The Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a hearing Sept. 3 to debate the possible authorization of U.S. military action against the Syrian government, featuring testimony by Secretary of State John Kerry, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ (D-NJ): This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

Let me first say that there -- I neither -- actions of approval or disapproval from the audience. We welcome you to be here on this important occasion, but we welcome you to be observers of this important occasion. And the chair will not tolerate actions that are in violation of the committee rules.

Let me welcome Secretary Kerry back to the committee that he chaired; Secretary Hagel, on a committee that he served on; and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dempsey, to the committee.

We convene this hearing as we have convened many before to make one of the most difficult decisions we are asked and tasked to make, the authorization of the use of American military power, this time in Syria, to respond to the horrific chemical attack of August 21st that took the lives of 1,429 Syrians, including at least 426 children. The images of that day are sickening. And in my view, the world cannot ignore the inhumanity and the horror of this act.

I do no take our responsibility to authorize military force lightly or make such decisions easily. I voted against the war in Iraq and strongly have supported a withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. But today I support the president's decision to use military force in the face of this horrific crime against humanity. Yes, there are risks to action, but the consequences of inaction are greater and graver still: further humanitarian disaster in Syria, regional instability, the loss of American credibility around the world and an emboldened Iran and North Korea and the disintegration of international law.

This decision will be one of the most difficult any of us will be asked to make, but it is our role as representatives of the American people to make it, to put aside political differences and personal ideologies, to forget partisanship and preconceptions, to forget the polls, the politics and even personal consequences. It is a moment for a profile in courage and to do what one knows is right. It is our responsibility to evaluate the facts, assess the intelligence we have and then debate the wisdom and scope of a military response fully and publicly, understanding its geopolitical ramifications and fully aware of the consequences.
At the end of the day, each of us will decide whether to vote for or against a resolution for military action based on our assessments of the facts and our conscience. The decision rests with us. It is not political. It is a policy decision that must be based, I believe, on what we believe is in the national security interests of the United States.

To be clear, the authorization we will ultimately seek is for focused action, with a clear understanding that American troops will not be on the ground in combat, and the language before us is but a starting point.

The president has decided to ask Congress for our support. Now the eyes of the world are upon us. The decision we make, the resolution we present to the Senate and the votes we take will reverberate around the world. Our friends and allies await our decision, as does the despot in Pyongyang, the ayatollahs of terror in Tehran and terrorist groups wherever they may be.

What we do in the face of the chemical attack by the Assad regime against innocent civilians will send a signal to the world that such weapons, in violation of international law, cannot be used with impunity.

The question is: Will we send a message that the United States will not tolerate the use of chemical weapons anywhere in the world, by anyone, for any reason? Will we, in the name of all that is human and decent, authorize the use of American military power against the inexcusable, indiscriminate and immoral use of chemical weapons? Or will we stand down?

What message do we send the world when such a crime goes unpunished? Will those who have these weapons use them again? Will they use them more widely and kill more children? Will they use them against our allies, against our troops or embassies? Or will they give them or sell them to terrorists who would use them against us here at home?

Are we willing to watch a slaughter just because the patrons of that slaughter are willing to use their veto at the United Nations to allow it to happen so their beneficiary can stay in power? And are we so tired of war we are willing to silence our conscience and accept the consequences that will inevitably flow from the silence -- from that silence to our national interests?

We will hear the arguments and the options presented to us today and we will look at the facts as we know them according to the declassified assessment released last Friday that Secretary Kerry has so passionately presented to the nation. According to that assessment, we know with high confidence from the intelligence community that the Syrian government carried out a chemical weapons attack in the Damascus suburbs on August 21st.

We know that the Assad regime stockpiled chemical agents including mustard, sarin, and VX gas and has thousands of munitions capable of delivering them. We know that President Bashar al-Assad makes the decisions when it comes to the regime’s stockpile of chemical agents, and that personnel involved in the program are carefully vetted to ensure loyalty to the regime and the security of the program.

We have evidence that chemical weapons have been used on a smaller scale against the opposition on several other occasions in the past year, including in the Damascus suburbs, that sarin gas has been used on some of those occasions, and that it was not the opposition that used it.

We know that chemical weapons personnel from the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center, subordinate to the regime’s Ministry of Defense, cooperating in the Damascus suburb of Adra, from Sunday, August 18th until early in the morning on Wednesday, August 21st near an area the regime uses to mix chemical weapons, including sarin; and human intelligence as well as signal and geospatial intelligence have shown regime activity in the preparation of chemicals prior to the attacks, including the distribution and use of gas masks. We have multiple streams of intelligence that show the regime launched a rocket attack against the Damascus suburbs in
the early hours of August 21st, and satellite corroboration that the attacks were launched from a regime-controlled area and struck neighborhoods where the chemical attacks reportedly occurred, clearly tying the pieces together. That is what we know in terms of who deployed these weapons.

More evidence is available, and we will be looking at all of the classified information in a closed session of the committee tomorrow that more clearly establishes the use of chemical weapons by the regime, the military responses available to us and the results we expect from those responses. But as of now, in my view, there is a preponderance of evidence beyond a reasonable doubt that Assad’s forces willfully targeted civilians with chemical weapons.

Having said that, at the end of the day, the chemical weapons attacks against innocent civilians in Syria is an indirect attack on America’s security with broader implications for the region and the world.

If chemical weapons can be used with impunity, in violation of the Geneva protocol crafted by the League of Nations and signed by the United States in 1925, in fact signed by Syria itself in 1968, they can be used without fear of reprisal anywhere by anyone. And in my view, such heinous and immoral violations of decency demand a clear and unambiguous response.

We are at a crossroads moment. A precedent will be set either for the unfettered and unpunished use of chemical weapons or a precedent will be set for the deterrence of the use of such weapons through the limited use of military force that sends a message that the world will not stand down. We will either send a message to Syria, Iran, North Korea, Hezbollah, al-Qaida and any other nonstate actors that the world will not tolerate the senseless use of chemical weapons by anyone, or we will choose to stand silent in the face of horrific human suffering.

We need to consider the consequences of not acting. Our silence would be a message to the ayatollah that America and the world are not serious about stopping their march to acquiring nuclear weapons. Israel would no longer believe that we have their back and would be hard-pressed to restrain itself. Our silence would embolden Kim Jong Un, who has a large chemical weapons cache, and would send a message that we are not serious about protecting South Korea and the region from nuclear or chemical weapons, and would embolden Hezbollah and Hamas to redouble their efforts to acquire chemical weapons, and they might succeed.

Clearly at the end of the day our national security is at stake.

I want to thank our distinguished witnesses, who will present the facts as they know them. We’ll evaluate them, debate a resolution, and at the end of the day, each of us will decide whether to send a message to the world that there are lines we cannot cross as civilized human beings or stand silent and risk new threats.

Let me say before I turn to Senator Corker for his opening statement, the president is asking for an authorization for the use of limited force.

It is not his intention or ours to involve ourselves fully in Syria’s civil war.

What is before us is a request, and I quote, “to prevent or deter the use or proliferation of chemical or biological weapons within, to or from Syria and to protect the United States and its allies and partners against the threat posed by such weapons.” This is not a declaration of war but a declaration of our values to the world, a declaration that says we are willing to use our military power when necessary against anyone who dares turn such heinous weapons on innocent civilians anywhere in the world.

We know the facts. We’ll hear the arguments. We will have the debate. And then it will be up to each of us to search our conscience and make a decision on behalf of the American people.
I trust that we can achieve that in a bipartisan way. I have been working with Senator Corker as we move towards a resolution that I hope will get broad bipartisan support.

And before I turn to him, I just want to acknowledge the presence -- and we're thrilled to see her here today -- of Teresa Heinz Kerry to join us on this momentous occasion. I'm glad to see you so well and being here with us.

And with that, Senator Corker.

**SENATOR ROBERT CORKER (R-TN):** Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your comments and the time we've spent together recently, and I want to thank our witnesses for being here, not only for their service to our country in their current capacity but in their service in every way for many, many years. I thank you for being here.

Today you're beginning the formal request of asking each of us to make the most important decision many of us will make during our tenure in the United States Senate. And I know that everybody here on the dais and those who are not take that decision very seriously.

I've noticed a distinct sense of humility as we've gone about the various questions, conference calls, the earlier meetings we've had today and previously this week.

And I know that every member here knows that whether they decide to support an authorization for the use of military force or not, they are making a decision about our country's national interests. And I know that everybody is going to be taking that decision very, very seriously.

One of the issues that many members will have is, the fact is that should we support an authorization for the use of military force -- and I think that everyone here knows that I am very generally inclined to do so and am working closely with Senator Menendez for something that will be a starting point for this committee's discussions -- and I know each member will have its imprint on what it is that we end up deciding to vote upon.

But one of the problems that members have -- and I think this hearing and tomorrow's hearing is important to answer -- is, while we make policy, you implement. And the implementation of this is very, very important. And I think there have been mixed signals about what that implementation actually is going to mean and the effect it's going to have on the country that we're involved in.

I want to say that I was just in the region, as I know many people have been, and I am still totally dismayed at the lack of support we are giving to the vetted moderate opposition. We publicly stated what that support is going to be even though it's being carried out in a covert way. But it is, to some degree, humiliating to be in a refugee when our policy has been that we are going to train, we're going to equip, we're going to give humanitarian aid to the vetted opposition, and yet, when you sit down with the people we're coalescing around, like General Idris and others, very little of that has occurred.

So I know today's focus is going to be largely on the issue of chemical warfare. And I know that the case has to be made. And I know that each of us have had the opportunity to hear that case, to see intelligence, to understand on what basis these claims have been made. And my guess is that most everyone here fully believes that chemical weapons have been used on civilians to a large degree.

So I know that case is going to be made to the American people today as you're making it to us, but it's my hope that a big part of what you're going to do here today -- and I know we talked about this earlier this morning at the White House -- but is to make a case as to why Syria is important to our national interests, why Syria matters to the region, why it's important for us to carry out the stated strategy and how we're going to continue to carry out that stated strategy.

One of the things that I do not want to see in this authorization is after -- if it's authorized and force takes place,
I want to see us to -- I want to see us continue to carry out the strategy that has been stated, and that is building the capacity of the vetted moderate opposition. So I’d like to have you address that. I’d like to have you today also address how this use of military force supports that strategy, how it’s going to affect the region in the aftermath.

So I thank you for being here today. I know a big part of what we’re discerning today and what we’re making decisions upon is the credibility of the United States of America.

I know that people in the region are watching. I know that we’ve been hesitant to move on with many of the activities that we’ve stated we’re going to be carrying out. So today, I hope that each of you will bring clarity to this. I know we’re going to talk about chemical warfare, but I hope you’ll give us even more clarity about our opposition strengthening, about how this is going to affect us overall. And I hope we’ll all leave here today with a clear understanding of how this strategy is going to be carried out.

I thank you, and I look forward to your testimony.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Secretary Kerry.

SECRETARY JOHN KERRY: Well, Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, Ranking Member Corker, thank you very, very much for having us here today. We look forward to this opportunity to be able to share with you President Obama’s vision with respect to not just this action, but as Senator Corker has inquired appropriately about Syria itself and the course of action in the Middle East.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for welcoming Teresa. This is her first public event since early July, so we’re all happy she’s here.

As we convene for this debate, it’s not an exaggeration to say to you, all of you, my former colleagues, that the world is watching not just to see what we decide, but it’s watching to see how we make this decision, whether in a dangerous world we can still make our government speak with one voice. They want to know if America will rise to this moment and make a difference.

And the question of whether to authorize our nation to take military action is -- as you have said, Mr. Chairman, and you’ve echoed Mr. Ranking Member -- this is obviously one of the most important decisions, one of the most important responsibilities of this committee or of any senator in the course of a career.

The president and the administration appreciate that you have returned quickly to the nation’s capital to address it and that you are appropriately beginning a process of focusing with great care and great precision, which is the only way to approach the potential use of military power.

Ranking Member Corker, I know that you want to discuss, as you said, why Syria matters to our national security and our strategic interests beyond the compelling humanitarian reasons, and I look forward with Secretary Hagel and General Dempsey to laying that out here this afternoon.

But first, it is important to explain to the American people why we’re here. It’s important for people who may not have caught every component of the news over the course of the Labor Day weekend to join us, all of us, in focusing in on what is at stake here. That’s why the president of the United States made the decision, as he did, contrary to what many people thought he would do, of asking the Congress to join in this decision. We are stronger as a nation when we do that.

So we’re here because against multiple warnings from the president of the United States, from the Congress, from our friends and allies around the world and even from Russia and Iran, the Assad regime, and only, undeniably, the Assad regime, unleashed an outrageous chemical attack against its own citizens.
We're here because a dictator and his family's personal enterprise, in their lust to hold on to power, were willing to infect the air of Damascus with a poison that killed innocent mothers and fathers and hundreds of their children, their lives all snuffed out by gas in the early morning of August 21st.

Now, some people here and there, amazingly, have questioned the evidence of this assault on conscience. I repeat here again today that only the most willful desire to avoid reality can assert that this did not occur as described or that the regime did not do it. It did happen, and the Assad regime did it.

Now, I remember Iraq. Secretary Hagel remembers Iraq. General Dempsey especially remembers Iraq. But Secretary Hagel and I and many of you sitting on the dais remember Iraq in a special way because we were here for that vote. We voted. And so we are especially sensitive, Chuck and I, to never again asking any member of Congress to take a vote on faulty intelligence.

And that is why our intelligence community has scrubbed and rescrubbed the evidence. We have declassified unprecedented amounts of information, and we ask the American people and the rest of the world to judge that information.

We can tell you beyond any reasonable doubt that our evidence proves the Assad regime prepared for this attack, issued instructions to prepare for this attack, warned its own forces to use gas masks; that we have physical evidence of where the rockets came from and when.

Not one rocket landed in regime-controlled territory -- not one. All of them landed in opposition-controlled or contested territory. We have a map -- physical evidence -- showing every geographical point of impact. And that is concrete.

Within minutes of the attack -- 90, I think, to be precise, maybe slightly shorter -- the social media exploded with horrific images of the damage that had been caused -- men and women, the elderly and children sprawled on a hospital floor with no wounds, no blood, but all dead. Those scenes of human chaos and desperation were not contrived. They were real. No one could contrive such a scene.

We are certain that none of the opposition has the weapons or capacity to effect a strike of this scale, particularly from the heart of regime territory. Just think about it in logical terms, common sense. With high confidence, our intelligence community tells us that after the strike the regime issued orders to stop and then fretted openly, we know, about the possibility of U.N. inspectors discovering evidence.

So then they began to systematically try to destroy it, contrary to my discussion with their foreign minister who said we have nothing to hide. I said, if you have nothing to hide then let the inspectors in today and let it be unrestricted. It wasn’t. They didn’t. It took four days of shelling before they finally allowed them in under a constrained pre-arranged structure. And we now have learned that the hair and blood samples from first responders in east Damascus has tested positive for signatures of sarin.

So my colleagues, we know what happened. For all the lawyers, for all the former prosecutors, for all those who have sat on a jury, I can tell you that we know these things beyond the reasonable doubt that is the standard by which we send people to jail for the rest of their lives.

So we're here because of what happened two weeks ago. But we're also here because of what happened nearly a century ago, in the darkest moments of World War I and after the horror of gas warfare, when the vast majority of the world came together to declare in no uncertain terms that chemical weapons crossed a line of conscience, and they must be banned from use forever. Over the years that followed, over 180 countries, including Iran, Iraq and Russia, agreed, and they joined the Chemical Weapons Convention. Even countries with whom we agree on little agreed on that conviction.
Now, some have tried to suggest that the debate we’re having today is about President Obama’s red line. I could not more forcefully state that is just plain and simply wrong. This debate is about the world’s red line. It’s about humanity’s red line. And it’s a red line that anyone with a conscience ought to draw.

This debate is also about Congress’ own red line. You, the United States Congress, agreed to the Chemical Weapons Convention. You, the United States Congress, passed the Syria Accountability Act, which says Syria’s chemical weapons are -- quote, “threaten the security of the Middle East and the national security interests of the United States.”

You, the Congress, have spoken out about grave consequences if Assad in particular used chemical weapons. So I say to you, Senator Corker, that is one of the reasons why Syria is important.

And as we debate and the world watches as you decide and the world wonders not whether Assad’s regime executed the worst chemical weapons attack of the 21st century -- that fact I think is now beyond question -- the world wonders whether the United States of America will consent through silence to standing aside while this kind of brutality is allowed to happen without consequence.

In the nearly 100 years since the first global commitment against chemical weapons, only two tyrants dared to cross the world’s brightest line. Now Bashar al-Assad has become the third, and I think all of you know that history holds nothing but infamy for those criminals, and history reserves also very little sympathy for their enablers.

So the reality is the gravity of this moment. That is the importance of the decision that this Congress faces and that the world is waiting to learn about in these next days.

Now, Ranking Member Corker asked a central question: Why should Americans care, beyond what I just said, which ought to be enough in the judgment of the president and this administration?

Well, it is clear that in addition to what I just mentioned about the Syria Accountability Act and the threat to the Middle East, we cannot overlook the impact of chemical weapons and the danger that they pose to a particular volatile area of the world in which we’ve been deeply invested for years because we have great friends there.

We have allies there. We have deep interests there. Since President Obama’s policy is that Assad must go, it is not insignificant that to deprive him of the capacity to use chemical weapons, or to degrade the capacity to use those chemical weapons, actually deprives him of a lethal weapon in this ongoing civil war, and that has an impact. That can help to stabilize the region, ultimately.

In addition, we have other important strategic national security interests, not just in the prevention of the proliferation of chemical weapons but to avoid the creation of a safe haven in Syria or a base of operations for extremists to use these weapons against our friends. All of us know that the extremes of both sides are there waiting in the wings, working and pushing and fighting. They’d be desperate to get their hands on these materials. And the fact is that if nothing happens to begin to change the equation or the current calculation, that area can become even more so an area of ungoverned space where those extremists threaten even the United States, and more immediately, if they get their hands on those weapons, allies and friends of ours, like Jordan, or Israel, or Lebanon or others.

