freedom from the forces of tyranny and falsehood. We were very saddened to hear of their deaths. Their courage, energy, and creativity were inspirational and continue to inspire throughout Syria and beyond.

Thank you for the privilege to testify. Chairmen Ros-Lehtinen, my colleagues and I at the State Department want to thank you sincerely for your support throughout your career and we wish you well as you move forward.

I welcome the opportunity answer your questions.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much. That was an excellent statement.

And, Mr. Jenkins, we have been joined by our ranking member, Mr. Deutch, who—and it shows you the high level of interest he has on this issue because we know that, on your side, you have got a lot going on and competing time restraints. So, thank you, Mr. Deutch, for joining us. And I would love to have you give your opening statement.

Mr. DEUTCH. Great. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thanks for calling the hearing.

Thanks, Ambassador Jeffrey and Mr. Jenkins, for appearing before the committee today.

Mr. Jenkins, thanks for the difficult work that USAID does to address the humanitarian crisis in Syria, and we appreciate that.

Ambassador Jeffrey, you are no stranger to the committee. I was encouraged by your appointment as Special Representative for Syria Engagement, and I am hopeful that you will lead the administration to finally solidify a comprehensive strategy for Syria. Thus far, the administration's failure to really codify what we aimed to accomplish and how we plan to accomplish it has been concerning to say the least. I am sorry that I got here just after your comments, but I know we will be spending a lot of time together going forward.

In the past year, we have Iran expand its military footprint, getting closer and closer to Israel's border. And while I am encouraged by the progress against ISIS, which has seen the group lose tremendous amounts of territories since mid-2015, the administration hasn't made tangible efforts to solidify strategy to ensure that ISIS doesn't resurge after conventional fighting is concluded, nor does it seem the administration has a plan for our future relationship with the Syrian Kurds, whose partnership has resulted in the most dramatic losses for ISIS in Syria.

The administration's missile strikes against the Assad regime, while something I support, lack a strategic backend to actually alter Assad's behavior and I worry appear thus just as empty gestures. Assad continues to break international law and commit human rights crimes on a massive scale.

The administration has stated that it wants to find peace diplomatically through the Geneva process, which in the last several years has failed to bring the Syrian conflict to an end. The administration has also stated it wants Syria to no longer be led by the brutal Assad regime, but we haven't seen any evidence that the administration has a plan to achieve these goals. The State Department has stated the U.S. will not commit itself to full reconstruction until there is a credible and irreversible political process underway to end the crisis. However, after the regime, Iran and Russia have routinely made a mockery of international proceedings to lessen the suffering of the Syrian people. I have little confidence in the process.

The tyrannical Assad regime has played the international community for a fool by hiding behind the so-called de-escalation zones that allow him to dedicate military resources to one front before breaking the agreement to bomb civilian targets in other zones. We have sat by watching as he continues to use chemical weapons,

cluster munitions, barrel bombs, starvation, and other horrendous illegal measures to break civilian enclaves and crush opposition parties. The humanitarian crisis in Syria continues to be wrought with uncertainty. In Idlib, the sporadic fighting between the pro-regime forces and opposition groups threatens an all-out assault on a region with a large number of internally displaced civilians with nowhere else to go. A full regime assault on Idlib threatens to cause the largest humanitarian crisis of this entire conflict.

In June, I wrote to the Secretary of State asking him to prepare to mitigate such disaster and to account for why the administration froze \$200 million in stabilization funds, which included funding for Radio Fresh, an independent radio station which countered the extremist propaganda right in northwestern Syria.

Last week, the founder of Radio Fresh, Raed Fares was killed, striking a blow to those of us who support counter-extremism and pro-democracy efforts in Syria. To me, and I know too many of us on this committee, cuts to programs like this further demonstrate the lack of a plan to address ISIS' long-term threat. And having had the opportunity to spend time with Raed and to hear him speak about the number of times he was able to avoid the attacks on him, the news was particularly difficult for us to take.

This pull back in stabilization assistance once again cedes American leadership. Though the Russians will be more than happy to fill that void—I know the administration will also say that Saudi Arabia is picking up the funding commitment, but the question is, can we guarantee that we will be able to use that funding to advance what we believe are the best strategic interests for our own country? Congress has questions. We have had questions, and we need adequate answers to those questions.

The President has repeatedly said that we are in Syria to defeat and destroy ISIS. Now the administration talks of American troops staying in Syria until Iran leaves. How do we plan to achieve a complete Iranian withdrawal and avoid any direct military confrontation with Iran? Do we expect Russia or Assad to ask Iran and its proxies to leave? What will happen to the stagnating peace process in the wake of envoy Staffan de Mistura stepping down?

Finally, I would note that the House has taken meaningful process push the political process along by passing legislation, the Caesar Syrian Protection Act, authored by the ranking member, Mr. Engel, that would give the administration tools to go after those that support the Assad regime and the ability to waive sanctions if meaningful negotiations are taking place and violence has ceased. I hope that the Senate will finally pass this bill before Congress adjourns.

Ambassador Jeffrey, Mr. Jenkins, I want this to be a productive hearing. I am sorry that my colleagues can't be here, except for Mr. Schneider, who I am grateful has arrived. I hope today—well, I know today will shed light on how going forward the administration is going to address what has been to date the lack of a real Syria policy. And I hope we will get the opportunity to continue this conversation into the new Congress.

Thanks again to our witnesses for being here. And thank you, Madam Chairman, for letting me present.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Deutch. As always, you make excellent points.

And now we are pleased to hear from Mr. Jenkins. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF MR. ROBERT JENKINS, DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, CONFLICT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. JENKINS. Thank you, Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

As you have already heard, for more than 7 years, the regime of Bashar al-Assad has waged an unrelenting campaign of terror against its own civilians, including the use of chemical weapons. In 2014, the emergence of ISIS exasperated the crisis, imposing brutal tactics, including beheadings and torture. Nearly 11.3 million people are displaced within Syria or have fled to neighboring countries as refugees. Nearly the entire population of southern Florida. Through it all, United States remains committed to the Syrian people. Our assistance is reaching 5 million Syrians every month, 4 million Syrians inside across all 14 governance, and over 1 million refugees in neighboring countries. Using backpacks, small trucks, drops from airplanes, even donkeys, USAID works with partners who will do whatever it takes to get the job done.

Flexibility is key to our response. USAID food assistance includes both food stuffs, such as wheat and rice, but it also includes ready-to-eat rations for people on the move. Our assistance to refugees also includes vouchers so that they can buy food in local markets.

Since the conflict started, nearly 75 percent of Syria's medical doctors have left the country, leaving a profound healthcare gap. At great risk to their own safety, USAID partners have stepped in to fill the void. Last year alone, our partners responded to the health needs of almost 5 million people inside Syria. Their heroic efforts and courage have saved countless lives.

As ISIS has been driven out of areas in northeast Syria, people have started returning home. In Raqqa, 80 percent of the buildings are either entirely destroyed or very seriously damaged and half of the city's water infrastructure is in need of rehabilitation. Here, the U.S. is providing safe drinking water and food, distributing shelter and other relief supplies, and providing healthcare services.

I saw the impact of our assistance firsthand in January when I was able to travel to Raqqa with our Administrator, Administrator Mark Green, and U.S. CENTCOM Commander Joseph Votel. It was chilling to drive around Naem Circle, which became the focal point of the Syrian Democratic Forces' victory celebrations after Raqqa was liberated. Just 3 months prior, the spikes on the fence around the fountain where people were celebrating had been using to display the heads of ISIS victims. To sit there, stand there, look at that, was chilling.

Despite our best efforts, the single greatest factor limiting the reach of our humanitarian assistance is access. The Syrian regime has now regained control of the southwest. After that, they cut off the cross-border humanitarian operations from Jordan, a major

blow to our response efforts. Similarly, aid groups struggle to reach people living in territory control by terrorist organizations.

