

# 11 YEARS OF WAR: THE HUMANITARIAN IMPACT OF THE ONGOING CONFLICT IN SYRIA

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## HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS SECOND SESSION

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## 11 YEARS OF WAR: THE HUMANITARIAN IMPACT OF THE ONGOING CONFLICT IN SYRIA

Wednesday, March 16, 2022

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:05 p.m. Via Webex, Hon. Theodore E. Deutch (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. DEUTCH. The Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the subcommittee at any point. And all members will have 5 days to submit statements, extraneous material, and questions for the record, subject to the length limitation in the rules.

As a reminder, members, please keep your video function on, even when you are not recognized by the chair.

Members are responsible for muting and unmuting themselves. Please remember to mute yourself after you finish speaking. Consistent with House Resolution 8 and the accompanying regulations, staff will only mute members and witnesses, as appropriate, when they are not under recognition, to eliminate background noise.

We have a quorum, and I will recognize myself for opening remarks. Again, I thank everyone for being accommodating with the crazy schedule we have today.

Pursuant to notice, we are holding a hearing on the humanitarian impact of the ongoing conflict in Syria. I would like to extend a warm welcome to our witnesses, Ms. Qaddour, Mr. Lang, Ms. Shawky, and Mr. Rayburn.

Thank you for joining us today.

Yesterday marked the 11th anniversary of the start of the Syrian revolution, 11 years of conflict, violence, displacement, and hardship. What began with the Syrian people rising to demand dignity, freedom, and a voice in shaping their government was met with a brutal crackdown by Bashar al-Assad, who, with the help of outside support from Iran and Russia, ushered in over a decade of conflict and aided the proliferation of global terrorism.

While fighting has abated in many areas, there is still significant violence across the country, from offenses in the northwest, north and northeast, to targeted killings, unlawful detention, and torture.

Further, the humanitarian situation on the ground is dire. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

found that in 2022, 14.6 million people needed humanitarian assistance, an increase of 1.2 million people from 2021.

This is coming at a time when the international community is giving less money for humanitarian programs in Syria. The U.S. and the entire international community must step up to meet the needs of the Syrian people.

The struggle for the future of Syria has led to the deaths of over half a million Syrians and the displacement of more than 12 million. There are over 6.8 million Syrian refugees living in the region, primarily Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, and Turkey. And while many refugees have found haven abroad, the generosity of those countries is beginning to wane and violence against refugees is on the rise.

In Fiscal Year 2021, the United States spent over \$1.8 billion in humanitarian funding for the Syrian regional response alone.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about how our foreign assistance is being used and how the international community and host countries can work together to ensure the safety and security of Syrian refugees as well as to create the conditions for them to 1 day return to Syria if they choose.

The U.N. estimates there are 6.7 million internally displaced people, IDPs, in Syria, 3.1 million of which are children. IDPs living in both official and informal camps often face severe overcrowding, violence, malnutrition, and lack of economic opportunity.

Al-Hawl refugee camp in northwest Syria was built for 10,000 people. It now holds more than 60,000, the vast majority of whom are women and children. The camp also contains an annex that houses former ISIS supporters or affiliates.

The tenuous security situation within the camp, combined with squalid living conditions, have resulted in mounting discontent, creating a breeding ground for radicalization.

I am eager to hear from our witnesses today about the conditions of refugee and IDP camps, the impact that that has on terrorist radicalization and recruitment, and how NGO's, the U.S., and the international community can improve humanitarian conditions on the ground, combat extremism, and support the swift and secure repatriation of foreign nationals.

From fiscal years 2012 to 2021, the U.S. spent over \$14 billion responding to the Syrian humanitarian situation, all while employing severe sanctions, including through the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, on Syrian President Assad, senior Syrian government officials, and any related entities or affiliates.

Nevertheless, the Assad regime has been manipulating aid for over a decade, siphoning millions of dollars from international donors and humanitarian organizations by withholding aid to opponents, channeling it to allies, and engaging in currency manipulation.

I welcome thoughts from our witnesses not only on ways to improve the utilization of humanitarian exemptions to existing sanctions, but also on what NGO's, the U.S., and the international community can do to reduce Assad's leverage over humanitarian assistance.

As we confront the long-term humanitarian realities of conflict in Syria, we must be steadfast in our support for assistance to the

Syrian people, including recovery assistance, while also remaining vigilant in ensuring that Assad and his cronies do not benefit from the people's suffering.

The Assad regime's manipulation of aid further underscores the importance of cross-border aid delivery, which allows aid to be delivered directly to communities without first having to go through the regime in Damascus.

Bab al-Hawa crossing on the border between Turkey and Syria is the last crossing with a U.N. mandate since Russia prevented the extension of three other aid crossings. I look forward to hearing about the necessity of Bab al-Hawa to aid operation as well as observations and expectations leading to reauthorization in July.

Finally, we cannot forget the crimes and atrocities committed by the Assad regime: torture, murder, rape, and the use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people. The recent conviction of a former Syrian official for crimes against humanity in Germany is a strong step toward justice.

We must ensure that Syrian regime officials, as well as President Assad himself, are held accountable for the heinous crimes that have been and continue to be committed.

As we mark 11 years of devastating conflict, Congress and the United States stand committed to raising awareness to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria, supporting the people of Syria in their quest for dignity, freedom, and opportunity. And I look forward to discussing ways that the U.S. can empower Syrians and Syrian-led organizations as well.

I thank the witnesses for what I know will be a productive discussion.

And, with that, I will recognize Ranking Member Wilson for the purpose of making an opening statement.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Chairman Ted Deutch, for your excellent comments and for calling this important hearing on Syria.

Yesterday marked the 11th anniversary of the Syrian revolution against the murderous regime of Bashar al-Assad. How many more Syrians will be killed until the world acts?

For over a decade, the world has stood by and watched as the barbaric Assad regime and its backers in Russia and Iran indiscriminately butchered the Syrian people in order to cling to power. They have brutally killed over half a million Syrians, with over 13 million displaced in a country of 20 million, committed countless atrocities, and perpetrated egregious war crimes.

It must be said without equivocation: Bashar al-Assad must go. There is no question [inaudible] Syria if the brutal Assad regime remains in power.

I was grateful this week to introduce a bipartisan resolution, along with our colleague Congressman Vicente Gonzalez of Texas, calling upon the Biden Administration to do more to enforce the Caesar Act and push back against efforts by many countries in the Arab world to normalize relations with this brutal and illegitimate regime.

Syrian murders are a tragic example of the conflict of authoritarianism against democracy worldwide, the choice of rule of gun or rule of law, as we see happening today in Ukraine, soon

Moldova and Georgia, for control, tomorrow in Taiwan for control, and next in Israel for extermination.

Humanitarian considerations regarding the conflict in Syria cannot be separated from the Assad regime's brutal war against its own people. Of course, humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people is essential, but it is a terrible mistake to believe that humanitarian aid itself is a strategy to achieve justice and accountability for the people of Syria.

Unfortunately, this seems to be the policy of the Biden Administration, which has failed to implement the bipartisan Caesar Act sanctions in the name of humanitarian assistance and green-lighted so-called, quote, "early recovery," end of quote, projects in Syria, a euphemism for reconstruction projects.

The Administration has also ignored the plain text of the Caesar Act by facilitating energy deals that would not only directly benefit the Assad regime, but also exacerbate corruption in Lebanon. I am also concerned by reports that the Administration is seeking to implement a geographic waiver of the Caesar Act in the name of humanitarian assistance, further weakening the law.

We should not be taking cues from Putin and Tehran when considering the next steps in Syria. We must clearly oppose all authoritarian dictatorships which are promoting a rule by gun instead of rule by law.

In addition to the United States, we have provided over \$6 billion to U.N. operations in Syria. While we would like to believe that the money is going to ease Syrian civilian suffering, analysts on all sides of the political spectrum have documented how much of this aid has propped up the Assad regime, which has devoted millions of dollars to entities controlled by the regime.

President Obama's former Ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, wrote on February 12, 2018, of the U.N. aid that, quote, "It is clear the aid is not neutral and is being used as a weapon by the Syrian Government," end of quote.

In addition, the U.N.'s procurement reports have shown the U.N. operations in Syria delivered millions to the Syrian Arab Army and other regime entities, as well as millions to charities co-opted by members of the Assad family, including Bashar al-Assad's wife, Asma.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how the United States can help the Syrian people through mechanisms outside of the U.N. process.

I was grateful the last Congress to introduce the Stop U.N. Support for Assad Act, which would prohibit taxpayer dollars from going to U.N. operations in Syria so long as the U.N. provided assistance to the Assad regime or its cronies and, instead, provide assistance directly to the Syrian people.

Again, thank you for the witnesses being here. I look forward to hearing from each of you. And I am grateful to yield back to Chairman Ted Deutch.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Wilson.

I will now turn to the witnesses for their testimony.

Thanks to all of you for being here today.



Let me remind the witnesses to please limit your testimony to 5 minutes. And without objection, your prepared written statements will be made a part of the hearing record.

Thanks again for being here. I will introduce all four of you before turning it over to you to make your presentations.

Ms. Jomana Qaddour is a resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center and Middle East programs, where she leads the Syria portfolio and is a member of the U.N.-facilitated Syrian Constitutional Committee as part of the Civil Society Group. She is the co-founder of Syria Relief and Development, a humanitarian organization working in northwest Syria that has implemented over \$120 million worth of aid, as well as a doctoral student at the Georgetown University Law Center.

Mr. Hardin Lang is the vice president for programs and policy at Refugees International and is a veteran of six U.N. peacekeeping and humanitarian field missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Guatemala, Haiti and Mali. Before joining Refugees International, Mr. Hardin was a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, where he specialized in Middle East conflicts and national security policy, as well as a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Ms. Nirvana Shawky is the regional director for CARE's Middle East and North Africa region, where she leads humanitarian response and development programming across 11 countries. She has two decades of experience working in the Middle East in multiple roles in diverse fields, like academia, media, advocacy and campaigning. She has also led global efforts to mitigate humanitarian crises in the MENA region, with a focus on international humanitarianism and the protection of civilians in conflicts.

And finally, Mr. Joel Rayburn is a fellow focusing on Middle East issues at the New America Foundation as well as the Hoover Institution and is currently writing a history of the Syrian conflict. He was the U.S. Special Envoy for Syria from 2018 to 2021 and served for 26 years as a U.S. Army officer across the world, with his final assignment as the Senior Director for Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon on the National Security Council Staff in 2017–2018. And we thank you for your service.

Thanks to all of you for being here today.

I now recognize the witnesses for 5 minutes each.

And, Ms. Qaddour, you are recognized.

#### **STATEMENT OF MS. JOMANA QADDOUR, HEAD OF THE SYRIA PROJECT, ATLANTIC COUNCIL**

Ms. QADDOUR. Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to speak at today's hearing. My name is Jomana Qaddour, and I am a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council. I am here to speak solely on my own behalf.

I am heartened by your decision to hold a hearing focused on Syria, which remains a singular source of conflict and instability, despite newer instances of war dominating the headlines.

As images of Ukraine rightfully captivate international attention, Syria watchers are reminded painfully of the conflict we have seen unfold over the last 11 years. Images of a bombed maternity hos-

pital in Mariupol recall the 601 medical facilities destroyed in Syria, 542 of those destroyed by Russian and Syrian Government attacks.

Today, there is a slow deterioration of conditions and quality of life for all Syrians except those close to Assad and his inner circle. Ninety-seven percent of Syrians live under the poverty line, even though \$2.27 billion worth of U.N. aid was distributed across the country last year.

This has done little to offset the needs, however, given the Syrian Government's chokehold over humanitarian aid operations and their manipulation of all aspects of the humanitarian response.

Each year, humanitarian organizations operating in north Syria are annually threatened by a U.N. Security Council vote by Russia to cutoff all cross-border aid in an attempt to pressure donors to send all aid through Damascus.

Russia has also tried to press strictly for cross-line deliveries from Damascus to north Syria, but over the last 8 months it has only permitted two cross-line deliveries to the northwest, which is wholly insufficient.

We see a similar predicament in northeast Syria since the Yaroubia crossing was shut down in 2019. There, the government holds all aid to the northeast hostage by restricting and limiting access for U.N. funding to loyalist supporters rather than credible local NGO's.

Northeast, northwest, and government-held Syria all have varying needs.

Northwest Syria is home to at least 3 million civilians, 80 percent of which have been displaced more than six times. It is also the site of consistent attacks, despite a delicate, often violated cease-fire forged by the Astana Process. According to the White Helmets, the Syrian and Russian Governments perpetrated at least 1,500 attacks in 2021 alone.

The predicament of northwest Syria is further complicated by the presence of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, the strongest military group in the area. Although the group allows humanitarian operations with limited intervention, local governance entities, education centers, women's facilities, and activists are often treated with hostility, threats, closures, and violence.

Meanwhile, international diaspora and local NGO's managing programs in northwest Syria struggle to operate, as budgets for international aid decrease. Stabilization funding to northwest Syria remains also extremely limited, placing a burden, undue burden, on humanitarian organizations, with limited mandates to promote governance and strategic development services in the area.

The next generation also continues to suffer the consequences of short-term aid policy in Syria. Local organizations operating in this sector struggle, as the criteria for what donors are willing to fund continues to narrow.

Funding is almost exclusively limited to primary education, and even that is short-term in length and prevents any long-term planning, meaning children do not have access to stable education programs or higher education, and even fewer have access to actual school buildings due to systematic and ongoing attacks on such buildings by Russian and Syrian regime forces.

In government-controlled areas, the economic situation has undergone unprecedented decline as corruption schemes monopolize the Syrian economy, cutting out average Syrians, and instead enriching select members of Assad's elite circle and his military patrons, Iran and Russia.

Compounding the economic challenges, mass flight of Syria's young population is ongoing due to arbitrary arrests, intimidation, conscription, lack of job opportunities, and the flight of businesspeople and former loyalists, who see no future in a highly securitized and corrupt State. The collapse of the Syrian pound and Lebanese banking crisis have depressed and devastated things further.

Today, the Russian war on Ukraine also increases the likelihood of famine and starvation, given Russia has canceled its wheat contracts with Syria, which in recent years has come to account for 25 percent of Syria's wheat.

Damascus also maintains a chokehold over U.N. operations, with resulting limits on monitoring and evaluation, procurement and hiring.

Although the U.N. is not subject to U.S. and EU sanctions and, therefore, can work with sanctioned actors, it is nonetheless required, by its own supplier code of conduct, to, quote, "support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights and to ensure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses."

The U.S. is the largest contributor to U.N. humanitarian operations worldwide and, therefore, has a central role to play in seeking accountability of these funds.

Next, in northeast Syria, home to 3 million people, located in an area with a small but critical U.S. military presence, 1.8 million people need humanitarian assistance and 630,000 remain in IDP camps, while grim environmental conditions—namely a lack of water—decrease agricultural production and further waterborne diseases.

Security in northeast Syria remains tenuous as the Islamic State attempts to revive its presence and secure resources.

