

**THE RUSSIAN-SYRIAN CONNECTION:
THWARTING DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST
AND THE GREATER OSCE REGION**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
**COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE**
ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

MARCH 9, 2005

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CONTENTS

MARCH 9, 2005

COMMISSIONERS

	Page
Hon. Sam Brownback, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe	1
Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin, Ranking Member, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe	2

WITNESSES

Walid Phares, Professor, Florida Atlantic University and Senior Fellow, Foundation for the Defense of Democracies	4
Farid N. Ghadry, President, Reform Party of Syria	7
Entifadh K. Qanbar, Special Envoy and Spokesperson, United Iraqi Alliance ..	9
Steven Emerson, Executive Director, The Investigative Project	16
Ilan Berman, Vice President for Policy, American Foreign Policy Council	18

APPENDICES

Prepared statement of Hon. Sam Brownback, Chairman	26
Prepared statement of Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin, Ranking Member	28
Prepared statement of Walid Phares	29
Prepared statement of Farid N. Ghadry	33
Prepared statement of Steven Emerson	35
Prepared statement of Ilan Berman	47

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MARCH 9, 2005

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE
WASHINGTON, DC

The Commission met in room 225, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, DC, at 1 p.m., Hon. Sam Brownback, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding.

Commissioners present: Hon. Sam Brownback, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; and Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin, Ranking Member, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Witnesses present: Walid Phares, Professor, Florida Atlantic University, Senior Fellow, Foundation for the Defense of Democracies; Farid N. Ghadry, President, Reform Party of Syria; Entifadh K. Qanbar, Special Envoy and Spokesperson, United Iraqi Alliance; Steven Emerson, Executive Director, The Investigative Project; and Ilan Berman, Vice President for Policy, American Foreign Policy Council.

**HON. SAM BROWNBACK, CHAIRMAN,
COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

Sen. BROWNBACK. The hearing will come to order. Thank you all for joining us today.

I am sorry for running late. I had another prior commitment I had to fulfill. Today's hearing will focus on troubling connections between Russia and Syria, and the implications for a transition to a truly independent, sovereign and democratic Lebanon.

This hearing will also explore the destabilizing role that Syria and its nexus to terrorist organizations play in the security of surrounding countries, such as Iraq and Israel.

Since the assassination of the former Lebanon prime minister last month a remarkable thing has happened in that country. As a result of popular pressure by the people of Lebanon in public protests at Martyrs' Square, reminiscent of what happened in Kiev, the pro-Syrian government in Beirut resigned last week. Based on meetings this weekend, Syrian President Al-Assad has announced preliminary plans for the withdrawal of Syrian troops by March 31.

While these are positive developments, actions, not words will dictate success, especially given nearly 30 years of Syrian entrenchment in Lebanon.

Yesterday's large pro-Syria demonstration in Beirut is a reminder that sizable elements in Lebanon are determined to prolong Syria's domination of that country. That orchestrated event underscores the importance of keeping the pressure on Syria to comply fully with UN Resolution 1559.

The pro-democracy "Cedar Revolution" is a call for freedom, sovereignty and independence. By contrast, what does Syria have to offer: authoritarianism, subjugation and dependence.

The Lebanese people have a clear choice.

This hearing will help connect the dots, if you will, between key actors in the region and how the United States can best support courageous individuals in Lebanon who are saying, "Enough, we want to take back our country."

For the record, I would like to point out that both Lebanon and Syria were once associated with the OSCE as Non-Participating Mediterranean States.

I just returned from Iraq about two weeks ago. I would underscore that how we address these issues is not just an academic matter. Given Syria's support for the insurgency in Iraq, they have profound implications for the lives of our men and women serving in Iraq.

The Lebanese people themselves have suffered under Syria's long history of supporting such insurgencies and terrorist organizations.

The Bekaa Valley has long been the base for Hezbollah training camps. After September 11 and the defeat of the Taliban, the Bekaa Valley is now the major location for terrorist training camps.

What role has Russia played in all this? For years, Russia and Syria have had what President Putin referred to recently as a special relationship. Russia has agreed to provide Syria with an unspecified number of Igla low-altitude surface-to-air missiles capable of targeting most major Israeli cities.

According to experts, the SA-18s can easily be dismantled into single man portable air defense systems. The sale appears on track despite objections from the United States, and Russia's commitments as an OSCE participating State not to support terrorist regimes.

Warming relations between Moscow and Damascus are expected to lead to a series of arms deals for Syria and further transfers to Hezbollah and to others.

These are examples of Russian economic and military support for a regime that sponsors terrorism, including attacks on U.S. troops.

These and other issues will be discussed at today's hearing and are of paramount importance.

We have an excellent panel to discuss these topics.

Before we go to that, I would like to go to my colleague, Congressman Cardin, for an opening statement.

**HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, RANKING MEMBER,
COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

Mr. CARDIN. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate very much you holding this hearing.

Syria represents a major challenge for all of us. They support terrorism. They are certainly counterproductive in the peace process in the Middle East. They certainly present a problem for the

freedom of Iraq. They clearly are interfering with Lebanon's opportunity to control its own country.

That alone is troublesome, but the relationship between the Russian Federation and Syria presents a particular concern to this Commission because the Russian Federation is a member State of the OSCE.

So I think this hearing is extremely important.

Yesterday, we had a chance to talk to the Chairman-in-Office, and we had a chance to go over many of the challenges, including some of the problems with the Russian Federation on many of the principal objectives of the OSCE.

Clearly, its relationship with Syria is a matter of interest to this Commission.

I thank you for holding this hearing so that we can get more information so we can try to play a constructive role in dealing with Syria and dealing with the larger issues of peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Chairman, as I said to you earlier, I regret that I will not be able to stay for the hearing, because the Ways and Means Committee that I serve on has hearings today on the Social Security plans and I need to be back over on the House side.

But I want you to know how much interest we all have in the subject matter of this hearing.

Thank you.

Sen. BROWNBACK. Thank you, Congressman.

I am delighted you could come here for a little while and appreciate you doing that.

Have the panel come forward, if you would.

I will introduce each of you and then we will have presentations by each and questions.

First, I would introduce Walid Phares, professor of Middle East politics at Florida Atlantic University. Since September 2001, Dr. Phares has been a fellow with the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, serving as an expert on terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, and jihad movements.

I am delighted to have you here, and it is good to see you again, from my days on the Foreign Relations Committee and seeing you there.

Next, I would introduce Farid Ghadry, who is originally from Syria. He emigrated to Lebanon due to political turmoil in Syria. After completing school, his family moved to the United States and settled in the Washington area. In October 2001, Mr. Ghadry and several other American Syrians began the Reform Party of Syria.

I am delighted to have you join us here today.

Next, Entifadh Qanbar, who served in the Iraqi air force during the Iraq-Iran War from 1980 to 1985, was arrested by Iraqi military security in 1987 for suspected activities against Saddam Hussein's regime. He currently serves as special envoy for the United Iraqi Alliance and as spokesperson for the Iraqi National Congress in Baghdad.

I am delighted to have you join us here today as well.

Gentlemen, your full statements will be placed into the record. You are welcome to summarize if you would like to.

We will run the time clock at 7 minutes to give you just an idea of time frame. That is not a hard and fast.

I do appreciate your willingness to step forward, to speak out. That can be a dangerous thing to do even in this country, and I am very appreciative that you would do it.

Dr. Phares?

**WALID PHARES, PROFESSOR, FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY
AND SENIOR FELLOW, FOUNDATION FOR THE DEFENSE OF
DEMOCRACIES**

Dr. PHARES. Mr. Senator, thank you for this historic opportunity you are granting us to address the very serious issue of the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. One of the ingredients today which is helping the Syrian occupation to resist the application of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559, and that is the support by the Russian Federation in terms of weapons, in terms of support and intelligence as well, to the Syrian occupation.

Also I am the Secretary General of the World Lebanese Cultural Union.

I have been mandated by the international Lebanese diaspora around the world to visit the United Nations Security Council. I did so over the past 2 days.

I will be more than happy to brief you as well within the 7 minutes of what we said, basically, to the Russian Ambassador as well, and what we heard. This would be the most recent statement I obtained in this regard.

Mr. Chairman, the Syrian occupation of Lebanon started officially when the former President of Syria, Hafez Al-Assad, declared in July 1976 that he entered Lebanon on his own will, with his own intention, and deployed his forces gradually in the Lebanese territories, fighting one militia then the other.

Finally, in 1990, after 14 years, actually, of conflict with a variety of groups in Lebanon during the civil war and after the civil war, Syrian forces in Lebanon were able to storm the last free enclave in October 1990, ending the war physically by terminating their opponents.

Indeed, at that time, the Syrian forces have been always supported strategically, supply of weapons, but also in terms of intelligence and Muhabarat relationship with the then-Soviet Union.

So I will consider that the assistance that Moscow provided to Syria, to Damascus, is as old as its intervention in Lebanon, as Syria's intervention in Lebanon, from 1976 to 1990. Therefore, the supplying of weapons, the supplying of other ways and means to maintain that occupation of Lebanon stretched from 1976 to 1990.

Now, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, one would have imagined that the Russian Federation, the inheritant of the Soviet Union, would basically cease its strategic relationship with Syria, which was based on the Communist Party vision of a strategic relationship with the Baath Party.

In fact, it did not cease. The supply of weapons continued to flow to the regime in Damascus throughout the 1990s, as many of my colleagues will testify to in the second panel about the type of weapons that Damascus received from the Russian Federation for

about 14 years until 2004, end of 2004, as all reports have indicated.

Now, the Russian weapons are being used by the Syrian Baathist regime in a variety of ways that contradict the application of human rights in a variety of ways that basically ends up in support to terrorist organizations. I will mention two and focus on one.

The fact that the Syrian regime, according to the Iraqi Government and other reports, has been involved in supplying weapons, training and allowing jihadists to cross either from Lebanon or coming into Syria into Iraq into the Sunni Triangle is, in fact, that to supply of weapons to those forces is in total contradiction with all agreements by the OSCE.

No. 2, the fact that the Syrian regime has the headquarters of Hamas and Islamic Jihad and other organizations based in Damascus—that these organizations conduct terrorist operations against Israel while claiming those press releases out of Damascus—that also constitutes an act of terror, which is basically endorsed by the Syrian regime, because they do allow these organizations to operate out of Damascus.

So if the Russian Federation supplies weapons and intelligence to the Syrian regime and the Syrian regime, in turn, sustains and supports terrorist activities in Gaza, the West Bank, and in Israel, that constitutes, basically, another breach.

But, yet, the most important one is what Syria's regime is doing in Lebanon has been doing not just since 1976 but even after the Taif agreement, which was signed in 1989, supported by the international community, by the United States, in virtue of which, the Syrian regime committed to withdraw from Lebanon as of 1992.

Instead, and using the power which was granted by the arms provided by Russia to occupy Lebanon—tanks, artillery, weapons used by infantrymen, and also the weapons used by the terrorists networks of Hezbollah and the local branch of the Baath Party of Syria.

All of that was used by Syria to impose its own military occupation of Lebanon.

Because of that it imposed on the Lebanese Government, in August 1991, a military treaty, brotherhood, cooperation agreement in virtue of which—which is the most dangerous, Mr. Senator—the Syrian command can, at any time of its choosing, at its own discretion, deploy its forces in any point of the Lebanese territories and by using its own armed forces.

It has been applied between 1991 until the speech of President Bashar Al-Assad, 3 days ago.

Now, in this speech, the President of Syria said that he is redeploying some of those troops from some areas of Lebanon into other areas of Lebanon. He is moving furniture from one place to the other into the Bekaa Valley.

He was clear on that second point when he stated that his decision to withdraw from Lebanon will be made after he meets with the Lebanese Government, which is under his own control.

That would be a reminder of how the Soviet Union and the Soviet satellite governments used to coordinate the removal or the redeployment of Soviet forces in Eastern Europe, which means that

the control and command is in Moscow. In this case, it is in Damascus.

Because of that, we do consider, as of today, that the Syrian regime has not abided by Resolution 1559.

Furthermore, Mr. Senator, in the same speech, he called on what he defined as the allies of Syria to start resisting and obstructing the actual implementation of international decisions to withdraw from Lebanon.

We only saw yesterday a demonstration—which I will be more than happy to analyze for you if needed—of Hezbollah, the ally of Damascus, in which they showed their obstruction and opposition to the application of international law in Lebanon.

The first conclusion, Mr. Senator, is that if a great power like the Russian Federation continues to arm and supply a regime such as the Baathist regime of Syria, and that Baathist regime is involved in terrorist support in Iraq, in Israel, occupation of Lebanon, support of Hezbollah, support of organizations in Lebanon—which basically are located within the Palestinian camps—and more importantly, as my colleague may detail, using these weapons to oppress the Syrian people, the peak of that oppression using Soviet weapons then, Russian weapons today, was the oppression of the Syrian city of Hama. This leads me to the conclusion, Mr. Senator, that the Russian Federation is in full contradiction with its commitment with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. It needs—and I do recommend that it should cease its support of the Syrian armed forces, its supply of all kinds of weapons to the Syrians, and it needs, actually, to tell Damascus that it should comply with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559.

I have met with seven members of the Security Council yesterday and the day before. I have submitted also a memorandum which I will be glad to submit to you as well.

On behalf of the Lebanese diaspora, 12 million Lebanese or people from Lebanese dissent around the world, reflecting also the opinion of large segments of the Lebanese civil society from all communities, Christian, Sunni, Jews and many moderate elements from the Shiite community, which is now under the deterrent factor and influence of Hezbollah—but all of that influence is caused by the fact that Hezbollah is armed.

Many of those weapons are supplied by Syria or by the depots in Iran, most of which are coming from Russia.

I do conclude, Mr. Senator, that I think the U.S. Congress, the U.S. administration, through their bilateral relationship with the Russian Federation, must tell the Russian Government that the best way to see stability in Lebanon and Syria—actually to see a future, good relationship between the two peoples of Lebanon and Syria—is to cease the supply of weapons to Syria until Syria complies completely with Resolution 1559.

The ambassador I met yesterday told me that is what is the intention of the Russian Government, but all the documents that we have till yesterday indicated that the Russian Federation was not yet ready to cross that line and tell the Syrians that they should withdraw from Lebanon.

Sen. BROWNBACK. Dr. Phares, thank you very much.

Mr. Ghadry, thank you for joining us.

FARID N. GHADRY, PRESIDENT, REFORM PARTY OF SYRIA

Mr. GHADRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Honorable members of the Helsinki Commission, ladies and gentlemen, it is with great honor that I stand before this distinguished Commission to talk about Syria.