Despite our best efforts, there have been failures which we have sought to learn from. USAID has put risk-mitigation programs in place to reduce the possibility of fraud, waste, abuse, and the diversion of assistance. We place the highest priority on ensuring that taxpayer funds are used wisely, effectively, and for their intended purpose. Humanitarian assistance alone cannot provide a solution to the conflict. But it is saving lives and helping to alleviate the suffering of everyday people throughout the region. The United States remains committed to a strong humanitarian response, to support the Syrian people and Syria's neighbors.

Thank you for your time. And in particular, Madam Chairman, I would like to thank you on behalf of USAID for your service and your commitment to foreign assistance. Thank you. I look forward to taking your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Jenkins follows:]

Written Statement of Robert W. Jenkins
Deputy Assistant Administrator, U.S. Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian
Assistance, U.S. Agency for International Development
Before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Middle East & North Africa

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, ranking member Deutch, Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, alongside my distinguished colleague from the Department of State. The Syria conflict is one of the largest and most complex humanitarian emergencies of our time, driving record levels of displacement. Nearly 11.3 million people are displaced within Syria or have fled to neighboring countries as refugees — that's more than the population of New York City and Chicago combined.

For more than seven years, the regime of Bashar al-Assad has waged an unrelenting campaign of violence against its own people, even using chemical weapons, which the U.S. has strongly condemned. In 2014, the emergence of ISIS exacerbated this already protracted crisis, with the group imposing brutal tactics — including public beheadings, torture, and the taking of slaves — as punishments for minor offenses. Many innocent Syrians have been forced to flee their homes with little more than the clothes on their backs. Over the last seven years, many have resettled more than once, fleeing when active combat drove them to seek safety and shelter in yet another village or town.

Behind these staggering statistics is the very real toll on the innocent people of Syria who have endured these crises and gotten caught in the crossfire — the women and girls who endure rape and violence, the more than 2 million children who are out of school, representing a lost generation of talent, innovation, and entrepreneurship, and the thousands of families who have been torn apart by death or separated across borders. Years of ongoing violence have ripped apart places that should be safe: schools, hospitals, playgrounds, parks, and even people's own homes.

Yet through it all, we remain committed to the Syrian people, working with partners who are fearlessly crossing conflict lines at great personal risk to help those caught in the crossfire, delivering emergency food, water, shelter, and relief supplies, as well as providing lifesaving medical care.

U.S. Humanitarian Response

The United States has been working to help Syrians and the communities that host them since the crisis began. As the leading donor of humanitarian assistance for the Syria response, the United States has provided more than \$9 billion in aid throughout Syria and the region, half of which is through USAID. USAID assistance is reaching 5 million Syrians every month, including 4

million people across all 14 governorates inside Syria and 1 million refugees in neighboring countries.

Since 2012, USAID has had a team located in the Middle East, leading and coordinating the U.S. government's humanitarian efforts for Syria. Currently, a 20-person USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team — or DART — is on the ground in Syria, Turkey, Jordan, and Kuwait, working with our brave partners to find creative ways to navigate war zones and fluid front lines in order to reach the millions of people who would otherwise be cut off from receiving aid. Whether backpacks, small trucks, air drops from planes, even donkeys, our DART coordinates with our interagency colleagues at State and DoD, as well as with our implementing partners who will use whatever means necessary to get the job done. With 13 million people in need of humanitarian aid, failure is not an option.

Food Assistance

The ongoing seven-year war has crippled the Syrian economy, destroyed local infrastructure and damaged the agricultural sector. As a result approximately 11 million Syrians are not able to meet their basic food needs. The United States remains the single largest donor of emergency food assistance for the Syria crisis. Staying flexible is a central part of our approach.

USAID food assistance includes rations, such as bulgur wheat, beans, lentil, pasta, and rice, as well as ready-to-eat emergency rations to help people on the move who don't have access to cooking areas or equipment. It includes programs like electronic food vouchers which enable refugees to buy food in local markets. This allows us to address food needs of Syrian refugees and invest in the local economy of neighboring countries.

USAID food assistance is also helping families become more self-sufficient and food secure by teaching them how to grow and sustain their own gardens and providing vital training in modern cultivation methods and rainwater harvesting.

Our assistance is making a difference and, where possible, helping families become more self-sufficient. In Al Hasakah in northeast Syria, nearly half the population depends on agriculture as a source of income. But the war has devastated this industry, and food prices have skyrocketed, with families spending an astonishing 80 percent of their income on food. Parents like Fatima and her husband, who both had jobs, had to skip meals to ensure their five children had enough to eat. Now, thanks to the training she received from a USAID partner, Fatima is growing her own nutritious food for her family at home, and growing enough to share the bounty with her neighbors.

Medical Care

Since the conflict started, nearly 75 percent of Syria's medical doctors have left the country, leaving a profound health care gap. According to the latest humanitarian reports, 50 percent of Syria's public hospitals and more than 50 percent of the country's primary health care centers are either partially functioning or closed entirely.

The UN estimates 12 million in need of health assistance from January to October of this year. That's almost equivalent to the total number of Syrians displaced by this crisis.

At great risk to their own safety, USAID partners have stepped in to help fill the void. Last year alone, our partners responded to the health needs of nearly 5 million people inside Syria. This included everything from training medical workers, delivering direct health care services, providing much-needed supplies, and support for vaccination campaigns.

Over the past seven years, the doctors, nurses, and healthcare professionals of our partner organizations have worked amidst daily bombings, threats of kidnapping, and chemical weapons attacks to keep health care services operational in northern Syria. Their heroic efforts and courage have saved countless lives.

Protection

Women and children often fare the worst in war, and the crisis in Syria is no exception. Civilians have been deliberately targeted and killed; women have been raped; and children have been forcibly recruited to be soldiers.

One of the protection advisors on our DART heard stories of these atrocities first-hand when she visited displacement camps in northeast Syria and held focus groups with women and teenage girls earlier this year. At one camp, she heard about an 8-year-old who was married to an ISIS fighter because she was deemed "acceptable" in their eyes. At another camp, a teenage girl told her that she used to dream of being an engineer. Now, she assumes she'll either be forced to get married or have to go fight.

USAID works with our partners in Syria to provide programs that ensure maximum safety and dignity for women and children. We support women's health centers, mobile clinics and specialized medical staff training to provide care for survivors of gender-based violence. In addition, our partners implement simple measures, like setting up gender-separated latrines and showers in camps for the internally displaced, which can prove life-changing for people who face the risk of violence and abuse.

Assistance to Syrian Returnees

This past May, the United States, the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, and local partners — including the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) — launched operations to liberate the final ISIS

strongholds in Syria. As ISIS has been driven out of areas of northeast Syria, people have started returning home. Last October, SDF recaptured Ar Raqqa, the city that for four years served as the de facto capital of ISIS' self-declared caliphate. As of October 31, nearly 153,000 people have returned home to Ar Raqqa City.

The United States is providing assistance to Syrian returnees, prioritizing life-saving humanitarian aid, landmine clearance, and rubble removal. In Ar Raqqa city, 80 percent of all buildings were damaged or destroyed and more than half of the city's water system requires rehabilitation. Here, USAID-supported NGOs are providing safe drinking water and food, distributing shelter and other relief commodities, conducting mine risk education, and providing primary and trauma health care services.

I saw the impact of our assistance first-hand in January, when I traveled to Ar Raqqa with Administrator Green. It was chilling to drive around Naem Circle, the infamous traffic circle broadcast worldwide in the days following the city's liberation. This circle became a focal point for the Syrian Democratic forces' victory celebration. However, as we drove around the circle, I could not help but think that just three months before, this was a site of torture and death. The spikes on the fence surrounding the fountain where people were celebrating had been used to display the heads of ISIS victims.