Forcing Assad to change his calculation about his ability to act with impunity can contribute to his realization that he cannot gas or shoot his way out of his predicament.

And as I think you know, it has been the president’s primary goal to achieve a negotiated resolution. But you’ve got to have parties prepared to negotiate to achieve that.
Syria is also important because, quite simply -- I can't put this to you more plainly than to just ask each of you to ask yourselves: If you're Assad, or if you're any one of the other despots in that region, and the United States steps back from this moment, together with our other allies and friends, what is the message? The message is that he has been granted impunity -- the freedom to choose to use the weapons again or force us to go through this cycle again with who knows what outcome after once refusing it. We would have granted him the capacity to use these weapons against more people with greater levels of damage, because we would have stood and stepped away.

As confidently as we know what happened in Damascus, my friends, on August 21st, we know that Assad would read our stepping away or our silence as an invitation to use those weapons with impunity. And in creating impunity, we would be creating opportunity -- the opportunity for other dictators and/or terrorists to pursue their own weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

I will tell you, there are some people hoping that the United States Congress doesn't vote for this very limited request the president has put before you. Iran is hoping you look the other way. Our inaction would surely give them a permission slip for them to at least misinterpret our intention if not to put it to the test. Hezbollah is hoping that isolationism will prevail.

North Korea is hoping that ambivalence carries the day. They are all listening for our silence. And if we don't answer Assad today, we will erode a standard that has existed for those hundred years. In fact, we will erode a standard that has protected our own troops in war, and we will invite even more dangerous tests down the road.

Our allies and our partners are also counting on us in this situation. The people of Israel, of Jordan, of Turkey, each look next door, and they see that they're one stiff breeze away from the potential of being hurt, their civilians being killed as a consequences of choices Assad might take in the absence of action. They anxiously await our assurance that our word means something. They await the assurance that if the children lined up in unbloodied burial shrouds were their own children that we would keep the world's promise. That's what they're hoping.

So the authorization that President Obama seeks is definitively in our national security interest. We need to send to Syria and to the world, to dictators and to terrorists, to allies and to civilians alike the unmistakable message that when the United States of America and the world say, never again, we don't mean sometimes; we don't mean somewhere; never means never.

So this is a vote for accountability. Norms and laws that keep the civilized world civil mean nothing if they're not enforced. As Justice Jackson said in his opening argument at the Nuremberg trials, the ultimate step in avoiding periodic wars, which are inevitable in a system of international lawlessness, is to make statesmen responsible to the law.

If the world's worst despots see that they can flout with impunity prohibitions against the world's worst weapons, then those prohibitions are just pieces of paper. That is what we mean by accountability and that is what we mean by we cannot be silent.

So let me be clear: President Obama is not asking America to go to war. And I say that sitting next to two men -- Secretary Hagel and Chairman Dempsey -- who know what war is. Senator McCain knows what war is. They know the difference between going to war and what President Obama is requesting now. We all agree, there will be no American boots on the ground.

The president has made crystal clear, we have no intention of assuming responsibility for Syria's civil war. He is asking only for the power to make clear, to make certain that the United States means what we say, that the world, when we join together in a multilateral statement, mean what we say. He's asking for authorization to degrade and deter Bashar al-Assad's capacity to use chemical weapons.
Now, some will undoubtedly ask, and I think appropriately, what about the unintended consequences of action? Some fear a retaliation that leads to a larger conflict. Well, let me put it bluntly: If Assad is arrogant enough, and I would say foolish enough, to retaliate to the consequences of his own criminal activity, the United States and our allies have ample ways to make him regret that decision without going to war.

Even Assad’s supporters, Russia and Iran, say publicly that the use of chemical weapons is unacceptable.

Now, some will also question the extent of our responsibility; to them, I say when someone kills hundreds of children with a weapon the world has banned, we are all responsible. That is true because of treaties like the Geneva Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention and for us, the Syria Accountability Act. But it’s also true because we share a common humanity and a common decency.

This is not the time for armchair isolationism. This is not the time to be spectators to slaughter. Neither our country nor our conscience could afford the cost of silence. We have spoken up against unspeakable horror many times in the past; now, we must stand up and act. And we must protect our security, protect our values and lead the world with conviction that is clear about our responsibility.

Thank you.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Thank you, Mr. Secretary --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Secretary -- (off mic) -- there are people today who don’t -- (off mic) --

SEN. MENENDEZ: (Sounds gavel.) The committee will be in order.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: -- people who said -- (off mic) -- go to war.

SEN. MENENDEZ: The committee will be in order.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We don’t want another war.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Could I ask the police to restore order?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Off mic) -- nobody wants this (war ?) -- (inaudible) -- is because of war. The American people did not want this. Secretary -- (off mic) --

SEN. MENENDEZ: Secretary Hagel.

SEC. KERRY: Can I just say, before I -- (inaudible) -- you know the first time I testified before this committee, when I was 27 years old, I had feelings very similar to that protester.

And I would just say that is exactly why it is so important that we are all here having this debate, talking about these things before the country and that the Congress itself will act representing the American people. And I think we all can respect those who have a different point of view, and we do.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Secretary Hagel.

SECRETARY CHARLES HAGEL: Mr. Chairman, thank you. Chairman Menendez and Ranking Member Corker, members of the committee, as we all know, in the coming days Congress will debate how to respond to the most recent chemical weapons attack in Syria, a large-scale sarin gas assault perpetrated by the Syrian government against its own people.

As a former senator and member of this committee, I welcome this debate, and I strongly support President Obama’s decision to seek congressional authorization for the use of force in Syria.
As each of us knows, committing the country to using military force is the most difficult decision America’s leaders can make, as Ranking Member Corker noted. All of those who are privileged to serve our nation have a responsibility to ask tough questions before that commitment is made. The American people must be assured that their leaders are acting according to U.S. national interests, with well-defined military objectives, with an understanding of the risks and consequences involved.

The president, along with his entire national security team, asked those tough questions before we concluded that the United States should take military action against Syria because of what the Assad regime has done.

I want to address how we reached this decision by clarifying the U.S. interests at stake, our military objectives, and the risks of not acting at this critical juncture.

As President Obama said, the use of chemical weapons in Syria is not only an assault on humanity, it is a serious threat to America’s national security interests and those of our closest allies. The Syrian regime’s use of chemical weapons poses grave risks to our friends and partners along Syria’s borders, including Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq.

If Assad is prepared to use chemical weapons against his own people, we have to be concerned that terrorist groups like Hezbollah, which has forces in Syria supporting the Assad regime, would acquire them and would use them. That risk of chemical weapons proliferation poses a direct threat to our friends, our partners and to U.S. personnel in the region. We cannot afford for Hezbollah or any terrorist group determined to strike the United States to have incentives to acquire or use chemical weapons.

The Syrian regime’s actions risk eroding the nearly century-old international norm against the use of chemical weapons, which Secretary Kerry has noted, a norm that has helped protect -- helped protect the United States homeland and American forces operating across the globe from those terrible weapons. Weakening this norm would embolden other regimes to acquire or use chemical weapons.

For example, North Korea maintains a massive stockpile of chemical weapons that threatens our treaty ally the Republic of Korea and the 28,000 U.S. troops stationed there. I’ve just returned from Asia, where I had a very serious and long conversation with South Korea’s defense minister about the threat, the real threat that North Korea’s stockpile of chemical weapons presents to them.

Our allies throughout the world must be assured that the United States will fulfill its security commitments.

Given these threats to our national security, the United States must demonstrate through our actions that the use of chemical weapons is unacceptable. The President has made clear that our military objectives in Syria would be to hold the Assad regime accountable, degrade its ability to carry out these kinds of attacks, and deter the regime from further use of chemical weapons.

The Department of Defense has developed military options to achieve these objectives. And we have positioned U.S. assets throughout the region to successfully execute this mission. We believe we can achieve them with a military action that would be limited in duration and scope. General Dempsey and I have assured the President that U.S. forces will be ready to act whenever the President gives the order.

We are also working with our allies and our partners in this effort. Key partners, including France, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and friends in the region have assured us of their strong support of U.S. action. In defining our military objectives, we made clear that we are not seeking to resolve the underlying conflict in Syria through direct military force. Instead we are contemplating actions that are tailored to respond to the use of chemical weapons.

A political solution created by the Syrian people is the only way to ultimately end the violence in Syria. And
Secretary Kerry is leading international efforts to help the parties in Syria move toward a negotiated transition, a transition that means a free and inclusive Syria.

We're also committed to doing more to assist the Syrian opposition. But Assad must be held accountable for using these weapons in defiance of the international community.

Having defined America's interests and our military objectives, we also must examine the risks and the consequences of action as well as the consequences of inaction. There are always risks in taking action. The Assad regime under increasing pressure by the Syrian opposition could feel empowered to carry out even more devastating chemical weapons attacks without a response. Chemical weapons make no distinction between combatants and innocent civilians and inflict the worst kind of indiscriminate suffering as we have recently seen. Our refusal to act would undermine the credibility of America's other security commitments, including the president's commitment to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. The word of the United States must mean something. It is vital currency in foreign relations and international and allied commitments.

Every witness here today -- Secretary Kerry, General Dempsey and myself -- have served in uniform, fought in war and seen its ugly realities up close -- as has already been noted, Senator McCain. We understand that a country faces few decisions as grave as using military force. We are not unaware of the costs and ravages of war.

But we also understand that America must protect its people and its national interests. That is our highest responsibility.

All of us who had the privilege and responsibility of serving this great nation owe the American people, and especially those wearing the uniform of our country, a vigorous debate on how America should respond to this horrific chemical weapons attack in Syria. I know everyone on this committee agrees and takes their responsibility of office just as seriously as the president and everyone sitting at this table.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Thank you, Secretary Hagel. And I know that General Dempsey is available to answer questions from the members of the committee. And in that regard, let me start off by urging members tomorrow there will be an intelligence briefing for the committee on both the issues at hand as well as potential military actions. So in this setting, we obviously are somewhat constrained about what we might discuss with greater specificity tomorrow.

Mr. Secretary, you make and have made a compelling case. And I think it's important, and I appreciate you reiterating the high degree of confidence that exists in our intelligence assessments. I think those are the conditions precedent to be able to move forward.

This weekend, I was at a soccer tournament, and I had a group of moms come up to me and say, Senator, we saw those pictures. They're horrific. We can't imagine the devastation those parents must feel about their children. But why us? Why us? And so I ask you, would you tell them that we would be more secure or less secure by the actions that are being considered for which the president has asked for the authorization of the use of force?

SEC. KERRY: Well, Senator I would say unequivocally that the president's actions will make us more secure, less likely that Assad can use his weapons or chooses to use his weapons, and the absence of taking the action the president has asked for will, in fact, be far more threatening and dangerous and potentially ultimately cost lives.

SEN. MENENDEZ: And do you consider the consequences of inaction greater than the consequences of action?

SEC. KERRY: I do.
SEN. MENENDEZ: General Dempsey, what do we envision, in broad terms, this potential military campaign to be in terms of its effect? What do we expect at the end of any authorized action to see the results look like? What is our expectation?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yes, thank you, chairman. The task I've been given is to develop military options to deter -- that is to say, change the regime's calculus about the use of chemical weapons and degrade his ability to do so -- that is to say, both activities directly related to chemical weapons themselves, but also potentially the means of employing them -- and anything further than that I would prefer to speak about in a classified setting.

SEN. MENENDEZ: I understand that. Let me ask you this: In the process of achieving those two goals that you just outlined, would there not be a collateral consequence to the regime of further degrading its overall capabilities?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yes.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Mr. Secretary, we received from the administration a proposed resolution for the authorization of force, and of course that is a negotiation between the Congress and the administration.

Would you tell us whether you believe that a prohibition for having American boots on the ground -- is that something that the administration would accept as part of a resolution?

SEC. KERRY: Mr. Chairman, it would be preferable not to, not because there is any intention or any plan or any desire whatsoever to have boots on the ground. And I think the president will give you every assurance in the world, as am I, as has the secretary of defense and the chairman. But in the event Syria imploded, for instance, or in the event there was a threat of a chemical weapons cache falling into the hands of al-Nusra or someone else and it was clearly in the interest of our allies and all of us, the British, the French and others, to prevent those weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of the worst elements, I don’t want to take off the table an option that might or might not be available to a president of the United States to secure our country. So that was the only kind of example, that’s the only thing I can think of that would immediately leap to mind to say, you know --

SEN. MENENDEZ: Well, if we -- if we said that there’d be no troops on the ground for combat purposes, that clearly would, I assume --

SEC. KERRY: Well, assuming that in the going to protect those weapons, whether or not they had to, you know, answer a shot in order to be secure -- I don’t want to speak to that. The bottom line is this -- can I give you the bottom line?

SEN. MENENDEZ: We’re going to have to -- we’re going to have to -- we’re going to have to work to -- (inaudible) --

SEC. KERRY: I’m absolutely confident, Mr. Chairman, that it is easy, not that complicated, to work out language that will satisfy the Congress and the American people that there’s no door open here through which someone can march in ways that the Congress doesn’t want it to while still protecting the national security interests of the country.

I’m confident that can be worked out.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Well, I --

SEC. KERRY: The bottom line is, the president has no intention and will not, and we do not want to, put American troops on the ground to fight this -- or be involved in the fighting of this civil war, period.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/running-transcript-senate-foreign-services-committee-hearing-on-syria/2013/09/03/35ae1048...
SEN. MENENDEZ: I appreciate that. And I appreciate the response about chemical weapons and the possibility of securing them in our national security interests as well our allies', but I do think we're going to have to work on language that makes it clear that this is an overriding issue that I thing that members as well as the American people want to know.

Let me -- let me ask you, what -- you mentioned it in your remarks -- what do you think is the calculus of Iran, North Korea, if we fail to act, and what is the calculus of our allies if we fail to act?

SEC. KERRY: Well, if we fail to act, we're going to have fewer allies. I mean, we're going to have fewer people who count on us, certainly in the region.

We have -- we have huge doubts right now. I hear them. I mean, you know, I have the privilege of talking with many of the leaders of these countries with respect to what they may or may not be inclined to do. I've heard their warnings very clearly about what is at stake, not just for them but for us in the region. And I think that it's fair to say that our interests would be seriously set back in many respects if we are viewed as not capable, or willing, most important, to follow through on the things that we say matter to us.

As I said earlier in my testimony, this really is not President Obama's red line. The president drew a line that anyone should draw with respect to this convention that we have signed up to and which has been in place since the horrors of World War I.

And the truth is that through all of World War II, through Vietnam, through Korea, through both Gulf Wars, through Afghanistan, through Iraq, the combatants in those efforts have never resorted to this use. So I think that it's clear, with those two prior usages that I referred to, that we would be opening Pandora's box with respect to a whole set of dangerous consequences as a result of the United States not keeping its word. And it would make our life very, very difficult with respect to North Korea and Iran.

There's no question in my mind that those countries are watching. The mullahs and many others are watching what we are doing now with great interest. And that's why even the quality of this debate and the nature of this debate are very important.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Thank you. Senator Corker.

SEN. CORKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And again, thank you for your testimony.

I want to first thank you for bringing this to Congress. I think our foreign policy through the years has been far too focused on the administration. I don't think Congress has played the role that it should play in foreign policy. And I want to thank you for bringing it hear and giving us the opportunity to have this debate in advance.

I want to focus a little bit on our strategy with the vetted opposition. I don't know how anybody -- matter of fact, I know of no one who's been to the area and spent time with opposition that isn't incredibly dismayed at the lack of progress that is occurring there.

I know there's a lot of capacity that has to be built. I know there are interagency discussions about whether we should move to industrial-strength training, move away from the kind of activities that are taking place now to build capacity more quickly.

And I just would like for whichever one of you wants to respond to talk with us, those of us who have been to the region, who do believe that Syria is important, who are watching what is happening in Iraq as this sectarian issue moves over to there, it's moving into Lebanon, it's moving -- certainly destabilizing Jordan -- why have we been so slow, so inept in so many ways at helping build capacity of this opposition that we have said publicly that we support?
SEC. KERRY: Well, Senator, it's a -- it's a worthy and important question. I have had a number of different meetings with the opposition over the course of the months now since I came in in February, beginning with a meeting in Rome and subsequently, in Istanbul and in Amman, Jordan. And the opposition -- one has to remember that as little as a year ago, there was no great clarity to the structure of that opposition or to who they were, and they certainly had had no experience in this kind of an endeavor.

Over the course of that year, they have evolved, I would say, significantly. Are they where they need to be? Not completely. But they have changed markedly over the course of the last few months.

At our insistence -- and when I say "our" insistence --- the insistence of all of their supporters, the so-called London 11 -- they reached out and expanded significantly their base within Syria. They elected new leadership. They brought in a much broader base of Syria representation, including women, including minorities, Christians, others. And so they’ve built up a much more competent leadership -- (inaudible).

SEN. CORKER: If I could -- I've only got a few minutes.

SEC. KERRY: OK.

SEN. CORKER: I am very aware of all those things.

SEC. KERRY: (Inaudible) --

SEN. CORKER: What I'm unaware of is why it is so slow in actually helping them with lethal support -- why has that been so slow?

SEC. KERRY: I think -- I think, Senator, we need to have that discussion tomorrow in classified session. We can talk about some components of that. Suffice it to say, I want to General Dempsey to speak to this, maybe Secretary Hagel. That is increasing significantly. It has increased in its competency. I think it's made leaps and bounds over the course of the last few months.

Secretary Hagel, do you -- or General, do you want to --

SEN. HAGEL: I would only add that it was June of this year that the president made a decision to support lethal assistance to the opposition, as you all know. We have been very supportive with hundreds of millions of dollars of nonlethal assistance. The vetting process, as Secretary Kerry noted, has been significant. But -- I'll ask General Dempsey if he wants to add anything -- but we, Department of Defense, have not been directly involved in this. This is, as you know, a covert action, and as Secretary Kerry noted, probably to go into much more detail would require a closed or classified hearing.