We thank you for giving us this opportunity to present to you why democracy is being thwarted under the oppressive regime of Al-Assad. I would like to take this opportunity and analyze to you why the Russian-Syrian relationship is so strong, and we believe it is because there is no democracy in Syria. I would like to discuss that with you if I may.

Yesterday, March 8, marked the 43rd anniversary of the rise of the Baath Party in Syria. As a Syrian-American who has a keen interest in helping Syria become free and peaceful, I stand before you seeking to portray how much Syrians aspire to achieve democracy.

Forty-three years of an oppressive regime has taken its toll on the society to such an extent that continued Russian interference is expected to continue.

Today, Syrians live in poverty, unable to educate their children. To make ends meet, Syrians are forced to put their children to work to help with additional wages that can hardly sustain a family. This is very important for us Syrians, for this Commission to realize why there is terrorism in that part of the world.

Costs of living are such that the price of two pounds of meat is equal to 10 percent of an average Syrian's salary, which does not exceed \$100 a month according to the World Bank.

Allow me to share with you a snapshot of the Al-Assad regime in Syria today.

Starting March 8, 1963, and beyond, the Baath Party imposed a series of emergency laws that have suppressed the liberties of all Syrians, except the elite. Demonstrations were not and still are not allowed. Anyone who questions, criticizes or defies the regime is arrested, imprisoned, tortured and sometimes killed.

In 1982, the guns of the Al-Assad regime were turned against the innocent Syrian people in the city of Hamad, that leveled the small historical city. When the smoke settled and cleared, up to 30,000 innocent people were massacred.

Over the years, the Al-Assad regime has built the most elaborate drug and counterfeiting operations in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, in addition to terrorism that we all know about, that still feed the intelligence apparatus in both countries, Syria and Lebanon.

It is estimated that 85 percent of Syrian oil is sold directly by agents of the Al-Assad family, with the billions in proceeds distributed between them and the top intelligence officers. These funds belong to the Syrian people and must be returned to help build a better Syria for all of us.

The Al-Assad regime recently struck a deal with Russia to purchase dangerous shoulder-held SA-18 missiles, which dramatically raises the stakes in the Middle East. The SA-18 is capable of downing an aircraft flying at up to 900 miles per hour, so one can only imagine the possibilities if these weapons fall into the wrong hands. I can cite many organizations in the Middle East that would love to have their hands on such weapons.

The Al-Assad regime has been accused of supporting terrorism in Iraq and Lebanon, and given the chance will expand to other countries. The Al-Assad regime encourages hate and enmity against anyone that does not support their ideologies.

If given the chance to think freely, most Syrians will appreciate the United States if it helps bring about their freedom. That is a very, very crucial point to understand. The Syrian people feel that freedom is the single most important element, and they would thank the United States if that freedom is brought upon them.

According to the Syrian Human Rights Committee, the Al-Assad regime in Damascus has caused the killing of about 17,000 Syrian and Lebanese prisoners.

I would like to bring to the attention of this honorable Commission a few names of prisoners of conscience and champions of human rights, accountability and transparency who are still languishing under horrible conditions in Syrian jails today: Riad Seif, member of parliament; Aref Dalilah, economist; Ma'mun al-Homsi, member of parliament; Abdul Aziz Al-Khayer, physician; Habib Issa, a lawyer; Walid Al-Bounni, physician; Mohammad Bashir al-Arab, student leader and a doctor; Mohanad al-Debs, student leader.

They were just sentenced to 3 years hard labor because they had a peaceful sit-in in the University of Aleppo about 8 months ago.

Mahmoud Ammo, Naqman Moubo Ayana, Suleiman Mohammed Ismail, Safwan Eyoum al-Soud, Abdul Aziz Mudlej, Mustapha Omar Dahou, Osama Shreiqi, Riad al-Shawi, Sadon Sheikho, Mahmoud Abou Sader, Mazi Ali Al-Terkawi and Fawaz Tello—there are more than 600 prisoners of conscience in Syrian jails today.

The Assyrians and Caledonians, in addition to other Christian minorities who have lived in Syria long before the birth of Christ, have been forced to emigrate for decades for lack of opportunity, discrimination and suppression of their religious rights.

We appeal to this Commission to understand their plight. Only freedom and democracy can restore their rights and celebrate their contribution to the Syrian society.

Furthermore, the Kurds in Syria have been abused by the Al-Assad regime, their lands confiscated and their culture and language stifled.

We will celebrate this Saturday, March 12, their uprising a year ago against the regime, which culminated in the imprisonment of 2,000 innocent Kurds, many under the age of 18.

We ask the Commission to honor these people for their courage and help free the last 200 Kurds who are still languishing in Syrian jails.

The Al-Assad regime has propagated the notion that the alternative to their rule is Islamic extremism. I am here to dispel this notion and assure you that most Syrians are either secular or Muslim moderates, such as the Grand Mufti Kaftaro followers in Aleppo.

The Muslim Brotherhood would, under normal conditions and free elections in Syria, win 10 to 15 percent of the votes, representing a minority that would be included but not able to impose its will on the rest of the Syrians.

This is exactly the representation they have today in Jordan. We are no different than Jordan.

When Syria is free of the Al-Assad regime, Syria will be peaceful, democratic and embracing of the international community of nations.

The world can no longer afford the policies and practices of the Al-Assad regime.

The Reform Party, with many other Syrian reformist leaders inside the country that we talk to all the time—but I cannot mention their names to protect their identities—are able and willing to help ease Syria to democracy if given the chance.

We trust that this snapshot has given the honorable Commission a picture of the kind of people who are ruling Syria today and why Russia will continue helping them.

I would like to end my statement with a message we received from a democratic Syrian leader inside Syria in which he says, “Please tell the Commission that Syrians are waiting for your help impatiently.”

On behalf of all Syrians, I want to thank you for giving us this opportunity.

Thank you.

Sen. BROWNBACK. I want to thank you for that statement. Again, thank you for being willing to come forward in an open hearing and say it. Those can be dangerous things to do and I appreciate it greatly.

Mr. Qanbar, thank you very much for being here.

**ENTIFADH K. QANBAR, SPECIAL ENVOY AND SPOKESPERSON,
UNITED IRAQI ALLIANCE**

Mr. QANBAR. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. It is a great honor for me to appear before this Commission with such a distinguished group of witnesses. I would like to thank you and the members of the United States Helsinki Commission for giving me this opportunity during my visit here to Washington from Baghdad. I will make a short presentation and then I will welcome your questions. Mr. Chairman, 2 weeks ago, on February 23, the Iraqi people watched Al Iraqiyya, the main Iraqi television channel, broadcast a startling interview with the commander of a terrorist group who had recently been captured inside Iraq. A bearded man dressed in a gray jacket and shirt introduced himself. “My name is Anas Ahmed al-Essa. I live in Aleppo. I am from Syria,” he said. A voice off-camera asked him, “What is your job?”

He replied, “I am a lieutenant in intelligence.”

“Which intelligence?” asked the voice.

“Syrian intelligence,” he replied.

Lieutenant Al-Essa then went on to detail how he had recruited and commanded a terrorist group inside Iraq in order to cause chaos, as he said. “We receive all our instruction from Syrian intelligence,” he stated. He went on to describe how weapons and explosives came to the group from Syria and how he was required to send reports of their attacks back to a colonel in Syrian intelligence.

Lieutenant Al-Essa and his group—which included eight Syrians, 12 Egyptians, 10 Sudanese and a number of Iraqis—were arrested

the day before the Iraqi elections. They were carrying guns, explosives and maps of the voting centers.

Iraqi television had broadcast a number of other interviews with captured Iraqi terrorists who confirmed that they received training in Syria before being sent back to Iraq to kill Iraqis and Americans.

Several captured terrorists stated that they had practiced beheadings on animals in Syria so that they would be able to use the technique on human beings in Iraq.

One terrorist said that a member of his network needed to have completed 10 beheadings in order to be promoted to emir, or group leader.

Mr. Chairman, these televised interviews confirm what we have known for a long time: that Syria is the logistical, financial and training base for the terrorists in Iraq.

The leaders of the Iraqi terror campaign are high-ranking Baathist officials from Saddam Hussein's regime, and all of them take refuge in Syria.

A key leader of the anti-Iraqi forces, Mohammed Yunis Al-Ahmed, is known to travel back and forth across the Syrian border into northern Iraq. Mr. Chairman, we had him in our custody at the Iraqi National Congress in May 2003.

We know from interrogations of senior Baathist prisoners that even Saddam's murderer sons, Uday and Qusay, had been sheltered in Syria before they returned to Iraq to take part in the fight against the coalition forces.

Just last month, General Hassan Zeidan Al Lahaimy, a former commander of the Iraqi army 3rd Corps under Saddam, was arrested crossing the border from Syria with a large amount of cash. He is a high-ranking Baathist and one of the leaders of the terror campaign. Of course, we know that Syria recently handed over Saddam's half-brother, Sabawi, and a number of other senior Baathists who had been sheltering there.

The Baathists in Iraq directed from Syria have made great strides in penetrating the military, police and security services established by the interim government of Iyad Allawi.

Statistics show that as the Baathists and members of Saddam's security forces were integrated into the new Iraqi armed forces by Allawi, attacks against Iraqis and coalition forces have steadily risen, as have U.S. and Iraqi casualties.

The only way to win the war on terror in Iraq is to cut off Baathist support from Syria and expel them from the Iraqi Government and specifically from the security police and army.

Terrorism in Iraq is led by the Baath Party and not by Al Qaida or Abu Musab Zarqawi. Foreign fighters are a minority of the terrorists.

Mr. Chairman, the Baath Party in Iraq and Syria is a racist, fascist organization that takes its inspiration directly from the genocidal ideologies of the 1930s Europe. Baathism has no place in democratic Iraq, because the Baathists do not respect democracy; their goal is power at all costs. The Iraqi people lived under the Baathists' tyranny for 35 years and they have known this well. This is why de-Baathification is overwhelmingly popular in Iraq.

Mr. Chairman, the time has come for the United States and all other democratic countries to list the Baath Party as a terrorist organization.

Thank you.

Sen. BROWNBACK. Thank you, Mr. Qanbar.

Mr. Ghadry, take me through a bit of a lesson on just the origins and developments of the Baathist Party. Could you do that?

Because I have had different people say things to me about this. I was just going—you know, this would be a good chance to just speak to me about its origins and its development, where it came from and how it developed to where it is today.

Mr. GHADRY. Senator, the history of the Baath Party goes back to the late 1920s, early 1930s, when a gentleman by the name of Michel Aflak, who was a Syrian, and another gentleman by the name of Salah a-Din.

Aflak was studying at the Sorbonne in France. And in the early 1930s, he went and visited Germany often. He saw how the German Third Reich was able to galvanize and get the people behind one cause and one dictator.

So we see the roots of most of that teaching of the Baath Party come from illuminations that Mr. Aflak had had during his many visits to Germany.

That is why, as Mr. Qanbar said, their roots go back to that part of the world.

When Mr. Aflak went back to Syria, he started the party in Syria—if I am not mistaken, in the early 1940s he started the party in Syria. The Baath Party just grew and grew from there and in 1963 ascended to power. It ascended to power, became a fixture of Syrian politics.

We had some very high officials in the Syrian Government then in control of key posts that eventually when they ascended to power, the Al-Assad family ascended to power, they were Baathists. And so the Baath Party became the de facto ruler of Syria.

But the roots of it—and that is a key issue to understand—have been mainly cultivated by understanding fascism and understanding what Hitler did in Germany in the early 1930s. And that is why we have problems with this particular party. It has the same ideology.

Kids, when they go through school, they go through the same procedures—similar to a Boy Scout, but the same procedure as the Nazi went through. You would come to a certain point where you are called. You are given a title because you are loyal to a certain ideology. Then as you grow older, you are given a different title and on and on.

So it has very much the same structure and the same psychological aspects to it that attracts the people to it and keeps them loyal to the system.

Today if you want to have work in Syria, you have to be a Baathist. You cannot really obtain any quality of life if you're not a Baathist.

Those who are loyal to the party are given the best jobs, are allowed to travel overseas and on and on. Those who are not, are usually left behind by the system.

So loyalty is a very major issue with the Baath Party. That is how they have been able to really rally the troops around them and the people of Syria around them.

Sen. BROWNBACK. With that history, why would Russia maintain contact and work with the Syrian Baathist Party and government, with that knowledge of that level of history and with their support for terrorism when Russia has had to deal so much with terrorism on its own soil? Why would they maintain that contact?

Mr. QANBAR. Well, Bashar Al-Assad himself is a Baathist. As a matter of fact his titles—he has multiple titles within the Baath hierarchy. But the system—many people will tell you that the Baath Party has drifted away from its real ideology that started, but then more so in Syria because the Al-Assad family became a type of family that was able to, through corruption, truly have the only say in that part—

We also believe that it is a question of really good old money. The Russians want to have some kind of a trading part in the Middle East and they want to take advantage of that relationship. So at the end of the day they do it also for money reasons as well.

Sen. BROWNBACK. I understand. But why would Russia then maintain contact there, having their own fight with the fascists in history, having their own difficulties with terrorist organizations?

Here's a state sponsor of terrorism in Syria. Here's a fascist regime. Why would they do that?

Mr. QANBAR. Because at the end of the day for Russia, it is few issues of interest. Having a foothold in the Middle East back is a very important card that they can play.

The Baath Party is a secular party, and so the Russians feel that there are many common denominators among their ideology and the Baath Party ideology.

We also believe that it is a question of really good old money. The Russians want to have some kind of a trading part in the Middle East and they want to take advantage of that relationship. So at the end of the day they do it also for money reasons as well.

Sen. BROWNBACK. Dr. Phares, let me ask you what a friend of mine of Lebanese descent, a wonderful man, asked me. A number of Lebanese-Americans in this country concerned about Lebanon going back into a civil war situation. I am sure that has been presented to you.

The Syrians were successful, they are removed from the country, they do leave the country, what happens then in Lebanon?

Dr. PHARES. Well, Mr. Senator, it is interesting also to realize historically that those who helped or pushed Lebanon toward civil war were indeed, among others, the Syrian Baathists. They were the ones who, before 1975, have armed organizations such as the Palestinian pro-Baathist Saika and other organizations to move inside Lebanon instigating terror, fighting with the objective of creating the conditions for civil war.

Lebanon has been a democracy since 1920 and again an independent democracy since 1943. But the Syrian Government in general and the Baathist regime in particular have never accepted, actually, the existence of the state of Lebanon as an independent state.

So this is a strategic objective by the Syrians to make sure that the international community will not see Lebanon as viable. The second condition, to tell the world that if they would withdraw from Lebanon, there will be a civil war.

So No. 1, they have created the conditions of this civil war.