The Syrian people are exceptionally resilient. When I flew into Ar Raqqa, I saw green fields emerging in the vast desert. Syrians are once again growing food to sell in markets that used to be under ISIS control. Around Naem Circle, stores are popping up. People are moving home, opening businesses, and going back to school, although much work remains.

This is all being done with the generous support of the U.S. government on behalf of the American people. This is what we, as humanitarians do; we help shine light into the darkest places on earth.

Challenges

Despite our best efforts, the single-greatest factor limiting the reach of our humanitarian assistance is the lack of access to people in need. The Syrian regime regained control of southwestern Syria in late July following a military offensive against opposition groups, after which Assad's forces stopped cross-border humanitarian operations from Jordan — a major blow to our response efforts and the hundreds of thousands of Syrians who still need assistance in the area. However, the ability of our partners to remain flexible and find alternative ways to deliver assistance has been key to this response. We are now working with our partners to provide aid — including food, water, and health supplies — on convoys from the capital city of Damascus.

Some of our partners are exploring other options to continue to provide humanitarian assistance in southern Syria, including trying to find ways to work under the Assad regime. NGOs are now required to register with the Syrian Arab Republic Government in order to operate in areas controlled by the regime. This has resulted in fees, delays, permit denials, and other bureaucratic impediments that have limited the aid these groups can deliver. Some of our partners have been forced to suspend or partially suspend their activities in Dar'a because of the absence of approvals from Damascus.

In addition, our partners continue to face security challenges that make our life-saving operations more dangerous. Violence against aid workers and looting of relief supplies are regular occurrences in Syria. From January to June 2018, 55 aid workers were killed in Syria, representing the highest number of aid workers killed during the first half of the year in any country experiencing protracted conflict, according to the USAID-funded Danger in Aid project. Our stance on this issue remains firm: All parties must allow for unfettered humanitarian access throughout the country. Humanitarians work tirelessly at great personal risk to deliver aid, but they need full and unhindered access to save lives.

Conclusion

As we look ahead, it is clear that many challenges remain. The Assad regime is gearing up for a large-scale offensive in northwest Syria, an area already facing significant humanitarian needs due to years of conflict, as well as the large number of displaced people who already live there. The city of Idlib currently hosts the highest concentration of displaced people inside Syria— with thousands of people arriving just in the last couple months from eastern Ghouta and southwest Syria — further taxing the area's ability to support them. This upcoming offensive has the potential to create a humanitarian emergency at a scale not yet seen during this seven-year civil war, possibly creating temporary displacement for up to 900,000 people. In addition to this mass displacement, the UN and other humanitarian groups are bracing for intense bombing and shelling, resulting in civilian deaths, as well as the destruction of schools and hospitals. Our partners are looking to pre-position relief supplies where possible, and our DART is already looking to identify areas of greatest need.

An additional challenge in Syria, particularly the northwest, is the ability of aid groups to reach people living in territory controlled by terrorist organizations. Because the Syria crisis is subject to elevated risks of aid diversion to U.S.-sanctioned terrorist groups, USAID has put risk mitigation programs in place — including the hiring of dedicated risk mitigation staff — to reduce the possibility of fraud, waste, and abuse, and the diversion of benefits. Do not be mistaken: USAID places the highest priority on ensuring that taxpayer funds are used wisely, effectively and for their intended purpose. But without aid from the United States and the international community, Syrians in desperate need of basics aid — food, water, and shelter — do not have a good chance of survival. So USAID works with our partners to put in place checks

and safeguards that will allow assistance to keep flowing to the people who need it, without being diverted.

Looking ahead, we will continue grapple with dynamic population shifts — and the humanitarian needs they cause — as more Syrians look to return home. Between January and October of this year, approximately 1.5 million internally displaced people moved throughout Syria, according to the UN. Border closures and restrictions on the shipment of supplies will constrain our partners' ability to reach people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

Many families who return home will face obstacles to rebuild their lives and livelihoods, including lack of housing, infrastructure, and a way to make a living. Working closely with other international donors, we will continue to provide lifesaving aid to Syrian returnees while working with Coalition partners to support longer-term initiatives, such as repairing basic infrastructure, reopening schools and medical facilities, and supporting rubble and mine removal. These efforts will help stabilize communities and enable Syrians to voluntarily and safely return to their homes.

Humanitarian assistance alone cannot provide a solution to this conflict, but it is saving lives and helping to alleviate the suffering of everyday people throughout the region. As the leading donor of humanitarian assistance for this crisis, the United States remains committed to a strong humanitarian response--coordinating closely with other international donors--to support the Syrian people and Syria's neighbors. Thank you for your time and I look forward to answering your questions.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much.

I was very moved by your voice when you were speaking, and I can see how this impacts the folks who are trying to make things better, as well as, of course, the people of Syria themselves. But thank you. I can see that you are a devoted public servant who feels in his heart the heart break that is going on in that region.

And, Ambassador Jeffrey, as I said in my opening statement, I am so very glad to have you in this new position. I appreciate your more active approach in Syria.

Now, in your testimony, you stated that your confidence in Russia's promise was weakened after the violation of the southwest de-escalation zone this summer, an area agreed to by President Trump, and that the violation had consequences. But as far as I know, there have been no costs to Russia to date, despite two State Department warnings telling Russia not to violate the zone. Could you explain why the State Department issued these warnings, when in the end there were no costs when the zone wasn't enforced? And what cost against Russia is the administration prepared to make should Russia decide to violate another de-escalation zone?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. The U.S. had negotiated a deconfliction agreement with Russia, as you pointed out, at the Presidential level in Da Nang a year ago. The Russians did not adhere to their commitments under that agreement and they not only allowed but they supported the influx of Syrian forces into the southwest with humanitarian, military, and other consequences.

The administration issued initial warnings of a diplomatic nature. Absent military force for which there was no legal authorization, the administration was not able to take further action directly at that point. What this led to directly was a series of decisions by the administration. First of all, to continue our presence in Syria against ISIS because that is what they are there for, that is what the authorization is, but to ensure that we don't turn that mission over to anybody else until it is finished, particularly anybody else who is liable to abuse—the people in those areas abuse our partners and everything else. So that is one decision. Our second decision was to strengthen the absolute commitment we have to block any reconstruction assistance to the criminal callous Assad regime until that regime starts contributing to the political process. And then, thirdly, to play a much stronger role in the diplomacy designed to achieve that. And I will cite a success that we had, and that is Idlib. The last of the deconfliction zones, which the Turks had negotiated originally with the Iranians and the Russians almost a year ago, on the 7th of September, Putin humiliated President Erdogan by saying there would be no cease-fire. Ten days later, Erdogan got a cease-fire agreement in writing from Putin in Idlib that is still holding. One reason for the change was President Trump's direct and dramatic intervention in that, not only by saying we would take very strong action if chemical weapons were used in any offensive—and you made that very, very clear, and we worked with our allies to ensure this wouldn't be America alone—but, secondly, the President stated publicly that this would be a

reckless escalation of the conflict, and he kept a drum beat of pressure on Russia both publicly and privately.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. If I could interrupt. So are you saying that basically it was a diplomatic arrangement? That there was no teeth to that—were it to be violated, which it was, there was no agreement about what penalties could be imposed and that we no longer trust Russia to keep its promise?

Ambassador JEFFREY. We no longer will rely only on diplomatic measures to hold to agreements, Madam Chairman.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Now you did not mention Hezbollah by name, but you did refer to Iranian-commanded forces. Can you clarify for us, do you and the administration, do you consider Hezbollah one of these Iranian-commanded forces? And is its removal from Syria a stated U.S. goal?

Ambassador JEFFREY. It is a stated U.S. goal. When we say “Iranian-commanded,” we were thinking specifically of Hezbollah. They take pride of place of all of the awful outside forces that have contributed to chaos.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Now is there any reason why that exact word—that term is not used?

