

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

CATHLEEN COLVIN *et al.*,

Plaintiffs,

v.

SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC,

Defendant.

Civil No. 1:16-cv-01423 (ABJ)

EXPERT REPORT OF AMBASSADOR ROBERT STEPHEN FORD

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I, Robert Stephen Ford, hereby declare pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746 as follows:

I. Introduction

1. I am the former Ambassador of the United States to the Syrian Arab Republic (“Syria”) and currently a Kissinger Fellow at Yale University’s Jackson Institute for Global Affairs. I have been asked by Plaintiffs in this litigation to provide an expert opinion on a number of topics concerning the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (the “Assad Regime” or “Regime”) and its governance in Syria following the March 2011 anti-government uprising. I understand that my opinion will serve as context for the conditions that existed in Syria at the time of Marie Colvin’s death on February 22, 2012. I reserve the right to amend and/or supplement the analysis and conclusions contained in this report. My qualifications, instructions, summary of opinions, and basis for expertise are set forth in greater detail below.

a. Qualifications

2. This Report is informed by my academic background, my three-decade-long career as a Foreign Service Officer, and the time I spent living in the Middle East and North Africa, including as the U.S. Ambassador to Syria. Collectively, and as detailed further below, these experiences qualify me to opine on the political, social, and cultural landscape within Syria and the surrounding region.

3. I received my Bachelor of Arts in International Relations from Johns Hopkins University in 1980. In 1983, I obtained a Master of Arts in International Studies from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. I then moved to Cairo, Egypt, where I studied Arabic at the American University of Cairo and subsequently served as a member of the U.S. Peace Corps in Morocco. I joined the U.S. Foreign Service in 1986 as an Economic and Consular Officer in Turkey. I then spent the next 20 years in various diplomatic roles at U.S. Embassies in Bahrain, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, and Cameroon. I served as the U.S. Ambassador to

Algeria from 2006 to 2008 before serving as the Deputy U.S. Ambassador to Iraq from 2008 to 2010.

4. In 2011, I was appointed U.S. Ambassador to Syria and remained in this role until I left the Foreign Service in 2014. As Ambassador, I was based in Damascus for an extended period from shortly after my recess appointment in December 2010 until the U.S. government closed the Embassy in February 2012. From 2012 to 2014, I remained the U.S. Ambassador to Syria, but was based in Washington D.C., where I maintained an office in the State Department's Front Office. I ultimately left the State Department in April 2014. Since July 2014, I have been a Senior Fellow at the Middle East Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based think-tank. In 2015, I became a Kissinger Fellow at Yale University.

5. Attached as Appendix A is my *curriculum vitae*, which contains additional details about my background, including a list of my publications from the last ten years. I have never previously testified as an expert witness.

b. Instructions

6. Plaintiffs have requested that I opine on the following three topics:

- i. The origins of the Assad Regime's power and the means by which it maintains its authority and control;
- ii. The nature and context of the Assad Regime's response to the March 2011 anti-government uprising in Syria; and
- iii. The Assad Regime's efforts to control the narrative of the conflict that unfolded in Syria after the outbreak of protests in March 2011.

7. I am not being compensated for my work as an expert witness in this case, but will be reimbursed for reasonable travel and out-of-pocket expenses incurred while fulfilling my role as an expert.

c. Summary of Opinions

8. My conclusions on the three topics I was asked to address are as follows:

- i. **The Assad Regime's Origins and Means of Maintaining Authority and Control:** Since assuming power, the Assad Regime has ruled Syria through an extensive and highly centralized military, security, and intelligence system backed by informal networks of supporters. In Section II of this Report, I provide a brief historical account of the Assad family's ascent to power. I also describe how the Assad Regime under President Bashar al-Assad has employed the intelligence agencies, military, and paramilitary forces to exert control over the country and destroy threats to its rule. Finally, I explain how the Assad Regime maintains its authority and control through the use of domestic and foreign alliances and kinship networks.
- ii. **The Assad Regime's Response to the March 2011 Anti-Government Uprising in Syria:** President Assad responded to the outbreak of protests in March 2011 by instituting a violent crackdown against the civil opposition through mobilization of military, intelligence, and security forces. The Assad Regime's *modus operandi* included the disappearing, torture, and killing of civilians in an effort to stop the country-wide opposition. In Section III, I provide an overview of the protest movement—commonly referred to as the “Arab Spring”—that spread across the Middle East and served as the precursor to the civil unrest in Syria. I also explain the evolution of the opposition movement in Syria from one of sporadic protests to one of organized opposition. Finally, I offer my conclusions regarding the measures undertaken by the Assad Regime to quell political opposition, namely its use of force against civilians.
- iii. **The Assad Regime's Efforts to Control the Narrative:** In conjunction with its attempts to subdue the protests, the Assad Regime sought to control the nature and scope of information disseminated about the conflict and the Regime's response to the civil unrest. In Section IV, I assess the various means employed by the Assad Regime to promote a false narrative and to restrict the free flow of information, which included the repression of journalists, like Marie Colvin. I further address the widespread international condemnation of the Assad Regime's actions.

d. Basis for Expertise

9. In preparing this Report, I have relied on my extensive educational and professional background, my firsthand experiences and observations while serving as U.S. Ambassador to Syria, and my review of the sources cited herein.

10. As U.S. Ambassador, I received extensive briefings and information on the situation throughout the country and was well placed to make my own observations prior to the closure of the U.S. Embassy in Damascus in February 2012. I interacted with countless Syrians, including writers, activists, businesspeople, lawyers, parliamentarians, and former ministers, as well as foreign ambassadors working in Damascus and Beirut. Indeed, many of these individuals became sources of information for the Embassy, and I remained in contact with many of them after leaving Syria. Also, until President Barack Obama called for President Assad to step aside in August 2011, I regularly met with Regime officials, including President Assad himself on two occasions, and more frequently with his close advisors, including the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Walid al-Muallem, and General Nasif Kheirbek. At these meetings, we discussed issues that were important to the United States, including the growing protest movement and the Assad Regime's treatment of protestors. Finally, before leaving the Foreign Service, I had access to classified and unclassified intelligence, including information regarding the Assad Regime.¹ The consultation of such sources is an accepted and widely used method of research and analysis in the Foreign Service and in the academic study of political and international relations. An index of all the materials cited in this Report is appended hereto as **Appendix B**; I exhibit all of the cited materials that are not publicly available.

II. The Assad Regime's Origins and Means of Maintaining Authority and Control

11. Since its origins in the 1970s, the Assad Regime has formed Syria into a centralized police state. This section addresses the Assad family's rise to power and how, under President Bashar al-Assad, the Regime has cultivated and employed intelligence agencies,

¹ None of the information provided in this Report is classified.

military and paramilitary forces, and domestic and foreign alliances to exert control over the country and destroy threats to its rule.

a. Historical Background

12. On November 13, 1970, Hafez al-Assad, Bashar's father, led a successful coup against the government of Syria, taking control of the governing Socialist Arab Baath ("Baath") party and ushering in close to half a century of dictatorship that continues today.² Hafez, whose family hails from Qardaha, a rural Alawite village in the mountain region overlooking the coastal city of Latakia, was an officer in the Syrian Air Force. As part of the inner circle of plotters behind the 1970 coup against the government, Hafez was able to consolidate his influence among the nation's most powerful military officers and secure his seat, in 1971, as Syria's new president.³ Once in power, he ruled through a new, monolithic, one-party state, rewarding loyalty and crushing dissent. This one-party state was formalized in 1973, when the Syrian Constitution was amended to designate the Baath party as the "leading party in the society and the state[.]"⁴

13. In the late 1970s, opposition to Hafez al-Assad's rule grew. Wary of the possibility of unrest, Hafez Al-Assad's brother and top military commander, Rifaat, delivered a masked threat to potential dissenters at the Baath party's seventh regional Congress:

² Robert M. Danin, *Remembering Hafez al-Assad*, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS (Nov. 11, 2011), <http://blogs.cfr.org/danin/2011/11/11/remembering-hafez-al-assad/>; *A Wasted Decade: Human Rights in Syria during Bashar al-Asad's First Ten Years in Power*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (July 16, 2010), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/07/16/wasted-decade/human-rights-syria-during-bashar-al-asads-first-ten-years-power>.

³ Danin, *supra* note 2; Neil MacFarquhar, *Hafez al-Assad, Who Turned Syria into a Power in the Middle East, Dies at 69*, N.Y. TIMES (June 11, 2000), <https://nyti.ms/2kdStww>.

⁴ *The Syrian Constitution - 1973-2012*, CARNEGIE MIDDLE EAST CENTER (Dec. 5, 2012), <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/50255?lang=en>; Fares Qais, *The Syrian Constitution: Assad's Magic Wand*, CARNEGIE MIDDLE EAST CENTER (May 8, 2014), <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/55541?lang=en>.

The leader decides, the party approves, and the people applaud. This is how socialism in the Soviet Union works. Anyone who does not applaud is sent to Siberia.⁵

14. Hafez al-Assad's regime made good on its warning three years later, when, in 1982, Hafez ordered his brother Rifaat to respond to growing opposition in the Syrian city of Hama. In what would become known as the "Hama massacre," Syrian security forces stormed the city in February 1982, killing over 10,000 civilians.⁶

15. The 1980s witnessed the instrumentalization of state terror by Hafez al-Assad's regime against the general population. The security state systematically used torture and other methods of coercion to quash all forms of opposition.⁷ During the late 1970s and 1980s, the government also aligned itself with Iran and provided arms to anti-Israeli groups, becoming an ardent sponsor of international terrorism and providing material support to various foreign

⁵ MICHEL SEURAT, SYRIE, L'ETAT DE BARBARIE [SYRIA, THE BARBARIC STATE] 59, (Presses Universitaires de France, 1989), Ex. 2 ("Rif'at al-Assad attachait une importance toute particulière au déroulement des élections des délégués au congrès, au niveau des différentes « divisions » (*shu'ba*). À la *shu'ba* de la place des Abbassides, à Damas, il devait, à l'occasion, définir ainsi devant les militants ses conceptions politiques, en référence à son modèle théorique : « Le Chef désigne, le Parti approuve et le peuple applaudit. Ainsi fonctionne le socialisme en Union soviétique. Celui qui n'applaudit pas va en Sibérie. »") [(“Rif’at al-Assad attached a very particular importance to the conduct of the elections of the congressional delegates at the level of the different ‘divisions’ (*shu'ba*). At the *shu'ba* in Abbassid Square in Damascus, he is said, on occasion, to have defined before the militants his political conceptions by reference to his theoretical model thus: ‘The leader decides, the party approves, and the people applaud. This is how socialism in the Soviet Union works. Anyone who does not applaud is sent to Siberia.’”)]. Michel Seurat, a French journalist and scholar who had been covering Syria since 1978 for the French newspaper *Le Monde Diplomatique*, was abducted in 1985 by a terrorist group affiliated with Hizballah and Hafez al-Assad's regime. In 1986, he was murdered while being held as a hostage. His body was discovered in 2012, buried in Beirut's southern suburbs, a Hizballah stronghold.

⁶ Bill Rugh, *Syria: The Hama Massacre*, MIDDLE EAST POLICY COUNCIL (Feb. 26, 2015), <http://www.mepc.org/articles-commentary/commentary/syria-hama-massacre>; *30 Years Later, Photos Emerge from Killings in Syria*, NPR (Feb. 2, 2012), <http://www.npr.org/2012/02/01/146235292/30-years-later-photos-emerge-from-killings-in-syria>.

⁷ *30 Years Later, Photos Emerge from Killings in Syria*, *supra* note 6.

terrorist organizations, most notably Hizballah.⁸ In response, the United States formally designated Syria a state sponsor of terrorism on December 29, 1979 and has maintained that designation ever since, pursuing a policy of sanctions.⁹

16. Following the death of Bashar al-Assad's older brother in 1994, it became clear that Bashar, an ophthalmologist who had been practicing in London, would succeed his father as President of Syria.¹⁰ After Hafez's death in 2000, Bashar assumed control.¹¹

b. Power Through Control

17. The Assad Regime exercises its power through control of an elaborate web of intelligence agencies (the *mukhabarat*), its military forces, and an informal paramilitary organization (the *shabiha*), as well as through political means. I describe each of these means of control below.

⁸ Holly Fletcher, *State Sponsor: Syria*, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS (Feb. 1, 2008), <http://www.cfr.org/syria/state-sponsor-syria/p9368>.

⁹ U.S. Dep't of State, *State Sponsors of Terrorism*, <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/list/c14151.htm>. See also 45 Fed. Reg. 33,956 (May 21, 1980). Additionally, on May 11, 2004, the President issued Executive Order 13338, declaring a national emergency to address the threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States posed by the Syrian government's support of terrorism. The United States has since then promulgated a comprehensive sanctions program to address the Assad regime's sponsorship of terrorism and, since April 29, 2011, its commission of human rights abuses against the people of Syria. See Dep't of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control, *Syria Sanctions Program*, Updated August 2, 2013, <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/syria.pdf>.

¹⁰ Roula Khalaf, *Bashar al-Assad: Behind the Mask*, THE FINANCIAL TIMES (June 15, 2012), <https://www.ft.com/content/669da3aa-b5b5-11e1-ab92-00144feabdc0>; Neil Quilliam, *Hands of Power: The Rise of Syria's Assad Family*, CHATHAM HOUSE (Nov. 4, 2015), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/hands-power-rise-syrias-assad-family>; *How Syria's 'Geeky' President Assad Went From Doctor to Dictator*, NBC NEWS (Oct. 30, 2015), <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/syria-peace-talks/how-syrias-geeky-president-assad-went-doctor-dictator-n453871>.

¹¹ Quilliam, *supra* note 10; *How Syria's 'Geeky' President Assad Went From Doctor to Dictator*, *supra* note 10.

i. The *Mukhabarat*

18. The formal Syrian security apparatus is composed of four main intelligence agencies, all of which report directly to President Assad: the Air Force Intelligence Directorate, the General Intelligence Directorate, the Political Security Department, and the Military Intelligence Department. These agencies are collectively referred to as the *mukhabarat* (“intelligence” in Arabic), a term not lightly invoked by Syrians in ordinary conversation due to the fear associated with these agencies.¹² Together, they form the backbone of the police state. Historically trained by the East German *stasi*, the *mukhabarat* maintain networks of informants that infiltrate every domain of Syrian life.¹³ They also maintain advanced surveillance systems allowing for nation-wide monitoring of substantially all internet, telephone, mobile, and satellite communications.¹⁴ Through intimidation, imprisonment, forced disappearances, and the killing of opponents, the *mukhabarat* seeks to eliminate all threats to the Assad Regime.¹⁵

¹² *Syrians Talk of a Country Held Back by Fear*, CNN (Mar. 30, 2011), <http://www.cnn.com/2011/OPINION/03/30/bohn.syria.al.assad/index.html>.

¹³ *Who’s Who in the Battle for Syria*, NPR (June 11, 2012), <http://www.npr.org/2012/06/11/154773995/whos-who-in-the-battle-for-syria> (interview with Andrew Tabler, Washington Institute for Near East Policy).

¹⁴ *Open Season: Building Syria’s Surveillance State*, PRIVACY INTERNATIONAL (Dec. 2016), https://web.archive.org/web/20161225153952/https://privacyinternational.org/sites/default/files/OpenSeason_0.pdf; see also John W. Parker, *Understanding Putin Through a Middle Eastern Looking Glass*, INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL STRATEGIC STUDIES, 16 (July 2015), <http://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/inss/Strategic-Perspectives-19.pdf> (discussing the Regime’s use of an electronic surveillance system “to pinpoint the coordinates of satellite phones”).

¹⁵ Joseph Holliday, *The Assad Regime: From Counterinsurgency to Civil War*, THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR (Mar. 2013), <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/TheAssadRegime-web.pdf>.

ii. Syrian Armed Forces

19. The Syrian military was historically oriented towards protecting Syria from external threats, most notably potential invasion by Israel.¹⁶ However, it has not engaged in armed hostilities with the State of Israel since the war of 1973, with the exception of some minor border incidents.¹⁷ Instead, the Regime has primarily utilized the Syrian Army to bolster its domestic security apparatus. In particular, the Army's Fourth Armored Division—under the *de facto* command of Bashar's brother, Maher al-Assad—operates as the Regime's top military protection unit against all threats—external and, more importantly, internal.¹⁸ Additionally, the Assad family has relied on the *mukhabarat* to function as Soviet-style commissars ensuring obedience and loyalty within military ranks.

20. Control of the military is centralized directly and indirectly in the President. Under Syria's Constitution, the President is the head of the military¹⁹ and has the power to appoint and remove all senior commanders.²⁰ Further, presidential war and emergency powers are unchecked, and the President's power over the military is virtually unlimited.²¹ In addition to

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Syria Profile - Timeline*, BBC (May 11, 2017), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995>.

¹⁸ Joseph Holliday, *The Syrian Army: Doctrinal Order of Battle*, INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR, 5 (Feb. 15, 2013), <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/SyrianArmy-DocOOB.pdf>.

¹⁹ CONSTITUTION OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC, Feb. 27 2012, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_125885.pdf.

²⁰ *Id.* at art. 106; *see also id.* at art. 114 (“If a grave danger and a situation threatening national unity, the safety and integrity of the territories of the homeland occurs, or prevents state institutions from shouldering their constitutional responsibilities... [the President may] take the quick measures necessitated by these circumstances to face that danger.”).

²¹ Qais, *supra* note 4.

being commander in chief of the armed forces,²² the President wields the power to declare and end states of emergency at his discretion.²³ These powers are not constrained by any other branch of government, either in theory or practice.

iii. The *Shabiha*

21. The Assad Regime also exercises its control through an informal network of supporters commonly referred to as the *shabiha* (“ghosts” in Arabic). Originally associated with the al-Murtada, a Latakia-based religious organization of the Alawite sect (the religious sect to which the Assad family belongs), the *shabiha* arose in the late 1970s as a loosely connected group of smugglers who cooperated with the security services.²⁴ By the time the revolution broke out in 2011, the *shabiha* had taken on a new paramilitary function that became instrumental in the Regime’s crackdown on opponents.²⁵

22. Members of the Assad family have reportedly played a leading role in directing these activities.²⁶ According to one former ally of the Assad Regime, Maher al-Assad and Rami Makhlouf, Assad’s cousin, ordered the group to kill opposition activists and provided arms, funding, and personnel (including criminals released from Syria’s “death row”) for this very

²² CONSTITUTION OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC, at art. 105.

²³ *Id.* at art. 103.

²⁴ Andrew Chapman, *Defining and Dangerous? An Examination of the Assad Regime’s Use of the Shabiha Militia in the Syrian Conflict*, 1 CISED YEARBOOK OF GLOBAL STUDIES 1, 101 (June 2014), <https://www.soas.ac.uk/cisd/research/cisd-yearbook-of-global-studies/file114701.pdf>.

²⁵ Holliday, *supra* note 15.

²⁶ Salwa Amor and Ruth Sherlock, *How Bashar al-Assad Created the Feared Shabiha Militia: An Insider Speaks*, THE TELEGRAPH (Mar. 23, 2014), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10716289/How-Bashar-al-Assad-created-the-feared-shabiha-militia-an-insider-speaks.html>.

purpose.²⁷ Through such tactics, the *shabiha* quickly became an effective and swift tool of state repression.²⁸

23. I experienced these tactics firsthand in July 2011. Following a trip that I took to the Syrian city of Hama, members of the *shabiha*, along with other pro-government demonstrators whom we understood were organized by the Assad Regime, stormed the U.S. Embassy, severely damaging its security windows and doors.²⁹ Despite frantic phone calls to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Interior, the Assad Regime was slow to send assistance. When they did arrive, the police watched idly as the demonstrators tore down and burned the American flag and raised the Syrian flag in its place.

iv. The Assad Regime's Political Control

24. Finally, the Assad Regime maintains authority through various political alliances. Through the Baath political party, the Assad Regime wields considerable influence over local community, tribal, and religious networks. As a secular party, the Baath party provides protection to minority groups—particularly the Druze, Isma'ilis, and Christians, not to mention Assad's own Alawite minority.³⁰ In return, these communities have helped solidify Regime rule

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ U.S. Dep't of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, Syria Unrest: December 19 Update [3 RG], 2 (Dec. 19, 2011), **Ex. 14** (discussing the *shabiha*'s role in repression of peaceful protests). "Between December 16 and 18 at least 78 civilians were killed by SARG forces, including 8 children. In the Damascus neighborhood of Midan, activists said that one young girl was shot and killed and one injured by shabiha (government thugs) during a peaceful protest on December 18." *Id.*

²⁹ Nada Bakri, *Crowds in Syria Attack U.S. and French Embassies*, N.Y. TIMES (July 11, 2011), <https://nyti.ms/2DeOZE1>.

³⁰ Shmuel Bar, *Bashar's Syria: The Regime and its Strategic Worldview*, INSTITUTE FOR POLICY AND STRATEGY, 8 (2006), http://www.herzliyaconference.org/_uploads/2590bashars.pdf.

over the years, providing the Assad family with powerful Syrian allies hailing from a diverse base.

25. Syria has also relied heavily on its Shi'a allies in the region, such as Iran and Hizballah, for support. These two allies have played crucial roles in keeping the Regime afloat since 2011.³¹ From an ideological standpoint, Assad has exploited the threat of Sunni jihadists to galvanize support for his Regime.³² This narrative has allowed Assad to frame the current conflict as one between secular people (represented by his Regime), and radical Sunni Islamists (represented by the opposition).

26. Finally, Assad relies on a close network of his own family members to promote and consolidate his power. For example, as the *de facto* commander of Syria's Fourth Armored Division, Maher al-Assad is suspected of issuing orders to attack and kill protestors against the Regime.³³ Rami Makhlouf—Assad's cousin and Syria's most powerful businessman—has been described as the Assad family's banker.³⁴ Talal Makhlouf—another of Assad's cousins—is a general in the Syrian Republican Guard, which is a target of U.S. sanctions due to its human rights abuses. Further, Assef Shawkat, Assad's brother-in-law, was formerly the Head of

³¹ Marisa Sullivan, *Hezbollah in Syria*, INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR (Apr. 2014), http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah_Sullivan_FINAL.pdf.

³² Kathy Gil Sinan, *How Syria's Uprising Spawned a Jihad*, THE ATLANTIC (Mar. 16, 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/03/syria-civil-war-five-years/474006/>.

³³ U.S. Dep't of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, Unrest in Syria: March 24 Classified Update [2 MD Doc 7], 2-3 (Mar. 24, 2011), **Ex. 10** [hereinafter "Unrest in Syria: March 24 U.S. Embassy Update"] (discussing that "[r]umors have spread among Syrians that Maher al-Assad was responsible for the order to attack Dara 'a's al-Omari Mosque on March 23"); *By All Means Necessary!: Individual and Command Responsibility for Crimes against Humanity in Syria*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (Dec. 2011), https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria1211webwcover_0.pdf.

³⁴ Anthony Shadid, *Syrian Businessman Becomes Magnet for Anger and Dissent*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 30, 2011), <https://nyti.ms/2BAicL5>.

Military Intelligence before being promoted to Deputy Chief of Staff of the Syrian military and Deputy Minister of Defense.³⁵

c. Conclusion

27. Since assuming power, the Assad Regime has ruled Syria as a repressive, one-party police state, demanding loyalty and attacking dissent. As addressed in this section, the Regime's authority rests on powerful, centralized institutions, including an extensive surveillance system administered by the *mukhabarat*, a powerful and loyal military, and a developed paramilitary network that operates under the Regime's patronage. The Regime finds its political base in the minority Alawite community and further bolsters its rule over the majority Sunni population through reliance on kinship networks and domestic alliances with other minority groups and a regional alliance with Shi'ite powers.

III. The Assad Regime's Response to the March 2011 Anti-Government Uprising in Syria

28. When the Arab Spring reached Syria in March 2011, the Assad Regime responded brutally. This section traces the Arab Spring from its Tunisian origins to its arrival in Syria, where it spurred the development of a political, and later an armed, opposition movement. The section then describes the Assad Regime's ferocious campaign to eradicate that opposition through a violent and unsparing crackdown.

a. Outbreak of the Arab Spring

29. On December 17, 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a young Tunisian street vendor, set himself on fire when security forces confiscated his merchandise following repeated instances of

³⁵ *Syria Crisis: Profiles of Security and Defence Chiefs Killed in Damascus Blast*, BBC NEWS (July 20, 2012), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-18889030>.

harassment over the course of several months.³⁶ His self-immolation sparked civil protests across Tunisia,³⁷ which were subsequently met by a brutal security crackdown.³⁸ This marked the start of Tunisia's uprising, often referred to as the "Jasmine Revolution," and the outbreak of the Arab Spring within the region.³⁹ On January 14, 2011, protestors successfully forced Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who had held power for 23 years, to step down and ultimately flee the country.⁴⁰ Inspired by the Tunisian uprising, similarly organized demonstrations quickly spread across other countries in the Middle East and North Africa, most notably Egypt, where large protests in January 2011 received heavy news coverage throughout the region.⁴¹

b. The Arab Spring Arrives in Syria

30. Following a spontaneous demonstration in Damascus on February 17, 2011 that was quickly dispersed, Syrian protests erupted in the southern city of Dera'a on March 18, 2011. On that day, several thousand protestors marched in Dera'a after the arrest and alleged torture of 15 young boys (aged 10 to 15),⁴² who had spray-painted anti-Assad messages on city walls that

³⁶ Robert F. Worth, *How a Single Match Can Ignite a Revolution*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 21, 2011), <https://nyti.ms/2jZZYaf>.

³⁷ Alexis Arieff & Carla E. Humud, *Political Transition in Tunisia*, CONG. RESEARCH SERV., RS21666, 5 (Feb. 10, 2015), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS21666.pdf>.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *The 'Arab Spring': Five Years On*, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (Jan. 2016) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/01/arab-spring-five-years-on/>.

⁴² Tom Porteous et al., *"We've Never Seen Such Horror": Crimes against Humanity by Syrian Security Forces*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 14 (June 1, 2011), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2011/06/01/weve-never-seen-such-horror/crimes-against-humanity-syrian-security-forces>.

copied slogans from the Tunisian and Egyptian protests.⁴³ The *mukhabarat*, under the command of Brigadier General Atif Najib (the head of Dara'a's Political Security Intelligence branch and a figure whom the U.S. Embassy understood to be closely linked to his cousin, Maher al-Assad⁴⁴), fired on the crowd, killing at least four demonstrators.⁴⁵ Several days later, the Regime decided to release the children from custody in an effort to defuse the growing tensions within the country. However, the children were released bruised and bloodied, which only heightened popular anger against the Regime.⁴⁶

31. In the aftermath of the Dara'a incident, protests spread across Syria after a country-wide call for a "Day of Dignity,"⁴⁷ reaching Damascus⁴⁸ and Aleppo,⁴⁹ as well as other major cities including Latakia,⁵⁰ Baniyas,⁵¹ Hama,⁵² and Homs.⁵³ (These cities can be located on

⁴³ *Id.* at 1; *In Syria, Crackdown After Protests*, N. Y. TIMES (Mar. 18, 2011), <https://nyti.ms/2jKKoBW>.

⁴⁴ Unrest in Syria: March 24 U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 33, at 2-3 (also discussing that "[r]umors have spread among Syrians that Maher al-Asad was responsible for the order to attack Dara'a's al-Omari Mosque on March 23").

⁴⁵ Porteous et al., *supra* note 42, at 1.

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *Syria Braces for "Day of Dignity" Rallies*, AL JAZEERA (Mar. 25, 2011), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/03/20113255460868563.html>.

⁴⁸ Adrian Blomfield, *Syrian Protests Spread Throughout Country*, THE TELEGRAPH (Mar. 25, 2011), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/8407402/Syrian-protests-spread-throughout-country.html>.

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Syria unrest: Twelve Killed in Latakia Protest*, BBC (Mar. 27, 2011), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12873053>.

⁵¹ *Syrian Tanks Enter 'Protest Hub' Baniyas*, AL JAZEERA (May 7, 2011), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/20115765059910917.html>.

⁵² *Syria: Shootings, Arrests Follow Hama Protests*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (July 6, 2011), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/07/06/syria-shootings-arrests-follow-hama-protest>; *Nomination of Robert Stephen Ford to be Ambassador to the Syrian Arab Republic: Hearing Before the S.*

the detailed Syrian map enclosed as Exhibit 1. The protesters came from various ethnic and religious minority communities, including Christians and Alawites,⁵⁴ and while initial protests were attended by a few hundred people, they quickly grew in size and scale as the brutality of the government's crackdown on the protests intensified, including through the use of lethal force against demonstrators.⁵⁵ Already by late March 2011, the size of the demonstrations had reached tens of thousands, as people marched at funerals held for those killed by security forces and the

Comm. on Foreign Affairs, 111th Cong. 581 (2010) [hereinafter "Ford Confirmation Testimony"].

⁵³ Liam Stack & Katherine Zoepf, *Security Forces Fire on Protesters in Restive Syrian City*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 18, 2011), <https://nyti.ms/2lkG0uf>.

⁵⁴ One prominent example is Samar Yazbek, an award winning Alawite writer who participated in the protests against the Assad Regime in 2011. Samar Yazbek, *A Testimony From Syria*, THE GUARDIAN (Aug. 3, 2011), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/aug/03/author-author-samar-yazbek-syria>; Aida Edemariam, *Syrian Writer Samar Yazbek: 'A Woman Like Me Makes Life Difficult'*, THE GUARDIAN (Oct. 12, 2012), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/oct/13/interview-samar-yazbek-syria-revolution>; U.S. Embassy Damascus, *A Message From Ambassador Ford on the Arrests of Human Rights Activists*, FACEBOOK (Feb. 17, 2012), <https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADmessage%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADford%ADon%ADthe%ADarrests%ADof%ADhuman%ADrights%ADactivists/10150563608741938>, **Ex. 15-E**.

⁵⁵ Katherine Marsh, *Syria: Four Killed in Deraa as Protests Spread Across South*, THE GUARDIAN (Mar. 22, 2011), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/22/syrian-protests-troops-kill-deraa>; U.S. Dep't of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, SARG Responds with Violence to Second Damascus Demonstration in Two Days [2 MD Doc 12], 1-3 (Mar. 16, 2011), **Ex. 5** (discussing how Embassy officials bore witness to the Regime's violent response to peaceful demonstrators as well as the arrest and loading of protestors onto government buses). The cable details the attack, arrest, and beating of protestors by "government thugs" and plain-clothed security officers, noting that "[o]ne of the more disturbing images was a boy (who appeared to be 10 years old)...dragged onto a bus and beaten, as security officers pulled a curtain over the window so onlookers could not see." *Id.*

shabiha.⁵⁶ By the middle of 2011, the numbers grew to unprecedented levels: one protest on July 8, 2011 in Hama reportedly attracted more than half a million people.⁵⁷

32. Along with other U.S. Embassy personnel, I observed demonstrations to assess the size and nature of the protests, and determine whether they were peaceful. I would send my diplomatic staff every Friday to observe the protests, but instructed them to watch from a safe distance, not to engage in the protests, and to report any violence. We also coordinated with other embassies to share observations and concerns. Overall, we observed that very little violence was initiated by the protestors, and I publicly supported the rights of the Syrian people to protest peacefully and advocated for the Assad Regime to protect fundamental civil rights.⁵⁸

c. The Rise of an Organized Opposition

33. In the very first weeks of the Syrian uprising, the opposition movement was largely dispersed and sporadic. Soon thereafter, however, Syrians began organizing into Local Coordinating Committees (LCCs), which became, in effect, the foundation for the civilian grassroots political opposition.⁵⁹ The LCCs operated without a hierarchical leadership, which enabled the protests to continue despite the arrest of LCC leaders by the *mukhabarat*. In addition to the organization of demonstrations, media activism was a central component of activities

⁵⁶ Khaled Yacoub Oweis, *Protests Spread Against Assad Rule in Syria*, REUTERS (Mar. 24, 2011), <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-idUSTRE72N2MC20110325>.

⁵⁷ ‘Half a Million’ Protest on Streets of Hama, AL JAZEERA (July 8, 2011), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/07/2011780473138345.html>.

⁵⁸ U.S. Embassy Damascus, *A Note from Ambassador Robert Ford*, FACEBOOK (Sept. 6, 2011), <https://www.facebook.com/notes/usembassydamascus/anotefromambassadorrobertford/10150286333121938>, **Ex. 15-B**. See also, U.S. Embassy Damascus, *A Note from Ambassador Robert Ford*, FACEBOOK (July 10, 2011), <https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADnote%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADrobert%ADford/10150237831306938>, **Ex. 15-A**.

⁵⁹ *Local Coordination Committees of Syria*, CARNEGIE MIDDLE EAST CENTER (Dec. 20, 2012), <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/50426?lang=en>.

undertaken by the LCCs. Local activists became amateur journalists and reported on the daily events of the revolution, largely through social media.⁶⁰ In many cities, including Homs, Raqqa, and Damascus, activists eventually formed “Revolutionary Councils” to organize and oversee the LCCs for the purpose of facilitating communication among the LCC groups and coordinating activities nationally.⁶¹ In addition to mobilizing demonstrations and coordinating media outreach, the Revolutionary Councils and LCCs also distributed humanitarian aid and facilitated access for medical teams to conflict areas.⁶²

34. The LCC in Homs was one of the first committees to begin reporting the daily events of the uprising.⁶³ Homs subsequently saw the creation of its Revolutionary Council in September 2011. By early 2012, the Homs Revolutionary Council was virtually a state-within-a-state.⁶⁴ The Council had an elected leadership and committees dealing with security and armed operations, media, demonstrations, and medical, humanitarian, and legal needs. Indeed, as of January 2012, it was feeding approximately 16,000 families throughout the province.⁶⁵

35. The LCCs also created various media centers and online social network hubs to facilitate communication among protest organizers and to disseminate information about events

⁶⁰ Amer Abu Hamed, *Syria's Local Coordination Committees: The Dynamo of a Hijacked Revolution*, KNOWLEDGE PROGRAMME CIVIL SOCIETY IN WEST ASIA, 9 (May 5, 2014), https://www.hivos.org/sites/default/files/syrias_lccs-dynamo_of_highjacked_revolution.pdf.

⁶¹ JOHN DAVIS ET AL., *THE ARAB SPRING AND ARAB THAW: UNFINISHED REVOLUTIONS AND THE QUEST FOR DEMOCRACY* 99-100 (John Davis ed., 2013), **Ex. 4**.

⁶² *Id.*; Hamed, *supra* note 60, at 8-11.

⁶³ Hamed, *supra* note 60, at 8-11.

⁶⁴ Nir Rosen, *The Battle for Homs*, AL JAZEERA (Feb. 11, 2012), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/02/20122101097421319.html>.

⁶⁵ *Q&A: Nir Rosen on Syria's Armed Opposition*, AL JAZEERA (Feb. 13, 2012), <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/02/201221315020166516.html>.

as they unfolded on the ground to Syrians and the world at large.⁶⁶ These groups proved to be a valuable source of information, and my staff remained in frequent contact with them. As Ambassador, I received reports that the Assad Regime viewed the LCCs and media centers as a threat to its authority and specifically targeted people suspected of participating in them for arrest.

d. The Armed Opposition

36. The opposition to the Assad Regime was generally unarmed until the summer of 2011, when some residents and defectors in besieged towns began taking up arms to defend themselves from attacks by Assad's security forces.⁶⁷ Soldiers and lower-level officers who defected from the Syrian Army formed small fighting groups that called themselves the Free Syrian Army (FSA). As of early 2012, they in no way constituted a unified entity with a centralized command structure at a national level. Instead, they were a loose network of rebel groups that identified with the FSA name.⁶⁸ The FSA and other unaffiliated armed rebels were separate and independent from the civilian opposition movement in Syria, although certain members of the civilian and armed groups were in regular contact.⁶⁹

e. The Assad Regime's Crackdown

37. The Assad Regime's brutality was constant. From the outset, the Regime refused to allow peaceful marches, used security forces to shoot and arrest marchers, instituted

⁶⁶ Hamed, *supra* note 60, at 9.

⁶⁷ Joseph Holliday, *Syria's Armed Opposition*, INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR, 11 (Mar. 2012), http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Syrias_Armed_Opposition.pdf.

⁶⁸ *Id.* at 35.