No. 2, all indicate, at least since the brutal, savage assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri, but also the attempt to assassinate other members of the Lebanese Government and to send threats against other political leaders—I can just give you quickly a list to tell you, Mr. Senator, that the Syrian Baathists are not targeting one community.

They have assassinated, according to Mr. Walid Joumblatt, his own father, the head of the Socialist Progressive Party in 1977, a Druze. They have assassinated Bashir Gemayel and President-elect Moawad, Christians. They have assassinated Mufti Hassan Khaled and Rafiq al-Hariri, Sunnis. They have also assassinated the head of the Lebanon press corps in the 1980s, Riyad Parar, Shia.

So they do not distinguish between one community and the other. They only make the distinction between those who want an independent Lebanon from all communities and those who are with them.

They do have with them elements from a variety of communities, not just the Hezbollah, who are their stooges. As the Nazis have occupied many countries in Europe and had their own collaborators, the Syrian Baathists have the same in Lebanon.

My conclusion, Mr. Senator, is that what the world has seen and our eyes have seen since the death of Prime Minister Hariri, the emergence in Lebanon of the actual proof that the Lebanese people from all communities are coming together—Martyrs' Square, the Cedar Revolution, is not the impression or expression of one community. You see Christians. You see Sunni. You see Druze. And you see Shia from a variety of communities.

You see even those who fought the civil war, one against the other. You see the Progressive Party on the left; you see the phalangists on the right. And all have one voice. They are not going back to the civil war. They are going forward to a civil society with one objective: to be independent, democratic, multiparty. In the language of post-Iraq liberation, they were so excited to see elections taking place in Iraq. They would want to bring back Lebanon to democracy.

There is not return to civil war. If Syria wants to do a war, it may be using Hezbollah or others, but everybody in Lebanon understands that once the Syrians are out, Lebanese can sit down around a table and take off with a democratic Lebanon.

Sen. BROWNBACK. How do you square what took place yesterday and over the last couple of weeks?

When I was on the way back from Iraq and in Germany I saw the initial pictures coming from Lebanon of people protesting for a democratic Lebanon and using the word "Enough" as we have heard in the Ukraine and as we have heard in Georgia. It was quite inspiring.

Then yesterday, according to press accounts, a much larger set of demonstrations in support of Syrian occupation and Hezbollah. How do you explain? How do you square that?

Dr. PHARES. Mr. Senator, we have to understand what we see, not just see it and then draw conclusions.

If you remember, in the case of East Timor, the entire country of East Timor had a population of 700,000. The largest demonstration they could put was 50,000. But those who were against the independence of East Timor, because of the support then by a huge nation of more than 200 million, was put on the ground in East Timor as much as the population of East Timor, more than 500,000.

One has to understand who is demonstrating and in which condition. The free Lebanese democratic movement is demonstrating not in Sweden but in Beirut under occupation by the Syrian army under the threat of Hezbollah and under the threat of other terrorist organizations.

So to be able to muster and to put so many thousands of people, despite these threats and despite the fact that the Lebanese army is still under the control of the Syrian army—so if you have 50,000 of the free Lebanese who demonstrate, they will be speaking on behalf of hundreds of thousands if they have the liberty.

To give you an example, Mr. Senator, when the pope went to Lebanon in the mid-1990s, and since the pope was not a political figure, 500,000 were meeting him in what is Martyrs' Square today.

Now, the Hezbollah demonstration is a march. It is almost an organized march by three regimes: Iran, Syria, and the Lebanese regime.

Just to give you an example, which is sound and factual report, there were 500 buses unloading Syrian workers who exist in Lebanon because of the open borders controlled by the Syrians and by the Syrian regime. As my colleague mentioned, yesterday was the Baath Party celebration. It was holiday, so they brought tens of thousands of Syrians.

I could show you footage of interviews made by Arab networks with members of the demonstration speaking in Syrian accents, saying that, "We are from Syria and coming to help."

Also, Palestinian camps had been opened to this demonstration.

One must say and admit that, yes, Hezbollah has tens of thousands of members, that it is the party of the regime. It is supported by Iran, \$40 million a year. Obviously, as it was mentioned, if you have a regime organizing a demonstration, everybody who's profiting from the regime will take to the streets. But let them do the demonstration every day, it will be impossible, because they have taken every single person in the areas of control of Hezbollah who had a job while democracy movement will continue.

As it was the case in East Timor, at the end of the day, everybody in Lebanon would rally to the democracy movement.

Sen. BROWNBACK. Mr. Qanbar, thank you for being here and serving the way you have.

You call for us to identify the Baathist regime as a terrorist regime. When you stated—I do not know if there would be agreement in the panel to do that.

Is there among other panel members—

Mr. GHADRY. I would agree, Senator.

Sen. BROWNBACK [continuing]. To that notion that the basis, in fact, exists there for calling and establishing and identifying the Baathist regime as a terrorist party?

Mr. GHADRY. Senator, what do you call sending Syrians to kill Americans and innocent Iraqis in Iraq today? If that is not terrorism, what is?

Dr. PHARES. Senator, there are public statements made by the entire apparatus of the Syrian Baathist regime in encouragement of martyrdom operations, which is the equivalent of terrorist organizations. I mean, public knowledge would define by itself the Baathist regime in Syria as terrorists.

Sen. BROWNBACK. Mr. Qanbar, you've served in the Iraqi air force. Did you then witness a very close relationship in the military between Syria and Iraq?

Mr. QANBAR. At that time, there was a very tense relations between Syria and Iraq. The Baath Party split in the 1960s. One division of the Baath Party ruled Iraq and the other division—just like what happened between, let's say, China and Russia, the Soviet Union. The division was about tactics and power. It had nothing to do with ideology.

We suffered from Syrian terrorism even under Saddam. Syrians are very well known—or Syrian intelligence, I should say, in their mastering car bomb. I have met some Iraqi intelligence officers, after the fall of the regime in Iraq and the liberation of Iraq, who told me we were looking up to their skill and to them they had the best skills in the whole world in making car bombs.

I would like to add another thing: The Baath Party is much older in its terrorism than many current organizations that are considered as terrorist organizations, such as the Islamic Jihad and others. One more thing, the Baath Party, I can guarantee you, is the richest terrorist organization ever in history. They have billions of dollars they could use for terrorism. Every high-ranking Baathist we have arrested we found with him several million dollars of cash in his deposit at home.

They have more money than any terrorist organization I have heard of or read about or known about.

I think the Baath Party is going to continue to hire other terrorist organizations, front other terrorist organizations to cover themselves and use this cover to terrorize the world and terrorize the Middle East.

I personally grew up in an area in Baghdad which is known to be one of the forts of the Baathists in Baghdad. One of the most known features about Baathists, they can change colors and they can change their politics to fit the agenda of the day. Baathists who were wearing green uniforms, just before April 9, before the liberation of Iraq, they are now wearing short dishdashas (white Arabic dress and short which is how Wahhabis dressed) and are growing beards. They are calling themselves Wahhabis.

In the mid-1970s, Baathists became almost Communists, because they made alliance with the Communist Party. Then they killed all the Communists.

I think it is a very dangerous organization.

Sen. BROWNBACk. I want to thank the panel for being here. If you have further additions to add to the record, I would be happy to receive those.

Mr. Ghadry, I would like to put the names of the individuals that you have cited into the Congressional Record of those that are in prison and to put that forward, of individuals that are in jail now that we would like to see out.

Dr. Phares, yours, the ones who have been assassinated, to put that forward as well.

Dr. PHARES. Thank you, Senator.

Sen. BROWNBACk. Thank you, gentlemen, very much.

The second panel will include Steven Emerson. He has briefed Congress many times on terrorist financing and on operational networks of Al Qaida, Hamas, Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad. He serves as executive director of the Investigative Project, gathering intelligence data on Islamic and Middle Eastern terrorist groups and co-authored five books on this topic. Ilan Berman is vice president for policy of the Washington-based American Foreign Policy Council. Mr. Berman is an adjunct professor at the American University School of International Service; serves as editor of the Journal of International Security Affairs, and is a member of the reconstituted Committee on the Present Danger.

Gentlemen, thank you very much for joining me today.

Mr. Emerson, I am looking forward to your testimony.

**STEVEN EMERSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
THE INVESTIGATIVE PROJECT**

Mr. EMERSON. Thank you very much, Chairman Brownback. I applaud you for hearing today's hearing especially about increasingly how Russia has played a very dangerous role in undermining the movement for democracy in the Middle East. Russia has helped empower and strengthen a regime that is allowing terrorist groups to carry out murderous attacks on civilians in Israel and on American forces in Iraq.

In one of the most brazen acts of empowering a rogue regime with blood on its hands, Russia announced, only two days after Syrian intelligence murdered former Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri weeks ago, that it would upgrade Syria's air missile systems with the sale of SA-18, the sophisticated shoulder-fire anti-aircraft missiles that pose a dire threat to almost all Israeli airspace, as well as to American flights in Iraq.

Today, as positive signs of change seem to be sweeping some parts of the Middle East, Syria remains impervious to the calls for a democracy, while it continues to harbor, support and actively collaborate in the active commission of terrorism.

That Syria has received such extensive financial, political, military and technological support from Russia recently has enormous consequences. It has only served to empower and embolden Bashar Al-Assad's regime and to give it new resolve in avoiding withdrawing completely from Lebanon entirely, and continuing attacks on Israelis through terrorist corps headquartered in Damascus and Lebanon, and in continuing to allow, perhaps even encourage, international jihadists to use Syria as a way station in their infiltration of Iraq to kill Americans and Iraqis.

Indeed, following the destruction of the Baathist regime in Iraq, Syria now fills the rather dubious role of being one of the headquarters for Terror, Inc., alongside Iran, with full support from murderous Palestinian terrorist groups that have routinely carried out horrific acts of terrorism against Israelis and Americans living in Israel; the most recent being the Islamic Jihad-directed suicide attack that killed five young Israelis at a nightclub in Tel Aviv.

It has funneled weapons, arms and provided sanctuary to jihadists; smuggled across the border with Iraq in order to kill Americans; facilitated the transfer of explosives, automatic weapons and missiles and rockets to Hezbollah, the Iranian-created Shiite terrorist group in Lebanon; and allowed senior Iraqi Baathists to escape and receive sanctuary. Finally, it encourages state-run media and state-supported clerics to routinely issue declarations justifying the murder of Americans, Israelis, or espousing outlandish conspiracy theories that ultimately inspire attacks on Israelis and Americans.

In my hand here is a recent copy of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, published in early 2005, authorized by the Syrian Ministry of Information in May 2004.

The tragic irony of what Russia is doing has not been lost. Although Russia justifiably wants Western support in its war against Islamic terrorists operating in Chechnya, at the very same time Russia is arming terrorist-supporting regimes and movements directly and indirectly that have allied themselves with the very terrorists that have carried out the horrific Beslan attack last year that killed some 700 Russians, most of them children.

Syria serves as a training ground for various Islamic and Middle Eastern terrorist groups with the direct knowledge and support of Syrian officials. Members of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, renegade Fatah Tanzim, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad have all been escorted through Jordan and through Syria and maintain operational base camps where they are taught sabotage training, kidnaping and suicide bombings.

It has permitted Iran to use Damascus as a hub for transferring a massive amount of weapons to Hezbollah.

Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad has himself expressed vocal support for terrorist groups. At an Arab League summit in 2002, he said, "As far as an occupier is concerned, there is no distinction between soldiers and civilians."

High-ranking leaders of Palestinian terrorist groups, including Khalid Mishal, Mousa Abu Marzook of Hamas and Ramadan Abdullah Shallah of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, have long been given safe haven and sanctuary in Damascus.

Given the stakes at hand, Senator, the United States should make clear to Russia that the sale of SA-18 missiles should disrupt and will disrupt any of the newly established trade, economic and technological relationships between the United States and Russia.

If that fails to persuade Mr. Putin, then the United States needs to ratchet up the political and economic pressure on Russia to levels that have not been imposed since the end of the Cold War. It is manifestly clear that Russia is violating the terms of the OSCE annex of December 2002 to which Russia is a party.

As for Syria, the United States has to put on the table a whole range of new punitive actions.

Mr. Chairman, one action I would recommend highly for this Commission and other congressional committees to investigate, is the degree to which Syria has received commercial, technological and other support from other countries in the Middle East, Europe and elsewhere.

Let's find out who was supporting Al-Assad and his Hezbollah allies. Thank you very much.

Sen. BROWNBACK. Thank you.

Mr. Emerson—before I go to Mr. Berman here—why on Earth would the Russians do this?

I mean, you lay out the situation, the setting. They have got terrorists fighting on their own soil. They have got difficulty there.

Syria is a state sponsor of terrorism. They are operating even with some of the same groups. Why on Earth would Russia do this?

Mr. EMERSON. Well, interesting, this is a resumption of the Cold War strategy, when they obviously armed certain Arab regimes as counterweight to the United States.

Interestingly enough, it never ceased supporting Al-Assad. Back in 2000, it actually offered a major package forgiving loans, at that point, selling sophisticated weapons including new air fighters.

So it has sought increasingly to basically play a countervailing weight to the United States in almost a replication of the Cold War strategy.

It receives cash. It also receives support in exchange. It has an extension of its political hegemony that it can impose.

For all it is worth, there has not been enough of a disincentive for Russia to stop its support of Syria.

Sen. BROWNBACK. You look at the missile technology being sold, shoulder launched missiles that could bring commercial, civil aviation, that could be used by Chechen fighters against Russia's civil aviation.

I understand the political philosophy of Putin. We have seen this play before. We have seen it a number of times before by the Soviet Union and then Russia. But that part just does not make much sense.

Mr. EMERSON. I think there is also another calculation here. I think Putin is trying to slap the United States in the face more aggressively than he has in the past, resenting, from his perspective, what he calls U.S. intervention particularly in the Ukraine elections.

So his response has been basically to say to the United States, "I will show you. I will interfere in your backyard."

Sen. BROWNBACK. All right.

Mr. Berman, thank you for joining.

**ILAN BERMAN, VICE PRESIDENT FOR POLICY, AMERICAN
FOREIGN POLICY COUNCIL**

Mr. BERMAN. Thank you, Chairman Brownback.

Thank you for the opportunity. It is an honor to be here today to talk about Russian-Syrian strategic cooperation.

My name is Ilan Berman. I am the vice president for policy at the American Foreign Policy Council, and I oversee the council's

Eurasia Program, which does research and analysis on the Middle East, Central Asia and the Russian Federation.

I think it is important to start out by saying that this is a pivotal time in Syrian foreign policy, because our overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq in 2003 and the political transformation that we see emerging since then has profoundly threatened the stability of the regime in Damascus.