Ambassador JEFFREY. There are so many—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. I just want to make sure that it is an umbrella term.

Ambassador JEFFREY. It is an umbrella term.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Okay. I know that you share my feelings, and everyone thinks that Assad is the root cause of the conflict in Syria. And you said elsewhere the Assad regime produced ISIS and that the regime’s behavior will lead to its reemergence. And with that in mind, will you commit or will the administration commit to Assad not running in a future election? Are we going to have an official position on that?

Ambassador JEFFREY. We do not have an official position on any personality other than that we think Assad is exactly the worst person to rule any place. What we are trying to do in part, Madam Chairman, as this committee has indicated in many instances it wants us to do to, to build up an international coalition. Rightly or wrongly, the bulk of the international community is not going to follow us in regime change efforts because there is a long history of them, frankly, not turning out very well. So what we are looking for is a change of behavior, a dramatic drastic change in behavior by the Syrian Government to be a very different government to its own people and, as I mentioned, to its neighbors and the one we have today—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Is it realistic, Mr. Ambassador, to think the Syrian people would want Assad to run again? And how could an election possibly be free and fair if the Assad regime is still in place?

Ambassador JEFFREY. The relevant U.N. Resolution 2254 tasks the U.N.—this is one thing the U.N. is good at—for running free and fair elections, including among the diaspora and everybody that isn’t under Assad’s control. That is nearly half the population. We cannot imagine the bulk of that population voting for that individual if there is free elections. So, if you are wondering what the solution to Assad is, it is to carry out U.N. Resolution 2254.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

I have further questions for you, Mr. Jenkins, but I want to yield time to our ranking member, who will soon be chairman of this committee, Mr. Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

In a letter from the State Department in September, which I would like to enter into the record—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Without objection.

Mr. DEUTCH. The President has been clear that we are prepared to remain in Syria until the enduring defeat of ISIS, and we remain focused on ensuring withdrawal of Iranian forces and their proxies.

Ambassador Jeffrey, how far will the administration go to remove Iranian proxies from Syria?

Ambassador JEFFREY. First of all, that is a diplomatic goal, Mr. Ranking Member. That is not a military goal of our military forces now; it never has been. Our military forces are present in Syria to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS. We believe one element of that is to work on the diplomatic track to get foreign forces out that have entered since 2011. That would include the Iranian forces because they are a particular problem both for the situation inside of the country and the security of Israel, Turkey, and Jordan.

Mr. DEUTCH. So, if military force is not an option, how does the administration plan to use the diplomatic process to achieve that goal?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Well, first of all, to put the regime under as much economic pressure through the denial, not only by us but by the rest of the international community, of reconstruction. The regime is sitting on top of a big pile of rubble in Aleppo and much of the country. Secondly, to impose ever tougher sanctions on the regime and on those people that aid and abet it. And here we will be asking and looking for help from Congress in this regard.

Mr. DEUTCH. What is the long-term strategy for the areas in northeastern Syria currently held by the SDF, especially as we believe the regime attempts to retake that territory?

Ambassador JEFFREY. First of all, we think that any intervention by anyone into the northeast as we continue our operations against Daesh or ISIS would be of great concern, particularly placing American troops at risk. As you know, sir, there have been several attempts to penetrate that near Deir ez-Zor, for example, and we have responded using our inherent right of self-defense.

What we are hoping to do is help stabilize that area and then ensure that that area becomes integrated into a new Syrian body politic. We are not trying to create a separate entity. We are not going to change the territorial integrity of Syria. We are trying to for the moment stabilize that area, keep ISIS out, keep the situation peaceful, and work to use that as part of the leverage to try to push the political process forward.

Mr. DEUTCH. So let me go back to Iran and its processes for a second. What role does Russia play? You talked about sanctions. We are going to impose sanctions, and we are going to ratchet up the pressure. I understand that. What role does Russia play in this? What discussions have we had? What discussions are ongoing? To what extent will they be helpful in helping to push Iran

out, or will they hinder our ability, despite our efforts to ratchet up the pressure to push Iran out?

Ambassador JEFFREY. We talk to Russians at almost every level, the President spoke at length with President Putin at Helsinki summit about Syria. And we have at various levels—some of them confidential, some of them more open, such as at the U.N. General Assembly in the Security Council. We have exchanges very, very frequently with our Russian interlocutors in addition to the deconfliction conversations our military has with the Russians as well, which is important. So there is a very rich exchange of at least positions. We have made it clear to the Russians that there is no solution to this conflict as long as the Iranian forces are there. What do we use as leverage? We point out that all foreign forces who have entered since 2011—that would not include the Russians who have been there for decades—need to leave the country sooner or later as part of a solution negotiated by the U.N. and supported by the international community. That is a benefit to everybody involved, and absent that, we are going to sit in the situation we are right now.

Mr. DEUTCH. Ambassador Jeffrey, that would include the Russians. And I appreciate the rich exchange of ideas. Those are our ideas. What ideas do we hear back from the Russians?

Ambassador JEFFREY. The Russians, first of all, want to secure their own interests there, which begin with bases. Secondly, they want a friendly government. What they have not yet done, and you are absolutely right, is define to us how they can achieve their goals while also meeting our goals, which we have made very clear to them. This is still an ongoing process, and we haven't reached that point yet.

Mr. DEUTCH. Well, I am glad that you are now part of this process, Ambassador Jeffrey.

Madam Chairman, before I yield back, I know that it is your desire, and I hope that we are able to have one more hearing before we finish, but in the event that the timing does not permit that, I will use this opportunity to just quickly say, quickly, that, for those of us who—not just those of us who serve on the committee, but for those of us who pay attention to foreign affairs, I think it is clear that if you are a dictator or a despot or a brutal regime anywhere in the world that violates human rights and supports terror, that for these past decades now and certainly for the time that my chair has been sitting as chairman of this committee and chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, they understand that there is no one more committed to standing up for American values and American principles as the chairman. And a lot of people—I could go on and on—there will be opportunities for that, and I will look forward to embarrassing you on those opportunities. I will just simply say that, for those who look at the United States House and are fond of pointing out the inability of Members of Congress to work across the aisle to accomplish things on behalf of the American people, there is no more important work that we do here than standing up for the values we hold dear—and there is no one on either side of the aisle who best represents that and stands as the model of working with anyone and everyone who is willing to fight for those basic rights and American values than our chairman.

And I thank you and yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much. You are a mensch. Thank you so much, Ted. He is my friend. Thank you. And we don't need to continue with that.

Mr. Kinzinger is recognized. And you already said it.

Mr. KINZINGER. Well, no. I think it is important to note that sometimes you tick us off pretty bad too. You know, there are days where we are kind of miserable and in a bad mood around here. And it always really makes me upset to see you smile no matter what. It is like, could you just be in a bad mood once? But you never are, so thank you for that.

As I mentioned earlier in my opening statement, this administration and, frankly, the prior administration inherited a really bad situation in Syria for which there are no easy answers. I do think that one of solutions we need to do is to, frankly, target Assad, I think target his military. I think that can compel Assad and Russia to the table to a solution. I understand that may not be on the table. I am not sure the internal discussions, but I think that would actually be the fastest way to compel the Russians and the Iranians and the Syrians to the table.

Let me just ask you really quickly, Mr. Ambassador, has the administration taken a position on the Ceaser Act, the Caesar Civilian Protection Act?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I do not believe we have taken a specific position on that particular piece of legislation. You know, it is complicated for us to do that on a particular piece of legislation. More generally, we believe that the more sanctions we can impose on that regime, particularly in key strategic areas that serve their military, that serve the regime directly, all the better for our entire policy and if this House can help in one way or the other, without endorsing specific legislation, that is our position.