Further, genuine social cohesion issues are rampant in areas held by the Syrian Democratic Forces due to marginalization of Arab communities and tribes amongst political and military leadership, which has inadvertently allowed the Islamic State to exploit social rifts.

Finally, let me speak briefly about Rukban, located near al-Tanf military base, which hosts U.S. forces. The proximity of Rukban to the nearby U.S. base prevents the regime and its allies from exterminating the camp's 10,000 residents, but also includes 6,000 children. The government has denied entry to humanitarian convoys since 2019.

Let me end by providing some recommendations.

First, ensure that the U.N. humanitarian operations continue in northwest Syria this July when the U.N. cross-border resolution comes up for renewal, even if the U.S. and its allies must consider an alternative plan to ensure crossing into northwest and northeast Syria. Given broader tensions with Russia over Ukraine, an independent approach may be needed, in concert with partners like Turkey.

Second, the U.S. Government should lead in ensuring that accountability is integrated into global humanitarian policy, including effective audits for U.N. funding.

Third, ensure that early recovery aid and stabilization aid, a crucial part of this Administration's strategy, benefits all areas of Syria.

Fourth, encourage carving out exemptions from economic sanctions in northeast Syria if we are to make it prosperous and stable.

Fifth, education should be a key priority for all donors across all contexts in Syria, including primary, secondary, and higher education programming.

Sixth, the U.S. Government should lead legal efforts to ensure assets seized from Russian officials as a result of the Ukraine war sanctions be allocated to rebuild and restore areas outside of government-held Syria, given they too have suffered from Russian military attacks.

Seventh, financially support Syrian diaspora organizations, like the American Relief Coalition for Syria, which has implemented about \$1 billion worth of aid programs, given their strong connections to both Syrians and Americans.

Finally, ensure humanitarian aid to civilians in Rukban and facilitate their passage to north Syria, as they have requested.

I thank you for your time.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Qaddour follows:]



John F.W. Rogers  
CHAIRMAN  
Frederick Kempe  
PRESIDENT & CEO

**“11 Years of War: The Humanitarian Impact of the Ongoing Conflict in Syria”**  
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism  
Wednesday, March 16, 2022, 3:00 PM ET

As prepared

**Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, Members of the House Foreign Affairs  
Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism Subcommittee:**

Thank you for inviting me to participate in today’s hearing. My name is Jomana Qaddour, and I am a Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council where I head the Syria project. I am here to speak solely in a personal capacity and my comments today do not reflect the institutional views of the Council.

**Overview of Humanitarian Situation**

I am heartened by your decision to hold a hearing focused on Syria, which remains a singular source of conflict and instability despite newer instances of war dominating the headlines. As images of Ukraine rightfully captivate international attention, Syria-watchers are reminded, painfully, of the conflict we have seen unfold over the last eleven years. Images of a bombed maternity hospital in Mariupol recall the 601 medical facilities destroyed in Syria<sup>1</sup>, 542 of those destroyed by Russian and Syrian government attacks. Today, despite an overall decrease in hostilities, the Syrian people endure the next phase of the conflict: a slow deterioration of conditions caused by the persistent threat of violence, political instability, lack of sustainable education or healthcare, economic precarity and disparity, and the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which have created serious obstacles for the quality of life for all Syrians, except for the Assad regime.

97% of Syrians live under the poverty line, and 80% of the population is food insecure, even though \$2.27 billion worth of UN aid was distributed across the country last year.<sup>2</sup> This has done little to offset needs, however, given the Syrian government’s chokehold over humanitarian aid operations and their manipulation of all aspects of the response across the country. Each year, humanitarian organizations operating in the north Syria are annually threatened with a UN Security Council veto by Russia to cut off all cross-border aid in an attempt to pressure donors to send all aid through Damascus. Russia has also tried to press strictly for cross-line aid deliveries from Damascus to north Syria. However, over the last eight months, only two cross-line deliveries were sent to the northwest, far too little for the three million people living there. But we

<sup>1</sup> “Physicians for Human Rights’ Findings of Attacks on Health Care in Syria,” Physicians for Human Rights, last updated June 2021, <http://syriamap.phr.org/#/en/findings>.

<sup>2</sup> “Syrian Arab Republic 2021,” UNOCHA Financial Tracking Service, last updated 10 March 2021, <https://fts.unocha.org/countries/218/summary/2021>.



John F.W. Rogers  
CHAIRMAN  
Frederick Kempe  
PRESIDENT & CEO

know this is a pattern: we see this same predicament in northeast Syria since the Yaroubia crossing was shut down in 2019. Since then, the Syrian government holds all aid to the northeast hostage by restricting life-saving aid and limiting access for UN funding to loyalist supporters, rather than credible, local NGOs.

Syria is best understood in three distinct parts, with each part requiring different humanitarian needs. Northwest Syria is home to at least 3 million civilians, 80% of which have been displaced more than six times.<sup>3</sup> It is also the site of consistent attacks, despite a delicate, often-violated ceasefire forged by the Astana Process. According to the White Helmets, the Syrian and Russian governments perpetrated at least 1500 attacks in 2021 alone.

The predicament of Northwest Syria is further complicated by the presence of the National Salvation Government and its armed wing, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, the strongest military group in Syria's northwest. Although the group by and large allows humanitarian organizations to operate without intervention, local governance entities, education centers, women's facilities, journalists, and activists are often treated with hostility, threats, closures, and sometimes violence.

Meanwhile, international, diaspora, and local NGOs managing programs in northwest Syria struggle to operate, as budgets for international aid decrease due to COVID-19. And while the Biden administration may be considering easing sanctions on northeast Syria, such a proposal for civilians in Idlib remains unlikely due to the presence of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham. Likewise, stabilization funding to northwest Syria also remains extremely limited, placing an undue burden on humanitarian organizations with limited abilities or funding to promote governance and strategic humanitarian and economic development services in the area.

The next generation also continues to suffer the consequences of short-term aid and development policy in Syria: in addition to a lack of authorities leading education in northwest Syria, local organizations operating in this sector struggle as the criteria for what donors are willing to fund is increasingly narrowing. Funding is almost exclusively limited to primary education, and even that is short-term in length and prevents any medium- or long-term planning – meaning children do not have access to stable education systems or higher education, and even fewer have access to actual school buildings, due to systematic and ongoing attacks on such buildings by Russian and Syrian regime forces. With nearly 75% of the Syrians in need being women and children—we're not doing enough to aid the most vulnerable.

In government-controlled areas, the economic situation has undergone unprecedented decline, as corruption schemes monopolize the Syrian economy, cutting out average Syrians, and instead enriching select members of Bashar al-Assad's elite circle and Assad's military patrons, Iran and

<sup>3</sup> Natasha Hall, "Rescuing Aid in Syria," Center for Strategic and International Studies Middle East Program, 14 February 2022, [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/220214\\_Hall\\_Rescuing\\_Aid\\_Syria.pdf?hG4dKipxCaBNDRDaezmDvn2IHVmr8937](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/220214_Hall_Rescuing_Aid_Syria.pdf?hG4dKipxCaBNDRDaezmDvn2IHVmr8937).

Russia. Compounding the economic challenges, mass flight of Syria's young population is ongoing and due to arbitrary arrests, conscription, and lack of job opportunities, including the flight of businesspeople and former loyalists who see no future in a highly-securitized and corrupt state. The collapse of the Syrian pound and the Lebanese banking crisis have depressed and devastated the average Syrian's future. The cost of an average food basket increased by 97% between December 2020 and December 2021.<sup>4</sup> Today, the Russian war on Ukraine also increases the likelihood of famine and starvation, given Russia has cancelled its wheat contracts with Syria, which in recent years came to account for 25% of Syria's wheat.

Damascus also maintains a chokehold over UN operations, with resulting limits on monitoring and evaluation, procurement, and hiring. Although the UN is not subject to US and EU sanctions and therefore can work with sanctioned actors, it nonetheless is required, by its own supplier code of conduct, to "support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights and to ensure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses."<sup>5</sup> However, over the past several years, the UN's work with suppliers and contractors affiliated with human rights abusers or their close affiliates or business entities has been thoroughly documented. The United States is the single largest contributor to UN humanitarian operations worldwide and therefore has a central role to play in seeking accountability regarding these funds.

Finally, in northeast Syria, home to three million people located in an area with a small but critical U.S. military presence, 1.8 million people need humanitarian assistance and 630,000 remain in DP camps. Both widespread displacement and latent political violence continue to devastate the area, while grim environmental conditions – namely a lack of water – decrease agricultural production and further water-borne diseases. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies' new report, *Rescuing Aid in Syria*, since the 2019 closure of the Yaroubia border crossing, the UN was unable to collaborate with NGOs and suffers from too little access to pooled funds in Damascus. Security in northeast Syria remains tenuous as the Islamic State attempts to revive its presence – now accessing illicit resources other than oil, including theft of livestock, taxation, and international funding from supporters. Further, genuine social cohesion issues are rampant in areas held by the Syrian Democratic Forces due to marginalization of Arab communities and tribes amongst political and military leadership – all of which has inadvertently allowed the Islamic State to exploit social rifts. While the US leads in the repatriation of its foreign fighters, at least 10,000 fighters are housed in prisons, likely to become more of a security risk in the coming period. The al-Hol camp houses another 60,000 Islamic State fighters and their families, creating fears that a new generation of children are being radicalized.

<sup>4</sup> "Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic," UNOCHA, February 2022, [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/hno\\_2022\\_final\\_version\\_210222.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/hno_2022_final_version_210222.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Natasha Hall, "Rescuing Aid in Syria," Center for Strategic and International Studies Middle East Program, 14 February 2022, [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/220214\\_Hall\\_Rescuing\\_Aid\\_Syria.pdf?hG4dKipxCaBNDRDaezmDvn2IHVmr8937](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/220214_Hall_Rescuing_Aid_Syria.pdf?hG4dKipxCaBNDRDaezmDvn2IHVmr8937).



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Finally, let me speak briefly about Rukban. The Rukban camp, located on the Syrian-Jordanian border near al-Tanf military base, which hosts U.S. forces, is the site of an unaddressed humanitarian catastrophe. The proximity of Rukban to the nearby U.S. base has prevented the regime and its allies from exterminating the camp's 10,000 residents, which includes former rebels but also almost 6,000 children. However, they remain stranded, with no prospect of security or stability.

The Russian and Syrian governments have denied entry to humanitarian convoys since February 2019, leaving Rukban without access to medical care, education, and food.<sup>6</sup> Jordan has refused to admit the camp's residents due to security concerns. Individuals who have consented, out of desperation, to relocate from the camp into Syrian regime-held areas have been treated with hostility, detained, or disappeared. Rukban's residents instead have pled for relocation to non-government held areas, a prospect continuously denied by all actors.

Let me end by providing some recommendations for the Committee to consider:

- First, ensure that UN humanitarian operations continue in northwest Syria this July when the UN cross-border resolution comes up for renewal, even if the US and its allies must consider an alternative plan to ensure crossings into northwest and northeast Syria. Given broader tensions with Russia over Ukraine, an independent approach may be needed, in concert with supporting partners like Turkey.
- Second, the US government should lead in ensuring that accountability is integrated into global humanitarian policy. This means effective audits for all UN funding the United States contributes, to ensure that American tax dollars reach the most vulnerable rather than corrupt actors.
- Third, ensure that early recovery aid, a crucial part of this administration's strategy, benefits all areas of Syria, including northwest Syria, where medium-term funding and support for governance and development is critical. Additionally, stabilization funding should be pursued robustly in both northwest and northeast Syria.
- Fourth, encourage carving out exemptions from economic sanctions in northeast Syria if we are to make it prosper and remain stable.
- Fifth, education should be a key priority area for all donors across all contexts in Syria, including funding primary, secondary, and higher education programming like online university and college degrees, given the massive flight of Syria's educated class, and to

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Hagedorn, "Lawmakers urge US action on Syria's crisis-hit Rukban camp," *Al-Monitor*, 7 March 2022, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/03/lawmakers-urge-us-action-syrias-crisis-hit-rukban-camp>





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prevent child exploitation, including child labor, early marriage, and prevent recruitment by extremist groups.

- Sixth, the US government should lead legal efforts to ensure assets seized from Russian officials as a result of the Ukraine war sanctions be allocated to rebuild and restore areas outside of government-held Syria given they too have suffered from Russian military attacks.
- Seventh, financially support diaspora organizations, like the American Relief Coalition for Syria, made up of ten Syrian American humanitarian organizations that have implemented about \$1 billion worth of aid programs, given their strong connections with local Syrians as well as their ties to the United States.
- Finally, ensure immediate access to humanitarian aid to civilians in Rukban and facilitate their passage to north Syria as they have requested.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Ms. Qaddour.  
Mr. Lang, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF MR. HARDIN LANG, VICE PRESIDENT FOR  
PROGRAMS AND POLICY, REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL**

Mr. LANG. Thank you, Chairman Deutch and Ranking Member Wilson and members of the subcommittee, for holding today's hearing on Syria. At a time when so many other crises are absorbing public attention, your decision to spotlight the war on its 11th anniversary is to be commended. My remarks will focus on the plight of Syrian refugees in the region.

For years, the United States has played a leading role in providing life-saving assistance to Syria's displaced. Refugees International has seen this firsthand in our work.

Syria remains the single largest displacement crisis in the world. Some 6 million Syrians continue to seek refuge abroad, and more than 6 million people are displaced internally.

Neighboring countries have borne most of the responsibility. Turkey ranks as the world's largest refugee-hosting country, while Lebanon and Jordan host the most refugees per capita.

Inside Syria, violence may have fallen, but areas of the country are still contested. The cease-fire in Idlib remains fragile, as is the situation in the northeast. In areas controlled by the Assad regime, returning refugees face grave human rights abuses and persecution.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that few Syrians are going home. Last year, only about 36,000 did so.

At the same time, however, Syrians are facing increased pressure to return. Resources and infrastructure in host countries are strained, and so is the domestic political will to sustain refugees. The COVID-19 pandemic has only made the situation more acute.

Recent trends give cause for concern. Turkey has deported refugees to Syria and threatened to send millions back into a safe zone along the border. In Lebanon, Syrians are evicted, arrested, and occasionally deported. And Jordan is refusing to provide refuge or aid to Syrians living in desperate conditions just across the border in Rukban camp, as we heard earlier.

Most urgently, Russia will probably veto the U.N. cross-border aid resolution into northwest Syria this July, and the consequences for millions of displaced Syrians will be catastrophic.

The hard truth is that Syrian refugees remain caught between a rock and a hard place, unable to go home but facing tough conditions in their host communities. Meaningful resettlement remains an aspiration.

The bottom line is that integrating the refugees into their host countries' society and economy offers the most viable, safe, and dignified pathway forward for the time being.

To this end, the United States and other donors should take ten steps to support both refugees and host communities in the region.

First, the United States should encourage Turkey and Lebanon to comply with international law and stop forcing Syrian refugees back into Syria. UNHCR should be allowed to monitor removal centers to ensure that all returns to Syria are voluntary, and the U.N.

should also demand access and closely monitor the condition of the few refugees who are actually returning to Syria.