We see the U.N. passing new measures. Resolution 1559, which was passed in September of 2004, put mounting and heretofore unseen international pressure on Syria to roll back its almost three-decade-long occupation of Lebanon.

These are pretty large strategic challenges, and it is understandable that they have spurred the Syrian regime to expand its historic ties with the Russian Government, particularly because those ties are very deep.

This growing proximity between Damascus and Moscow was demonstrated publicly this past January, when Bashar Al-Assad embarked on a diplomatic visit to the Kremlin. His trip was a major success, and it yielded a mutual commitment to closer cooperation between the Russian Government and what the Russians call "their most important strategic partner," in the Middle East.

The meeting between Al-Assad and Russian President Vladimir Putin also had several tangible outcomes. First, as part of its public reengagement with Syria, the Kremlin agreed to write off almost three-quarters, 73 percent, of Syria's \$13.4 billion Cold War-era debt. As a result, according to Syrian declarations, foreign debt has now been cut to less than 10 percent of Syria's roughly \$58 billion GDP.

Among other things, this has very serious military implications. The Syrian military remains overwhelmingly reliant on Soviet-and Russian-origin weaponry; it makes up an estimated 90 percent of the Syrian arsenal. Therefore, any Syrian military modernization effort inevitably revolves around cooperation with the Russians. The Syrians have been talking about this sort of program for a long time, but they have not had the wherewithal to do it. There are now new signs that they might now have the resources to accomplish this, thanks in large part to the Kremlin.

Second, Russia and Syria signed six supplemental agreements on economic cooperation, including an accord designed to strengthen energy coordination between the two countries. This deal involves increased contact between Russia's Soyuzneftegaz conglomerate and Syria's oil and natural resources ministry, and it sets the stage for greater Russian investment in the Syrian energy sector.

This is critically important for Syria's long-term solvency, because approximately half of the country's total annual export revenues currently derive from oil sales. This is a fact that is not very well-known. Moreover, the investment base in the Syrian energy sector has been steadily shrinking over the last couple of years. Since mid-2002, international pressure has led two super-majors, U.S.-based Conoco Phillips and France's TotalFinaElf, to announce their disengagement from Syria.

This means that Russian energy conglomerates are now positioned to play an increasingly decisive role in propping up the Syrian regime.

Third, as part of the expanding military technical cooperation between the two countries, Russia has committed to upgrading Syria's air defense infrastructure. Syrian and Russian officials have commenced talks about the Al-Assad regime's acquisition of the Strelts mobile air defense system, and Syrian officials are said to be interested in the advanced S-400 air- and missile-defense system.

Now, through the provision of these defenses, as well as potential sales of other technologies, like the Iskander E short-range ballistic missile, Russia is, in effect, creating a strategic umbrella over the Syrian regime.

It is important to focus on what drives this policy, both on the Russian side and the Syrian side. On the Syrian side, one factor is certainly leadership. It is not a secret that the Syrian leader Bashar Al-Assad is an ophthalmologist by training. Until his death in January of 1994, his older brother Basil was actually the heir-apparent to Hafez Al-Assad in Syria.

As a result, until shortly before his assumption of power with Al-Assad's death in the summer of 2000, Bashar had had little exposure to affairs of state.

To put it in perspective, this means that the Syrian president has been a foreign policy practitioner for less time than the current crop of graduate political science students that are now at universities.

So I think this goes a long way toward explaining what we see often as a haphazard and even schizophrenic foreign policy, at times collaborating with the United States in provision of intelligence, other times sponsoring terrorist organizations like Hezbollah, Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, or even the Iraqi Baathist loyalists.

Another factor here is threat perception. As a result of its Baathist credentials, as well as its role as a major state sponsor of terror, Syria sees itself as the next possible candidate for U.S.-assisted regime change, and it is trying very hard to prevent that from coming to pass.

In this context, the Syrians' turn to Russia is only one part of a larger effort. Over the past year, Syria has also signed new strategic agreements enhancing military cooperation with Tehran.

Those agreements are notable because they actually codify for the first time an Iranian commitment to defend Syria in the event of an Israeli or an American military offensive.

But on the Russian side—and here, hopefully, I will be able to address the question that you had earlier about what drives Russian policy—we're seeing the re-emergence of a geopolitical, neo-imperialist strategic agenda in the Kremlin. That is almost beyond question at this point.

It is being driven on many fronts by both threat perceptions and by domestic determinants. The Russian parliament has always been an unfair analogue to the U.S. Congress. They have little freedom of action and little authority to curb the power of the executive branch in Russia.

But since the sweeping victory of the pro-Putin United Russia Party in the December 2003 elections, the Duma, Russia's lower

house, has transformed from being a rubber stamp for Kremlin policy to being an enabler of it.

The United Russia Party garnered slightly over 50 percent of the necessary seats, which gave it a super majority allowing it to take control of all of the major committees dealing with foreign and defense policy. This means that there are now Putin loyalists actively generating legislation that the Kremlin can enact.

Simultaneously, President Putin has been very successful in his campaign to install former KGB members, known as siloviki, to key decision-making posts within the Russian Government.

This has created an entrenched constituency that is supportive of Kremlin policy, whatever it may be. So there is not a lot of pluralism in the foreign policy discussion that is now going on in Moscow. Putin has a *carte blanche* to do what he wants.

At the same time, foreign policy priorities also play a big part here. The entrenchment of American forces in the Caucasus and Central Asia, as part of the war on terror, has been significant, and it has been mirrored by NATO's expansion of its area of responsibility to include the post-Soviet space. NATO said as much in its Istanbul communique, in the summer of 2004: the Caucasus and Central Asia now constitute an area of direct command responsibility.

So there is some justification for the sense of siege that we now see in Moscow. And a lot of policy toward the Middle East is a reflection of it, a reflection of the fact that Russia wants to re-establish its strategic position in the Middle East, *de facto*, at the expense of American strategy there.

In this context, the relationship with Syria has a very large role to play. Let me quote from a recent analysis in the independent *Kommersant* newspaper, published out of Moscow, because I do not think I could say it any better. The paper said, "Russian foreign policy ambitions long ago reached Soviet proportions. However, in reality, up to now Moscow has not been in the position to lay claim to superpower status. On the contrary, a series of failures on the international scene have shown the real state of affairs. Nevertheless, using the Syrian Government's fear of a possible American invasion, Moscow is calculating on binding Damascus to its own military-industrial complex following the example of Soviet times." This collusion that the Russian Government has committed to with the Syrian regime has regional implications. Since the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri last month, Syria has been weathering an unprecedented challenge to its traditional role as Lebanon's overlord.

Moreover, there are signs that Lebanon's "Cedar Revolution," as it is being called, could spark internal change within the Syrian regime itself. And the assistance from Moscow, whether it is economic incentives or military sales, constitutes a major lifeline for the Syrian regime.

It is a lifeline that will provide the Syrian Government with greater resources and greater capabilities to resist pro-independence stirrings in Lebanon or in its own country. Notably, some encouraging signs are visible.

In the past week, Russian officials have echoed their counterparts in the United States and Saudi Arabia and Europe in pub-

licly calling for a complete Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. Moreover, Kremlin officials have been cautiously supportive of recent signs of political transformation within Lebanon.

So far, though, this rhetoric has not been matched by reality. The Kremlin has not begun to roll back its strategic ties with Damascus. For all practical purposes, this means that the Kremlin's partnership with the Al-Assad regime—and it is a partnership—continues to constitute a major impediment to the progress of democracy in the Middle East. Thank you.

Sen. BROWNBACK. Thank you very much.

Speak to me just a second about the—you mentioned the changes within Syria, and some of that was alluded to a little bit earlier in the earlier panel. What are we seeing taking place of a Syria democracy movement within or without—outside of Syria?

Mr. BERMAN. Well, I think what we are seeing is the last gasps of a desperate regime trying to provide the veneer of a new order while trying to preserve an old order. We see Syrian assistance in the handing over of Saddam Hussein's relative recently. We have seen the disbandment of the former pro-Syrian Government in Beirut. These are tactical changes. These are not fundamental changes. This is not glasnost, as we knew it.

And I think that analogy, in particular, is important because Mikhail Gorbachev tried to use glasnost to provide introspection into the shortcomings of the regime. But once he let the genie out of the bottle, he realized that internal forces that were seeking change were emboldened by this perception of weakness. It was, to quote a great strategist, "provocative weakness." I think the Syrian regime has learned this lesson very well. They know that they are at a crossroads. They want to take as many tactical steps as possible to prevent real, lasting change, because real, lasting change constitutes what they see as the end of the Baath regime as they know it.

Sen. BROWNBACK. But what are we witnessing?

What on the ground are we seeing taking place inside Syria about democracy activities, civil society building outside of the Baathists? Are we seeing that taking place today, are you witnessing?

Mr. BERMAN. I think we are seeing that to a great degree, I certainly—my colleague, Mr. Phares, is better positioned to speak on that. But we do see hopeful signs. There has been footage—which I have seen and I have, and I can present to you—of Lebanese dissidents—that is what they are—waving American flags saying, "Syria out of Lebanon," and exhibiting, as you yourself alluded—

Sen. BROWNBACK. But what about inside of Syria, not in Lebanon, what about inside of Syria?

Mr. EMERSON. I think that it is sort of episodic. When Al-Assad took over in 2000, there was a movement that began to crystallize in Syria, in terms of demands for—there is a great secular base there, and so there was a real, I think, emergence of a movement—if we can call it a movement—demanding accountability, demanding Westernization, democracy. But it was really nipped in the bud.

Now, I can tell you that, based on some of the translations provided by MEMRI, the organization that translates from the Arabic media, there have been a series of incredibly courageous articles

written in the last year by some Syrian dissidents within Damascus, calling for reform and condemning the regime's support for terrorism.

Now, unfortunately, they are few and far between, because the bottom line is Al-Assad basically empowered himself and got the bureaucracy to clamp down on the dissidents. And so in the last couple of years, they have been either imprisoned, they have been exiled, some have been executed, they have been tortured. He has really reimposed his father's brutal clamp down in ways that are phenomenally similar to what his father did. And so, therefore, today within Syria there are a couple of pockets, but it does not replicate the situation in Iran or other places where there have been larger pockets and support for dissident movements.

There really is no center of gravity today within Syria. It is outside of Syria. It is in the United States. It is in London. It is in Europe.

Sen. BROWNBACK. And that is what we have seen more often than not in that region of the world is that the leaders, the dictatorial leaders, they just clamp down on everything, and then anything of a democracy movement generally happens outside of the country and it is coalescing in various Western capitals that take place, because you just cannot operate internally.

Mr. EMERSON. And you have to add the fact that the bureaucracy itself that he has entrenched has a vested interest in clamping down, because their power base is threatened, which also goes to the point of the solidification of ties between Russia and Syria.

You have got tens of thousands of graduates from both countries living in each other's country, and they have served—now they are second-generation, and they are now employed in different levels by each government.

So they have sort of continued the tradition of close relationships. If you look at the statements made by Putin and Al-Assad after the conference this year—and I have attached them as Attachments A and B—you will find this incredible continuity and romance between the two that existed 20 years ago.

Sen. BROWNBACK. Just building on that: Is there any evidence, has there been any evidence of a direct Russian involvement in Iraq that either of you have seen?

We talked about a Russian-Syrian involvement. We have talked a lot and seen evidence of a significant Syrian-Iraqi involvement. Is there anything of a direct contact between Russia and Iraq?

Mr. EMERSON. You are talking about in terms of terrorist or jihadist—

Sen. BROWNBACK. Terrorist organizations, any weaponry that we have seen, any direct contact between organizations operating, terrorist groups, inside Iraq that are receiving any Russian support?

Mr. EMERSON. Well, there are ties, perhaps, let's say, between—and I know there are—Chechen terrorist groups, but that is not really under the control of the Russians at this point.

I do not see direct Russian Government support for the jihadists in Iraq.

Now, of course there are lots of Russian weapons there, the residue, which was realized after the United States toppled the Saddam regime.

I do not see the Russians involved today.

There is some political cover. There is some financial cover to some of the attacks on U.S. policy. But They are very careful to pinpoint their direct support for terrorism indirectly through Syria or Iran, and therefore, they can keep their hands clean.

Sen. BROWNBACk. Those being proxies.

Mr. Berman?

Mr. BERMAN. Senator, I tend to agree with Mr. Emerson. The single largest nexus that I can point to is the fact that the Iraqi Mukhabarat, the secret service, was built along the KGB model that was propagated during Soviet times. There were one or two incidents immediately following the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime in which Russian diplomats, Russian foreign service officers, and Russian intelligence officers were apprehended in Baghdad trying to spirit away files of the Mukhabarat, basically doing their own operation to obfuscate the ties between the two secret services. But that is the extent of the collaboration that I know.

Mr. EMERSON. I think you will also see new discoveries in the oil-for-food investigation, in terms of payoffs to senior Russian officials.

Sen. BROWNBACk. I think there is going to be a lot that will come out of those.

I want to point your attention, if I could briefly, to the Damascus-Tehran connection here. What is the extent and the nature of that today?

Mr. Berman?

Mr. BERMAN. Well, the Syrian regime was visited by Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi last February, almost a year ago exactly, and they signed a memorandum of understanding that enshrined a mutual defense commitment.

Now, it is quite clear that the Iranians are the senior partner in this relationship. A military attack by either Israel or the United States on Iran is less likely than one on Syria, for a number of technical and political reasons.

This is the Syrians and, to an extent, the Iranians attempting to forestall the spread of American-assisted regime change into places like Syria and to places like Lebanon. They are doing it through the only country that could provide them with substantial security guarantees in the near term. Iran is, along with Syria, a major backer of Hezbollah, and via Syria it has provided Hezbollah with what the Israelis estimate are 13,000 artillery and short-range rockets that are now arrayed against Israel.

They have established a northern front, which the Syrians or the Iranians can open against the Israelis to derail a possible U.S.-assisted regime change in either of those countries.

So They are very much working in tandem to prevent U.S. strategy from succeeding.

Sen. BROWNBACk. At a government-to-government level.

Mr. BERMAN. Absolutely.

Sen. BROWNBACk. At a Damascus-to-Tehran level?

Mr. BERMAN. Absolutely.

Mr. EMERSON. Adding to the fact that the Islamic Jihad and Hamas operate from both Damascus and Tehran, and there have been intelligence reports showing that attacks in Israel have been

launched by directions from both countries, both Iran and from Syria, and you see this shuttling back and forth of leaders of both organizations, Khaled Meshal, for example, and others going back between Tehran and Damascus all the time.

So there is sort of this proxy collaboration that ends up attacking Israel or basing its operations out of Lebanon.