Mr. KINZINGER. Well, I would like to ping-pong that back to you. We passed the Syrian Act, the Civilian Protection Act here. It is in the Senate. As I know, it has been hotlined, but there is at least one Senator with a more exotic view on foreign policy than most people have that is trying to slow that up. But I think the administration is probably the last hope to get that through. So you don't have to comment on that, but I think it is something worth noting because we have a very limited time, and that would be our best shot.

Given that there has been a lot of attention with Saudi Arabia and their actions with the journalists, which I think the actions were abhorrent, but just this week we learned the fate of Layla, a Chicago-born aid worker helping displaced persons in Eastern Ghouta. Layla disappeared over 2 years ago where she was detained and tortured for 8 months before being transferred to a military court. This week, our worst fears were confirmed. She was tortured and executed by Assad's forces on December 28th, just after Christmas, 2016. We know that Bashar al-Assad and his Russian and Iranian backers have committed countless war crimes like those endured by Layla, and yet we haven't acted on that. And that is where I want to begin.

With the news of Layla's death, she became the first American citizen that we know of to be killed by the Assad regime. And this

is an incredibly important point to note: Whatever response the administration decides to take will shape how the regime and its backers treat other Americans in their custody now or potentially in their custody in the future.

Mr. Ambassador, how does the administration plan to respond to the killing of an American on Syria soil?

Ambassador JEFFREY. We can confirm that she was—she is deceased and that this was under Syria Government hands. We are looking into that. This is something that, just like you, we take very, very seriously. If I can change my testimony from a moment ago, we do support the Caesar Act.

Mr. KINZINGER. Great. Thank you for clarifying the administration's support of that. That is I think very important. Thank you.

Do you know the status of any other Americans currently being held in Assad's torture and detention facilities?

Ambassador JEFFREY. There are various inquiries underway. There are reports. None of these I can talk about in an open session.

Mr. KINZINGER. Understood. We all know that there are four broad instruments of power the United States can use: Diplomatic, information, military, and economic. I think we have used a number of those well. One that I think is important to note is information. Earlier this year, the administration decided to withdraw all assistance from northwest Syria, and some of those funds have been reinstated, which we appreciate, but others have been ignored. As was mentioned earlier, Radio Fresh, which I did an interview on a number of years ago, was run by a man that I had the pleasure to meet, Mr. Fares. The programming was centered around anti-extremism messaging, and it reached 2 million of the most at-risk individuals for radicalization. Unlike northeast Syria, where we have a military presence, U.S. stabilization aid is our only leverage to push back against the radicalism in the northwest. And last Friday, he was assassinated by the same terrorist groups he dedicated his life to speaking out against. He was a U.S. partner and one of our most effective bulwarks against the rise of al-Qaeda in Syria. How do you think, Mr. Ambassador, the United States can learn from his assassination so that critical programs in Idlib can get renewed U.S. funding?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Mr. Congressman, this is one of my top priorities, is to review, not just that particular program, Radio Fresh, but also the aid to the White Helmets, which we were able to restore temporarily, and several other programs. You know the back story, I am sure, when we suddenly lost all American assistance to the northeast where we have troops and contact, we shifted whatever money we could into that area. We are now looking at the consequences of that, particularly with the situation around Idlib, which is of strategic concern to us, just as much as the northeast. We will have to get back to you on it, but it is something we take very, very seriously.

Mr. KINZINGER. And I believe you do, and thank you. Nobody wants to waste money, but we want to spend it effectively. My time is up, and, Mr. Jenkins, while I don't have a question for you—and I apologize for that—I want to say thank you for your hard work too and everybody that works for you. I think many times the work

that you and your folks do gets overlooked, but it is extremely important. So thank you and please pass that on. And for both of you, thank you for being here.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Amen. That is true.

Thank you, Mr. Connolly.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you for the little chocolates.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Absolutely. Thank you for all of your service and your friendship. We will miss you a great deal.

Ambassador Jeffrey, my understanding is there is somewhere between 25,000 and 100,000 Iranian-supported troops, including Hezbollah, in Syria? Is that—I mean, that is a pretty wide range, but is that estimate close?

Ambassador JEFFREY. You are almost certainly—somewhere in there.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Yeah, well—but still, that is a lot of people. And our goal is complete removal of Iranian and Iranian-backed troops in Syria. Is that correct?

Ambassador JEFFREY. That is correct.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Let's take the upper end for a second. Let's just theorize it is 100,000, closer to that than 25,000. How in the world do we propose, given our limited footprint in Syria and, frankly, our limited influence historically in Syria, how do we propose to remove 100,000 very determined troops in foreign soil that is not friendly to the United States?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Boy, is that ever a good question. We don't plan on doing it through military forces—

Mr. CONNOLLY. By the way, Madam Chairman, you heard that was a good question, and do you know why?

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Why?

Mr. CONNOLLY. Because I worked for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. You know, I had heard that. I don't know if many Members know it.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I am sorry. That is an inside joke. I am sorry.

Ambassador JEFFREY. That is fine. The more discussion, the less time I have for your very good question.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Give us your magic solution.

Ambassador JEFFREY. Basically, this has to be done through diplomatic effort. I can see the rolling of eyes, but I was personally involved in the rollback of 25,000 Russian troops from Georgia in 2008. We saw the withdrawal of the Israeli Army from the Sinai after 1973. It is perfectly conceivable and quite normal in international relations for peace processes to lead to settlements that lead to withdrawals of foreign forces from somebody else's territory.

Mr. CONNOLLY. So, if I understand your answer, it is not that we have some detailed plan to do it; our answer is, within the context of some kind of overall peace settlement, that would be a provision.

Ambassador JEFFREY. That would be an absolute requirement. But we sweeten it by saying our troops will eventually leave. The Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan has said when there is a political process and elections under 2254, the U.N. Resolution, his troops are ready to leave. The Israelis tell us that they only carry

out military operations because the Iranians are there. So you can see the elements of a possible solution.

Mr. CONNOLLY. The Turks previously had a goal of the removal of Assad, kind of a *sine qua non* for that. Has that changed, or is that still their goal?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I have a tough enough time sometimes answering questions on U.S. foreign policy. Turkey, even though I spent 9 years there, is even more difficult, but I do not believe that that is the official policy of the Turkish Government. What I can assure you is the Turkish Government sees existential dangers coming from multiple sources within Syria, and one of them is certainly the current Syrian Government.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I believe it had been a cardinal part of their policy vis—vis Syria. In fact, it was a bit of a bone of contention between us and Turkey. But all right. You said multiple concerns. One of those concerns is the role of the Kurds, our allies, militarily, in trying to win back territory in Syria from folks who were certainly hostile to our Western values and interests. How do we reconcile our relationship with Kurds who have fought and won on Syrian territory with the Turks' concern—and I mean active concern because they put troops into Syria, not to overthrow Assad as much as to counter the Kurdish influence, our ally. How do we reconcile that difference?

Ambassador JEFFREY. The Turks have actually used troops against the regime. They used it against ISIS, and they have used it against the Kurds in Afrin. But first of all, it is——

Mr. CONNOLLY. Excuse me. I wasn't denying that. I was pointing out they actually introduced troops for this specific purpose. I didn't mean to say there weren't other purposes but that is how seriously they take it.