General Dempsey?

SEN. CORKER: As he's answering that, and if you could be fairly brief, is there anything about the authorization that you're asking that in any way takes away from our stated strategy of empowering the vetted opposition to have the capacity over time to join in with a transition government, as we have stated from the beginning?

Is there anything about this authorization that in any way supplements that?

GEN. DEMPSEY: To your question about the opposition, moderate opposition, the path to the resolution of the Syrian conflict is through a developed, capable, moderate opposition. And we know how to do that.

Secondly, there's nothing in this resolution that would limit what we're doing now, but we're very focused on the response to the chemical weapons. I think that subsequent to that, we would probably return to have a discussion about what we might do with the moderate opposition in a -- in a more overt way.
SEN. CORKER: So, you know, I'm very sympathetic to the issue of chemical warfare and very sympathetic to what this means to U.S. credibility, and I'm very sympathetic to the fact that people are watching in the region and this'll have an impact. But I want to say I am not sympathetic regarding the lack of effort that is taking place, in my opinion, on the ground as it relates to the vetted opposition. And I hope the end state that you imagine here is something that, while it will be proportional and will be surgical, is something that enhances the strategy that we've already laid in place. And I hope you'll answer that, yes or no, at this time.

GEN. DEMPSEY: The answer to whether I support additional support for the moderate opposition is yes.

SEN. CORKER: And this authorization will support those activities in addition to responding to the weapons of mass destruction.

GEN. DEMPSEY: I don't know how the resolution will evolve, but I support --

SEN. CORKER: But what you're seeking -- what is it you're seeking?

GEN. DEMPSEY: I can't answer that, what we're seeking.

SEC. KERRY: The action, if it is authorized, the answer is, as I said in my opening comments, that the consequence of degrading his chemical capacity inevitably will also have downstream impact on his military capacity.

SEN. CORKER: And is this only -- this authorization is only about weapons of mass destruction?

SEC. KERRY: That is correct. This authorization is a limited, targeted effort to focus on deterring and degrading the chemical weapons capacity of the Assad regime.

SEN. CORKER: Is it against any other enemies other than the Assad regime?

SEC. KERRY: I -- no, Senator.

SEN. CORKER: Is it to be utilized in any other country except inside Syria?

SEC. KERRY: No, Senator.

SEN. CORKER: I will say that -- in response to your answer to Senator Menendez, I didn't find that a very appropriate response regarding boots on the ground. And I do want to say that -- that that's an important element to me, and I hope that as we together work through this, we work through something that's much clearer than the answer that you gave. I don't think, while we're all -- we all feel the actions by the Assad regime are reprehensible, I don't think there are any of us here that are willing to support the possibility of having combat boots on the ground.

SEC. KERRY: Well --

SEN. CORKER: And I do hope as we move through this, the administration can be very clear in that regard.

SEC. KERRY: Well, let me be very clear now because I don't want anything coming out of this hearing that leaves any door open to any possibility. So let's shut that door now as tight as we can. All I did was raise a hypothetical question about some possibility -- and I'm thinking out loud -- about how to protect America's interests. But if you want to know whether there's any -- you know, the answer is, whatever prohibition clarifies it to Congress and the American people, there will not be American boots on the ground with respect to the civil war.

SEN. CORKER: Thank you.
SEN. MENENDEZ: Thank you. Senator Boxer.

SENATOR BARBARA BOXER (D-CA): Mr. Chairman and Senator Corker, thank you so much for holding this hearing on a vote of conscience. And I ask unanimous consent that my full statement be entered into the record.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Without objection.

SEN. BOXER: So I'm going to make a brief statement because a lot of people have been asking me -- including my own constituents -- on how I view this. And then I will ask some questions about the intel if I can.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for showing us those images of children because even though it's really hard to look at we have to look at it. Children gasping for air, young bodies lined up in a row should shock the world. And the failure to act, I think, gives license to the Syrian president to use these weapons again and it sends a terrible signal to other brutal regimes, like North Korea.

And can I thank you, Secretary Hagel, for bringing up the issue of North Korea in your opening statement -- and Secretary Kerry for your bringing it up. I mean, how many of us have been there through the lines where we see thousands of our troops standing there just a stone's throw away from North Korea? We need to think about it. Maybe because I'm from California I tend to look at Asia, but this is very serious. We've seen that danger up close when we go to that line.

Now, since I came to the Senate I voted against the Iraq War, but I did vote for the use of force against Osama bin Laden. I voted to support air strikes against Serbia, but I vocally opposed the military surge in Afghanistan. So I approach the Syria issue in the same way I approached those -- with a very heavy heart and a very independent mind.

I've heard some of my colleagues compare President Obama's position on Syria to the decision to invade Iraq in 2003, and I thank Secretary Kerry for discussing this because I believe it's a totally false comparison.

And I know it's been mentioned before. You drew that line again. In Iraq, the Bush administration prepared to invade and occupy a country with well over a hundred thousand troops. In this case, the president's been clear: no ground invasion, no occupation. We'll have that in our resolution.

So why should we take any targeted action against Syria? Not only is it important to keep North Korea in mind, but also allowing the continued use of chemical weapons to go unanswered makes it much more likely that we'll see it used again in Syria and we'll see it used maybe elsewhere, and terrorists could obtain those and use them on America or our allies or our troops -- use them, for example, against Israel and other friends. It makes it more likely.

And this is key: that Iran will view us as a paper tiger, when it comes to their nuclear program, and that is dangerous not only for us and our friends but for the world.

Now, in 1997 the Senate supported a ban on chemical weapons by a vote of 74-26. Shouldn't an overwhelming vote like that mean something? Shouldn't the Senate stand behind its words and actions?

And then in '03, we passed the Syria Accountability Act by a vote of 89-4. I wrote that bill with Senator Santorum. We had a huge vote in favor of it. This is what it says: Acquisitions of weapons of mass destruction threaten the security of the Middle East and the national security of the United States.

Shouldn't an overwhelming vote like that mean something? Shouldn't the Senate stand behind its words and its actions?

So I believe -- as Secretary Kerry said, and so I'll reiterate it -- that not only has our president drawn a line, a red
line, on the use of chemical weapons, and not only has the world done so, but we in the Senate, we did so.

Now, I know this tremendous reluctance to get involved in another military effort, and sometimes, the easiest thing to do is to walk away. Well, I believe we cannot close our eyes to this clear violation of long-standing international norms. I believe America's morality, America's reputation and America's credibility are on the line.

I applaud this administration and our president for coming to Congress. I applaud those who asked him to come to Congress. It's the right thing to do. And I will support a targeted effort, but not a blank check, to respond to Syria's unspeakable deeds to gas its own people to death.

Now, my question involves the intel here, and I don't know how much you can give us, so I'm going to try to make this pretty broad so you can answer it and whoever feels most comfortable. A lot of people are fearful, because of what happened in Iraq, that there might be some disagreement between the intel agencies. And we have a lot of intelligence agencies, 17 in all, all over the place. I don't know how many were involved in this, whether it was four or six or eight, I don't know whether you can disclose that.

But my question is, was there any argument about this fact that they agree, that there's high confidence that these weapons were used by the Assad regime?

Was there any debate -- I mean, there was debate -- was there any dissension between the various agencies?

SEC. KERRY: The intelligence community, represented by DNI Clapper, has released a public document, unclassified, available for all to see in which they make their judgment with high confidence that the facts are as they have set forth. So you know, I think that speaks for itself.

SEN. BOXER: Well, I'm going to press just a little bit harder here, John, but, Mr. Secretary, if I can. Out of all the different agencies -- because I remember in Iraq -- sure, eventually, the word came down; everyone agreed. But then we found out there was disagreement.

To your knowledge, did they all come to the same conclusion -- the various intelligence agencies?

SEC. KERRY: To my knowledge, I have no knowledge of any agency that was a dissenter or anybody who had, you know, an alternative theory. And I do know -- I think it's safe to say that they had a whole team that ran a scenario to try to test their theory to see if there was any possibility they could come up with an alternative view as to who might have done it, and the answer is, they could not.

SEN. BOXER: OK, last question on intel and Russia. I read -- and I didn't know if this is true or false, but I read in one of the publications today that members of the Russian parliament were going to come here to lobby colleagues here to tell colleagues here that there is no such intelligence, that there is no proof. I myself met with the Russian ambassador several times on this matter, and I knew right away -- a long time ago -- they were going to do nothing to help us.

But what are they clinging to here? What -- how could they make that case given what you said?

SEC. KERRY: I -- honestly, I don't know. I mean, there's no way for me to hang on hat on what it is. I think that -- I've had personal conversations with the foreign minister. They make an argument to some effect that we don't have evidence and that the opposition did it. No matter what you show, that's the argument they take. Now, as to why they do that or what the rationale is, I'm not going to speculate. The president, as you know, is leaving this evening to go to St. Petersburg for the summit. He will have ample opportunity to hear firsthand from President Putin, and I'm confident they'll have a discussion about it.

SEN. BOXER: Thank you.
SEC. KERRY (?): Thanks.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Senator Risch.

SENATOR JIM RISCH (R-ID): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEC. KERRY: Could I just say -- I want to add, though, our Russian -- you know, the Russians -- I think it’s important for us not to get into an unnecessary sort of struggle over some of his with the Russian for -- there are a lot of reasons. The Russians are working with us and cooperating on this effort to try to make a negotiated process work. And I think they’re serious about trying to find a way forward with that, number one. Number two, on major issues, like START, North Korea, Iran, the Russians are cooperating. So I think, you know, we have to sort of deal with this thoughtfully, and let’s hope the summit might produce some change of heart as the president makes the evidence available to President Putin.

SEN. BOXER: Thank you.

SEN. RISCH: Mr. Chairman, first of all, let me say that I’ve seen the pictures of what happened, and I’ve been seeing pictures for 14 months or more, two years, I guess, of what’s going on over there, and you can’t have an ounce of compassion in you and not be moved tremendously by what’s happening there.

It’s awful. It’s horrendous. There’s been almost a hundred thousand people killed there, and we all know -- I guess in an unclassified setting, we can say that these people have used gas on multiple occasions, but the deaths have only been in the hundreds and not in the thousands. But all of this is moving, and there is no question about it.

I do -- nonetheless, I am reluctant. If there was one American -- if this was an attack against any American, against any American interest, this would be a no-brainer for me. But I’m reluctant at this point. And part of it stems from where this is going to go, as to the limit that we’re going to put on it.

SECRETARY KERRY, you said you’ve met with your -- with the -- your counterpart from Russia. And first of all, you say they’re cooperating with us on all major issues. I view this as a major issue, and I don’t view them as cooperating with us. They’re printing their currency. They’re providing them with information. They’re providing them with technology. They’ve provided them with a tremendous amount of military power. And so the question I have is what’s your counterpart telling you as to what they’re going to do when and if America pulls the trigger?

SEC. KERRY: Senator, I -- look, I understand anybody’s reluctance about this. But again, I’d ask you to confront the greater reality of what happens if you don’t -- if we don’t do something. I mean, if you think it’s bad today what they’re doing, just think about what happens if they confirm their suspicion that the United States isn’t going to do anything.

One of the reasons Assad has been using these materials is because they have, up until now, made the calculation that the West writ large and the United States particularly are not going to do anything about it. Impunity is already working to kill a lot of people and to make things more dangerous. I guarantee you that is in their assessment.

So if we make it worse by not being willing to do something, those terrible images you see are going to be -- (inaudible) -- but worse than that, our interests will be set back; Israel will be at greater risk; Jordan will be at greater risk.

The longer that this conflict goes on, and particularly with Assad’s ability to be able to use chemical weapons, the more you will see the humanitarian crisis grow. We are already the largest contributor -- thanks to the, you
know, generosity of the American people and the willingness of Congress to move, we're already the largest
contributor to refugee camps in the borders. Many of you have been to them. You want to see them grow? You
want to see Jordan, which is already fragile --

SEN. RISCH: Of course not.

SEC. KERRY: Many of you -- many of you have met with the king. You know King Abdullah's judgment is that
he's at risk because of what is happening.

So I believe the best way to curb that and reduce the threat is by acting.

SEN. RISCH: And I -- I don't disagree -- I don't disagree with anything you said, but let's take that and try to
expand on that. We need the credibility. There is no question about it. But are we really going to be giving them
credibility if we go in with a limited strike and, the day after or the week after or the month after, Assad crawls
out of his rat hole and says, look, I stood up to the strongest power on the face of this Earth and I won? And so
now it's business as usual here. And he may say, and by the way, I'm not going to use chemical weapons
anymore because I don't like what just happened, but I'm going to continue to use conventional weapons and
we're going to go on with business as usual, and the refugees are going to continue and the thousands are
going to be killed.

And our allies are going to say, what's the matter with the United States? You said you'd do something about
this, you did -- you did a limited strike but you didn't finish Assad off and the problem is just as bad as it was.

What does that do to our credibility? You know, that concerns me.

SEC. KERRY: Well, Senator, let me -- let me speak to that. That's a good question. First of all, I think General
Dempsey will tell you, Assad may be able to crawl out of the hole and say, look, I survived, but there's no way
that with reality and other assessments he's going to be able to say he's better off.

There is no question that whatever choices are made by the president, that he and his military effort will not be
better off, number one. And the opposition will know that and the people in Syria will know that. Already today,
just with the threat that action may be taken, defections have gone up and people in Syria are reconsidering
whether Assad is a long-term bet.

Moreover, General Dempsey has made it clear, and Secretary Hagel's make it clear and the president's made it
clear that there will be additional support to the opposition, which is only now in its third month of receiving the
overt support -- or about to receive, in fairness, Senator McCain and others know there are things that haven't
gotten there yet. But that process is in place and that will increase.

So I believe --

SEN. RISCH: My time is almost up, Senator Kerry.

SEC. KERRY: OK.

SEN. RISCH: Let me -- I really want to get a handle on this. I think all of us feel strongly about this. And I need
-- I need my -- I need to be reassured on this. The other thing that is -- really troubles me about this is what
happens if this thing gets away from us? I mean, what's happens -- you've been on the border between Israel
and Lebanon, as I have. And since the last war, I mean they have -- the -- Hezbollah has really beefed that up.

What happens if they get into it with Israel? What's our response to that going to be?

SEC. KERRY: Well, I talked with Prime Minister Netanyahu just yesterday, and he made it pretty clear to me that
Israel feels very confident about Israel's ability to be able to deal, as they have previously, with a miscalculation by Assad. And the rest of the community, the Turks, the Jordanians, the Emiratis, the Saudis, Qatars, the United States, France, others, all have a capacity.

So as I said in my -- in my statement, you all have to make a kind of calculation here, just as Assad does. If he is foolish enough to respond to the world's enforcement against his criminal activity, if he does, he will invite something far worse, and I believe, something absolutely unsustainable for him.

Now --

SEN. RISCH: First of all --

SEC. KERRY: -- that doesn't mean the United States of America going to war, as I said in my comments. There are plenty of options here.

SEN. RISCH: Well, we do know --

SEC. KERRY: Let me finish one other comment, because it's important to the earlier question: Russia does not have an ideological commitment here. This is a geopolitical transactional commitment. And our indications are, in many regards, that that's the way they view it, there may be more weapons to sell as a result of weapons sold, but it's not going to elicit some kind of major confrontation.

Now, let me go further: They have condemned the use of chemical weapons, the Russians have. The Iranians have. And as the proof of the use becomes even more clear in the course of this debate, I think it is going to be very difficult for Iran or Russia to decide against all that evidence that there is something worth defending here.

So this is the kind of calculation you have to make, but I'd measure that against a calculation of what happens if we don't respond.

If we don't respond, we're going to be back here asking you to respond to some greater confrontation with greater potential for damage and danger because somebody miscalculated as a result of believing the United States isn't good for what it says. And that will invite much greater danger for the American people, much greater risk for our armed forces and conceivably much greater chances of a (genuine ?) kind of conflagration that we don't want to see.

SENATOR RISCH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My time is up.

Thank you, Secretary.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Senator Cardin.

SENATOR BENJAMIN CARDIN (D-MD): Well, let me thank all of you for being here, but also thank you very much for your service. And Mr. Chairman, Senator Corker, I thank you very much for arranging this hearing.

It's very clear that the type of conduct that President Assad has done in Syria, the pattern of his actions, creating a humanitarian crisis, and now the use of chemical weapons -- the evidence that's been presented -- it's clear that we have to respond, and a military response is justified.

So I support your efforts. And Mr. Secretary, the way that you have described it is what I think we need to do. We have to have a tailored mission that deals with degrading and deterring the use of chemical weapons. We need to have it focused on that mission. It's got to be done in a way that protects civilians the best that we can. And it's got to be of very limited duration.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/running-transcript-senate-foreign-services-committee-hearing-on-syria/2013/09/03/35ae1048...
But I just want to come back to the point that the chairman raised in your own comments, where you say we should shut that door as tightly as possible when dealing with putting our troops on the ground in Syria. I’ve read the resolution that you presented to us. I think it is broader than what you have stated the president’s intentions on the mission.

And I understand that, and I understand the president’s strong desire to keep the mission very tight. And it certainly does not leave open -- it does not close the door on the introduction of ground troops.

I’ve also heard your comments about the unexpected. Something could happen. I would just point out that the president as commander in chief has the authority, the inherent authority to act in urgent situations where time requires that action. And I would suggest, as you have come to Congress for this authorization, if circumstances change and there is time to come to Congress, you’ll have the opportunity to come back to Congress and seek our participation. We are a separate branch of government, as you recall.

So I just want to urge you in the strongest possible terms to work with our leadership to draft a resolution that is as tight as we can make it that’ll allow you to carry out the mission that you have defined here today so that we can go back and tell the American people that we in Congress are supporting your action but are not leaving open the door for the introduction of American troops into Syria.