Second, the United States should encourage donors to ensure multiyear funding to the formal education sector in host countries. It should also support nonformal education in camps and in formal settlements to help fill gaps.

Third, the United States should redouble efforts to improve conditions for women refugees. Programs should provide childcare, address gender-based violence, and offer vocational training for jobs that empower women as members of society.

Fourth—and this is important—donors must promote labor market integration. More jobs for refugees are essential to making them self-reliant. A joint research project by RI and the Center for Global Development has shown that labor market integration is an economic win-win for refugees and their hosts alike.

Fifth, the United States should channel more resources to local aid groups. The goal here should be to allocate a quarter of U.S. funding over the next 4 years, in line with USAID's new commitment. The shift is particularly urgent in Lebanon, where government corruption is a major concern.

Sixth, the United States should adopt a holistic approach to Lebanon. As this committee well knows, the country's economic and political crisis is deepening by the day. Aid for Syrians, while urgent, must be integrated into a comprehensive strategy to meet the needs of refugees and host communities alike.

Seventh, donors must fund the U.N. regional refugee plan. Last year, only 28 percent of the U.N. refugee response plan in the region was funded. And as of this morning, funding for this year's plan received amounted to zero. The United States should mobilize other donors, particularly the Gulf, to close the gap.

Eighth, the United States must work with Jordan to find solutions to the Rukban crisis. Negotiations over the 5-year memorandum of understanding and its renewal with Jordan offer an opportunity to make progress.

Ninth, the United States has resettled just over 23,000 refugees from Syria to date. That is a drop in the bucket. RI is deeply aware of the overall stress on the U.S. resettlement system, but we can and should resettle at least 15,000 Syrians each year for the next 4 years, in concert and compliance with the Presidential PD.

And finally, we must urgently prepare for the scenario in which Russia vetoes the U.N. cross-border aid resolution in July of this year. We can discuss more of that in the question and answer.

I will stop there. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. And I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Lang follows:]

Testimony of Hardin Lang  
Vice President of Programs and Policy  
Refugees International  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee: Middle East, North Africa and Global Counterterrorism  
“11 Years of War: The Humanitarian Impact of the Ongoing Conflict in Syria”  
March 16, 2022

**I. Overview**

Thank you to Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, and members of this subcommittee for holding today’s hearing.

Refugees International (RI) has reported on the Syrian crisis from the beginning, conducting field research both inside Syria and neighboring refugee-hosting countries. Refugees International is a non-governmental organization that advocates for lifesaving assistance and protection for displaced people in parts of the world impacted by conflict, persecution, and forced displacement. Refugees International investigates and reports on the circumstances of displaced populations in countries such as Poland, Ethiopia, Mexico, Greece, and Bangladesh, among many others. We do not accept government or United Nations funding, which helps ensure that our advocacy is impartial and independent.

It bears remembering that the situation in Syria remains the world's single largest displacement crisis—by a long shot. Some 6 million Syrians continue to seek refuge outside their country, and more than 6 million people are displaced within Syria. Countries near to Syria have borne the most significant responsibility. For more than a decade, they have taken in and sheltered millions of Syrians—numbers that, at times, have not received enough acknowledgment from the international community. In addition, the lifesaving assistance donors, and particularly the United States, have provided has been critical during the years of this protracted displacement crisis, as Refugees International has seen in our field assessments.

Most Syrians who are registered as refugees with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) remain in neighboring Jordan (670,000), Lebanon (844,000), and Turkey (3.65 million). However, the actual number of forcibly displaced Syrians in the region is likely much higher. Jordan's latest census reports 1.3 million Syrians, while Lebanon counts 1.5 million. Turkey remains the world's largest hosting country, and Lebanon and Jordan host the most refugees per capita globally. Eleven years into Syria's civil war, this quantitative picture shows few signs of significant change.

Inside Syria, overall levels of violence have fallen sharply, but areas of the country are still contested. The ceasefire in Idlib in northwest Syria remains fragile, and the situation in the northeast of the country is beginning to deteriorate. The country's economy is in free fall. An estimated 13 million people require humanitarian assistance. Perhaps more importantly, the consolidation of regime control over much of the country has only entrenched Syrian President Bashar al Assad's repression.

According to Human Rights Watch, Syrian refugees "who voluntarily returned to Syria between 2017 and 2021 from Lebanon and Jordan faced grave human rights abuses and persecution at the hands of the Syrian government and affiliated militias, including torture, extra-judicial killings, and kidnappings."<sup>i</sup> Returning refugees have also found their homes destroyed and cannot afford essential food items or services. The Syrian government has also enacted a law allowing it to seize refugees' property.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that relatively few Syrian refugees are going home of their own accord. All told, just over 305,000 Syrian refugees have returned voluntarily to Syria. Last year, the annual returns fell to roughly 36,000 people, and the rate is not expected to increase throughout 2022. Moreover, UNHCR's latest return intentions survey in Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq suggests that while most Syrians wish to return one day (70 percent), only a small number planned to do so within the following 12 months (2.4 percent).<sup>ii</sup>

At the same time, Syrians in the region face increasing pressure to return. While host governments continue to support some services for refugees and assistance continues through the United Nations and international and local organizations, public resources and infrastructure are increasingly strained. Moreover, domestic political will in host countries to sustain support for refugees is wearing thin. The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic shutdown in host countries have significantly impacted refugee livelihoods, health, and access to services.

Countries in the region are to be congratulated on the welcome they often accorded Syrians in the early days of the war. However, the overall record has always been somewhat mixed, and, over time, some of these governments have adopted more exclusionary and restrictive policies towards Syrian refugees. The political pressures resulting from general economic uncertainty impacting host communities often drive these policies. The COVID-19 pandemic and its lasting impacts on regional economies have accentuated these pressures. In addition, leaders in some host countries have faced—and in some cases egged on—growing public discontent with the continued presence of Syrian refugees.

Recent trends give cause for concern. Turkey has deported refugees to Syria and threatened to send millions more back into a “safe zone” along the border in northern Syria. In Lebanon, Syrians have a precarious legal status and have been increasingly subjected to security checks, evictions, random arrests, and occasional deportations. Moreover, the Jordanian government has refused to offer refuge or aid to Syrians living in desperate conditions just across the Jordanian border in Rukban camp.

The hard truth is that Syrian refugees remain caught between a rock and a hard place—unable to go home but facing worsening conditions in their host communities. These host communities now often endure humanitarian indicators akin to their Syrian guests in places like Lebanon.

Nor does the prospect of resettlement offer a real light at the end of the tunnel for these refugees. The United States and European governments—except for Germany—have implemented policies that have limited durable solutions for Syrians in these countries. UNHCR currently estimates that more than 612,415 Syrians are sufficiently vulnerable in their current host country as to need resettlement.<sup>iii</sup> However, the total number of Syrians resettled via UNHCR throughout the war is roughly 174,900. Moreover, annual rates of resettlement have fallen consistently since 2016.<sup>iv</sup> Last year, 17,519 Syrian refugees departed for resettlement in other countries.<sup>v</sup> And U.S. resettlement of Syrians was nearly non-existent.<sup>vi</sup>

The bottom line is that some kind of integration in host countries offers the only viable, safe, and dignified pathway for the vast majority of Syrian refugees in the region for the foreseeable future. Such an approach could signal an end to exile but would need to be accompanied by a significant increase in resettlement in Western countries. To this end, the United States, European countries, and other donors must find better ways to address the plight of Syrian refugees and support their host communities in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. The situation in each of these countries differs in important ways. An effective policy response must therefore provide boutique solutions attuned to each context.

## II. Turkey

Turkey hosts the world's largest refugee population, including 3.6 million Syrians. Most of these refugees reside in host communities across the country. Their children attend Turkish schools. While Syrian refugees often receive humanitarian assistance, many work to provide for their families. Initially, Turkey openly welcomed Syrian refugees. However, eleven years into the Syria crisis, the climate for Syrians in Turkey has reached a critical juncture.

Turkey's economy is in decline. The rate of economic growth has slowed consistently since the onset of the Syrian civil war. Unemployment is on the rise. Over time, public sentiment in Turkey has hardened against refugees. In 2014, a public opinion survey found that almost 58 percent of respondents rejected the notion that "the refugees should be sent back to their country."<sup>vii</sup> Five years later, 83 percent "called for the return of all refugees and disagreed with the government's policy of hosting them."<sup>viii</sup>

Turkish policy has also become less welcoming. Since 2017, registration for Syrian refugees in Turkey—and the accompanying identity card ("kimlik," in Turkish) that opens the door to benefits, such as free education, health care, and EU cash assistance—has become increasingly restricted. In addition, a number of provinces have ceased registration of Syrians,<sup>ix</sup> including some of those with the highest concentration of Syrian refugees.<sup>x</sup>

In 2019, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan threatened to move a million or more Syrian refugees into a "safe zone" corridor running along the border and stretching 30km into northern Syria.<sup>xi</sup> Beyond humanitarian and normative concerns and international legal obligations, the plan is logistically unfeasible.<sup>xii</sup> While Turkey has not yet tried to implement the plan, the government has pressured refugees to return to Syria. Turkish authorities have conducted widespread identity checks in Syrian neighborhoods. Syrian men were also reportedly coerced into signing voluntary repatriation forms. Rights groups report that there has been a wave of deportations of Syrian men to Idlib, which remains under threat of a Syrian regime offense and subject to sporadic Russian bombing.<sup>xiii</sup>

Syrian refugees in Turkey describe an increasingly hostile environment where acts of xenophobia are ordinary.<sup>xiv</sup> Most Syrian refugees who work do so in the informal labor market.<sup>xv</sup> Turkey established a work permit system for Syrian refugees in 2016. However, employers must request permits and are often unwilling to go through the permit process.<sup>xvi</sup> Most refugees end up in low-paying jobs, many of them in small textile workshops and construction.<sup>xvii</sup> Women make up about half of Turkey's Syrian refugee population, but comparatively few have jobs. Only about 15 percent of Syrian women engage in gainful

employment, and even fewer have work permits.<sup>xviii</sup> This is how a widowed Syrian refugee mother of three recounted her experience in Turkey earlier this week during an RI event:

I left Idlib in 2019, after the Syrian regime took my hometown in Maarat al-Nu'maan. For almost 9 years, I never left. But I was left with no choice. In Turkey, I had to start from scratch. I arrived at a time when Turkey had become a difficult place for Syrians. I have no access to work and can't get a work permit. In Idlib, I had come a long way since the start of the revolution. I was a mom and a teacher. I became a revolutionary and a right activist. I tried to volunteer with organizations. I had my triumphs and my failures. My failures are due to laws and exploitation here in Turkey. I want to harness all the power in me, continue to break the stereotypes, continue to learn and study, contribute to the cause of women and the Syrian revolution. But I feel constrained here with no prospect.<sup>xix</sup>

Despite these challenges, most Syrian refugees have built lives in Turkey. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, almost a million Syrians worked in Turkey, mostly in the informal sector. More than 750,000 Syrian students are in Turkish public schools. Syrian refugees in Turkey do not want to return. The conditions that might make them consider returning to Syria will not exist for the foreseeable future.

Key instruments for meeting the humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees in Turkey include the UN regional refugee response plan (3RP) and the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT). The latter emerged out of the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement. While concerns have emerged in some quarters over the channeling of funding through the Turkish government, support via the FRIT accounts for almost 80 percent of international aid to refugees and their host communities.<sup>xx</sup> The FRIT has delivered both a social safety net, including education and healthcare and a system of cash transfers for the Syrian refugee households.<sup>xxi</sup> All told, some €6 billion euros have been committed, and €4.5 billion disbursed through the facility.<sup>xxii</sup> In addition, the European Commission has announced another €325 million for humanitarian assistance and €560 million for refugee education to run through early 2023.

Barring a massive effort to deport millions of refugees into northern Syria forcibly, Syrian refugees are likely to remain in Turkey for some time to come, making self-sufficiency, inclusion with dignity, and, for many if not most, some kind of integration as the only real viable pathway to a solution. As a report from the Center for American Progress has observed, Turkey's grinding economic slowdown could continue, and poor Syrians could emerge as a permanent underclass.<sup>xxiii</sup> A better course would see Turkey—with international support—finding a way to strengthen the self-reliance and resilience of Syrian refugees living within its borders.



### III. Jordan

Jordan hosts 670,000 registered refugees, but the government puts the figure closer to 1.3 million. The vast majority of Syrian refugees have settled in urban and rural communities, but roughly 130,000 displaced Syrians live in camps. In 2016, the government signed the “Jordan Compact” with the EU and the World Bank. The agreement called for the issuance of work permits to 200,000 Syrian refugees and to open the labor market to foreign workers.

As of June 2021, a total of 239,024 work permits have been issued.<sup>xxiv</sup> Jordan has also demonstrated support for refugee self-reliance by simplifying the documentation requirements for work permits and allowing the registration and operation of home-based businesses – something Refugees International called for.<sup>xxv</sup> In addition, as of July 2021, the Jordanian government expanded the rules to give Syrian refugees access to all sectors open to non-Jordanians.<sup>xxvi</sup> However, many other professions remain closed to refugees. Moreover, the Jordan Compact—and the Jordan Response Plan (JRP)—fell short of including the Kingdom’s nearly 90,000 non-Syrian refugees from Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, and other countries, which has exacerbated their already dire conditions.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Unfortunately, some of the economic and social gains made under the Compact have been rolled back by Jordan’s weakening economy and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the pandemic, 4 in 5 Syrian refugees in Jordan fell below the poverty line. The situation worsened with the economic shutdown that accompanied the pandemic. Across the globe, sectors in which refugees work were particularly hard hit by the closures. In Jordan, a UN survey found that “68 percent of the refugees have seen their income drop” during the pandemic.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Food insecurity among refugees doubled over the first year of the pandemic.<sup>xxix</sup> According to the UN “only 2 percent of refugee households can meet their essential food needs without any negative coping strategies.”<sup>xxx</sup> Key donor-funded programs like the World Food Program (WFP) cash-based support system face severe funding shortfalls, forcing agencies to cut food subsidies for at-risk beneficiaries. In June 2021, the WFP announced that 21,000 refugees would no longer receive cash assistance due to a lack of funds, and another 250,000 refugees may see reduced food assistance.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Jordan made the commendable decision to include refugees in its national COVID-19 response plans. In 2021, Jordan initiated the world’s first COVID-19 vaccine program for Syrian refugees, making vaccines available to those living inside and outside camps. As of

February 2022, 90 percent of Syrian refugees in camps have been vaccinated, and 50 percent of those living outside of camps have been vaccinated.