Ambassador JEFFREY. The Turks are very concerned about this. We understand this because there are various ties between some of the Kurdish organizations that we deal with, specifically the PYD, YPG, which is an element of the SDF, the Syrian Democratic Forces, which is the military partner that we are working with against ISIS, and we understand and have daily exchanges with the Turks on this. Most importantly, we have a major activity with the Turks going on in the Manbij region to the west of the Euphrates, where we are working to encourage the PYD and the YPG to leave that area, and that is proceeding I think all in all quite well with the Turks. We have other concerns with them. But, again, our relationship with not just the specific Kurdish party but other parties are tactical and transformational—not transformational, but tactical and temporary in order to secure a goal that we both share, and many others do, which is the defeat of ISIS. We are not picking winners and losers in terms of any political movements inside Syria. The way we will try to help all Syrians, whether they are in the northeast or elsewhere, is to find a political process that allows a better government, democratic elections, and peace that everybody can profit from. It is just like we work with groups such as the Kurdish KDP in the Shia Arab Islamic Revolution before 2003 in Iraq. But when we went into Iraq, we didn't support that political party or this political party. We just tried to work with all Iraqis to help provide a constitutional democratic system, and this

is what we are working in the international community to do for all Syrians.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well, thank you. My time is up. I would just say one must be very careful about preserving the integrity and good name of the United States. It is one thing to decide that we are not taking political sides; it is another to abandon an ally that put blood on the table when they were the only ones willing to do it. And the Kurds fought and won territory. And it is a fine line between saying, well, once we get the peace, you are a party at the table, but you are not the only party or a favorite party; and it is quite another to actually abandon them because of outside pressure from another country with a different agenda.

Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTENIN. Thank you, Mr. Connolly. Thank you so much.

Now we are pleased to hear from Ambassador Wagner.

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Jenkins, as you noted, conflict situations put women and girls at a much higher risk of violence and exploitation. I appreciate the ways in which USAID is working to protect this vulnerable population.

What challenges has USAID come across in its work to prevent gender-based violence, and how can Congress help you overcome these issues?

Mr. JENKINS. Thank you very much for your question. And, yes, sadly, it is a fact of modern warfare that the victims that are hurt the most are women and children. And the crisis that we are looking at and talking about right now in Syria, many could say it is a protection crisis for all of the vulnerable people, IDPs, multiple times over, the number of widows and orphans is astounding in that population. And we are very dedicated to making sure that every one of our humanitarian assistance programs integrates protection for women and children into those—that program.

But also, last year, we spent about almost \$28 million on programming specifically to protect women and children. Sometimes it is as simple as creating safe spaces for women and girls to be alone and away from other parts of the community, involves training healthcare workers, training educators, training teachers for the—what to look out for for people that might be victims of sexually-based violence; it is working with healthcare workers on how you treat someone who has been a victim of specially—of sexually-based violence and actually the provision of different equipment and materials for that.

One of the challenges that we have had in this sector is there—a lack of people that are Syrian in Syria who have been trained to handle these sorts of issues before. So because almost everyone—I would like to stress this—

Mrs. WAGNER. The training would be some way the Congress could in terms of resources and such in this arena?

Mr. JENKINS. Well, we are very thankful for the resources that Congress has given and continues to give us to allow these programs to happen. It is not necessarily something that money can solve.

Mrs. WAGNER. Right.

Mr. JENKINS. It is a time issue, and it is about just not having enough people trained in Syria that have those skills. Over time, we have been able to build a base for that, but I am happy to ask my team and see if there is any actual acts that they have that need help.

Mrs. WAGNER. Please do. Please do. We would be most interested.

Ambassador Jeffrey, the United States cannot be implicit in supporting the murderous Assad regime. How do we approach supporting civil society and the many people in the opposition across the country if we restrict our stabilization funding?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Once again, we believe in stabilization programs where we have our own forces on the ground, just as we believe in humanitarian assistance, which we have, not just for people outside of Syria, but also I think in 14 provinces. We have various partners that deliver aid, so various kinds of aid are underway.

The specific issue of stabilization funding. The President took the decision, and I support that decision, of course, to try to get other countries to provide funding to reinforce what we are doing on the ground in the fight against ISIS where we bear 99 percent of the on-the-ground Syrian combat role, our advisory role, and we have been fairly successful so far. We have collected about \$300 million in the last 9 months. That money is now being deployed by teams—

Mrs. WAGNER. Good.

Ambassador JEFFREY [continuing]. That Mr. Jenkins and I are working with, and we will be trying to find further funding from the international community, which has as much of an interest in peace in Syria as we do.

Mrs. WAGNER. Speaking of the international community, I understand that the alternate peace talks that Russia, Iran, and Turkey are hosting in Astana are a source of consternation to those of us who wish to see the unbrokered talks succeed.

Ambassador Jeffrey, can the United States leverage its relationship with Turkey, a NATO ally, to ensure that real peace is achieved?

Ambassador JEFFREY. We think we can. You are referring to the Astana meeting that just failed early today. It failed in good part because Turkey would not yield to pressure from Iran and Russia to go along with essentially Damascus' vision of how the political process should end.

Where we disagree with Turkey is we don't think that this particular format, the Astana format, that brings these three countries in as brokers between the UN—

Mrs. WAGNER. Right.

Ambassador JEFFREY [continuing]. And the real audience of the UN in the resolution which says, UN, you talk to the opposition, you talk to the Damascus regime, and you work out a peace settlement. This Astana process has inserted itself between the two. We went along with that, we in the international community, for a year. It has failed. Russia signed up at the Presidential level in our last month to form this constitutional committee by the end of De-

ember. It does not look like that is going to happen now. It is time to move on, and I agree with you.

Mrs. WAGNER. It is time to move on. Thank you.

I have run out of time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Madam Ambassador. Good questions.

Mr. Schneider of Illinois.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you very much, and thanks to both of you for joining us today.

I have said this before here, as I look at Syria, there are three pillars of our interest there: Humanitarian, security, and strategic. Mr. Jenkins, your work on the humanitarian side, 11 million people displaced, 5 million people provided medical care. Your words where you say—I am going to quote you—whatever it takes to get the job done, is very much appreciated by us, and I hope the rest of the world has a chance to see what we are doing in that respect.

But I am going to turn to you, Ambassador Jeffrey, and you talked about Iran—and we have raised the issue of Hezbollah and IRGC and other proxies, and you said it was an umbrella of which Hezbollah is at the top of the list. How big is that umbrella? Besides Hezbollah, what other groups are of major concern? Who should we have on our radar?

Ambassador JEFFREY. First of all, all outside groups who are commanded by Iran and are supporting the Assad regime are of concern to us and to most of the Syrian people and to most of the neighborhood. But you have certain groups that have come in, Hazara groups from Afghanistan, other groups from Central Asia. You have certain Iraqi militias who have been active in the fighting, and Iran has recruited some Syrians as well. But the bulk of the people are from outside.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. These militias that are taking their orders from IRGC, from Hezbollah, what is the commanding control?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Ultimately, it is the Quds Force under Qasem Soleimani. And I want to emphasize, these people are outside of the chain of command of even the Syrian Government, bad as it is. The Russians work through the Syrian Government and through the regular army and normal institutions. The Iranians, common to their strategy in Iraq, we have seen it in Lebanon, we have seen it in Yemen, try to create parallel institutions that are loyal to and get their orders from Tehran rather than from their own fellow countrymen and own governments. That is another way that they insidiously infiltrate into other states.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Exactly. But I think it is the insidiousness of Iran that makes it such a challenging threat. If you look over the last 2 years, how has Iran's position changed over the last 2 years, and can you cite any strategies we have implemented, any tactics that have successfully diminished their position?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Ending the JCPOA has been a dash of cold water to Iran in all of its efforts through the region in two ways. First of all, it stripped from it its legitimacy as a trusted partner in international affairs and international agreements, at least from our standpoint. Secondly, and most importantly, it has robbed of Iran, particularly with the beginning of the oil sanctions under the

NDAA at the beginning of this month, major sources of finances for Iran to carry out its activities throughout the region.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. But even with that, my understanding is the bases that were destroyed over the summer by Israel have been rebuilt. It was reported this week that Iran continues to invest in indigenous missile manufacturing in Syria and even in Lebanon.

Are they getting stronger? Are they getting weaker? Are we at a status quo?