I want to talk a little bit about the specific military operations, and I'm going to leave most of this for tomorrow in our discussions, but I just want General Dempsey and Secretary Hagel to understand whether the mission is to degrade the weapons and deter the use of chemical weapons. Had you put into that equation the fact that obviously, Syria is aware that we are contemplating military action and therefore may try to change the equation during this period of time to make it more difficult for us to carry out that mission? Has that been brought into your planning stages?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yes, Senator, it has. And, you know, time works both ways. You recall, about a week and a half ago, there was a significant leak of military planning that caused the regime to react. So time works both ways. We have some pretty significant intelligence capabilities, and we continue to refine our targets.

SEN. CARDIN: Both of you have indicated your concern about American military involvement in Syria -- that it could draw us in in a way that we do not want to be drawn into an internal conflict. Are you also putting into your plans ways to prevent that type of drawing in of America into the internal conflict in Syria?

SEC. HAGEL: Senator, we are. As I noted in my opening statement, we have taken great care and much time in looking at all -- not only the options to present to the president, but the contingencies that may be a consequence of the president selecting one of those options, including what you have just noted. It is imperfect; as I said -- and I think everyone recognizes -- there is always risk. We’ve tried to minimize that risk in every way we can -- every presentation we’ve made to the president. The president has insisted on that -- collateral damage across the board. So yes, we’ve taken a lot of time to focus exactly on your point.

SEN. CARDIN: Secretary Kerry, you point out that if we don’t act, we’re liable to lose some friends. And I just really want to point out, we do have a direct interest here. We not only have a humanitarian reason to respond to the use of chemical weapons, we have a direct American interest in that region, and we have Americans that are in that region that are at risk if additional chemicals are used. So I see a direct connection to U.S. interests.

You say we may lose some friends if we don’t act. Why don’t we have more participation in the U.S. military response in addition to just support? It seems to me that this appears to be -- we understand America will be in the lead, but it does not seem like we have a growing list of countries that are actively joining us in the military operation.

SEC. KERRY: Well, first of all, there is no definitive list at this point in time because the president has not made
the decision as to specifically which set of choices he’s going to operate on. Secondly, as many countries as we could conceivably need to be able to be helpful in a limited operation have volunteered to be helpful. And they stand ready to take part in any specific operation. And we’re very, very comfortable with that.

But the bottom line in many ways remains that we’re talking about very specific kinds of capacities that, in some cases, only the United States of America possesses. And so you know, that remains open. It’s a process that will evolve as this debates evolves and as the president makes his decisions and the joint chiefs of staff and the military present him with the various options. And those will probably evolve, as you mentioned. People may make adjustments in Syria. And I can assure the Syrians that General Dempsey and his people will be making adjustments as they go along.

SEN. CARDIN: Well, I would hope we would have stronger international participation. Is there a consideration of a role for NATO to play here considering that one of NATO’s partners, Turkey, is on the direct front line here on the use of chemical weapons? Can we -- is that being considered?

SEC. KERRY: Well, as you say, is it being considered -- everything is being considered, and all of these things are being evaluated. Discussions are taking place. I will be meeting on Saturday in Vilnius with European ministers. I know this topic will come up. And most of them -- they’re all members of NATO, so we will have -- or most of them are, not all of them. So we’ll have some discussions when we’re there.

But I -- at the moment, this is a limited operation, with the scope of support that the president makes a judgment that we ought to have.

We will have very broad -- we have already very broad -- I think we’ve -- I’ve been in -- you know, we’ve had some 53 nations or countries and organizations have acknowledged that chemical weapons were used here and have condemned it publicly. Thirty-one nations have stated publicly that the Assad regime is responsible, and I think we’re at about 34 countries have indicated that if the allegations are true that they would support some form of action against Syria.

So there’s a very broad coalition that’s growing of people who believe we ought to take action against Syria, but the question is, you know, whether or not it makes sense for whatever number to be part of it is a decision that our military and the president have to make as we go along here.

SEN. CARDIN: I’ll reserve the rest of the questions for the closed session. Thank you.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Senator Rubio.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Off mic.)

SEN. MENENDEZ: (Sounds gavel.) The gentleman will sit down, or I’ll have the officer remove you. (Sounds gavel.) Police will make sure that the committee is in order.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Off mic.)

SEC. KERRY: Yeah, that’s why I said -- (off mic) --

SEN. MENENDEZ: Senator Rubio.

SENATOR MARCO RUBIO (R-FL): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me begin by answering a fundamental question that I get asked a lot as we discuss this very important issue, and that is, why do we even care about what’s happening in Syria? And I want to very clear my belief that I think reflects the belief of most of the members of this committee. And that is that what happens in Syria is a -- is of
vital national interest to the United States and to our national security for reasons that have already been outlined.

The Syrian relationship with Iran is very significant, it's a key part of their ambitions to be the regional power, the dominant regional power. In fact, the Iranians love to brag that Syria gives them a border with Israel.

Number two, Assad is an anti-American supporter of terrorism, is a supporter of Hamas, he’s a supporter of Hezbollah. And by the way, he's a supporter of al-Qaida in Iraq, the same al-Qaida in Iraq that's responsible for the death and maiming of countless brave young men and women who served our country in uniform.

It’s also of interest to us because of the instability that this is creating in Syria, instability that's allowing portions of Syria to quickly become kind of what Afghanistan was before 9/11, the premier operational space for global jihadists from abroad to come train and fight and plan attacks in the future.

And now added to that is this chemical attack which undermines and -- the post-World War II world order, which basically said that these things are unacceptable. And allies that look at the United States and our capabilities of living up to our security promises is all at risk now as a result of all of this.

This is why Syria and what's happening in Syria matters to our national interests, which it's so clearly tied to a critical national security interest of the United States.

By the way, most of if not all of this was true two years ago, when I joined other voices on this committee and in the Senate and beyond that advocated that at that time, when Assad was on the ropes, the United States should engage in trying to identify moderate elements and equip them so that they became the predominant rebel force in Syria and not others. But that didn't happen. Instead, the choice was made to lead from behind.

The choice was made to watch at this thing unfolded, as others advocated that we should just mind our own business. And what we’re seeing here now is proof and an example that when America ignores these problems, these problems don’t ignore us; that we can ignore them but eventually they grow and they come to visit us at our doorstep. And now we’re faced with what we have.

In fact, as -- Secretary Kerry, a moment ago, you said that one of the calculations that Assad used in deciding to use chemical weapons was that the U.S. wouldn’t do anything about it. Now I understand, perhaps, why he made that calculation because, yes, this is a horrible incident where a thousand people died. But before this incident, a hundred thousand people had died, including snipers that were used to pick off civilians, including women that were raped as part of -- they were going to these villages and carried this out. And nothing happened. So of course he reached that calculation.

So this is a reminder of what happens when we ignore the world, when we look inwards sometimes and we ignore these problems: They only get worse and more difficult to solve. And that's the mess that we have here right now. We are left with options, all of which are less than ideal. And I want to walk through the three that have been presented to us by different voices and then ask specifically about the one the president is considering.

The first option is to decide to help Syrians remove Assad and replace (with ?) a more -- a more moderate government. I think that's the ideal outcome, but it has its own complications. Today the rebel forces on the ground are not just the moderate rebels, they’re nonmoderate rebels. They’re jihadists that now control major portions of the country, and in other parts of the country are intermingled with these rebels forces, creating a real prospect that after the fall of Assad, a new civil war could be triggered -- one that could involve sectarian violence, massacres of minorities, et cetera. (As I said ?), this comes with its own set of complications.

The other, which some voices have advocated, is doing nothing. But that would guarantee the following
outcome: an emboldened Assad, an emboldened Iran, increased instability in the country because portions of that country will still be ungoverned. And it will also send a message to the world that there is no red line that they should fear crossing. So Iran will move forward toward nuclear weapons. North Korea can act crazier, if that’s even possible. Our allies in South Korea and Japan may start to doubt their security arrangements with us. Israel may decide it needs to strike Iran unilaterally. Iran will move towards the bomb, which, by the way, it won’t just be an Iranian bomb.

It’ll be a Turkish bomb as well and a Saudi bomb and maybe even an Egyptian bomb one day.

The third is the action the president is asking us to consider, what he termed, not me, what he called a shot across the bow -- a military strike of limited duration and scope that has three goals, as I understand it, that have been outlined here today. Goal number one is to hold Assad accountable. Goal number two is to deter this behavior in the future. And goal number three is to degrade Assad’s capacity to carry out these attacks in the future. This is -- the president wants us to authorize a limited strike that would accomplish these three things.

The question that I have, quite frankly, I’m a bit skeptical that the act -- that what the president is asking for will provide the support needed to achieve these objectives, and that these objectives are even realistic at this point. So here’s my first question, and I think I’ll ask this of General Dempsey. The calculation that Assad has made is that the reason why he’s using these chemical weapons is because he’s afraid that if he doesn’t he could lose this war, be overthrown and killed. That’s the calculation that he’s made. That’s why he used these chemical weapons. He wants to beat the rebels.

So my question is this: Can we -- can we structure an attack that tips that calculation where he’ll basically decide that he would rather risk being overrun by rebels than risking a limited attack from the U.S. if he uses these chemical weapons. He has to decide: I’ll use chemical weapons and take on a limited U.S. attack in the future or I’ll risk being overrun by the rebels. How are we going to unbalance that and lead him to calculate that he’s better off risking losing to the rebels?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, Senator, I think the -- it may be even more insidious than that. He’s reached the point where he now thinks of chemical weapons as just another weapon in his arsenal. And that’s the part that makes this so very dangerous.

And I think that as I’ve provided advice on what targets may be appropriate, I certainly want to degrade his capabilities coming out of this. So I want to come out of it stronger than we go into it.

SEN. RUBIO: Leads me to my second question: How confident are you and how confident can you express to this committee you are that we can in fact put in place a military plan that’s limited in scope and duration, that can effectively degrade Assad’s capability to carry out future chemical attacks?

GEN. DEMPSEY: I’m confident in the capabilities we can bring to bear to deter and degrade. And it won’t surprise you to know that we will have not only an initial target set but subsequent target sets should they become necessary.

SEN. RUBIO: And this question is probably for Secretary Kerry, and I think this was asked earlier, but I think it’s important to elaborate on it. One of the concerns that I have and I’ve heard others express is that Assad could take three, five, six days of strikes, maybe longer, maybe shorter, and emerge from that saying, I have faced down the United States and I have held onto power and survived, and at that point be further emboldened both domestically and perhaps even abroad. Have we taken that into account? And I understand your argument that inaction would be worse, but have we taken into account what the implications could be of an Assad that could weather a limited strike and what that could mean for the long-term prospects of the conflict?

SEC. KERRY: Yes, we absolutely have. For certain, we’ve taken that into account. He will -- I mean, he will
The president's asking for a limited authority to degrade his current capacity and to deter him from using it again. He is not asking for permission from the Congress to go destroy the entire regime or to, you know, do a much more extensive kind of thing. That's not what he's asking. So he will be able to stand up, and no doubt he'll try to claim that somehow this is, you know, something positive for him.

But I think General Dempsey has made it clear and I think we believe deeply, as do others who are knowledgeable about this in the region, that there is no way that it will, in fact, be beneficial for him, that it will not translate for him on the ground; that the defections that are taking place now and other things that will happen will further degrade his capacity to prosecute it going forward.

And I want to emphasize something. I want to come back to it because I don't want anybody misinterpreting this from earlier. This authorization does not contemplate and should not have any allowance for any troop on the ground. I just want to make that absolutely clear. You know, what I was doing was hypothesizing about a potential it might occur at some point in time, but not in this authorization, in no way -- be crystal clear -- there's no problem in our having the language that has zero capacity for American troops on the ground within the authorization the president is asking for. I don't want anybody in the media or elsewhere to misinterpret that coming out of here. As I said earlier, I repeat it again now, that's important.

**SEN. RUBIO:** Thank you. And --

**SEN. MENENDEZ (?):** I can assure you that will be in the resolution.

**SEC. KERRY (?):** Good.

**SEN. MENENDEZ:** Senator Shaheen.

**SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN (D-NH):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, gentlemen, for your testimony. I agree that we should not turn our back on such a blatant violation of international norms with respect to the use of chemical weapons, and that if we stand quietly by while a tyrant like Assad uses chemical weapons on his own people, that we will be giving carte blanche to any dictator anywhere in the world to develop and use chemical weapons.

I think the question now, as we've all said, is how do we respond specifically? How do we best send a message that it's completely unacceptable to develop, much less use, these types of weapons, and how do we do that without inadvertently spreading the conflict beyond the borders of Syria? That's really the question that we have today.

And we've heard that we want to deter the future use of chemical weapons, but according to the president and to your testimony today, we don't want to tip the scales on the ground. So how do we ensure that we can do that without spreading the conflict throughout the region? And how do we hit Assad hard enough so that we deter his future use of chemical weapons and yet, don't affect the military outcome on the ground?

**SEC. KERRY:** Well, General, do you want to ask -- address this other just military piece and I'll take the other piece?

**GEN. DEMPSEY:** Sure. And I think the language about not to -- not using American military power to tip the scale is -- would be our direct action. In other words, this resolution is not asking for permission for the president to be able to use the United States' Armed Forces to overthrow the regime.

On the other hand, back to the earlier questions about developing a moderate regime that has capabilities to be a stabilizing force inside of Syria, that's the path -- our military action, in this case, is very focused on the chemical weapons, but will have the added benefit of degrading -- and it will also have the added benefit of
supporting the diplomatic track.

And with that, let me turn it over the secretary.

**SEC. KERRY:** Senator Shaheen, the president has made it very, very clear that the policy of this administration -- and sometimes, people have sort of said -- you know -- questioned precisely what it is, and I'll tell you precisely what it is -- the president is asking for the Congress to take steps that will specifically deter and degrade Assad's capacity to use chemical weapons.

He is not asking the Congress for authorization to become whole-hog involved in Syria's civil war, to try to change the regime through military action.

This is a targeted action to deal with the problem of chemical weapons, but there is a separate track which the president has already committed the administration and the country to, which is that Assad must go, that he has lost all moral authority or capacity to ever govern Syria and that he is pursuing that -- the president is pursuing that track by helping the opposition, by now having made the decision to lethally arm that opposition by upgrading the efforts for the opposition to be able to fight the fight -- not the United States -- the opposition -- and to be able to come to a negotiated settlement, because the president is convinced, as I think everybody is, that there is no military solution, that ultimately, you want to get to Geneva, you want a negotiated settlement, and under the terms of Geneva One, there is an agreement which the Russians have signed onto, which calls for a transition government to be created with the mutual consent of the current regime and the opposition. And that transition government will establish the rules of the road for the Syrian people to choose their new government.

There is no way possible that by mutual consent, Assad is going to be part of that future. The Russians have agreed that that is in fact Geneva I, and the purpose of the Geneva II meeting is to implement Geneva I.

Now, it's complicated, obviously. How do you get there? And that's part of this struggle. But the president is convinced that as the support to the opposition increases, there is a much greater likelihood that you will wind up ultimately with a negotiated settlement.

The alternative is that you stand back and do nothing and Syria in fact implodes, becomes an enclave state, there are huge ungoverned spaces, al-Nusra, al-Qaida, Hezbollah, others become more of a threat to our friends in the region, and the region becomes much more of a sectarian conflagration. That is part of the effort.

**SEN. SHAHEEN:** Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary Hagel and General Dempsey, you made a number of statements throughout the spring cautioning against intervention in the conflict in Syria. Why do you feel at this point that it's appropriate for us to take action? What's changed?

**SEC. HAGEL:** Senator, thank you. I'll let General Dempsey respond for himself.

Well, first, very clear intelligence and evidence that the Assad regime used chemical weapons on its own people. So we are dealing with a new set of realities, based on facts. And I think -- it is at least my opinion -- that that needs to be addressed, that needs to be dealt with, for the reasons I have noted -- I have said in public and also addressed in my statement, I think -- and what Secretary Kerry and General Dempsey have said, and obviously what the president has said.

So that's the most specific reason. The dynamics have changed.

One additional point in regard to your question on this, as to your previous question: If in fact the president is given the authorization from Congress to go forward -- and as he's already said, he believes he has within his
constitutional power as commander in chief to act as well -- and he's given his reasons, which we all support, why he came to the Congress -- there are parallel actions that would work along with whatever action the president would take: opposition strength, which Secretary Kerry has noted; second, defections within the Syrian government and military, as Secretary Kerry has noted; other intelligence, other consequences.

And this is about getting to an end game. That end game is a diplomatic settlement. It is driving this toward what we believe, the president believes is the only way out of this, if for no other reason than what Secretary Kerry has noted: We do not want to see the country of Syria disintegrate, result in ungoverned space, which I think the consequences would be devastating for our partners, for our allies, the entire Middle East. Then we would all have to respond in some way. So I just add that on to answering your last question.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Chairman, may I -- I'll make it brief, but in response to your question about the -- let's say the past year.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Yes, General.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Over the past year, we've provided a full range of options. And my advice on those options was based on my assessment of their linkage to our national security interests and whether they would be effective.

On this issue, that is the use of chemical weapons, I find a clear linkage to our national security interest. And we will find a way to make our use of force effective.

SEN. SHAHEEN: Thank you all.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Senator Johnson.

SENATOR RON JOHNSON (R-WI): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm trying to reconcile, I guess, the two tracks of goals we got going here, military action and then negotiated settlement. Secretary Hagel, you said we are not seeking to resolve the underlying conflict in Syria. Isn't that exactly what we're trying to do? Why aren't we trying to resolve that?

SEC. HAGEL: I was referring in my statement to the authorization to use military force. That specifically is not why we have come to the Congress, why the president asked for the Congress' support. As he has said, the authorization is for a very specific and focused military action.

SEN. JOHNSON: But our stated goal really is to remove Assad and move to a negotiated settlement. Why wouldn't we use this opportunity, military action, to move toward that goal?

SEC. HAGEL: Well, that is one option. If those options would range from an invasion or a lot of military options on the table. But the president has said what this authorization is about is a -- is a limited authorization for a limited exercise. The goal of removing Assad from office, as the president has stated, is still the policy of this administration.