⁶⁹ *Syria: The Crisis and Its Implications: Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Foreign Affairs*, 112th Cong. 14 (2012) (statement of Hon. Robert Ford, U.S. Ambassador to the Syrian Arab Republic) [hereinafter "Ford Syria Crisis Senate Testimony"].

widespread arrest campaigns against activists, and committed brutal acts of torture against detainees and opponents.⁷⁰ President Assad’s violent response to the protests led to international condemnation,⁷¹ and numerous countries, including the U.S., urged the Assad Regime and opposition to open a serious dialogue to find political solutions to the growing crisis.⁷² While Assad and his aides occasionally spoke of accepting dialogue, in reality the security state rejected any negotiation and escalated repression. By July 2011, the U.S. government publicly questioned President Assad’s political legitimacy and in mid-August 2011, President Obama called for Assad “to step aside” following months of the Regime’s brutal crackdown.⁷³

38. The Assad Regime’s repression in the face of the burgeoning uprising was ruthless. The Regime deployed the *mukhabarat*, the military, and the *shabiha* in an effort to halt a protest movement that had become unmanageable by autumn of 2011. When the Assad Regime’s own resources proved to be insufficient to quash the uprising, the Regime began to rely on Hizballah, Iran, and—when those failed—Russia, to assist in its repression.⁷⁴ Assad systematically used tanks, armored vehicles, and snipers against civilians in Syrian cities and

⁷⁰ Ford Confirmation Testimony, *supra* note 52, at 597.

⁷¹ G.A. Res. 66/L.36 (Feb. 14, 2012); G.A. Res. 66/253 (Feb. 16, 2012); Human Rights Council Res. 20/22, Situation of Human Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic, U.N. DOC. A/HRC/RES/20/22 (July 16, 2012).

⁷² *News Wrap: White House Urges Political Solution in Syria*, PBS (Jan. 30, 2012), http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/world-jan-june12-othernews_01-30/; Final Communiqué, Action Group for Syria (June 30, 2012), <http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Syria/FinalCommuniqueActionGroupforSyria.pdf>.

⁷³ Scott Wilson & Joby Warrick, *Assad Must Go, Obama Says*, WASH. POST (Aug. 18, 2011), https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/assad-must-go-obama-says/2011/08/18/gIQAelheOJ_story.html.

⁷⁴ Raja Abdulrahim, *Syrian Regime, Backed by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, Expands Ground Offensive to Aleppo*, WALL STREET JOURNAL (Oct. 18, 2015), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/syrian-regime-backed-by-russia-iran-and-hezbollah-expands-ground-offensive-to-aleppo-1445206886>.

towns. By mid-autumn of 2011, the Regime resorted to artillery and tank fire against civilian districts to intimidate opposition in Homs and other cities.⁷⁵ By early 2012, the violence had escalated further. I remember watching footage of the attacks in Homs in February 2012 with a sense of horror and revulsion, as the Assad Regime used artillery designed for full-scale warfare against residential neighborhoods.⁷⁶

39. Casualties were high. While accurate numbers are difficult to ascertain, reliable organizations reported horrific statistics. For example:

- In 2011, more than 5,000 civilians were killed,⁷⁷ including at least 300 children.⁷⁸ Between December 2 and 4 in Homs alone, at least 35 civilians were killed.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Joseph Holliday, *The Struggle For Syria in 2011: An Operational and Regional Analysis*, INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR, 20 (Dec. 2011), http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Struggle_For_Syria.pdf; 'Scores dead' as Syrian Tanks Storm Hama City, AL JAZEERA (July 31, 2011), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/07/201173143432348733.html>; Julian Borger & Mona Mahmood, *Syrian Troops Bombard Sealed-off Suburb of Homs*, THE GUARDIAN (Feb. 9, 2012), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/feb/09/syrian-troops-suburb-homs>; U.S. Embassy Damascus, *A Message from Ambassador Robert Ford*, FACEBOOK (Mar. 5, 2012), <https://www.facebook.com/notes/us-embassy-damascus/a-message-from-ambassador-robert-ford/10150595589281938>, **Ex. 15-F**; *Homs 'Massacre' Leaves 260 Dead*, THE TELEGRAPH (Feb. 4, 2012), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9061181/Homs-massacre-leaves-260-dead.html>.

⁷⁶ U.S. Embassy Damascus, *A Note From Ambassador Ford on Recent Events in Syria*, FACEBOOK (Feb. 9, 2012), <https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADnote%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADford%ADon%ADrecent%ADEvents%ADin%ADSyria/10150545674871938>, **Ex. 15-C**; U.S. Embassy Damascus, *A Note From Ambassador Ford*, FACEBOOK (Feb. 10, 2012), <https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADnote%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADford/10150547572706938/1>, **Ex. 15-D**; U.S. Embassy Damascus, *A Message From Ambassador Robert Ford*, FACEBOOK (Mar. 5, 2012), <https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADmessage%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADrobert%ADford/10150595589281938>, **Ex. 15-F**.

⁷⁷ *As Syrian Death Toll Tops 5,000, UN Human Rights Chief Warns about Key City*, UN NEWS CENTRE (Dec. 12, 2011), <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=40708>.

⁷⁸ *Id.*

⁷⁹ U.S. Dep't of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, Syria Unrest: December 5 Update [2 RG], 2 (Dec. 19, 2011), **Ex. 13** [hereinafter "Syria Unrest: December 5 U.S. Embassy Update"] (discussing the extent of the death toll). In November of 2011, the "Local Coordination

- By the end of 2012, the number of civilians killed by Regime forces had risen to over 60,000.⁸⁰
- In addition, more than 20,000 people were arbitrarily detained in 2011, many of whom were tortured.⁸¹ Indeed, at least 105 people died while in custody in the same year,⁸² and by the end of 2012, 1,215 people had died while in custody.⁸³

40. The Assad Regime also reportedly targeted vulnerable populations in Syria in an effort to break the will of the opposition. For example, the State Department reported that the Assad Regime deliberately targeted and tortured Syrian children due to relations or assumed relations with members of the FSA and other armed and civilian activist groups,⁸⁴ kidnapped over 6,000 women, and subjected at least 4,000 women and girls to rape and mutilation in 2012 alone.⁸⁵

41. Civilian casualties increased significantly throughout the country as the protests continued. Over time, however, the Regime's repression became more and more focused on certain towns and cities that had come to represent the revolution's symbolic hubs. By the end of 2011, Homs, which straddles the main highway linking the political capital Damascus to the

Committees (LCCs) said that they documented a total of 848 deaths, including 59 children...making it the most deadly month since the uprising began." *Id.*

⁸⁰ *Data Suggest Syria Death Toll Could Be More than 60,000, Says UN Human Rights Office*, UN NEWS CENTRE (Jan. 2, 2013), <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=43866>.

⁸¹ *World Report 2012: Syria - Events of 2011*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (2012), <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2012/country-chapters/syria>.

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ U.S. Dep't of State, Bureau of Democracy, H.R. and Lab., Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2012: Syria 6 (2012), <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/204595.pdf> [hereinafter "U.S. Dep't of State 2012 Human Rights Report: Syria"].

⁸⁴ UNICEF Canada, *UNICEF Statement on Children Caught in the Bloodshed in Syria* (Feb. 15, 2012), <http://www.unicef.ca/en/blog/unicef-statement-on-children-caught-in-the-bloodshed-in-syria>; U.S. Dep't of State 2012 Human Rights Report: Syria, *supra* note 83, at 7.

⁸⁵ U.S. Dep't of State 2012 Human Rights Report: Syria, *supra* note 83, at 5, 7.

commercial hub of Aleppo, had effectively become the opposition's greatest stronghold and the Regime's main target.

42. This focus continued into 2012. Shortly before her death in February 2012, Marie Colvin reported on the situation in the Baba Amr neighborhood of Homs, relaying the dire situation in the area:

Snipers on the rooftops of al-Ba'ath University and other high buildings surrounding Baba Amr shoot any civilian who comes into their sights. Residents were felled in droves in the first days of the siege but have now learnt where the snipers are and run across junctions where they know they can be seen. Few cars are left on the streets.

Almost every building is pock-marked after tank rounds punched through concrete walls or rockets blasted gaping holes in upper floors. The building I was staying in lost its upper floor to a rocket last Wednesday. On some streets whole buildings have collapsed — all there is to see are shredded clothes, broken pots and the shattered furniture of families destroyed.⁸⁶

f. Conclusion

43. The protests that broke out in Syria in March 2011 were largely non-violent in nature. The Assad Regime responded brutally, spurring the formation of an organized opposition movement. Through its ensuing efforts to eradicate dissent, the Assad Regime was responsible for many tens of thousands of deaths and disappearances, as well as for perpetrating countless acts of torture against the civilian population.

⁸⁶ Marie Colvin, *Final Dispatch from Homs, the Battered City*, THE SUNDAY TIMES (Feb. 19, 2012), <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/final-dispatch-from-homs-the-battered-city-ontg7xk3397>. See also, Marie Colvin, *Syria Kills 200*, THE SUNDAY TIMES (Feb. 5, 2012), <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/syria-kills-200-czg73kncqlm>; Marie Colvin, Peter Kellier, & Flamand Beirut, *Bombs Fell Like Rain. You Could only Pray*, THE SUNDAY TIMES (Feb. 5, 2012), <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/bombs-fell-like-rain-you-could-only-pray-rmj598bvnzk>; Marie Colvin, *A Vet is Only Hope for Syrian Wounded*, THE SUNDAY TIMES (Feb. 19, 2012), <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/a-vet-is-only-hope-for-syrian-wounded-rcmsqmwbbb>.

IV. The Assad Regime's Efforts to Control the Narrative

44. The Assad Regime sought to justify its brutal response to the civil uprising by promulgating a false narrative of regional sectarian conflict and suppressing reporting of its abuses. This section addresses the content of the Assad Regime's false narrative and the means by which it promoted its propaganda and silenced counter-narratives, including through limiting the free flow of information and persecuting journalists.

a. The Regime's False Narrative

45. From the outset of the uprisings in early 2011, the Regime promoted a false narrative⁸⁷ of a regional sectarian conflict led by terrorist groups⁸⁸ comprised of hardline Salafi Muslims⁸⁹ and supported by Western governments,⁹⁰ which had as its goal regime change in

⁸⁷ Unrest in Syria: March 24 U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 33, at 3-4 (Discussing how “in an editorial, Muhammad Kanaysi, editor of al-Baath, calls on the youth in Syria to beware of the Western attempts to convince them that criminal acts can be a means to achieve reform.” The cable then explains that “the Syrian government is going into a heavy defense and spin mode,” and that “the SARG is lashing out at foreign satellite networks for their ‘biased’ coverage – yet another demonstration of how sensitive the Syrians are to negative foreign media coverage.” The cable also recounts how Buthaina Shaaban “told the BBC correspondents that Syrian television should be the only one considered authoritative on events in Syria.”).

⁸⁸ Porteous et al., *supra* note 42, at 2.

⁸⁹ Anthony Shadid, *Syria Broadens Deadly Crackdown on Protesters*, N.Y. TIMES (May 8, 2011), <https://nyti.ms/2D5hylL>; Ford Syria Crisis Senate Testimony, *supra* note 69, at 17; Kyle Orton, *From Kessab to Cannibals: Syria's Media War*, THE SYRIAN INTIFADA (Jan. 5, 2015), <https://kyleorton1991.wordpress.com/2015/01/05/from-kessab-to-cannibals-syrias-media-war/>; Bassam Barabandi & Tyler J. Thompson, *Inside Assad's Playbook: Time and Terror*, THE ATLANTIC COUNCIL (July 23, 2014), <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/inside-assad-s-playbook-time-and-terror>.

⁹⁰ *Syria: Thousands Protest in Restive City of Hama*, BBC NEWS (July 8, 2011), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14083087>.

Syria.⁹¹ On March 30, 2011, President Bashar al-Assad delivered a speech to the People's Assembly, alleging the existence of a foreign conspiracy. In Assad's words:

I am sure you all know that Syria is facing a great conspiracy whose tentacles extend to some nearby countries and far-away countries, with some inside the country.... They will say that we believe in the conspiracy theory. In fact there is no conspiracy theory. There is a conspiracy.⁹²

46. In his speech, President Assad attempted to disclaim responsibility for the hardline response to peaceful protests and claimed that the Regime issued clear instructions not to harm any Syrian citizens.⁹³ But a few months later, in another speech presented before an audience at Damascus University, President Assad reasserted the view that the protests in Syria were the result of a foreign-backed conspiracy, likening the opposition movement to a virus that had to be exterminated:

Conspiracies are like germs, after all, multiplying every moment everywhere. They cannot be eliminated, but we can strengthen the immunity of our bodies in order to protect ourselves against them. It doesn't require much analysis, based on what we heard from others and witnessed in the media, to prove that there is indeed a conspiracy. We should not waste time discussing it or being frightened by it. Rather, we would [sic] to identify the internal weaknesses through which this conspiracy can infiltrate the country... The solution, at the end of the day, is for us to solve our own problems and to avoid ramifications that could weaken our national immunity. Germs exist everywhere, on the skin and within the guts.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Michelle Nichols & Louis Charbonneau, *Syria Accuses U.S., France, Others of Arming, Funding "Terrorism"*, REUTERS (Oct. 1, 2012), <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-un-assembly-syria-idUSBRE89018220121001>.

⁹² *President Assad Delivers Speech at People's Assembly*, SYRIAN ARAB NEWS AGENCY (Mar. 30, 2011), <https://web.archive.org/web/20110406012411/http://www.sana.sy/print.html?sid=339334&newlang=eng>.

⁹³ *Id.*

⁹⁴ *Speech by President Bashar al-Assad at Damascus University*, AL-BAB (June 20, 2011), <http://al-bab.com/documents-section/syria-speech-bashar-al-assad-1>.

47. Furthermore, the Regime repeatedly blamed violence in cities and towns across Syria on “terrorist groups,” “armed gangs,” and “foreign elements.”⁹⁵ When I asked the Minister of Social Affairs, Diala al-Haj Aref, about the Regime’s crackdown in Dera’a during a meeting in March 2011, she responded by questioning the peaceful nature of the demonstrations and insisting that foreigners were instigating the unrest.⁹⁶ Similarly, President Assad’s Intelligence Advisor, General Nasif Kheirbek, told me that the protestors were causing anarchy and chaos and that the Assad Regime was justified in using force and gunfire to suppress them.

48. The Regime promoted this narrative in Homs in particular, going to great lengths to counter accounts of Regime repression in Homs—the visibility and magnitude of which was difficult to ignore—and attempting instead to pin the blame on rebel groups. The state-owned media, the Syrian Arab News Agency (“SANA”), consistently attributed violence in Homs to “armed terrorist groups” in the opposition. For example, SANA reported on one occasion that “armed terrorist groups” detonated “booby-trapped houses” in Baba Amr “with the aim of terrifying citizens and to give the impression that the Army is shelling the neighborhood.”⁹⁷ More generally, SANA reported that unrest in Homs was just an “armed mutiny” led by Salafi

⁹⁵ Porteous et al., *supra* note 42, at 2.

⁹⁶ U.S. Dep’t of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, Unrest in Syria: March 23 Update [2 MD Doc 9], 1 (Mar. 23, 2011), **Ex. 7** [hereinafter “Unrest in Syria: March 23 U.S. Embassy Update”].

⁹⁷ Matthew Weaver, Haroon Siddique & Ben Quinn, *Syria: Bombs Hit Aleppo as Tanks Pound Homs - Friday 10 February*, THE GUARDIAN: MIDDLEEASTLIVE (Feb. 10, 2012), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/middle-east-live/2012/feb/10/syria-aleppo-bombs-homs-tanks-live#block-33>.

Muslims.⁹⁸ By contrast, SANA dismissed any suggestion that the Regime was responsible for the violence as “distortion [and] falsification.”⁹⁹

49. This disinformation campaign was specifically noted in numerous analyses prepared by my staff at the Embassy:

- “We [] sense that the Syrian government is going into a heavy defense and spin mode. The [Assad Regime] is lashing out at foreign satellite networks for their ‘biased’ coverage – yet another demonstration of how sensitive the Syrians are to negative foreign media coverage.”¹⁰⁰
- “The Syrian media – both state-owned and private – has ramped up its attacks on Arab satellite networks for their coverage of the Dara’a demonstrations, accusing it of supporting foreign instigators, especially the West. In an editorial, Muhammad Kanaysi, editor of *al-Baath*, calls on the youth in Syria to beware of the Western attempts to convince them that criminal acts can be a means to achieve reform. ‘Such acts slow down reform, as the government is busy confronting chaos instead of responding to the youth needs,’ he says. The governor of Homs made the same argument to the Ambassador in a March 21 meeting...suggesting it is an official [Assad Regime] talking point.”¹⁰¹
- “Though people continue to take to the streets in Dara’a, the state-controlled Syrian press has reported calm in the city, and it attributed the violence of the night of March 22 to armed troublemakers who attacked a medical team of the security services. The state news agency Sana has published numerous reports of an ‘armed gang’ stashing weapons and using kidnapped children as human shields.”¹⁰²
- “While high-level officials have thus far remained quiet, Syrian state television blamed the protests on ‘infiltrators’ for ‘causing chaos and riots.’ The

⁹⁸ Liam Stack & Katherine Zoepf, *Security Forces Fire on Protesters in Restive Syrian City*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 18, 2011), <https://nyti.ms/2lkG0uf>.

⁹⁹ “Hundreds of Casualties” in Syria’s Homs, AL JAZEERA (Feb. 4, 2012), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/02/201223231333768854.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Unrest in Syria: March 24 U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 33, at 4.

¹⁰¹ *Id.* at 3.

¹⁰² Unrest in Syria: March 23 U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 96, at 2.

government is reportedly organizing large pro-regime demonstrations across the country, with a large march planned for April 1.”¹⁰³

- “Syrian state-controlled media reported the burials of 20 army and security force ‘martyrs’ on December 3 and 4 after they were killed by ‘terrorists’ in Homs, Damascus, and the Damascus suburbs. The media also claims that [] ‘terrorists’ also killed a number of civilians, including five in Homs on December 4. The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) said that on December 4 ‘terrorists’ in Homs assassinated two professors from al-Baath University in separate attacks. The local media indicated that [Assad Regime] authorities have launched operations against ‘terrorists’ in Idlib and Homs which led to the deaths and arrests of a large number of ‘wanted men.’ [Assad Regime] authorities reportedly also disarmed a number of explosive devices in two cities. On December 34 Syrian state-controlled television broadcast the confession of an alleged terrorist who operated in the Damascus suburbs. During the confession the ‘terrorist’ said that he fed al-Jazeera false information. [Syrian] state media indicates that attacks on [Regime] forces have increased but also maintains that [Regime] authorities are in control of the situation.”¹⁰⁴
- Syria’s then-Presidential and Media Advisor, Bouthaina Shabaan, “even told the BBC correspondents that Syrian television should be the only one considered authoritative on events in Syria.”¹⁰⁵

b. Methods of Controlling the Narrative

50. As the ruler of a centralized police state, the Assad Regime enjoys extensive powers to advance its narrative and silence all others. This section describes the primary means that Syria used to achieve these ends.

i. Promoting the False Narrative

51. The Assad Regime went to great lengths to promote its narrative of a terrorist insurrection, disseminating propaganda and misinformation through the state press and even facilitating the rise of Islamist radicals within the ranks of the opposition.

¹⁰³ U.S. Dep’t of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, Bloody Friday Shatters Syria’s Claim [2 MD Doc 10], 2-3 (Mar. 20, 2011), **Ex. 6**.

¹⁰⁴ Syria Unrest: December 5 U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 79, at 3.

¹⁰⁵ Unrest in Syria: March 24 U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 33, at 4.

1. Disseminating Propaganda and Misinformation

52. The Assad Regime utilized the state media to disseminate propaganda promoting its narrative of the conflict. SANA articles and television reports repeatedly attributed the Regime's military actions to "armed gangs" or "terrorists," with one such account blaming violence in Dera'a during the night of March 22, 2011 on "armed troublemakers who attacked a medical team of the security services."¹⁰⁶ In the same vein, SANA-published reports attributed unrest in the south to an "armed gang" alleged to have been "stashing weapons and using kidnapped children as human shields."¹⁰⁷ Such reports were also made about Homs in the winter of 2011, when pro-Regime media "reported the burials of 20 army and security force 'martyrs'" and blamed their deaths on Homs "terrorists."¹⁰⁸ Another report quoted a former Regime official describing scenes of "loyalist women" being "brought in" to Homs "and disguised as locals for government television interviews" to "say that the massacres...were perpetrated by armed gangs."¹⁰⁹

53. The Assad Regime also directly presented distorted facts to foreign diplomats and international observers. For example, it was obvious that the approved trips that I and other

¹⁰⁶ Unrest in Syria: March 23 U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 96, at 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Id.*

¹⁰⁸ Syria Unrest: December 5 U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 79, at 3 (the Regime also reported that "authorities...also disarmed a number of explosive devices in two cities."); U.S. Dep't of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, Syria Unrest: December 14 Update [4 RG], 2 (Dec. 14, 2011), **Ex. 12** [hereinafter "Syria Unrest: December 14 U.S. Embassy Update"] ("Syrian state-controlled media reported that on December 13 seventeen army and security forces 'martyrs' were buried after they were killed by 'terrorists' in Homs, Dara'a, Idlib, and the Damascus countryside," attributing those deaths to "terrorists").

¹⁰⁹ Ivan Watson, Raja Razek & Saad Abedine, *Defecting Syrian Propagandist Says His Job Was 'to Fabricate'*, CNN (Oct. 9, 2012), <http://www.cnn.com/2012/10/09/world/meast/syria-propagandist-defects/>.

Western diplomats took outside of Damascus were being staged by the Regime.¹¹⁰ Similarly, when Arab League Observers visited Homs and other provinces in later 2011 and early 2012, Regime security forces actively concealed information from them. Dissidents were discouraged from speaking to the Arab League Observers,¹¹¹ and the Syrian Army appeared to withdraw some tanks from the city hours before the Observers arrived, only to resume attacks against the city once the Observers left.¹¹² Further, interviews with Regime loyalists aired at discrediting defectors were frequently televised on pro-Assad channels.¹¹³

54. The Assad Regime routinely rejected reports by the international media. Authorities criticized media coverage as being unfair and advanced a rhetoric that claimed that Syria was involved in a “media war.” For example, the Regime accused satellite television channels, such as Al Jazeera, and print news sources of distorting facts and siding with the opposition.¹¹⁴ Such accusations echoed the Regime’s broader narrative of a nation facing a global conspiracy involving foreign media backed by the U.S., Israel, and Arab Gulf States.

2. Sectarianizing the Conflict

55. Since the late 1970s, the Regime has sought legitimacy as the protector of the nation’s myriad religious minorities—specifically, Alawites, Christians, and Druze—from Sunni

¹¹⁰ Ford Confirmation Testimony, *supra* note 52, at 590.

¹¹¹ *Violence and Doubts Mar Syria Monitor Mission*, AL JAZEERA (Dec. 30 2011), <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/12/2011122944024838879.html>.

¹¹² Julian Borger, *Arab League Monitors Visit Homs*, THE GUARDIAN (Dec. 27, 2011), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/27/arab-league-monitors-syria-homs>; Ford Syria Crisis Senate Testimony, *supra* note 69, at 7.

¹¹³ Watson, Razek & Abedine, *supra* note 109.

¹¹⁴ U.S. Dep’t of State 2012 Human Rights Report: Syria, *supra* note 83, at 20.

majoritarian tyranny. The fall of the Regime, it claimed, would lead to the inevitable takeover of the country by radical Islamist Sunnis.¹¹⁵

56. When the uprising began in March 2011, the Regime sought to entrench itself as the only viable alternative to radical Sunni rule by taking active steps to sectarianize the conflict. Notably, the Assad Regime strategically arrested many non-religious protesters while releasing radical Islamists from prison at the outset of the protests, in order to create the enemy Assad publicly claimed existed.¹¹⁶ Later in the conflict, the Regime also focused military efforts against the moderate armed opposition groups, while generally avoiding any military entanglements with terrorist groups. Largely free of attacks from Regime forces, a terrorist faction linked to al-Qaida progressively moved against the same moderate armed groups the Regime was targeting. Facing a war on two fronts, the moderate opposition increasingly lost ground, and armed Islamist groups grew in size and seized more territory.

ii. Silencing Contrary Narratives

57. In addition to promoting a false narrative, the Assad Regime also silenced contrary narratives by restricting the flow of information in order to suppress dissent and bolster its authority.¹¹⁷ The Regime adopted a holistic approach to suppressing information, which became increasingly violent as protests grew. The Regime's suppression was so successful that

¹¹⁵ *Assad's Alawites Fear a Time When Sunnis Seek Revenge*, PRI (Aug. 22, 2012), <https://www.pri.org/stories/2012-08-22/assads-alawites-fear-time-when-sunnis-seek-revenge>; *Don't Be Fooled: Assad Is No Friend of Syria's Christian minorities*, THE HILL (May 11, 2017), <http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/religion/332938-dont-be-fooled-assad-is-no-friend-of-syrias-christian-minorities>; *Why Did Assad, Saddam and Mubarak Protect Christians*, PBS (Oct. 14, 2011), <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/mid-east-christians-intro/>.

¹¹⁶ *Syria Turmoil: Political Inmates 'Freed' After Protests*, BBC (Mar. 26, 2011), <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12870679>; Simon S. Cordall, *How Syria's Assad Helped Forge ISIS*, NEWSWEEK (June 21, 2014), <http://www.newsweek.com/how-syrias-assad-helped-forge-isis-255631?rx=us>.

¹¹⁷ Ford Confirmation Testimony, *supra* note 52, at 591-92.

it was often impossible to get an up-to-date read of the situation on the ground. Instead, information would leak out after the fact.

1. Formal Limits on Reporting

58. From the very beginning of the conflict, the Assad Regime placed legal restrictions on reporting in Syria. Early on, authorities withdrew the accreditations of foreign correspondents who refused to self-censor, claiming that their reports were “unprofessional and false.”¹¹⁸ It also expelled journalists and refused new visas to journalists seeking to enter the country.¹¹⁹

59. In August 2011, the Syrian President adopted Decree No. 108/2011 (the “Decree”). Passed as part of a series of ostensible reforms, the Decree gave the appearance of protecting basic press freedoms, but in fact provided legal grounds for silencing dissent.¹²⁰ As a result, after passing the Decree, the Assad Regime continued to detain and arrest journalists for

¹¹⁸ *Reuters Journalists Missing in Syria*, THE GUARDIAN (Mar. 28, 2011), <https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2011/mar/28/reuters-syria>.

¹¹⁹ *Upheaval in the Arab World: Media as Key Witnesses and Political Pawns*, REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS, 12 (Nov. 2011), https://web.archive.org/web/20160102234721/https://rsf.org/rapport/RSF_BILAN_MOYEN_ORIENT_2011_GB.pdf [hereinafter “Reporters Without Borders: Upheaval in the Arab World”]; *see also* U.S. Dep’t of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, SARG Scrambling to Choke Information on Protests [2 MD Doc 8], 2 (Apr. 6, 2011), **Ex. 11** [hereinafter “SARG Scrambling to Choke Information on Protests U.S. Embassy Update”] (discussing the expulsion of Khaled Yacoub Oweis, then Reuters’s Syria correspondent: “this was another blow to the protest movement as Oweis was in touch with many activists. Oweis had been consistently breaking news of protests and crackdowns ahead of other journalists, especially in the southern city of Dara’a...at least four other Reuters photographers and journalists have been arrested and detained over the last 15 days.”).

¹²⁰ Dahlia El Zein, *The ‘New’ Syrian Media Law is Nothing New*, COMMITTEE TO PROTECT JOURNALISTS (Sept. 7, 2011), <https://cpj.org/blog/2011/09/the-new-syrian-media-law-is-nothing-new.php>.

printing material in opposition to the Regime and only allowed for the establishment of pro-Regime parties.¹²¹

2. Limits on Access to Information

60. On February 8, 2012, authorities passed a further decree restricting freedom of expression on the internet.¹²² Additionally, the Regime cut phone and internet services during demonstrations to prevent activists from uploading videos to YouTube, Facebook, and other social media platforms.¹²³ During the siege of Dera'a, the Assad Regime shut down all means of communication, including cell phone networks, and confiscated cell phones during searches of houses and at checkpoints.¹²⁴ As described in a cable from the U.S. Embassy in Damascus, the south of the country was experiencing “a strong security presence, checkpoints, and interruption to Internet and phone service.”¹²⁵ Similarly, the Regime jammed cellular, landline, and satellite phones during the attack on Baniyas,¹²⁶ and there were also reports of nation-wide mobile disruptions, sometimes lasting for days at a time.¹²⁷ The Regime’s efforts were so effective that, during one outage, an internet monitoring firm detected that two-thirds of all Syrian networks

¹²¹ U.S. Dep’t of State 2012 Human Rights Report: Syria, *supra* note 83, at 24.

¹²² Human Rights Council, Rep. of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/19/69 (Feb. 22, 2012), <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/IICISyria/Pages/Documentation.aspx>.

¹²³ Ford Syria Crisis Senate Testimony, *supra* note 69, at 40.

¹²⁴ Porteous et al., *supra* note 42, at 5.

¹²⁵ U.S. Dep’t of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, Unrest in Syria: March 23 Update II [2 MD Doc 11], 1 (Mar. 23, 2011), **Ex. 8** [hereinafter “Unrest in Syria: March 23 U.S. Embassy Update II”].

¹²⁶ Holliday, *supra* note 75, at 20.

¹²⁷ SARG Scrambling to Choke Information on Protests U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 119, at 2 (cable reporting the country-wide crash of Syriatel, Syria’s leading mobile, for two days).

were unreachable from the global internet; notably, among those networks that remained reachable were those that belonged to the Assad Regime.¹²⁸

61. The Assad Regime also routinely extracted passwords of social media sites from journalists through torture and beatings,¹²⁹ and the online pro-Regime Syrian Electronic Army frequently hacked websites to post pro-Regime material.¹³⁰ During the early days of the uprising, however, the Assad Regime had limited technical capacity to monitor and track cell and internet-based communications in Syria. The Regime gradually developed these abilities with assistance from Iran (which had acquired significant expertise during its own crackdown on anti-government protests in 2009), and it eventually became capable of monitoring people's conversations, tracking their locations, and hacking laptop cameras to identify suspected opposition members.¹³¹ The U.S. Embassy warned opposition members that the Assad Regime was able to monitor their conversations and that prior methods used to evade surveillance, such as virtual private networks, were no longer safe.

3. Persecution and Repression of the Independent Media

62. As the conflict developed, I and other U.S. Embassy personnel became increasingly aware of the Assad Regime's restrictions on media within Syria. This approach was reflected in widespread persecution and attempts to detain and expel reporters and other journalists considered to be reporting in favor of the opposition.¹³²

¹²⁸ Jim Cowie, *Syrian Internet Shutdown*, ORACLE DYN: BLOG (June 3, 2011), dyn.com/blog/Syrian-internet-shutdown/.

¹²⁹ SARG Scrambling to Choke Information on Protests U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 119, at 1.

¹³¹ By 2013, the Syrian Electronic Army's technological capabilities had advanced to the point that it was able to hack the *Washington Post*.

¹³² U.S. Dep't of State 2012 Human Rights Report: Syria, *supra* note 83, at 20-21.

63. Such repression was present following the initial outbreak of protests in Dera'a in March 2011, which provoked the Assad Regime to ban international media from the city and to force journalists already present in the city back to Damascus under armed escort.¹³³ My staff in the U.S. Embassy in Damascus reported the following incidents to keep Washington aware of the escalating situation on the ground:

- The Assad Regime's "heightened efforts" to "control the flow of information" "began on March 16, [2011,] when the security services harassed and arrested witnesses filming the crackdown by police on a protest in front of the Interior Ministry in Damascus."¹³⁴
- "Days after the March 18 demonstrations, the security services began jailing those working with and speaking to the western media."¹³⁵ This included journalist Khaled Ekhteyar, as well as human rights activist Mazen Darwish, who was arrested after speaking with various media outlets.¹³⁶ Both were released after a few days, but with a "noticeable change in behavior."¹³⁷ Ekhtayer was also believed to have been forced to reveal his e-mail passwords during his detention, since, following his release, "his Facebook account was spamming pro-government propaganda."¹³⁸
- On March 26, 2011, Reuters journalist Khaled Oweis, who had been "consistently breaking news of protests and crackdowns ahead of other journalists, especially in the southern city of Dara'a," was expelled from Syria for filing "unprofessional and

¹³³ Reporters Without Borders: Upheaval in the Arab World, *supra* note 119, at 12; Chelsea J. Carter, *Deadly Attack on Protesters Raises Questions about Syria's Stability*, CNN (Apr. 26, 2011), <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/04/25/syria.security.forces/>; Ford Syria Crisis Senate Testimony, *supra* note 69, at 40; *see also* Unrest in Syria: March 23 U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 96, at 2 (noting that foreign media had "begun covering events here more intensively, despite reported intimidation of some journalists from the SARG").

¹³⁴ SARG Scrambling to Choke Information on Protests U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 119, at 1.

¹³⁵ *Id.*

¹³⁶ U.S. Dep't of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, Unrest in Syria: March 24 Unclassified Update [2 MD Doc 1], 1 (Mar. 24, 2011), **Ex. 9**; SARG Scrambling to Choke Information on Protests U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 119, at 1-2.

¹³⁷ SARG Scrambling to Choke Information on Protests U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 119, at 2.

¹³⁸ *Id.* at 1.

false” reports.¹³⁹ Other Reuters journalists were arrested and detained in late March.¹⁴⁰

- The *mukhabarat* “systematically threatened” correspondents reporting in Syria for Orient TV, “a Dubai-based station...frequently cited...as a source for independent news.”¹⁴¹ These threats caused many of Orient TV’s journalists to quit, “making it difficult for the station to report on events” on the ground.¹⁴²
- BBC correspondent Lina Sinjab was arrested on March 26 and subjected to an eight-hour interrogation by the *mukhabarat*.¹⁴³

64. As the revolution progressed, the Regime continued to detain, arrest, and threaten journalists affiliated with media organizations deemed critical of the State.¹⁴⁴ Syria became notorious for its high journalist death toll.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ *Id.* at 2.

¹⁴⁰ *Id.* Reuters journalist Suleiman al-Khalidi subsequently reported on the torture he witnessed while in detention. Suleiman al-Khalidi, *Witness: Shattered Humanity Inside Syria's Security Apparatus*, REUTERS (May 26, 2011), <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-witness-syria-torture-idUSTRE74P2VD20110526>; *see also* *Jordanians call for release of Reuters journalist*, REUTERS (Mar. 31, 2011), <http://www.reuters.com/article/jordan-syria-reuters-idUSLDE72U19S20110331>.

¹⁴¹ Unrest in Syria: March 23 U.S. Embassy Update II, *supra* note 125, at 2; Unrest in Syria: March 24 U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 33, at 3; SARG Scrambling to Choke Information on Protests U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 119, at 2.

¹⁴² SARG Scrambling to Choke Information on Protests U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 119, at 2.

¹⁴³ *Id.*

¹⁴⁴ U.S. Dep’t of State 2012 Human Rights Report: Syria, *supra* note 83, at 20-21; *see also* Syria Unrest: December 5 U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 79, at 2 (discussing the arrest and detention of Razan Ghazzawi, an American-Syrian blogger and member of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression. She was arrested on December 4, 2011, “when attempting to enter Jordan to attend a workshop for advocates of press freedoms in the Arab world.”). On December 12, Ghazzawi was charged “by Syrian authorities with trying to incite sectarian strife, spreading false information and weakening national sentiment,” charges which she denied. Syria Unrest: December 14 U.S. Embassy Update, *supra* note 108, at 2. *See also* Central Intelligence Agency, Middle East-North Africa: Situation Update (Apr. 2, 2012), **Ex. 3** (“On Saturday, activists said that Ali Mahmoud Othman—a Syrian journalist who worked alongside the Western journalists who were killed in Bab Amr in February—was detained in Aleppo last weekend is being subjected to torture, according to Western press reporting.”).

4. Restrictions on Diplomatic Staff's Access to Information

65. The Assad Regime also sought to silence contrary narratives by limiting the information available to international diplomatic personnel. As Ambassador to Syria, I experienced firsthand the effectiveness of these measures, which affected the Embassy's ability to confirm even routine details necessary to plan visits around the country. For example, when I visited Hama on July 8, 2011,¹⁴⁶ I was unaware that a general strike was ongoing, which is information that I would have expected to learn under ordinary circumstances.

66. After my trip to Hama, I and all other personnel in the U.S. Embassy were officially restricted by the Assad Regime to moving exclusively within a 15-kilometer (nine-mile) radius of the Embassy, ostensibly for the protection of me and my staff. Even in Damascus, my staff and I were regularly blocked from meeting with Syrian citizens. We learned that the *mukhabarat* warned Syrian citizens in advance not to meet with me or my staff, and such meetings were frequently cancelled at the last minute. On one occasion, a mob appeared, blocking me and my staff from entering a building to meet with members of the opposition. On another occasion, a member of my diplomatic staff was arrested by the *mukhabarat* and detained, hooded and handcuffed for hours while other detainees were loudly beaten nearby. I understood such measures as efforts to intimidate and restrict my diplomatic staff from gathering information related to the uprising and Assad Regime's crackdown.