Sen. BROWNBACK. With some plausible deniability by either of the Governments of Iran or Syria.

Mr. EMERSON. Syria today denies that it supports terrorism and it denies that it facilitates any of the attacks from Damascus through money or through instructions onto Israel; says we had nothing to do with it. The office has been closed down, they are just informational.

As you know, the Israelis released some intelligence just in the last couple of weeks showing direct instructions from Ramadan Shallah—by the way, a former professor from Florida—issuing instructions to launch a suicide bombing.

It was absolutely demonstrable and something that clearly shows that the Syrians were trying to—they never thought that that would be obtained by the Israelis.

Sen. BROWNBACK. Gentlemen, thank you very much for joining us here today. If there is anything further you want to add into the record, we can add it later, if you want to submit that into the record.

I appreciate very much the panel. I appreciate the audience for being here today.

The hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:33 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

APPENDICES

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. SAM BROWNBACK, CHAIRMAN, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Today's hearing will focus on troubling connections between Russia and Syria and the implications for a post-Hariri transition to a truly independent, sovereign, and democratic Lebanon. This hearing will also explore the destabilizing role that Syria and its nexus to terrorist organizations plays in the security of surrounding countries such as Iraq and Israel.

Since the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri last month, a remarkable thing has happened in that country. As a result of popular pressure by the people of Lebanon in public protests at Martyrs Square reminiscent of what happened in Kiev, the pro-Syrian government in Beirut resigned last week. And based on meetings this weekend, Syrian President Assad has announced preliminary plans for the withdrawal of Syrian troops by March 31.

While these are positive developments, actions not words will dictate success, especially given nearly 30 years of Syrian entrenchment in Lebanon. Yesterday's large pro-Syria demonstration in Beirut is a reminder that there sizable elements in Lebanon determined to prolong Syria's domination of that country. That orchestrated event underscores the importance of keeping the pressure on Syria to comply fully with U.N. Resolution 1559.

The pro-democracy Cedar Revolution is a call for freedom, sovereignty, and independence. By contrast, what does Syria have to offer: authoritarianism, subjugation, and dependence? The Lebanese people have a clear choice.

This hearing will help connect the dots, if you will, between key actors in the region and how the United States can best support courageous individuals in Lebanon who are saying 'enough', we want to take back control of our country. For the record, I would point out that both Lebanon and Syria were once associated with the OSCE as "Non-Participating Mediterranean States."

Having just returned from Iraq, I would underscore that how we address these issues is not just an academic matter. Given Syrian support for the insurgency in Iraq, they have profound implications for the lives of our men and women serving in Iraq. The Lebanese people themselves have suffered under Syria's long history of supporting such insurgencies and terrorist organizations. The Bekaa Valley has long been the base for Hezbollah training camps. After 9/11 and the defeat of the Taliban, the Bekaa Valley is now the major location for terrorist camps and training.

What role has Russia played in all of this? For years Russia and Syria have had what Russian President Putin recently termed a "special relationship." Russia has agreed to provide Syria with an unspecified number of Iglu low-altitude surface-to-air missiles capable of targeting most major Israeli cities (see posters). The SA-18s, according to experts can easily be dismantled into single man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS). The sale appears on track despite objections from the U.S. and Russia's commitments as a participating State of the OSCE not to support terrorist regimes.

During Syrian President Assad's state visit hosted by President Putin in January, Russia announced the write-off of three quarters of the \$13.4 billion debt Syria owes Moscow. With their foreign debt now less than 10 percent of their \$58 billion in GDP, there is a lot more financial wiggle room to more aggressively support terrorist organizations.

Warming relations between Moscow and Damascus are expected to lead to a series of arms deals for Syria and further transfers to Hezbollah and others.

The fact that Russia is attempting to regain regional leverage through closer ties with Syria is quite telling and is a bit confounding given the fact that Russia herself has been targeted by terrorists at Beslan and elsewhere.

These are mere examples of Russian economic and military support for a regime that sponsors terrorism, including attacks on U.S. troops. These and other issues will be discussed at today's hearing.

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN,
RANKING MEMBER, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

I thank Chairman Brownback for convening this hearing on this timely topic which has grave consequences for U.S. security and the interests of our allies. Though recent events in the Middle East have rejuvenated hope that democracy can take hold in that region, there are some, such as Syria and Iran—state-sponsors of terrorism—that want to thwart that process. While the scenes from Beirut offer a glimmer of hope that Lebanon will soon regain its sovereignty, we must not underestimate infiltration of that country by Syrian forces, visible and invisible. We will explore the connection between Moscow and Damascus and the implications of ties for the region and beyond.

For years, Syria has both sponsored and hosted terrorist groups, such as Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, and al-Qaeda. This is particularly pertinent in light of the February 14 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. The act, which seems to be linked to al Qaeda, targeted a man who stood adamantly against the Syria's occupation of his country.

The car bombing has drawn attention to the even larger issue of Syria's control of Lebanon. Upon the request of the Lebanese Government in 1976, Syria sent troops to restore peace during the Lebanese civil war. In 1989, the signing of the Taif Accord signaling the end of the civil war, required Syria to pull its troops back to the Bekaa Valley, but failed to specify a date. Syria has capitalized on this ambiguity by maintaining a military presence of nearly 15,000 uniformed soldiers in Lebanon and thousands of intelligence agents.

Promises of withdrawal have been continually made, but never entirely fulfilled. Since the assassination of Hariri, thousands of Lebanese protestors have taken to the streets in Beirut demanding full Syrian withdrawal, bringing the matter to the forefront of international politics. In the past few weeks, much of the international community has reiterated its demands that Syria remove its troops in accordance with September 2004 UN Security Council Resolution 1559. In a recently published letter to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, over 140 Syrian intellectuals insisted that it was time for Syria to change its policy toward Lebanon. However, Mr. Al-Assad has resisted international pressure, asserting that Syria will pull out, eventually.

Though Russia has also called for a withdrawal, President Vladimir Putin's recent behavior has undermined these demands. Reports indicate that Russia and Syria are negotiating a military alliance, in direct contradiction to the 2002 OSCE Charter on Preventing and Combating Terrorism. In the Charter, Russia fully agreed to condemn all acts of terrorism and to "refrain from . . . providing active or passive assistance to, or otherwise sponsoring terrorist acts in another State." The State Department has determined the Syrian Government to be a sponsor of terrorism. As such, Russia's warming relations with Syria threatens to undermine the spread of democracy in the Middle East.

I look forward to hearing the discussion.

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF WALID PHARES, PROFESSOR,
FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY AND SENIOR FELLOW,
FOUNDATION FOR THE DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES**

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, members of the United States Helsinki Commission.

I am pleased to participate in this timely hearing on the subject of Russian involvement with Syria. I shall focus my remarks upon the impact of Russian-Syrian relations on Lebanon. I am a professor of international relations, an expert on terrorism and am originally from Lebanon. I am the Secretary-General of the World Lebanese Cultural Union, and in that capacity I have just been in New York where I met seven ambassadors to the UN Security Council (Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, France, Greece, Russia, United States) and the Deputy Secretary General for Middle Eastern affairs. While I am not an international lawyer, I shall draw your attention to international legal standards which I sincerely believe Russia is not meeting.

As you know, the present turmoil in Lebanon stems from the assassination of the former prime minister, Rafiq Hariri, on February 14, 2005. Mr. Hariri's murder was, however, not a bolt from the blue. Rather, his brutal removal from the political scene followed months of threats by Syria and its proxies against Lebanese who have sought the end of the Syrian occupation of Lebanon in compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1559 of September 2, 2004 (UNSCR 1559/2004). The U.S. Congress was ahead of the international community in demanding such a withdrawal through the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003.

Throughout the increasing tensions in Lebanon, Russia has stood firmly with its traditional ally in Damascus. It is clear to me that Russian influence over Syria will play a significant role in the fortunes of democracy in Lebanon and the Middle East region.

By supplying arms and diplomatic support, Russia sustains the Syrian government and the continued Syrian presence in Lebanon which is in violation of UNSCR 1559/2004. Russian arms are used to violate human rights in both Syria and Lebanon. These same Russian arms are supplied to terrorists and insurgents who attack U.S. forces and Iraqi civilians in Iraq and who conduct terrorist operations against Israeli civilians.

As you know, the Soviet Union had a long history of support, economic, financial and military, for Syria and for Syrian-aligned terrorist groups. Russia has continued the military relationship since the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, albeit on a reduced scale.

Syria depends on Russia for the supply, maintenance and spare parts for all of its major weapons systems. Although there is some indigenous manufacture of armaments, this is neither of the scale nor quality that would allow Syria to claim to have an independent arms industry.

Russian military supplies are the foundation upon which the Syrian state is built. As you know, Syria is the last remaining Ba'athist dictatorship and its sole means of influence is armed force and intimidation.

Russia, and its predecessor the Soviet Union, have supplied Syria with the following armaments that play a role in Syrian power projection: surface to air missiles, surface to surface missiles, tanks and armored personnel carriers, small arms.

The surface to air missiles allow Syria to attempt to compensate for the weakness of its air force and to provide an air defense umbrella stretching beyond Syria's borders.

The surface to surface missiles allow Syria to threaten its neighbors' cities, as Iraq's long range missiles did under Saddam Hussein's regime. In addition, the suspicion that Syria has active chemical and biological weapons programs raises the concern that such missiles may be armed with non-conventional warheads.

The tanks and armored personnel carriers, along with the small arms, are the standard weapons of Ba'athist repression at both home and abroad. Small arms, in particular, have ended up in the hands of the various Syrian-aligned terrorist groups that have plagued the Middle East. For example, the large stock of arms made available to Hizbullah by Syria and Iran contains significant quantities of Russian made weapons and weapons of Russian origin made under license abroad. The same applies to the arms that Syria has passed on to other Syrian-aligned militias and terrorist groups in Lebanon such as the Syrian Ba'ath Party, the Syrian National-Social Party and the Palestinian Saika units.

Russia appears to place no conditions on the use of arms that it supplies to foreign governments, unlike the United States, and appears to show no interest in the fact that its weapons have become the killing instruments of choice of terrorists and insurgents around the world. Indeed, according to a 2003 report by Amnesty International and Oxfam International, Kalashnikovs are "up to 80 percent" of the world's assault rifles.¹

The indirect provision of arms to terrorists by Russia is particularly worrying as it violates the spirit and letter of the OSCE Charter on Preventing and Combating Terrorism,² to which Russia is a signatory and which this commission is charged with overseeing the implementation of. The OSCE Charter on terrorism states clearly at paragraph 8 that "every State is obliged to refrain from harbouring terrorists, organizing, instigating, providing active *or passive support* or assistance to, or otherwise sponsoring terrorist acts in another State, or acquiescing in organized activities within its territory directed towards the commission of such acts" (emphasis added). Indeed, paragraph 20 of the same document speaks of "the need to address conditions that may foster and sustain terrorism, in particular by fully respecting democracy and the rule of law, by allowing all citizens to participate fully in political life"—Russia, by facilitating the continued Syrian occupation of Lebanon, is stifling democracy, the rule of law and participation in political life.

¹ Amnesty International and Oxfam International, *Shattered Lives: the case for tough international arms control*, London 2003, page 19, "The Kalashnikov is the godfather of assault rifles. Total production is estimated to be between 70 and 100 million, comprising up to 80 percent of the total number of assault rifles in the world." For comparison, M-16 production was 7 million. Available at http://www.controlarms.org/documents/arms_report_full.pdf.

² Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council Annex 1, "OSCE CHARTER ON PREVENTING AND COMBATING TERRORISM," December 7, 2002, Porto, available at http://www.osce.org/documents/odhr/2002/12/1488_en.pdf.

Moreover, Russian arms sales to Syria appear to contravene, in both spirit and letter, the provisions of the OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons, in particular nine of the eleven grounds listed for a state not to grant and arms export license under the proposed common export criteria.³

In addition, there is a hidden dimension to the Russian-Syrian relationship that receives insufficient attention-intelligence cooperation. Syrian intelligence officers have often been trained in Russia and the two countries appear to maintain a close intelligence relationship. A key aspect of the Syrian occupation of Lebanon is the widespread presence of Syrian intelligence officers, men who conduct their own operations while simultaneously controlling the Lebanese security services.

While it has been widely reported that Russia called on March 3, 2005 for Syria to withdraw from Lebanon, it is my belief that Russia's stance remains broadly supportive of Damascus. Remember that Russia abstained during the passage of UNSCR 1559/2004. Indeed, the Russian UN delegation stated after the adoption of UNSCR 1559/2004 that it had "tabled amendments, the purpose of which was [sic] to move the draft towards the context of a Middle East settlement as a whole and to prevent the document from being one-sided and from concentrating solely on domestic Lebanese affairs," put otherwise, Russia sought to water down UNSCR 1559/2004 and to weaken the clear implication of the resolution that Syria is occupying Lebanon in defiance of the will of its people and international opinion.

Indeed, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said on March 4, 2005 after meeting with Walid Muallem, the Syrian first deputy foreign minister, said that Russia was "satisfied that the Syrian side, with due regard to all the circumstances and UNSCR 1559, is planning to carry out steps that we understand will soon be announced and which will go in the mainstream of the Taif Agreements and with respect for UNSCR 1559." Lavrov also criticized "the unhealthy atmosphere which being whipped up around Syria."⁴ Yet, just yesterday, the Russian ambassador to the UN

³Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, FORUM FOR SECURITY CO-OPERATION, "OSCE DOCUMENT ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS," Vienna, November 24, 2000, available at <http://www.osce.org/docs/english/fsc/2000/decisions/fscw231.htm>. SECTION III: (A) 2. states in part (b) that

Each participating State will avoid issuing licences for exports where it deems that there is a clear risk that the small arms in question might: . . . (i) Be used for the violation or suppression of human rights and fundamental freedoms; (ii) Threaten the national security of other States; (iii) Be diverted to territories whose external relations are the internationally acknowledged responsibility of another State; (iv) Contravene its international commitments, in particular in relation to sanctions adopted by the Security Council of the United Nations, decisions taken by the OSCE, agreements on non-proliferation, small arms, or other arms control and disarmament agreements; (v) Prolong or aggravate an existing armed conflict, taking into account the legitimate requirement for self-defence, or threaten compliance with international law governing the conduct of armed conflict; (vi) Endanger peace, create an excessive and destabilizing accumulation of small arms, or otherwise contribute to regional instability; (vii) Be either re-sold (or otherwise diverted) within the recipient country or re-exported for purposes contrary to the aims of this document; (viii) Be used for the purpose of repression; (ix) Support or encourage terrorism; (x) Facilitate organized crime; (xi) Be used other than for the legitimate defence and security needs of the recipient country."