Syrian refugees have access to healthcare in Jordan, but the cost can be high. In February 2018, the Jordanian government abruptly “cut the health subsidies for Syrian refugees from 80 percent to 20 percent of their costs.”<sup>xxxii</sup> UNHCR provides some support, but a lack of funding limits what most refugees can afford. Some told Refugees International that they now avoid going to the doctor due to the higher fees. “Instead, they self-medicate or take their medication infrequently to make it last longer.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> A 2021 UN health survey found that almost 87 percent of Syrian refugees could not afford medicines—up from 52 percent in 2018.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Syrian refugees are also exposed to the climate-related challenges linked to increasing desertification, the loss of fragile ecosystems, and water scarcity in Jordan. In addition, the Kingdom’s economic challenges and rising unemployment have created domestic challenges for average Jordanians, the stressors of which are also felt by refugees who must also compete formally and informally for jobs. Jordan’s water scarcity is already creating ripples across critical industries in Jordan, particularly agriculture, where thousands of Syrian refugees are currently employed.

Without water supplies, Jordan’s crop cultivation will be insufficient to meet the nation’s food demands. More recently, the Ukraine crisis has deepened fear over long-term global food security. With grain imports from Ukraine and Russia affected by the crisis, the price of Jordan’s food imports is expected to rise. This will affect food procurement for refugees, whose cash assistance will lose buying power due to rising inflation.

The trends in Jordan are worrisome, but refugees are not likely to go home anytime soon. Despite high hopes following a 2018 ceasefire in southern Syria, only 41,000 Syrians have returned voluntarily. For many Syrian refugees in Jordan, conditions in Syria are not yet conducive for safe, sustainable, and dignified return. Most Syrian refugees in Jordan originate from the southern province of Dara’a, where assassinations and outbreaks of violence have become day-to-day occurrences.

Last August, the resurgence of violence in the provincial capital – Dara’a City – between government forces and reconciled militias left many people dead and hundreds displaced. The residual instability paired with reduced international commitments to resettle refugees and the emergence of new humanitarian crises paint a grim picture for hundreds of thousands who remain in Jordan.

#### IV. Rukban

Across the border from Jordan lies Rukban camp, where Syrians have been stranded since fleeing the Syrian government in 2014. An estimated 10,000 Syrians reportedly remain in the Rukban camp without regular food, water, or medicine. The last UN humanitarian convoy to bring aid to Rukban arrived in late 2019. As a result, camp residents have been forced to rely on smuggler networks to provide necessities for survival. The remaining clinic in the camp lacks supplies or medicine to address even the slightest of illnesses, let alone offer any form of COVID-19 care or treatment. As a result, even the most preventable and treatable ailments are often a death sentence to residents.

Mothers and their children are among those who suffer due to limited access to basic necessities and medical care. There are reports of newborns and young mothers dying during childbirth due to preventable complications on several occasions. Since 2020, the UNICEF clinic inside Jordan, which provided emergency treatments for Rukban residents, has not been able to access people in the camp except on rare occasions because the Jordanians closed the border in response to COVID-19.

Prior to COVID-19, Jordan had acquiesced and opened its border for emergency cases to receive treatment in Jordan. However, the subsequent border closure forced greater reliance on the U.S.-led At-Tanf Garrison, just a few kilometers from the camp. On one occasion, U.S. special forces were called upon to deliver a baby after Jordan closed their border. While it is not the mission of U.S. Special Forces at Tanf to provide aid, their control of the 55-kilometer zone in eastern Syria has made them the de-facto authorities, alongside their Syrian partners—Maghwair al Thawra.

The Syrian government has blocked UN aid efforts for Rukban, and Jordan has also restricted any UN aid across its border. This week, a newborn girl faces life-threatening medical complications and requires specialized medical treatment, which is available in Jordan but is not now accessible. The crisis at Rukban is dire; it has remained dire for nearly eight years without a glimmer of hope or a plan to alleviate the suffering of its Syrian residents.

#### V. Lebanon

One of the most concerning refugee situations in the region is Lebanon. The country hosts one of the highest ratios of refugees per capita—one in five people is a refugee. Lebanon's initial open-door policy fell by the wayside by late 2014. The government started imposing

strict regulations that limited access to residency for Syrians. However, Lebanon tacitly allowed Syrian refugees to remain in the country while ensuring that they lived in an atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity.

Syrians are subjected to security checks, evictions, random arrests, and occasional deportations. According to the latest Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR), the rate of Syrian refugees with legal residency continued to decline, with only 16 percent of individuals 15 years or older holding legal residency.<sup>xxxv</sup> Due to the lack of legal documentation, their mobility is significantly constrained, thereby limiting access to other services and rights such as health, work, and education.

Lebanon's overlapping crises (political, economic, financial, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Beirut port blast) have led to a collapse in the standard of living and a devaluation of the Lebanese pound by nearly 90 percent against the U.S. dollar since 2019.<sup>xxxvi</sup> As a result, Lebanon now has one of the highest inflation rates in the world, with food prices rising by 1,000 percent, according to WFP.<sup>xxxvii</sup> This has exacerbated poverty among refugees and their hosts alike.

Some 90 percent of Syrian refugees live in extreme poverty, up from 55 percent just two years ago. Most refugee households do rely on international humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs. Nonetheless, in 2021, 94 percent of households ran short on food and were forced to resort to negative coping strategies.<sup>xxxviii</sup> All this is happening at a time when more than half the UNHCR financial requirements of \$553.7 million for 2021 remained unfunded.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Most Syrians do not live in camps but in cities, towns, or spontaneously erected tented settlements. Many have ended up in impoverished host communities. More than 65 percent of registered refugees live in the Bekaa and northern Lebanon, historically marginalized areas.<sup>xl</sup> Most Syrian refugees live in overcrowded conditions. Often, several families share one apartment. In informal settlements, conditions are deplorable.

Due to the economic crisis, housing conditions for refugees have worsened. As a result, additional families started sharing housing units. Others have moved to informal settlements as they cannot afford rent. Since 2020, more than 10 percent of Syrian refugee households have been evicted or have faced the threat of eviction.<sup>xli</sup>

Syrians are subjected to a highly restrictive labor law that has pushed most into the informal sector. As a result, Syrian refugees are primarily employed in low-skilled jobs, including

agriculture, construction, and services. The economic crisis has only exacerbated the situation. As resources and employment have become increasingly scarce, existing competition between refugees and host communities has worsened. The VASyR did show a small increase in employment rates from 26 percent in 2020 to 33 percent in 2021.<sup>xliii</sup> But this is likely due to easing measures related to COVID-19.

Even before the pandemic and the collapse of the economy, less than half of all Syrian children had access to formal education. However, the deteriorating economic situation in Lebanon has already worsened bleak prospects for the education of Syrian children. The costs of education material and transportation and the cost of living have increasingly pushed Syrian families to stop sending their children to school. In 2021, the already low attendance rate for Syrian children between the ages of 6 and 14 dropped by 25 percent.<sup>xliiii</sup>

Hardship and poverty have led most refugees to resort to negative coping strategies. These include child labor, child marriage, begging, and borrowing money. Refugees are also cutting down on health-related expenses. According to the vulnerability survey, 92 percent of surveyed households reported resorting to new debts, 75 percent purchased food on credit, 54 percent reduced health expenditures, 29 percent reduced education expenditures, 25 percent sold off goods and/or spent savings, and 7 percent withdrew children from school and/or sent their children to work.<sup>xliv</sup>

In Lebanon, Syrian refugees have died from COVID-19 at a rate more than four times the national average.<sup>xlv</sup> Yet, by December 2021, they had received only 3.5 percent of the total administered vaccines, despite accounting for nearly one-quarter of the population.<sup>xlvi</sup> Lebanon purportedly adopted an inclusive vaccination policy. However, limited mobility, insufficient doses, identification requirements, and skepticism towards the vaccine are among the many barriers that prevent higher vaccination rates.

## **VI. Recommendations**

For most Syrians, returning to Syria in the foreseeable future or third-country resettlement will not be viable options. Donors and host governments must recognize this reality and take meaningful measures to enhance self-sufficiency and inclusion. It is also increasingly apparent that for many if not most Syrians in countries like Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, some kind of integration—and an end to exile—will be the most appropriate, realistic, and dignified solution. This must be accompanied by far more ambitious commitments to third country resettlement on the part of the United States and other resettlement countries. Even

as governments and international organizations begin to consider these longer-term solutions, they should take several critical short- and medium-term measures.

**Cease Deportations and Increase Monitoring of Returns:** The United States should push Turkey and Lebanon to comply with international law and stop deporting Syrian refugees back to Syria. The UN Refugee Agency should be allowed to freely monitor removal centers to ensure that all returns to Syria are voluntary. The UN should also demand access and closely monitor the conditions of the limited number of refugees returning to Syria voluntarily.

**Support Education:** The United States and other donors should support host countries' efforts to enroll Syrian children in public schools by dedicating predictable multi-year funding to the education sector. However, refugee access to formal education will continue to suffer due to worsening economic conditions, language difficulties, and the rising cost of transportation and school supplies. Thus, the United States should support the efforts of aid agencies and local civil society to provide quality non-formal education inside the camps and informal settlements to fill gaps in the education sector.

**Improve Conditions for Women Refugees:** The United States and other donors should redouble efforts to improve conditions for women refugees, who remain a largely underserved population in all three regional host countries. Programs should address the unique challenges and the barriers that women currently face. These include a lack of childcare, transportation costs, gender-based violence (GBV), and cultural norms that oppose women's work outside the home. In addition, vocational training should be driven by women's own perspectives and wishes. Finally, the programs should help women find jobs that empower them as participants in the formal labor market and as members of society.

**Promote Labor Market Integration:** Access to jobs in the formal labor market, including work permits, rights at work, and freedom of movement away from camps and settlements, will be essential to refugee integration and self-reliance. A joint multi-year research project by Refugees International and the Center for Global Development has conclusively demonstrated that labor market integration can be a shared win for refugees, donors, and host countries alike.<sup>xlvii</sup> Of course, the policies, tools, and outcomes will look different across regional host countries, but we know the strategy works. For their part, the United States, the World Bank, and other donors must continue to leverage their support for host countries to improve labor market integration. These efforts should build on progress made in Jordan and work to reverse recent backsliding in Turkey.

**Accelerate Localization and Empower Civil Society:** The United States should increase direct funding to local NGOs involved in the refugee response in all three host countries. The goal should be to allocate 25 percent of total U.S. funding over the next four years, in line with USAID's 2021 worldwide commitment. The shift to localization is particularly urgent in Lebanon, where corruption and predatory behavior by elites and distrust of the central Government are major concerns. In addition, U.S. assistance should strengthen the role of local partners in the design, implementation, and decision-making of its programs.

**Adopt a Holistic Approach in Lebanon:** As this subcommittee was briefed last July, Lebanon's economic collapse and political crisis are only deepening by the day. Moreover, the country is now in the grip of a significant humanitarian crisis. Therefore, the United States should seek to integrate its response to Syrian refugees within a comprehensive approach that addresses the broader humanitarian needs of host and other vulnerable communities across the country. This approach should focus on creating livelihood opportunities and partnerships with small entrepreneurs that would benefit those hit hardest by the devastating Lebanese crisis.

**Fund the UN regional refugee response plan:** Over the past five years, the UN Refugee Agency has requested \$5.5-6 billion annually to fund its Syrian Refugee Response and Resilience Plan (3RP) to support Syrian refugees and their host communities across the Middle East. However, last year, only 28 percent of the 3RP resource requirements were funded. For this year's plan, zero funding has been received.<sup>xlvi</sup> This needs to change quickly. In addition to increasing its own commitments, the United States should mobilize other donors to close the gap. Gulf countries have a key role to play, especially in light of the increased revenue these countries are likely to accrue as a result of the impact of the war in Ukraine on global oil markets.

**Address the situation in Rukban camp:** The United States must step up and shoulder the responsibility of finding a long-term solution to the Rukban crisis while addressing short to mid-term needs. The United States provides Jordan an estimated \$1.275 billion in aid annually under its five-year Memorandum of Understanding, which is set to expire in FY22. If Jordan and the United States plan to sign a new agreement, this is an important opportunity to address Jordan's own economic instability while including Rukban into a comprehensive plan to support Jordan.

**Increase U.S. Resettlement of Syrian Refugees:** Over the course of the war in Syria, the United States has taken roughly 23,200 of the total number of 174,900 Syrian refugees who have been resettled.<sup>xlix</sup> This is a drop in the bucket when it comes to what is needed.

Refugees International is deeply aware of the limitations in capacity and the overall stress level on the U.S. refugee resettlement system. However, the United States can and should commit to resettle at least 15,000 to 20,000 Syrians each year over the next four years. This would be possible within the regional allocations provided in the FY2022 PD.<sup>1</sup>



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Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Lang. I appreciate it. Ms. Shawky, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF MS. NIRVANA SHAWKY, REGIONAL DIRECTOR  
FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA, CARE**

Ms. SHAWKY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman Deutch, Mr. Ranking Member, subcommittee members. Thank you for this opportunity to examine the humanitarian impact of the 11 years of conflict in Syria.

My name is Nirvana Shawky. I am the regional director for CARE in the Middle East and North Africa, and I have been working on the Syria crisis and multiple mandates since the beginning of the crisis.

CARE implements humanitarian and development programs in over 100 countries, with a focus on women and girls, who are the most vulnerable in crisis situations, but also the most powerful change-makers.

CARE responds to the Syria crisis directly and through partners in Syria and neighboring countries. And since 2013, we have reached more than 9 million people inside Syria alone.

Simply put, humanitarian needs are increasing while diplomacy and support are decreasing.

Alongside life-saving aid, Syrians need longer-term, sustainable assistance that builds their self-reliance and resilience. This includes durable solutions to displacement, mitigating the impacts of climate change, like recurrent drought and harsher winters, addressing the ways gender inequalities compound humanitarian needs, and investing in locally led solutions.

Above all, support for Syria must not be politicized. And while humanitarian access or early recovery support is a longstanding pillar of the humanitarian response in Syria, the Syrian people cannot afford for it to be used as a political bargaining chip.

The severity of needs after 11 years of war are compounded by multiple crises: economic collapse, food insecurity, water scarcity, and the global pandemic.

CARE's recent Rapid Gender Analysis reveals that the households are under immense duress across northern Syria.

In the northwest, where 97 percent of the population lives on less than \$2 a day, women reported domestic violence as a major concern.

The northeast, that was Syria's breadbasket, has now been devastated by drought. Twenty-five percent of households eat one meal a day, and one in five children are malnourished.

Families are resorting to negative coping mechanisms, like eliminating meat and fruits and vegetables and all nutritious elements, selling farmlands and animals, begging and borrowing, sending their children to work, and marrying off young daughters to older men.

The reality is grim, and we are preparing for further deterioration. Cross-border humanitarian access, a fundamental lifeline, has been eroded, and the last authorized crossing into northwest Syria is at risk again if the U.N. Security Council Resolution 2585 expires in July.

Additionally, the devastating situation with the conflict in Ukraine may well have dire impacts on global supply chains, exacerbating food insecurity in places like Syria and Lebanon while further straining diplomatic efforts.