¹⁴⁵ U.S. Dep't of State 2012 Human Rights Report: Syria, *supra* note 83, at 2.

¹⁴⁶ Jason Ukman, *U.S. Ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, Greeted in Hama with Flowers and Olive Branches*, WASH. Post (July 8, 2011), https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/us-ambassador-to-syria-robert-ford-greeted-in-hama-with-flowers-and-olive-branches/2011/07/08/gIQA1Faz3H_blog.html.

c. International Condemnation

67. Syria received widespread international condemnation for its media policies and treatment of journalists.¹⁴⁷ From March 2012, U.N. Human Rights Council resolutions included language “strongly condemn[ing] the continued widespread and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Syrian authorities,” and in particular “the killing and persecution of protestors, human rights defenders and journalists.”¹⁴⁸ Likewise, the U.N. Human Rights Council urged the Regime to allow free access to the Internet and telecommunications networks and to lift censorship on reporting, including by allowing appropriate access by foreign journalists.¹⁴⁹ Consistent with these positions, Kofi Annan’s Six-Point Proposal of April 2012 highlighted that the Assad Regime should “ensure freedom of movement throughout the country for journalists and [implement] a non-discriminatory visa policy for them.”¹⁵⁰

68. Countries in the region joined in the international condemnation after Syria failed to cease its repressive crackdown. In August 2011, Turkish officials, concerned with the growing magnitude of repression by the Assad Regime, requested from Syrian authorities that they withdraw security personnel from several cities in what was then known as the “Turkish Initiative.” While the U.S. was not involved in the “Turkish Initiative” I was debriefed by Turkey’s Ambassador. The Assad Regime agreed to withdraw its forces from Hama and Deir

¹⁴⁷ G.A. Res. 66/L.36 (Feb. 14, 2012); G.A. Res. 66/253 (Feb. 16, 2012); Human Rights Council Res. 20/22, Situation of Human Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic, U.N. DOC. A/HRC/RES/20/22 (July 16, 2012).

¹⁴⁸ G.A. Res. 66/L.36 (Feb. 14, 2012); G.A. Res. 66/253 (Feb. 16, 2012).

¹⁴⁹ Human Rights Council Res. S16/1, U.N. DOC. A/HRC/RES/S-16/1 (May 4, 2011).

¹⁵⁰ S.C. Res. 2042 (Apr. 14, 2012), http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/six_point_proposal.pdf; U.S. Embassy Damascus, *A Message From Ambassador Ford*, FACEBOOK (Apr. 6, 2012), <https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADmessage%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADford/10150655544736938>, **Ex. 15-G**.

Ezzor over the course of two weeks and to release prisoners. However, site visits conducted by Turkish Embassy officials revealed that the Regime failed to comply with the terms of the agreement. Turkish diplomatic personnel on site confirmed that the Syrians had not withdrawn any of their forces and that no prisoners had been released. After the agreement broke down at the end of August, Turkey joined Western countries in demanding that Assad step down.¹⁵¹

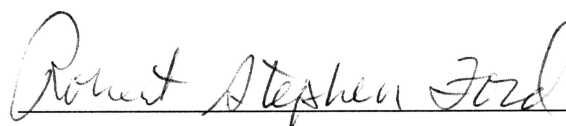
d. Conclusion

69. A central component of the Assad Regime's response to the protests that broke out in 2011 was the propagation of a false narrative concerning the circumstances and nature of the protest movement. In addition to spreading its own propaganda, the Regime created facts on the ground supporting its narrative by actively working to sectarianize the conflict. It further silenced contrary portrayals of the conflict by imposing formal and informal restrictions on lawful reporting and by persecuting and repressing foreign and domestic journalists.

¹⁵¹ Nada Bakri, *Turkish Minister and Other Envoys Press Syrian Leader*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 9, 2011), <https://nyti.ms/2nFehVS>; Steven L. Myers, *U.S. and Allies Say Syria Leader Must Step Down*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 19, 2011), <https://nyti.ms/2vx1nu7>.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is a true statement of my independent professional opinion.

Executed on March 17, 2018

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Robert Stephen Ford", written over a horizontal line.

Robert Stephen Ford

APPENDIX A:
CURRICULUM VITAE OF AMBASSADOR ROBERT STEPHEN FORD

Ambassador (ret) Robert S. Ford

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Dynamic former diplomat, university teacher, team leader and Middle East/North Africa analyst with demonstrated record supporting peaceful political reform; accustomed to working with top officials, legislators and civil society activists; wide range of contacts in Middle East and North Africa; public outreach and teaching skills, fluent in Arabic and French.

Kissinger Fellow, Yale University Jackson Institute for Global Affairs, 2016 – present
Teach undergraduates and graduate courses in international affairs and Middle East politics

Senior Fellow, Middle East Institute, Washington, DC, 2014 – present
Write and speak around the country on developments in Syria, Iraq and North Africa; participate in regular unofficial discussions with Iranian and Russian officials and experts to develop ideas about resolving the Syria conflict. Appeared in *New York Times*, CNN, PBS, NPR, Fox and other English and Arabic media.

Diplomatic Career:

Deputy Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of State, 2012 – 2014

State Department lead on Syria, proposing and implementing policy. Received in 2014 the Secretary of State's Distinguished Service Award, the Department's highest award.

- Developed common goals and strategies with European and Middle Eastern allies to contain and resolve the Syria crisis; regular ministerial-level meetings agreed to implement many suggestions I put forward in preliminary coordination meetings.
- Assembled State Department team to prepare reporting and devise strategy for non-lethal assistance to Syrian activists and opposition, drawing on U.S. government agencies and outside experts for advice.
- Led interagency effort to establish a U.S. diplomatic team in Turkey to implement \$70 million in aid projects in Syria that has kept infrastructure and municipalities functioning in selected communities and impeded extremist encroachment.
- Regularly spoke to Congress, American media and think-tank forums 2012-2013, generating support for U.S. policy. Spoke often to Arabic media in Arabic.

Ambassador, U.S. Embassy Damascus, Syria, 2011-2012

Directed an Embassy of 60 Americans and 200 Syrians. Received in 2013 Presidential Honor Award for leadership of the Embassy.

- Guided Embassy reporting as the revolution expanded. Devised with section chiefs methods of developing new information sources, and prepared policy recommendations for Washington, most of which were accepted, such as on opposition engagement.

- Undertook major public outreach to Syrian and foreign audiences. Engaged vigorously with Arab and western media. Revived moribund U.S. Embassy Damascus Facebook site with regular postings that garnered hundreds of new readers.

Deputy Ambassador, U.S. Embassy Baghdad, Iraq, 2008 – 2010

Responsible for internal management of the largest diplomatic mission in the world at the time with a \$2 billion annual budget, 900 direct-hire and 13,000 contract staff.

- Assembled interagency team to plan the transition from U.S. military lead in Iraq to State Department lead. Launched working groups on security and logistical support; the new Obama administration used the plans to stand up our diplomatic posts now in Iraq.
- Developed with mission team benchmarks for provincial project implementation. For the first time the mission matched personnel to specific projects; saved tens of millions of dollars by rejecting dozens of ill-advised projects and personnel requests.

Ambassador, U.S. Embassy Algiers, Algeria, 2006-2008

Policy lead on Algeria and oversight of an embassy of 53 American and 300 Algerian staff.

- Greatly expanded bilateral cooperation. Motivated team to create new collaborative programs in rule of law, media and education drawing on American government and NGO expertise. Added new FBI office and other staff to implement these new projects.
- Recalled early from Algeria at the explicit instruction of Secretary of State Rice to help reverse the growing Iraq debacle.

Previous Positions

Political Section Chief, U.S. Embassy Iraq 2004-2006

Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy Bahrain 2001-2004

Political/Economic Section Chief, U.S. Embassy Cameroon 1999-2001

Economic Officer, Egypt/North Africa Office, U.S. Department of State, Washington, 1997-1999

Political/Economic Officer, U.S. Embassy Algeria 1994-1997

Lebanon/Syria Analyst, Intelligence Bureau, Department of State, Washington 1992-1994

Sinai Peacekeeping Force Observer, Sinai Peninsula 1991-1992

Economic Officer, U.S. Embassy Egypt 1988-1991

Economic and Consular Officer, U.S. Consulate, Izmir, Turkey 1986-1988

English Teacher, U.S. Peace Corps Morocco 1981-1983

Languages

Fluent in Arabic and French; some capacity in German and Turkish

Other Awards Including:

2012 John F. Kennedy Library Profile in Courage Award

2012 Project on Middle East Democracy Annual Human Rights Defender Award

2012 U.S. State Department Award for best ambassador work in field of human rights

Education

M.A. in International Studies, Johns Hopkins SAIS 1983

B.A. in International Studies, Johns Hopkins University 1980

Intensive advanced Arabic program, American University of Cairo 1983-1984

PUBLICATIONS

No One Will Intervene to Save Ghouta, ASHARQ AL-AWSAT (Feb. 27, 2018), <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1188701/robert-ford/exclusive-no-one-will-intervene-save-ghouta>.

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The Fatal Flaw in Trump's ISIS Plan, THE ATLANTIC (May 11, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/05/trump-turkey-erdogan-kurds-isis-syria-raqqa/525963/>.

How to Salvage US Interests in Syria, FAIR OBSERVER (Jan. 17, 2017), https://www.fairobserver.com/region/middle_east_north_africa/syria-us-russia-middle-east-news-analysis-74325/.

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Gauging the German Reaction to America's New Direction, WAR ON THE ROCKS (Nov. 22, 2016), <https://warontherocks.com/2016/11/gauging-the-german-reaction-to-americas-new-direction/>.

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The Kurdish PYD and the Challenge of Rebuilding a Syrian State, MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE (Aug. 25, 2015), <http://www.mei.edu/content/at/kurdish-pyd-and-challenge-rebuilding-syrian-state>.

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How the U.S. Can Help Syria Drive Out ISIS, CNN (Aug. 26, 2014), <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/26/opinion/ford-isis-syria/index.html>.

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The Fractured Caliphate, FOREIGN POLICY (July 7, 2014), <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/07/07/the-fractured-caliphate/>.

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**APPENDIX B:
INDEX OF MATERIALS CITED IN EXPERT REPORT
OF AMBASSADOR ROBERT STEPHEN FORD**

I. MATERIALS EXHIBITED WITH EXPERT REPORT OF AMBASSADOR ROBERT STEPHEN FORD*:

Exhibit No.	Description
1	Map of Syria and Lebanon, Cartographia (Jan. 1, 2011).
2	MICHEL SEURAT, SYRIE, L'ETAT DE BARBARIE [SYRIA, THE BARBARIC STATE], (Presses Universitaires de France, 1989)
3	Central Intelligence Agency, Middle East-North Africa: Situation Update (Apr. 2, 2012)
4	JOHN DAVIS ET AL., THE ARAB SPRING AND ARAB THAW: UNFINISHED REVOLUTIONS AND THE QUEST FOR DEMOCRACY (John Davis ed., 2013)
5	U.S. Dep't of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, SARG Responds with Violence to Second Damascus Demonstration in Two Days [2 MD Doc 12] (Mar. 16, 2011)
6	U.S. Dep't of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, Bloody Friday Shatters Syria's Claim [2 MD Doc 10] (Mar. 20, 2011)
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8	U.S. Dep't of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, Unrest in Syria: March 23 Update II [2 MD Doc 11] (Mar. 23, 2011)
9	U.S. Dep't of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, Unrest in Syria: March 24 Unclassified Update [2 MD Doc 1] (Mar. 24, 2011)
10	U.S. Dep't of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, Unrest in Syria: March 24 Classified Update [2 MD Doc 7] (Mar. 24, 2011)
11	U.S. Dep't of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, SARG Scrambling to Choke Information on Protests [2 MD Doc 8], 2 (Apr. 6, 2011)
12	U.S. Dep't of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, Syria Unrest: December 14 Update [4 RG] (Dec. 14, 2011)
13	U.S. Dep't of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, Syria Unrest: December 5 Update [2 RG] (Dec. 19, 2011)
14	U.S. Dep't of State, Update from Embassy in Damascus, Syria Unrest: December 19 Update [3 RG] (Dec. 19, 2011)
15-A	U.S. Embassy Damascus, <i>A Note from Ambassador Robert Ford</i> , Facebook (July 10, 2011), https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADnote%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADrobert%ADford/10150237831306938
15-B	U.S. Embassy Damascus, <i>A Note From Ambassador Robert Ford</i> , Facebook (Sept. 6, 2011), https://www.facebook.com/notes/usembassydamascus/anotefromambassadorrobertford/10150286333121938

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15-C	U.S. Embassy Damascus, <i>A Note From Ambassador Ford on Recent Events in Syria</i> , Facebook (Feb. 9, 2012), https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADnote%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADford%ADon%ADrecent%ADevents%ADin%ADsyria/10150545674871938
15-D	U.S. Embassy Damascus, <i>A Note From Ambassador Ford</i> , Facebook (Feb. 10, 2012), https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADnote%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADford/10150547572706938
15-E	U.S. Embassy Damascus, <i>A Message From Ambassador Ford on the Arrests of Human Rights Activists</i> , Facebook (Feb. 17, 2012), https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADmessage%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADford%ADon%ADthe%ADarrests%ADof%ADhuman%ADrights%ADactivists/10150563608741938
15-F	U.S. Embassy Damascus, <i>A Message from Ambassador Robert Ford</i> , Facebook (Mar. 5, 2012), https://www.facebook.com/notes/us-embassy-damascus/a-message-from-ambassador-robert-ford/10150595589281938
15-G	U.S. Embassy Damascus, <i>A Message From Ambassador Ford</i> , Facebook (Apr. 6, 2012), https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADmessage%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADford/10150655544736938

* For the convenience of the Court, this index has been linked to the cover page of each exhibit listed. All exhibits appear at the end of this document.

II. PUBLICLY AVAILABLE MATERIALS CITED IN EXPERT REPORT OF AMBASSADOR ROBERT STEPHEN FORD:

A. Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic

No.	Description
1	CONSTITUTION OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC, Feb. 27 2012, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_125885.pdf

B. United Nations Resolutions, Reports, and Communications

No.	Description
2	G.A. Res. 66/L.36 (Feb. 14, 2012), http://undocs.org/A/66/L.36
3	G.A. Res. 66/253 (Feb. 16, 2012), http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/253
4	Human Rights Council Res. 20/22, Situation of Human Rights in the Syrian Arab Republic, U.N. DOC. A/HRC/RES/20/22 (July 16, 2012), https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/G12/153/46/PDF/G1215346.pdf?OpenElement
5	Final Communiqué, Action Group for Syria (June 30, 2012), http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Syria/FinalCommuniqueActionGroupforSyria.pdf
6	<i>As Syrian death toll tops 5,000, UN human rights chief warns about key city</i> , UN NEWS CENTRE (Dec. 12, 2011), http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=40708
7	<i>Data suggest Syria death toll could be more than 60,000, says UN human rights office</i> , UN NEWS CENTRE (Jan. 2, 2013), http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=43866
8	Statement, UNICEF, Statement on children caught in the bloodshed in Syria (Feb. 15, 2012), http://www.unicef.ca/en/blog/unicef-statement-on-children-caught-in-the-bloodshed-in-syria
9	Human Rights Council, Rep. of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, U.N. DOC. A/HRC/19/69 (Feb. 22, 2012), http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/IICISyria/Pages/Documentation.aspx
10	Human Rights Council Res. S16/1, U.N. DOC. A/HRC/RES/S-16/1 (May 4, 2011), http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SY/HRC-RES-S-16-1.pdf
11	S.C. Res. 2042 (Apr. 14, 2012), http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/six_point_proposal.pdf

C. Non-Governmental Organization Reports

No.	Description
12	<i>A Wasted Decade: Human Rights in Syria during Bashar al-Asad's First Ten Years in Power</i> , HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (July 16, 2010), https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/07/16/wasted-decade/human-rights-syria-during-bashar-al-asads-first-ten-years-power
13	<i>By All Means Necessary!: Individual and Command Responsibility for Crimes against Humanity in Syria</i> , HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (Dec. 2011), https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria1211webwcover_0.pdf
14	<i>The 'Arab Spring': Five Years On</i> , AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (Jan. 2016), https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/01/arab-spring-five-years-on/
15	Tom Porteous et al., <i>"We've Never Seen Such Horror": Crimes against Humanity by Syrian Security Forces</i> , HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 14 (June 1, 2011), https://www.hrw.org/report/2011/06/01/weve-never-seen-such-horror/crimes-against-humanity-syrian-security-forces
16	<i>Syria: Shootings, Arrests Follow Hama Protests</i> , HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (July 6, 2011), https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/07/06/syria-shootings-arrests-follow-hama-protest
17	<i>World Report 2012: Syria - Events of 2011</i> , HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (2012), https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2012/country-chapters/syria
18	<i>Upheaval in the Arab World: Media as Key Witnesses and Political Pawns</i> , REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS, 12 (Nov. 2011), https://web.archive.org/web/20160102234721/https://rsf.org/rapport/RSF_BILAN_MOYEN_ORIENT_2011_GB.pdf
19	Dahlia El Zein, <i>The 'New' Syrian Media Law is Nothing New</i> , COMMITTEE TO PROTECT JOURNALISTS (Sept. 7, 2011), https://cpj.org/blog/2011/09/the-new-syrian-media-law-is-nothing-new.php

D. U.S. Department of State Reports

No.	Description
20	U.S. Dep't of State, <i>State Sponsors of Terrorism</i> (last visited Mar. 3, 2018), https://www.state.gov/j/ct/list/c14151.htm
21	U.S. Dep't of State, Bureau of Democracy, H.R. and Lab., <i>Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2012: Syria</i> (2012), https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/204595.pdf

E. U.S. Department of the Treasury Reports

No.	Description
22	Dep't of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control, <i>Syria Sanctions Program</i> , (last updated Aug. 2, 2013), https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/syria.pdf

F. United States Statutes and Regulations

No.	Description
23	45 Fed. Reg. 33,956 (May 21, 1980)

G. United States Senate Hearings

No.	Description
24	<i>Nomination of Robert Stephen Ford to be Ambassador to the Syrian Arab Republic: Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Foreign Affairs</i> , 111th Cong. 581 (2010), https://www.congress.gov/112/chrg/shrg74273/CHRG-112shrg74273.pdf
25	<i>Syria: The Crisis and Its Implications: Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Foreign Affairs</i> , 112th Cong. 14 (2012), https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-112shrg75019/pdf/CHRG-112shrg75019.pdf

H. News Articles

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26	Robert M. Danin, <i>Remembering Hafez al-Assad</i> , COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS (Nov. 11, 2011), http://blogs.cfr.org/danin/2011/11/11/remembering-hafez-al-assad/
27	Neil MacFarquhar, <i>Hafez al-Assad, Who Turned Syria into a Power in the Middle East, Dies at 69</i> , N.Y. TIMES (June 11, 2000), https://nyti.ms/2kdStww
28	<i>30 Years Later, Photos Emerge from Killings in Syria</i> , NPR (Feb. 2, 2012), http://www.npr.org/2012/02/01/146235292/30-years-later-photos-emerge-from-killings-in-syria
29	Holly Fletcher, <i>State Sponsor: Syria</i> , COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS (Feb. 1, 2008), http://www.cfr.org/syria/state-sponsor-syria/p9368
30	Roula Khalaf, <i>Bashar al-Assad: Behind the Mask</i> , THE FINANCIAL TIMES (June 15, 2012), https://www.ft.com/content/669da3aa-b5b5-11e1-ab92-00144feabdc0
31	<i>How Syria's 'Geeky' President Assad Went From Doctor to Dictator</i> , NBC NEWS (Oct. 30, 2015), http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/syria-peace-talks/how-syrias-geeky-president-assad-went-doctor-dictator-n453871
32	<i>Syrians Talk of a Country Held Back by Fear</i> , CNN (Mar. 30, 2011), http://www.cnn.com/2011/OPINION/03/30/bohn.syria.al.assad/index.html
33	<i>Who's Who in the Battle for Syria</i> , NPR (June 11, 2012), http://www.npr.org/2012/06/11/154773995/whos-who-in-the-battle-for-syria
34	<i>Syria Profile - Timeline</i> , BBC (May 11, 2017), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703995

35	Salwa Amor and Ruth Sherlock, <i>How Bashar al-Assad Created the Feared Shabiha Militia: An Insider Speaks</i> , THE TELEGRAPH (Mar. 23, 2014), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/10716289/How-Bashar-al-Assad-created-the-feared-shabiha-militia-an-insider-speaks.html
36	Nada Bakri, <i>Crowds in Syria Attack U.S. and French Embassies</i> , N.Y. TIMES (July 11, 2011), https://nyti.ms/2DeOZE1
37	Kathy Gil Sinan, <i>How Syria's Uprising Spawned a Jihad</i> , THE ATLANTIC (Mar. 16, 2016), https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/03/syria-civil-war-five-years/474006/
38	Anthony Shadid, <i>Syrian Businessman Becomes Magnet for Anger and Dissent</i> , N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 30, 2011), https://nyti.ms/2BAicL5
39	<i>Syria crisis: Profiles of Security and Defence Chiefs Killed in Damascus Blast</i> , BBC NEWS (July 20, 2012), http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-18889030
40	Robert F. Worth, <i>How a Single Match Can Ignite a Revolution</i> , N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 21, 2011), https://nyti.ms/2jZZYaf
41	<i>In Syria, Crackdown After Protests</i> , N. Y. TIMES (Mar. 18, 2011), https://nyti.ms/2jKKoBW
42	<i>Syria Braces for "Day of Dignity" Rallies</i> , AL JAZEERA (Mar. 25, 2011), http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/03/20113255460868563.html
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46	Liam Stack & Katherine Zoepf, <i>Security Forces Fire on Protesters in Restive Syrian City</i> , N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 18, 2011), https://nyti.ms/2lkG0uf
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48	Aida Edemariam, <i>Syrian Writer Samar Yazbek: 'A Woman Like Me Makes Life Difficult'</i> , THE GUARDIAN (Oct. 12, 2012), https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/oct/13/interview-samar-yazbek-syria-revolution
49	Katherine Marsh, <i>Syria: Four Killed in Deraa as Protests Spread Across South</i> , THE GUARDIAN (Mar. 22, 2011), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/22/syrian-protests-troops-kill-deraa
50	Khaled Yacoub Oweis, <i>Protests Spread Against Assad Rule in Syria</i> , REUTERS (Mar. 24, 2011), http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-idUSTRE72N2MC20110325
51	<i>'Half a Million' Protest on Streets of Hama</i> , AL JAZEERA (July 8, 2011), http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/07/2011780473138345.html
52	Nir Rosen, <i>The Battle For Homs</i> , AL JAZEERA (Feb. 11, 2012), http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/02/20122101097421319.html
53	<i>Q&A: Nir Rosen on Syria's Armed Opposition</i> , AL JAZEERA (Feb. 13, 2012), http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/02/201221315020166516.html

54	<i>News Wrap: White House Urges Political Solution in Syria</i> , PBS (Jan. 30, 2012), http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/world-jan-june12-othernews_01-30/
55	Scott Wilson & Joby Warrick, <i>Assad Must Go, Obama Says</i> , WASH. POST (Aug. 18, 2011), https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/assad-must-go-obama-says/2011/08/18/gIQAelheOJ_story.html
56	Raja Abdulrahim, <i>Syrian Regime, Backed by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, Expands Ground Offensive to Aleppo</i> , WALL STREET JOURNAL (Oct. 18, 2015), https://www.wsj.com/articles/syrian-regime-backed-by-russia-iran-and-hezbollah-expands-ground-offensive-to-aleppo-1445206886
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58	Julian Borger & Mona Mahmood, <i>Syrian Troops Bombard Sealed-off Suburb of Homs</i> , THE GUARDIAN (Feb. 9, 2012), http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/feb/09/syrian-troops-suburb-homs
59	<i>Homs 'Massacre' Leaves 260 Dead</i> , THE TELEGRAPH (Feb. 4, 2012), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9061181/Homs-massacre-leaves-260-dead.html
60	Marie Colvin, <i>Final Dispatch from Homs, the Battered City</i> , THE SUNDAY TIMES (Feb. 19, 2012), https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/final-dispatch-from-homs-the-battered-city-0ntg7xk3397
61	Marie Colvin, <i>Syria Kills 200</i> , THE SUNDAY TIMES (Feb. 5, 2012), https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/syria-kills-200-czg73kncqlm
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Exhibit 1

Exhibit filed physically with the Court,
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Exhibit 2

Michel Seurat

SYRIE L'ÉTAT DE BARBARIE

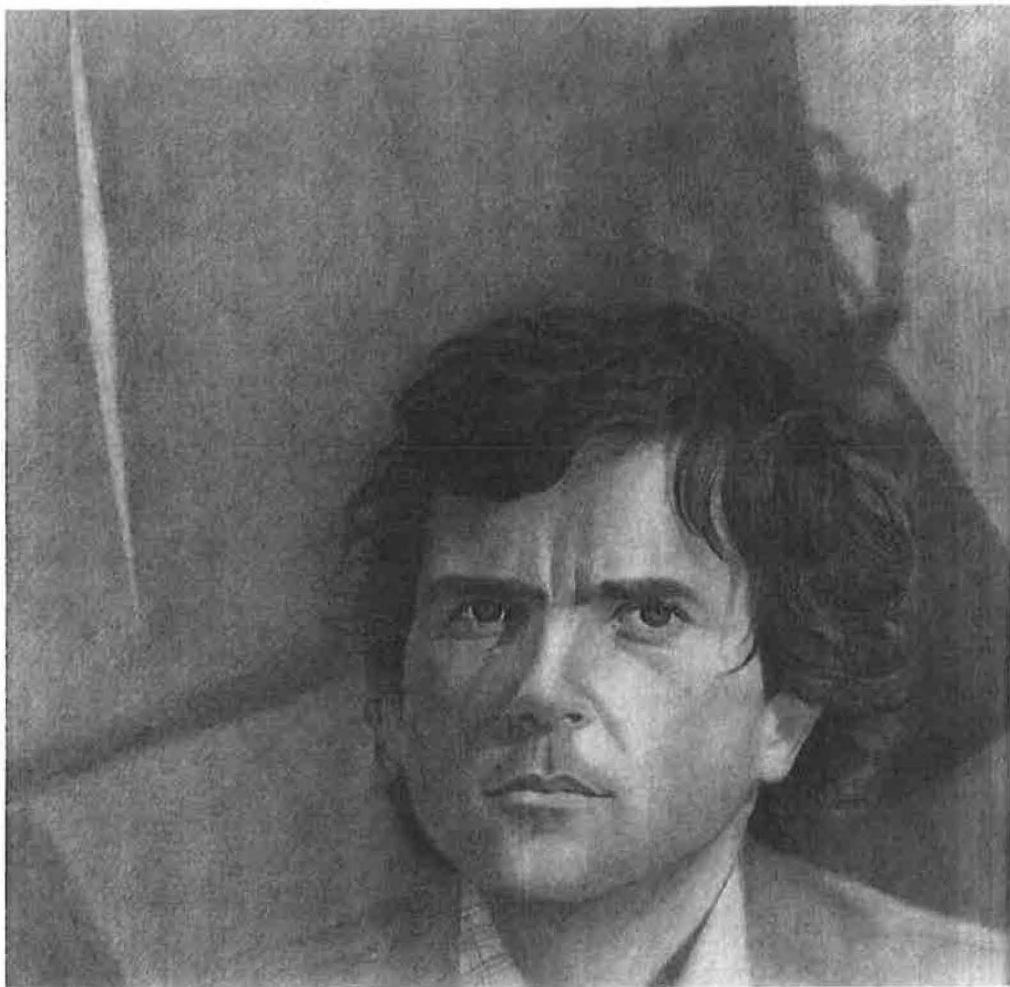
Préface de Gilles Kepel



proche
orient

puf

Syrie
L'État de barbarie



Portrait de Michel Seurat, par Rida Housos. Huile sur toile, Damas, 1977

Syrie L'État de barbarie

MICHEL SEURAT



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« Proche Orient »

collection dirigée
par Gilles KEPPEL

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Préface

En ce printemps 1985, Michel Seurat avait passé quelques jours à Paris, dormant sur le canapé de ma bibliothèque. Le 21 mai, veille de son voyage de retour à Beyrouth, où il serait enlevé au sortir de l'aéroport en compagnie du journaliste Jean-Paul Kauffmann, nous avions dîné à la maison avec des amis, devisant de la Syrie et du Proche-Orient, et de l'attitude à adopter face aux conflits qui déchiraient la région. Il s'était fait l'écho des griefs d'intellectuels progressistes arabes qui me reprochaient une posture trop distanciée. Lui-même se percevait comme un chercheur engagé – peut-être la différence d'âge (il était mon aîné de huit années) – empreint des idéaux d'un Mai 68 vécu à vingt et un ans. Il venait de publier dans la revue *Esprit* des articles – sans les signer de son nom – qui analysaient la nature du régime syrien, son mode de domination brutal, après l'écrasement au prix de dizaines de milliers de morts, du soulèvement de Hama en 1982, à l'instigation des Frères musulmans. L'ultime article, qu'il avait intitulé « L'État de Barbarie » et que nous avons repris avec Olivier Mongin, rédacteur en chef d'*Esprit*, en titre de la première compilation posthume de son œuvre, parue en 1988, serait son testament intellectuel et aussi, de manière atrocement prémonitoire, la description du destin qui l'attendait, otage assassiné par ses ravisseurs du groupuscule armé chiite « Organisation du Jihad Islamique » – prête-nom du Hezbollah libanais, lui-même instrument des régimes syrien et iranien.

Son acuité de sociologue perceait, avec le regard du chercheur de terrain, les œillères idéologiques des grands systèmes qui réduisaient les événements du Levant à des épi-phénomènes

Au-dessus des contingences matérielles de la vie civile, le chef (*al-qâ'id*) « appartient à sa seule fin » (la lutte), pour reprendre Hegel cité par K. Popper¹, « il arrive qu'il traite légèrement d'autres intérêts. [...] Une si grande figure écrase nécessairement mainte fleur innocente, ruine mainte chose sur son chemin ». Quelle est donc cette « fleur innocente » que le président syrien écrase dans sa marche triomphante ? La « liberté » ? Certes, et du reste Hâfèz al-Assad concède volontiers ce point : ainsi, dans le discours qu'il prononce le 8 mars 1978, à l'occasion de sa seconde investiture présidentielle, il se justifie de ne pouvoir lever l'État d'urgence en vigueur dans le pays depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir du Baas le 8 mars 1963, en arguant des contraintes de la lutte nationale. Mais, par-delà la liberté, le système politique, comme on l'a vu, et la construction nationale. Dans sa diatribe contre Hegel, Karl Popper s'en prend à sa « conception de l'homme comme animal héroïque plutôt que comme doué de raison », en y voyant un « idéal typiquement tribal ». Il ne pensait pas si bien dire. Notre « héros » hégélien a-t-il bâti l'État ? On ne pourrait l'admettre qu'en choisissant délibérément de regarder la réalité à la loupe de l'anthropologie politique, pour ne pas dire du folklore, et en tirant un trait sur toute la pensée politique arabe et le projet d'État moderne qu'elle porte en elle depuis plus d'un siècle.

Chapitre III

La société syrienne contre son État*

Six mois d'action violente¹ ont donné au mouvement des Frères musulmans une dimension historique qu'il ne semble pas, cependant, en mesure d'assumer à lui seul. Plus qu'un réel danger, ce mouvement – qui n'a aucune solution politique à proposer dans l'immédiat – apparaît plutôt comme un défi lancé au régime du président Assad qui, jusqu'à présent, a fait montre de son incapacité à en venir à bout, malgré l'ampleur des moyens répressifs mis en œuvre. Dans la foulée de ce terrorisme, l'opposition dite « démocratique » essaie activement de s'organiser et, oubliant les formules éculées du Mouvement national arabe, de trouver un terrain d'action au niveau de la société civile, qu'elle voudrait ressusciter contre l'État. Pour faire face à la situation, celui-ci a d'abord joué l'ouverture, en proposant un élargissement du Front national progressiste actuellement au pouvoir. Devant la fin de non-recevoir des principales forces concernées par cette proposition, il semble qu'il soit à présent décidé à imposer la « continuité », comme il ressort du VII^e congrès régional du parti Baas, qui s'est tenu du 22 décembre [1979] au 6 janvier [1980] à Damas, et malgré le risque évident que s'accroisse l'isolement politique et confessionnel du régime.

Depuis l'opération menée contre l'École d'artillerie d'Alep le 16 juin [1979] dernier et qui, on s'en souvient, avait fait 83 tués dans les rangs des élèves officiers – tous choisis dans la communauté alaoutite –, les attentats se sont multipliés dans les grandes villes du pays, au point de

* Première publication dans *Le Monde diplomatique*, avril 1980. À la demande de l'auteur, cet article fut publié sous un pseudonyme (N.D.E.).

1. Pour l'analyse de la situation antérieure, voir « L'agitation confessionnelle en Syrie », *Le Monde diplomatique*, octobre 1979. (Voir, dans ce recueil, article n° 4 [N.D.E].)

1. *La Société ouverte et ses ennemis*, op. cit., p. 52.

devenir la marque d'une nouvelle quotidienneté syrienne. Il serait donc tout à fait illusoire de vouloir en dresser une liste exhaustive, et l'on se contentera de rappeler les faits les plus saillants de ces derniers mois. À Alep, la métropole du Nord qui est devenue l'épicentre du mouvement, la guerre est désormais ouverte entre l'organisation militaire de la confrérie et les « Brigades de défense » de M. Rif'at al-Assad – frère du président –, lesquelles, malgré les 5 000 hommes engagés dans la bataille, ne parviennent pas à empêcher que les deux tiers de la ville ne soient de fait soustraits à l'autorité légale. Tout a commencé – ou recommencé – en novembre, quelques jours avant la grande fête musulmane de l'Adha, quand une escouade a attaqué un bureau de la sûreté, tuant 14 agents des forces de sécurité intérieure et des Mukhabarat (renseignements). Le lendemain, le pouvoir s'est cru assez fort pour arrêter le cheikh Zeineddin Khairallah, l'imam de la Grande Mosquée, dont le gendre n'est autre que Husni 'Abo, le responsable militaire des Frères musulmans pour la région d'Alep (récemment exécuté). En réponse à cette mesure, plusieurs milliers de manifestants se sont déversés dans les rues de la ville, à la sortie de la mosquée Rawda. Une fusillade a alors éclaté, qui a fait une dizaine de morts et plusieurs dizaines de blessés. Dans les deux jours qui ont suivi la fête – par ailleurs boycottée sur ordre de la confrérie –, 18 personnes ont été assassinées, toutes dans la communauté alaouite. Début décembre, huit hommes armés ont réussi à pénétrer dans une école de la ville, où se trouvaient réunis des cadres du parti Baas préparant le futur congrès régional, et ont ouvert le feu. Bilan : une quarantaine de morts. À noter à ce propos que, dans la « branche » d'Alep, les défections en masse ont réduit ce parti à l'État de squelette, puisqu'il ne compte plus que 600 militants, pour une population de près d'un million d'habitants.

À Hama, le fief de l'intégrisme musulman, deux grandes manifestations avaient soulevé la population. La première, en novembre, était une réponse au meurtre d'un chauffeur de poids lourd musulman de la ville par un alaouite du village voisin de Rabi'a. Elle a réuni plusieurs dizaines de milliers de manifestants, armés pour certains. La seconde, en décembre, entendait protester de la même manière contre le meurtre d'un écolier de 16 ans par les Mukhabarat. Dernier fait marquant concernant cette ville : la tentative d'assassinat du *mohafez* (gouverneur), au cours de laquelle deux de ses gardes du corps ont été tués, ainsi que deux des agresseurs. À Lattaquié, après les violents affrontements qui ont embrasé la ville au début de septembre, et sur lesquels on ne reviendra pas, les Frères musulmans ont imposé un couvre-feu de fait après 19 heures. Il faut signaler également que cette agitation a débordé le cadre urbain pour gagner la campagne avoisinante dans le Nord du

pays, autour d'Idlib et d'Alep, en particulier, où les centres de la sûreté ont été attaqués par des éléments armés. Ainsi dans le village d'Atma, où quatre policiers ont été tués. Dans les autres villes du pays, et en particulier à Damas, où l'appareil répressif tient encore solidement la rue, les événements sont moins spectaculaires : assassinats de personnalités proches du régime (Hassan Karkora, médecin, 'Adnan Ghanem, professeur de géologie, dans son bureau de l'université...), attentats contre les forces de la sûreté.