SEN. JOHNSON: General Dempsey, how confident are you that you can calibrate, tailor, fine-tune military action that doesn't have spillover effects, so we that we keep it to the limited, stated goal of, I guess, degrading and deterring?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, the task was to do just that -- to deter and degrade, not -- and to be limited and focused in scope and duration.

I mean, that's the task I've been given and the task I've been --

SEN. JOHNSON: Yes, but how can you calibrate that?
GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, we can calibrate it on our side. There is always the risk of escalation on the other. But they have significantly limited capabilities to do so, and most of the intelligence informs us -- we could talk about that in a closed session.

SEN. JOHNSON: But what planning is being undertaken right now in case this does spin out of control? I mean, you know, we were talking about potential for boots on the ground.

Secretary Kerry, I'm very glad to hear you're bringing into the equation what I think is our number one national security interest, and that is those chemical weapons falling in the hands of al-Qaida elements or possibly even Hezbollah. What commitment do we have long-term to make sure that doesn't happen? And if you have a very limited resolution here, how do we know that we're not -- that we will prevent that from happening?

SEC. KERRY: Senator Johnson, this is -- this moment in time and -- as the president has said, he is asking for a limited military response, recognizing that neither he nor most of America want to be dragged into a civil war in Syria.

SEN. JOHNSON: But our goal is to get rid of Assad.

SEC. KERRY: Our goal is to help the opposition, and there are lots -- I mean, you have to look overall. The president and, I think, all of us agree -- I mean, can you imagine Assad running Syria? Can you imagine this man who has gassed his people and -- (inaudible) --

SEN. JOHNSON: Again, I'm trying to reconcile why, if we're going to go in there militarily, if we're going to strike, why wouldn't we try and do some kind of knock-out punch? Is it because we simply have no faith that there's anybody on the ground, the rebels, to take -- (inaudible) --

SEC. KERRY: No. No, absolutely --

SEN. JOHNSON: I mean, is -- or is it not for regime change? Is that -- is that the problem?

SEC. KERRY: No, Senator, that's not the reason. The reason is that the president is listening to the American people and has made a policy decision, in addition, that that is not something that the United States of America needs to engage in or ought to engage in.

That is a much broader operation.

SEN. JOHNSON: But it -- but it's the stated goal.

SEC. KERRY: Well, yeah, it is. It is, Senator. Is the Congress of the United States read to pay for 30 days of 30,000 air strikes to take out -- and is there a legal justification for doing that? And you can run through a whole series of different questions here that are very serious about what you're talking about.

SEN. JOHNSON: What do we know about the opposition? I mean, what is -- have we been tracking them for the last two years? I mean, it seems like -- and this is more of an impression I have as opposed to any exact knowledge, but it seems like initially, the opposition was maybe more Western-leaning, more moderate, more democratic, and as time has gone by, it's degraded, become more infiltrated by al-Qaida. That -- is that basically true? Or to -- (inaudible) -- has that happened?

SEC. KERRY: No, that is -- no, that is actually basically not true. It's basically incorrect. The opposition has increasingly become more defined by its moderation, more defined by the breadth of its membership and more defined by its adherence to some, you know, democratic process and to an all-inclusive, minority-protecting constitution, which will be broad-based and secular with respect to the future of Syria. And that's very critical.
SEN. JOHNSON: Secretary Hagel, do you --

SEC. KERRY: Let me -- let me just finish. One other point about the opposition. It’s my understanding, because I talked to the president to the opposition yesterday -- he’s in Germany now; he’s meeting with the German parliament. He is coming to Great Britain. He will be meeting with the Parliament in Great Britain. And he is prepared to come here as soon as those meetings are over in order to meet with you, and you can have an opportunity to talk to President Jarba and meet with the opposition, have a much better sense of who they are.

SEN. JOHNSON: We appreciate that.

Secretary Hagel, do you have a feel for the number of members of the opposition? I mean, how large is their force?

SEN. HAGEL: I don’t know the numbers. Our intelligence communities have estimates of those numbers.

But I think, as Secretary Kerry said, the momentum has shifted, in the opinion of our intelligence community and others who are close to the situation, where --

SEN. JOHNSON: I’m kind of a numbers guy.

General Dempsey, do you know the force strength of the rebel forces?

GEN. DEMPSEY: I don’t have them committed to memory, Senator.

SEN. JOHNSON: But we have them. I can --

GEN. DEMPSEY: Yeah, the intelligence community has that available, and we’ll make it available --

SEN. JOHNSON: And do you also have a pretty good feel for how many really would be considered moderate versus elements of al-Qaida?

GEN. DEMPSEY: I have seen documents that lay that out.

SEN. JOHNSON: How do we know that Hezbollah, because they’ve been so cooperative with the Assad regime -- how do we know that they already don’t have access to chemical weapons? Do we have any feel for that at all?

SEC. KERRY: I think we need to talk about that in our classified session. But let me just say to you that in terms of the opposition numbers, you see ranges up to 80(,000), 90,000, 100,000 in total opposition. You see ranges from -- well, I don’t want to go into all the numbers, but in the tens of thousands in terms of operative, active combatants. The -- I’ve seen some recent data on the numbers of the extremists in al-Nusra. They’re actually lower than former expectations.

I would also say to you, Syria historically has been secular, and the vast majority of Syrians, I believe, want to remain secular. It’s -- it’s our judgment that -- and the judgment of our good friends who actually know a lot of this in many ways better than we do because it’s their region, their neighborhood -- I’m talking about the Saudis, the Emirates, the Qatars, the Turks, the Jordanians -- they all believe that if you could have a fairly rapid transition, the secular component of Syria will re-emerge and you will isolate --

SEN. JOHNSON: OK. Very good.

That tends to argue for a more robust response.

Final question. You said this is the world’s red line. I agree. So in the intervening time period before we
potentially act here, how many additional countries will be supportive of this action? What is your goal? And what do we have right now? What is your goal?

SEC. KERRY: Well, our goal is to have as broad a coalition and support of what we might do as is possible, and we're working that right now. But the military and the president are going to have to decide how many they actually want to have take part in the action, as I said. We already have more partners ready to do something kinetic than the military feels, under this particular operation, we need to effect that.

Now, obviously we want them to participate because we want it to be a broad coalition. But the final numbers will have to be decided by the president and by the specific operation that he defines together with you in the authorization.

SEN. JOHNSON: OK, thank you. I look forward to tomorrow's briefing. Thanks.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Thank you. Senator Coons.

SENATOR CHRISTOPHER COONS (D-DE): Thank you, Chairman Menendez. I'd like to thank Secretaries Kerry and Hagel and Chairman Dempsey for your service to our nation and for your testimony in front of us today. I think the authorization of the use of force, I think the commitment of American military strength is one of the most important issues that we will ever debate in this Congress, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to have this conversation today. As Secretary Kerry said in his opening testimony, not just what we decide but how we decide it will send a very important message around the world that this Congress can still function in a nonpartisan way, in the interests of the people of the United States.

As I've listened to Delawareans in recent days, I think they reflect a nation that is weary of war and that is wary of inadvertently repeating some of the challenges of our engagement in Iraq. I've heard specific and pointed concerns that we not rush into action based on uneven or inaccurate intelligence, that we not be drawn into a civil war we don't fully understand or where we can't quite discern the good guys from the bad guys, and more than anything, that we not commit to an open-ended participation, a direct military invasion and an occupation of a country in a part of the world that is often confounding and is full of competing priorities.

Having reviewed the intelligence this morning in a classified briefing, having participated in a number of briefings from you and folks leading in your agencies and departments, I am persuaded that this is not that circumstance, that the intelligence is solid, that we have, in this instance, a clear violation of a long-standing global red line against the use of chemical weapons -- as you've stated, something embedded in America's statutes and in our treaty commitments, something that is a truly global standard.

My view, as I've watched both the images on TV that were presented at the beginning of this hearing and as I've spoken to family and friends and neighbors at home, is that we face a real risk here if we do not act, that this is an instance where one of the world's worst dictators has steadily ratcheted up an ascending crescendo of death in his own nation. He began with thugs, police and the military taking on peaceful demonstrators, graduated to snipers killing innocent civilians, has used helicopters and jet fighters against his own people, has deployed cluster bombs and scud missiles.

I think over the last two years, there is no doubt that Bashar al-Assad and his regime is willing to go to any length to stay in power. So the challenge now, for those of us who seek an appropriate path forward, is to make sure that we craft an authorization for the use of military force that responds to Americans' legitimate concerns but still allows the administration to act in a decisive and timely way to both deter and punish the Assad regime for what they've done.

So I have a few questions for you, if I might, the first to General Dempsey. And I know we've spoken to this before, but I think it is worth repeating: How do we strike the right balance between military action that is too
insignificant to actually effectively deter or degrade Assad's capabilities, and one that is so decisive and overwhelming that it reaches beyond the scope of an authorization and becomes actually a regime change effort?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, Senator, I'll assure you, I won't recommend an option or a set of targets that won't effectively deter and degrade. That's the task I've been given. And that -- now, we'll continue to refine that, not just based on intelligence, but based on the resolution that comes out of this committee.

SEN. COONS: And could you, in your view, accomplish that mission, with an authorization that is limited in scope in terms of a time duration and in scope, as has been discussed with Secretary Kerry, in terms of not introducing U.S. troops on the ground?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, it won't surprise you to know that as the military leader responsible for this, the more -- the broader the resolution -- the less limiting, the better off I will be in crafting a set of options. But I completely -- I defer to the secretary of state to give me what I need to do that.

SEN. COONS: Well, if I might then to Secretary Kerry, because our goal here is to not pass or even consider an authorization that is so narrow that it prevents any effective message to be sent here, as you said, I think in a compelling way in your opening statement, our actions here are not just meant to deter Assad, but to send a strong message to Pyongyang, to Tehran, to nonstate actors around the world who might use chemical weapons or might seek nuclear weapons -- how do we craft an authorization? How do we take actions that are effective here in deterring other countries that are watching our decisiveness and our action in this instant?

SEC. KERRY: Well, I think the language that the administration submitted with respect to the military action necessary to degrade and deter and prevent the use of chemical weapons specifically is very targeted.

But I -- as I've said several times now and will repeat again, I know the administration has zero intention of putting troops on the ground, and within the confines of this authorization, I'm confident we'd have zero problem in including some kind of prohibition there if that makes you comfortable.

I would not urge an excessively pinpointed, Congressionally-mandated set of targets -- and I think, in the course of the classified briefings, the intelligence community and the military community will make it very clear to you why that's not advisable -- and I think they have to have general need -- some latitude here to be able to make sure he can accomplish his task. But I think the broad confines and constraints of this particular operation are not hard for us to arrive at in agreement. And I'm confident we'll do it very quickly.

SEN. COONS: Thank you. One of my other concerns, Mr. Secretary, is the flood of refugees and their impact on the region. In a visit in January to a Syrian refugee camp in Jordan, I was moved both by the humanitarian situation they're facing and by the very real impact that this is having on our regional allies -- on Jordan, on Turkey, the destabilizing impact on Lebanon, and of course, the real impact it's potentially going to have on our close ally, Israel.

I was encouraged to hear there was a successful missile defense system test earlier today, Secretary Hagel. What steps are we taking to ensure that our allies in this immediate area of Turkey and Jordan and Israel are able to defend themselves from a potential response by the Assad regime?

SEC. HAGEL: Well, Senator, first, Jordan -- you know we have Patriot Missile defense batteries in Jordan.

And we also are working very closely with the Israelis. You know they have a very sophisticated Iron Dome, an aerial system -- missile defense system there. We are in constant coordination with all the allies in the region, and as you may know, General Dempsey was just in Jordan for a commanders meeting, which included all the senior military from the neighboring countries and our partners. So we are closely connected with and assisting...
our allies on this and other issues.

**SEN. COONS:** Thank you. Last question, Secretary Kerry, if I might. I am interested in our having a follow-on conversation about how this specific strike and this specific authorization that you’re seeking can also lead to a broader strategy, a strategy for support and engagement with the opposition that’ll lead to the diplomatic resolution of the Syrian civil war that you’ve spoken about repeatedly. I don’t think these are mutually exclusive. I do think it’s possible for us to take action that reinforces a global red line against chemical weapons use but to still continue to strengthen and broaden our engagement with the opposition in a way that moves towards a post-Assad Syria that is sustainable and secure. And I’d look forward to your input with us in our next hearing on that topic.

**SEC. KERRY:** Absolutely, Senator. I look forward to it too. And what I’d like to do is get the whole committee maybe to come down to the department, and we could, you know, have this discussion in that confine as a committee also, and I think that might be helpful, in addition to what we do in the classified briefing tomorrow.

**SEN. COONS:** Thank you.

**SEN. MENENDEZ:** Senator Flake.

**SEC. KERRY:** Mr. Chairman, is that -- if you want to do that, I'm happy to do that.

**SEN. MENENDEZ:** We'll follow up.

Senator Flake.

**SENATOR JEFFRY FLAKE (R-AZ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you all for your testimony. And I want to thank you, particularly the State Department, for making information available with regard to unclassifying certain information and also for the classified hearings that have taken place with regard to the chemical attack.

I think that one would have to suspend disbelief, as you mentioned, to assume that the regime was not in charge of this.

Secretary Kerry, in your initial testimony, you asked us to ask ourselves what Assad’s calculation would be if we failed to act. I think that’s an appropriate question. But I think it is appropriate for us to ask you or the administration, what is the calculation of Assad right now when rather than after we have proof that he did engage in what he engaged in, that we’re waiting for a congressional authorization? I think one would have to suspend disbelief to assume that we wouldn’t be better off attacking those targets right now or a week ago than waiting three weeks for Congress to take action.

And just drawing some parallel to the conflict in Libya, I think the president’s statement was, before we went ahead and engaged in combat there or at least along with NATO, the president said, I refuse to wait for the images of slaughter and mass graves to take action and did so without congressional authorization under the War Powers Resolution, and we had some dispute when he came back, but initially, we went ahead. Here we have evidence that chemical weapons were used. And how can we assure or tell our constituents that this isn’t political when we come, when you come, when the administration comes to the Congress to ask for authorization to take action that the president clearly has said he has authority to take?

**SEC. KERRY:** Well, Senator Flake, it’s somewhat surprising to me that a member of Congress, particularly one on the Foreign Relations Committee, is going to question the president fulfilling the vision of the founding fathers when they wrote the Constitution and divided power in foreign policy to have the president come here and honor the original intent of the founding fathers in ways that do not do anything to detract from the mission...
Now, General Dempsey will tell you that he advised the President of the United States that not only was there not a deterioration in this mission by waiting, there might even be some advantages. And so, in fact, we're not losing anything by waiting. And I personally believe there are advantages because we have time to work with our friends in the international community, because we have time to make the case to the American people and share with them the evidence that we have shared with you in the last days, because we have an opportunity to be able to build greater support.

And as the general has said, we can adjust to any changes or shifts that they make in that time. This does not in any way deteriorate the fundamental mission of degrading and deterring the use of chemical weapons. Now, if at any moment Assad were foolish enough to believe that this period of waiting is somehow an invitation to do more of his criminal activity, I can assure you that the president of the United States, and I think you all, would probably speed up your process and/or the president would respond immediately. So I -- this is working.

There are defections taking place. There's great uncertainty in Syria. We are building support, a greater understanding. And I would far rather be playing our hand than his at this point in time.

So I don't think we're losing anything. I think the president made a courageous decision to take the time to build the strength that makes America stronger by acting in unity with the United States Congress.

**SEN. FLAKE:** Well, if I may, I can certainly understand if there -- if that is a secondary goal or the primary goal that will -- in this intervening time it causes our allies to get with us, it causes Russia to put the pressure on maybe the Assad regime to get back to the table, peace talks, something like that; that's great. But purely in terms of military strategy -- and I don't have a military background, but I would have to suspend disbelief, and I think all of us would, to assume that we're better off in a couple of weeks doing what we're planning to do, what we will authorize the administration to do.

General Dempsey, is there evidence that the Assad regime is right now moving some of the targets that can be moved or surrounding targets with civilians or others to make it more difficult to give effect to our strategy?

**GEN. DEMPSEY:** Yeah, thanks, Senator. First I do want to -- for interest of clarity here, what I actually said to the president is the following: The military resources we have in place can remain in place, and when you ask us to strike, we will make those strikes effective.

In other sessions, in the principals committee, not with the president present, we talked about some targets becoming more accessible than they were before.

But to your question, there are, in fact -- there is evidence, of course, that the regime is reacting not only to the delay, but also they were reacting before that to the -- to the very unfortunate leak of military planning.

So this is a very dynamic situation.

**SEN. FLAKE:** Secretary Hagel, you seem eager to jump in.

**SEC. HAGEL:** I was just going to add something that you added, Senator, and that is the international community. In addition to what the president has already noted, a nation is always stronger when it is together, when he gets the Congress and the American people with him to begin with. But also, the international community, as many of the members of the international community with us on this, I think the president feels pretty strongly would be also an important part of whatever decision he might make.

And it doesn't end with whatever military option the president decides to go with, as we have all heard. That's all the more important we would want the international community with us.
SEN. FLAKE: Secretary Kerry, what will happen if the Congress says no and does not authorize this strike or this use of force? What will the president do?

SEC. KERRY: Well, I can't tell you what the president is going to do, because he hasn't told me, but the president, as you know, retains the authority, always has the authority, had the authority to strike before coming to Congress, and that doesn't change.

But I'll tell you what will happen, where it matters, in Pyongyang, in Tehran, in Damascus, folks will stand up and celebrate. And in a lot of other capitals in parts of the world, people will scratch their heads and sign a sort of condolence for the loss of America's willingness to stand up and make itself felt where it makes a difference to the world. I think it would be an enormous setback to America's capacity and to our vision in the world and certainly to the role of leadership that we play.

SEN. FLAKE: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Senator Durbin.