Russia appears to fail to observe all but stipulations (iii) and (iv).

⁴MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, INFORMATION AND PRESS DEPARTMENT, "Transcript of Remarks and Replies to Media Questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov at Press Conference Following Talks with First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Syria Walid Muallem, Moscow, March 4, 2005," available

told me that his country would put pressure on Syria to quit Lebanon and to comply with UNSCR 1559/2004.

These are not encouraging remarks from the foreign minister of the country that arms and so sustains the Syrian regime. Indeed, the entire Russian policy towards Syria is particularly troubling given Russia's own problem with terrorism. The Russian people have suffered grievously from terrorism, yet their government seems to be unable to reach the same conclusion as the United States, that terrorism is never acceptable.

Members of the United States Helsinki Commission, there will be no stability and democracy in Lebanon, nor peace in the Middle East, unless and until Russia stops supporting the Syrian regime. We all know that ending the supply of arms, curbing diplomatic support and intelligence cooperation will not on its own end the Syrian occupation of Lebanon nor the flow of arms to terrorists. We all know, however, that no progress can be made on any of these issues while that Russian support for Syria, support in contradiction with OSCE principles and agreements, continues unabated.

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF FARID N. GHADRY, PRESIDENT,
REFORM PARTY OF SYRIA**

Mr. Chairman, Honorable Members of the Helsinki Committee, Ladies and gentlemen:

Yesterday was the 43rd anniversary of the rise of Ba'athism in Syria. As a Syrian-American who has a particular interest to see a free and peaceful Syria, I stand before you seeking to help portray how much Syrians are hoping for democracy. 43 years of an oppressive regime has taken its toll on the society to such an extent that we can expect terrorism to rise in the Middle East rather than subside.

Syrians today live in poverty, unable to educate their children and marrying them young to help with additional wages that hardly can sustain a family. When the cost of two pounds of meat is equal to 10 percent of your salary, the United States should expect when it calls for freedom in Syria, that most people will heed the call.

Allow me to share with you a snapshot of the regime of Al-Assad in Syria:

- In 1982, the guns of Rifaat Al-Assad turned against his people in Hama that leveled the small city. When the smoke cleared, up to 30,000 innocent people were killed.

- Over the years the Al-Assad family has built the most elaborate drug and counterfeiting operations in the Beka'a valley in Lebanon.

- It is estimated that 85 percent of Syrian oil is sold directly by agents of the Al-Assads with the billions in proceeds distributed amongst them and the top intelligence people to keep them loyal. We intend to recover these funds one day to rebuild our country with.

- The Al-Assads are building schools of hate in the Beka'a valley that will produce the next generation of terrorists. Most peaceful people hedge their bets around a negotiating table, but the Al-Assads hedge their bet upon the future killings of their enemies.

- The Al-Assads recently struck a deal with Russia to purchase dangerous shoulder-held SA-18s, which dramatically raises the stakes in the Middle East. The SA-18 is capable of downing an aircraft flying at up to 900 miles per hour.

- The Al-Assads are supporting terrorism in Iraq, in Lebanon, and most recently they helped in the attack against four innocent youths in Tel Aviv.

- On March 8, 1963, the Al-Assads installed a series of Emergency Laws that have stifled our liberties. Demonstrations are not allowed and anyone who speaks against the regime is imprisoned, tortured, and sometimes killed.

- The Al-Assads keep the people of Syria busy by preaching hate and enmity against our neighbors and the United States. If given the chance to think freely, most Syrians will thank the United States for helping bring about their freedom.

- According to the Syrian Human Rights Committee, the Syrian Ba'athists in Damascus have killed about 17,000 prisoners. I would like to bring to the attention of this honorable committee the names of the following prisoners of conscience and champions of

human rights, accountability, and transparency who are languishing under horrible conditions in Syrian jails today:

Riad Seif (Member of Parliament); Aref Dalilah (Economist); Ma'mun al-Homsi (Member of Parliament); Abdul Aziz Al-Khayer (Physician); Habib Issa (Lawyer); Walid Al-Bounni (Physician); Mohammad Bashir al-Arab (Student leader); Mohanad al-Debs (Student leader); Mahmoud Ammo; Mahmoud Abou Sader; Mazid Ali Al-Terkawi (Businessman); Fawaz Tello (Engineer). There are over 800 prisoners of conscience in Syrian jails today.

- The Assyrians and Caledonians, in addition to other Christians that have lived in Syria even before the birth of Christ, have been emigrating from Syria for decades for lack of opportunity, because of discrimination, and because of stifling of their religious rights. We appeal to this committee to understand their plight. Only freedom and democracy can restore their rights and celebrate their contribution to our society.

- Furthermore, the Kurds in Syria have been abused by the Ba'athist regime, their lands confiscated, and their culture and language stifled. We will celebrate on March 12 their uprising a year ago against the regime, which culminated in the imprisonment of 2000 of them, many under the age of 18. We ask the Committee to honor these people for their courage and help free the 200 Kurds still languishing in Ba'athist jails.

We hope this snapshot gives this honorable committee the kind of people that are ruling Damascus today and helping sow the seeds of violence all around them.

The Ba'athists have us believe that if they go, the extremists would take over. I am here to dispel this notion and tell the U.S. Government that without a shadow of a doubt, most Syrians are either secular (Thanks to the Al-Assads, the only credit I give them) or Muslim moderates such as the Grand Mufti Kaftaro followers in Aleppo. The Muslim Brotherhood would, under normal conditions and free elections in Syria, get between 10 and 15 percent of the votes, a minority that will not be able to impose its will on the rest of the majority. That is exactly the representation they have in Jordan today.

When Syria is free of the Al-Assad rule, Syria will be peaceful, democratic, and embracing of the international community of nations. The world can no longer afford the Ba'athists in Damascus with their "scorch the earth" policies. The Reform Party, with many other Syrian reformist leaders that I cannot name to protect them are able and willing to help ease Syria into democracy if given the chance.

Finally, we received this message from a democratic Syrian inside Syria:

"Please tell the Commission that Syrians are waiting for your help impatiently."

Thank you for giving us this opportunity.

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF STEVEN EMERSON, EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, THE INVESTIGATIVE PROJECT**

Chairman Brownback and distinguished members of the Helsinki Commission: I applaud you for holding today's hearing on how Russia has increasingly played a dangerous role in undermining the movement for democracy in the Middle East. Russia has helped to empower and strengthen a regime that is allowing terrorist groups to carry out murderous attacks on civilians in Israel and on American forces in Iraq.

Today, as signs of positive change seem to be sweeping parts of the Middle East, one country remains seemingly impervious to the calls for democracy while it continues to harbor, support and actively collaborate in the commission of international terrorism: Syria. That Syria has received such extensive financial, political and military support from Russia recently has enormous consequences: Such support by Russia has only served to empower and embolden Bashar Al-Assad's regime and to give it new resolve to avoid withdrawing from Lebanon entirely; in continuing attacks on Israelis through terrorist groups headquartered in Damascus and in Lebanon; in continuing to allow, perhaps even encourage international jihadists to use Syria as a way-station in their infiltration of Iraq to kill Americans and Iraqis; and to try to play the spoiler in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Indeed, following the destruction of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq, Syria now fills the rather dubious role of being one of the headquarters for Terror Inc., (alongside Iran), with full support for murderous Palestinian terrorist groups based in Damascus that have routinely carried out horrific acts of terrorism against Israelis and Americans living in Israel (the most recent being the Islamic Jihad-directed suicide attack that killed 5 young Israelis at a nightclub in Tel Aviv); funneled weapons, arms and provided sanctuary to jihadists smuggled across the border with Iraq in order to kill American soldiers; facilitated the transfer of explosives, automatic weapons, and missiles and rockets to Hizbollah, the Iranian-created Shiite terrorist group in Lebanon whose goal remains unremitting in its aim to destroy Israel; allowed senior Iraqi Ba'athists to escape and receive sanctuary; and encourages state-run media and state-supported clerics to routinely issue declarations justifying the murder of Americans and Israelis or espousing outlandish conspiracy theories that ultimately inspire attacks on both Israelis and Americans.

The assassination of Rafiq Hariri by Syrian intelligence and the Syrian collaboration with the Islamic Jihad, headquartered in Damascus, in the murder of 5 Israelis, represent only the latest culmination of acts of murderous terrorism by the Syrian regime over a 30-plus year period. When Hafez Al-Assad passed away and was succeeded by his son, Bashar, there was some hope that the new leader, given his Western educational background, would embark on a campaign to democratize Syria and withdraw its traditional support for terrorism. But this would not be the case.

Perhaps we should not expect Bashar Al-Assad to pursue a course any different than the totalitarian path pursued by his father. Very few times in history have children of dictators behaved any differently than their parents. But with respect to trying to

change the regime in Syria, there are other actors that the United States must hold to account in their continued support of the murderous regime in Damascus.

In one of the most brazen acts of empowering a rogue regime with blood on its hands, Russia announced only two days after Syrian intelligence agents murdered former Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri that it would upgrade Syria's air missile systems with the sale of the SA-18 Iгла missile systems, the sophisticated shoulder fire anti-aircraft missiles. These missiles not only pose a dire threat to Israeli civilian and military aircraft in the small confines of Israeli airspace but they also threaten U.S. flights in neighboring Iraq. Moreover and most ominously, given Syria's long demonstrable record of transferring sophisticated weaponry to other terrorist groups, in particular Hizbollah in Lebanon, the provision of such weapons to Syria by the Russians is a flagrant effort by Russia to destabilize the Middle East, undermine Israeli security as well as threaten that of the United States. Indeed, one would be reckless not to assume that these weapons might ultimately find their way into the hands of terrorists in Lebanon, Gaza or Iraq.

Given the stakes at hand, the United States should make it very clear to Russia that such a sale will disrupt any of the newly established trade, economic and technological relationships between the United States and Russia. If that fails to sway Mr. Putin, then the United States needs to ratchet up the political and economic pressure on Russia to levels that have not been imposed since the end of the Cold War. It is manifestly clear that Russia is violating the terms of the OSCE Annex of December 2002 to which Russia is a party.

In January of this year, Al-Assad traveled to Moscow for a four-day official visit. Mr. Putin gave him a veritable Christmas present but the stockings contained not children's toys but a package of assistance that was designed to bolster the Syrian regime: Russia forgave \$10 billion of Syrian debt; committed to sell arms and weapons to Syria (as well as other radical regimes); gave a political vote of support including vetoing or abstaining from any UN resolution critical of the Syrians; and provided an array of wide-ranging technological and industrial investments.

According to *The Weekly Standard* of March 2, 2005, "[t]he Russians have also agreed to a number of economic agreements with Syria. Syria's economy has long been dependent upon commerce in Lebanon. With the coming Syrian retreat, Al-Assad is desperate for economic relief. In an interview with the Russian Government daily, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, Al-Assad explained a number of areas in which Syria and Russia will cooperate, including: 'surveying oil fields and refining oil,' constructing 'an oil and gas pipeline from Iraq to the Mediterranean,' and possibly creating 'industrial zones with a view to delivering commodities to Iraq' through which 'Syria could provide preferential terms for Russian companies to work in these zones.'" ¹

For Russia, the newly established close relationship with and influence over Syria is a throwback to the days during the superpower confrontation when Russia automatically supported any

¹Thomas Joscelyn, "Axis of Outcast," *The Daily Standard*, March 2, 2005.

Arab regime that resisted an alliance with the West or the United States. After the disintegration of the Soviet empire, Syria and other terrorist states and movements lost their prime financial, political and military sponsor. But over time, Russia has begun to resume the pernicious and destructive role it played during the Cold War, providing dangerous technology and weaponry to both the Syrian and Iranian regimes, not to mention other terrorist supporting regimes. To be sure, Russia's destructive role in Syria was not terminated at the end of the Cold War. In 2000–2001, Russia agreed to sell Syria \$2 billion worth of military equipment including jet fighters.

The tragic irony of what Russia is doing has not been lost: Although Russia justifiably wants Western support in its war against Islamic terrorists operating in Chechnya, at the very same time Russia is arming terror-supporting regimes and movements, directly and indirectly, that have allied themselves with the very terrorists that carried out the horrific Beslan attack last year that killed some 700 Russians, most of them children.

The statements issued by Putin and Al-Assad during that trip in January are worth replicating in its entirety. I have attached them as Attachments A and B to my testimony. What is most striking about it is that while it claims to be supportive of peace efforts, its naked transparency of promoting an anti-democratic and pro-terrorist agenda is easily seen. The lovefest between Putin and Al-Assad is all the more upsetting in light of the demonstrable record of Syria in supporting terrorist organizations launching terrorist attacks on Israelis. It bears restating and enumerating the extent to which Syria has been involved in terrorism over the last 4 years—if only to demonstrate that Russia cannot evade responsibility for claiming that it is unaware of the consequences of the murderous regime it is empowering and emboldening.

SYRIAN SUPPORT FOR PALESTINIAN TERRORISM

According to the U.S. Government, Damascus provides “political and material support” to at least four Palestinian terrorist groups: Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. These groups have claimed responsibility for multiple anti-Israeli terrorist acts since the start of the so-called “Second Intifada.” The Ba’athist regime continues to insist that the Damascus-based offices of these organizations are involved in only “political and informational” activities,² but investigations by Israeli intelligence indicate their direct operational and strategic role in planning scores of deadly terrorist attacks.³

TERRORIST TRAINING CAMPS IN SYRIA

Syria serves as a training ground for several terrorist groups, with the direct knowledge and support of Syrian officials. According to former FBI intelligence analyst Matthew Levitt, operatives “are

² U.S. State Department, Patterns of Global Terrorism—2003, Released April 29, 2004, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2003/31644.htm>.