Encore une fois, ce ne sont là que des exemples limités d'une action beaucoup plus large qui, quotidiennement, secoue une rue, un quartier, un village dans le pays. Alors, bien sûr, se pose la question de la finalité de cette action du point de vue du mouvement lui-même. Pour des raisons évidentes qui tiennent à la nature clandestine de celui-ci, il est difficile d'apporter une réponse précise à cette question. Tout au plus peut-on se référer aux organes de la confrérie en Syrie, comme *Al-Nadhir* ou *Al-Ra'id*, et autres tracts qui circulent sous le manteau dans tout le pays. Tous proclament en substance que les Frères musulmans ne sont pas contre les alaouites, mais contre le despotisme d'une minorité, pour le rétablissement de la souveraineté de la « majorité ». Il est à remarquer que les revendications formulées, telles que la libération des prisonniers politiques, le respect des convictions de chacun, etc., ne concernent pas la seule « Communauté des croyants » (*Umma*), mais avec elle, et explicitement, tous les citoyens victimes de l'oppression. C'est une « perche » tendue à l'opposition « démocratique » et à toutes les forces de changement.

SOURDE LUTTE DANS LES ORGANISATIONS PROFESSIONNELLES

En parfaite conformité avec les clivages politiques syriens traditionnels, cette opposition est très largement dominée par trois courants : les communistes du « bureau politique » de Riyad Turk, né d'une scission du Parti communiste de M. Khaled Bagdash en 1971 ; les nassériens, avec le docteur Jamal Atassi, qui a aussi son pendant au sein du Front national au pouvoir en la personne de M. Fawzi al-Kayyali ; enfin, les baassistes du « Mouvement du 23 février », autrement dit l'aile « dure » du parti qui fut au pouvoir entre les deux coups d'État (23 février 1966-16 novembre 1970), et dont les chefs « historiques » sont soit en exil (M. Ibrahim Makhos), soit regroupés dans la prison de Mezzé à Damas (MM. Salah Jedid, Nouredin Atassi, Youssef Zu'ayyen).

Tous les dirigeants de ces formations politiques que nous avons interrogés reconnaissent aux Frères musulmans l'immense mérite d'avoir les premiers brisé le mur de la peur et tiré la société syrienne de sa léthargie, même s'ils ne peuvent approuver les moyens utilisés, à savoir le terrorisme et la confessionnalisation de la lutte.

Autre trait marquant que l'on retrouve dans les différentes prises de position : la froideur de l'analyse, la modestie des programmes d'action à court terme. Rompant avec une certaine « langue de bois » triomphaliste – à laquelle, il faut bien le dire, le discours politique arabe nous a habitués –, ces organisations manifestent une grande maturité et ne craignent pas d'affirmer, au risque de se voir débordé par l'effervescence de la rue, que le régime du président Assad ne tombera pas en un jour.

Seul le « Mouvement du 23 février » semble avoir encore du mal à se débarrasser d'un certain atavisme poushiste, et regrette le temps où il suffisait de trois chars d'assaut pour prendre le pouvoir à Damas. Son impatience se justifie : nourri dans le sérail baassiste, il est également le mieux implanté, et de loin, dans l'armée, de même que dans la communauté alaouite : les trois assises du régime actuel. Selon deux membres du comité central que nous avons rencontrés, les 12 campagnes de répression que le Mouvement a dû affronter depuis 1970 sont la meilleure preuve qu'il représente le danger le plus sérieux pour le pouvoir et, dans les circonstances actuelles, « il est celui qui peut le plus facilement tirer le tapis à lui ». Mais le « Mouvement du 23 février » reste tout de même acquis à l'idée, qui s'est affirmée peu à peu dans l'opposition en Syrie, selon laquelle le plus urgent n'est pas tant de s'emparer de l'État que d'organiser et de défendre la société contre celui-ci.

Ce n'est pas un mince programme quand on mesure la situation présente : au terme d'un long processus de « dé-socialisation », le Baas est parvenu à ramener la société syrienne au niveau d'une organisation politique avec ses organes d'encadrement que sont – à l'instar des corporations – les « organisations populaires » chargées de reproduire le discours uniforme du pouvoir dans toutes les catégories sociales. Aujourd'hui, pourtant, à la faveur de la crise, le système mis en place semble se retourner contre son initiateur. Une lutte sourde s'est engagée, depuis plus d'un an déjà, pour bouter hors de ces organisations les représentants attitrés du pouvoir. Le résultat est que des pans entiers de la société échappent désormais à l'emprise de l'État.

Ainsi, chez les ingénieurs, les médecins, les pharmaciens, les élections syndicales qui ont eu lieu à la fin de l'année écoulée se sont traduites par un échec cuisant pour le parti au pouvoir. À Damas, sur un total de 15 élus par union syndicale, les baassistes n'ont obtenu que 3 représentants chez les ingénieurs, 1 chez les pharmaciens, aucun chez les médecins.

À Homs, seul un baassiste médecin a été élu, aucun dans les autres professions. À Alep et à Hama, les jeux étaient encore plus simples puisqu'il n'y avait même pas de candidat de ce parti. Les avocats, pour leur part, ont déjà derrière eux une longue expérience d'opposition au régime¹ : leur union ainsi que des groupements comme l'« Association des droits de l'homme », dont ils ont eu l'initiative, exercent une action concrète dans le domaine de la défense des libertés. En décembre dernier, ce sont les magistrats qui ont fait porter l'attention sur eux en déclenchant une grève de vingt-quatre heures. À l'université, la situation n'est guère plus enviable pour le pouvoir. Ses représentants patentés hésitent à s'y afficher, par peur des attentats terroristes. Dans cette position stratégique, l'État se devait de réagir plus vigoureusement, par des résiliations de contrat et des mutations qui ont touché plus d'une centaine de membres du corps professoral. À la faculté de génie de Damas, l'arrestation des professeurs Rif'at Sioufi et 'Asef Shahine, alaouite connu pour son opposition au régime, a suscité quelques remous dans les milieux universitaires.

Dans le monde ouvrier, enfin, les élections générales dans les syndicats, au mois d'octobre 1978, avaient déjà sonné comme un avertissement. Plus récemment, au mois de novembre dernier, les 5 000 ouvriers qui travaillent sur les champs pétrolifères de Rmeilan, dans l'extrémité nord-est du pays, se sont mis en grève durant quatre jours en revendiquant de meilleures conditions de travail et des augmentations de salaire. Après quelques tentatives d'intimidation des Mukhabarat, l'État a fini par céder sur tous les points, sans doute pour éviter d'avoir à se battre sur tous les fronts. De même, dans deux usines à Homs et dans la sucrerie d'Adra, près de Damas, où les ouvriers ont eu encore moins de difficultés à obtenir ce qu'ils demandaient.

Ainsi, des avocats aux ouvriers, une nouvelle carte de l'opposition se dessine peu à peu en Syrie. C'est à ce large mouvement populaire, mobilisant toutes les forces de la société, que l'opposition plus proprement politique cherche à s'associer, sur le terrain des luttes ponctuelles. Le fait que ces forces soient de « droite » ou de « gauche » passe désormais au second plan, la priorité déclarée étant de dresser un front uni contre l'État. Le « progressisme » arabe a fait long feu, et une certaine nostalgie des années 1950 et de la « démocratie bourgeoise » ne craint plus de s'exprimer dans les rangs de l'opposition, fût-elle communiste. Les contacts avec les Frères musulmans eux-mêmes ne sont pas par principe exclus, et il est du reste vraisemblable que, sur ce point encore, la pratique ait largement dépassé la théorie.

1. Cf. *Le Monde*, 27 décembre 1978.

ATMOSPHÈRE DE FIN DE RÉGNE

Comment l'État a-t-il donc réagi pour tenter de mettre fin à une situation dont il peut craindre qu'elle ne débouche à terme sur la multiplication des foyers insurrectionnels et la désobéissance civile ? Entre le gant de fer et le gant de velours, la politique suivie a pu paraître déconcertante. Mais, par-delà ses atermoiements, il est encore possible de déceler en elle une certaine rationalité, comme résultante de luttes intestines qui, à l'intérieur du bloc au pouvoir, opposent divers groupes constitués selon des clivages politiques, confessionnels ou de clientèle.

Durant cette dernière période, la tension a été vive entre ce que l'on est tenté d'appeler désormais la « vieille garde » du parti Baas avec MM. Mahmoud al-Ayyoubi, Abdallah al-Alimari, Muhammad Jaber Bajbouj... et une supposée « nouvelle génération », selon la formule consacrée par les grands organes d'information, emmenée par M. Rif'at al-Assad, le frère du président Hâfèz al-Assad. En principe au-dessus de la mêlée, le président syrien veille à n'être identifié à aucune de ces tendances, mais à les utiliser l'une contre l'autre, selon les circonstances. Encore qu'en dernière analyse l'axe politique Hâfèz-Rif'at semblait l'emporter sur toute autre considération, malgré les rumeurs de disgrâce concernant le second qui se font entendre périodiquement.

Face à la crise actuelle, la première tendance serait plutôt portée vers la conciliation. De par les personnalités qui l'incarnent, celle de M. Al-Ayyoubi en particulier, elle représente une ouverture sur la communauté sunnite, la bourgeoisie de Damas, et derrière elles l'Arabie Saoudite qui les soutient. M. Rif'at al-Assad, qui se plaît à se définir à l'opposé comme le chef de file de la « gauche » du Baas, et qui est reconnu comme tel par le Parti communiste de M. Khaded Bagdash et par l'Union soviétique, serait partisan de ne rien céder à la pression de l'intégrisme musulman ; et, à supposer qu'on lui donne carte blanche, il se fait fort, avec ses fameuses « Brigades de défense », de régler définitivement la question en trois mois. Le seul problème est que cela signifierait leur éloignement de la capitale, là où elles sont les plus utiles pour prévenir un coup d'État militaire.

À la fin du mois de septembre dernier [1979], la tendance générale dans les cercles du pouvoir était plutôt aux grandes remises en cause, sans que l'on pût vraiment savoir qui gardait l'initiative de la critique et contre qui elle était plus particulièrement dirigée. Le Front national progressiste – qui est, on le rappelle, la coalition des partis au pouvoir – publiait alors (26 septembre) un communiqué en 37 points, sous forme de réquisitoire contre la situation intérieure dans tous les domaines.

Du fléau de la corruption et des intermédiaires à l'irresponsabilité qui entrave le fonctionnement des appareils bureaucratiques, la crise du logement et du pain, en passant par l'inexistence des libertés fondamentales et d'une vie politique démocratique, la mauvaise application de la justice, rien n'était oublié qui aurait pu être repris dans la plate-forme politique d'un parti d'opposition.

En conséquence, le communiqué réclamait une stricte application de la loi au sein des organismes d'État, le châtimement de tous les contrevenants et, surtout, un renforcement du pouvoir du Conseil des ministres, de l'Assemblée du peuple (Parlement) et des partis dirigeants pour faire face à la crise. Cette dernière revendication, visant à redonner quelque poids aux institutions, pourrait bien être la signature d'une politique menée par ce que nous avons désigné comme la première faction du parti Baas pour arracher l'État à l'emprise exclusive d'une clique aux attitudes communautaires très marquées. Il est tout de même très frappant que, depuis le départ de M. Al-Ayyoubi lors de l'intervention syrienne au Liban, le Conseil des ministres soit une institution de plus en plus négligée en Syrie – ces derniers mois, il ne prenait même plus la peine de se réunir ; il faut aussi voir de quelle manière, aujourd'hui, M. Al-Ayyoubi parle du « régime » (*nizâm*) dans les conversations privées, comme s'il ne se considérait pas lui-même comme l'un de ses représentants.

Deux jours après le communiqué du Front, 52 fonctionnaires et autres citoyens syriens étaient arrêtés pour corruption, contrebande et autres délits ; et le président Assad prenait des mesures pour s'assurer que les autorités douanières soient les seules à avoir compétence pour introduire et faire sortir des marchandises du pays. Par ailleurs, la presse syrienne jetait de temps à autre de l'huile sur le feu. Ainsi l'officieux *Al-Thawra* critiquait-il violemment (17 octobre) les « dirigeants irresponsables » qui, plutôt que de chercher les véritables causes des problèmes sociaux et les moyens de les régler, en rejettent la responsabilité sur l'extérieur. « Qu'est-ce qu'Israël, l'impérialisme américain et les accords de Camp David ont à voir avec la crise du pain et du gaz, la corruption, le vol et l'exploitation de la patrie et des citoyens ? », demandait-il.

À la suite de son fameux « communiqué », le Front entreprenait des consultations avec les représentants des différents groupes sociaux en vue d'un élargissement de sa base et de l'établissement d'un nouveau consensus pour l'étape à venir. Le 9 octobre, dans un amphithéâtre de l'université de Damas et durant sept heures, une commission *ad hoc*, nommée par le président et dirigée par M. Al-Ayyoubi, s'enquerrait auprès de quelques personnalités du monde de la presse et des lettres des dispositions de l'intelligentsia envers cette proposition. Dire que celle-ci fut en définitive repoussée est un euphémisme, tant fut cinglante

et sans appel la critique que formulèrent alors les intellectuels contre le régime et le bilan des dix-sept années de pouvoir baassiste. Dans cette société en pleine mobilisation contre l'État, ils ne pouvaient demeurer en reste. Bien plus, les meilleurs « morceaux » du réquisitoire furent enregistrés sur une cassette d'une heure et demie, qui se mit à circuler dans toute la Syrie à des dizaines de milliers d'exemplaires. C'était un événement politique d'une portée considérable. Du coup, les projets d'élargissement du Front ont été ajournés *sine die*.

Tous ces événements ont contribué à entretenir une étrange atmosphère de « fin de règne » dans les milieux politiques de la capitale. Dans les ministères et les différents appareils d'État, les conversations vont bon train, qui ont toutes pour thème l'issue possible à la crise. On se comporte comme si le régime devait être renversé le lendemain. Quelques noms parmi les vieilles figures du Baas, comme MM. Salaheddin Bitar ou Akram Haurani, alimentent même les conjectures les plus fantaisistes. D'aucuns affirment que l'ambassade soviétique, inquiète de l'avenir de son allié privilégié au Proche-Orient, tendait alors une oreille discrète.

Le 27 décembre, l'affaire de l'ambassadeur de Syrie à l'ONU ajoutait encore à la confusion : à New York, M. Hammoud al-Shoufi annonçait qu'il se démettait de ses fonctions pour manifester son opposition « aux méthodes antidémocratiques et répressives, à la corruption du régime Assad ». Il a rejoint ensuite l'opposition syrienne à Paris¹.

Durant les derniers mois de l'année écoulée, l'armée fut tenue à l'écart de cette intense activité politique, malgré quelques attentats touchant le corps des officiers et qui furent le fait de soldats isolés. M. Rif'at al-Assad veillait personnellement à ce que cette institution ne fût pas « contaminée ». Deux groupes d'officiers furent successivement arrêtés : le premier, d'une quarantaine de membres de toutes les armes, dont le colonel Muhammad Za'rour et le commandant Muhammad Fadil, accusés d'être en rapport avec l'opposition démocratique ; le second, un mois plus tard, comprenant neuf officiers, dont le commandant Wajih Sleiman. Par ailleurs, dans l'aviation, où les officiers sunnites sont encore majoritaires, nombreux sont les pilotes qui se sont vu interdire de voler jusqu'à nouvel ordre.

Que l'armée et les services de la sûreté demeurent un bastion alaouite, la « vieille garde » du parti Baas était disposée à l'accepter,

1. M. Hammoud al-Shoufi fut une personnalité de premier plan, aussi brillante qu'éphémère, durant les premiers mois du régime baassiste. En 1964, il fit sécession avec quelques membres éminents de l'aile gauche radicale du Baas, pour disparaître peu à peu de la scène politique. Au sein de l'armée, il pouvait alors compter sur le soutien d'un petit nombre d'officiers, parmi lesquels Salim Hatoun, Yumad Ubayd, Muhammad Rabah 'Awil et un certain... Hâfez al-Assad.

pourvu que lui soit laissée la responsabilité des affaires politiques. Finalement, cette question du partage du pouvoir entre les deux factions allait être réglée au VII^e congrès régional du Baas. Pour ne rien laisser à l'improvisation, M. Rif'at al-Assad attacha une importance toute particulière au déroulement des élections des délégués au congrès, au niveau des différentes « divisions » (*shu'ba*). À la *shu'ba* de la place des Abbassides, à Damas, il devait, à l'occasion, définir ainsi devant les militants ses conceptions politiques, en référence à son modèle théorique : « Le Chef désigne, le Parti approuve et le peuple applaudit. Ainsi fonctionne le socialisme en Union soviétique. Celui qui n'applaudit pas va en Sibérie. »

LA MARGINALISATION DU POUVOIR

Malgré toutes les précautions prises dans l'« élection » des 515 délégués, il semble que les travaux du congrès ne se soient pas déroulés sans heurts entre les deux principales tendances évoquées, par des allusions directes au comportement des uns et des autres, jugé peu conforme à l'éthique du socialisme. La radio phalangiste au Liban, généralement bien informée de ce qui se passe en Syrie, a, du reste, diffusé alors les enregistrements pirates de quelques passes d'armes bien choisies. Mais, en définitive, l'élection du nouveau Commandement régional entérinait l'hégémonie du clan de M. Rif'at al-Assad sur le parti. Malgré un rééquilibrage confessionnel de façade – sur 21 membres, on compte désormais 4 alaouites au lieu de 8 précédemment, 14 sunnites, 2 chrétiens et 1 druze –, les représentants notoires de la « nouvelle génération » y occupent des places de choix, comme celle de secrétaire général adjoint, le premier personnage du parti après M. Hâfez al-Assad (M. Zuhair Mashârîqa, sunnite d'Alep), ou de directeur du bureau de la sûreté (M. Ahmad Diab, sunnite).

L'élection de quelques personnalités de l'autre clan au sein du Commandement, comme MM. Hikmat al-Shelabi, sunnite, chef d'état-major, ou Mahmoud al-Ayyoubi, a laissé croire quelque temps à une possibilité de conciliation : ceux-ci retrouveraient, au niveau ministériel, le pouvoir dont ils n'avaient pas été gratifiés dans la répartition des différents bureaux du Commandement du parti. Mais il fallut vite se rendre à l'évidence : en chargeant un homme « neuf », sans aucun poids politique, de former le nouveau gouvernement, le régime, au sens le plus étroit du terme, à savoir l'axe Hâfez-Rif'at, entendait montrer qu'il

n'était pas disposé à faire des concessions et à aller au-delà d'une mesure démagogique comme la hausse des salaires.

L'ascension très rapide de M. Abdel Ra'ouf al-Kassem, des fonctions de doyen de la faculté des Beaux-Arts il y a quelque six mois à celles de *mohafez* de la ville de Damas, puis de Premier ministre, est bien la preuve que cette nouvelle figure de la vie politique syrienne est une pure création du régime. La communauté sunnite en général, et celle de Damas en particulier, ne se sent pas représentée par le chef du gouvernement : le fait est d'importance. Certes, une personnalité comme le général Nasr al-Din Nasser, connu pour son sunnisme militant et son opposition au clan de M. Rif'at al-Assad, peut encore donner le change en occupant des fonctions aussi importantes que celles de ministre de l'Intérieur et de directeur du Bureau de la jeunesse et des étudiants au sein du Commandement régional. Mais il est aussi connu comme l'homme de M. Hâfez al-Assad, intégré dans la stratégie propre de ce dernier à l'intérieur de la communauté alaouite.

Et c'est bien là le danger le plus grave qui guette le régime syrien en cette étape décisive du « Mouvement de redressement », dont le général Hâfez al-Assad a eu l'initiative en arrivant au pouvoir le 16 novembre 1970 : celui d'une marginalisation toujours plus grande du pouvoir, appuyé sur sa communauté et ses appareils répressifs, mais sans attaches avec la société. Héritier d'un mouvement populaire dont le Baas fut en son temps un des animateurs, il tend de plus en plus à revêtir tous les traits d'une dictature du Tiers Monde. À ce titre, le palais que se fait construire le président syrien, isolé sur la colline désertique de Rabwé, dominant la capitale, est à lui seul un symbole. Le coût de sa construction est provisoirement évalué à deux milliards de livres syriennes, soit la moitié de l'aide extérieure annuelle.

Chapitre IV

Caste, confession et société en Syrie Ibn Khaldoun au chevet du « progressisme arabe »*

Par-delà l'archaïsme ou l'outrance généralement relevés de leurs convictions, il faut reconnaître aux Frères musulmans le mérite de nous proposer, dans la foison de leurs libelles, une nouvelle lexicographie politique d'une valeur heuristique certaine pour conduire à une réflexion sur l'État. Celle-ci pourrait bien remettre la réalité arabe orientale sur ses pieds, une réalité décidément rebelle à toutes les théories dont on dispose, depuis la « modernisation politique » chère à la sociologie américaine jusqu'à la « voie non capitaliste de développement » des écoles de cadres marxistes. Cette « nouvelle » approche reprend un cadre d'analyse mis en place il y a quelque six cents ans par Ibn Khaldoun, quand il montre comment, à un endroit historique donné, une communauté (*'asabiyya*), soudée par des liens du sang ou simplement une similitude de destin, use d'une prédication (*da'wa*) religieuse/politique – en islam, les deux sont indissolublement liés – comme d'un tremplin pour accéder au pouvoir total (*mulk*)¹. Transposée dans le contexte syrien, tel qu'appréhendé par la pensée intégriste musulmane, la triade khaldounienne présente donc les alaouites, minorité confessionnelle regroupant 10 % de la population, originaires des zones rurales et montagneuses du Nord-Ouest

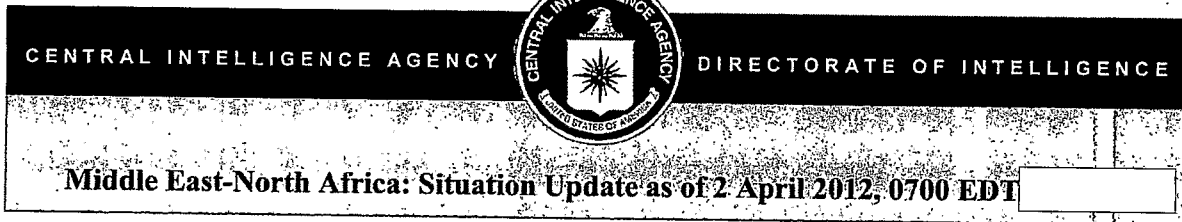
* Première publication dans *Peuples méditerranéens*, juillet 1981, sous le pseudonyme de Gérard Michaud (N.D.E.).

1. Cf. G. Labica, *Politique et religion chez Ibn Khaldoun. Essai sur l'idéologie musulmane*, Alger, SNEP, 1968.

Exhibit 3

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(b)(3)



2 April 2012
0700 EDT

Syria: International pressure on President al-Asad continues to mount. At the "Friends of Syria" meeting in Istanbul yesterday, the group—which included 83 representatives from Arab and Western countries—recognized the Syrian National Council (SNC) as "a legitimate representative of all Syrians and the main opposition interlocutor with the international community," according to a Western press report. Participants urged UN-Arab League Special Envoy Annan to set a timeline for Damascus to implement his six-point peace plan, according to a separate Western press report.

- SNC leader Ghalioun yesterday announced the SNC would pay the salaries of members of the Free Syrian Army from an account funded by Gulf Arab states, according to Western press reporting.
- Yesterday at the meeting, Kuwait pledged a new donation of \$1 million to aid Syrian refugees, according to a Kuwaiti press report.
- The Maltese Foreign Ministry said yesterday that it was suspending the registration certificate of a Maltese-flagged, Iranian-owned tanker that the Ministry learned was carrying Syrian crude oil in breach of international sanctions, according to a Western press report. [REDACTED]

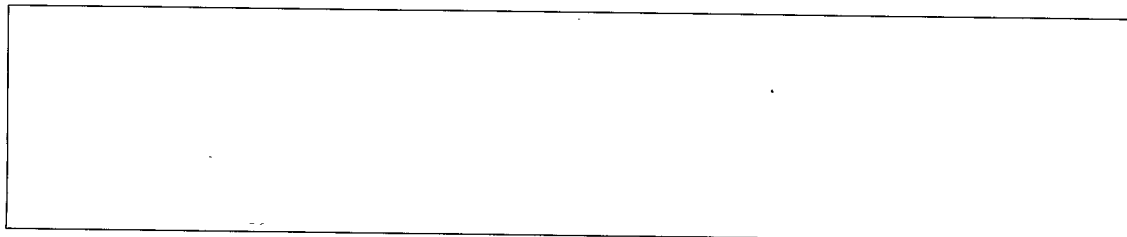
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Activists claimed that at least 50 people were killed in ongoing violence throughout Syria yesterday, including 18 deaths in Homs because of continued shelling, according to a Western press report. Activists also reported fighting in suburbs of Damascus and in Hama and Darfur Provinces. [REDACTED]

(b)(3)

On Saturday, activists said that Ali Mahmoud Othman—a Syrian journalist who worked alongside the Western journalists who were killed in Bab Amr in February—was detained in Aleppo last weekend and is being subjected to torture, according to Western press reporting. [REDACTED]

(b)(3)



(b)(1)
(b)(3)

This report was prepared by the CIA Middle East Task Force. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Task Force [REDACTED]

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Exhibit 4



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THE ARAB SPRING AND ARAB THAW

UNFINISHED REVOLUTIONS
AND THE QUEST FOR
DEMOCRACY

EDITED BY JOHN DAVIS

THE ARAB SPRING AND ARAB THAW

The Arab Spring and Arab Thaw
Unfinished Revolutions and the Quest for Democracy

Edited by

JOHN DAVIS
Trinity Washington University, USA

ASHGATE

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John Davis is Director of the International Security Studies Program at Trinity Washington University. His areas of expertise include American Foreign Policy, Presidential Studies, International Relations, International Terrorism, Counterterrorism, International Security, National Security, American Government, and Black Politics. He has published a number of books: *Terrorism in Africa: The Evolving Front in the War on Terrorism* (ed.) (2010), *Target Towers: New York and the Path to 9/11 and Its Aftermath* (2009), *Barack Obama and US Foreign Policy: Road Map for Change or Disaster?* (2009), *Barack Obama's Historic Election: A View from Howard University* (2009), *Africa and the War on Terrorism* (ed.) (2007), *Perspectives in Black Politics and Black Leadership* (ed.) (2007), *Presidential Policies and the Road to the Second War in Iraq: From 41 to 43* (ed.) (2006), *The Global War on Terrorism: Assessing the American Response* (ed.) (2004) and he is the author of over 41 book chapters, journal articles and book reviews.

Muhamed A. El-Khawariz is Professor of History and Political Science in the Department of Urban Affairs and Social Sciences at the University of the District of Columbia, Washington, DC. He has published numerous articles, chapters, and monographs, both in the United States and abroad. His books include *Qaddafi: His Ideology in Theory and Practice*, *American Aid to Israel: Nature and Impact*, *Democracy, Diamonds and Oil: Politics in Today's Africa*, *Mozambique in the*

Twentieth Century, The Kissinger Study of Southern Africa and American-Southern African Relations.

Dave Jervis is Associate Professor and Chair of the Political Science Department at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois. His areas of primary research interest are American foreign policy and political change in the non-Western world. He has published articles in the *Journal of Development Alternatives and Area Studies*, *The South African Journal of International Affairs* and *The Journal of Third World Studies*, among others. Dr Jervis is spending 2011–present at Marie Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland, as a Fulbright Scholar.

Bruce Maddy-Weitzman is Principal Research Fellow at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, and Associate Scholar at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, Philadelphia, PA. He is the author of *The Berber Identity Movement and the Challenge to North African States* (2011), *Palestinian and Israeli Intellectuals in the Shadow of Oslo and Intifada al-Aqsa* (2002), *The Crystallization of the Arab State System, 1945–1954* (1993) and editor or coeditor of 13 volumes on the contemporary Middle East and North Africa.

Laura Sjöberg is Associate Professor of Political Science with an affiliation with the Center for Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Florida. She holds a BA from the University of Chicago, a PhD from the University of Southern California, and a JD from Boston College Law School. Dr Sjöberg's research interests lie at the intersection of gender and security studies, and include feminist war theorizing and women's violence in global politics. She is the author or editor of eight books, most recently, *Gendering Global Conflict: Towards a Feminist Theory of War* (Columbia University Press, 2013) and her work has been published in more than two dozen scholarly journals in Political Science and Women's Studies.

Jonathon Whooley is a PhD candidate at the University of Florida. He has a Bachelor's degree in History and Political Science from Sonoma State University, and a Master's degree in International Relations from San Francisco State University, both in California. He has published on various topics including the role of human rights and minority populations within the modern Middle East, the role of technologically-sophisticated, peaceful, democratic protest in the process of the Arab Spring (2010–2012) and the construction of American foreign policy toward the Middle East. His current work focuses on gender constructions in American media and narrativized discourse at the popular and governmental level.

Radwan Ziadeh served as a Senior Fellow at the US Institute of Peace in Washington DC, and Fellow at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) in Washington DC. Since the Syrian uprising that started on 15 March

2011, he was involved in documenting the human rights violations and testifying at the UN Human rights council in Geneva twice. He was also involved in the opposition activities where he was elected in October as Director of the Foreign Relation Office for the Syrian National Council (SNC); the main umbrella for the Syrian opposition. He is the founder and director of the Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies in Syria and co-founder and executive director of the Syrian Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Washington, DC. He is the managing editor of the *Transitional Justice in the Arab World Project*. Some of Ziadeh's books include *Power and Policy in Syria: Intelligence Services, Foreign Relations and Democracy in the Modern Middle East* (2011), *The Clash of Values Between Islam and the West*, with Kevin James O'Toole (2010), *Political Islam in Syria* (2008), *Decision Making and Foreign Policy in Syria* (2007), *The Challenges of Reform in The Arab World: Islam, Identity, Modernity and Globalization* (2006), and *The Intellectual Confronts Power: Dialogues of Syrian Civil Society* (2005).

as it had done before, the regime abandoned political liberalization and harassed and incarcerated opposition leaders.¹⁸

Forced to Violence

In light of the Assad family's history of using violence to counter dissent, the government's response to the Syrian Arab Spring should have come as no surprise. By the end of April 2011 (only a month after Syria's protests had begun), Bashar al-Assad had run out of patience with the demonstrations. Although initially responding to protests with a combination of violent repression and reactionary promises of reform (lifting Syria's emergency law, granting citizenship to Kurds—who had previously been considered “foreigners,” and cutting taxes), when protesters responded with greater mobilization, militant voices within the regime won out. Like his father had done in Hama before him, Assad deployed the Syrian Armed Forces with orders to shoot to kill, first in Daraa,¹⁹ where the revolution was born, but soon to much of the rest of the country. As the brutal violence perpetrated against what the regime described as “armed terrorists” but who were in actuality peaceful demonstrators grew, so too grew the size of anti-government protests. Hundreds of thousands demonstrated across Damascus, Aleppo and Hama.²⁰

The crackdown continued. Syrian tanks laid siege to restive population centers including: Daraa, Baniyas, Homs, Talkalakh, Latakia, Rastan, Talbiseh and Hama. The security forces deployed snipers on buildings close to demonstrations and used the notorious *Shabitha* Alawite paramilitary units to intimidate, torture and kill protesters. Not all of Syria's soldiers were happy to kill unarmed civilians in cold blood, however, and, despite government orders to execute any soldier refusing to fire on demonstrators,²¹ news of conscripts defecting from the army spread.

Then, on 29 July 2011, Air Force Colonel Riad al-As'ad, along with several other officers, announced his defection and the formation of the Free Syrian Army.²² In a video posted on Youtube, al-Assad called on members of the government forces to “abandon their military units,” and join him in the creation of “a national army that can protect the revolution and all sections of the Syrian people with all their sects.” The armed struggle for Syria had begun.

18 Radwan Ziadeh, “A Multifaceted Response to Syria's Brutality,” Project on Middle East Democracy Policy Brief, 5 May 2011.

19 Cal Perry, “No Humanity Left in Syria,” *Al Jazeera*, 24 April 2011. <http://blogs.aljazeera.com/blog/middle-east/no-humanity-left-syria>.

20 “Hundreds of Thousands Join anti-Assad Protests,” *BBC*, 1 July 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13988701>.

21 “Defected Security Agent Speaks Out,” *Al Jazeera*, 8 June 2011. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/06/201168175624573155.html>.

22 “Syrian Army Colonel Defects Forms Free Syrian Army,” *Asharq al-Awsat*, 1 August 2011. <http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=1&id=26095>.

The Opposition

Not all of the Syrian Opposition is armed, however. From the beginning of the uprising, various groups, councils and committees were formed to plan protests and support Syria's revolution, both inside and outside the country.

Syrian National Council

Formed in Istanbul, Turkey on 23 August 2011, the Syrian National Council is “the biggest and most significant opposition grouping in exile, and the main point of reference for outside countries that support the opposition.”²³ It consists of famous intellectuals and human rights activists from the days of the “Damascus Spring” and the “Damascus Declaration” but also includes representatives from other opposition groups and demographic minorities including: the Muslim Brotherhood, the National Bloc (a group of prominent Syrian dissidents that went into exile following the Ba'ath coup in 1963), Kurds, Assyrians, Local Coordinating Committees, and Independents.²⁴ Although the Syrian National Council was formed to play a similar role as Libya's National Transitional Council, the SNC has found much less success than the organization that inspired it. This can be attributed to discord within the council itself, which has been plagued with infighting, particularly on the issues of how best to support the armed opposition, Kurdish minority rights, and the over-representation of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist factions in the council. As of 3 July 2012, it appeared however that the SNC had agreed on a common political platform—though it remains unclear what role, if any, the council will play in Syria's post-Assad future.

Local Coordinating Committees and Revolutionary Councils

The Local Coordinating Committees and Revolutionary Councils make up Syria's internal grassroots opposition. The local coordinating committees were created for the sake of planning, documenting, and publicizing demonstrations against the regime and had no connections to Syria's pre-revolt opposition.²⁵ The more than 400 different local committees in Syria's towns and suburbs make up

23 The Syrian National Council, *The Carnegie Middle East Center*. <http://carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=48334>.

24 Elizabeth O'Bagy, “Syria's Political Opposition,” *Middle East Security*, Report 4, Institute for the Study of War, p. 11.

25 Jonathan Spyer, “The Syrian Opposition Before and After the Outbreak of the 2011 Uprising,” *Gloria Center*, 27 October 2011. <http://www.gloria-center.org/2011/10/the-syrian-opposition-before-and-after-the-outbreak-of-the-2011-uprising/>.

the “backbone of the Syrian revolution,”²⁶ but operate only on the most local of levels, so, some 50 Revolutionary Councils formed organically across the country to facilitate communication and planning over larger geographic areas and urban centers. And, although the grassroots opposition has increasingly played a secondary role as the armed conflict has escalated, local councils are still instrumental in coordinating the activity of civilian populations be it in anti-regime efforts, distributing humanitarian aid, or providing medical and legal services.²⁷ Most Syrians look to the representatives in these bodies as legitimate leaders of the Syrian revolution, however, the state security apparatus remains too strong and capable, and the danger for representatives and local leaders too great, for these councils to coalesce into some form of central authority.

Free Syrian Army

The Free Syrian Army (FSA), is not an “army” per se but rather the branding under which the majority of the armed opposition in Syria operates, consisting of a large number of loosely coordinated local militias, battalions, and brigades. The character of these groups varies by location. In some areas, the forces consist entirely of defectors from the army, in others local residents that have chosen to take up arms to defend their families.²⁸ The FSA’s command hierarchy is much more horizontal than that of a traditional force. In fact, the leadership’s past relative isolation in Turkey has led to an almost irreparable loss of credibility on the ground. Individual militias form temporary alliances with neighboring groups to plan operations and coordinate defense of territory. Now, Riad al-As’ad, commander of the FSA has moved his headquarters into northern Syria for the sake of bolstering support, solidifying the command and control structure, and uniting the various disparate forces. As the battle rages on, the success of this new attempt at organization is anything but guaranteed.²⁹

And the World Watched

International reaction to the burgeoning Syrian crisis was delayed and disappointing at best. Although the United States, the European Union and other nations were reasonably quick to condemn the violence, impose sanctions, and place travel bans and asset freezes on the most notorious persons in the Assad regime, the

26 O’Bagy, “Syria’s Political Opposition,” p. 22.

27 Ibid.

28 Jonathan Spyer, “Defying a Dictator: Meet the Free Syrian Army,” *World Affairs*, May/June 2012, p. 46.

29 “Syria’s FSA Splintering into Factions,” *Al Jazeera*, 12 October 2012. <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2012/10/2012101115349594767.html>.

international community could offer little else to support Syria’s revolutionaries. At the United Nations, despite near continuous debate, the Security Council repeatedly failed to pass resolutions criticizing Syrian violence. The Arab League took until August 2011 to issue a single statement critical of the Assad regime, but subsequently imposed sanctions on Syria and suspended the country’s membership in the league in November. These actions did end the violence. However, and after multiple failed Arab League-brokered peace plans in November and December, the body decided to ask the UN to form a joint peacekeeping force to halt the violence.³⁰

On 23 February 2012 UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon announced the appointment of former Secretary General Kofi Annan as UN-Arab League envoy to Syria.³¹ For the next three months, much of the international community’s efforts would be focused on Annan’s six point peace plan, designed to negotiate a ceasefire between the Syrian army and rebel forces. But the plan was doomed to fail, Russia and China had blocked any measures that would ensure consequences should the Assad regime fail to implement the plan, and in reality, the fighting hardly paused.³²

Even before the collapse of the Annan ceasefire, however, it is clear that various international forces were implementing fundamentally incompatible foreign policies in Syria. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Iran, Russia, China, the United States, the United Kingdom and France were all sparring over the future of Syria.