SENATOR RICHARD DURBIN (D-IL): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On Saturday I was standing with a group of friends watching the television screen with the announcement at any minute the president would make a statement. And I turned to them and said, I'll bet the missiles were launched and shot off hours ago and we'll hear about it now. And to my surprise, of course, the president came forward and said, I have that authority, I made that decision, but I'm going to respect our constitutionals democracy and give the Congress -- that is, the American people through Congress -- a voice in this decision.

From where I was standing, that was good news because for as long as I've been in Congress, House and Senate, I've argued about that congressional responsibility. Some presidents have respected it; some have not. Most of the time Congress, in writing or in speeches, insists on being respected and being given this authority and then starts shaking when it's given because it calls on us to be part of historic life-and-death decisions. It's one of the toughest calls we'll ever make as members of Congress. But I salute the president for respecting the Constitution and giving us that responsibility. And I think the turnout today on short notice in the midst of a break in this committee, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, is an indication we're taking this seriously and solemnly.

I'll also note to Senator Kerry and also to -- pardon, Secretary Kerry -- and Secretary Hagel, we all served together some 12 years ago and faced similar awesome historic decisions related to Iraq and Afghanistan.

We saw those differently, in some respects. But I voted against the Iraqi resolution and going to war in that country, and felt that the events that transpired afterwards gave me some justification for my vote.

But I voted for the war in Afghanistan, believing that it was a clear response to 9/11. We were going after those responsible for killing 3,000 innocent Americans, and we were going to make them pay a price. I still believe that was the right thing to do.

But I didn't know at the time that I voted for that authorization for the use of military force I was voting for the longest war in the history of the United States and an authority to several presidents to do things that no one ever could have envisioned at that moment in history.

So, Secretary Kerry and Secretary Hagel, I take this very seriously. I understand this president, I understand his values, but I take it very seriously that the language be as precise as possible when it comes to this whole question of expanding this mission into something much larger, something that would engage us in a new level of warfare or a new authority for this president or a future president. So I hope that we can have your word and assurance that we can work together in bipartisan fashion to craft this in a way that it carefully achieves our goal...
but does not expand authority anywhere beyond what is necessary.

SEC. KERRY: Senator, thank you. Very important statement, and you not only have my word that it will not do that, but we will work with you very, very closely, with the White House, in shaping this resolution. We -- there's no hidden agenda.

There's no subterfuge. There's no surrogate strategy here. There's one objective, and that objective is to make sure we live up to our obligations of upholding the norm with respect to international behavior on the use of chemical weapons. And that is what the president is seeking in this authorization.

SEN. DURBIN: Let me speak to the issue of Chemical Weapons. I don’t know if General Dempsey or Secretary Hagel or perhaps Secretary Kerry is the appropriate person. The French have done an assessment of what they believe the Syrians have in terms of their chemical weapons arsenal. General Dempsey, are you familiar with it?

GEN. DEMPSEY: I'm not familiar with the French assessment. I'm familiar with our own.

SEN. DURBIN: Well, let me ask -- we have it here, a copy of it here, and it's been published. And we have talked a lot about sarin gas and other nerve agents. And what we hear from this report -- and I'd ask you if it's close to what your assessment is -- the Syrians have more than 1,000 tons of chemical agents and precursor chemicals, several hundred tons of sarin representing the bulk of their arsenal. It’s also been speculated that they have the missile capability of delivering these chemical weapons in Israel, portions of Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and beyond. What is your assessment of their potential when it comes to the delivery and their capacity when it comes to the amount of chemical agents they have available?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Our assessment very closely matches the French assessment.

SEN. DURBIN: I guess my question to you, Mr. Secretary, Secretary Kerry, is in light of the vulnerability of these countries, what has been the response of the Arab and Muslim world to this?

I mean, you've listed four or five who've stepped forward to say they support our efforts. It would seem that if this danger in the region is so profound that we would have even greater support.

SEC. KERRY: Senator, I think -- this is something I'd be happier discussing in greater detail with you in the closed session. There are -- there are obviously some countries for whom public statements are more complicated than others. And I think we should talk about that at the other session.

SEN. DURBIN: Fair enough.

General Dempsey, we saw these photographs earlier -- these heartbreaking photographs. Page three of The Washington Post this morning, an ad by a group supporting the president's effort has a photograph that's riveted in my mind, as a father and grandfather, of the children on the floor in shrouds, victims of this chemical agent gas attack.

What the administration is asking us for is military authority to launch additional attacks. What have you been charged with in terms of the issue of collateral damage from those attacks as it would affect innocent people and civilians in the nation of Syria?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Senator, the guidance that we've received on targeting is to maintain a collateral damage estimate of low. And I just -- briefly on how we come up with our assessments of collateral damage, it's based on how much we know about a target through intelligence, its proximity to civilian structures and weapons effects as we decide what weapon to weaponize against it.

And a -- and a collateral damage estimate of low means just that, that we will keep collateral damage lower than
a certain number, which I would rather share with you in a classified setting. That doesn’t mean, by the way, that we would have the same constraint, if you will, in what damage could be done to regime personnel.

So that’s a separate issue, although even in that case I could probably tell you some more things in the classified setting.

**SEN. DURBIN:** I look forward to that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

**SEN. MENENDEZ:** Thank you, Senator.

Senator McCain.

**SENIOR JOHN MCCAIN (R-AZ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the witnesses.

And may I say, John, it’s very good to see Teresa here with you, in good health and good spirits. Thank you. So Teresa, I apologize for what I’m about to do to John.

John.

**SEC. KERRY:** Man, there’s a set-up.

**SEN. MCCAIN:** John, when you tell the enemy you’re going to attack them -- I’m not going to take any time on this -- you tell the enemy you’re going to attack them, they’re obviously going to disperse and try to make it harder. I’m looking right here at a(n) AP story, report, Syria said to be hiding weapons and moving troops. There’s even open-source reporting that they may be moving some of their assets into the Russian naval base. But let’s not get -- it’s ridiculous to think that it’s not wise from a pure military standpoint to -- not to warn the enemy that you’re going to attack.

Secretary Hagel, in the Wall Street Journal today we read the following: Pentagon planners were instructed not to offer strike options that could help drive Mr. Assad from power. The big concern is the wrong groups in the opposition would be able to take advantage of it, a senior military officer said.

Is there any truth to that Secretary Hagel?

**SEC. HAGEL:** Senator, as I’ve said, the president asked us for a range of options and we provided him a range of options.

**SEN. MCCAIN:** I’m asking if there’s any truth to the Wall Street Journal --

**SEC. HAGEL:** Our options were not limited to any --

**SEN. MCCAIN:** I will just ask if there’s any truth to the story that’s in the Wall Street Journal.

**SEC. HAGEL:** No.

**SEN. MCCAIN:** Secretary Kerry, in the same Wall Street Journal article quote: The delay in providing arms to the opposition in part reflects a broader U.S. approach rarely discussed publicly but that underpins its decision-making. According to former and current U.S. officials, the current administration doesn’t want to tip the balance in favor of the opposition for fear the outcome may be even worse for U.S. interests than the current stalemate.

Is that story accurate?
SEC. KERRY: No.

SEN. MCCAIN: Thank you.

SEC. KERRY: By the way, can I add something, Senator -- on the warning issue, I don’t disagree with you about warning. In fact, the general wouldn’t disagree with you either. And we are all --

SEN. MCCAIN: But the general said it would be just as easy --

SEC. KERRY: No, we're deeply --

SEN. MCCAIN: Let's not get into that when we just --

SEC. KERRY: All I want to -- all I want to say to you is that there were leaks, which are the bane of everybody's existence, and the fact is that the newspapers began to carry stories about a strike in targeting well before any decisions were made, and that began a process of moving. So now there is the belief --

SEN. MCCAIN: OK. I got it. I really would like to move on to some more important questions, if you don't mind.

SEC. KERRY: Well, I thought all your questions were important, John.

SEN. MCCAIN: (Chuckles.) Thank you, John. That’s good. I’ll try to remember that.

The president said today that the purpose of the military action in Syria is not just to respond to Assad’s use of chemical weapons but to degrade his military capabilities as part of a broader strategy to change the momentum on the ground and, as the president said, quote, allow Syria ultimately to free itself. Do you agree with that assessment, John?

SEC. KERRY: I said upfront, I've said several times here, they will automatically be, as a result of degrading his ability for chemical weapons, there will be downstream impact, which will have an impact on his military capacity.

SEN. MCCAIN: And to let --

SEC. KERRY: I agree with the president.

SEN. MCCAIN: Thank you. General Dempsey, do you agree with that statement of the president's?

GEN. DEMPSEY: I agree. I have never been told to change the momentum. I have been told to degrade capability.

SEN. MCCAIN: Do you think, General, that without a change in momentum, that Syria ultimately could free itself? Secretary Hagel?

SEN. HAGEL: Well, Senator, I think they all are connected. Degrading a military capability, as you know, is a -- is a pretty significant part of momentum shifts.

SEN. MCCAIN: Secretary Kerry -- John, over the weekend, the Wall Street Journal ran an important op-ed by Dr. Elizabeth O’Bagy -- I hope you saw it -- a Syria analyst at the Institute for the Study of War, spent a great deal of time inside Syria, including just this month.

And I want to read her assessment of the situation on the ground. And I quote the story. "The conventional wisdom holds that the extremist elements are completely mixed in with the more moderate rebel groups; this isn’t the case. Moderates and extremists wield control over distinct territory. Contrary to many media accounts, the war in Syria is not being waged entirely or even predominately by dangerous Islamists and al-Qaida
die-hards. The jihadists pouring into Syria from countries like Iraq and Lebanon are not flocking to the front lines. Instead, they are concentrating their efforts on consolidating control in the northern rebel-held areas of the country. Moderate opposition forces -- a collection of groups known as the Free Syrian Army -- continue to lead the fight against the Syrian regime. While traveling with some of these Free Syrian Army battalions, I've watched them defend Alawi and Christian villages from government forces and extremist groups. They've demonstrated a willingness to submit to civilian authority, working closely with local administrative councils, and they've struggled to ensure that their fight against Assad will pave the way for a flourishing civil society.

John, do you agree with Dr. O'Bagy's assessment of the opposition?

SEC. KERRY: I agree with most of that. They have changed significantly. They have improved, and as I said earlier, the fundamentals of Syria are secular, and I believe, will stay that way.

SEN. MCCAIN: And I think it's very important to point out, again, as you just said -- it's a secular state. They would reject radical Islamists, and they, in some cases -- in the areas in which they have control, the people are demonstrating against them, is the information I have.

So when we see these commentators say, well, we don't know which side will win; we don't know, you know, who the bad -- who the bad guys are, if you agree with this assessment, we certainly know who the bad guys are. Is that correct?

SEC. KERRY: I believe we do, for the most part.

SEN. MCCAIN: For the most --

SEC. KERRY: There are -- there are some worse than al-Nusra, and they tend to be, most of them, in the northern area and the -- and the east.

SEN. MCCAIN: I thank you. And again, I'd like to ask again, can you assure the committee that the administration does not see a protracted stalemate and conflict in Syria as somehow a good thing or a goal of U.S. policy?

SEC. KERRY: The goal of U.S. policy is not a stalemate. The goal is a negotiated solution which results in the departure of Assad and the free choice of the Syrian people for their future.

SEN. MCCAIN: And finally, I'd like to ask again, if we reject this resolution, doesn't it send a serious -- as you already said, a seriously bad message to our friends and allies alike, encourages our enemies and would dispirit our friends, particularly those fighting in Syria, but not only there but around the world?

SEC. KERRY: Senator McCain, I have gotten to know my counterparts in the Mideast particularly well because of the number of crises and initiatives that we've had to deal with in that region. And I cannot emphasize enough how much they are looking to us now, making judgments about us for the long term, and how critical the choice we make here will be, not just to this question of Syria but to the support we may or may not anticipate in the Mideast peace process, to the future of Egypt, to the transformation of the Middle East, to the stability of the region and other interests that we have.

There's no way to separate one thing from all of the rest. Relationships are relationships and they are integrated. And that's why this is so important.

SEN. MCCAIN: But I would also emphasize, if it's the wrong kind of resolution it can do just as much damage, in my view.

I thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/running-transcript-senate-foreign-services-committee-hearing-on-syria/2013/09/03/35ae1048...
SEN. MENENDEZ: Thank you, Senator.

Senator Udall.

SENATOR TOM UDALL (D-NM): Thank you. Thank you, very much. And I thank all the witnesses for their testimony and for their service here today. And I also want to thank Chairman Menendez for the way he has conducted his hearing.

Like everyone here, I deplore what Bashar al-Assad has done to his own people. By attacking them with chemical weapons Assad has committed an atrocious crime so heinous that international law singles it out as an assault deserving of international action. But let there be no mistake, I fully agree his horrific acts deserve an international response.

But what should that response be? That is why we are here today, to ask that question and many others. And I hope this hearing will do more than just rubber stamp a decision that has already been made by this administration. I have grave concerns about what the administration is asking of us, of our military and of the American people.

Here's the situation as I see it: With limited international support, we are being told the United States must retaliate for the use of chemical weapons with a surgical bombing campaign of our own.

We're being told we're bombing in order to send a message. But what message are we sending? To the international community we're saying once again the United States will be the world's policeman. You break a law, and the United States will step in.

We are on shaky international legal foundations with this potential strike, and we need to know whether we exhausted all diplomatic and economic sanction options to affect Syria's behavior. We need to increase our attention on the source of Assad's ability to continue to ruthlessly kill his own people, and that is support from nations including Russia and China, who are cynically trying to hold the moral high ground. Assad would not be able to maintain his grip on power if he were not being supported from outside. The full force of international outrage should come down on those nations that are refusing to allow the U.N. to act and find a solution.

And finally, I see this potential bombing campaign as a potential next step towards full-fledged war. We've been here before. The Iraq War began as an international effort to kick Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait, and then years of a no-fly zone and airstrikes to prevent Saddam from threatening his neighbors or reconstituting his arsenal of chemical weapons. And as we all know, this limited military action eventually led to what is one of the biggest blunders in U.S. foreign policy: a war that I voted against. Many who voted for it came to regret that vote.

Americans are understandably weary. After the fiasco of Iraq and over a decade of war, how can can this administration make a guarantee that our military actions will be limited?

How can we guarantee that one surgical strike will have any impact other than to tighten the vice grip Assad has on his power or allow rebels allied with al-Qaida to gain a stronger foothold in Syria?

I take our role extremely seriously here, like many of the other senators have said, and I will hear the president and his team out. The president made the right decision to pursue an authorization for the use of military force. I hope these hearings will give the American people the answers they deserve. But there are troubling questions that need to be answered. And Secretary Kerry, I want to start with you.

You've assured the American people -- I watched your national television performances -- that the U.S. action will not include, and I think you've said this here today, will not include the use of ground troops, that it will be limited in nature to deter Assad and others from using weapons of mass destruction. Yet the draft authorization
of force proposed by the administration states that it would allow the president to use the armed forces -- and I quote here -- as he determines to be necessary and appropriate in connection with the use of chemical weapons or other weapons of mass destruction in the conflict with Syria.

Now, this is a very open-ended proposal with no specific limits on types of forces that would be used, with no limit on their duration. Why was it proposed in a way that it conflicts with the statements of no ground troops? And what kind of language Secretary Kerry or the precise language are you willing to back in terms of showing the American people that we really mean what we say in terms of no boots on the ground?

SEC. KERRY: Senator, all good questions, and I will respond to all of them. But I want to -- I want to -- I want to address sort of the suspicion and concern that you have, which is appropriate. I think everybody understands that Iraq left a lot of folks reeling for some period of time. So it’s appropriate to ask the questions you’ve asked.

But please let me try to emphasize: This is not sending a message per se. This is having an effect, an impact. This is taking action to achieve something more than just a message. It is to degrade his current capacity. It'll make it harder for him to do that in the future, and it will also facilitate our ability to hold him accountable in the future if he does. And he will know that. So this will affect his calculation. That’s number one. That’s not just a message.

SEN. UDALL: Secretary Kerry, by degrading his capacity, don’t you in fact make him weaker and make the people out there like al-Nusra and al-Qaida and these other extremist forces stronger? And this is what I want General Dempsey to talk about in a little bit too, but --

SEC. KERRY: Well, I’m happy to --

SEN. UDALL: -- could you answer that? Could you answer that? By degrading him, you make these extremist forces stronger, do you not?

SEC. KERRY: No, I don’t believe you do. As a matter of fact, I think you actually make the opposition stronger. And the opposition is getting stronger by the day now. And I think General Idris would tell you that, that he is not sitting around, and his daily concern is not the opposition; it’s Assad and what Assad is doing with his Scuds, with is airplanes, with his tanks, with his artillery to the people of Syria.

But I think it’s important also to look at this -- because you raised the question of doesn’t this make the United States the policeman of the world. No. It makes the United States a multilateral partner in an effort that the world, 184 nations strong, has accepted the responsibility for. And if the United States, which has the greatest capacity to do that, doesn’t help lead that effort, then shame on us. Then we’re not standing up to our multilateral and humanitarian and strategic interest.

Now, that said -

SEN. UDALL: Can I stop you, Secretary Kerry, just there on that one --

SEC. KERRY: (Any time ?).

SEN. UDALL: -- because if you’re talking about multilateral efforts, what we’re talking about is the world being able -- this is a breach of a treaty, and the world put within the United Nations that enforcement mechanism. And what we have done here, with Russia and China holding up the ability of the U.N. to act, we’ve just turned --

SEC. KERRY: Well, Senator, with all due respect --

SEN. UDALL: -- (inaudible). We should be standing up. We should be standing up and making sure that they are condemned, those countries that are not allowing us to move forward to find a solution where the solution should reside. I just --
SEC. KERRY: Well, Senator, I don’t disagree that we should be finding the solution where it resides. But the fact is that just a few weeks ago, just a few weeks ago, at the U.N. we sought a condemnation of a chemical attack -- without blame, without citing Assad, without saying who was responsible -- simply a condemnation of a chemical attack, and the Russians blocked it.

SEN. UDALL: Right.