³ “Iran and Syria as Strategic Support for Palestinian Terrorism,” September 30, 2002, http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/mfaarchive/2000_2009/2002/9/iran%20and%20syria%20as%20strategic%20support%20for%20palestina.

met at the Jordanian-Syrian border by Syrian officials, who check their documents without stamping them and literally escort them to Damascus for training . . . Members of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, renegade Fatah Tanzim, Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad have all been escorted through Jordan into Syria.”⁴

One such camp is the Ayn Tzahab camp, supported by the Iranian government and used for operational training of Palestinian groups, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

The training “curriculum” at the camp includes instruction in sabotage, artillery training, manufacturing of explosive devices and bomb belts, kidnapping, and guerilla warfare.⁵

Additionally, Syria continues to permit Iran (arguably the world’s preeminent state sponsor of terror) to use Damascus as a hub for providing Hizballah with weapons and funds in Lebanon.⁶

Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad has himself expressed vocal support for Palestinian terrorist groups. At an Arab League Summit in Beirut in 2002, he said: “As far as an occupier is concerned, there is no distinction between soldiers and civilians . . . There is a distinction between armed and unarmed, but in Israel everyone is armed. In any case, we adopted the following concept: resistance to occupation is a legitimate right.”⁷

High-ranking leaders of Palestinian terrorist groups, including Khaled Meshal and Musa Abu Marzook of Hamas, and Ramadan Abdullah Shallah of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, have been given safe haven in Damascus. Although there have been press reports that Damascus has finally expelled Meshal and Shallah, the Syrian government has a track record of deception on this matter. Al-Assad’s government has, in the past, publicly claimed to deport such individuals, while instead only asking the terrorist leadership to lower their profile rather than leave the country.⁸

TERRORIST ATTACKS INSIDE ISRAEL LINKED TO SYRIA

Since the “Second Intifada” erupted in September of 2000, over one thousand Israelis have been killed and thousands more injured by Palestinian terrorists.⁹

As I outlined earlier, the Syrian government, by acts of commission and omission, is involved, both directly and indirectly, in the overwhelming majority of Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians.

According to the Israeli government, in 2004 alone, Hamas committed a staggering 555 terrorist attacks, up from 218 attacks in

⁴Matthew Levitt, “Iran and Syria: State Sponsorship in the Age of Terror Networks,” March 7, 2005, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC07.php?CID=230>.

⁵“IDF Action in Syria,” October 5, 2003, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/government/communiques/2003/idf+action+in+syria++oct+5-+2003.htm>.

⁶U.S. State Department, Patterns of Global Terrorism—2003, Released April 29, 2004, <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2003/31644.htm>.

⁷“Iran and Syria as Strategic Support for Palestinian Terrorism,” September 30, 2002, http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/mfaarchive/2000_2009/2002/9/iran%20and%20syria%20as%20strategic%20support%20for%20palestina.

⁸Amos Harel, “Israel doubts Jihad, Hamas leadership Expelled from Syria,” Haaretz, March 7, 2005.

⁹“Four Years of Conflict: Israel’s War against Terrorism,” <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism+Obstacle+to+Peace/Terrorism+and+Islamic+Fundamentalism/Four+Years+of+Conflict+3-Oct-2004.htm>.

2003. Similarly, Islamic Jihad also became more active in 2004, carrying out 106 terror attacks, 35 more than the previous year.¹⁰

The most recent suicide bombing in Israel, a February 25 attack on a nightclub in Tel Aviv, which claimed 5 lives and injured 65 others, was orchestrated in Damascus.¹¹ White House press secretary Scott McClellan recently stated that the U.S. Government has “firm evidence that the bombing in Tel Aviv was not only authorized by Palestinian Islamic Jihad leaders in Damascus, but that Islamic Jihad leaders in Damascus participated in the planning.”¹² Moreover, Israeli intelligence asserts that Islamic Jihad’s Damascus headquarters spent roughly \$30,000 on the bombing.¹³

Further examples of major terrorist attacks committed, just since 2002, by Palestinian terrorist groups hosted by the regime in Damascus include:

An August 2004 dual suicide bombing of buses in Beersheva, perpetrated by Hamas, killing 16 civilians and injuring 100 more.¹⁴

Five months earlier, Hamas infiltrated the Israeli port of Ashdod, blowing up a shipping container, killing 10 Israelis and wounding 16.¹⁵

In early October of 2003, an Islamic Jihad suicide bomber killed 21 people, including three children and a baby girl, and wounded 60 more at a joint Arab and Jewish owned restaurant in Haifa.¹⁶ Following the attack, Israeli Deputy Defense Minister Zev Boim tied the Islamic Jihad cell in Jenin that perpetrated the attack to Islamic Jihad’s leadership in Damascus.¹⁷

In response to that bombing, Israel launched a counterattack against a training camp 24 kilometers outside of Damascus.¹⁸ According to a statement from the Israeli cabinet, the Ein Saheb camp was used by every Palestinian terrorist group.¹⁹ President Bush called the strike “essential” to Israel’s national defense.²⁰

A month earlier, a Hamas terrorist detonated a bomb at a hitchhiking post in Tel Aviv, killing 8 Israelis and wounding 32 others. That same day, a Hamas suicide bomber killed 7 people and wounded 50 more at a café in Jerusalem.²¹

¹⁰“Summary of Terrorist Activity 2004,” <http://www.mfa.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/927D5873-E41C-4C99-BBF0-5A53DF237FCF/0/terrorsummary2004.pdf>.

¹¹“U.S. Official Implicates Syrian-based Group in Tel Aviv Attack,” CNN, March 2, 2004, <http://edition.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/03/01/syria.attack/>.

¹²Jennifer Loven and Anne Gearan, “U.S.: Terrorists in Syria Bombed Tel Aviv,” Associated Press, March 1, 2004.

¹³“Amos Harel, “Israel doubts Jihad, Hamas leadership Expelled from Syria,” Haaretz, March 7, 2005.

¹⁴“Double Bombing of Buses in Beersheba,” August 31, 2004, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2004/8/Double%20bombing%20in%20Beersheba%2031-Aug-2004.

¹⁵“Suicide Bombing at Ashdod Port,” March 14, 2004, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2004/3/Suicide%20bombing%20at%20Ashdod%20Port%2014-Mar-2004.

¹⁶“Suicide Bombing of Maxim Restaurant in Haifa,” January 21, 2004, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2004/1/Suicide%20bombing%20of%20Maxim%20restaurant%20in%20Haifa%20-%20204-O.

¹⁷Michael Freund, “From Damascus to Ramallah,” The Jerusalem Post, October 8, 2003.

¹⁸Matthew Gutman and Janine Zacharia, “Syrian diplomat threatens retaliation,” The Jerusalem Post, October 9, 2003.

¹⁹Joshua Brilliant, “Israel Defends Bombing in Syria,” The Jerusalem Post, October 8, 2003.

²⁰Janine Zacharia “Bush Backs IAF strike on Syria,” The Jerusalem Post, October 8, 2003.

²¹“Suicide Bombings—Tzrifin and Jerusalem—September 9, 2003,” September 9, 2003, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2003/9/Suicide%20Bombings-%20Tzrifin%20and%20Jerusalem%20-%2020Septembe.

Two weeks earlier, on August 19, 2003, a Hamas suicide bomber blew up a bus in Jerusalem, killing 22 commuters while wounding 135 more.²²

On June 18, 2002, another Hamas terrorist boarded a bus in Jerusalem, detonating his suicide belt resulting in the killing of 19 people and injuring 74.²³

Two weeks earlier, and Islamic Jihad terrorists detonated a car bomb next to a bus in the Israeli city of Megiddo, killing 17 and injuring 38 more.²⁴

On May 7th of the same year, a Hamas suicide bomber walked into a pool hall in the town of Rishon Letzion, killing 16 and injuring 55 others.²⁵

A month earlier, on April 10th, a Hamas suicide bomber killed 8 people and injured 22 more on a bus traveling to Kibbutz Yagur.²⁶

Just over a week earlier, a Hamas terrorist killed 15 and wounded 40 others at a restaurant in Haifa.²⁷

And on March 27, a Hamas suicide bomber walked into a Pass-over seder at the Park Hotel in the coastal city of Netanya, killing 22 and injuring 140 more, as they celebrated one of the holiest days on the Jewish calendar.²⁸

SYRIAN DISSIDENT OPPOSITION

In his July 2000 inauguration speech, Syrian president Bashar al Al-Assad—then only 34 years old—spoke of the “desperate need for constructive criticism” of Syria’s ruling Ba’ath Party. In the same speech, he called for greater transparency and “democratic thinking” within Syria, as well as the necessity of economic restructuring.²⁹ His words were seen by Syrian dissidents, both at home and abroad, as the beginning of a new era of reform and a departure from the autocratic ways of his deceased father, Hafez, who presided over a brutal police state for 30 years before his death in June 2000. After years of repression, Syria’s democratic activists—galvanized by what they saw as a genuine desire for reform and openness by Syria’s youthful new President—turned out in full force following Bashar’s ascension, spearheading what became known as the “Damascus Spring.”

Almost immediately, private newspapers emerged to challenge Syria’s state-owned media, and people began to gather together in homes and coffee houses to debate and discuss what they hoped

²²“Suicide Bombing of No 2 Egged Bus in Jerusalem—19 August 2003,” August 19, 2003, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2003/8/Suicide+bombing+of+No+2+Egged+bus+in+Jerusalem++1.htm.

²³“Suicide Bombing at Patt Junction—18 June 2002,” June, 18, 2002, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2002/6/Suicide%20bombing%20at%20Patt%20junction%20in%20Jerusalem%20-%2018.

²⁴“Suicide Bombing at Megiddo Junction—5 June 2002,” June 5, 2002, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000—2009/2002/6/Suicide%20bombing%20at%20Megiddo%20junction%20-%205-Jun-2002>.

²⁵“Suicide and Other Bombing Attacks in Israel Since the Declaration of Principles (Sept 1993),” <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/terrorism-+obstacle+to+peace/palestinian+terror+since+2000/suicide+and+other+bombing+attacks+in+israel+since.htm>.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹<http://www.basharassad.org/english.htm>.

were the beginnings of a free and open society.³⁰ In September 2000, the London based pan-Arabic daily Al-Hayat published a statement, signed by 99 Syrian intellectuals, calling on Bashar al Assad to enact political reform in Syria. Among the signatories were the celebrated Syrian poet Adonis, writers Haidar Haidar and Sadek Jalal Al 'Azm, and philosopher Antoine Makdissi.³¹ This bold statement, which became known as the "99 Manifesto" was followed by another shortly thereafter that was signed by roughly one thousand Syrian intellectuals and politicians (and was therefore referred to as the "1,000 Manifesto"). It presented a number of demands to Al-Assad, including: the canceling of Syria's emergency laws and military rule; the granting of political freedom and freedom of the press; the implementation of democratic elections; the respect and implementation of human rights; the elimination of one-party rule; the elimination of discrimination against women; and the formation of committees for the establishment of a civil society.³² In addition to the "99" and "1,000" manifestos, a group of 70 Syrian lawyers signed a petition calling for political reform and an end to Syria's emergency laws.³³

All three of these petitions—which, in the past, would have led to the jailing, torture and possibly even execution of the authors—were met with silence by both the Ba'ath Party and the state-controlled Syrian media. At the time, it seemed to some that Bashar Al-Assad might have been serious about opening up Syrian society, even pardoning 600 Syrian political prisoners and closing Syria's notorious military courts. But by February 2001, Al-Assad was taking a far different stance, telling the London-based daily Al-Sharq Al-Awsat that Syrians were prohibited from criticizing the Ba'ath Party and threatening to punish anyone who endangered the interest of the state. "The development of civil society institutions," said Al-Assad, "is not one of my priorities."³⁴

It wasn't long before Ba'ath Party officials and the Syrian security apparatus were monitoring reformers' meetings and restricting their movements. Almost as quickly as it began, the Damascus Spring was over—many prominent Syrian reformers were thrown in prison, and at least six are still held today under solitary confinement.³⁵ One leader of the Damascus Spring, Kamal al-Labwani, a physician, was released from prison last year after serving a full three-year sentence for, among other charges, encouraging sedition against the Ba'ath Party. He told the Sydney Morning Herald, "Everything that I was charged with was for what I said, for my opinions. They didn't charge us for anything we did."³⁶

Following the false promise of the Damascus Spring and the government-ordered crackdowns that followed, the reform movement within Syria moved back underground. The smatterings of news that did emerge were resoundingly negative: for example, in Au-

³⁰ Ed O'Loughlin, "Damascus spring becomes winter of discontent," The Sydney Morning Herald, March 2, 2005.

³¹ Al-Hayat (London), September 27, 2000.

³² "The Battle for Reforms and Civil Society in Syria—Part I," February 9, 2001, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=countries&Area=syria&ID=IA4701>.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (London), February 8, 2001.

³⁵ Ed O'Loughlin, "Damascus spring becomes winter of discontent," The Sydney Morning Herald, March 2, 2005.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

gust 2002, economist Aref Dalila and physician Dr. Walid al-Bunni, founding members of the Committee for the Revival of Civil Society in Syria, were sentenced to 10 years in prison on charges that they attempted to change the Syrian constitution by illegal means, incite armed rebellion and spread false information. In 2003, Syrian parliament members Mamoun Homsy and Riad Al-Seif—Al-Seif in particular a persistent and vocal critic of the Ba’ath Party—were sentenced on similar counts to 5 years in prison. Also in 2003, two well-known political activists, Riad Al-Turk and Habib Saleh, were sentenced to 30 months and 3 years, respectively.³⁷

As Bashar Al-Assad’s grip on power tightened, it seemed that the only voices of dissent were coming from Syrians abroad, particularly in Europe and the United States. But with the U.S.-led invasion of Syria’s next-door neighbor, Iraq, in March 2003, and the subsequent collapse of Saddam Hussein’s Baa’thist regime, it seemed that homegrown Syrian reformers were once again emboldened. Encouraged by the Bush administration’s talk of a democratic Middle East as well as the increased visibility of democracy-minded Syrian exiles in Washington and Europe, voices for change within Syria began to once again emerge. In October 2003, Syrian-Christian journalist Michel Kilo, who is a member of the Syrian reform movement “The Civil Society,” published an article in the Lebanese daily Al-Nahar blasting the Syrian regime. Kilo complained, quite aptly, that “When the citizen demands reform, [the Baa’th Party] rebuke him and accuse him of treason.”³⁸

This is the type of dictatorial, terrorist-oriented regime with which Russia has struck an alliance, again something inexplicable given the Beslan massacre in Russia. I thank the Commission and you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me to address this grave matter with you today. I look forward to your questions and to working with you on this in the future.

ATTACHMENT A: STATEMENTS BY RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN, AND SYRIAN PRESIDENT BASHAR AL-ASSAD ON RESULTS OF THEIR TALKS IN THE KREMLIN*

JANUARY 25, 2005

VLADIMIR PUTIN

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, let me again welcome our esteemed guest, President Bashar Al-Assad of Syria. This is our guest’s first visit to Russia and I am convinced that the negotiations we had will be an important landmark and open a new essential page in bilateral relations.

Our peoples have had ties of sincere fellow feelings to each other for many years and this is a reliable foundation for partnership based on the principles of equality, mutual respect and trust to each other.

Today we had very substantial and, in my opinion, very successful talks with President Al-Assad. Their main result is the signing

³⁷ Nir Boms and Erick Stakelbeck, “Assad is Speaking,” <http://www.inthenationalinterest.com/Articles/Vol2Issue48/Vol2Issue48Boms.html>.

³⁸ Al-Nahar (Lebanon), October 11, 2003.