The NATO-led military intervention in Libya had left Russia feeling hard done by and particularly unwilling to cooperate with any other Western initiatives in the Middle East. After decades of Western wars and an Arab Spring, Russia found itself low on allies in the region. Syria, home to Russia’s only naval base in the Middle East, would not be allowed to collapse. Taking into consideration lucrative arms deals (Russia was repairing and upgrading attack helicopters on the Syrian Air Force’s behalf even while functioning helicopters were bombing civilian population centers) and Syria’s special status as Russia’s last bastion of influence in a rapidly changing Middle East shows that Russia’s reactive obstinacy at the United Nations has been, for Russian leaders, a necessity. With one eye on a restive Chechnya, Russia would support Bashar al-Assad’s government at all costs. Although the full extent of its involvement remains unknown, reports suggest that the Russian government continues to supply the Assad regime with cash and military hardware, in addition to diplomatic support.³³

30 “European Union backs joint Arab-UN Peacekeeping Mission in Syria,” *Al-Arabiya*, 13 February 2012. <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/02/13/194338.html>.

31 “Kofi Annan appointed UN-Arab League envoy to Syria,” Reuters, 23 February 2012. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/24/us-un-syria-envoy-idUSTRE81M25G20120224>.

32 Rick Gladstone, “Resigning as Envoy to Syria, Annan Casts Wide Blame,” *New York Times*, 2 August 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/03/world/middleeast/annan-resigns-as-syria-peace-envoy.html?pagewanted=all>.

33 “Flight Records Say Russia Sent Syria Tons of Cash,” *ProPublica*, 26 November 2012. <http://www.propublica.org/article/flight-records-list-russia-sending-tons-of-cash-to-syria>.

Exhibit 5

RELEASE IN PART
B1,1.4(D)

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster,
Senior Reviewer

From: Ibrahim, Mounir E
Sent: 3/16/2011 12:14:32 PM
To: svcSMARTHBTSP0P1
Subject: SARG RESPONDS WITH VIOLENCE TO SECOND DAMASCUS DEMONSTRATION IN TWO DAYS
Attachments: Metadata.dat

SECRET//NOFORN



MRN: 11 DAMASCUS 171
Date/DTG: Mar 16, 2011 / 161614Z MAR 11
From: AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE IMMEDIATE
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: PGOV, PHUM, ASEC, KDEM, SY
Captions: NOFORN
Reference: A) 11 DAMASCUS 169
B) 11 DAMASCUS 125
C) 10 DAMASCUS 981
D) 11 DAMASCUS 167
E) 11 DAMASCUS 91
F) 11 DAMASCUS 103
Subject: SARG RESPONDS WITH VIOLENCE TO SECOND DAMASCUS DEMONSTRATION IN TWO DAYS

1. (C) SUMMARY: One day after some 100 people protested in Damascus's popular old city market in response to calls for a "Day of Rage," demonstrators went back to the streets this time in support of prisoners of conscience. Today busloads of government thugs forcefully dispersed a crowd of over 100 people, attacking, arresting and beating the peaceful demonstrators gathering near the Interior Ministry. Many of those arrested were known civil society and human rights activists. The violence the security forces used to break up the demonstration in the middle of the city's busy commercial district indicates the concern these gatherings are causing for the SARG. While the protests are small and have not yet shown signs of expanding beyond activists to the masses, the back-to-back demonstrations highlight activists' determination to continue voicing their opposition to the government. Our contacts also report rumors of small disturbances, not yet confirmed, in several Syrian cities on March 15 and 16. END SUMMARY.

DEMONSTRATORS TAKE TO THE STREETS FOR A SECOND DAY

2. (C) In an unusual sight for Damascus's busy commercial district, the normally placid lunch hour was interrupted by busloads of government security forces breaking up a demonstration of at least 100 people attempting to raise awareness for political prisoners. The demonstration, which took place in the capital's central Marjaa Square adjacent to the Ministry of Interior and which included prominent human rights activists, took place one day after the SARG was surprised by a 100-person protest against corruption in Damascus' Old City in response to calls for a "day of rage" (ref A).

3. (C) Our contacts had been planning the demonstration for two weeks (ref B), and polooffs witnessed participants gathering in front of the MOI at noon with signs and pictures of imprisoned loved ones. Plainclothes SARG security officers quickly surrounded the crowd. The protesters began chanting, "The one who hits his people is a traitor," and attempted to

move to the center of Marjaa Square. SARG security promptly blocked their path, and busloads of plainclothes officers appeared at the scene and began attacking the demonstrators. Men, women, children and the elderly attempted to brave the attacks from baton-wielding thugs but proved no match.

DISTURBING SCENES

4. (S/NF) Emboffs witnessed people being beaten, arrested, and loaded onto buses. One man lay on the ground in a defenseless position as two men began kicking him. Another elderly man attempted to hold aloft a picture of a loved one, he had it ripped from his hands and was dealt a swift blow to the head with a wooden baton. Human rights activist [] [] Mazen Darwish was one of the first arrested and thrown into a bus, where officers continued to hit him. One of the more disturbing images was a boy (who appeared to be 10 years old and is reportedly named []) dragged onto a bus and beaten, as security officers pulled a curtain over the window so onlookers could not see. At one point, someone dropped leaflets from a building that read "Syria With Freedom." Security officers swarmed into the building, and approximately thirty minutes later brought out a young man whose face had been badly beaten, his eyes nearly swollen shut. [] told us he was beaten by security forces with batons.

B1
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5. (C) Plainclothes officers attempted to encourage onlookers to shout pro-government slogans. While some onlookers joined, most of the men yelling "with our blood we sacrifice for you, Bashar" were clearly security officers. Most bystanders, unaccustomed to scenes of political demonstrations in the middle of Damascus and visibly surprised by the events, did not respond to the security officers' calls. Offices remained open during the scuffles. Men in suits walked into banks adjacent to the square, and well-heeled Damascenes ate lunch at the fashionable Boulevard complex attached to the Four Seasons a few blocks away.

THOSE ARRESTED

6. (S/NF) Our contacts told us significant numbers of arrests were made. [] [] sent us a list of 27 names of arrested demonstrators. Among them were many prominent human rights contacts, including Mazen Darwish, Serine Khoury, and three members of the family of imprisoned dissident Kamal Labwani (ref C). A western diplomat told us that lawyer Catherine al-Talli, Kurdish activist Hervin Osso, and 81-year-old Damascus Declaration leader Riad al-Turk were also among the arrested. Contacts reported that blogger Kamal Sheikho (ref D) – released two days ago on bail – was arrested again today for participation in the demonstrations. Later in the day, contacts reported as many as 35 protestors were in jail.

B1
1.4(D)

DEMONSTRATIONS YET TO REACH MAINSTREAM

7. (C) Our contacts assessed that today's demonstration, while small, was significant because of the violence used by SARG security forces in plain view of significant numbers of onlookers. Nonetheless, the March 15 and 16 protests have not yet shown signs of attracting mass support. Damascus remained largely calm on the planned "day of rage" on March 15. On the campus of Damascus University on March 16, a small group of students told us that student life continued as normal, though they reported a larger police presence on campus. Many young professionals and students changed their Facebook profile pictures to images of President Asad and First Lady Asma al-Asad, and some criticized the demonstrators online. A young businessman close to the regime who was walking a block away from the March 16 demonstration insisted that "everything is normal."

8. (C) However, despite the arguments of some that these small demonstrations are anomalies, rumors of uprisings and demonstrations in cities outside Damascus have spread via online networks. [] [] reported March 15 an unconfirmed protest in Aleppo's Saadallah al-Jabri square at which the police allegedly opened fire causing injuries. He added that the army had surrounded the village of Nawa near the southern city of Daraa in response to protests. Similar, unconfirmed rumors are swirling on Internet sites in the wake of the demonstrations.

B1
1.4(D)

9. (C) COMMENT: The March 15 and 16 demonstrations were small, and have yet to exhibit signs of attracting mass, mainstream support. However, the back-to-back demonstrations are noteworthy in establishing that activists are capable

CLASSIFICATION: SECRET
Page 3 of 3

of staging protests in high-profile areas of Syria's tightly-controlled capital. The public use of violence by the SARG on March 16 was different from the response to other protests in the past two months, like the spontaneous demonstration against police mistreatment on February 17 in the Old City (ref E) and the February 22 solidarity protest outside the Libyan Embassy (ref F), where officials exercised restraint. In contrast, the security forces' heavy-handed response to today's protest seems meant to indicate a zero tolerance for public demonstrations in Syria. It remains to be seen if the Syrian people, knowing the likely reaction, will be willing to stand toe-to-toe with the SARG. Some clearly are. As one activist put it after the March 15 demonstration, "The wall of fear has fallen."

Signature: FORD

Classified By: Name: Chuck Hunter, Title: DCM
Office: US Embassy Damascus
Agency: State

Reason: 1.4 (b), (d)

Declassify on: 2036/03/16

Drafted By: DAMASCUS:Ibrahim, Mounir E; Munir, Junaid

Cleared By: Tachco, Amy N

Approved By: Hunter, Charles F

Released By: DAMASCUS:Ibrahim, Mounir E

Info: Abell, J Andrew *ROUTINE* ; Allen, Katherine *EROUTINE* ; Burnett, Andrew *BROUTINE* ;
Carper, David W (NEA/ELA) *ROUTINE* ; Cook, Latoya *GROUTINE* ; Creedon, Reid *MROUTINE* ;
Hanish, Bess *ROUTINE* ; Kokon, Ahmed *ROUTINE* ; Kosa, Lauren *SROUTINE* ; Miller, G. Thomas
ROUTINE ; Parrs, Walter *ROUTINE* ; Riggs, Susan *JROUTINE* ; Schedlbauer, Amy *WROUTINE* ;
Schwedt, Miriam *LROUTINE* ; Shampaine, Nicole *DROUTINE* ; Walker, Bridgette L (NEA/ELA)
ROUTINE ; 'Hajjar, Hagar H.' *ROUTINE* ; NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
ROUTINE ; Pounds, Tim *JROUTINE* ; Kang, Min *GROUTINE* ; Deaton, Anthony *AROUTINE* ;
Kiamie III, Charles *EROUTINE* ; ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE *ROUTINE*

XMT: AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI ,

Attachments: Metadata.dat

Action Post:
Dissemination Rule: Archive Copy

SECRET//NOFORN

CLASSIFICATION: SECRET
Page 3 of 3

Exhibit 6

RELEASE IN PART
B1,1.4(D)

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster,
Senior Reviewer

From: Munir, Junaid Jay
Sent: 3/20/2011 3:33:17 AM
To: svcSMARTHBTSP0P8
Subject: BLOODY FRIDAY SHATTERS SYRIA'S CALM
Attachments: Metadata.dat

CONFIDENTIAL



MRN: 11 DAMASCUS 183
Date/DTG: Mar 20, 2011 / 200733Z MAR 11
From: AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE ROUTINE
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: PREL, ASEC, PHUM, KDEM, SY, PGOV
Reference: A) 11 DAMASCUS 169
B) 11 DAMASCUS 171
C) 11 DAMASCUS 91
D) 11 DAMASCUS 135
E) 11 DAMASCUS 181
F) 10 DAMASCUS 72
G) 10 DAMASCUS 559
H) 10 DAMASCUS 1013
Subject: BLOODY FRIDAY SHATTERS SYRIA'S CALM

1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Following two small demonstrations on March 15 and 16 in the capital (refs A & B), thousands of demonstrators responded to calls for anti-government protests following Friday prayers on March 18 in at least four Syrian cities. In the southern town of Daraa, our contacts reported security forces used violence to end a large protest, killing at least 3 people and wounding more. In the capital, a small group of worshippers began chanting for freedom immediately following Friday prayers at the Umayyid Mosque, perhaps the most high profile and tightly controlled mosque in the country. Clashes were also reported between protestors and security forces in Homs, Banyas, and Deir al-Zour, with unconfirmed reports of additional deaths and injuries. The SARG is planning large pro-government demonstrations in response to the recent unrest.

2. (C) The March 18 demonstrations, the first time since regional unrest began that Syrian activists leveraged Friday prayers as a platform to get people on the streets, are noteworthy because: a) they occurred simultaneously in several cities; b) while we have not yet seen mass, widespread street protests in Syria, anti-government demonstrations on March 18 included for the first time significant numbers of ordinary citizens not affiliated with Syria's small activist community; and c) the SARG used lethal force to put down the protests. Observers are watching to see how the events of March 18 affect what has until now been a small anti-regime movement led by an opposition that many view as disconnected from the views of ordinary citizens. What is clear is that the March 18 violence has moved a country already on edge in the wake of the unrest affecting their neighbors (ref C) towards accepting that considerable discontent with the regime may translate into further protests. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

A VIOLENT DAY IN THE SOUTH

3. (C) Following small demonstrations in Damascus on March 15 and March 16 that buoyed government opponents here (refs A & B), Internet activists called for protests after Friday prayers on March 18. Our contacts in the southern town of Daraa, a city of 75,000 near the border with Jordan with a reputation for independence, told us security services used violence to put down a large gathering of demonstrators following Friday prayers, killing several people and wounding others. Reports on the size of the demonstration varied between several hundred and several thousand. The protestors chanted for freedom and reportedly called presidential cousin Rami Makhlof, a symbol of corruption here (ref D), a "thief" and a "criminal." The police reacted swiftly calling in reinforcements. [redacted] in Daraa reported a number of military helicopters over the city following Friday prayers. Residents of the village of Muhajeh, north of Daraa, also told us they saw and heard helicopters.

B1
1.4(D)

4. (C) Our contacts reported between 3 and 6 dead and many more injured. Young men in Muhajeh reported receiving text messages from "unknown numbers" encouraging residents to protest. Poloff arrived in Daraa about two hours after our contacts told us the SARG brought the demonstration under control. As the sun set on a Friday evening, a time when the streets generally become busy, there were few people about and most stores were shuttered. There was a heavy police presence, including plainclothes security men toting machine guns.

5. (C) In Muhajeh, about 20 minutes away, young men reported there had been significant problems in Daraa earlier in the day and that discontent with the government was to blame. "You picked a bad day to come to Daraa, when the whole army was there," a young man [redacted] declared. A young man [redacted] angrily denounced the SARG and declared events in Daraa were "the beginning of the revolution." His list of grievances included lack of employment opportunities, concluding that "young people have no dreams in Syria except to leave the country." But he added that "this is not just about lack of jobs. This is about respect and so many other things."

B1
1.4(D)

6. (C) On March 19, thousands of residents in Daraa participated in funerals for the dead with participants shouting anti-government slogans. Contacts observed riot police using tear gas to disperse crowds, and reported that mobile phone service had been cut and that the authorities had closed the main road to the city. Media reported that a committee would be formed to investigate the deaths in Daraa and meet with local leaders to discuss citizens' grievances. Among the officials said to have been named to the panel are Usama Uday of the Ba'ath Party National Command, the Minister of Local Administration, and Vice Foreign Minister Faisal al-Miqdad, who hails from Daraa.

PROTESTS IN DAMASCUS AND SEVERAL OTHER CITIES

7. (C) Protests occurred following Friday prayers on March 18 in at least four other cities, including the capital. At approximately 12:45, a small crowd of people gathered in Damascus' famed Umayyid Mosque after the imam's sermon and began chanting "freedom" and "there is no God but God." Video of the incident quickly appeared on the Internet. At approximately 13:00 busloads of pro-Asad supporters flew down Damascus streets toward the Umayyid Mosque. An hour long pro-Asad demonstration then took place outside of the mosque and the adjacent market, apparently in reaction to the pro-democracy chants minutes earlier. Most of the participants carried pictures of the Syrian president and chanted "with our soul, with our blood, we sacrifice for you, Bashar." Establishing the presence of security agents in what was billed as a demonstration by ordinary citizens, a participant stopped his chant mid-sentence and prevented poloff from sending an sms on his mobile phone. [redacted] told us they witnessed one woman getting arrested for publicly criticizing overzealous security agents.

B1
1.4(D)

8. (C) Contacts reported protests in at least three other cities across the country, including the central city of Homs, Deir al-Zour in the east, and the coastal town of Banyas. Internet postings from activists and residents reported the security forces used violence in all three towns, with unconfirmed reports of deaths in Homs. Human rights activist Mazen Darwish [redacted] The recently arrested and released activist [redacted]

B1
1.4(D)

THE GOVERNMENT RESPONDS

9. (C) While high-level officials have thus far remained quiet, Syrian state television blamed the protests on "infiltrators"

for "causing chaos and riots." The government is reportedly organizing large pro-regime demonstrations across the country, with a large march planned for April 1. "You will see soon that the numbers of government supporters far outnumber the opponents," a pro-regime young businessman told us on March 19. In a bid to cultivate public support, President Bashar al-Asad issued Decree No. 35 on March 19 reducing the duration of mandatory military service by three months. The mandatory service law is unpopular among Syrian youth, particularly because the sons of the wealthy generally manage to avoid it (refs F, G, & H).

10. (C) But there was a change in tone in the immediate aftermath of the March 18 violence even among some contacts who support the regime. While many young professionals in Damascus' business community, who clamor for reform but insist they are against revolutionary change (ref D), switched their Facebook profile pictures to images of President Asad this week, their on-line comments were somber following the violence. "Oh God, guide us and reassure us. You are forgiving, most merciful," one young man from a prominent family wrote on his Facebook page. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] told us March 19 that he is "worried about my dear Syria. Violence is definitely not the way to do it."

B1
1.4(D)

11. (C) COMMENT: March 18's images of blood have clearly moved Syrians regardless of their political affiliations. We are watching closely for signs that the demonstrations, which until March 18 had been dominated by a small community of Syrian activists, are attracting the type of mainstream, popular support that could translate into more widespread protests. The March 18 demonstrations exhibited some of those signs, including larger demonstrations consisting of ordinary citizens, protests occurring simultaneously in multiple regions, and a violent government reaction. The government's response in the coming days will be critical, and the regime may attempt to package a series of political and economic reforms to convince its people it is addressing their concerns (ref E). The SARG has made clear, however, that it will respond with violence to protests against its rule.

Signature: FORD

Classified By: Name: Charles Hunter, Title: DCM
Reason: 1.4 (b), (d)
Declassify on: 2021/03/20
Drafted By: DAMASCUS:Munir, Junaid Jay, Ibrahim, Mounir
Cleared By: Munir, Junaid Jay
Approved By: Hunter, Charles F
Released By: DAMASCUS:Munir, Junaid Jay
Info: NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC ROUTINE ; 'HHajjar@nss.eop.sgov.gov' ROUTINE ; Abell, J Andrew ROUTINE ; Allen, Katherine E ROUTINE ; Burnett, Andrew B ROUTINE ; Carper, David W (NEA/ELA) ROUTINE ; Cook, Latoya G ROUTINE ; Creedon, Reid M ROUTINE ; Hanish, Bess I ROUTINE ; Kokon, Ahmed ROUTINE ; Kosa, Lauren S ROUTINE ; Miller, G. Thomas ROUTINE ; Parrs, Walter ROUTINE ; Riggs, Susan J ROUTINE ; Schedlbauer, Amy W ROUTINE ; Schwedt, Miriam L ROUTINE ; Shampaine, Nicole D ROUTINE ; Walker, Bridgette L (NEA/ELA) ROUTINE ; Pounds, Tim J ROUTINE ; ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE ROUTINE
XMT: AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
Attachments: Metadata.dat

Action Post:
Dissemination Rule: Archive Copy

CONFIDENTIAL

Exhibit 7

RELEASE IN PART
B1,1.4(D)

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster, Senior
Reviewer

From: Tachco, Amy N
Sent: 3/23/2011 7:41:37 AM
To: svcSMARTHBTSP0P2
Subject: UNREST IN SYRIA: MARCH 23 UPDATE
Attachments: Metadata.dat

CONFIDENTIAL



MRN: 11 DAMASCUS 205
Date/DTG: Mar 23, 2011 / 231143Z MAR 11
From: AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE IMMEDIATE
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: PGOV, PHUM, ASEC, KDEM, SY
Subject: UNREST IN SYRIA: MARCH 23 UPDATE

1. (U) Below is an update on civil unrest and the government and public response to events in Syria. See para 10 for suggested press guidance on the violent SARG response to protests in Dara'a.

UPDATE:

Attack on Dara'a Protesters:

2. (SBU) Syrian security forces killed at least three (and perhaps up to six) people in the tense southern city of Daraa in the early morning hours of March 23 after five consecutive days of anti-government protests. Contacts in the south, Internet reports, and [] reported that protestors had sought refuge in the Omari Mosque in central Daraa, which has been the epicenter of demonstrations since trouble began in the city following Friday prayers on March 18. Internet video corroborates our contacts' reports. [] provided us a list of three names of those killed. Funeral processions are expected to begin around noon today, offering, as usual, another potential flashpoint for demonstrations or clashes. We have reports of March 22 protests in other towns near Dara'a as well, including Madaya, Sanamain, Jassem, and Sahnaya.

B1
1.4(D)

Ambassador Questions Minister of Social Affairs on Violent Response

3. (C) In a March 23 meeting, the Ambassador expressed surprise to Minister of Social Affairs Dr. Diala al-Haj Aref at the violent SARG response to peaceful protests in Dara'a, particularly after having sent an official delegation to negotiate with the protesters. The Minister questioned the peaceful nature of the demonstrations and insisted that foreigners were instigating the unrest and that the actions of the security service must have been justified. She urged the Ambassador not to rush to judgment until a SARG investigation was carried out. The Ambassador replied that he hoped there would indeed be an investigation and that it would be transparent, and he stressed that dialogue with the demonstrators should lead to a political solution. [Comment: Despite SARG claims of foreign instigation, we received a list of those arrested in connection with protests in Syria and from what we can tell, only Syrians have so far been detained. We suggest we use this as a talking point. See para 10. End comment.]

Arrest of Prominent Activist, Others Harassed:

4. (C) The very small Sahnaya protest appears to be related to the afternoon arrest in the town of Louay Hussein, an

activist who was imprisoned 1984-1991, but who had remained quiet since his release up until recently. As small demonstrations have broken out in Syria, Hussein has posted words of encouragement to demonstrators on the Internet, putting up an online petition a few days ago demanding the right to peaceful protest.

B1
1.4(D)

5. (C) Police are also summoning activists and their family members for questioning. [redacted]

B1
1.4(D)

[redacted] told us on March 22 that he was called by security agents three times in the last 7 days and has been receiving "weird" emails from the security agents. Mazen Darwish, detained for 8 hours after the March 16 demonstration, has been summoned or called by security services three times in the last two days. They called him to tell him not to attend the March 22 demonstration outside the palace of justice (which fizzled); nonetheless he attended. Later that evening he was brought in for questioning, released about 8 hours later on the morning of the 23rd and was re-summoned only a few hours later. A Damascus University student reported a heavy undercover police presence on campus, and that some students had been questioned in the last week.

Local Press Lies; International Press Pays More Attention

6. (C) Though people continue to take to the streets in Dara'a, the state-controlled Syrian press has reported calm in the city, and it attributed the violence of the night of March 22 to armed troublemakers who attacked a medical team of the security services. The state news agency Sana has published numerous reports of an "armed gang" stashing weapons and using kidnapped children as human shields. On the other hand, the international press has begun covering events here more intensively, despite reported intimidation of some journalists from the SARG and some affiliated with it. Reuters, Agence France Presse, the BBC, and other outlets have released coverage. CNN reported March 23 about the Dara'a attack and the Hussein arrest, adding that organizers are planning "mass protests" for Friday, March 25.

Public Shock at Violence:

7. (C) Damascenes who woke up to the news on March 23 reported being in a sense of shock over the continuing violence. At the Cham Center Mall, employees and shoppers gathered around televisions watching Arabic satellite television. "What is next? We really don't know," a café employee said. On their Facebook pages, many Syrians, including those who support the regime and posted pictures of President Asad on their pages after the demonstrations started, expressed grief. "God be with the martyrs," one young man wrote. Another young man wrote emboff, "We are worried. The news doesn't sound good." "God, please save this country," another wrote. [redacted] who generally toes a pro-regime line, wrote on his Facebook status, "Oh God." Many Syrians, including [redacted] changed their Facebook profile pictures to a black background with the words "salute the martyrs."

B1
1.4(D)

Increasing Buzz

8. (C) Meanwhile, whereas a few weeks ago most contacts told us calls for demonstrations would lead nowhere, Syrians increasingly report that the ongoing violence in Dara'a and scattered, small demonstrations in numerous towns across the country are dominating conversation and people are starting to make contingency plans. [redacted]

B1
1.4(D)

[redacted] told us March 22 that well-heeled Syrians are buying dollars and moving money out of the country "just in case." [redacted] corroborated [redacted] story on March 23, relating it was "impossible to get dollars and euros on the black market" and he was approached by other businessmen requesting exchanges amounting to US \$10-20,000. "What is so scary about this is how quickly it all happened and how violent it is. We are worried," [redacted] concluded. A cab driver, when asked whether an Egypt-style uprising is possible here, told emboffs it was and "the youth in particular are working under the radar to create such an uprising." A Damascus University told emboff he could not meet because he was "too busy" trying to organize student protests.

Six Detainees Released on Bail

9. (U) Post has learned that six women from among the 32 people reportedly arrested after the March 16 protest in front of the Interior Ministry have been released on bail: Wafaa Laham, Serine Khoury, Nisreen Hussein, Siba Hasan, Laila Labwani, and Rouba Labwani.

U.S. Reaction

10. (U) Post recommends that press guidance include the following:

- The U.S. calls on the Syrian government to refrain from violence in response to peaceful demonstrations and, likewise, on protesters to assemble and express themselves peacefully.
- While the Syrian government has claimed protests are the result of foreign instigation, we note that all those detained by Syrian security forces have been Syrian citizens.

Signature: FORD

Classified By: Name: Robert Ford, Title: Ambassador
Office: US Embassy Damascus
Agency: State

Reason: 1.4 (b), (d)

Declassify on: 2021/03/23

Drafted By: DAMASCUS:Tachco, Amy N

Approved By: Hunter, Charles F

Released By: DAMASCUS:Tachco, Amy N

Info: Abell, J Andrew ROUTINE ; Allen, Katherine EROUTINE ; Burnett, Andrew BROUTINE ;
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ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE ROUTINE

XMT: AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

Attachments: Metadata.dat

Action Post:

Dissemination Rule: Archive Copy

CONFIDENTIAL

Exhibit 8

RELEASE IN PART
B1,1.4(D)

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster, Senior
Reviewer

From: Munir, Junaid Jay
Sent: 3/23/2011 1:00:28 PM
To: svcSMARTHBTSP06
Subject: UNREST IN SYRIA: MARCH 23 UPDATE II
Attachments: Metadata.dat

CONFIDENTIAL



MRN: 11 DAMASCUS 211
Date/DTG: Mar 23, 2011 / 231700Z MAR 11
From: AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE ROUTINE
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: PGOV, PHUM, KDEM, ASEC, SY
Reference: A) 11 DAMASCUS 205
Subject: UNREST IN SYRIA: MARCH 23 UPDATE II

1. (U) Below is an update on civil unrest and the government and public response to events in Syria.

UPDATE:

Dara'a

2. (SBU) Our contacts, on-line sources, and media report that Dara'a remains a tense city following last night's killing of up to 6 people by Syrian security forces. Contacts and on-line reporting described continued marches this afternoon after funerals for some of the victims, with unconfirmed reports of additional deaths and injuries. [redacted] reported four additional deaths in Dara'a this afternoon following the funerals. Small protests also reportedly took place in neighboring villages and towns. Contacts report a strong security presence, checkpoints, and interruption to Internet and phone service. The town is close enough to the border that some residents can reportedly use Jordanian SIM cards to communicate. Some Dara'a residents are calling for additional protests tomorrow and after Friday prayers.

B1
1.4(D)

3. (C) [redacted] told conoffs that she and her family had been sheltering in their house and heard gunfire throughout the night in the center of town where they live. The woman reported that she was able to leave Dara'a because she is a woman as men are having their ID cards confiscated at checkpoints.

B1
1.4(D)

Yarmouk/Hajar al-Aswad Protests

4. (C) A resident of Yarmouk, just south of Damascus, reported that residents of the area plan major demonstrations for this coming Friday. While most area residents are of Palestinian origin, the resident related that those who participated in the Yarmouk/Hajar al Aswad anti-government protests on March 20 were mainly Syrians originally from Dara'a and maintain familial and tribal bonds with the city. Based on conversations with neighbors, the resident believes fear of the government has evaporated among those who wish to protest and that more protests can be expected. Witnessing the March 20 protests firsthand, the resident estimated the number of protestors in the thousands, with streets and alleyways packed with demonstrators.

Damascus

5. (C) While last night's killings in Dara'a are dominating conversations in the capital city and Damascenes continue to express shock about ongoing violence there, Damascus remained calm today. Internet videos of a small gathering of anti-government protestors shouting slogans in downtown Damascus appeared on the Internet, but the clip's date could not be immediately verified. Some activists are calling for a demonstration in front of the Palace of Justice on March 24 in support of prisoners of conscience, two days after a similar protest was thwarted by a massive security presence. Online activists are calling on Damascenes to protest following Friday prayers on March 25 and join what they hope will be nation-wide protests.

Economic Effects

6. (C) The manager of [redacted] Hotel told conoffs that reservations from Western tourists are down for the months of March and April following news of unrest and violence. While we continue to hear reports of affluent Syrian families moving assets abroad just in case, Poloffs have received several requests for visa appointments from prominent Damascenes telling us they are concerned about the situation in Syria and want to keep travel options open.

B1
1.4(D)

Orient TV

7. (C) Credible sources reported journalists working in Syria for Orient TV, a Dubai-based station reporting on events in Syria that is frequently cited by our contacts as a source for independent news, have been systematically threatened. Many or all have quit, making it difficult for the station to report on events. A [redacted] activist affiliated with the station told us they would continue to report.

B1
1.4(D)

Human Rights Activists

8. (SBU) Four women arrested on March 16 are scheduled to be released on bail today: Sirin Khoury, Wafa al-Laham, Nisreen Hussein, Sabaa al-Hasan, Leyla Labwani, and Ruba al-Labwani. It is unclear if these women are charged with a crime. Activists Suheir Attasi and Hervin Osse [redacted] Nahad Badaweesh and Dana Aljawabra remain in jail. There is an unconfirmed report that activist Mazen Darwish was arrested this evening following a summons reported earlier today (reftel).

9. (C) According to [redacted] activist Kamal Labwani has given up on "life," wrote a will and passed out his belongings to fellow inmates. Labwani has been on hunger strike with fellow inmates for about 13 days now and [redacted] says that he is worried about Labwani's health.

Signature: FORD

Classified By: Name: Charles Hunter, Title: DCM
Reason: 1.4 (b), (d)
Declassify on: 2021/03/23
Drafted By: DAMASCUS:Munir, Junaid Jay
Cleared By: Munir, Junaid Jay
Approved By: Hunter, Charles F
Released By: DAMASCUS:Munir, Junaid Jay
Info: Abell, J Andrew ROUTINE ; Allen, Katherine E ROUTINE ; Burnett, Andrew B ROUTINE ;
Carper, David W (NEA/ELA) ROUTINE ; Cook, Latoya G ROUTINE ; Creedon, Reid M ROUTINE ;
Hanish, Bess I ROUTINE ; Kokon, Ahmed ROUTINE ; Kosa, Lauren S ROUTINE ; Miller, G. Thomas
ROUTINE ; Parrs, Walter ROUTINE ; Riggs, Susan J ROUTINE ; Schedlbauer, Amy W ROUTINE ;
Schwedt, Miriam L ROUTINE ; Shampaine, Nicole D ROUTINE ; Walker, Bridgette L (NEA/ELA)
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ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE ROUTINE
XMT: AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
Attachments: Metadata.dat

Action Post:

Dissemination Rule: Archive Copy

CONFIDENTIAL

Exhibit 9

RELEASE IN
FULL

From: Tachco, Amy N
Sent: 3/24/2011 6:50:02 AM
To: SMART Core
Subject: UNREST IN SYRIA: MARCH 24 UNCLASS UPDATE

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster, Senior
Reviewer

UNCLASSIFIED



MRN: 11 DAMASCUS 198
Date/DTG: Mar 24, 2011 / 241048Z MAR 11
From: AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE IMMEDIATE
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: PGOV, PHUM, KDEM, SY
Captions: SENSITIVE, SIPDIS
Reference: A) 11 DAMASCUS 171
B) 11 DAMASCUS 183
Subject: UNREST IN SYRIA: MARCH 24 UNCLASS UPDATE

1. (U) This is an unclassified update on civil unrest and related developments in Syria. Post will also send a classified update with more local reaction at close of business in Damascus.

Dara'a:

2. (SBU) The city appears to be in lockdown. Internet sources and contacts tell us SARG forces continue to man checkpoints around Dara'a and that many residents are staying in their homes out of fear. Public processions for funerals, which have sparked numerous clashes between residents and security forces, have reportedly been banned to try to avoid further trouble. We cannot confirm the numbers killed in Dara'a on March 23, but most of the contacts we have talked to report 6 deaths in the morning raid of al-Omri Mosque and an additional 6 later during afternoon clashes with security officers. Contacts also report that residents of neighboring villages attempting to reach Dara'a to participate in the protests have been blocked.

Human Rights Activists:

3. (SBU) There are credible reports of additional arrests throughout Syria, aimed primarily at thwarting protests after Friday prayers on March 25. Several high-profile activists, including Mazen Darwish and journalist Khaled Ekhteyar, are said to be among those who have been detained, reportedly for passing information to international media. In addition, the number of those arrested in Dara'a and other villages in the south is believed to be in the hundreds.

Pro-Government Efforts

4. (SBU) Government supporters continue nightly caravans through Damascus neighborhoods honking their horns, waving Syrian flags, and shouting pro-Asad slogans. In addition, Syrians who support the government have using Facebook and other Internet sites to argue that while the Syrian people want reforms and are concerned about corruption, the president himself is popular.

Calls for More Demonstrations

5. (SBU) Regime opponents continue to call for demonstrations following Friday prayers in cities across the country on March 25. Contacts are reluctant to predict whether protests will succeed in taking place, given past security service efforts to prevent them (ref A). Nonetheless, many assess that demonstrations will continue in the coming weeks due to anger over the killings in Dara'a, and they cite the series of protests after prayers on March 18 (ref B) as a precedent for successful Friday protest calls.

Signature: FORD

Drafted By: DAMASCUS:Tachco, Amy N
Approved By: Hunter, Charles F
Released By: DAMASCUS:Tachco, Amy N
Info: ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE ROUTINE
XMT: AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
Attachments: metadata.dat

Action Post:
Dissemination Rule: Archive Copy

UNCLASSIFIED

Exhibit 10

RELEASE IN
PART B1,1.4(D)

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster, Senior
Reviewer

From: Tachco, Amy N
Sent: 3/24/2011 2:18:24 PM
To: svcSMARTHBTSP0P2
Subject: UNREST IN SYRIA: MARCH 24 CLASSIFIED UPDATE
Attachments: Metadata.dat

SECRET//NOFORN



MRN: 11 DAMASCUS 229
Date/DTG: Mar 24, 2011 / 241818Z MAR 11
From: AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE IMMEDIATE
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: PGOV, PHUM, KDEM, SY
Captions: NOFORN
Reference: A) 11 DAMASCUS 205
B) 11 DAMASCUS 211
C) 11 DAMASCUS 215
Subject: UNREST IN SYRIA: MARCH 24 CLASSIFIED UPDATE

Overview

1. (C) While following continuing events in Dara'a and elsewhere, post is particularly focused on whether calls for post-prayer protest for tomorrow will result in more and larger demonstrations (para 5). Damascus and other major cities this evening are calm. We have no reports of large demonstrations today. Some of our local staff report less evening nightlife as families stay home to watch TV news and to save money should things get worse, but commercial establishments all are open and operating normally. We will monitor the Friday PM situation and report as we gather information. We are also watching to see if a rushed SARG announcement on its reform plans will result in any real change (para 3) or was merely a meager attempt to forestall protests. Details on all the day's events, as well as what we are hearing in terms of public buzz, follow. We assess that the SARG is increasing the size of both its carrots and sticks. After a vicious application of the stick with the repression in Deraa, and the widespread arrest campaign also underway, the SARG announcement tonight was more of a carrot. It is unclear if the carrots will be big enough to satisfy the Syrian public, and the more it uses its sticks, the bigger risk it takes that its actions will backfire, pushing more people into the streets.