The U.S. commitment to prioritize humanitarian needs within its Syria strategy is very welcome, but this must be backed up with meaningful resources. Syrians cannot eat promises or shelter their families with words alone. Last year, humanitarian actors were forced to cut vital health services and food rations due to the lack of funding.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, members of the subcommittee, CARE urges Congress and the Administration to support additional funding for life-saving aid, early recovery, and resilience activities in Syria. We hope your offices will support a substantial increase of the top-line humanitarian accounts next Fiscal Year to respond at scale to growing global needs.

But aid alone is not enough. This must be complemented by concerted diplomacy toward an inclusive political solution.

CARE urges U.S. leaders to put renewed focus on international humanitarian cooperation, including the continuity of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2585 for another 12 months, at the minimum. The Syrian people need policymakers to be united in support of their access to basic needs.

Finally, CARE recommends increased direct funding to Syrian-led NGO's, particularly women-focused organizations. Local solutions are the most enduring.

CARE is honored to be invited to testify. And I am very pleased to see my colleague Jomana here today as a witness. But we must do more to engage and empower Syrians to defend their own path forward.

The Syrian crisis, while exceptionally dire in many ways, is sadly not unique. This crisis is symbolic of a chronic lack of humanitarian resourcing and diplomacy globally. But with these steps, we have an opportunity to reverse these trends in Syria while setting a new humanitarian course worldwide.

To mark the end of the 11th year of the crisis, CARE spoke to 11-year-old Syrian girls, all born the year the crisis started. I will let Atiya, a refugee in Lebanon, have the final word to you, sir.

"Even though we have been here for a long time, we are different. Our accent is different. I feel different from everyone else. I am not in my country. And when you are somewhere else, you never feel really safe.

"My parents say Syria was beautiful, that it was a good place to live. Sometimes people ask me why am I still here, why I do not go home, and I want to shout, 'Why do not you understand?' My country is destroyed. Where do you want me to go? I have nowhere to go."

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, members of the subcommittee, thank you for your time and attention today. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Shawky follows:]

**Statement for the Record**  
**Ms. Nirvana Shawky**  
**Regional Director, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) – CARE**  
**Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa**  
**and Global Counterterrorism**  
**“11 Years of War: The Humanitarian Impact of the Ongoing Conflict in Syria”**

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, thank you for this opportunity to examine the humanitarian impact of 11 years of conflict in Syria.

CARE implements humanitarian and development programs in over 100 countries with a focus on women and girls who are the most vulnerable in crisis but also the most powerful changemakers. CARE responds to the Syria crisis directly and through partners in Syria and neighboring countries. Since 2013, we've reached more than 9 million people inside Syria.

Simply put, humanitarian needs are increasing while diplomacy and support are decreasing. Alongside lifesaving aid, Syrians need longer-term, sustainable assistance that builds their self-reliance and resilience. This includes durable solutions to displacement, mitigating the impacts of climate change like recurrent drought and harsher winters, addressing the ways gender inequalities compound humanitarian needs, and investing in locally-led solutions. Above all, support for Syria must not be politicized. Syrians cannot afford for humanitarian access or early recovery support- a longstanding pillar of the humanitarian response in Syria- to be used as political bargaining chips.

The severity of needs after 11 years of war are compounded by multiple crises: economic collapse, food insecurity, water scarcity, and the global pandemic. CARE's recent Rapid Gender Analysis reveals households under immense duress across northern Syria. In the Northwest, where 97% of the population lives on less than two dollars a day, women reported domestic violence as a major concern. In the Northeast, Syria's breadbasket which has now been devastated by drought, 25% of households eat one meal a day, and one in five children is malnourished. Families are resorting to negative coping mechanisms like eliminating meat, fruit and vegetables; selling farmland and animals; begging and borrowing; sending children to work; and marrying off young daughters.

The reality is grim and we are preparing for further deterioration. Cross-border humanitarian access- a fundamental lifeline - has been eroded and the last authorized crossing into northwest Syria is at risk again if UN Security Council Resolution 2585 expires in July. Additionally, the devastating conflict in Ukraine may well have dire impacts on global supply chains, exacerbating food insecurity in places like Syria and Lebanon while further straining diplomacy.

The U.S. commitment to prioritize humanitarian needs within its Syria strategy is welcome but this must be backed up with meaningful resources. Syrians cannot eat promises or shelter their families with words alone. Last year, humanitarian actors were forced to cut vital health services and food rations due to the lack of funding. CARE urges Congress and the Administration to support additional funding for lifesaving aid, early recovery, and resilience activities in Syria. We hope your offices will support a substantial increase of the topline humanitarian accounts next fiscal year to respond at scale to growing global needs.

But aid alone is not enough. This must be complemented by concerted diplomacy towards an inclusive political solution. CARE urges U. S. leaders to put renewed focus on international humanitarian cooperation – including the continuity of UNSCR 2585 for another 12 months at a minimum. The Syrian people need policymakers to be united in support of their wellbeing.

Finally, CARE recommends increased direct funding to Syrian-led NGOs, particularly women-focused organizations. Local solutions are the most enduring. CARE is honored to be invited to testify, and I am very pleased to see my colleague Jomana here today as a witness, but we must do more to engage and empower Syrians to define their own path forward.

Syria, singularly dire in many ways, is sadly not unique. This crisis is symbolic of a chronic lack of humanitarian resourcing and diplomacy globally. But with these steps, we have an opportunity to reverse these trends in Syria while setting a new humanitarian course globally.

To mark the end of the 11th year of the crisis, CARE spoke to 11-year-old Syrian girls, all born the year the conflict started. I will let Atiya, a refugee in Lebanon, have the final word: "Even though we've been here for a long time... we're different. Our accent is different. I feel different from everyone else. I'm not in my country and when you're somewhere else, you never feel really safe. My parents say Syria was beautiful, that it was a good place to live. Sometimes people ask me why I am still here, why I don't go home. I want to shout: 'Why don't you understand? My country was destroyed. Where do you want me to go? I have nowhere to go.'"

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, Members of this Subcommittee, thank you for your time and attention today. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Ms. Shawky, for your testimony.

And finally, Mr. Rayburn, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF MR. JOEL RAYBURN, FELLOW, NEW AMERICA FOUNDATION (FORMER SPECIAL ENVOY FOR SYRIA, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE)**

Mr. RAYBURN. Thank you, Mr. Deutch and Mr. Wilson. And I commend the committee for bringing oversight to U.S. policy on the worsening humanitarian crisis in Syria.

The first thing to understand about this problem is that it is a symptom of a bigger one, which is Bashar al-Assad's continuing war against the Syrian population, enabled by Vladimir Putin.

For Assad, starvation is a strategy of war. So, the only way truly to stop humanitarian suffering in Syria is to compel Assad and Putin to cease their warfare and accept a political resolution of the conflict.

Thus far, the Biden Administration has chosen instead to focus on symptoms of Assad and Putin's war rather than the war itself. The Biden team proposed late last year to focus on terrorism, humanitarian deliveries, and local cease-fires, but they have done so in a way that is disconnected from any effort to resolve the broader conflict that creates these issues or to pressure Assad and Putin to stop.

The Administration also signaled a green light for Israel to attack Iranian weapons in Syria, but without addressing Iran's military expansion in the Levant more broadly. And, indeed, this afternoon we see reports that the Administration may soon lift the Foreign Terrorist designation from Iran's IRGC, a dangerous step that could allow money to flow back into the IRGC's terror networks and Assad's war machine and make the Syrian crisis even worse.

The previous Administration, of course, had a different approach of bringing severe pressure on Assad and his allies, especially through sanctions, to compel them to accede to the U.N.-sponsored political process and cease attacks against civilians. And in 2021, the Administration effectively discontinued this pressure and sanctions slackened.

The Administration instead made gestures to Russia to secure Moscow's vote to extend the U.N. mandate for cross-border aid deliveries. But while U.S. representatives were negotiating with Russian counterparts about ensuring U.N. aid deliveries to northern Syria, the Russian Air Force was bombing civilians in those same areas, making a mockery of the negotiations, unfortunately.

So, in my view, this current U.S. approach of treating symptoms rather than causes cannot work. Absent much greater pressure, Assad will not end his war against his own people, and the humanitarian catastrophe, refugee crisis, and terrorism that his war creates will continue ad infinitum.

But Assad also cannot win the war, even with a blank check from Putin. Eleven years without an Assad victory is long enough for us to reach that conclusion, and that means Congress can still make a difference in Syria.

So, I recommend you press for several policy changes in the United States.

First, mobilize international pressure to force Assad and Putin into complying with U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254 and discard all illusions about constructive engagement with the Russians on this issue for now.

The Russians are not interested in partnering with us to get a stable, acceptable outcome in Syria. The horrific tactics they are employing in Ukraine, indiscriminately bombing civilians, rubble cities, cutting off essential services, these are all methods that they practiced and continue to practice in Syria to this day.

Most recently, Russian Defense Minister Shoigu announced his intention of recruiting 16,000 Syrians to be flung into the war in Ukraine. So, Moscow is exporting the Syrian war, not deescalating.

And second, to this end, I think the United States should restore sanctions pressure immediately. With Putin's destabilizing behavior in Europe, there is no reason to go easy on his top Middle Eastern client just for the sake of creating a friendlier atmosphere with Moscow.

Regain leverage for the good of the situation both in Syria and Ukraine by reinstating the intense pace of Caesar-related sanctions from 2020, including against Russians, as the Caesar Act envisioned.

Third, Congress should also discourage the Administration from continuing with the misguided idea of having the regional countries send gas across Assad's territory to supposedly assist the Lebanese energy sector. There are better alternatives that wouldn't violate the Caesar Act and wouldn't give Assad a windfall, as that one does.

Fourth, scrutinize international assistance flowing through Damascus, especially the ways in which the Assad regime manipulates and intimidates the U.N. agencies there. Make U.S. aid conditional on much greater transparency about how aid deliveries are conducted and by whom.

Fifth—and this is one that hasn't yet been taken up by Congress—crack down on Assad's vast narcotrafficking operations that generate billions of dollars in revenue each year for the regime. Denying Assad and his Hezbollah partners this revenue would deal a body blow to both of them and make international pressure much more effective.

Sixth, encourage the U.S. Government to support criminal prosecutions against Syrian war criminals, as the Germans have started to do. And just today in The New York Times, for example, we saw a major article on mass graves of thousands of Syrian detainees being detected in Syria. So, this issue is going to become more prominent.

Seventh and finally, press the Administration to appoint a senior diplomat with a direct line to State Department leadership to conduct this diplomacy. The Administration, inexplicably, has not appointed a Special Envoy for Syria for the first time since 2014, and our allies and partners have taken that as a sign that we are not interested.

Since 2011, as the chairman mentioned, the United States has spent more than \$14 billion on humanitarian assistance for Syrians. The EU has spent \$25 billion during that time; Canada, \$3.5 billion. Turkey claims to have spent \$40 billion of its own. And



when you throw in the cost for refugee-hosting States, such as Jordan and Lebanon, you can see that the cost of the humanitarian response for the Syrian crisis is approaching \$100 billion.

But that \$100 billion has not done much by itself, and the next hundred billion won't either unless it is part of a comprehensive strategy to resolve the cause of the conflict rather than its symptoms by bringing all tools to bear to compel Assad and Putin to end their war against the Syrian people once and for all.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Rayburn follows:]

**Testimony by Joel Rayburn  
Fellow, New America Foundation  
Visiting Fellow, Hoover Institution**

**The House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism**

**Hearing on “11 Years of War:  
The Humanitarian Impact of the Ongoing Conflict in Syria”**

**March 16, 2022**

I appreciate the opportunity to offer my assessment of the situation in Syria and the U.S. response to it, and I commend the Committee for bringing oversight to this crisis. We ignore Syria at our peril. After eleven years, the Syrian conflict is as acutely dangerous an international security problem as ever. Syria is the source of the world’s largest humanitarian and refugee crisis, with about twelve million Syrians--half of the country’s prewar population--either registered as refugees or internally displaced.<sup>1</sup> While I understand the Committee’s wish to examine the humanitarian crisis in Syria, it is impossible and indeed counterproductive to examine that problem as though it can be distinguished from the broader Syrian conflict. The humanitarian problem in Syria is bad and worsening, but it is a symptom of a bigger problem, not a standalone issue of its own, and it will be insufficient to formulate a policy toward a symptom without addressing the larger problem that causes it.

The fundamental problem in Syria is the Assad regime’s continuing war against large segments of the Syrian population. Assad’s war against his own people is the cause of the humanitarian crisis, plain and simple. For the Assad regime, starvation is a tactic of war, and humanitarian aid from outside Syria is a resource to be used in the prosecution of Assad’s war. The situation in Syria thus differs markedly from other humanitarian crises that are caused by natural disasters, and Syria cannot be treated with the same standard humanitarian response as natural disasters require. The only way to stop the humanitarian crisis in Syria is to compel the Assad regime and its allies to cease their warfare against the Syrian people and accede to a political resolution of the conflict. Any policy or strategy short of this approach will amount to mere palliative care—care that will have to extend for many years to come.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.unicef.org/appeals/syrian-refugees#:~:text=The%20Syrian%20refugee%20crisis%20remains,%2C%20Jordan%2C%20Lebanon%20and%20T%20urkey.>

Since 2011, the United States and the western countries have spent massive amounts in humanitarian assistance for the Syrian people. The United States has been the largest single donor, with more than \$14 billion expended, while the European Union has spent more than \$25 billion and Canada more than \$3.5 billion, for a total of more than \$40 billion. Turkey in the same period claims to have spent more than \$40 billion of its own money in response to the refugee and humanitarian crisis. When we add the significant cost to other refugee-hosting countries such as Lebanon and Jordan, we can see that the Syrian crisis is headed toward a cost of \$100 billion in refugee and humanitarian response for the west and Syria's neighbors. But with Assad's continuing attacks against civilian populations, there is no end in sight for this spending, and after 11 years of crisis response the conditions for Syrian civilians in virtually every area that receives aid is growing worse, not better. The first \$100 billion has not averted this situation on its own, and the next \$100 billion won't, either. This funding can only have a lasting impact if it is part of a comprehensive strategy to end the Syrian conflict altogether--to treat the causes of the war rather than just its symptoms.

Thus far the Biden administration has chosen to focus on four symptoms of the Syrian conflict, rather than addressing the fundamental cause, the Assad regime itself. In describing the results of its months-long Syria policy review last November, the Biden team proposed to focus on the terrorism and humanitarian crisis emanating from Syria without energetically seeking a solution to the overall conflict from which those problems spring, as envisioned in UN Security Council Resolution 2254. They intend to reduce violence in Syria through cease fires that will not be connected to a broader process to resolve the political conflict that creates the violence in the first place. They signaled a green light for Israel to "mow the grass" by attacking Iranian bases and weapons in Syria without addressing the unprecedented (at least in modern times) Iranian military expansion into the Levant more broadly.

The approach of the previous administration was to bring severe pressure on the Assad regime and its allies in hopes of compelling them to accede to the UNSCR 2254 political process and to cease the military attacks against Syrian civilians that continue to cause great suffering. When the previous administration levied intense sanctions in 2019 and 2020 against the Assad regime under the Caesar Act and other Syria sanctions authorities, the object was to impose a cost on Assad and his regime for continuing the war and committing major atrocities against the Syrian people. The U.S. message at that time was a warning to Assad and his Russian allies that the sanctions pressure would deepen with each passing month until they halted their war machinery and came to the UN-sponsored negotiating table in earnest.