SEC. KERRY: So we have no illusions. Yes, is the U.N. Security Council having difficulties at this moment performing its functions?

x x functions? Yes. Does that mean the United States of America and the rest of the world that thinks we ought to act should shrink from it? No. And that’s really what’s at test here. I would urge you -- you said, how do we know it won’t result in X or Y or Z happening if we don’t do it?

Let me ask you: I -- it’s not a question of what will happen if we don’t do it; it’s a certainty. Are you going to be comfortable if Assad, as a result of the United States not doing anything, then gasses his people yet again and they -- and the world says, why didn’t the United States act? History is full of opportunity of moments where someone didn’t stand up and act when it made a difference. And whether you go back to World War II or you look at a ship that was turned away from the coast of Florida and everybody on it lost their lives subsequently to German gas, those are the things that make a difference. And that’s what’s at stake here.

And I would say to you, you know, these are troubling questions -- it’s a guarantee, if the United States doesn’t act together with other countries, we know what Assad will do. That’s a guarantee. I can’t tell you what’s guaranteed that some country will do if we do act, but I know what will happen if we don’t. And I’m pretty darn clear that a lot of things that people think will happen won’t happen if the United States acts; it will in fact have enforced this international standard with respect to the use of chemical weapons.

And if the multilateral institution’s set up to do it, the Security Council is being blocked and won’t do it, that doesn’t mean we should turn our backs and say there’s nothing we can do. That’s not the case. And we did it in Bosnia and made a difference; we saved countless numbers of lives. And I believe, Mr. -- the president of the United States believes we can do that now.

SEN. UDALL: Well, I don’t believe that we -- I don’t believe that we should have given up so easily on using the United Nations, using --

SEC. KERRY: We haven’t given up.

SEN. UDALL: -- yes, we have.

We haven’t -- we haven’t taken Russia to task. We haven’t taken China to task. And that’s what we should be pointing out at this point.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Time of -- time of the senator is expired.

SEN. UDALL: Oh, I mean we -- I want to respectfully disagree with you and say also I very much appreciate your service. I know that you’re trying very, very hard to find, on the diplomatic side, as secretary of state, a peace resolution.

Thank you for your courtesy. Sorry for going over.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Senator Barrasso.

SENATOR JOHN BARRASSO (R-WY): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.
Thank you for being here.

Over Labor Day weekend in Wyoming, I heard from people all across the state. All believe what is happening in Syria is awful, despicable, do have concerns about the administration and what the plan really is, what a strategy really is. They want to know what the core national security interests of the United States are that are at stake in Syria, what is our ultimate goal of proposed military strikes and what happens if the strikes are not effective.

And to that end, Mr. Chairman, I would -- I would ask you what exactly it is that we are going to be voting on. Is it what the White House has set forward? And when we're going to see the specifics? I think Senator Durbin also asked about the narrowness or the expanse of what would be -- and would we be voting within the next 24 hours?

SEN. MENENDEZ: The chair is working with the ranking member and others to come to an agreed-upon text that we believe would meet the goals of achieving the ability for the administration to pursue the military action they have sought the Congress' support for in a way that would allow them to have the maximum ability to succeed in that action but by the same token tailor it sufficiently so that this is not an open-ended engagement, and specifically not with boots on the ground, American troops on the ground.

We're not there yet. It is our aspiration to try to get there before the end of the day and then to look forward to the possibility of a markup tomorrow.

We'll see if we can get there, and if we do we'll give all members ample notice of that time. We start off in the morning, as I said, with a classified briefing and we'll move from there.

SEN. BARRASSO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, I appreciate you coming to Congress to seek legislative authorization for the military action. President Obama specifically asserted on Saturday that he already had the authority. Now, when the British Parliament rejected a motion supporting U.K. participation, the prime minister specifically said that he would respect the will of the British people and would -- there would be no British military intervention. Where does President Obama stand with that, based -- now that he has come to Congress?

SEC. KERRY: He intends to win the passage of the resolution.

SEN. BARRASSO: And on the case that he does not, are you still -- is the plan the he --

SEC. KERRY: Well, we're not contemplating that because it's too dire.

SEN. BARRASSO: OK. We talked a little bit about the risks of delays. There are already reports that by delaying military action that Assad is moving military assets, hardware, troops to civilian neighborhoods. Reports indicate that Russia plans to send an anti-submarine ship, missile cruiser, to the Mediterranean in the next few days. I wonder what this means to our contingency planning and what this impact is going to be for our military operations.

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, the movement of the Russian -- there's already four Russian warships in the eastern Med. And if the -- they are staying a respectful distance. I don't see that as a factor.

SEN. BARRASSO: Has the administration created -- conducted, perhaps, a threat assessment of how Russia, how Iran, how Hezbollah is going to respond to a U.S.-led attack? And what response do we expect from Syria's allies including, you know, Russia, Iran, Hezbollah, to our -- to military action?

SEC. KERRY: We all agree that that would be best handled in a classified session.
SEN. BARRASSO: All right.

The -- in terms of what success looks like, I think Senator Udall specifically, you know, said, what happens if gases are used again? I'm wondering, if we do a limited strike, as proposed, and still Assad goes back and uses chemical weapons on his people -- and that engenders an entire new set of hearings? How does this -- how does this end? Where we are we a month from now?

GEN. DEMPSEY: Well, as I said, Senator, the -- there's a -- we're preparing several target sets, the first of which would set the conditions for follow-on assessments, and the others would be used if necessary and on -- we haven't gotten to that point yet. What we do know is that we can degrade and disrupt his capabilities and that that should put us in a better position to make the kind of assessment you're talking about.

SEC. KERRY: Let me -- let me add to that, if I can, John. Senator Feinstein brought this up today at the meeting at the White House. It would be really -- it would not be sensible to pass this resolution with a view to degrading and degrading his capacity and preventing him from doing it -- if he were foolish enough to do it again, the general does have follow-on possibilities. And since the objective would remain the same, it'd be important for Assad himself to know that you have no limited this to one specific moment with respect to chemical weapons. You can still have a limited authorization, but with respect to chemical weapons, it'd be a huge mistake to deprive General Dempsey and company of their options to enforce what we're trying to achieve.

SEN. BARRASSO: Trying to achieve, Mr. Secretary -- the negotiated departure of Assad. You keep mentioning -- trying to get him to do this from the negotiating table. It seems to me that somebody who will, as Senator Coons said, go to any length to stay in power to the point of even using chemical weapons against his people -- that -- wouldn't he be just driven to a more serious level of determination to keep power rather than the negotiation table?

SEC. KERRY: John, it's a very decent -- it's a very appropriate question. And the answer is, I don't believe so, and there are a number of different reasons why I don't believe so. And most of them are best discussed -- and I look forward to it with you in the private session -- but there are very strong indications from a number of -- a number of discussions that have taken place between countries and individuals over the last months that Assad would not necessarily avoid making a different decision under certain circumstances. So I think we ought to leave it at that, but in the private session, I think we ought to dig into it.

SEN. BARRASSO: I was going to ask about the chemical weapons stockpiles -- and maybe you want to reserve this for the discussion tomorrow as well, in terms of steps that we could take in terms of command and control of the regime's chemical weapons stockpiles to make sure that these things are protected in a way that could not (potentially ?) be used.

SEC. KERRY: Absolutely. And I want you to know -- and this is, again, something that ought to be done in the other session, but I will just say generically that General Dempsey and his team have taken great pains, at the instruction of the president of the United States, to make certain that whatever we do doesn't make it -- doesn't make people less safe or potentially more exposed to weapons or that those weapons would have less control and so forth.

All of these things have entered into the calculation.

SEN. BARRASSO: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Thank you, Senator Barrasso. Just one add-on to my original response to you. The resolution as sent to us by the administration will not be the resolution that we will be working on, but it is a good opening
as to what the desires are, intentions are, but it will not be the specific resolution we'll be working on.

Senator Murphy.

**SENATOR CHRIS MURPHY (D-CT):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Secretary Kerry, Secretary Hagel, General, thank you very much for being with us and for taking so much time with us.

We all are referencing the conversations that we've had over the last week. I've never, frankly, seen a greater level of public engagement on an issue since, frankly, the health care reform debate of 2009. And while there are certainly hard-liners that have come to me with a resolution that we should go in, or many more with a resolution that we should stay out, most people see both sides of this issue. And they, frankly, appreciate the fact that they have an American president who has taken so much time and put in so much thought into arriving at this decision, even if they disagree.

And they, frankly, appreciate even more the fact that this president trusts them and trusts their elected representatives enough to bring this conversation to the United States Congress, albeit the fact that it may be a little messy to get from Point A to Point B. And so given all of the commotion that we will hear from our constituents, that, maybe more than anything else, comes out to me loud and clear.

I guess when I look at this question, I see two questions inherent in the one. One, we have to ask ourselves, is there a moral or national security imperative?

And I think you've very plainly made the case, as has the president, that there is atrocities committed that we cannot let stand and a country that has very vital security interests to the United States.

But there's a second question, and that's the one that I have trouble with and I think some of my colleagues have trouble with. And that's this: Will our action lessen the acuity of that moral atrocity or advance or national security interest? There both has to be a problem that needs to be solved and then a way to solve it. And that's why I struggle with this.

And frankly, I don't think the fact that I and many others struggle with that question means that we lack courage or that we are, frankly, enabling the Syrian regime. I just think it's that we wonder whether there is a limit to the ability of American military power to influence the politics on the ground in the Middle East.

And clearly, though there is not some direct linkage between what happened in Iraq and what happened in Syria, it does chill the ability of people to believe that American military might can influence politics on the ground in Syria after they have watched the last 10 years.

The second problem people have is this question of escalation. And I think one of the most important things, Secretary Kerry, that you said in your prepared remarks was this. You said that we would be prepared to respond to, I think as you stated, a miscalculation of Assad, whether it be in reprisals against his own people or attacks against our allies in the region, that we would be prepared to respond without going to war. Now, some people will find that statement a little incongruous. How do you respond without going to war?

And so let me maybe ask the question this way. There are a variety of responses from Assad. He could launch another chemical weapons attack against his own people. He could launch a ferocious conventional weapons attack against his own people.

He could -- of course, he or his allies could launch attacks against our allies in the region.

I don't expect you necessarily to explain exactly what the response will be today, but does this resolution that we're debating today give you the ability to respond to those reprisals or in any of those situations that I just outlined, responses within Syria against his own people or responses outside of Syria against our allies? Would
you have to come back to Congress for a new authorization of force?

SEC. KERRY: Well -- excuse me, sorry. As I think the president has made clear and as we have seen in many of these crises (ph) over the course certainly of my career here in the Senate, I saw presidents do both, and I supported some and I opposed others. And on a number of occasions, presidents acted without the authorization of Congress. So there is no question but that the president would have the authority and the right, and conceivably, the imperative to respond without any other authorization if Assad were to attack again. And so I can’t -- you know, I can’t speak for the president in terms of what decision he would make, but he has the authority, and that right would be available to him.

Now, if I can just say quickly with respect to -- you know, it’s absolutely appropriate to ask the question: Will this make a difference -- totally appropriate -- and to think about this question of escalation.

But let me -- let me say something quickly about both of those. If the Congress decides not to do this, it is a guarantee, whether it is with Assad in Syria, or nuclear weapons in Iran, or nuclear weapons in North Korea, we will have invited a for-certain confrontation at some point in time that will require you to make a choice that will be even worse, with a potential even greater conflict.

That, I guarantee you because that’s the message that will be sent.

Now, there’s a distinction between this and Iraq. I understand all the Iraq -- you know, we lived through that here. In Iraq, intelligence purported to suggest that weapons of mass destruction existed but we didn’t know if they existed. And so we had a massive invasion in order to try to find out if they existed. And we found out they didn’t.

Here, we have weapons of mass destruction that we not only know do exist, they have been used. Not once, not twice, not three times, but multiple times -- we estimate in the teens and the opposition estimates more than that. And now we have this most recent use of weapons of mass destruction in contravention of nearly a hundred years of a prohibition against their use.

SEN. MURPHY: OK, but that’s -- I don’t think that’s the dispute. The dispute is not that there’s a correlation between intelligence --

SEC. KERRY: Well, but the dispute is -- the dispute is what are you going to do about it?

SEN. MURPHY: -- it’s the ability of the military to be able to influence the reality on the ground.

SEC. KERRY: No, no. But, Chris, the dispute is what are you prepared to do about it. That’s the dispute. If you believe that by doing nothing you are going to stand up for the norm and somehow reduce the threat of the use at some future time, that’s your right to believe that. But I think and the president believes deeply and everybody at this table believes that flies against all common sense and all human behavior.

SEN. MURPHY: Mr. Secretary, let me ask just a question about Iran because I think it’s very important and a compelling narrative here.

Let me just ask you this. The circumstances are very different. Not to trivialize what has happened in Syria, but the stakes of Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon, which could kill millions, is different than Syria killing thousands with chemical weapons. And I wonder whether or not it lessens our moral authority to make a different decision with respect to Iran just because on Syria, we decided not to act.

And second, I worry about this weariness that we’ve talked about within the American public that it may ultimately make it harder -- I’m not saying it will, but it could make it harder for us to rally the American public with respect to a response to Iran having gone through what could be at least a slightly protracted engagement
with Syria.

And so I just -- I guess I want to challenge you for a second on the automatic nature of a failure to step in in Syria with respect to compromising our ability to respond in Iran.

SEC. KERRY: Well, let me -- let me just make it very, very clear. The world decided after World War I and the horrors of gas in the trenches and the loss of an entire generation of young people in Europe that we would never again going to allow gas to be used in warfare. And so if all of a sudden at this moment, where the third instance -- it was used by Adolf Hitler to gas millions of Jews; it was used by Saddam Hussein in order to gas Iraqis and his own -- Iranians and his own people; and now it has been used by Bashar al- Assad. Three people in all of history. And if the United States, knowing it and knowing that we've drawn a line that the world has drawn with us, is unwilling to stand up and confront that, it is an absolute certainty that gas will proliferate. We've had sarin gas in the Tokyo subway.

Do you really want to have a situation where that gas may be available to these groups if it continues to deteriorate, because Assad can use this gas to continue to subjugate his population that's looking for a governance that is, you know, representative and different and respectful of their rights? I don't know how we could live with that.

Now, is there a difference between gas and a nuclear weapon? Well, I suppose it would depend on the scale, to be honest with you. It would depend on the scale. But the world decided that chemical, biological and nuclear are the, you know, prohibited entities of warfare, and we as a nation and we as a global community have struggled to try to enforce that through the years. It’s hard for me to imagine that the United States would not stand with the world against that.

Now, is it going to be effective? I'm convinced that what we can do will reduce the possibilities of more use of gas and degrade his capacity to use this weapon. And I think it's imperative for us. As I've said again and again, we all have to take that step. But it's significantly different from what took place in Iraq originally with respect to weapons that we didn't know existed, and the two just are not similar.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Senator Paul.

SENATOR RAND PAUL (R-KY): Thank you for coming today.

It’s not often that I get to compliment the president. I can probably count the number of times maybe on one hand. But when I first heard that the president was going to come to Congress, boy, was I pleasantly surprised. I was proud that he was my president. I didn’t vote for him, and I still am opposed to him quite a few times, but I was proud that he did this.

And so that does concern me. I want to be proud of the president, but every time I'm just about there, then I get worried that really, he doesn't mean it, that he's going to sort of obey the Constitution if he wins. So I heard Secretary Kerry say, if we win, sure, but if we lose, what? I mean, make me proud today, Secretary Kerry. Stand up for us and say, you're going to obey the Constitution and if we vote you down, which is unlikely, but if we do, you would go with what the people say through their Congress, and you wouldn’t go forward with the war that your Congress votes against. Can you give me a better answer, Secretary Kerry?

SEC. KERRY: I can't give you a different answer than the one I gave you. I don't know what the president’s decision is, but I will tell you this, it ought to make you proud, because he still has the constitutional authority, and he would be in keeping with the Constitution.

SEN. PAUL: Well, I disagree with you there. I don’t believe he has the constitutional authority. I think Congress had -- has this. Madison was very explicit when he wrote "The Federalist Papers," he wrote that history supposes
or the Constitution supposes what history demonstrates, that the executive is the -- is the branch most likely to
go to war, and therefore, the Constitution vested that power in the Congress. It’s explicit and runs throughout all
of Madison’s writings. This power is a congressional power and it is not an executive power. They didn’t say big
war, small war; they didn’t say boots on the ground, not boots on the ground. They said, declare war. Ask the
people on the ships launching the missiles whether they’re involved with war or not.

If we do not say that the Constitution applies, if we do not say explicitly that we will abide by this vote, you’re
making a joke of us. You’re making us into theater. And so we play constitutional theater for the president. If this
is real, you will abide by the verdict of Congress. You’re probably going to win; just go ahead and say it’s real.
And let’s have a real debate in this country and not a meaningless debate that in the end you lose and you say,
oh, well, we have the authority anyway. We’re going to go ahead and go to war anyway.

A couple of items --

SEC. KERRY: Senator, I assure you there’s nothing meaningless, and there is everything real about what --
(inaudible).

SEN. PAUL: Only if you adhere to what we vote on. Only if our vote makes a difference. Only if our vote is
binding is it meaningful.

SEC. KERRY: And I will leave to the man who was elected to be president of the United States the responsibility
for telling you what his decision is, if and when that moment came. But the president intends to win this vote,
and he’s not going to make prior announcement.

SEN. PAUL: We’ve had a lot of discussion about, you know, whether or not we’re going to make the world safer
with this. Somehow, we’re going to have less chemical weapons. But I think that’s an open question, and I think
it’s conjecture at best. You can say, oh, well, we think Assad will be less likely to launch chemical weapons after
this. We may be able to degrade his capacity somewhat. He’s got a thousand tons. Are we going to wipe it out?
Most reports I hear say we’re not even probably going to directly bomb chemical weapons because of what
might happen to the surrounding population. So my guess is he still will have the ability.