More Deaths in Dara'a

2. (SBU) Our contacts in the activist community are reporting that 20,000 residents of Dara'a took to the streets again this afternoon following funerals for those killed on March 23 despite a ban on public funeral processions. Syrian bloggers and Facebook users began posting similar reports, with some writing that friends in the south had corroborated the accounts. International news agencies such as CNN and AFP are reporting the same. Hospital lists show 37 confirmed deaths from demonstrations in Dara'a, though journalists from [redacted] tell Western diplomats that the number could be in the hundreds. One journalist [redacted] says she will use the word "massacre" to describe events there.

B1
1.4(D)

Shaaban Announces Reform Plans

3. (SBU) Earlier this afternoon, our contacts reported that the SARG would make a "major announcement" of reforms this

evening in an effort to head off calls for protests after Friday prayers on March 25. Presidential and Media Advisor Bouthaina Shabaan held a press conference at 6:30 p.m. Damascus time at the Peoples' Palace. (Note: This is the first government press conference focused on purely domestic issues we recall occurring in Syria. End note.) After expressing the president's and Syria's love for Dara'a and the importance of the region to the rest of Syria, she announced a package of five economic and six political reforms. The economic reforms she announced were: 1) Establishing a steering committee to study the reasons for problems in Dara'a, to hold those who were negligent accountable and to respond to the legitimate demands of the citizens; 2) an immediate increase of salaries for state employees; 3) finding the funds to provide health insurance for public-sector workers; 4) increased job opportunities; and 5) an assessment of the performance of local and municipal administration. The political reforms she announced were: 1) anti-corruption legislation and a campaign; 2) studying the termination of the emergency law; 3) preparing a draft political party law and a project to strengthen political dialogue; 4) issuance of a new media law; 5) amending Decree 49 which makes Kurdish ownership of land in the northeast difficult; and 6) strengthening the authority of the judiciary and prevention of indiscriminate arrests. Details remain scarce, but an update from the official SANA news agency shortly after the press conference said that the basic salary raise for government workers would be 1500 Syrian pounds (USD 33) plus 30 percent of salary for those making less than 10,000 SYP (USD 217) per month and 20 percent for those earning more than 10,000 monthly.

4. (C) Initial reaction from our contacts to the speech varied depending on political orientation. Regime sympathizers with close ties to the government praised the effort. Prominent businessman and regime supporter [redacted] said the announcement included "true reforms." Writer [redacted] declared that "martial law will be lifted soon in Syria ... finally." Skeptics like [redacted] criticized the announcement assessing that it included "no plans." "But the situation will force plans. If they do not do it, they will face change for sure," he added. [redacted] criticized the speech calling it "words of hypocrisy and lies to pacify the people."

B1
1.4(D)

Calls for Friday Protests

5. (S/NF) Calls for protests after Friday prayers continue to circulate as organizers attempt to repeat and expand on last week's protests, which took place in at least four cities around the country. Several contacts told us March 23 and 24 that in addition to stepping up arrests, the SARG is reportedly encouraging supporters to begin chanting pro-Asad slogans at the end of Friday prayers at mosques around the country. One contact told us the Syrians are particularly focused on avoiding a repeat of anti-government slogans at the high-profile Omayyid Mosque in Damascus. When asked about the prospects Syrians will join protests on Friday, [redacted] said he was not certain but predicted that regardless of what happens on March 25 the potential for protests continues. "When you push a train stopped for many years, you push hard but with no response, until at a certain moment it will be very easy and fast. If the situation is not dealt cleverly and with wisdom, it will deteriorate suddenly in many places at the same time."

B1
1.4(D)

6. (C) An RSO contact from the SARG stated there will be a visible and increased police and security presence in Damascus. Security officers will attend Friday prayers in major cities like Damascus and Aleppo to listen for imams' rhetoric potentially inciting protests, especially regarding Dara'a victims.

Kurds Getting Involved?

7. (SBU) A London-based human rights organization reported that Kurdish Yekiti party leaders have encouraged their supporters to join in demonstrations. We are awaiting confirmation from our Yekiti contacts. If true, this is a noteworthy event as the Kurds - who have had a history of challenging the regime - have been largely quiet since protests began in Syria, with several saying they would not join the protests unless other Syrians joined first.

Dead Soldier's Online Following

8. (SBU) Reports about a soldier named Khaled (or Ashraf) al-Masri, who was allegedly killed by his superior officer for refusing to comply with an order to attack the al-Omari Mosque, are spreading quickly on the Internet, with some Syrians calling him a hero. His funeral reportedly took place at 13:00 on March 24. Contacts wonder if he might become a symbol of the Dara'a revolt.

Maher al-Asad's Role

9. (S/NF) Prominent businessman [redacted] told us March 23 that presidential cousin Brigadier General Atif Najib, head of the Political Security intelligence branch in Dara'a was playing a leading role in trying to bring the city under control, but that Najib is "under the control" of Maher al-Asad, the president's younger brother and commander of an elite army brigade. Rumors have spread among Syrians that Maher al-Asad was responsible for the order to attack Dara'a's al-Omari Mosque on March 23. / [redacted]

B1
1.4(D)

[redacted] Regardless of whether it is true, the rumor of Asad family direct involvement has the potential to exacerbate tensions.

B1
1.4(D)

Aleppo

10. (SBU) Credible contacts tell us that a small demonstration took place at the Attarine Market in Aleppo's old city. There were no reports of violence or clashes. We will continue to follow news from Aleppo.

SARG Campaign of Arrests, One Release

11. (S/NF) / [redacted]

B1
1.4(D)

[redacted] "There are young kids being beaten and tortured in Dara'a. The kids are walking in the streets with their shirts off to show the others what was done to them," human rights activist [redacted] asserted. Latest arrests:

- Mazen Darwish, human rights activist – Darwish gave remarks to several media outlets and was a noticeable face at public demonstrations.
- Khaled Ekhteyar, journalist – contacts tell us Ekhteyar worked in tandem with Louay Hussein (arrested yesterday) to collect and disseminate information to foreign media networks. Ekhteyar also attended public demonstrations.
- Our contacts fear that [redacted] is being targeted by SARG security forces and it is only a matter of time before she is arrested. [redacted] has left her home and is currently in a undisclosed location in Damascus.
- In one piece of good news, activist Louay Hussein, who was arrested yesterday in Sahnaya (ref A), was reportedly released from prison today.

B1
1.4(D)

Confirmation of Threats against Journalists

12. (C) Orient TV representatives confirmed to colleagues in Dubai, where it is based, that employees and reporters of the independent station were threatened by Syrian intelligence services (ref B). Those based outside Syria were reminded of their family ties still in the country. The sources also confirmed that Orient moved its operations to Dubai after Asad cousin and billionaire businessman Rami Makhlouf tried to buy a controlling share of the station and the management rebuffed his offer.

Syrian Press Blames Foreign Instigation for Protests

13. (SBU) The Syrian media – both state-owned and private – has ramped up its attacks on Arab satellite networks for their coverage of the Dara'a demonstrations, accusing it of supporting foreign instigators, especially the West. In an editorial, Muhammed Kanaysi, editor of *al-Baath*, calls on the youth in Syria to beware of the Western attempts to convince them that criminal acts can be a means to achieve reform. "Such acts slow down reform, as the government is busy confronting chaos instead of responding to the youth needs," he says. The governor of Homs made the same argument to the Ambassador in a March 21 meeting (ref C), suggesting it is an official SARG talking point.

Scrutiny at the Border

14. (C) An LES Embassy employee just returned from Amman and used the Jaaber border crossing. Jordanian customs asked to search the embassy diplomatic plated vehicle. The employee refused and the Jordanian relented easily. The LES experienced the same issue on the Syrian side. The Syrian customs officer pulled the LES aside and indirectly asked whether there was something in the embassy vehicle to be concerned about. The LES responded negative. The Syrian officer took the LES' name and diplomatic plate number. Both Jordanian and Syrian officers indicated the increased border inspection was obviously due to the unrest in southern Syria. We have also heard reports of heightened scrutiny at the border with Lebanon, including people being made to surrender computers and cameras for checks of the contents before being allowed into Syria.

Comment

15. (C) We caution that Dara'a is in one far corner of Syria and has a peculiar mix of tribal and Palestinian communities that make it unique. Nonetheless, Friday prayers on March 25 could again be the launching point for more demonstrations in many locales in Syria. As we look forward, much of the public reaction depends on the government's actions, and here the government's message is mixed – both iron fist and incentives ranging from firing controversial governors to subsidy hikes. The much hyped reform announcement from Shaaban turned out to be a list of things the government would “review” or find solutions to, rather than a series of concrete actions to be undertaken on a certain timeline. Clearly the Asad regime felt pressured enough to rush the announcement before Friday prayers, but we are unsure if it will be enough to head off the demonstrations. If the protests do continue, many of our contacts warn that the iron fist the SARG is choosing to use could instead stir more demonstrations as more anti-government segments of the populations sense that there is, in fact, a real battle and that like people in some other Arab countries, maybe they could prevail.

16. (C) We also sense that the Syrian government is going into a heavy defense and spin mode. The SARG is lashing out at foreign satellite networks for their “biased” coverage – yet another demonstration of how sensitive the Syrians are to negative foreign media coverage. Shaaban even told the BBC correspondents that Syrian television should be the only one considered authoritative on events in Syria. Foreign embassies have been told to stay out of Dara'a and in one instance a diplomat (Canadian) too close to a demonstration in the Damascus area March 16 was roughed up and briefly detained. Two Amcits also were detained on March 19 at the Umayyad Mosque and the Syrian government will not yet officially confirm that it is holding them, much less release them. The government also asked a planned U.S. National Defense University group to postpone its visit because “the timing is not appropriate.” Most likely, the MFA doesn't want to have to answer pointed questions if it can avoid it. The government, looking at burned Baath Party and court buildings in Deraa, perceives that the violence is two-sided, a point the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs emphasized to the Ambassador March 22. To the extent we want our messages, public and private, to be credible and influential with the Syrian government, we need to keep accenting (1) that we condemn violence generally and in particular killings; (2) that we deplore arrests that are not followed by prompt due process and (3) our support for peaceful political expression and (4) that the Syrian government has to abide by Vienna Convention norms about diplomats and foreign nationals it arrests.

Signature: FORD

Classified By: Name: Robert Ford, Title: Ambassador
Office: US Embassy Damascus
Agency: State
Reason: 1.4 (b), (d)
Declassify on: 2036/03/24
Drafted By: DAMASCUS:Tachco, Amy N
Cleared By: Hunter, Charles F
Approved By: EXECUTIVE:Ford, Robert S
Released By: DAMASCUS:Tachco, Amy N
Info: ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE ROUTINE
XMT: AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
Attachments: Metadata.dat

Action Post:
Dissemination Rule: Archive Copy

SECRET//NOFORN

Exhibit 11

RELEASE IN PART
B1,1.4(D)

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster,
Senior Reviewer

From: Ibrahim, Mounir E
Sent: 4/6/2011 10:54:06 AM
To: svcSMARTHBTSP0P8
Subject: SARG SCRAMBLING TO CHOKE INFORMATION ON PROTESTS
Attachments: Metadata.dat

SECRET//NOFORN



MRN: 11 DAMASCUS 283
Date/DTG: Apr 06, 2011 / 061454Z APR 11
From: AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE ROUTINE
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: PHUM, KDEM, KPAO, SY
Captions: NOFORN
Reference: A) 11 DAMASCUS 171
B) 11 DAMASCUS 183
C) 11 DAMASCUS 198
Subject: SARG SCRAMBLING TO CHOKE INFORMATION ON PROTESTS

1. (C) SUMMARY: Syria has never been known for freedom of the press or information, but diplomats, activists, and journalists agree that the Syrian government has stepped up its efforts to control all information flowing out of the country. Contacts say the SARG is concerned about information being leaked and has resorted to brute tactics like confiscation of cell phones and perhaps even cutting phone and Internet service. If the SARG were to shut down mass communication then the flow of information and coordination of protests could greatly hinder the ongoing demonstrations. END SUMMARY.

ATTACK THE NETWORKS

2. (C) In response to the recent wave of public demonstrations, the SARG has stepped up its efforts to control the flow of information about ongoing unrest in Syria. The government's heightened efforts began on March 16, when the security services harassed and arrested witnesses filming the crackdown by police on a protest in front of the Interior Ministry in Damascus (ref A). The police confiscated and broke cameras and phones. A Canadian diplomat attempting to film the attack on the peaceful demonstrators was briefly arrested by SARG security forces. After anti-government protests took place after Friday prayers on March 18 (ref B), western media attention increased and SARG pressure on journalists was ratcheted up.

3. (S) Days after the March 18 demonstrations, the security services began jailing those working with and speaking to western media. On March 22, activist Louay Hussein was arrested at his home and his computer and phones were confiscated. On March 23, journalist Khaled Ekhteyar (ref C) disappeared for several days.

According to [redacted] many people believe that the SARG forced Ekhteyar to reveal his e-mail passwords. "It was a blow when Khaled was arrested, [redacted] it was also odd that when he was released, his Facebook account was spamming pro-government propaganda," [redacted]

B1
1.4(D)

relayed. Human rights activist Mazen Darwish was arrested on March 23 after speaking with various media outlets. Like Ekhteyar and Hussein, Darwish was released in a matter of days but with a noticeable change in behavior. [REDACTED]

B1
1.4(D)

[REDACTED] although unaffiliated with media outlets, were imprisoned for taking photos of demonstrations. Although the SARG initially relaxed Internet freedoms, now it appears to be trying to stop photos and videos from being posted in the first place, especially if taken by westerners.

GET RID OF THE JOURNALISTS

4. (S) The same week, journalists from satellite TV channel Orient were threatened by security forces in response to their critical coverage of SARG violence against protestors (septel). On March 26 the Syrian government expelled Reuters journalist Khaled Oweis from Syria for filing "unprofessional and false" reports. Our contacts tell us this was another blow to the protest movement as Oweis was in touch with many activists. [REDACTED]

B1
1.4(D)

[REDACTED] Oweis had been consistently breaking news of protests and crackdowns ahead of other journalists, especially in the southern city of Dara'a. At least four other Reuters photographers and journalists have been arrested and detained over the last 15 days

5. (S) According to [REDACTED] there are very few international journalists in Syria in the first place, and all are working under extremely difficult conditions to get accurate information. "If the phones and internet are cut, then the world would be left in the dark. This government is sniping its own people without provocation and if they cut communication, no one would know about it," [REDACTED] One by one journalists are leaving or being arrested or detained. BBC correspondent Lina Sinjab was arrested on March 26 and interrogated by security forces for eight hours. Our contacts believe her arrest was a warning for her not to increase her coverage of violent events in Syria. All4Syria [REDACTED] beginning on March 20 the news website was victim to "massive denial of service attacks," disrupting its service. The website operator, based in Canada, told [REDACTED] that the attacks were "generated by individuals with lots of resources or from larger organizations who have greater resources to generate such an attack." [REDACTED] believes the attacking source is the Syrian government.

B1
1.4(D)

AL-JAZEERA'S SLANT

6. (S) Some Syrian activists claim that certain networks are not covering what is actually taking place in Syria. "We [activists] are mad at al-Jazeera. They are barely covering the stories and being very weak against the government," [REDACTED] claimed. [REDACTED] believes that the SARG has been reaching out to al-Jazeera officials in hopes of lessening the negative coverage on Syria. "I am told that Khaled Meshaal was sent to Qatar to speak with al-Jazeera and especially Qardawi. He told them that Syria is good to the Palestinians and al-Jazeera must not publicly bash them," [REDACTED] whispered. (Note: Regardless of whether a Meshaal trip to Doha is the reason, there has been a noticeable decrease in al-Jazeera coverage of events in Syria, most notably the ceasing of their online blog in Syria. Embassy Damascus analyzed the Arabic-language channel coverage and found that on one morning only one of Al-Jazeera's 60 minutes of news was focused on Syria, whereas 12 of BBC Arabic's 30 minutes were devoted to Syrian unrest. End Note.)

B1
1.4(D)

7. (C) Comment: So far, the Syrian security services have maintained a firm grip both on security and on information. If backed into a corner, however, the regime could attempt to shut down communication networks in Syria completely in a bid to thwart protests. As unrest continues, activists, diplomats, and journalists are increasingly worried about the possibility the SARG will decide to cut Internet and phone lines. When the country's leading mobile service provider, Syriatel, crashed on April 2 for two days after the company offered free calls to citizens to thank them for supporting President Asad, many Syrians immediately suspected an ulterior motive. If the SARG takes that dubious step, the world could be cut off from events inside Syria, making it even more difficult for activists and journalists to keep Syrians and the international community aware of developments here.

Signature: FORD

Classified By: Name: Charles Hunter, Title: DCM
Office: US Embassy Damascus
Agency: State

Reason: 1.4 (b), (d)

Declassify on: 2036/04/06

Drafted By: DAMASCUS:Ibrahim, Mounir E; Munir, Junaid

Cleared By: Harder, J J

Tachco, Amy N

Approved By: Hunter, Charles F

Released By: DAMASCUS:Ibrahim, Mounir E

Info: Abell, J Andrew ROUTINE ; Allen, Katherine EROUTINE ; Burnett, Andrew BROUTINE ;
Carper, David W (NEA/ELA) ROUTINE ; Cook, Latoya GROUTINE ; Creedon, Reid MROUTINE ;
Hanish, Bess IROUTINE ; Kokon, Ahmed ROUTINE ; Kosa, Lauren SROUTINE ; Miller, G. Thomas
ROUTINE ; Parrs, Walter ROUTINE ; Riggs, Susan JROUTINE ; Schedlbauer, Amy WROUTINE ;
Schwedt, Miriam LROUTINE ; Shampaine, Nicole DROUTINE ; 'Hajjar, Hagar H.' ROUTINE ;
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DCROUTINE ; Pounds, Tim JROUTINE ;
Deaton, Anthony AROUTINE ; ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE ROUTINE

XMT: AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

Attachments: Metadata.dat

Action Post:

Dissemination Rule: Archive Copy

SECRET//NOFORN

Exhibit 12

RELEASE IN
PART B6

From: Tachco, Amy N
Sent: 12/14/2011 7:44:08 AM
To: SMART Core
Subject: SYRIA UNREST: DECEMBER 14 UPDATE

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie Bolster,
Senior Reviewer

UNCLASSIFIED
SBU



MRN: 11 DAMASCUS 1066
Date/DTG: Dec 14, 2011 / 141213Z DEC 11
From: AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE IMMEDIATE
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: PGOV, PHUM, EFIN, ETRD, ASEC, CASC, KDEM, SY, RS, IZ, IR, AL-1
Captions: SENSITIVE
Reference: 11 DAMASCUS 123
Subject: SYRIA UNREST: DECEMBER 14 UPDATE

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On December 13, at least 35 civilians were killed by SARG forces as heavy clashes were reported between SARG forces and defectors in Idlib province. Syrian state-controlled media report the deaths of seventeen security force members as the SARG continued its operations against "terrorists" in many parts of the country. The SARG announced local election results in Damascus and Sweida provinces and claimed that there was high voter turnout. The Syrian military will conduct a coastal missile exercise on the Mediterranean coast December 19-21. The SARG has charged U.S.-born Syrian blogger Razan Ghazzawi with trying to incite sectarian strife, and she could face up to 15 years in prison. Mishan al-Jabouri, the owner of Syria-based TV station Al-Rai TV announced that the channel is now off the air because of the improved ties between Syria and Iraq. The Greek Orthodox Patriarch Gregorios III Laham and other church figures in Syria held a "Christmas and patriotism prayer" service where they reportedly expressed their objections to international interference. Arab media report that the new draft Syrian constitution will require the president of Syria to be Muslim, set the presidential term at 7 years, and eliminate the Baath Party monopoly on power. The Arab League (AL) confirmed its Council meeting on Syria will take place in Cairo on December 17, but there is still no date set for a broader AL-sponsored opposition conference. [redacted] close to Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari told an Embassy Damascus employee that Zebari might visit Syria on his way back from meetings in the U.S. AFP reported that Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused the West of an "immoral" stance on Syria because it has not condemned violence from the opposition. Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallim allegedly said a decision to stop the Kuwaiti Development Fund from working in Syria was premature. Iran and Syria agreed on a number of MOUs and trade agreements in an effort to show their "economic viability" under sanctions. END SUMMARY.

B6

On the Ground

CLASHES IN IDLIB BUT PROTESTS CONTINUE ELSEWHERE

2. (SBU) On December 13, at least 35 civilians were killed by SARG forces, according to activists, and at least 21 of the deaths occurred in Idlib province. Activists reported heavy fighting in and around Idlib as SARG forces allegedly battled defectors. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claimed that army defectors killed 7 security force members in

retaliation for an attack that killed 11 civilians in two villages in north western Idlib province. One of the civilians killed in Idlib province yesterday was Mohammad Munir Dolar, who according to AFP is a Saudi-Turkish citizen. The Local Coordination Committees (LCCs) claimed to have documented 376 "martyrs," including 34 children, killed by SARG forces so far in December.

3. (SBU) Peaceful protestors continued to take to the streets in Dara'a, Idlib, Aleppo, Homs, Daeel, Damascus, the Damascus countryside, Hama, and elsewhere on December 13. Activists claim the size of the peaceful protests is no longer decreasing, and contacts tell us that in many areas of the country the number of people willing to take to the streets is increasing. A embassy contact working for [REDACTED] visited Aleppo last week and noticed a marked difference in the attitude of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) volunteers and residents with whom she came in contact. Although the contact considers Aleppo a divided city in terms of having an Islamic population and a liberal secular population, more discontent about the regime was voiced, especially about the deterioration of the economy.

B6

17 SARG "MARTYRS"

4. (U) Syrian state-controlled media reported that on December 13 seventeen army and security forces "martyrs" were buried after they were killed by "terrorists" in Homs, Dara'a, Idlib, and the Damascus countryside. According to the local media, SARG forces in the town of Hzano in Idlib province clashed with "terrorists" and killed and injured several of them. Also in Idlib province in the city of Kfar Takharim SARG forces dismantled three explosive devices, according to the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA). There were also reports in the local media that "terrorists" stopped and burned a bus in Idlib province, but no injuries were reported.

SUSPICIOUSLY QUICK ELECTION RESULTS

5. (SBU) On December 14, SANA reported that the judicial sub-committee for the Local Council Elections in Damascus announced the results of the Provincial Council elections on Tuesday evening. The head of the sub-committee, Nazir Kheirallah, said, "The electoral process went according the committee's plan in an atmosphere of transparency marked by honesty and democracy" and that there was "wide popular participation." The vast majority of newly elected members of the local councils in Damascus belonged to the Workers and Farmers Party that is closely aligned with the Baath Party. SANA claimed that in the southern governorate of Sweida, an area with a high percentage of Druze, 80% of the population voted. Syrians told us that usually it takes around ten days for the SARG to announce election results, and they were puzzled as to why this time it took less than 24 hours. Some contacts assume the quick announcement of elections results was an indicator that the ballots were not even counted and that the elections were rigged.

SARG SHOWS OF BRAVADO CONTINUE

6. (SBU) The Syrian military will conduct a coastal missile exercise off the Mediterranean coast December 19-21, the Syrian Ministry of Defense told defense attachés in Damascus today. DAO will report more fully on the MOD Foreign Liaison Office presentation of the exercise on the classified system (and we will forward to our distro there).

AMCIT BLOGGER CHARGED

7. (U) AP reported that Syrian authorities have charged Amcit Razan Ghazzawi with trying to incite sectarian strife, according to activists. Ghazzawi was arrested December 4 at the Jordanian border while on her way for a conference on press freedoms. On December 12, she was charged by Syrian authorities with trying to incite sectarian strife, spreading false information, and weakening national sentiment, a charge often levelled against those who challenge the Syrian regime, according to rights activists. The charges could carry a prison sentence of up to 15 years. The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression in the Arab World, where Ghazzawi worked, said in a statement on December 13 that Ghazzawi denied all the charges.

AI-RAI STOPS BROADCASTING

8. (U) According to the AFP, Mishan al-Jabouri, the Iraqi Baathist owner of Syria-based TV station Al-Rai TV, said that the channel has been taken off the air. Post noted that the channel went off air early last week but no official announcement of its closure was made until yesterday. Long a pro-Iraqi insurgency television outlet known for instigating violence against U.S. and Iraqi forces post-Saddam, Al-Rai TV switched its focus to Libya early this year (reftel) broadcasting the messages of the late Libyan Leader Moammar Qadhafi. Jabouri said that he closed that station because of the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and improved Syrian-Iraqi relations. We suspect Qadhafi's death also had something to do with it.

CHURCH CALLS FOR NO OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE

9. (SBU) According to SANA, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Gregorios III Laham told parishioners at a "Christmas and patriotism prayer" held on December 13 that the people's allegiance is to Syria, and he stressed "rejection of any form of foreign interference from whatever party." The heads of a number of churches reportedly attended the prayer service, however SANA did not publish their names. In the past two weeks multiple Church leaders have told poloff that they are hoping for a peaceful solution to the ongoing crisis in Syria. One Christian figure in Damascus told poloff, "All we can do is pray because we do not want to get involved in politics." Many Christians are part of the opposition, but the majority of Christians have remained silent and are perceived by most Syrians as Asad supporters.

SARG "Reforms"

UPDATES ON THE NEW CONSTITUTION

10. (U) On December 13, the London-based newspaper *Al-Quds al-Arabi* published an article citing sources close to the national committee tasked with drafting a new constitution saying the committee has agreed the religion of the Republic's president must be Islam, but that this does not make Islam the state religion. The new draft also sets the minimum eligibility age of the president at 40 years (it was lowered from 40 to 34 years in 2000 to enable the election of President Bashar al-Asad), and sets the presidential term at seven years. The article also said that article 8 of the constitution, which defines the Baath Party as the governing party of the state, will be removed from the new constitution.

Arab League Initiative

AL COUNCIL MEETING SCHEDULED FOR DECEMBER 17

11. (SBU) The Arab League (AL) Council meeting on Syria is confirmed to take place in Cairo on December 17. The Ministerial Council on Syria, led by Qatar, will meet earlier in the day to formulate a joint position ahead of the full Council meeting. Embassy Cairo contacts reported that there is a growing split among Gulf member states on the next steps, with some leaning towards referring the situation to the UN, and others arguing the AL to delay calling for any UN action because the UN Security Council is "not currently in a position to back up any threats." (Embassy Cairo will report more septel following Saturday's meeting.)

12. (SBU) While Syrian opposition leaders have been meeting this week with each other and with Arab League officials, there is still no date set for a broader League-sponsored opposition conference. Arab League officials are hoping to set a date by the end of this week.

Abroad

IRAQI FM TO SWING BY DAMASCUS?

13. (SBU) On December 14, _____ close to Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, told emboff that Zebari might visit Syria on his way back from meetings in the U.S. Press reports have noted that an Iraqi delegation plans to visit Damascus to urge the SARG to accept the AL peace plan, but there has been no confirmation that the Foreign Minister himself would

B6

come.

LAVROV: WEST'S STANCE "IMMORAL"

14. (U) AFP reported that Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on December 13, after a meeting with the Algerian FM, said that the West had an "immoral" stance on Syria because it has not condemned violence from the opposition. Lavrov accused opposition groups of attempting to provoke a "humanitarian catastrophe" in order "to get a pretext to demand external interference into this conflict." Lavrov also defended a plan by Russia and China which urges both the opposition and the SARG to refrain from violence.

Economy

KUWAIT STOPS FINANCING IN SYRIA

15. (U) *Al-Watan* reported on December 14 that the Kuwaiti Development Fund would stop financing projects in Syria. In response, the paper claimed Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallim sent a letter on December 12 to his Kuwaiti counterpart calling the Kuwaiti decision "premature." The paper quotes Kuwait's Deputy Foreign Minister as saying he hoped Syria would respond to the efforts of the AL.

ANOTHER EMPTY IRAN-SYRIA DEAL

16. (U) In an effort for both countries to put a good face on their "economic viability" under sanctions, Iran and Syria have agreed to a series of MOUs and trade agreements in recent years. To coincide with the semi-annual economic meeting between the two countries, Iran's parliament passed a free trade agreement with Syria on December 13, to be implemented over the next five years. Although Iran and Syria are presenting this as a major achievement and one that will allow both to survive external pressure, in reality it is merely a restatement of many previous agreements that have yet to be implemented. Syrian-Iranian trade is not a major factor for either state, and in 2010 Syrian-U.S. trade was triple Syrian-Iranian trade, in spite of sanctions (although it has dropped sharply in 2011). This is playing to the camera and does not constitute either a major change or a significant support to the Syrian economy.

Signature: FORD

Drafted By: DAMASCUS:Tenbrink, Shawn; Tachco, Amy N; Cummings, Joanne; Hallett, Stephanie; Others...
Approved By: NEA:Tachco, Amy N
Released By: DAMASCUS:Tachco, Amy N
Info: ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE ROUTINE
XMT: AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

Action Post:
Dissemination Rule: Archive Copy

UNCLASSIFIED
SBU

Exhibit 13

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED
Page 1 of 4

RELEASE IN
FULL

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie
Bolster, Senior Reviewer

From: Tachco, Amy N
Sent: 12/5/2011 7:37:37 AM
To: svcSMARTBTSP0P1
Subject: SYRIA UNREST: DECEMBER 5 UPDATE
Attachments: Full_EN_Arab League Statement.docx; Metadata.dat

UNCLASSIFIED
SBU



MRN: 11 DAMASCUS 1042
Date/DTG: Dec 05, 2011 / 051237Z DEC 11
From: AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE IMMEDIATE
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: PGOV, PHUM, ASEC, APER, CASC, ECON, EPET, KDEM, SY
Captions: SENSITIVE
Subject: SYRIA UNREST: DECEMBER 5 UPDATE

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Arab League (SL) Ministerial Committee on Syria announced that AL sanctions will go into effect on December 15 after the SARG failed to agree to let observers into the country, though media reports that the Syrian foreign ministry belatedly agreed to sign the protocol on observers today. The UN Human Rights Council issued a resolution condemning the "gross and systematic" human rights violations perpetrated by Syrian forces and demanded the suspension of security forces suspected of violations and the release of prisoners of conscience. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's media adviser Ali al-Moussawi said that Iraq is willing to serve as a mediator between the Syrian opposition and Assad's regime in an effort to avoid further bloodshed. An amcit blogger was arrested when attempting to enter Jordan to attend a workshop for advocates of press freedoms in the Arab world. Between December 2 and 4 at least 80 civilians were killed by SARG forces. Clashes between defectors and SARG forces were reported in Syria over the weekend, but peaceful protests continued as well, with demonstrations in across the country. State TV reported on military exercises held over the weekend and meant to test "the capabilities and the readiness of missile systems to respond to any possible aggression." Syrian state-controlled media reported on the deaths of SARG forces targeted by "terrorists" but indicated that SARG authorities are in control of the situation. The current president of the Syrian National Council (SNC), Burhan Ghalioun, appealed for support for a UN Security Council resolution against Syria but did not call for intervention. The "National Committee," a group of leftist parties considered regime stooges by most of the Syrian opposition, held a conference in Damascus where the participants voiced their support for President Bashar al-Asad's reforms and a national dialogue conference. Asad issued a legislative degree permitting Syrians to vote with their ID cards in the upcoming local elections scheduled for December 12. Following the announcement of EU sanctions last week, Dutch oil firm Shell announced that it will cease operations in Syria as the Syrian economy deteriorates and the Syrian pound plunges against the dollar. END SUMMARY.

International Action

ALTO IMPLEMENT SANCTIONS, WHILE SARG BELATEDLY AGREES TO PLAN

2. (SBU) The Arab League Ministerial Committee on Syria met in Doha on December 3 and 4 to discuss the

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recommendations of the technical committee for the implementation of sanctions against Syria. After Syria failed to agree to allow monitors into Syria on December 4, the committee agreed to impose a travel ban and asset freeze on 19 Syrian officials and to cut flights to and from Syria by 50% starting on December 15. Qatari Prime Minister Hamed Bin Jassim warned Syria that "internationalisation" is inevitable if the situation continues as it is. (The AL statement is attached.) Media today report that a Syrian foreign ministry spokesman said Syria would sign onto the plan with "minor amendments that won't affect the essence of the plan," a belated positive response to Arab League overtures. We note the regime has repeatedly tried to buy time by responding positively to the AL while implementing none of the measures called for, and we are particularly skeptical of terms like "minor amendments."

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL EMERGENCY CONDEMNS SARG

3. (U) On 2 December the UN Human Rights Council held an emergency meeting to vote on a resolution on the situation in Syria. The resolution condemned the "gross and systematic" human rights violations perpetrated by Syrian forces and demanded the suspension of security forces suspected of violations and the release of prisoners of conscience. The resolution also recommended the appointment of a special investigator to report on the human rights abuses in Syria. The resolution passed with a total of 37 members voting in favor, four against (including Russia and China) and six abstaining. In response, Syria's permanent representative to the UN in Geneva said that the Commission report was biased and had ignored documents provided by the regime.

IRAQ TO PLAY THE MEDIATOR?

4. (U) Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's media adviser Ali al-Moussawi said on December 4 that Iraq is willing to serve as a mediator between the Syrian opposition and Asad's regime in an effort to avoid further bloodshed, according to Reuters. "We as a government ... seek a solution. If this clash continues forever it will be harmful for all, particularly to the Syrian people and the Syrian state," he said. Al-Moussawi added, "He [Maliki] is clear he is ready for a dialogue with all the parties." Al-Moussawi indicated that Iraq was in communication with the opposition. Opposition contacts dismissed the Maliki initiative noting that he has consistently backed the Syrian regime and could not be a neutral party.

On the Ground

AMCIT BLOGGER ARRESTED

5. (SBU) US-born blogger and member of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression Razan Ghazzawi was arrested December 4 when attempting to enter Jordan to attend a workshop for advocates of press freedoms in the Arab world. The Embassy Consular Section has been in touch with her family and is sending in reports separately.

VIOLENT CLASHES, PEACEFUL PROTESTS CONTINUE

6. (U) Between December 2 and 4 at least 80 civilians were killed by SARG forces according to activists, at least 35 in Homs. The Local Coordination Committees (LCCs) said that they documented a total of 848 deaths, including 59 children, in November making it the most deadly month since the uprising began. Activists reported violent clashes between army defectors and SARG forces in Homs, Idlib, Dara'a, Deir al-Zour and elsewhere. Despite the increasing violence, peaceful protests continued in Homs, Hama, Idlib, Deir al-Zour, Dara'a, Damascus, the Damascus suburbs, and elsewhere between December 2 and 4. Some larger protests, such as one in Idlib, were reported but the majority remain small due to the heavy security presence in all the major cities. Contacts tell us the arrest campaign targeting peaceful protestors is unrelenting. Reports from activists indicate that over 200 people were arrested in Dara'a on December 4 as SARG forces attempt to eliminate peaceful activism.

SARG MISSILES READY TO DEFEND AGAINST ATTACK

7. (U) According to AP, Syria's state-run media said Monday that Syrian military war games over the weekend included missile tests and operations by air force and ground troops, "similar to a real battle." State television said the exercise was meant to test "the capabilities and the readiness of missile systems to respond to any possible aggression." The drill

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED
Page 2 of 4

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED
Page 2 of 4

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED
Page 3 of 4

showed Syrian missiles and troops were "ready to defend the nation and deter anyone who dares to endanger its security" and that the missiles hit their test targets with precision, state TV said.

DEFECTORS AND DESERTERS

8. (SBU) Between December 2 and 4 activists reported numerous defections of soldiers and members of the security forces. There are nonetheless no reports of major defections that would indicate sizable instability inside of the army. Estimates from contacts place the number of defectors actively defending themselves against the SARG between two and five thousand. The Free Syrian Army (FSA) says that the number of defectors in its ranks is much higher. A large number of troops have also deserted and are not taking up arms against Asad's regime. There is also a large number of young Syrian men that have fled Syria to avoid mandatory military service.