In 2021, the Biden administration effectively discontinued this pressure and sought instead to make gestures to Russia and the Assad regime's interests to secure Russia's vote last summer to extend the UN's mandate for cross-border humanitarian assistance. The pace of Caesar sanctions and other sanctions has slowed dramatically in the past 15 months. In the

meantime, in this environment of diminished U.S. pressure, the Assad regime has continued its bombing of civilian areas in northern Syria, as has the Russian military. While U.S. and European representatives have negotiated with Russian counterparts about ensuring UN aid deliveries to needy areas of northern Syria, including camps for internally displaced persons, the Russian air force and Assad regime artillery have frequently bombarded those same camps and areas, causing significant civilian casualties and making a mockery of the aid negotiations going on elsewhere. This grotesque contrast has also befuddled Syrians in the camps, who are understandably puzzled by the west's quest for cooperation with the same Russians who are killing residents of those camps with high explosives.

Meanwhile, the Assad regime has continued its manipulation and diversion of international humanitarian assistance. Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, the regime has been able to a great degree to dictate the terms of the international community's humanitarian response to a humanitarian crisis the regime itself is causing. Assad's representative have been able to direct UN aid deliveries to regime loyalist communities while frustrating cross-line access to non-regime areas. In many instances, the regime has used starvation siege tactics, withheld aid deliveries, and used aid as a weapon of war, only to be delivered on the condition of surrender.

The UN organizations in Damascus have had little option but to go along with this misuse of billions of dollars—most of it coming from the United States and the western countries—in UN aid, very often being forced to work through regime-sponsored contractors and through the regime-associated Syrian Arab Red Crescent for local aid activities. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent and its chief Khaled Haboubati are Bashar al-Assad's mechanism for turning international humanitarian aid into a large-scale subsidy for the regime itself. This will continue until the western countries impose greater conditions on the billions they are spending in Syria via the UN organizations in Damascus. The UN agencies have been far too quiet about the Assad regime's manipulation of aid to this point.

Simply put, the current U.S. and western approach to the Syrian crisis, including its humanitarian catastrophe, is not working, and it cannot work. In my view, Congress should immediately engage the administration and press for a policy change in several areas:

**Adopt a comprehensive approach to the conflict and its fundamental causes rather than selectively attending to its narrow symptoms.** Do not try to divorce humanitarian assistance from its strategic context. Prioritize organizing an international coalition to pressure the Assad regime and its allies, especially Russia, into complying with UNSCR 2254 and entering a political process to resolve the conflict once and for all. This is most direct route, and probably the only viable route, to ending Syria's humanitarian and refugee crises for good.

**Be realistic about the Russian role in Syria and the idea of constructive engagement with the Russians.** Discard the assumption that the Russians have an interest in partnering with the United States and the west to achieve a stable, acceptable outcome in Syria. The Russians continue to show they are not interested in this kind of result, and that a perpetuation of the Syrian crisis serves their needs better. The Russian air force has not stopped its bombing of civilians, including IDPs, as a means of supporting their client Assad while threatening Turkey with causing a potential wave of refugees into that country. Most recently, Russian defense minister Shoygu has announced his intention of recruiting 16,000 Syrian fighters to be flung into the war in Ukraine, just as he employed Syrian fighters in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh. This cynical Russian exploitation of the conflict will continue for as long as the conflict does. The horrific tactics the Russians are employing in Ukraine, with the indiscriminate bombardment of civilians, the rubble of entire cities and critical infrastructure, and the cutting off of essential services such as water, are all methods the Russians practiced and continue to practice in Syria. The cynical use of humanitarian corridors as traps for attacking fleeing civilians, the bombing of hospitals and schools, and other such war crimes have all been part of Russia's record in Syria.

**Scrutinize international assistance flowing through Damascus, especially the ways in which the Assad regime manipulates and intimidates the UN agencies to turn aid into a resource the regime can use to prosecute its war.** Make U.S. and western support for this aid condition on much greater transparency about how aid deliveries are conducted, and by whom. Sanction the Syrian Arab Red Crescent if necessary. Press the UN to stop using Assad regime-associated contractors, even if it means some aid does not get delivered.

**Restore the sanctions pressure against the Assad regime and its allies, especially Russia and the Iranian regime.** It should be clear by now that Russia and Assad will make no concessions unless under pressure, and with Russia's destabilizing behavior in Europe there is no reason to withhold pressure from Russia's major middle eastern client just in the interest of creating a friendlier atmosphere with Russian government representatives. Now is the time to levy heavy Syria-related sanctions and regain leverage for the good of the situation both in Syria and Ukraine. The Treasury and State Departments should reinstate the intense pace of Caesar-related sanctions from 2020. They should also levy sanctions on Russian entities and persons as the Caesar Act envisioned, with emphasis on the Russian military and on all Russian companies that have operated in Syria or with the Syrian government. This would include both military industries and the Russian energy sector. Since the Caesar Act already contains secondary sanctions authorities, its use against Russian entities could have a powerful impact.

On a related note, the Congress should also discourage the administration from continuing with the misguided idea of having the regional countries send gas across Assad's territory to supposedly assist the Lebanese energy sector. This project would give Assad a windfall of gas and revenues he can use to fuel his war effort but would do little to actually

address the shortcomings of the Lebanese energy sector. There are better alternatives for Lebanon, such as international financing for fuel deliveries from the Mediterranean, that would not violate the Caesar Act and enrich Assad as this pipeline project would do.

**Congress should also signal its support for a development that is emerging in Europe in particular: the criminal accountability of members of the Assad regime for the crimes they've committed against the Syrian people.** Already, we have seen one conviction in a German court, and there is another trial going on in Germany now. These cases are just the tip of the iceberg. In the coming months and years, more of these cases will appear and will make it very difficult for western governments to soften their approach toward Bashar Al Assad. Along with these criminal prosecutions, courts in Europe and the United States are likely to see judgments for monetary awards to the victims of the Assad regime's crimes, creating difficulties for any companies or governments that want to start doing business with the Assad regime. Those companies or governments will have to be worried about court orders that could freeze their assets or business investments because of these cases. This is an issue that should not be underestimated as an obstacle to normalization. Congress should hold hearings on this issue and explore what authorities might enable the United States to participate in this growing accountability effort.

**Extend international financial pressure to encompass the Assad regime's vast narcotrafficking operations that generate billions of dollars in revenue each year.** The Assad regime has become one of the world's largest narco-states, especially with its export of the amphetamine-based drug Captagon to the Gulf and Mediterranean regions by a regime-sponsored cartel effectively headed by Bashar al-Assad's brother Maher and working in concert with Lebanese Hizballah. The astronomical drug profits that Captagon brings to the Assad regime help to insulate the regime from political pressure and give it vast resources to fuel Assad's war machine. Members of Congress have started to realize the importance of this Assad regime narcotrafficking and have proposed legislation to begin to tackle the problem. Congress should accelerate this action. Denying the Assad regime and Hizballah these billions of dollars in revenue would deal a body blow to both and make international pressure much more effective.

Some members and friends of the administration have expressed misgivings about using sanctions and financial pressure against Assad. They have unfortunately echoed Assad's own propaganda attempting to blame U.S. sanctions for the suffering of the Syrian people. In truth, sanctions are not the cause of the humanitarian crisis, and the United States should not shy away from using them in much greater force. Bashar Al Assad's war against the Syrian people, with the help of Russia and the Iranian regime and Hezbollah, is the main cause of the suffering of the Syrian people, both in terms of killing and violence and in terms of economic hardship. We need only think of how much money Assad spends each month to maintain the war machine and secret police he uses against the Syrian people instead of funding bakeries, cooking gas, and

medical services. The vast majority of U.S. sanctions are not sectoral, but are aimed at specific members and entities of the Syrian regime. But critics of the sanctions cannot name who specifically they believe should be removed from the SDN list in order supposedly to improve the lives of the Syrian people, because the SDN list is populated not by legitimate businesses, but by Assad loyalists and contributors to mass murder. Congress should feel free to discount this kind of uninformed criticism.

**Congress should press the administration to return to an approach of taking its closest allies' views and interests into account in Syria.** For much of 2021, the administration's reluctance to clarify its intentions in Syria led much of the region and the Europeans to conclude the administration was giving tacit approval to some states that hoped to normalize relations with Assad, such as the UAE and Jordan. Not until late 2021 did the Biden administration clarify its opposition to such normalization policies. At this stage, the administration should engage U.S. allies and partners about a return to a comprehensive approach to Syria that aims to address the conflict acute security problems, many of which could explode at any time into a regional conflict. We need think only of two major security problems to illustrate this point: first, the Assad regime's continuing effort to rebuild a chemical weapons arsenal, a problem that grew into grave crises for the two previous administrations, led to U.S. airstrikes against Assad twice in two years, and is now the subject of ongoing actions by Israel; and second, the continuing expansion of Iranian regime strategic outposts in Syria, an issue that threatens to escalate into regional war at any moment. The Biden administration has chosen not to address either of these issues in its current Syria policy.

**Finally, the Biden administration should appoint a senior diplomat with a direct line to the State Department's leadership to conduct this diplomacy.** Thus far the administration inexplicably has chosen not to appoint a Special Envoy for Syria for the first time since 2014. The absence of a special envoy has not been lost on our allies, partners, and the Syrian people, all of whom have interpreted it as a sign of U.S. neglect.

By creating the impression that it aspires to manage rather than to end the Syrian conflict, and by declining to articulate a pathway out of the conflict that accounts for the needs of U.S. regional allies, the Biden administration is leaving a policy vacuum in which other actors will seek their own, possibly destabilizing solutions. If regional actors conclude that the Biden administration is downgrading its Syria policy to one of benign neglect, the risk of expanded conflict will continue to grow, as will the risk of the worsening of all associated issues, humanitarian matters included. Syria is a toxic problem that will not allow for narrow, disconnected treatments. It is far past time to deal with the roots of the Syrian conflict rather than just its symptoms.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Rayburn.

Next, I will recognize members for 5 minutes each. And pursuant to House rules, all time yielded is for the purposes of questioning our witnesses.

Because of the virtual format of this hearing, I will recognize members by committee seniority, alternating between Democrats and Republicans. If you miss your turn, please let our staff know. We will circle back to you. If you seek recognition, you must unmute your microphone and address the chair verbally.

I will defer my time and start by recognizing Mr. Cicilline for 5 minutes.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to you and Ranking Member Wilson for holding today's hearing on this really important issue. And thank you to our witnesses for their excellent testimony.

Ms. Shawky, I want to begin with you.

As we watched the horrific atrocities being committed by President Assad and his government, I first want to say thank you for the difficult work that you are doing to help U.S. aid reach Syrians in need, while at the same time ensuring it never reaches the hands of those in the Assad regime. And that is always a concern, I think, as we fight for additional resources.

So, can you please describe for us in greater detail the extensive checks and screening mechanisms that are in place to ensure that any humanitarian programs in the regime-controlled areas are not used to benefit the regime?

Ms. SHAWKY. Thank you. Thank you, sir.

And, I mean, at CARE we are very grateful for the support of the United States in helping us provide the support to the Syrian people.

Allow me to provide also my testimony and further details in writing.

We apply the highest measures of internal controls to ensure that the vetting process is in line with the U.S. standards for implementation.

And while we deliver our assistance, directly in most areas, we also work with Syrian organizations on the ground through a very scrutinized vetting process to ensure that they cover all the checks and balances that are ensuring that there is no aid diversion, that the aid is directly reaching the hands of the beneficiaries. And we ensure that our reporting mechanisms are of the highest standards to verify all these different processes.

I, sir, will ask my team also to provide you in writing, and the esteemed committee, all the different details about our checks and balances to ensure the highest monitoring of our operations.

Thank you, sir.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you. That would be very helpful and appreciate you furnishing that.

Mr. Lang, thank you again for your testimony. I would like to focus for a moment on the al-Hawl refugee camp which, as you know, was built to house approximately 10,000 people but has housed more than 60,000 people since the caliphate fell over 3 years ago, and the vast majority of whom are women and children who fled ISIS-controlled territories.



And reports continue to be seen that demonstrate that the conditions remain quite squalid at al-Hawl from a variety of NGO's. And over the past 2 years, children in particular have been living in really horrific conditions.

In addition, obviously, the security situation is being monitored closely but presents real problems. Last month, ISIS-affiliated women tried to kidnap Kurdish guards that were patrolling the camp, leading to a shooting in which a 10-year-old child was killed and several women and children were wounded.

And so would you please describe the current humanitarian situation at al-Hawl and what concerns continued radicalization and deterioration of the conditions in these camps present to your organization's work and to our objective and mission broadly?

Mr. LANG. Thank you, Congressman, for the excellent question.

The first thing I should say is I have not been into northeast Syria since the beginning of the pandemic. So, my sort of personal knowledge of the situation at al-Hawl will be slightly dated.

That said, when I was in the area last, the conditions were already deteriorating pretty extraordinarily. What you cite with your description is quite accurate in terms of the conditions inside the camp, the sense that this sort of intersection of very, very poor security situation, very limited access to humanitarian assistance moving in, very challenging working conditions for those NGO's that are providing assistance, and no real horizon, right, about how we are going to get out of this.

And I think to me, one of the things that really sort of holds forth as a North Star to try to solve the situation is we really do need to be working as hard as we possibly can with other countries who have nationals in al-Hawl to work the process of getting them out.

Humanitarians and then the Kurdish forces in the region can only do so much in terms of providing humanitarian assistance and then security over time. If there isn't some sort of pathway in which there is some sort of opportunity for people to leave the camp, those who need to be taken back into other sort of conditions in countries of origin, those governments need to move forward in that process and they need to be pressured to do so. Otherwise, we do not see much of a resolution to this process.

Next door in Iraq, we have seen some people begin to go back. However, the conditions in terms of access to justice, what is happening to them when they do, all that remains less than transparent.

So, I think we have some work to do with respect to the member States that could be doing more to get their nationals out of that, even as we try to do our best through some assistance to Kurdish allies, but then also, importantly, humanitarian organizations, to try to keep their finger in the dike of the current situation.

But the bottom line is the situation is extremely difficult. It hasn't been made any easier by the fact that there is no longer cross-border access for humanitarian assistance via a U.N. mechanism into northeast Syria. All assistance now has to go through sort of bilateral and NGO methodologies, which are challenging and which limits the aid that can get in.

So, that said, I think our first and top priority really is diplomatic pressure on other countries to work the issue of getting their nationals out of al-Hawl.

Thank you.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you so much.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thanks very much, Mr. Cicilline.

Mr. Allred, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ALLRED. OK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. I appreciate the opportunity to hear from our distinguished panel on confronting the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

I want to build off of what Mr. Cicilline was saying and discuss women and children, who have been particularly vulnerable to violence during the 11 years of war in Syria as the price of basic needs has skyrocketed and infrastructure has been destroyed.