Ambassador JEFFREY. In my conversations with the Israelis, and I have to be very general here, the Israelis are committed to doing what it takes to ensure that Iran does not threaten Israel from Syria. We support Israel in this endeavor 100 percent. We have made that clear to the Russians. The Israelis will have to speak to that themselves. When they feel they need to act, I am confident they will act.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I appreciate that, because Iran on Israel's border is an existential threat, but U.S. Forces are north and east of the Euphrates, hundreds of kilometers away. What leverage are we demonstrating? What effective paths have we shown that we can put pressure, exert pressure on Iran to move them away from the border with Golan, to move them away from supporting these proxy militias and getting them out of the country? Do we have any successes so far?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Again, we talked to the Russians about the necessity of achieving the withdrawal of all foreign forces from 2011 on, and while that involves all forces who are now present from the outside other than the Russians who were there before, we have particularly stressed the problem of Iran. At times, the Russians seem to be interested in talking about solutions that would involve the withdrawal of foreign forces. At times, they don't get concrete—

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Let me grab my last few seconds here, because you mentioned earlier in one of the Q&As that the President talked to Mr. Putin in Helsinki. Can you share with us, what did they talk about? What was agreed to vis-a-vis Syria specifically, and more specifically, what we can do to get Iran out of Syria?

Ambassador JEFFREY. The President made clear, essentially, the policies that I have outlined here today.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Are there any notes from that? I know this committee has asked for that information, what was said in Helsinki, what promises were made, what agreements or tentative agreements might have been laid out?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I think I will stay with the President made clear what our policies on Syria are. I don't think any agreements related to Syria came out of that meeting.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Okay. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Schneider. Excellent questions.

And now I am pleased to yield to Mr. LaHood, who is not on our subcommittee but has always been very interested on this issue.

Thank you, Mr. LaHood. You are recognized.

Mr. LAHOOD. Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and I appreciate you granting me a temporary VISA to be here today. And I echo the comments of my colleagues regarding your service here in Con-

gress. Your energy, your voice, your optimism will be missed here in Congress. So thank you for all your work.

Ambassador Jeffrey, I can't tell you how pleased a lot of us were that the President picked you and Secretary Pompeo picked you for the Syrian position for Syrian engagement. I think it brings a lot of credibility to the issue, so thank you for your service on this.

I want to just talk a little bit or get your thoughts on Lebanon. Obviously, there are so many intertwining political and security issues that relate to Lebanon. I look on the positive side in Lebanon. We just had free and fair elections in May with a new election law that was free of controversy, no protests. We had a Cedar conference that pledged \$12 billion to Lebanon, which is positive. The LAF continues to cooperate with American forces and American intelligence, and it has been seamless with General Aoun in charge of the Lebanese forces. Obviously, I think we have one of the best ambassadors in the world there with Ambassador Richard, and so those are the positive things.

However, I look at the concerns and the challenges in Lebanon. Can't form a government after 7 months now. We have over 1 million refugees in Lebanon from Syria that continue to put stress and anxiety and uneasiness on the Lebanese infrastructure, everything from education to transportation to the government. Obviously, Hezbollah continues to flex its muscle in Lebanon. It is part of the reason we have not been able to form a government there, and that concerns me. And then also the pawn that Lebanon plays between the Sunni-Shia chess game in the Middle East.

But I would be curious on your thoughts on the relationship, particularly on the refugees. I know we have started to see some refugees go back, but hasn't been fulfilled to the level we need there.

Ambassador JEFFREY. Thank you very much, and welcome to the subcommittee, Mr. Congressman.

I am in agreement with acting assistant secretary and good friend David Satterfield to only talk about Syria, so I have to be careful in talking about Lebanon. Now let me talk about Lebanon, and I will do it from the standpoint of my focus in Syria, much of which is Iran.

The two major problems you cited of all three, Sunni-Shia conflict, Hezbollah, and refugees, I see Iran flashing before my eyes when you mention all three of them. Lebanon is a victim of Iran's encroachment throughout the Arab world as much as Syria is, although not to the same horrific degree, just as Lebanon previously was a victim of Syria's aggression as Syria was more expansionist than it is today because it has been tied up in a civil conflict, but tomorrow it could be back doing the same sort of thing.

So we have—and when I look at Lebanon, I see a Syria-Iran problem. That is simplifying things, but again, I have to keep my Syria focus level. If we can fix Syria and fix the Iranian expansionism, we are in a much better place with Lebanon.

In terms of the refugees, our position is clear. We do want refugees to go home, but refugee return has to be voluntary, it has to be safe, it has to be dignified, and they have to go back to areas where we believe in getting information from the UNHCR and others and putting that all together are safe for them to go back to. There is very little of that in Syria, particularly in the Assad-held

areas. These people, in many cases, want to go back to their homes, but they do not want to live under Assad's tyranny. That is the underlying problem.

Mr. LAHOOD. Can you just elaborate a little bit further on that, the de-escalation zones or proposed de-escalation zones, what is your opinion on whether they are safe? And it seems to be that the hurdles and the hoops to go through to bring these refugees out of Lebanon back, you know, seem unattainable at this point. But maybe comment a little bit about the de-escalation zones and whether those are possible to bring people back.

Ambassador JEFFREY. Certainly. The de-escalation—there is only one de-escalation zone left, which is Idlib. But the areas where the Turks are in the northeast of the country have seen a certain return of refugees to the tune of some tens of thousands over the past 6 months to a year. We have seen a smaller return of refugees to the northeast where we are. And again, there has been some return of our refugees into Assad-held areas. But of the something like 5½ million refugees who have left Syria, we have only seen in the tens of thousands return to Assad. So people are voting with their feet, specifically not moving with their feet.

Mr. LAHOOD. Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair, for your courtesy and flexibility in letting me been here. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. LaHood.

I have one question, if I could, for Mr. Jenkins. In my opening remarks, I mentioned the recent diversion of U.S. Humanitarian assistance to terrorist groups in Syria's northwest area. And I would like to give you an opportunity to explain exactly what happened and what was USAID's response to this incident and others we have heard about. What is the status of our humanitarian aid programs there?

And I totally understand this is a war zone. You are trying to deliver humanitarian aid. This is not the best situation. So I don't want you to think that we are second-guessing, but there is some concern about it going to the very people we want to defeat.

Mr. JENKINS. Well, thank you for that, and thank you for your understanding, but we welcome the second-guessing because it is a difficult situation, and we need everyone from Congress to our State Department and other AID colleagues.

You mentioned our Office of Inspector General and the reporting they did this year. You mentioned the fiscal year 2016 GAO report. All of that is helpful for us because we need as much help as we can working with our partners to double down and do everything we can. And we are committed to doing this, doing everything we can to prevent fraud, waste, abuse, and diversion of U.S. Taxpayer dollars. We have a zero tolerance policy. There is no acceptable amount of diversion as a cost of doing business. We don't go there.

So if you would look at what happened, which you were referencing in your statement, it was actually—it is very illustrative. It was our third-party monitors paid for USAID's third-party monitors that originally found what we thought was possible fraud.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Just to clear that up, the third-party monitors means that you contract with—

Mr. JENKINS. A group that its only job is to look at our other partners and find out if they are doing their job the right way. We also have our partners themselves——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Just to be clear.

Mr. JENKINS. Yeah.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And those groups would be Syria-based with Syrians, Syrians controlling it, or outside folks and they control it?

Mr. JENKINS. Those are——

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen. Is it a UN organization or who—give me a sense of who those third parties would be.

Mr. JENKINS. In this case, it is a third-party—it is a contractor who has a contract. They are all Syrians inside the country. One of the challenges about Syria is all of these people are inside and we are forbidden from getting in and actually looking at it. So what we tend to do is try to triangulate and put as many different levels of different eyes on the situation as possible, so if someone misses it, someone else catches it.