MORE TERRORISTS, BUT THE SARG IN CONTROL

9. (U) Syrian state-controlled media reported the burials of 20 army and security force "martyrs" on December 3 and 4 after they were killed by "terrorists" in Homs, Damascus, and the Damascus suburbs. The media also claims that a "terrorists" also killed a number of civilians, including five in Homs on December 4. The Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) said that on December 4 "terrorists" in Homs assassinated two professors from al-Baath University in separate attacks. The local media indicated that SARG authorities have launched operations against "terrorists" in Idlib and Homs which led to the deaths and arrests of a large number of "wanted men." SARG authorities reportedly also disarmed a number of explosive devices in the two cities. On December 3 Syrian state-controlled television broadcast the confession of an alleged terrorist who operated in the Damascus suburbs. During the confession the "terrorist" said that he fed al-Jazeera false information. SARG state media indicates that attacks on SARG forces have increased but also maintains that SARG authorities are in control of the situation.

Opposition Happenings

- SNC CALLS FOR UNSC RESOLUTION

10. (U) The current president of the Syrian Nation Council (SNC), Burhan Ghalioun, appealed for a UN Security Council resolution to protect Syrian civilians during a transitional democracy forum in Sofia, Bulgaria on December 3. He told a journalist, "What we will seek from the Security Council, above all, are mechanisms for the protection of the innocent civilians." He also urged the international community to put pressure on Russia to help pass a UNSC resolution achieving "a political solution of this crisis, avoiding civil war and military intervention." When specifically asked by the journalist about the possibility of foreign intervention, Ghalioun replied, "If they are going to use force against international observers or against humanitarian organizations bringing aid to the population, we have to defend them."

LEFTISTS WANT REFORMS AND DIALOGUE

11. (U) The "National Committee," a group leftist parties considered regime stooges by many in the Syrian opposition, held a conference in Damascus on December 3 to discuss how to end the crisis in Syria. The Secretary of the National Committee for the Unity of Syrian Communists Qadri Jamil said at the conference that U.S.- and western-backed plots were targeting Syria but that "the possibility of direct foreign intervention in Syria has receded," according to SANA. He also asserted that all the participants at the conference supported Asad's reform programs, rejected international intervention, and called for the start of a "comprehensive national dialogue." The participants agreed to change the name of the "National Committee" to the "Popular Will Party." The grouping of opposition parties has little to no support on the Syrian street and is considered by the Syrian opposition to be a tool of the regime.

SARG "Reforms"

- GET READY TO VOTE

12. (U) President Bashar al-Asad on December 4 issued a legislative decree that will allow Syrians to vote in the upcoming

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local elections, scheduled for December 12, by using Syrian identity cards. Assistant Interior Minister for Civil Affairs Hassan Jalali reportedly told SANA that "the decree is an opportunity for all citizens who meet the eligibility requirements to practice their right to vote in elections using their identity cards." He also said that the number of IDs that have been granted reached 15,495,359.

Economic Activity

SHELL CEASES OPERATIONS

13. (U) Royal Dutch Shell announced on December 2 that it will cease operations in Syria because of the new EU sanctions. Asset freezes imposed by the EU on the state-owned Syria Trading Oil Company (Sytrol), which is responsible for the country's entire export of oil, and the General Petroleum Corporation (GPC), a government-run oil firm, and Al-Furat Petroleum Company pushed Shell to make the decision to cease operations. Sanctions continue to squeeze the regime's purse strings, and regular Syrians tell us long lines at gasoline and fuel oil stations are having a real impact on normal citizens.

SYRIAN POUND PLUMMETS

14. (U) The tanking Syrian economy is playing havoc with the Syrian pound exchange rate against the dollar. The central bank dollar exchange rate is still around 48 SYP, however the semi-official exchange rate (as provided by Forex) has increased from around 49 SYP last week to 54.16 SYP this week. Black market rates have also increased dramatically in the same period from around 52-53 SYP last week to around 62 SYP this week.

Signature:	MAHONEY
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Drafted By:	DAMASCUS:Tenbrink, Shawn; Tachco, Amy N
Approved By:	NEA:Tachco, Amy N
Released By:	DAMASCUS:Tachco, Amy N
Info:	ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE ROUTINE
XMT:	AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
Attachments:	Full_EN_Arab League Statement.docx

Action Post:	
Dissemination Rule:	Archive Copy

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Exhibit 14

From: Tachco, Amy N
Sent: 12/19/2011 8:04:03 AM
To: SMART Core
Subject: SYRIA UNREST: DECEMBER 19 UPDATE

RELEASE IN PART
B7(F),B6

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Archie
Bolster, Senior Reviewer

UNCLASSIFIED
SBU



MRN: 11 DAMASCUS 1078
Date/DTG: Dec 19, 2011 / 191303Z DEC 11
From: AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
Action: WASHDC, SECSTATE IMMEDIATE
E.O.: 13526
TAGS: PGOV, PHUM, ASEC, ECON, CASC, KDEM, SY
Captions: SENSITIVE
Subject: SYRIA UNREST: DECEMBER 19 UPDATE

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Syria has agreed to allow Arab League (AL) monitors into the country with the first monitors to arrive in the next 48 hours. While Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad was in Cairo today to sign the document, Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallim gave a press conference in Damascus, explaining that Syria only agreed to the protocol once amendments protecting Syria's sovereignty were included. Over the weekend activists say at least 78 civilians were killed by SARG forces, including 8 children, as peaceful protesters took to the streets and SARG forces battled defectors. The size of peaceful protests grew in some areas of the country as opponents of the government took to the streets calling for the downfall of the regime and immediate action by the AL. Syrian state-controlled media claimed that a total of fifteen army soldiers were buried in the last two days as SARG forces carried out operations against "terrorists" throughout the country. A prominent news anchor on Syrian TV resigned and fled to Turkey. Chinese and Jordanian delegations are currently visiting Syria to observe events on the ground as the SARG attempts to keep up appearances. President Bashar al-Asad met with the Iraqi National Security Advisor Faleh al-Fayyad and the Iraqi MP Izzat al-Shahbandar on December 17 to discuss the Arab League's (AL) peace plan, specifically AL observers. Syria's Information Minister Adnan Mahmoud on December 17 announced the Ministry's plan to turn the "national media in Syria from media of the state to a media of the society." The Syrian National Council (SNC) reportedly came up with a four-point plan to move the opposition forward after its meeting in Tunisia. Another opposition group, called the Syrian Tribes Coalition, based in Saudi Arabia, said over the weekend that it supported the pressure put on Syria by the AL and that it will support Arab-Turkish intervention in Syria. Syrian Minister of Electricity Imad Khamis announced that because of the attacks on oil pipelines SARG authorities will start rationing power supplies to all the Syrian provinces. Turkey announced that it has changed its shipping routes to avoid Syria, a move it estimates will cost the Syrian government \$100 million in lost revenues. The low occupancy levels of the Four Seasons in Damascus may cause it to close after the new year. END SUMMARY.

TWO MONTHS LATER, SYRIA SIGNS THE AL PROTOCOL

2. (U) The Arab League (AL) confirmed today that Syria signed the protocol to send Arab monitors into Syria. Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad arrived in Cairo on December 19 to sign on behalf of Syria's Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallim. The AL expects to have an initial team of nine monitors, mostly high-level Arab League Secretariat officials, on the ground within 48 hours. Muallim gave a press conference in Damascus as soon as the protocol was signed. He

confirmed Syria's signature on the protocol and said he had agreed only after amendments were made to ensure Syria's sovereignty. He relayed that the Russians had advised Syria to sign on to the initiative, and though Syria had had doubts about Arab League intentions, AL SYG Nabil al-Arabi had proven himself trustworthy. The signing was the "beginning of cooperation between us and the Arab League," he declared, adding that the Arab observers would be able to see for themselves that there are terrorists killing the people. He criticized the "internationalization" of the Syrian crisis and asserted that any country imposing sanctions did not have the Syrian people's interests at heart. Replying a question on whether the security solution will stop, he said it depends on the other party. If the terrorist acts stop, the security solution will stop, he affirmed.

On the Ground

KILLING YOUNG GIRLS

3. (SBU) Between December 16 and 18 at least 78 civilians were killed by SARG forces, including 8 children. In the Damascus neighborhood of Midan, activists said that one young girl was shot and killed and one injured by shabiha (government thugs) during a peaceful protest on December 18. A large funeral procession for the young girl took place today in the neighborhood. Clashes were reported between SARG forces and defectors in Idlib, Homs, Dara'a, the Damascus suburbs and elsewhere, according to activists and opposition websites. The Syrian Observatory of Human Rights claimed that defectors killed at least six Syrian soldiers in Homs on December 18. Over the weekend the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) reported the presence of Libyan fighters working with the opposition in border areas near Idlib and quotes media reporting which claimed that Qatar is sending weapons and supporting foreign fighters in Syria. The SARG arrest and intimidation campaign continued and in the town of Kafar Sham near Dara'a where activists claimed that over 150 men were detained as SARG forces hunted for defectors.

PEACEFUL PROTESTS GO ON

4. (U) Peaceful protesters continued to take to the streets to demand the downfall of Asad's regime between December 16 and 18. Protests occurred in Homs, Dara'a, Idlib, Deir al-Zour, Hama, Damascus, the Damascus suburbs, Aleppo, Dael and elsewhere according to activists. Larger anti-government protests, of a few hundred people, occurred in Idlib and Hama. In Aleppo lawyers staged a sit-in at the main courthouse in the city after the arrests of lawyers. Anti-government websites claimed that the "general strike" continued in areas of Homs, Idlib, Dara'a, Hama and the Damascus suburbs. The size and frequency of anti-government protests is not decreasing and in some cities opponents of the Asad regime have been able to hold larger rallies. However, in Aleppo and Damascus, security forces have been able to keep the protesters confined to the back alleys and side streets. The Local Coordination Committees (LCCs) have labeled this week the "Week of the Revolution Stepping Up" as opponents of Asad call for an increase in civil disobedience to help accelerate the downfall of Asad's regime.

ARRESTS AND KILLINGS OF TERRORISTS

5. (U) Syrian state-controlled media claimed that on December 17 and 18 a total of fifteen army, police, and security forces "martyrs" were buried after being killed by "terrorists" in Homs, Hama, Dara'a, Idlib, and the Damascus countryside. On December 17 and 18 clashes between "terrorists" and SARG forces in Homs were reported in the local media. The clashes in Homs resulted in the deaths and the arrests of a number of "terrorists" local news sources claimed. In Idlib on December 17 local media said that "terrorists" attempted to block a highway but were stopped by SARG forces who killed and arrested a number of them. In Idlib a police officer and a soldier were killed by explosive devices placed along roadways in two separate attacks on December 17, according to the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA). There were also reports in the local media of an explosive device detonated on a railway line outside of Homs. SANA also said that "terrorists" in both Homs and Dara'a attacked civilians houses and private businesses on December 17 wounding and killing civilians. In Dara'a, SARG authorities said that they raided "terrorist" hideouts and seized weapons and explosives, according to SANA.

SYRIAN TV ANCHOR DEFECTS

6. (U) *Al-Quds al-Arabi* reported that Hani al-Malazi, a prominent Syrian TV anchorman, has resigned "protesting the repressive policy adopted by the Syrian regime and the lies of the TV." *Al-Quds al-Arabi* said that Malazi and his wife, who was also a Syrian TV employee, fled to Turkey.

CHINESE AND JORDIAN DELEGATIONS

7. (U) SANA reported that a Chinese and Jordanian delegations are currently visiting Syria to observe events on the ground. Both delegations reportedly told SANA that international media is spreading lies about the situation in Syria and that external interference is causing the crisis in Syria. Amjad Obeidat, one of the Jordanian delegation members, reportedly told SANA, "We have been following what is being broadcast about the events in Syria, we were aware of the conspiracy. This was made evident to us once we arrived in Damascus. We didn't see any aspects of army or security presence all the way from the Jordanian borders to the Syrian capital."

IRAQI PEACE PLAN?

8. (U) Syrian state-controlled media reported that President Bashar al-Asad met with the Iraqi National Security Advisor Faleh al-Fayyad and the Iraqi MP Izzat al-Shahbandar on December 17 to discuss the Arab League's (AL) peace plan, specifically AL observers. SANA claimed that Asad "expressed appreciation for the genuine efforts exerted by some Arab countries, especially Iraq, to help Syria overcome the crisis, stressing that Syria has reacted positively to all proposals offered to it since it is in Syria's interest that the world knows the truth about the situation amid twisting facts and fabrications." Fayadh reportedly described the talks as "positive" and also said that he met with opposition groups during the visit to Damascus, according to AFP. On December 18 Iraqi officials met with the Arab League Secretary General Nabil al-Arabi, who according to Fayadh "supported our (Iraqi) initiative alongside that of the Arab League in an effort to find a solution between the Syrians." Fayadh told AFP that Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari will announce the details and mechanisms of the Iraqi plan to the AL and the "Syrian parties" soon.

U.S. CITIZENS IN AND OUT OF JAIL

9. (P/II) [REDACTED] a prominent blogger in Syria, was released on bail the evening of December 18, and she is now reunited with her family pending her judicial process. [REDACTED]

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SARG "Reforms"

MORE OPEN MEDIA

10. (U) Syrian's Information Minister Adnan Mahmoud on December 17 announced the Ministry's plan to turn the "national media in Syria from media of the state to a media of the society." According to SANA, he said the "new approach in media aims at furthering interaction with the citizens' issues and ensuring a balanced expression of the social, economic and cultural movement in all the Syrian provinces." It is unclear what practical effect the announcement will have on Syria's notoriously repressive media environment.

Opposition

SNC MEETINGS WRAP UP

11. (U) The Syrian National Council (SNC) held closed-door meetings in Tunisia December 16-18 to discuss ways of accelerating the downfall of Asad's regime. Prior to the meeting, the SNC made a Facebook call for suggestions on what immediate action the SNC should undertake. This is the first time the SNC has called for recommendations from the public. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* quoted an anonymous SNC member who attended the meeting as saying that the SNC has come up with a 4-point plan to move the opposition forward. The plan includes:

- 1- Calling for a buffer zone to protect civilians
- 2- Requesting international monitors for documenting human rights violations in Syria
- 3- Settling on a plan for post-Asad Syria to be presented to the Arab League
- 4- Rejecting foreign military intervention while calling for protection for civilians only.

GENERAL SYRIAN TRIBES

12. (U) *Al-Hayat* quoted Faisal al-Sayyah, the Secretary General of the so-called Syrian Tribes Coalition, an opposition group based in Saudi Arabia, as supporting the AL's move to put pressure the Syrian regime. Sayyah called on the AL to support a UN resolution imposing a no-fly zone or a buffer zone on Syria. His deputy, Ismael al-Khaldi, told al-Hayat that his coalition supports an Arab-Turkish military intervention in Syria. Khaldi also expressed his coalition's willingness to join SNC. A delegation of the coalition will meet with AL officials soon, Khaldi said.

Economics

ALITALIA SUSPENDS FLIGHTS

13. (U) Italian colleagues confirm that Alitalia airlines will suspend all flights to and from Syria for five months beginning in January. The Embassy does not generally book with Alitalia so we expect the move will not have a large impact on our operations or security planning.

POWER OUTAGES INCREASE

14. (U) State-owned *Al-Watan* and *al-Thawra* both reported that the Syrian Minister of Electricity Imad Khamis announced that because of attacks on oil pipelines SARG authorities will start rationing power supplies to all the Syrian provinces. He said that in Damascus there will be four hours of electrical cuts per day and seven hours in the Damascus suburbs. The area around Tartous faces up to 12 hours of power cuts per day because the three power generation plants in that area are almost not operable, a source told us. Syrians in Damascus tell us that the SARG's claim of 4-7-hour power cuts daily are too low, saying cuts last much longer.

ALTERNATE ROUTES FOR TURKISH GOODS

15. (U) According to Reuters the Turkish Economy minister Zafer Çağlayan said on December 16 that Turkey had finalized talks to begin exporting goods via Egypt in January and added that Syria will lose more than \$100 million a year in transport revenues once Turkey forgoes Syrian transit routes.

FOUR SEASONS TO CLOSE?

16. (SBU) The Damascus Four Seasons hotel, the most upscale hotel outside the old city, may be set to close down next month due to low occupancy levels. An employee at the Damascus Four Seasons Hotel told A/RSO that the hotel will be closing shortly after the new year. According to this source, hotel managers told employees that it was untenable for the hotel to continue operating at its current 5% occupancy. Other contacts claim the SARG will not allow management to close the hotel, a symbol of the government's narrative that "Everything is fine" in Damascus. Nonetheless, though there have been rumors the Four Seasons would close for months, this is the first report coming directly from a hotel employee.

Signature: FORD

Drafted By: DAMASCUS:Tenbrink, Shawn; Tachco, Amy N
Approved By: NEA:Tachco, Amy N
Released By: DAMASCUS:Tachco, Amy N
Info: ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE ROUTINE
XMT: AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

Action Post:

Dissemination Rule: Archive Copy

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Exhibit 15

FACEBOOK POSTS PUBLISHED BY THE U.S. EMBASSY IN DAMASCUS**

Exhibit	Description
15-A	U.S. Embassy Damascus, <i>A Note from Ambassador Robert Ford</i> , Facebook (July 10, 2011), https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADnote%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADrobert%ADford/10150237831306938
15-B	U.S. Embassy Damascus, <i>A Note From Ambassador Robert Ford</i> , Facebook (Sept. 6, 2011), https://www.facebook.com/notes/usembassydamascus/anotefromambassadorrobertford/10150286333121938
15-C	U.S. Embassy Damascus, <i>A Note From Ambassador Ford on Recent Events in Syria</i> , Facebook (Feb. 9, 2012), https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADnote%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADford%ADon%ADrecent%ADevents%ADin%ADsyria/10150545674871938
15-D	U.S. Embassy Damascus, <i>A Note From Ambassador Ford</i> , Facebook (Feb. 10, 2012), https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADnote%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADford/10150547572706938
15-E	U.S. Embassy Damascus, <i>A Message From Ambassador Ford on the Arrests of Human Rights Activists</i> , Facebook (Feb. 17, 2012), https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADmessage%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADford%ADon%ADthe%ADarrests%ADof%ADhuman%ADrights%ADactivists/10150563608741938
15-F	U.S. Embassy Damascus, <i>A Message from Ambassador Robert Ford</i> , Facebook (Mar. 5, 2012), https://www.facebook.com/notes/us-embassy-damascus/a-message-from-ambassador-robert-ford/10150595589281938
15-G	U.S. Embassy Damascus, <i>A Message From Ambassador Ford</i> , Facebook (Apr. 6, 2012), https://www.facebook.com/notes/us%ADembassy%ADdamascus/a%ADmessage%ADfrom%ADambassador%ADford/10150655544736938

** For the convenience of the Court, Declarant provides an index of the Facebook posts contained in this exhibit that is hyperlinked to the cover page of each post listed.

Exhibit 15-A

A Message from Ambassador Ford on the Arrests of Human Rights Activists

Syria's government says it wants a political dialogue with the opposition. So do its few remaining friends among the international community. But if they want a real dialogue with the opposition, why does the Syrian government arrest people like human rights activist Mazen Darwish, who are calling for their basic human rights as espoused in Syria's current constitution but not, in fact, respected by this Syrian government?

Despite the signature by Syrian Vice Foreign Minister on the Arab League Protocol last November that it would stop its arrest campaign and release political prisoners, Mazen Darwish, blogger Razan Ghazzawi, and twelve others were just arrested. The international community knows Darwish to be a strong defender of finding political solutions, rather than using violence, to solve Syria's crisis. Eleven months ago today, Syrian police arrested Darwish during a peaceful protest in solidarity with prisoners of conscience. This was one of the first protests of the revolution; it was a silent vigil that did not call for regime change, for violence, for anything other than the rights of political prisoners. Regime forces attacked the protesters. Darwish was beaten and arrested in a crowded Damascus square. Now we see that almost one year later, the Asad regime is doing the same thing, to the same people. While this is a testament to the resilience of the Syrian people, it is also a sober reminder that nothing has changed in Syria.

On the contrary, Mazen's detention, like the detention of other advocates of non-violent solutions to Syria's crisis—people like Yahia Shurbaji—makes the credibility of the Syrian government, and its international friends, highly dubious when they all call for an honest dialogue. If the Syrian government wants to be credible in calling for a dialogue, it should implement all the measures in the Arab League protocol that it said it would respect, and its friends should urge the Syrian government to do so. If it wants a real dialogue, it could show its credibility by respecting basic human rights.

I would also add that this comes one day after Zeena Shala, a youth leader, was arrested in Damascus for providing aid to vulnerable communities. Darwish is Alawi; Shala is Christian. It is clear that people of all faiths and backgrounds oppose the regime and are working to help their fellow Syrians. The regime will repress any opponent who demands the government respect human rights and allow peaceful political change.

We hope that countries that claim that they support real dialogue will, in fact, support and respect the Syrian people's basic human rights, starting with freedom of expression and peaceful political assembly, and that they will call on the regime to release people like Darwish, Shurbaji, Ghazzawi, and Shala—and thousands of others—without delay.

Exhibit 15-B

A note from Ambassador Robert Ford

This past weekend, as Eid al-Fitr was concluding, I read reports of peaceful protests yet again being met with security force gunfire in places like Basra ash-Sham, Telbissa and Jassem. International media reports already speak of dozens of civilians killed. This is yet another sad day to reflect on the courage of the tens of thousands of courageous Syrians who march peacefully.

Some of the people who write on this page complain that the U.S. is “helping terrorists” in Syria. We support the right of Syrians to protest peacefully. Peaceful protesters are not “terrorists,” and after all the evidence accumulated over the past six months, no one except the Syrian government and its supporters believes that the peaceful protesters here are. Also, the United States is not providing any assistance to any armed group in Syria. If the Syrian government has evidence, let’s see it. I’ve asked them and I’ve gotten nothing back from the officials. The United Nations, which was finally allowed to send an assessment team here, instead has directly assigned responsibility for the violence in Syria to the Syrian government. The Arab League has assigned responsibility for the violence to the Syrian government. The European Union and its member states have done so. The governments of Canada, Japan and Saudi Arabia have done so. The Turkish government has done so. Don’t like or trust the United States – fine – look at what other organizations and countries are saying.

Some Syrian security service members have been killed. Some want the United States to acknowledge it; well, I’m the American ambassador, and I just did. But the number of security service members killed is far, far lower than the number of unarmed civilians killed. No one in the international community accepts the justification from the Syrian government that those security service members’ deaths justify the daily killings, beatings, extrajudicial detentions, torture and harassment of unarmed civilian protesters. I entirely agree with the group of Muslim scholars in Aleppo who says that the Syrian government, which has a clear preponderance of arms and force, bears the responsibility for the violence. And given the extent of the government’s brutality, neither the Syrian protest movement nor the international community will believe that this Syrian leadership desires or is capable of the deep, genuine and credible reforms that the Syrian people demand. This isn’t about Western military intervention. This isn’t about oil (many governments have banned its import). This isn’t about Israel or the West wanting to dominate the Arab world (an old, discredited government line). This is about basic political freedoms from the United Nations’ Human Rights Charter – signed by Syria, don’t forget – which calls for freedom of speech and freedom of peaceful assembly. And the United States wholly supports Syrians’ rights to exercise those freedoms.



Exhibit 15-C

A Note from Ambassador Robert Ford

Outside the Embassy demonstrators complained about U.S. policy towards the Syrian government and my trip to Hama.

As I have said before, we respect the right of all Syrians – and people in all countries - to express their opinions freely and in a climate of mutual respect. We wish the Syrian government would do the same – and stop beating and shooting peaceful demonstrators. I have not seen the police assault a “mnhebak” demonstration yet. I am glad – I want all Syrians to enjoy the right to demonstrate peacefully. On July 9 a “mnhebak” group threw rocks at our embassy, causing some damage. They resorted to violence, unlike the people in Hama, who have stayed peaceful. Go look at the Ba’ath or police headquarters in Hama – no damage that I saw.

Other protesters threw eggs and tomatoes at our embassy. If they cared about their fellow Syrians the protesters would stop throwing this food at us and donate it to those Syrians who don’t have enough to eat. And how ironic that the Syrian Government lets an anti-U.S. demonstration proceed freely while their security thugs beat down olive branch-carrying peaceful protesters elsewhere.

The people in Hama have been demonstrating peacefully for weeks. Yes, there is a general strike, but what caused it? The government security measures that killed protesters in Hama. In addition, the government began arresting people at night and without any kind of judicial warrant. Assad had promised in his last speech that there would be no more arrests without judicial process. Families in Hama told me of repeated cases where this was not the reality. And I saw no signs of armed gangs anywhere – not at any of the civilian street barricades we passed.

Hama and the Syrian crisis is not about the U.S. at all. This is a crisis the Syrian people are in the process of solving. It is a crisis about dignity, human rights, and the rule of law. We regret the loss of life of all Syrians killed, civilians and security members both, and hope that the Syrian people will be able to find their way out of this crisis soon. Respect for basic human rights is a key element of the solution.

احتج المتظاهرون الذين احتشدوا خارج السفارة على سياسة الولايات المتحدة تجاه سوريا وعلى زيارتي لمدينة حماة.

كما قلت سابقاً، نحن نحترم حقوق كافة السوريين وحقوق الناس في كافة البلدان الأخرى في التعبير عن آرائهم بحرية وفي مناخ من الاحترام المتبادل. تمنينا لو تصرفت الحكومة السورية بالمثل وتوقفت عن إطلاق النار على المتظاهرين السلميين.

لم أشاهد حتى الآن شرطياً واحداً يسيء إلي مظاهرات "منحبك". وهذا يسعدني، فأنا أرغب بأن يتمتع جميع السوريين بحق التظاهر السلمي.

في التاسع من تموز، قامت إحدى مظاهرات "منحبك" بإلقاء الحجارة على مبنى سفارتنا، متسببين ببعض الأضرار. لقد لجأوا إلي العنف، بعكس أهالي مدينة حماة، الذين ظلوا مسالمين. بإمكانكم الذهاب إلي مبنى حزب البعث أو إدارة الشرطة في حماة، حيث لم أر أي ضرر لحق بها.

وقام متظاهرون آخرون برمي البيض والبندورة على مبنى سفارتنا. لو أن هؤلاء كانوا يهتمون فعلاً لإخوانهم من السوريين، لكانوا توقفوا عن رمي

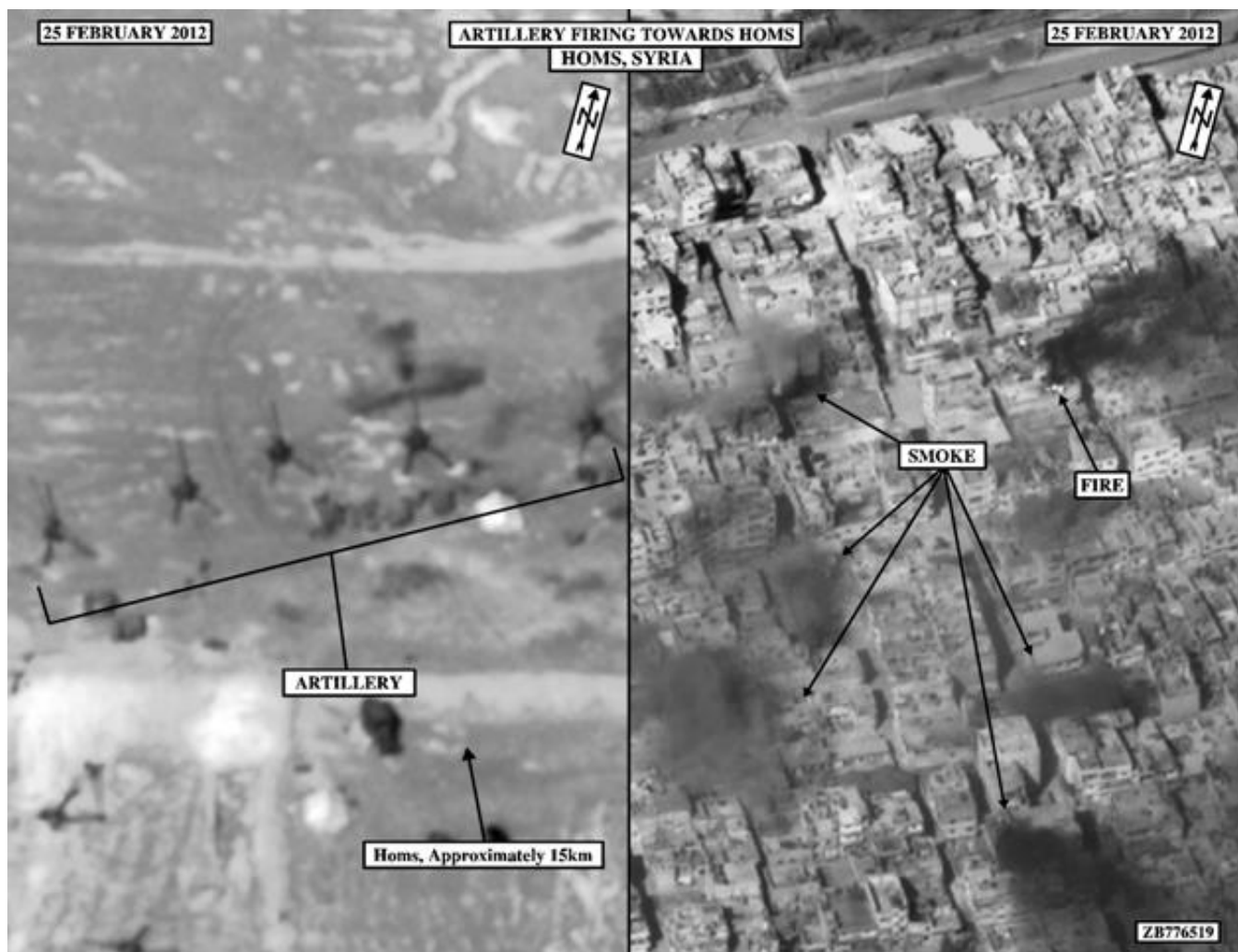
الطعام نحونا ولتبرعوا به للسوريين الذي يفتقرون لما يقتاتون به. إنه لمن المفارقة أن الحكومة السورية تسمح للمظاهرات المناهضة للولايات المتحدة أن تتحرك بحرية بينما يقوم أفراد أمنها السفاحون بضرب حاملي أغصان الزيتون المسالمين في مكان آخر.

لقد قام أهالي مدينة حماة بالتظاهر السلمي لعدة أسابيع. نعم هناك إضراب عام، ولكن ما سببه؟ إنها الإجراءات الأمنية الحكومية التي قتلت المتظاهرين في حماة. وإلى جانب ذلك بدأت الحكومة باعتقال المواطنين ليلاً دون أي نوع من مذكرات التوقيف. لقد الوعد الرئيس الأسد في خطابه الأخير بأنه لن تكون هناك أية اعتقالات دون إجراءات قضائية، لكن عائلات حموية أخبرتني عن حالات متكررة لم تطبق فيها أي إجراءات قضائية، كما أنني لم أشاهد أي علامات على وجود أي عصابات مسلحة في أي مكان، ولا على أي من الحواجز الأهلية التي مررنا عبرها.

إن أزمة سوريا وحماة ليس لها أي علاقة بالولايات المتحدة بأية حال من الأحوال. إنها أزمة يقوم الشعب السوري بحلها حالياً، وهي أزمة كرامة، وحقوق إنسان، وسيادة قانون. إننا نشعر بعميق الأسف لأرواح السوريين الذي قتلوا، من المدنيين ومن أفراد الأمن على حد سواء، ونأمل أن يجد السوريون الطريق لخروجهم من هذه الأزمة في أقرب وقت، إن احترام حقوق الإنسان هو العنصر الأساسي لحل الأزمة.

Exhibit 15-D

A Message from Ambassador Robert Ford:



The United States is trying as hard as it can to show the world it knows what is occurring in Syria. On February 28 I spoke to the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee with the Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman. In our opening remarks before the committee we said that "the United States and the broader international community are determined not to allow two members of the Security Council to prevent the pursuit of a political solution to the crisis in Syria and the provision of urgent assistance to the Syrian people." The majority of the world community stands with the Syrian people. The United Nations General Assembly made that clear when it adopted the February 16 resolution to fully support the Arab League's transition plans by 137 votes for and only 12 votes against. On February 24, the Friends of the Syrian People conference showed the growing chorus of condemnation from the international community is gaining strength and unity of purpose.

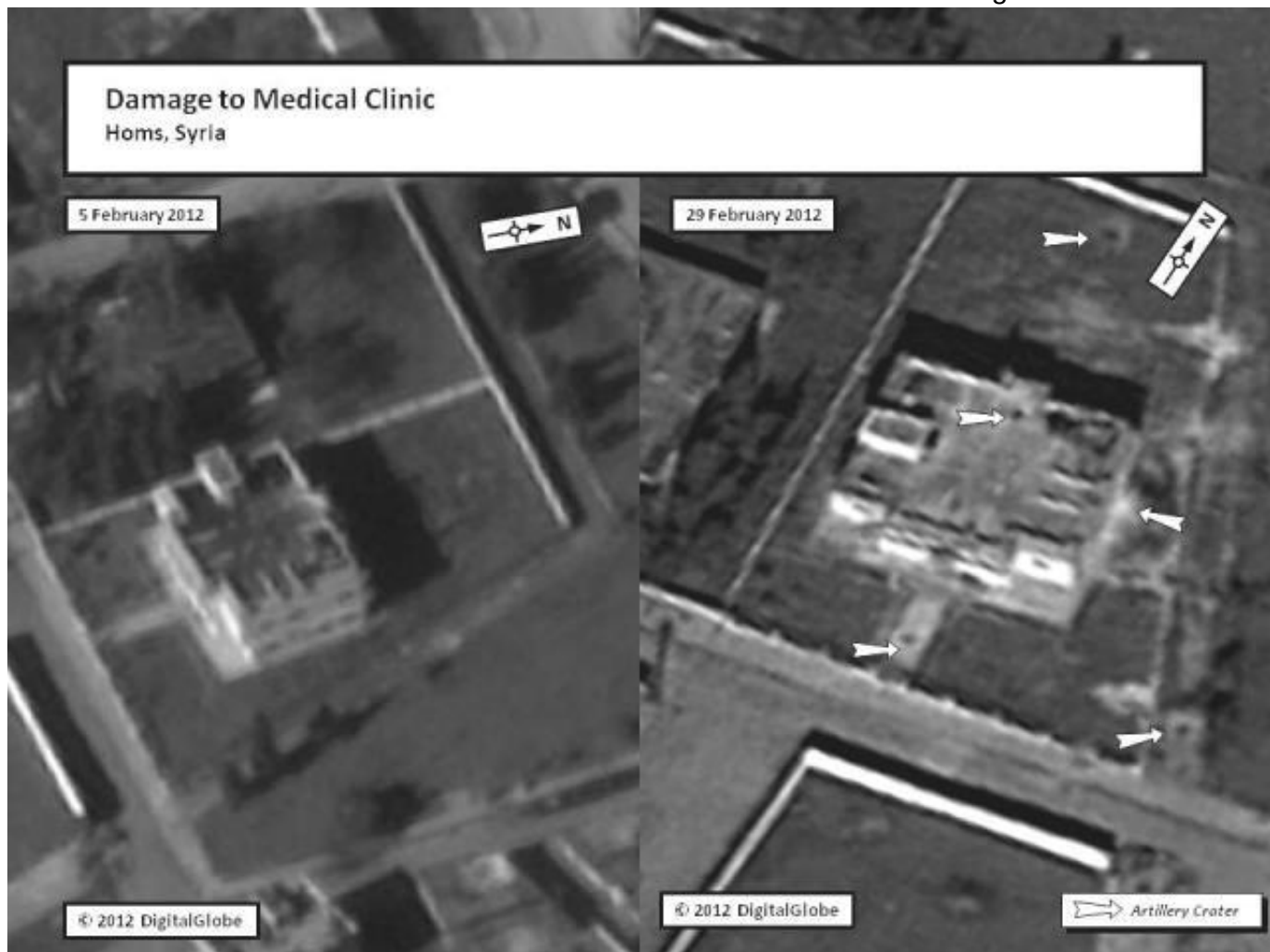
On February 9 here on Facebook, we began using declassified images that illustrate the disproportionate nature of the Assad regime's violence against the people and his willingness to attack civilian targets. Additionally, the Syrian government has put up multiple obstacles in front of reputable, independent international aid organizations like the International Federation of Red Cross and Red

Crescent Societies (IFRC) or UN aid organizations to provide emergency medical and humanitarian assistance to Syrian civilians in Homs and other cities under attack. I noted in our remarks to the Senate on February 28 that, "Emergency assistance is desperately needed, but the regime is doing everything it can to prevent aid from reaching those who need it most. It is attacking aid workers, doctors, and journalists reporting on the suffering." The first image above clearly shows the Syrian army's equipment ringing the city of Homs. I want to be clear to those bloggers who said that this firing position is a normal military base with the artillery deployed normally. We know that these guns are aimed at Homs and that they are firing at Homs. Armed opposition groups do not have artillery.