According to the United Nations, 6.1 million children require humanitarian assistance and 3.1 million children are internally displaced. Moreover, an additional 2.5 million Syrian refugee children have been forced out of school and an additional 1.6 million are at risk of dropping out. And the toll on women has also been particularly brutal, and gender-based violence remains a very serious concern.

And so let me begin with you, Ms. Shawky.

Can you please describe the specific challenges women and children have faced during 11 years of conflict in Syria?

And if each of you could describe how your organizations have prioritized them in your aid efforts.

Ms. SHAWKY. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Allred.

Allow me to say that this is really a great question and I really thank you for that. And as the crisis continues to have a gendered impact, with women and girls paying the highest price, and children, of course, paying the highest price due to harmful and discriminatory norms and gender norms that are prevalent and widespread, the gender-based violence, including early and forced marriages, are really on the rise.

And since the beginning of the conflict, people's options to survive diminished. Families are making increasingly desperate choices to survive. And for many children, this means that they cannot continue their education, but instead they are taken out of school to help contribute to the family income. And for many girls, parents see child marriage as the only option to feed their children.

CARE has recently conducted a Rapid Gender Analysis in northwest Syria and northeast Syria between December 2021 and February 2022. Among the key findings in this analysis, that in order to cope, families have resorted to reducing food, selling assets, child labor and marriage, and increasing household debt.

Fifty-three of the respondents reported reducing food intake to ensure children are well-fed. And one in five children faces malnutrition in northern Syria, and pregnant and lactating women are at risk due to nutritional deficiencies.

Also, parents reported increasing psychological stress due to feeling unable to feed their children and risks to their health and safety. And in northwest Syria, domestic violence was women's highest

security concern. And in 2020, one in five suicide attempts and deaths in northwest Syria were by children.

Allow me to add that the worst drought in decades has led to significant harvest and income losses of over 70 percent of farmers in northeast, and disproportionately affecting women, who are the majority of the farming work force. And the costs of buying water alone accounted for about one-fifth or more of the budget of 27 percent of the households.

CARE has been actually engaging and working on all different fronts, both in northwest Syria and northeast Syria, to ensure that we are providing support against gender-based violence. And we are providing also support for increased accountability in the collection and the analysis and the consistent application of age, sex, and diversity aggregated data.

We also are addressing the gender impact of shifting social roles in Syria by increasing engagement of men and boys in psychological support and gender-based violence prevention and response, and the strategies to increase women's voice in the public sphere.

And also, we are working with local organizations to ensure that we are responding to the immediate needs for the families and households that are suffering the most on the ground.

I defer the rest of my time to my colleagues. Thank you.

Mr. ALLRED. Thank you.

Also, Ms. Qaddour, if in your response you could also add anything that you think that the U.S. and the international community should be doing to increase attention and support in this area, please add that as well.

Ms. QADDOUR. Yes. Thank you, Congressman.

No, I mean, I echo Ms. Shawky's statements about the vulnerability of women and children.

You know, as I mentioned, the American Relief Coalition for Syria represents 10 Syrian-American humanitarian organizations, and these organizations to varying degrees have been working with local—especially local leaders, including local women and others, to really craft programs that are based on the kinds of needs that women and children in various parts of Syria need. Because, as I mentioned, each part of Syria needs a different kind of attention, depending on its different access to aid and what type of aid.

Unfortunately, and something that we would really like to underline is that due to the increased number of crises across the world and the COVID-19 pandemic, the aid to these areas is constantly dropping, and we are constantly having to shut down programs.

And, unfortunately, the need is not decreasing with that decrease in aid. Unfortunately, it is an inverse relationship. And we are seeing, as I said, more programs that are—there is a plethora of short-term programs, but not enough in terms of long-term and more stable planning.

I am hopeful that the early recovery aid that was passed last July might be an opportunity. This might be an opportunity to increase more stable programming, especially as it pertains to women and children.

It is still incredibly limited, however, in northwest Syria, and that is something that we absolutely need to prioritize, is allocating

stabilization and early recovery funding for northwest Syria, where the need is incredibly high and dramatic.

Mr. ALLRED. Well, thank you.

My time has expired, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Allred.

I now yield 5 minutes to the ranking member, Mr. Wilson.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And, again, thank you for having this hearing, which is so important as we discuss the 11th anniversary of the Syrian revolution, resulting in such a level of mass murder.

Additionally, we really see that we are in a worldwide conflict of rule of law, which is opposed by authoritarians who propose rule of gun.

In Syria, we have seen over half a million people killed, 13 million displaced. And we see it continuing with Putin following the Aleppo model to conduct the tactic of mass murder of as many civilians as possible. And, sadly, this is beginning for him to go from Ukraine, to then go to Moldova, control of the Republic of Georgia.

And then, sadly, it is also a model for the Chinese Communist Party for the taking over of Taiwan, and then encouragement to Tehran to proceed with their death to Israel, with the concept of terminating the people of Israel.

And, Mr. Rayburn, on November 24 the Biden Administration issued a license for early recovery in Syria. And, sadly, early recovery is a euphemism which is used by dictators for reconstruction.

What are your thoughts on this license?

Mr. RAYBURN. Well, Mr. Wilson, I think the idea of early recovery is reconstruction and subsidy of the Assad regime by stealth, especially given the way the Assad regime has such extensive control over contracting, over the construction sector, the infrastructure in Syrian regime territory.

The entire Syrian Government is a worse mafia than the New York and New Jersey crime families. So, any significant project that takes place anywhere in regime-controlled territory is going to be an Assad mafia project. It is going to be channeled into their pocket.

Mr. WILSON. And that is so concerning and needs to be addressed. In fact, what are the specific examples of the Biden Administration failing to implement the bipartisan Caesar Act?

Mr. RAYBURN. I think, first, Mr. Wilson, the Administration has just stopped issuing the sanctions. In the first 6 months of the Caesar Act, from June to December 2020, we issued more than a hundred designations under the Caesar Act and other Syria-related authorities. And then, in 2021, that flow just dried up, even though there were many, many more sanctions targets that were on our radar screen and that I think should have been sanctioned.

But that pressure just stopped. That was a move by the Biden Administration to relieve some pressure on Assad in order to get Russian acquiescence to the cross-border U.N. mandate.

Mr. WILSON. Very, very sad.

And then I was really grateful a couple years ago to be working with the former chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Congressman Eliot Engel of New York, to work with U.S. Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut.

The irresponsible and virtually insane to me Iran JCPOA, the Iran deal, we should learn that the last time that there was an agreement providing billions of dollars, some in cash, to the mullahs in Tehran who proclaimed proudly death to America, death to Israel. With this, Iran immediately provided a billion-dollar credit line to the Assad regime and sent thousands of fighters to help carry out the atrocities against the people of Syria.

If there is another deal reached—and, sadly, we hear it is to be negotiated on behalf of the United States by Putin, which is somewhat inconceivable, but that is what is going on today in Vienna. And it is so dangerous for the people of America, for the people of Israel, and our Arab allies throughout the region. And this is at the same time that Iran is conducting every effort to develop missile development delivery, ICBMs.

There is only one reason for an ICBM. They already have missile capability to strike Italy, to strike Romania, Bulgaria, India. And, obviously, they can strike Israel. But ICBMs have only one purpose, and that is to deliver a nuclear weapon against the people of the United States.

With that in mind, what do you see if there is a repeat of the flawed agreement?

Mr. RAYBURN. Well, we do not have to guess, Congressman, because we have seen it before. In the first 2 years under the JCPOA, 2016 and 2017, we know, because President Rouhani revealed to us the Iranian budget. We saw that in those first 2 years of sanctions relief under the JCPOA, the Iranian regime's military and security budget increased by more than 40 percent and that a hugely disproportionate portion of the windfall that they got from sanctions relief went to their terror networks, missile development, IRGC, Hezbollah, the Assad regime and the Houthis, and so on.

The same thing will happen again, and I think it will increase the conflict that threatens to rage across the Middle East right now. And it will be a severe threat, increased risk to an Iranian threat against Israel from both Syria and Lebanon and Iraq and Yemen.

Mr. WILSON. And it would certainly reinforce the Hamas and Gaza and the incredible situation of rocket attacks from Gaza by Hamas, and then the rocket attacks of Hezbollah from Lebanon, all provided by Iran.

And so, I really hope the American people will be in touch with their members of the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate to let them know that an Iran deal is not in the interest of world peace. And what would work is peace through strength.

And so I am grateful again for your testimony, and then I am really grateful that Chairman Ted Deutch has returned and thank goodness he brought Congressman Brad Schneider with him.

And so as I conclude, I yield back to the high honorable chairperson.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you to the ranking member.

Chairperson, yes. High and honorable, I appreciate that coming from you.

I am now pleased to yield 5 minutes to Ms. Manning for her questions.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you, Chairman Deutsch, for holding this very important hearing.

Thank you, Mr. Ranking member.

Ms. Qaddour, you mentioned that the prospects for a renewed cross-border aid resolution are threatened by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. And assuming that Russia will veto the cross-border aid mechanism, what does an alternative system of aid delivery look like?

Ms. QADDOUR. Thank you, Congresswoman.

So, for several years now, actually the Syrian organizations, along with a lot of donors, you know, some of the donors and INGO's have tried to develop a plan B. You know, the details of that are still developing. But our understanding is there is absolutely a way to go through Turkey in order to deliver that aid and to possibly, you know, create a pooled funding system that countries like ours could contribute to and could oversee.

Now the U.N. Unfortunately has—or the good thing is that what the U.N. provides is an umbrella that protects all different kinds of organizations, as they operate. I mean, the role of the U.N. is absolutely critical. And we do not want to lose that cross-border.

But if it were to be lost, there is absolutely ways to coordinate with OCHA, with WHO which is doing an amazing job inside of northwest Syria, but allow, you know, non-U.N. Entities to be able to get that aid inside, hopefully directed, you know, outside by U.N. organizations and entities.

But the details of those, my understanding is they are being developed by donors, INGO's, and local organizations that are very worried about this prospect come July.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you.

And, Mr. Lang, you said you had some suggestions with dealing with Russia's veto on the cross-border aid. Can you add those?

Mr. LANG. Thank you, Congresswoman. It would be a pleasure.

Look, first and foremost, we should do everything we can in our diplomatic power to see the resolution renewed for access into northwest Syria.

Jomana is right. The plan B will not be anywhere close to the current operation in terms of the ability to get humanitarian assistance inside.

All that said, this last exercise over the last couple of years, every time we go through this, the kind of concessions that are extracted by the Russians increase. And I would say that, given what is happening in Ukraine, and watching the posture of the Russians and the security council over the last couple of weeks, I think it is fair to say that we are in for a very rough ride come July.

So, I think planning for a plan B is pretty much what we have moving forward. And there, I think, Jomana has put her finger on a number of key points.

First, you know, the pooled fund that the U.N. uses to get assistance in, we need an alternative to this. And there is some discussion about certain donors being able to create such a mechanism to hold that money. And so, I think getting an alternative to the pooled fund will be a first order of priority.

Second, the U.N. plays an incredibly important role, not just in terms of getting stuff across the border, but in terms of coordina-

tion. And so we are going to have to build a coordination mechanism that can step in and do some of that. That is going to be a difficult and challenging task, but it can be done. And I think it may be possible to keep the U.N. at least in a transition phase moving out of—if the resolution is vetoed, I think the U.N. can go into a transition moment where it helps to buildup and hand off some sort of transition coordination role to NGO's that are leaving behind.

There has been tremendous pressure on NGO's, international NGO's, in Turkey with respect to their aid operation. And so, I think we are going to need some diplomatic pressure from the U.S. Government vis—vis the Turkish Government, to the extent it is possible, or outreach to try to facilitate sort of the expansion of some of the international NGO operations in southern Turkey, which will need to pick up some of the slack.

However, the most important element of this—sorry. Please.

Ms. MANNING. I just wanted to, because I have limited time, I want to move on to another issue.

What is the most significant thing you think the United States, along with its allies and partners, can do to support the long-term resettlement of Syrian refugees in light of the distant possibility that they could actually return successfully to Syria?

Mr. LANG. Great.

So, the last thing I would say, just on the last question, prioritizing assistance to local NGO's really is the heart of the matter. They are the ones that do the hard work every day on the ground in northwest Syria, and they are the essential part of the solution. So, getting more aid to them and starting that now is critical.

With respect to resettlement, we have a couple of engines that do this. One, the U.S., I do think, can step up and do a little bit more and set an example in terms of resettling more Syrian refugees.

Two, in the regions, really arrangements like the Jordan Compact, right, where you trade assistance and economic access, trade access to Europe, for example, for access for Syrian refugees to the work force, to the labor market, that sort of, like, getting a job makes Syrians self-sufficient, with dignity, and is perhaps one of the most important things we can do in terms of expanding their access to the labor market in Turkey, in Lebanon, and in Jordan.

In Lebanon, it is going to be very, very hard, given where we are economically. But I would put a real priority on labor market integration, and also continued education. And whether that is done through the formal system or informally, we need to give Syrian children some light at the end of the tunnel on their future.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you.

My time has expired, Mr. Chair.

I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Ms. Manning.

I am pleased to yield 5 minutes to Mr. Schneider for his questioning.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to our witnesses for joining us today.

It is hard to fathom that we are 11 years into the brutal Syrian conflict, and the U.S. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs found that humanitarian needs in Syria are increasing as donor countries are giving less money in foreign assistance. That was noted in the materials in preparation for this hearing. While the violence may be at a lull in Syria, the economic stress situation is at its worst.

In its February report, the U.N. Secretary General Stated that cross-border operations are a vital lifeline to ensure that aid reaches millions of Syrians desperately in need. I would also like to mention that the U.N. estimates there are 12 million people in Syria that are considered to be food insecure.

I share these snapshots of the realities Syrians face because of the dire humanitarian situation. It is something that is not improving, and so many Syrians are relying, or are dependent on this vital assistance. There are many conflicts across the globe, and we have to do more to help people wherever their needs. But in Syria, the suffering under the Assad regime cannot be forgotten.

And so to that end, a number of questions. I actually spoke to a friend of mine who is at the border of Ukraine in Poland. And he was sharing with me that the impression he got of the role technology is playing in helping manage the crisis, making sure people get the resources that they need, being connected with the agencies that can provide help. And it sparked a question. So, I will share—so I will ask the question of each of the panelists.

Your thoughts of how we can better use technology, provide technological resources to deliver humanitarian assistance to Syrians, and what role Congress might play in helping make sure that assistance, that technology is getting in the right places.

Ms. QADDOUR. I could jump in here, Congressman.

Just briefly—

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Please.

Ms. QADDOUR [continuing]. Since I mentioned this in one of my—in my recommendations and in my statement. There is absolutely a lot to be done in terms of education and extending education programs: primary, secondary, even some college and university degrees of Syrians in north Syria that are cutoff from, you know, the institutions that used to be under Assad, you know, under the control of the Assad government.