Our partners themselves have their own third-party monitors as well. So what happened about a year ago is one of these third-party monitors thought that there was a problem that HTS was diverting or getting USAID assistance. They reported it to the NGO, to us, and to the IG, inspector general, all at the same time. By February, we found out that things actually were happening, and we immediately suspended and ended those programs.

Now, in the northwest, that is—we now have three. That was one of the three programs that we have suspended. We do not wait for the IG to come back with their findings. We immediately suspend while people investigate.

What we have now put in place over the course of 7 years as we have had to deal with different iterations in this difficult kinetic environment is we now have the most comprehensive, rigorous, detailed mitigation mechanisms, mitigation measures, and safeguards in place than we do anywhere else in the world. And every time one of these unfortunate incidents comes to light, we use that to inform all of our other partners on how we have to up our game yet again.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Those are comforting words, and we realize how difficult it is, but we have got to give the American people a sense that their tax dollars are being used always in the right way. And I am glad you say there is not a little line that you write off the cost of doing business. That is not acceptable.

Mr. JENKINS. Never. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Jenkins.

Mr. Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thanks.

Mr. Jenkins, I will also—just to finish up with you, we have had this hearing, and we talk about Iran and we talked about Russia and Iran's proxies and the various ways that we are trying to figure out how Iran can get pushed out. Can you just take a step back for a second?

You gave us some statistics, over 11 million people who fled or have been internally displaced. Can you take a step back further and just remind us, and for the members of this committee, for the

American people, what Saddam—what Assad has wrought on his people, the overall toll that this has taken on the country?

Mr. JENKINS. Thank you. You just want to see me cry again.

Mr. DEUTCH. No, Mr. Jenkins, you know, I would like—I don't—I am not saying this is what it takes, but I would like more people to be more emotional about what is happening in Syria. That is what I would like.

Mr. JENKINS. So I am from Pasadena, California. The Rose Bowl's a big deal there. Fill the Rose Bowl five times, kill everybody. That is at least how many people have died. At least 500,000 people.

Think about what it is to have 11.3 million people displaced, many of them many times. 5.6 of those made the very difficult decision to leave the country and become refugees, right. We are talking about all the people of New York City and all the people of Chicago displaced probably forever.

I met with two amazing, courageous doctors who were married a few weeks ago. Some of you probably met them at the Syrian-American Medical Society, the last two doctors left in Aleppo who got out barely with their lives and their 12-year-old daughter. They could have left. In fact, they come here to talk to us, but they choose to go back. And they are working in Idlib now, and they are afraid they don't have a way to take their daughter out if they have to get out.

So they are there, taking their own blood in the middle of—because there is not enough blood for patients during surgeries, so the doctors and the nurses are doing their own transfusions. That is terrible. And when we look at why do we take the risk that there might be diversions, it is because that situation is exactly where the United States Government should be spending, spending wisely, U.S. Taxpayers' dollars as an extension of our values, as extension of our principles, and because it is the right thing to do. Thank you.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Jenkins, the work that you and your colleagues do is the manifestation of those values, and we are grateful for it.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you.

And I will just say in closing, as chairman of this subcommittee for the past 6 years, it has broken my heart, it has broken Mr. Deutch's heart, to see what has happened in Syria. We have seen this unfold. And with this hearing, the last that I will hold on Syria, I know that the oversight of our policy will be in more able hands. And the pressure on you and the responsibility on you is enormous, and I hope that you carry that weight with you and that heart with you and make all the right decisions for all the right reasons.

And I encourage all of our colleagues, we both do, to give the attention to Syria that it deserves. Syria is too important, and we have got to use every tool at our disposal to achieve an enduring defeat of ISIS, to get Iranian forces out of Syria, and finally, give the Syrian people the peace that they deserve, the democracy that they deserve, the freedom that they deserve without Assad, and may it happen. And thank you so much.

Thank you, Mr. Deutch.

And with that, our subcommittee is adjourned. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

[Whereupon, at 3:30 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
Heena Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman

November 21, 2018

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at <http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov>).

DATE: Thursday, November 29, 2018

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: U.S. Policy Toward Syria (Part II)

WITNESSES: The Honorable James F. Jeffrey
Special Representative for Syria Engagement
U.S. Department of State

Mr. Robert Jenkins
Deputy Assistant Administrator
Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance
U.S. Agency for International Development

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5921 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON the Middle East and North Africa HEARING

Day Thursday Date 11/29/18 Room 2172

Starting Time 2:05 pm Ending Time 3:28 pm

Recesses ☐ (to) (to) (to) (to) (to) (to)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

U.S. Policy Toward Syria (Part II)

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

GOP: Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Reps. Kinzinger, Zeldin, Wagner, Curtis, Fitzpatrick

Dem: Ranking Member Deutch, Reps. Schneider, Connolly

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

Rep. LaHood

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

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

Letter Submitted by Ranking Member Deutch

Questions for the Record Submitted by Chairman Heana Ros-Lehtinen and Rep. Chabot

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE

or

TIME ADJOURNED 3:28 pm

Antoine Daneshmand
Subcommittee Staff Associate

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY THE HONORABLE THEODORE E. DEUTCH,
A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF FLORIDA



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable
Ted Deutch
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

SEP 24 2018

Dear Mr. Deutch:

Thank you for your letter dated August 10 regarding the State Department's review of stabilization in Syria. This Administration is committed to the enduring defeat of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), rooting out its remaining havens, and ensuring ISIS cannot return. To date, U.S. and Coalition forces have successfully cleared ISIS from approximately 99 percent of the territory it once controlled in Syria and Iraq and have prevented the terrorist organization from being able to launch external attacks, including on the United States. However, our job is not done. Our continued support for stabilization assistance, successful efforts to encourage Coalition burden-sharing to secure the lasting defeat of ISIS, and decision to bring on board two additional senior Department officials to advance our Syria policy underscore our commitment to these priorities.

Since April, members of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS have pledged approximately \$300 million to support stabilization and early recovery efforts in northeast Syria, a portion of which will be implemented by the U.S. Government through the Department of State and USAID. These contributions come from a variety of partners, including Australia, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Kuwait, Norway, Taiwan, the UAE, the United Kingdom, and Saudi Arabia. Funding contributions will allow stabilization assistance, including explosive remnants of war removal, the restoration of essential services, and efforts to build local capacity to support sustainability to continue at pace in liberated areas of northeast Syria.

These contributions allowed Secretary Pompeo to authorize the reprogramming of approximately \$230 million in stabilization funds for Syria, which have been under review. This decision was made by the Secretary, in consultation with the White House, and took into account the already significant military and financial contributions made by the United States to date, the President's guidance on the need to increase the contributions of allies and partners, and significant new pledges made by Coalition partners. In consultation with Congress, the State Department will redirect these funds to support other key initiatives.

The Secretary has also directed the transition of certain U.S. assistance efforts in northwest Syria over recent months to enhance our focus on stabilizing areas liberated from ISIS in northeast Syria. We remain committed to countering ISIS and al-Qa'ida, in Syria and elsewhere, and we continue to work with our international coalition partners in support of that mission. Additionally, we will continue to provide life-saving, needs based, humanitarian assistance to vulnerable Syrians, including those in northwest Syria.

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The President has been clear that we are prepared to remain in Syria until the enduring defeat of ISIS, and we remain focused on ensuring the withdrawal of Iranian forces and their proxies. We believe that neither of these events will happen without irreversible progress toward a political resolution of the conflict in accordance with UNSCR 2254. With the recent additions of Ambassador Jim Jeffrey and Deputy Assistant Secretary and Syria Special Envoy Joel Rayburn leading the Department's efforts to advance a solution the conflict in Syria, we feel confident in our ability to move forward on these and other important Administration priorities in Syria.

We hope this information has been helpful to you. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance on this or any other matter.

Sincerely,



Charles S. Faulkner
Acting Assistant Secretary
Legislative Affairs