The second picture shows the results before and after the fighting in Homs. We can see the damage.



The third image is the same type of damage to a medical clinic in Homs. The damage to all three of these civilian buildings is constant with impact scars from the equipment show in the first picture. These pictures, combined with credible media reports about the savage government assault on Bab Amr and some other Homs districts, prove the Syrian government's indiscriminate use of heavy weaponry against civilians. And we will collect these images on www.HumanRights.gov for the world to see.

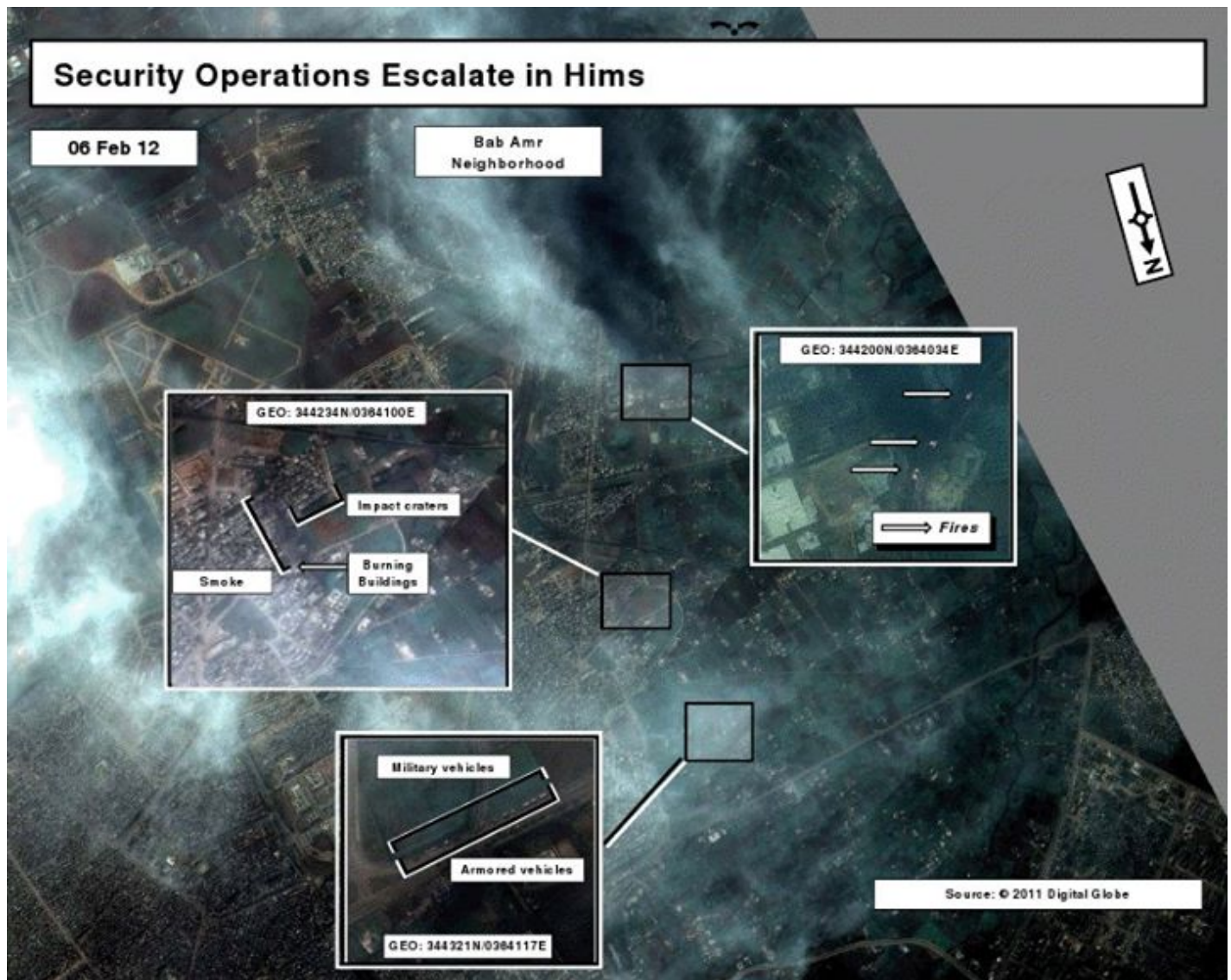


For the United States' part, after discussions at the Friends of Syria conference we decided to provide another \$10 million for more humanitarian aid to Syrians inside of Syria and in neighboring countries. This money will support emergency health care and get clean water, food, blankets, heaters and hygiene kits to the Syrians in need. And we are prepared to provide more humanitarian aid in the days ahead if the Syrians will allow international agencies access to provide the aid.

The United States and all the Friends of the Syrian People have long called for a strong UN Security Council Resolution that would require the Assad regime to uphold the commitments it made to the Arab League in November 2011, including immediately ending all violence against civilians, withdrawing the regime's forces from cities and other residential areas, allowing monitors and journalists free and unfettered access, and releasing political prisoners. Additionally, the Friends of Syria support the Arab League plan calling for a peaceful, democratic transition to occur in Syria and for the Assad regime to immediately allow international aid organizations inside of Syria to provide the required medical and humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people. Russia and China have had an opportunity to support such a resolution and we hope that they yet will, in fact, join the rest of the international community in voting for one. The Friends of Syria, including the U.S., will continue to find ways to support the Syrian people's aspiration for dignity, respect for basic human rights and political transition.

Exhibit 15-E

A note from Ambassador Ford on recent events in Syria



Satellite image taken February 6, 2012

For best quality, go to the link below, click download, and choose 'JPG'

First, like people around the world, my colleagues and friends are watching the video coming out of Homs and some of the other Syrian cities in the last days with horror and revulsion. I hear the devastating stories about newborns in Homs dying in hospitals where electricity has been cut and when we see disturbing photos offering proof that the regime is using mortars and artillery against residential neighborhoods, all of us become even more concerned about the tragic outcome for Syrian civilians. The Arab League protocol, which received wide support from the international community, called for the Syrian military to withdraw from residential areas, to stop firing at peaceful protests and to release prisoners arrested due to the unrest. The film coming out of Homs and elsewhere in Syria shows the Syrian government's real response. And we have never heard of the

armed opposition firing artillery for example. It is odd to me that anyone would try to equate the actions of the Syrian army and armed opposition groups since the Syrian government consistently initiates the attacks on civilian areas, and it is using its heaviest weapons.

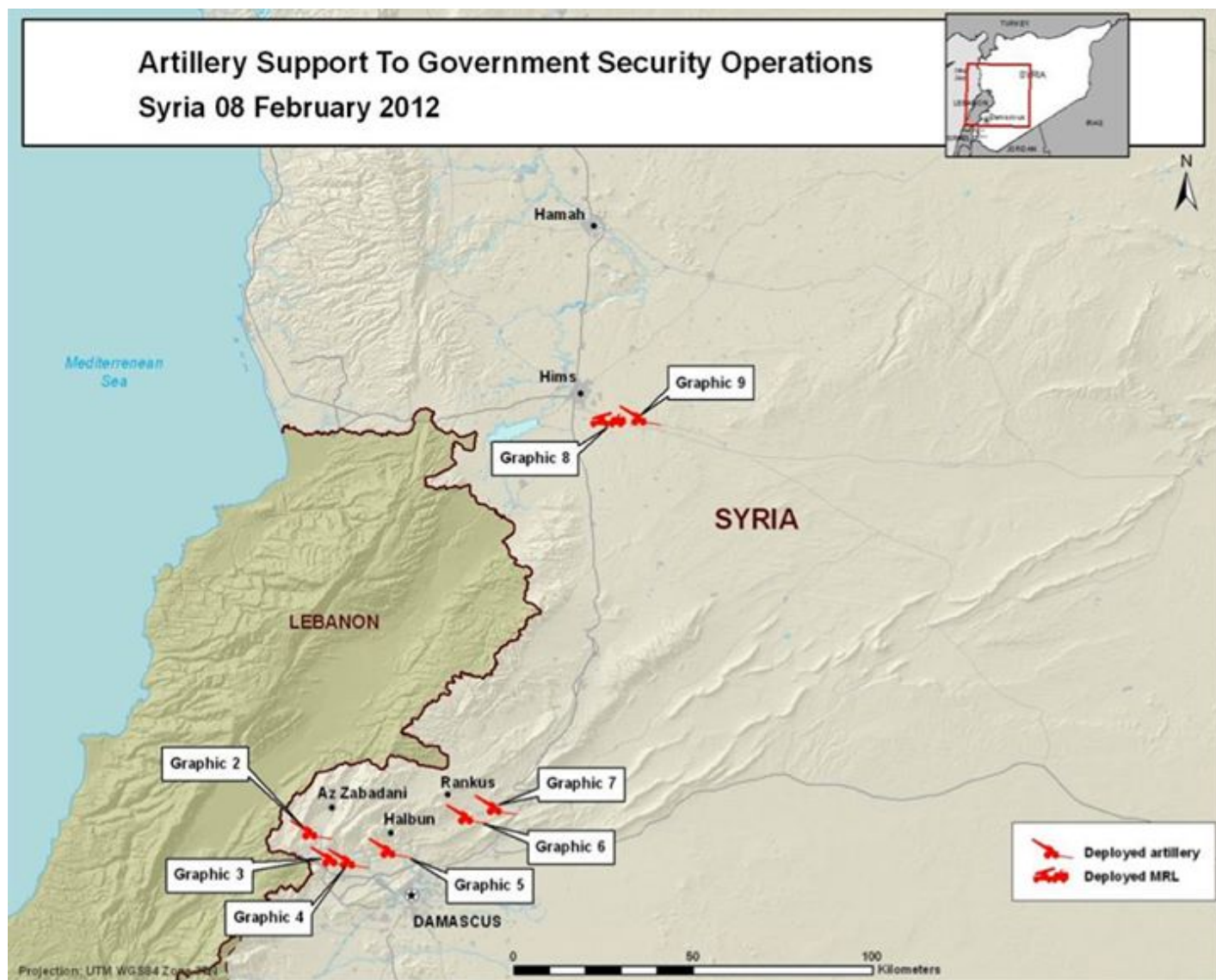
I also want to say a word about our suspending the work of the American Embassy in Damascus. I can say without exaggeration that February 6 was the most emotionally taxing day of my career as a Foreign Service Officer. Due to the elevated security risks we confronted in Syria, the Government of the United States had to suspend operations at our Embassy in Damascus, and I had to depart with my American colleagues and say goodbye to our Syrian colleagues and friends who face a very uncertain future.

I left Damascus with immense sadness and regret—I wish our departure had not been necessary, but our Embassy, along with several other diplomatic missions in the area, was not sufficiently protected, given the new security concerns in the capital. We and those other embassies requested extra protection measures from the Syrian government, given the danger to both our citizens and the Syrian citizens that worked with and near us. Our concerns were not addressed.

As the United States' Ambassador to Syria—a position that the Secretary of State and President are keeping me in—I will work with colleagues in Washington to support a peaceful transition for the Syrian people. We and our international partners hope to see a transition that reaches out and includes all of Syria's communities and that gives all Syrians hope for a better future. My year in Syria tells me such a transition is possible, but not when one side constantly initiates attacks against people taking shelter in their homes.

Exhibit 15-F

(4) A Note from Ambassador Ford



For best quality, go to the link below, click download, and choose 'JPG'

The violence is not equal.

Yesterday I put out a note about the situation in Syria as I've witnessed it from the ground and since leaving the country. A terrible and tragic development in Syria is the use of heavy weaponry by the Assad regime against residential neighborhoods. For those unfamiliar with military equipment, the artillery used by the regime is designed for full scale warfare, and the regime is using it to pound civilian apartment buildings and homes from a distance. There is no evidence that the opposition -- even those opposition members who have defected from the military -- has access or has employed such heavy weapons. Those who defect from the military are often lucky to leave with only the rifle in their hands, fearful that those loyal to the regime will hunt them down for refusing to kill unarmed civilians. It's also important to note the opposition began as a peaceful movement and it is still mostly a peaceful protest

[Haifashion Barhoumi](#) Hello guys. Sorry to put an end to your enthusiastic comments but the pictures turned out to be proofs of terrorist attacks against civilians. Check "High-tech Trickery Homs" for more details. And I'm keeping lots of copies of the article in case it disappears.

Den Roda Vargen, watch less video games and read more books.

[Les Visible](#) What a total pack of lies. These are the terrorists; Israel, US and England. These are the mass murderers. these are the people who did 9/11

<http://theinfounderground.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=5367> and 7/7 and The Madrid Train Station bombing while Is...[See More](#)

[Eamon Shea](#) Indeed, [Les Visible](#). The Money Master Mafia, a.k.a. the Anglo-American-ZioNazi crime syndicate, a.k.a. the US, England, and Israel, are THE terrorists, par excellence. We all know that Kool-aid is for children, not adults. The Kewl-aid the MSM serve...[See More](#)

[Anonthy Singh](#) I completely agree with Les Visible and Eamon, Syria is being tormented like anyone else who doesn't cower to the Zionists. Anyone here who supports armed action against the innocent people of Syria will suffer the same pain one day, you can mark my words.

[Ali Mahmood](#) the biggest liar in the the world is Robert Ford dirty man with dirty Agenda and you are sooo known for the syrian people they laugh at you all you wrote in this article are lies so stop it liar

[Maram O Rama](#) So what? an army is always going to have bigger weapons than an insurgency. What's your point, people with bigger weapons are the ones in the wrong? You americans have the biggest weapons of all what does that say? What about the people who equate palestinian violence with israeli violence? hmmm....? quiet are we? I thought so.

[Larry Dorsey](#) One of the worst parts of this is that we the United States of America have the most powerful military in the world and we are doing anything to stop this mass genocide! I will be the first one to say President Barack Obama is a coward for hiding behind...[See More](#)

[Larry Dorsey](#) Bashar Al- assad is slaughtering his people now and will be doing so after the dead line and the United States will do nothing about it! Never in my life have I been so disgusted with a sitting president who allow this and unlike any other situation he...[See More](#)

[Larry Dorsey](#) I admire the Ambassador for exposing the Assad the Murderous Tyrant and his lies and his gumption to insult the intelligence of the world but this is not a political or diplomatic situation this is a matter of life and death we are not talking about do...[See More](#)

[Larry Dorsey](#) Let me also say that I can't understand why Russia is on the UN Security Council or that they are even allowed to vote seeing as how they are supplying and continue to supply the murder weapons and that their troops are fighting along side Assads military while they kill, mam ferociously execute and slaughter the Syrian people!

[Larry Dorsey](#) I say to all those Middle eastern countries that want to intervene Saudi Arabia, The United Arab Emerates and Turkey,these are your Muslim brothers and sisters protect them now you dont need the permission or help of the United States or any other country to do whats right band together go in and save and protect the Syrian people now!

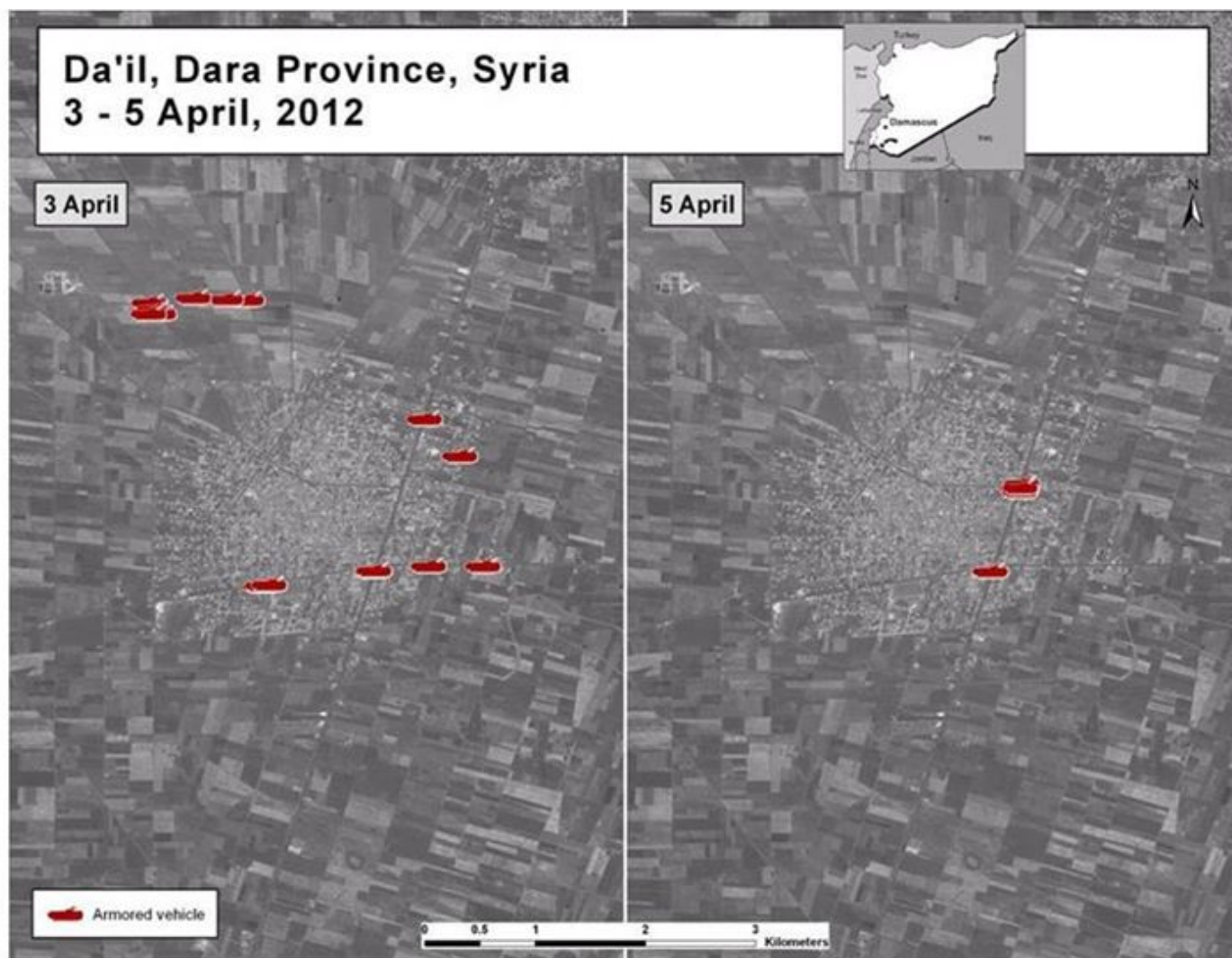
[Larry Dorsey](#) Will the President of these United States please stand up? President Obama you can say what you will about George W. Bush Jr. but he would'nt have ever allowed these massacres to happen and he certainly would'nt have allowed Russia to openly threaten u...[See More](#)

Exhibit 15-G

A Message from Ambassador Ford

On April 5, the United Nations Security Council unanimously issued a Presidential Statement supporting the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and League of Arab States Kofi Annan's six-point proposal. This proposal call for an immediate end to all violence and human rights violations, securing humanitarian access and facilitating a Syrian-led political transition leading to a democratic, plural political system, in which citizens are equal regardless of their affiliations, ethnicities or beliefs, including through commencing a comprehensive political dialogue between the Syrian government and the whole spectrum of the Syrian opposition. It also calls upon the Syrian government to remove its troops, including the Shabiha, and heavy weapons from their locations around cities no later than April 10, 2012. The Asad regime committed itself to this proposal on March 25, 2012.

The United States and the Friends of Syria are closely monitoring whether these required actions are occurring or not. We have seen media reports from the Asad regime that it has started to remove soldiers and equipment away from Syrian cities and civilian areas. We are providing some images to illustrate our conclusions at this point.

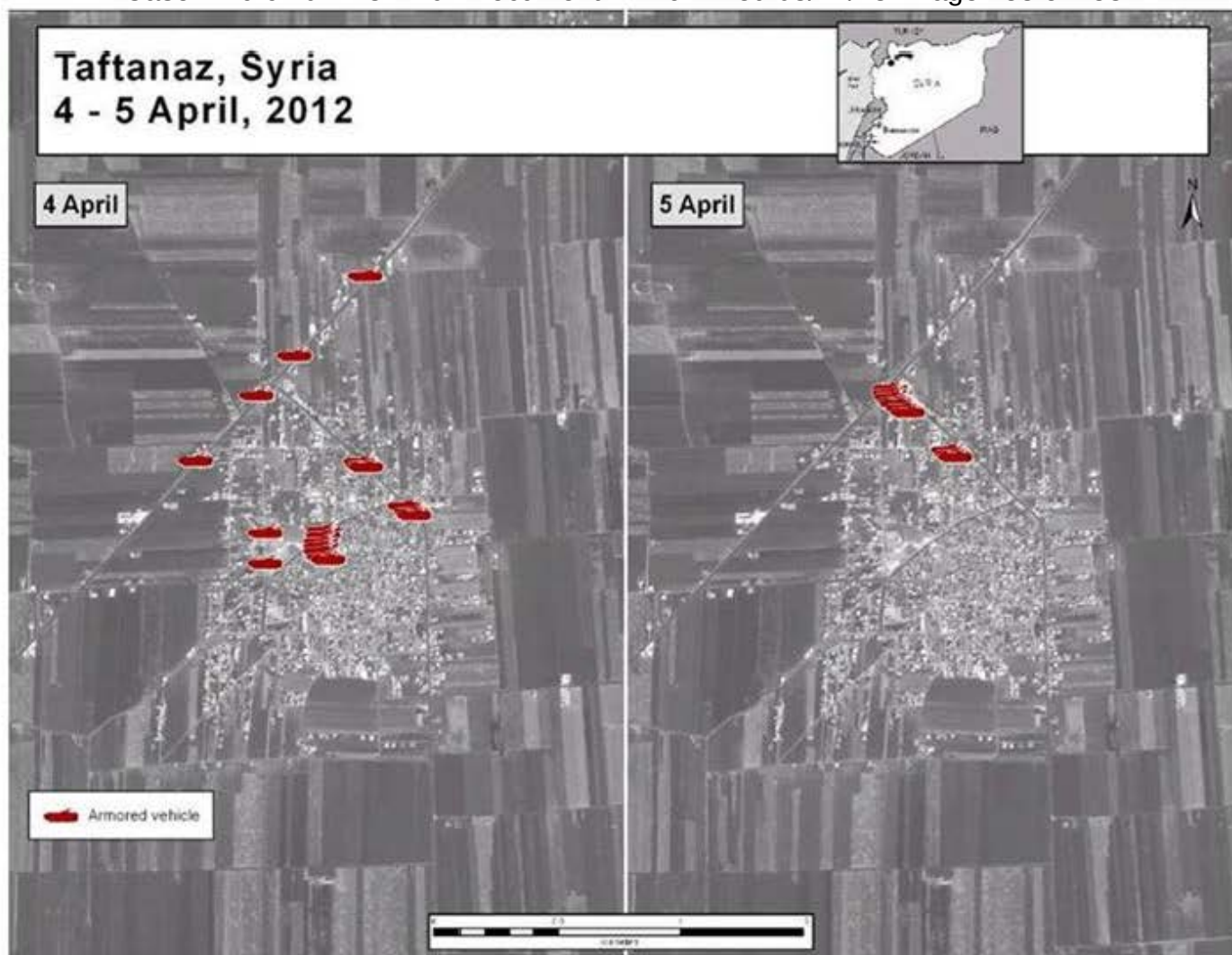


Graphic 1



Graphic 2

We know from our satellites that there are some locales where the Syrian government did remove some forces, such as Da'el (graphics 1 and 2) in Daraa province and Taftanaz in Idlib, following several days of assaults against the towns.

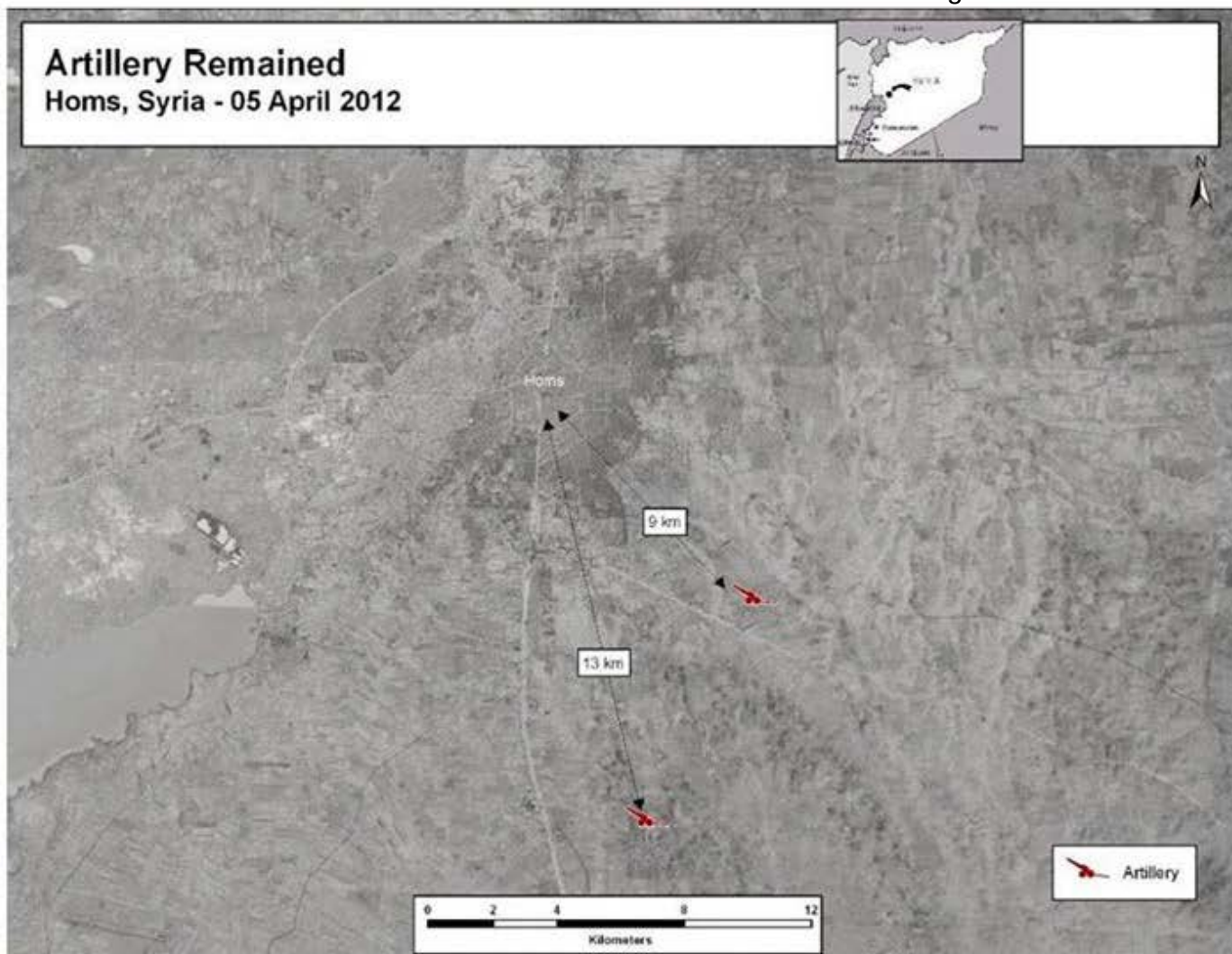


Graphic 3

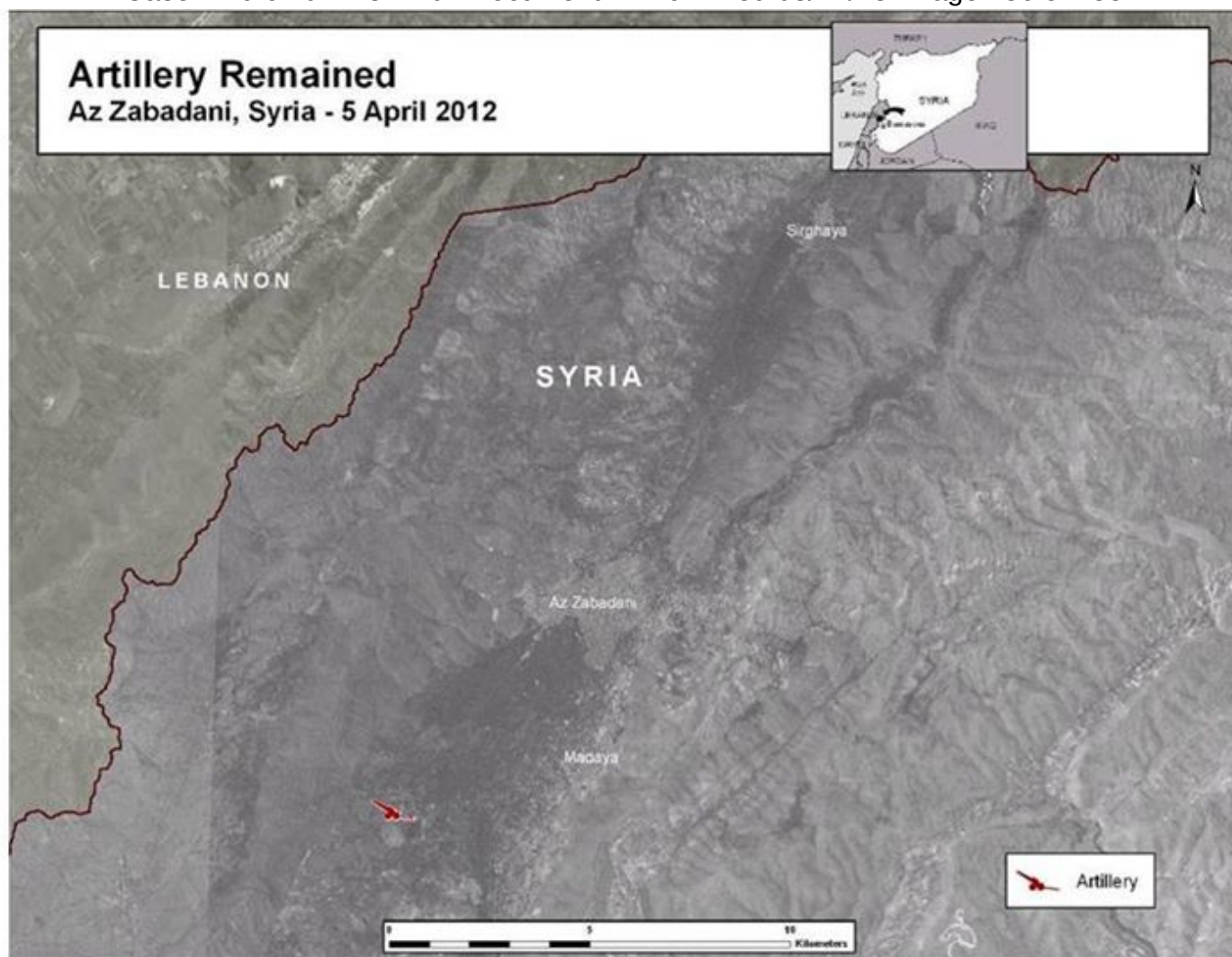


Graphic 4

In the case of Taftanaz (graphic 3), the Syrian government simply moved some armored vehicles out of Taftanaz to the nearby town of Zirdana (graphic 4).

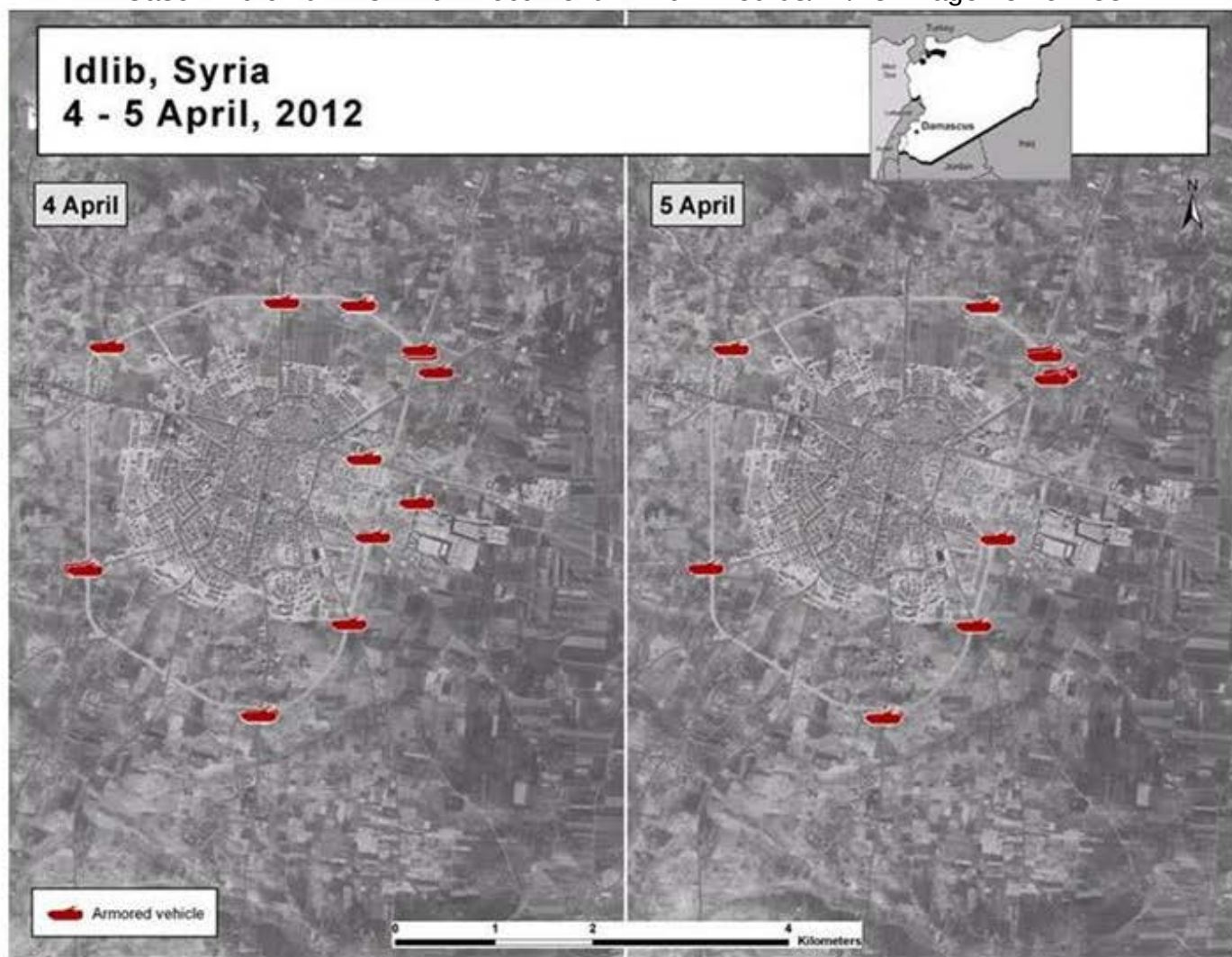


Graphic 5



Graphic 6

In some other places, such as Homs (graphic 5) and Zabadani (graphic 6), the Syrian government kept artillery units near residential areas where they could again fire upon them.



Graphic 7



Graphic 8

According to media reports and Syrian activists, on April 5 and April 6 Syrian forces used artillery against residential areas in Zabadani and Homs and Aazaz in Idlib (graphics 7 and 8), and there were arrest sweeps in other locations, including suburbs of Damascus. And we understand there has been a big increase in the numbers of Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey because of military operations in their neighborhoods. This is not the reduction in offensive Syrian government security operations that all agree must be the first step for the Annan initiative to succeed.

International journalists are unable to legally enter the country to independently verify such reports. If the Asad regime is keeping its promises based on the Annan proposal, it should allow international journalists to freely enter the country to verify. In their absence, U.S. and other governments have other means, including the satellites that took these images, of verifying the regime's compliance or lack thereof. The regime and the Syrian people should know that we are watching. The regime cannot hide the truth. We strongly urge the Asad regime to allow the UN compliance team, an effective and independent means of verification, to have full and unfettered access throughout Syria to investigate the regime's compliance.