Many of those children are out of school. They are at risk for all kinds of exploitation. But, you know, we can work a lot more with technological companies. Now there is, you know, WiFi, et cetera, is being extended across from the Turkish border. There is more that can be done in the northeast but allowing education programs to flourish, you know.

And even kids in Assad-held areas, you know, do and can access some online programs. And I think that we can find cooperative ways to work with USAID to make sure that children across all parts of Syria can access sustainable and formal education programs. I think that should definitely be a priority for us.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Great. Thank you.

Mr. Lang, any thoughts on the ways we can deploy technology and how Congress might help?



Mr. LANG. Sure. And technology has been absolutely essential to supplying sort of cash transfers to refugees living in Jordan and other locations in the region. This has been a tool, right, that has actually sort of facilitated a much more efficient form of cash transfer and involves iris scan technology, and it allows aid to sort of be boutique and speaks to the nature of the need that the individual has very specifically.

In addition, technology is increasingly playing a very important role with access to the labor market, right? There are a number of firms that are getting involved in helping markets clear in terms of getting Syrians access to jobs. They have done it a number of different places in Europe and elsewhere, and sort of upping the game that technology plays and the tech companies play in helping facilitate job matching and skill transfer in the regional host countries, I think, would be an exceptional opportunity.

And, finally, education. Again, for in the overstressed systems where we have in Jordan, in Lebanon, et cetera, where there are now two phases to classes, right, in the morning and in the afternoon, to try to get refugee children in, facilitating access to technology, and using those tools to improve Syrian children's opportunity and access to education are a big part of the way forward.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Great. Thank you.

And Mr. Rayburn.

Mr. RAYBURN. I think the northwest does not get enough attention, Congressman. We have given—over the last few years we have given a lot of interest and focus on the northeast because the Defeat ISIS campaign is there at the northwest. We essentially zeroed out a lot of U.S. assistance funding to the northwest. It is time to rebalance that. The northwest has more people and more territory than the country of Lebanon in the liberated territories of the northwest, and it is time for the United States to take focused interest in that.

I would suggest Congress engage with the State Department to reopen the regional embassy office Gazientep, move the START team there so they can have better visibility on assistance and technological deployment into northwest Syria. And that is a part of countering Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and those groups. There—which we are not competing against—there are millions of people there who hate Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, hate al-Qaeda, hate ISIS. But they get no assistance from us the way that our allies in the northeast do.

So, I think it is long overdue to have a relook at the way the United States engages with the northwest.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you.

And I now have the “up” arrow on the timer which either means I have unlimited time or my time is up. I am guessing it is the latter.

I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Schneider.

Great. I will yield myself 5 minutes for additional time as I may need.

Thank you very much to all of the witnesses. This is a really, really important conversation.

I want to just focus on a couple of things. This has gone the way a congressional hearing should go. The conversation was specific and detailed, and my colleagues were well-informed, and our witnesses are knowledgeable and do so much to help this horrific situation.

But I want to try to make this—I want to take a step back and suggest that half a million Syrians having been slaughtered, and over 12 million displaced, is the equivalent of over 9 million Americans being killed, and nearly 250 million Americans being displaced.

We have a tendency, especially over time, especially over 11 years, to continue to focus on the specifics, sometimes losing sight—because the day to day is so terrible, sometimes losing sight, I think, of the enormity of the atrocities wrought on Syria by Bashar al-Assad.

And so, I have two questions: The first question is, you have laid out—and, again, I am so grateful to our witnesses, not just for being here but for your thought leadership and the work that you do on the ground. You have laid out a lot of specific steps that we can take to ensure that aid can be provided to address the gender issues. There is just a lot that you laid out.

Here is the question: How do we continue—first, how do we get enough of a commitment to actually have the resources to do it? I think earlier 28 percent of the refugee plan was funded. Then how do we actually get it paid, because thus far this year that number is zero? That is question one.

And I will open that under to any of you.

Who has thoughts?

Mr. LANG. Mr. Chairman, I can jump in for a second.

The United States has done an extraordinary amount in terms of the, you know, the funding and the leadership, right, in no small part due to Congress in the kind of response that we have offered both inside Syria for the humanitarian response, and then also for the refugees' response externally.

I think part of this has to do with sharing the responsibility, and marshalling others to do more as well. The Europeans have spent a tremendous amount of money, particularly in Turkey, right? And so I think there is a question about how do you sort of divide—the Europeans had, like, a 5-year program or a 6-year program for, in essence, trading certain migration protocols for assistance. Now we could have a discussion about whether or not that was the right thing to do from a protection standpoint, but largely, it seems to have held.

At the moment there are only about another 1/1–2 years of assistance in that pipeline. So, I think trying to encourage our European allies, especially as Ukraine comes online, to take the long view, and to look at making a longer-term commitment in the coming years, one that we can similarly match in countries like Jordan, and then countries like Lebanon which are going to need a tremendous amount of help.

In addition, I would posit that there are certain, you know, for example, Gulf allies who, whether or not—I mean, one of the sort of externalities of the situation in Ukraine are going to be an increase in the amount of money that is going to be made on certain

oil markets. And I think it might be an opportunity for some of our Gulf allies to step up and stand shoulder to shoulder with us in getting assistance to refugee populations in the region, but then also, potentially, inside of Syria for humanitarian assistance.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thanks.

Yes, yes.

Mr. RAYBURN. Congressman, I think it is about U.S. leadership, to be honest with you. I mean, my experience as the Syria envoy was that when we showed a commitment, even if it was not a maximal commitment compared to previous years, when we showed a continued commitment, others fell in line. That was seed money. And others came—others came to where we would lead them. We have the convening authority, the convening example.

So, it really is about being active. That is why I think it is so important. I wish the Administration would appoint a senior diplomat to fill that envoy role, to show leadership.

And I think also that diplomat could take the lead in engaging the Gulf countries, as Mr. Lang mentioned, to up their contribution as well. We had a difficult time with that during the Trump Administration. That was mainly because of the Turkey-Gulf rift. I think those things are improving now. There may be an opening there.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thanks.

And Ms. Shawky, I think you had wanted to say something.

Ms. SHAWKY. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I only wanted to add that we are deeply grateful for the investments the United States has made, and continues to make in global development and humanitarian response, and the global response to COVID as well.

And we, as an international confederation of CARE partners across the world, we are actively engaging governments throughout the world in both wealthy nations and in the global south. And we consistently urge wealthy nations to contribute their fair share to global efforts. And we also seek our best to push governments in the global south to adopt policy changes that will create systematic transformational change for communities who face poverty and injustice. And, of course, in the forefront of this discussion is the Syrian people.

Thank you.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thanks.

And my final question is on the topic of justice and the continued importance of the pursuit of justice and accountability.

How significant is that? As we look ahead to the future in Syria, hopefully a future of better for the people of Syria, how significant is that pursuit of justice in holding those accountable for these horrific atrocities responsible?

Ms. QADDOUR. Congressman, I will jump in here if you do not mind.

Absolutely. I mean, I think accountability is going to be about most importance in the coming years. You have Syrian doctors and nurses and humanitarian workers that have been documenting all kinds of crimes that have taken place across Syria for the last decade. We have it. The IIIM has been part of this process. The Commission of Inquiry has been, you know, a part of this process.

You have many Syrian and international legal organizations that have kept dossiers of chemical weapons used, of attacks on hospitals, of attacks on schools. And I think right now it is really important. I mean, we have seen only a handful of trials across Europe, universal jurisdiction trials.

But I think with what we are seeing now in Russia and the, you know, the submission to the ICC, and the potential opening of inquiries into Russia's crimes in the Ukraine, this offers us a really important moment, and also a responsibility to not just hold Russia accountable for what it has done in Ukraine, which is justified, but also to widen that dossier and to look at—you have some of these same Russian generals that were involved both in crimes committed in the Ukraine and Syria that were dropping bombs on both populations. And they should be held accountable for both of those crimes so that the victims can be treated equally by, you know, a court of law.

Mr. DEUTCH. Ms. Qaddour, thank you to you and Ms. Shawky, Mr. Lang, and Mr. Rayburn. We are most grateful for your papers in this hearing today. This is a really difficult time for the world. But the unity that we—the—as those with shared values stand together against Putin's aggression and attacks on Ukraine, we have to continue to maintain that unity. And that applies to standing with the people of Ukraine, and it applies to remembering the people of Syria, just as we have over the past 11 years.

We will work to ensure humanitarian assistance is provided. We will work to ensure that justice is ultimately meted out. And we will do that throughout the whole of this government, both the Administration and the U.S. Congress, and I know from dedicated leaders, activists, and NGO's that all of you represent. Thanks very much.

And I will remind the members that if you have additional questions, you can ask witnesses to please respond to them in writing. And I would ask my colleagues that any witness questions for the hearing record be submitted to the subcommittee clerk within 5 business days.

And with that and without objection, the hearing is adjourned. Thanks again.

[Whereupon, at 4:25 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

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

**Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism**

**Ted Deutch (D-FL), Chair**

March 16, 2022

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held virtually by the Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism via Cisco WebEx (and available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>):

**DATE:** Wednesday, March 16, 2022

**TIME:** 3:00 p.m., EST

**SUBJECT:** 11 Years of War: The Humanitarian Impact of the Ongoing Conflict in Syria

**WITNESSES:** Ms. Jomana Qaddour  
Head of the Syria Project  
Atlantic Council

Mr. Hardin Lang  
Vice President for Programs and Policy  
Refugees International

Ms. Nirvana Shawky  
Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa  
CARE

Mr. Joel Rayburn  
Fellow  
New America Foundation  
(Former Special Envoy for Syria, U.S. Department of State)

\*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

**By Direction of the Chair**

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## COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism HEARING

Day Wednesday Date 3-16-2022 Room Cisco Webex

Starting Time 10:05 a.m. Ending Time 11:25 a.m.

Recesses ☐ (\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_ ) (\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_ ) (\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_ ) (\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_ ) (\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_ ) (\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_ )

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*Chairman Theodore E. Deutch*

Check all of the following that apply:

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### TITLE OF HEARING:

*11 Years of War: The Humanitarian Impact of the Ongoing Conflict in Syria*

### SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

*See Attached*

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

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

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

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

*SFR - Rep. Connolly*

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE \_\_\_\_\_

or

TIME ADJOURNED \_\_\_\_\_

Clear Form

Note: If listing additional witnesses not included on hearing notice, be sure to include title, agency, etc.

Subcommittee Staff Associate

WHEN COMPLETED: Please print for subcommittee staff director's signature and make at least one copy of the signed form. A signed copy is to be included with the hearing/markup transcript when ready for printing along with a copy of the final meeting notice (both will go into the appendix). The signed original, with a copy of the final meeting notice attached, goes to full committee. An electronic copy of this PDF file may be saved to your hearing folder, if desired.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
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## STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD FROM REPRESENTATIVE CONNOLLY

**“11 Years of War: The Humanitarian Impact of the Ongoing Conflict in Syria”**  
**House Foreign Affairs Committee**  
**Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism**  
**3:00 PM, Wednesday, March 16, 2022**  
**Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)**

Eleven years of war have displaced half Syria’s pre-war population. 6.9 million internally displaced people. 5.7 million Syrian refugees in neighboring countries. More than 600,000 Syrians buried by their loved ones, including countless civilians, women, and children. 14.6 million Syrians in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. Tens of billions of dollars invested in humanitarian assistance, with even more desperately needed. This is where we are after eleven years of war in Syria. While ISIS no longer controls Syrian territory, Islamic State fighters continue to operate as an insurgency and earlier this year carried out a significant attack against a prison in al-Hasakah in Northeast Syria. We need no further proof that the international strategy to bring humanitarian relief to Syria has failed and must change course if we want to prevent another eleven years of war and suffering.

The already dire humanitarian situation in Syria has tragically worsened over the past few years. The World Food Program cites more than 90 percent of Syrians live below the poverty line, and more than half of the population food insecure, an increase of 4.5 million people in the last year alone. Syria’s infrastructure remains in a state of collapse, with electricity at 15 percent capacity of what it was prior to the start of the conflict in 2011. We read in horror as we learned of, in violation of international humanitarian law, the bombing over 350 medical facilities, mostly by the Assad regime. The broader crisis has resulted in poor access to healthcare and 50% of Syria’s healthcare workforce leaving the country since the conflict began in March of 2011.

While there is little dispute that the humanitarian situation is deteriorating, the fractured territorial, political and administrative landscape, complicates the international community’s capacity to both rebuild Syria and provide urgent humanitarian relief. Unfathomably, the UN Office of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has found that as needs have increased inside Syria, donor countries are decreasing their contributions of foreign assistance. The United States must work with its allies to make sure multilateral assistance programs, like the U.N. Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), are fully funded and exert robust accountability. For FY22, HRP has request for \$4.2 billion to reconstruct infrastructure, protect civilian education and health care facilities, and provide for basic necessities such as water, sewage, and electricity. The United States must play a central role in ensuring allies and partners meet their prior contribution levels to provide basic humanitarian necessities to those most vulnerable to see overall improvements in the humanitarian situation.

If the last eleven years can serve as a lesson, we know the humanitarian catastrophe in Syria requires a complex, multipronged, and multilateral approach to lead the Syrian people to a better future. For the fourteen million Syrians living under Assad regime-control, the United States must work with its allies to ensure that U.S. funded aid gets to those that need it the most, including women and children. As the administration works within the confines of the United Nations to reach a lasting a political settlement pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 2254, they must also advocate for the continuity or expansion of cross-border aid, authorized by U.N. Security Council Resolution 2165. Cross-border aid



remains a crucial avenue for assistance to reach families in Syria without having to be bypass through Damascus, risking diversion by the Assad regime. With a vote at the United Nations Security Council scheduled for July 2022, the administration should already be strategizing how to maintain humanitarian, cross-border corridors.

To attain a lasting peace settlement in Syria, the United States must firmly establish what our end goal in Syria looks like, identify the concrete and measurable steps that will be required to get there, and decide what our policy towards Assad will be moving forward. The administration has said that our policy towards Assad has not changed and that there is “no question” of the United States normalizing relations with the Assad government, while at the same time emphasizing that we have no interest in regime change. We can’t have it both ways, and attempting to has undoubtedly been to our detriment.

We must work with our partners and allies to provide dignity and justice to the Syrian people who have suffered for more than a decade. We can be a beacon of hope for the Syrian people that have been forced to leave their country by increasing the minimum number of refugees our country receives each year and assisting countries hosting Syrian refugees themselves. I was proud to introduce the Lady Liberty Act (H.R. 977) this Congress which would set 125,000 as a minimum for the number of refugees admitted annually. It is time for the United States to ramp up our humanitarian efforts and show the world that we are not indifferent to the grave suffering of the Syrian people.

We can all agree that after eleven years of fighting, the solution to Syria does not lie in more tanks or bullets. The United States must work with its international allies and partners to ensure aid and access is maintained and expanded into Syria. Political negotiations are the only meaningful and realistic effort that will bring long-term relief to millions of desperate Syrian civilians and lasting peace to this war-torn nation. I thank the witnesses for their presence and look forward to hearing their remarks.