Most people say Assad acted very illogically. Why would he release chemical weapons on his own people when
it brought the anger and enmity of the entire world? So he’s already acting irrationally or illogically, and now
we’re going to deter him and he’s going to act in a rational manner. I think it’s equally likely that he either does
it again or he doesn’t do it. I don’t think you can say for certain which is better. I don’t know that we can say that
by attacking them, he’s not going to launch another chemical attack.

SEC. KERRY: Well --

SEN. PAUL: Will region -- will the region -- I’ve got a few of them and then I’ll stop. Will the region be more
stable, or less stable? We all say we want stability in the Middle East, and stability in the Middle East is a national
interest for our country. Will it be more stable, or less stable? I frankly think there are equal arguments on both
sides of that. Will Israel be more likely to suffer an attack on them, a gas attack or otherwise, or less likely?

I think there’s a valid argument for saying they’ll be more likely to suffer an attack if we do this. Will Russia be
more likely or less likely to supply more arms or get more heavily involved in this? I think there’s a valid
argument that they may become more likely to be involved. Iran -- more likely or less likely to be involved with
this? If Iran gets involved, more likely or less likely that Israel launches a reprisal attack on Iran?

There are all kinds of unknowns that I can’t tell you absolutely the answer, and neither can you, but I think
there’s a reasonable argument that the world may be less stable because of this and that it may not deter any
chemical weapons attack.
So what I would ask is how are we to know? How are we to go home -- I haven’t had one person come up to me and say they’re for this war, not one person. We get calls by the thousands. Nobody’s calling in favor of this war. I didn’t meet one when I was home all month. I went to 40 cities. I didn’t have one person come up and say -- do they all agree it’s a horrendous thing? Yes, we all agree that chemical attacks are a horrendous thing. But people are not excited about getting involved, and they also don’t think it’s going to work. And they’re skeptical of what will occur with this.

But I’d appreciate your response, and try to reassure the rest of us, one, that the vote is meaningful and valid, that you’d adhere to it, and also that you’re convinced that all of these different items will be better, not worse, by this attack.

SEC. KERRY: Well, Senator, I’d be very happy to do that. Will Israel be more likely to suffer an attack, or will they be safer; will they be less safe? I can make it crystal clear to you that Israel will be less safe unless the United States takes this action. Iran and Hezbollah are two of the three biggest allies of Assad. And Iran and Hezbollah are the two single biggest enemies of Israel. So if -- if -- if Iran and Hezbollah are advantaged by the United States not curbing Assad’s use of chemical weapons, there is a much greater likelihood that at some point down the road, Hezbollah, who has been one of the principal reasons for a change in the situation on the ground, will have access to these weapons of mass destruction. And Israel will for certain be less secure.

SEN. PAUL: But I would also argue that --

SEC. KERRY: Let me just finish.

SEN. PAUL: -- it would be more likely that Hezbollah will attack, because of this attack, in response.

SEC. KERRY: And Israel feels quite confident of its ability to deal with Hezbollah if they were to do so. You will notice that Israel has on several occasions in the last year seen fit to deal with threats to its security because of what’s in Syria, and not once has Assad responded to that to date. I think there are a bunch of things we should talk about in a -- in a classified session.

But let me just make it very clear to you that -- you know, you ask these questions, will this or that be more likely to happen or not likely to happen. If the United States of America doesn’t do this, Senator, is it more or less likely that Assad does it again? You want to answer that question?

SEN. PAUL: I don’t think it’s known. I don’t think it’s known --

SEC. KERRY: Is it more or less likely that he does it again?

SEN. PAUL: -- (inaudible) -- the attack. I think it’s unknown whether it’s more or less likely (whether you have ?) the attack.

SEC. KERRY: It’s unknown? Senator, it’s not unknown. If the United States of America doesn’t hold him accountable on this, with our allies and friends, it’s a guarantee Assad will do it again. A guarantee. And I urge you to go to the classified briefing and learn that.

Secondly, let me just point out to you that with respect to this question of Americans wanting to go to war, you know, you got three people here who’ve been to war. You got John McCain, who’s been to war. There’s not one of us who doesn’t understand what going to war means, and we don’t want to go to war. We don’t believe we are going to war in the classic sense of taking American troops and America to war. The president is asking for the authority to do a limited action that will degrade the capacity of a tyrant who has been using chemical weapons to kill his own people.

SEN. PAUL: But I think by doing so, you announce -- you announce --
SEC. KERRY: It's a limited -- it's limited.

SEN. PAUL: By doing so you announce in advance that your goal is not winning.

SEC. KERRY: But that's not what --

SEN. PAUL: And I think the last 50 years of secretaries of defense would say if your goal is not to win, then you shouldn't be involved.

SEC. KERRY: Senator, when people are asked, do you want to go to war with Syria, of course not. Everybody, a hundred percent of Americans will say no. We say no. We don’t want to go to war in Syria either. It’s not what we’re here to ask. The president is not asking you to go to war. He's not asking you to declare war. He’s not asking you to send one American troop to war. He’s simply saying we need to take an action that can degrade the capacity of a man who’s been willing to kill his own people by breaking a nearly hundred-year-old prohibition, and will we stand up and be counted to say, we won’t do that. That’s not -- I don’t -- you know, I just don’t consider that going to war in the classic sense of coming to Congress and asking for a declaration of war and training troops and sending people abroad and putting young Americans in harm’s way. That’s not what the president is asking for here.

General, do you want to speak to that, alter that?

GEN. DEMPSEY: No, not really, Secretary. Thank you for offering.

SEC. KERRY: Right. (Laughter.)

SENATOR TIM KAINE (D-VA): (Off mic.) Great. Thank you to all of you. This has been a good discussion.

I want to echo what Senator Paul, Senator Durbin and others have said: I very much appreciate and celebrated the president’s decision to bring this matter to Congress. I also believe with others that the Constitution reserves the power to initiate military action to Congress. Five hundred and thirty-five people get to vote on that. There's only one commander-in-chief after the vote is taken, after we do that searching inquiry. It's the commander-in-chief that has to decide how to execute the decided-upon mission, but I applaud the president for doing it. I view it not only as a matter of constitutional law, I view it as reflecting a very important underlying value, and the value is this -- we shouldn’t put servicemembers into initiating battle -- putting people into harm's way if they don’t have the consensus behind them -- the American public political leadership is behind them. To send young men and women into war or into a military action where they are exercising military options with a divided political leadership class is the worst thing we can do. And so we need to come to a consensus and then execute on that consensus, whatever it is. And it would be my hope that Congress' consensus would then be what the president would do and not otherwise.

There is a basic principle at stake. I think you’ve stated it well: it’s the principle of international law and American law. No use of weapons of mass destruction against civilians. I don’t know of a higher principle of the relations of states -- of the law of nations, of sort of international legal morality than no use of weapons of mass destruction against civilians. And that is the principle that is at stake as we wrestle with this request of the president on this committee. That is a principle that is very clear. As you said, Secretary Kerry, it's not about, do weapons of mass destruction exist; they exist. It's not just whether they exist; they’ve been used. They’ve been used against civilians -- they've been used against civilians on a massive scale, including women and children.

And so it’s a principle that is squarely at stake. We know that Bashar al-Assad does not care about the principle. Contrary to things that you’ve said, we know that Vladimir Putin, until he shows otherwise, does not care about the principle. I hope Congress still cares about the principle. It is a principle of long-standing origin. Syria signed
onto it. The Geneva Convention. The Soviet Union signed onto the Geneva Convention and then again in the 1990s era chemical weapons convention as Russia under the leadership of the -- of the previous president, President Yeltsin. So we know that there are some who don't care, but I hope that Congress shows that we do care by our action.

Couple of questions. First, Russia. I want to associate with something that Senator Udall said earlier. The fact that they -- we have not done enough to demonstrate that Russia has essentially become a pariah nation by being pro-chemical weapons. It is hard to read their action and come up with any conclusion other than the current governor -- government of Russia is pro use of chemical weapons against civilians.

We should make them wear being the pro-chemical weapons like a rotting carcass around their neck in every instance we can so that at some point they'll ask themselves the question: Do we really want to be the nation that is pro use of chemical weapons against a civilian population? If we make that as painful as we can ever day at the U.N., even if they're going to block it we come back with another.

We should make it painful every day so that at some point they'll ask themselves the question: Why do we want to carry this water for a dictator who's using chemical weapons against his own civilians? We haven't done enough on that score. The fact that they're going to block us shouldn't dissuade us. We should do more and more and more. I think that will ultimately contribute to a political negotiation.

When I asked you the question about the Syrian opposition's position on chemical weapons I was unclear about their position on chemical weapons, but I understand that the opposition may have made some commitments and compacts that have been negotiated, Mr. Secretary, that they are anti-chemical weapons, that they would commit to turn over chemical weapons to the international community either if they take control of those weapons during the course of this civil war or whether they are in the lead in a post-Assad government.

Can you talk about the opposition and their commitment to get rid of this stockpile of chemical weapons that is currently being used?

SEC. KERRY: Yeah, we've had some discussions with him about that, and I hope that when the president comes here, when President Jarba comes here, that he will make that position clear to all of you.

SEN. KAINES: That would be very helpful. I think that would be one of the best things the opposition could do, is make that plain.

There is a little bit of a confusion. I think we can talk shorthand here in ways that might make it hard for senators and certainly the public to follow. We are here talking about military action on the same time we're saying there will be no solution to this civil war that's not a negotiated political solution. So those can seem to be at odds.

I want to state my understanding of how they fit together, and you tell me if I'm right or wrong. If we take action, action to degrade the ability of Syria to use chemical weapons, action to degrade their ability to violate international law, it will take away a significant asset that they have in their battle against the opposition. It will level the playing field by removing the ability to use chemical weapons, and it will therefore increase the odds that the parties will then come to the table to try to figure out that political solution. Is that the connection between the military option you are proposing and the stated end goal of a solution to the civil war only being -- only being achieved through a political end?

SEC. KERRY: It's the collateral connection to it. It's not the purpose of it, but it is a collateral connection.

SEN. KAINES: I don't have any other questions, Mr. Chair. I'll save them for tomorrow.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Thank you.
Senator Markey.

SENATOR EDWARD MARKEY (D-MA): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, very much. Without question, there is great horror and disgust at Assad's use of chemical weapons, and great sympathy for the people of Syria, that their leader would use chemical weapons upon his own people and that his murderous regime is so dedicated to retaining power that they would use those weapons.

At the same time, in our own country, there is great concern that we could be invoking the law of unintended consequences as we talk about using our own military in Syria. Back in 2001 and 2002, the threat obviously was that the next attack at the United States could come in the form of a mushroom cloud from Iraq. And although there were inspectors on the ground for 100 days in Iraq -- could not find it before the war started, nonetheless, that war began. And I think people are understandably apprehensive about what we're talking about right now, because of what did precipitate that war in Iraq.

So I continue to look forward to additional evidence being presented and my hope is that we can act in a way that does not bog us down into the middle of a Syrian civil war. I think there are many people who want us in the middle of the Syrian civil war, many people. But I don't think that the American people do. I think they are very wary of having our country once again drawn into a civil war in another country.

The concern that I think many people have is that we don't fully understand as well what the reaction of the Russians will be to this action. So General, you -- and I thank you, General, and Secretary Kerry and Secretary Hagel, for your -- this is a tough job, and we really appreciate the sensitivity and the professionalism with which you are handling this.

You talked about the Russians now having four vessels in the eastern Mediterranean, but you did not seem to be that concerned about it. Syria is a proxy state of Russia. They provide the military assistance, the training to Syria. Are you concerned in any way that a strike by the United States could increase the amount of military assistance that Russia sends into the Syrian regime?

GEN. DEMPSEY: It could, Senator. I mean, they -- there is some indication that they have assured the regime that if we destroy something, they can replace it. But you know, that's not a reason for me to hesitate to act. And to the -- to your point, there's always unintended consequences of conflict, but as the secretary has mentioned, we know what the consequences could be, probably would be if we do not act.

SEN. MARKEY: Thank you. Mr. Secretary -- and Teresa, you look great. You look absolutely fantastic here today. It's my understanding that the U.N. chemical inspection team left Syria on Saturday and that U.N. Secretary Ban Ki-moon has directed the team to expedite the mission's analysis of the samples and information it has obtained. When do we expect to obtain that data and the analysis of -- made by the U.N., and when do we expect that information to be made public?

SEC. KERRY: I'm sorry, which information?

SEN. MARKEY: The United Nations inspection team.

SEC. KERRY: Senator -- by the way, Mr. Chairman, I'm looking over here at my successor in the United States Senate, and I don't know if there's a new initiation process here on the committee, but I notice he doesn't even get a nameplate. (Laughter.)

SEN. MARKEY: Oh, I -- (making an adjustment).

SEC. KERRY: Oh. (Laughter.) All right. I was worried about you.

SEN. MARKEY: In the House, they put it up for you. (Laughter.) So I'm learning what the protocol is over here.
SEN.: We're dealing with sequester, so you're -- (inaudible).

SEC. KERRY: I thought -- I thought Massachusetts was on an uneven keel here for a minute.

Senator, first of all, welcome to the committee and welcome to the Senate.

SEN. MARKEY: Thank you.

SEC. KERRY: It's good to see you here.

With respect to the U.N. process, we're hearing somewhere, you know, three weeks, anywhere from two to four weeks, I suppose, is the range, but I think about three weeks is what we've been told.

SEN. MARKEY: So would it be wise for us to wait for that information from the United Nations in order to ensure that there is a signal sent to the international community as to the veracity as to the analysis by the United States that chemical weapons have been used?

SEC. KERRY: Well, let me speak to that, because it's a very important and legitimate question. First of all, the mandate of the United Nations inspection team, which we have great respect for and we're grateful to them and to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for their courageous effort to go in under difficult circumstances -- and we have obviously pushed for inspections in other circumstances -- the distinction here is that their mandate will only allow them to say that a chemical weapons attack took place. They have no mandate to assign blame, who did it. And Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has reaffirmed that this is in fact what they won't do. They won't assign blame. They will confirm what happened. Now, can they provide additional information in terms of details and some additional evidence? The answer is yes. But will they tell us anything that we do not know today beyond a reasonable doubt? The answer is no.

They can't tell us because they don't have the technical means or the intelligence operation or the capacity in the -- to put together what we have released to the world in an unclassified document. And when you add what we have in classified form, that I obviously can't go into here, we have an even more persuasive case about what has happened here.

Now let me add to that, if I can, just one more thing. Iran and Syria itself have both admitted that a chemical weapons attack took place. So Iran and Syria are already telling us an attack took place. But they've chosen the improbable and illogical notion that the opposition did it, not the regime.

SEN. MARKEY: My only suggestion would be that the United States declassify a high percentage of the information that we have so that the American people and the international community can see it. And I think that would be helpful in this whole discussion, that if we declassify it, I think it would actually give more assurance to the international community.

SEC. KERRY: Sir, I understand. And I have to tell you, the unprecedented level of declassification already according to the intel community could possibly put at risk some sources and methods. Now, one of the reasons that it was chosen to release one is somehow it leaked from someplace in the world and it was already in several newspapers.

So as a result of that, it was -- it was further declassified.

But that itself is an intercept, an actual conversation now out in public that shows the regime acknowledging its own culpability and expressing fear about the U.N. discovering it. So there's already, it seems to me, a sufficient level without tempting fate on sources and methods.

SEN. MARKEY: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.
And Secretary Hagel, if I may, just quickly, on the administration's draft resolution, would that draft -- authorization allow the U.S. military to conduct military operations outside of Syria?

SEC. HAGEL: No, it would not.

SEN. MARKEY: And would it allow military operations against foreign governments other than Syria?

SEC. HAGEL: No.

SEN. MARKEY: And would it authorize military operations against nonstate actors?

SEC. HAGEL: No.

SEN. MARKEY: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. MENENDEZ: Thank you, Senator Markey.

Let me -- on behalf of the committee, thank all of our distinguished witnesses. They have been testifying for an excessive 3 1/2 hours, and I appreciate their information they've imparted with the committee.

Let me say that I appreciate the thoughtfulness with which each member has come to this issue at this hearing and expressed their concerns and their views. And I have listened closely and understand some of those concerns.

I've listened to my colleagues particularly express concern as to whether the actions we conceived would in fact deter or degrade the ability of Assad to pursue chemical weapons attacks in the future, and I'm reminded in a much different context of an experience I had in my own life -- General Dempsey is actually originally from my area, Jersey City and Bayonne.

And I grew up in a tough neighborhood. And we had a bully in the neighborhood. And I was walking along the street one day, and he just slapped me in the face, and I went away and told my mom, and she said, avoid him. Avoid him. And a week later I saw the bully again, and I did all my best to avoid him, and this time he punched me in the nose, and it was bloody. And I went back to her and said, you know, Mom, I tried to avoid him. She says, well, just avoid him. And it wasn't till the third time, when we were by a construction site, that I got a piece of wood and whacked the bully, and that was the end of it. I never got whacked again. (Laughter.)

It's not quite this, but there is a lesson to be learned. Assad has made a calculation now to -- inching up several times, that he can use chemical weapons, or he believes he can use chemical weapons without consequences. And in doing so, there is a global message that in fact other state actors and other nonstate actors may believe they can do so as well. That's a critical challenge for the national security of the United States. And I hope members will consider that as we move towards the final action.

I want to advise members -- I think we're close to a text on a -- on a resolution, and so that they should consider that it is likely that we may very well be in a business meeting sometime after the classified hearing tomorrow morning. And we look forward to working with all the members of the committee.

Senator Corker, is there anything else you --

SEN. CORKER: I think you've said it well enough. I want to thank the witnesses for spending this much time not only in the hearing but also in advance of the hearing.
I look forward to the classified meeting tomorrow.

And I want to thank all the members for incredible thoughtfulness throughout all of this, and I appreciate everybody coming back to be a part of this and taking it so seriously and -- (inaudible). Thank you.

SEN. MENENDEZ: With the thanks of the committee, this hearing is adjourned.

Transcript courtesy of Federal News Service.