* <http://www.president.kremlin.ru>

of a declaration on further development of relations of friendship and cooperation. I am convinced that this declaration will open up new vistas for business ties and cultural exchanges, for direct contacts between our citizens.

During the meeting we discussed a broad range of bilateral issues. First of all, we focused on the development of trade and economic relations between our countries. Syria and Russia have a long record of interaction and successful work on major projects. But the current level of trade and economic relations certainly cannot satisfy us: in our opinion, the level has been too low.

We have positive trends in the economic sphere, and our goal is securing those positive trends. First of all, this concerns cooperation in spheres traditional for our countries such as hydroelectric power generation, oil and gas production and construction of transport facilities. I believe that the Russian-Syrian Business Council established last year will widen the range of bilateral cooperation by adding new projects and establishing direct contacts.

During negotiations, we resolved the problem of Syria's debts to the Russian Federation. We have managed to resolve it on a compromise base acceptable for both parties, thus creating good preconditions for the development of trade and economic relations in the future.

During the meeting we discussed a broad range of issues on the international agenda. In this connection I would like to note that our countries favor the formation of a stable and democratic global order, a global order that would be based on the principles of international law and would rule out the use of force or interference in internal affairs of sovereign states.

The situation in the Middle East was high on the agenda. We hail Syria's intention to engage in political dialogue with Israel, Syria's readiness to resume talks without any preliminary conditions. Our opinions coincide in that lasting peace in the Middle East is only possible if it has a comprehensive nature. This settlement should rely on the commonly recognized international legal form, the UN Security Council's resolutions and the Madrid principles.

We have paid a lot of attention to the Palestinian problem. Like our Syrian partners, we have supported the intention of the new leadership of the autonomy led by Mahmoud Abbas to look for political settlement with Israel. The Road Map drawn up by the Quartet and approved by the UN Security Council will serve this goal. I am convinced that the observance of all of its provisions by all parties would be a real way to the resumption of the peace process.

When considering the situation in Iraq, we noted that the international community should invigorate its efforts aimed at establishing peaceful life in that country. The restoration of the economy and social infrastructure in Iraq has been among the top priorities. In this respect both Russia and Syria could make their contribution to the realization of joint projects.

During negotiations we certainly discussed pooling our efforts in the struggle against terrorism. In this connection we find it expedient to broaden interaction between special services and agencies and between the defense ministries.

We are grateful to Syria for its position in the realization of the decision of the Organization of the Islamic Conference on granting Russia an observer status.

In conclusion let me thank President Al-Assad for constructive dialogue of trust. I am convinced that relations between Russia and Syria will continue to work for the interests of our peoples, promote the strengthening of peace and stability in the Middle East in general.

Thank you for your attention.

BASHAR AL-ASSAD

Mr. President, this visit is taking place in the framework of historic relations between our countries which will work for the strengthening of those relations in all spheres and in the wake of dramatic events of the past 2 years, which has given a new impetus to our relations.

Our negotiations were held in a friendly and very good atmosphere and we discussed all issues of mutual interest, including regional, international and bilateral.

As for our bilateral relations, they should be based on the principles of mutual respect and interest. And we have agreed that those relations will be mutually beneficial. In this framework we approached the solution to a long-standing issue—Syria's debt to Russia, and we expect this to give a new impetus to our economic ties.

We have also signed a number of agreements, particularly in the power energy sphere. We have discussed the creation of a free economic zone, and we have agreed that discussions on the issue will continue. This problem will be discussed by the two countries' experts. A statement has been signed on ways to deal with those problems in the future.

We have discussed peace settlement in the Middle East and ways to establish peace in our region. We have stressed that the obstacles to the peace process in the Middle East could eventually have their effect on all countries in the region. And this may further increase the level of violence and undermine the foundations of stability in the region. We noted that it is necessary to continue cooperation with the purpose of resolving the Middle East problem on the basis of the Madrid Convention and the UN Security Council's Resolutions 242 and 138 and other international resolutions. Plus the principle of peace in exchange for land, plus the Arab peace initiative set forth in Beirut in 2002. We have agreed that it is necessary to continue negotiations without any preliminary conditions, which would allow reaching a comprehensive and fair solution, moving Israeli troops out of all Arab lands occupied since 1967 and creating a Palestinian state with the capital of al-Quds (Jerusalem). It was noted that it is necessary to make sure that the Middle East should be totally free from mass destruction weapons.

As for Iraq, we agreed that it is necessary to retain Iraq's integrity and its national identity and that we should promote the peace process which is underway there, including the election process, while underscoring the need to have all layers of the Iraqi people involved.

As for the international situation, we have agreed that the world should be more active, that other countries should also act more energetically in this field, and that it is necessary to bolster the United Nations' role in maintaining peace worldwide. We are convinced, though, that comprehensive reform of the United Nations is required.

We have denounced terrorism and we are ready to combat it. Our opinions coincide on the roots of this disease and on ways to treat it.

In conclusion we voice our support for Mr. Putin's policy which has reasserted Russia's active presence in the global arena. We also express gratitude to Russia for support of our legitimate rights.

ATTACHMENT B: STATEMENTS BY RUSSIAN PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN, AND SYRIAN PRESIDENT BASHAR AL-ASSAD ON RESULTS OF THEIR TALKS IN THE KREMLIN*

JANUARY 25, 2005

PRESIDENT PUTIN

Dear Mr President, Dear colleagues,

I am very glad to welcome the Syrian delegation to Moscow, headed by President Bashar Al-Assad, who is worthily continuing the glorious traditions of his father, President Hafez Al-Assad. Hafez Al-Assad was a great friend of our people and our country, he was a political figure of international scale. And I would like to stress that at the one-to-one talk with the President of Syria, Mr. Bashar Al-Assad once more showed that the warm relations of friendship between our peoples and countries, which have a long tradition, have been maintained and have good prospects. On our part, we are firmly resolved to continue on the path of developing fruitful and mutually beneficial cooperation both on the bilateral level, and in continuing our efforts together with the international community, with our partners, on regulating the situation in the region as a whole. We also expect fruitful joint work with our Syrian partners.

Welcome!

BASHAR AL-ASSAD

Thank you very much, Mr President. You talked of the historical side of our relations: we are still feeling this historical unity, because there are tens of thousands of graduates from your country in Syria who occupy key positions both in the economy and administration. We also have major fundamental projects which Russia has taken part in, and of course is currently taking part in, with your assistance.

The goal of this visit is to solve certain tasks of developing our relations.

Your country is very influential on the international stage. We highly value your position, and we have common, coordinated interests. We look to the future of economic and trade relations, and hope that they reach the political level that exists between us.

* http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/01/25/1725__type82914__83031.shtml

Naturally, there are several issues that we could discuss, but first of all I would like to stress the importance of the agreements that we signed today.

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF ILAN BERMAN, VICE PRESIDENT
FOR POLICY, AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY COUNCIL**

Chairman Brownback, distinguished members of the Commission: It is an honor to appear before you today to address the subject of Russian-Syrian strategic cooperation. My name is Ilan Berman, and I am Vice President for Policy of the American Foreign Policy Council. This hearing comes at a pivotal time in Syria's foreign policy. The U.S.-led overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and the political transformation that has since begun in Iraq has profoundly threatened the stability of the Syrian regime. Moreover, since the passage of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1559 in September 2004, the government of Syrian president Bashar Al-Assad has faced mounting international pressure over its nearly three-decade-long occupation of Lebanon.

These strategic challenges have led the Syrian regime to expand its contacts with the Russian government. This growing proximity was demonstrated publicly in January 2005, when Al-Assad embarked upon a diplomatic visit to Moscow. His trip was a major success, yielding a mutual commitment to closer cooperation between the Russian government and its "most important partner" in the Middle East. The Moscow meeting between Al-Assad and Russian President Vladimir Putin also had several tangible outcomes:

As part of its public re-engagement with Syria, the Kremlin agreed to write off almost three-quarters (73 percent) of Syria's \$13.4 billion Cold War era debt.¹ As a result, according to Syrian officials, foreign debt has now been cut to "less than 10 percent" of Syria's roughly \$58 billion GDP.²

This arrangement has serious implications. The Syrian military remains overwhelmingly reliant on Soviet- and Russian-origin weaponry, which make up an estimated 90 percent of its arsenal.³ Therefore any Syrian military modernization effort inevitably revolves around cooperation with Russia. Such a program has long been contemplated by the Syrian government, and is now much more likely, thanks to the Kremlin.

Russia and Syria signed six supplemental agreements on economic cooperation, including an accord designed to strengthen energy coordination between the two countries.⁴ This deal involves increased contacts between Russia's Soyuzneftegaz conglomerate and Syria's Oil and Natural Resources Ministry, and sets the stage for greater Russian investment in the Syrian energy sector.

Such involvement is critically important for Syria's long-term solvency. Approximately half of the country's total annual export revenues currently derive from oil sales.⁵ Moreover, the investment base in Syria's energy sector is shrinking. Since mid-2002, international pressure has led two supermajors, U.S.-based ConocoPhillips and France's TotalFinaElf, to announce their dis-

¹ Riad Khawaji, "Russia, Syria Revive Ties with Debt Reduction," Defense News, January 31, 2005.

² "Syrian Foreign Debt Cut to 10 Percent of GDP After Russia Deal," Agence France Presse, January 27, 2005.

³ Simon Saradzhyan, "Countries Race for Russian Weapons," St. Petersburg Times (Russia) No. 481, July 9, 1999.

⁴ "Russia and Syria Agree on Debt," Russia Journal, January 26, 2005.

⁵ Energy Information Administration, U.S. Department of Energy, "Country Analysis Brief: Syria," April 2004, <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/syria.html>.

engagement from Syria.⁶ Russian energy conglomerates are therefore positioned to play an increasingly decisive role in propping up the Syrian regime.

As part of the expanding military-technical cooperation between the two countries, Russia has committed to upgrading Syria's air defense infrastructure. Russian and Syrian officials have commenced talks about the Al-Assad regime's acquisition of the "Strelets" mobile air defense system.⁷ Additionally, Syrian officials are said to be interested in Russia's advanced S-400 air- and missile defense system.⁸ Through its provision of these defenses, as well as potential sales of other technologies—such as the "Iskander E" short-range missile—Russia is assisting in the creation of what amounts to a strategic "umbrella" over Syria.⁹

What drives Syrian policy? One factor is certainly leadership. Syria's current ruler is an ophthalmologist by training. Until his sudden death in January 1994, it was his older brother, Basil, who had been Syrian dictator Hafez Al-Assad's heir-apparent. As a result, until shortly before his assumption of power in June 2000, Bashar had had little exposure to affairs of state.

In perspective, this means that Syria's president has been a foreign policy practitioner for less time than the current crop of graduate political science students now completing studies at American universities. This is perhaps the reason that, under his direction, Syria has been pursuing a haphazard and at times even schizophrenic foreign policy—ranging from sporadic intelligence assistance to the United States to expanded partnership with the Hezbollah terrorist organization to harboring elements of Palestinian radical groups and high-level Iraqi Ba'ath loyalists.¹⁰

Another element is threat perception. As a result of its Ba'athist credentials, as well as its role as a major state sponsor of terrorism, Syria understandably sees itself as a possible candidate for U.S.-assisted regime change, and is working actively to prevent such an eventuality.

Syria's turn to Russia is only one part of this effort. Over the past year, Syria has also signed new agreements with Iran codifying closer military cooperation between Damascus and Tehran and enshrining an Iranian commitment to defend Syria in the event of an American or Israeli offensive.¹¹

Russia's role is driven by different considerations. Under the guidance of President Putin, Russia increasingly has begun to revert to a geo-political, neo-imperialist strategic agenda.

Kremlin officials have set their sights on the post-Saddam Hussein Middle East, and have begun efforts to reestablish a regional role at the expense of American strategy. Cooperation with Damascus constitutes a large part of these plans. As a recent analysis in Moscow's independent Kommersant newspaper explained:

⁶ Paul Michael Wihbey, "Syria's Weak Spot," National Review Online, March 3, 2005.

⁷ Marina Golovkina, "Russia to sell Advanced missiles to Syria," Reuters, February 16, 2005.

⁸ "Syria's Assad Negotiated for S-400 Anti-Missile System in Moscow," Geostrategy-Direct, February 21, 2005.

⁹ "Superpower Optimism," Kommersant (Moscow), January 24, 2005.

¹⁰ See, for example, Editorial, "Warning to Damascus," Wall Street Journal, February 7, 2005.

¹¹ "Defence Minister Says Syria a Part of Iran's Security," IRNA (Tehran), February 26, 2004; "Syria Part of Iran's Security: Shamkhani," Tehran Times, February 28, 2004; "Iran, Syria Form Common Front," BBC, February 16, 2005.

“Russian foreign policy ambitions long ago reached Soviet proportions. However, in reality, up to now Moscow has not been in a position to lay claim to superpower status. On the contrary, a series of failures on the international scene have shown the real state of affairs. Nevertheless . . . [u]sing the Syrian government’s fear of a possible American invasion, Moscow is calculating on binding Damascus to its own military-industrial complex following the example of Soviet times.”¹²

Russia’s collusion with the Syrian regime has regional implications. Since the February 14th assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in Beirut, Syria has been weathering a sudden and unprecedented challenge to its traditional role as Lebanon’s overlord. Moreover, signs that Lebanon’s “Cedar Revolution” could spark internal change within the Syrian regime are also beginning to emerge.¹³ Assistance from Moscow, in the form of economic incentives or new military sales, constitutes a major lifeline—one that will provide the Syrian government with greater resources and capabilities to resist pro-independence stirrings in Lebanon or within its own country.

Notably, some encouraging signs are visible. In the past week, Russian officials have echoed their counterparts in the United States, Saudi Arabia and Europe in publicly calling for a complete Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon.¹⁴ Moreover, Kremlin officials have been cautiously supportive of the recent signs of political transformation emerging from Lebanon.¹⁵

So far, however, this rhetoric has not been matched by a rollback of strategic ties between Moscow and Damascus. For all practical purposes, therefore, the Kremlin’s partnership with the Al-Assad regime continues to constitute a major impediment to the progress of democracy in the Middle East.



¹²“Superpower Optimism,” *Kommersant* (Moscow), January 24, 2005.

¹³See, for example, Amir Taheri, “Syria’s Road to Freedom,” *New York Post*, March 7, 2005; Marc Ginsburg, “The Road From Damascus,” *Weekly Standard* 010, Iss. 24, March 14, 2005.

¹⁴“Russia Urges Syria to Leave Lebanon,” *United Press International*, March 3, 2005.

¹⁵“Russia Firmly Supports Lebanon Independence,” *Xinhua* (Beijing), March 1, 2005.

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