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No, but they do have a sizable anti-aircraft and ballistic missile capability. They also have air and missile capabilities, CW and BW weapons. It is not going to be a so-called cakewalk. The other issue that must be brought up is that many people talk about a humanitarian intervention in Syria, for all of the right causes, along the Turkish border, with safe havens and humanitarian corridors. However, let us not delude ourselves. Any major humanitarian effort must have a military component. That is when you start entering into the fog of a military intervention in Syria.

Then, as General Colin Powell, a good friend of mine, famously said to President George W. Bush in terms of Iraq, if you break it, you own it. Once we go in militarily, then we and the coalition own the problem. We are going to have to put back together whatever successor regime there is. To answer your initial question, how long, I think it is very important. First of all, no one can predict that. This regime has proven to be extremely resilient. When I was Ambassador to Syria under the father, Hafez al-Assad, who constructed this regime as a very powerful, political, military intelligence, Alawite, elite-based regime, it proved its ability to withstand a great crisis. However, having said that, I am convinced that we are in a post-Assad era. When he will go, I cannot predict, but we are in the post-Assad era.

The most significant events to have taken place recently are the rebels being able to enter and fight in Aleppo, and Damascus. That is the beginning of the end. The regime was able to maintain its sovereign position in the country, as long as the fights were in Homs, Hama, Latakia and other places. However, when it comes to Aleppo and Damascus, you know that is an end-of-regime scenario. The thing here that is absolutely critical is what comes after. If you trace the beginnings of the Arab Spring coming to Syria, which Bashar al-Assad famously said, 'Syria is immune from the Arab Spring, because we are with the people. We are with the Arab world.' It is a nonsensical statement. However, if you look at what happened in Daraa, where it all started, a dusty little town in South Syria, the protestors were largely high school students. What were the two targets they went to, buildings in Daraa, to write anti-regime graffiti? The Ministry of the Interior building was absolutely understandable. It was the symbol of repression. However, the other one was Syriatel, the Syrian telecommunications, because they knew that Bashar al-Assad's in-laws, the Makhloufs, had a monopoly on the cell phone industry, duty free, and the energy industry. Syria is a kleptocracy. It is not an oligarchy, it is a kleptocracy. These young kids knew and were symbolising the whole thrust of the Arab Spring. If you look back at the origins of the Arab Spring in Tunisia, there is one banner that always stuck in my mind in YouTube, "kefayah", "enough". Enough political repression, lack of political participation, bad education, no jobs, etc. Those same issues were replete and are replete in Syria and damaged the regime. It started out as a peaceful protest. Everyone had hopes for Bashar al-Assad, as a younger Arab leader who studied ophthalmology in London. I call him an ophthalmologist without vision. However, he fundamentally did not understand the forces of change in the Arab world.

I met with him in 2003 in Damascus. I was out of government, of course, at that time. I asked him, 'Mr President, you have come in as a young reformer and yet we do not see reforms moving forward.' He told me something that remained in my mind. I was reminded of it again in 2011, when the Arab Spring came to Syria. He said, 'Mr Ambassador, you have to understand that the people must be ready for reform and they are not.' He said, 'Therefore, I am going to be instituting administrative reforms. That was 2003. Eight years later, when I heard the same refrain coming out of Syrian official spokesmen, I said, 'He does not get it. He is not serious about reforms. He is not going to be a Mohammad VI who, at least, very successfully in Morocco, got ahead of the reform movement. The international community, if you remember, gave Bashar al-Assad a pass for several months. Then, the realisation came in when he started repressing his own people with arms that this was going to end badly.

Now, the situation is one in which the regime is getting weaker every month. The opposition is still too incoherent and not unified enough. I met with opposition people in Istanbul recently. I met with 15 people and I had 10 opinions. An effort has been made recently, as you know, in Doha, to bring them together. There is a movement towards greater



coherence, but the real opposition in Syria are the local coordinating committees on the ground, not so much the people in exile, if you will. It is the people on the ground. One of the problems is that there is no defined leadership to deal with it. Therefore, when you talk about why the international community is not more active, the question arises as to who you are going to deal with and who is your assistance is going to.

In the United States, we Americans do not listen to history very much, because we are so young, but there is one lesson that has remained in the American psyche, Afghanistan. We supported the Mujahideen against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. We all successfully got the Soviet Union to leave Afghanistan. Then, we, the United States, subcontracted our efforts in Afghanistan to Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, who then supported the madrassas and the creation of the Islamic radicals, which gave birth to Al Qaeda. Many years later, Al Qaeda, tragically, visited us in the United States on September 11th. I say this because it is very important to try to understand the mindset of Washington as to whether or not to take military action. My Turkish colleagues have told me that they are not going to act alone, because they feel that they do not want to carry a unilateral burden of military action across the Syrian-Turkish border. France has taken a leading position, recognising the opposition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. The American position is that we recognise the Syrian opposition as representing the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. We are one step behind, certainly, where France is and where Europe is. The point of the matter is that it is because of these unintended consequences. If we start giving major military support, intelligence support, and economic support, is it going to go into the wrong hands?

Let me just speak about the Russian and the Chinese position, because it is very important to understand this. Both Russia and China do not want to participate in any United Nations Security Council action that sets yet another precedent for the United Nations Security Council and the international community to interfere in the internal affairs of third countries. They read it that it could come home to them. If Putin cracks down on Chechnya, will that become a UNSC issue; or if China cracks down in Tibet or the Xinjiang province? They have a principled position that makes them support non-UNSC action on Syria. Of course, Russia has a very strong military relationship in the Port of Tartus in Syria. They have their interests. However, to really get to the depth of this, into Putin's mind, I will never forget a conversation I had with Henry Kissinger about a year ago. He told me that in his first conversations with Putin he asked, 'What, Mr President, is your greatest challenge?' Kissinger said that he thought Putin was going to tell him the anti-ballistic missile system being deployed in Europe. Putin said, 'The rise of Islamic radicalism on the Southern soft belly of the Russian Federation. This is another reason. The Russians think that we, in the west, are naïve, because we are countering a secularist regime and allowing the Islamists to come to power.'

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Putin was in Istanbul and he had a very small group briefing with a few journalists, me included. The same question came up. He said, 'We are against intervention in Syria, because we do not want Americans to get into every country. Whenever they do not like the leader, they want to change it. We do not want that.' However, he hinted. Time is up with Assad. However, he does not know who would replace him. I think because of the nature of our Prime Minister, he went too far, too quickly. He thought that with few decorations, Assad will fall. Really, he invested in Assad. He invested. The whole Cabinet went to Damas. We had agreements. He had this idea of having Syria and Turkey as a kind of a coalition. He was trying to get Syria out of the Iranian sphere of influence. It did not work. He told us many times that he repeatedly told Assad, 'Do something before it is too late. You are going to burn your hands.' Unfortunately, he took it very personally. He complained that Assad did not listen to him. The theory in Turkey is that we look at the Middle East like a marécage, so we do not want to get in, especially the military. The Turkish military does not want to get in. For the time being, we are having a big problem. We have question marks as to whether the Americans are trying to push the Turks, saying, 'Hey, do the dirty job for us.'

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Trying to look ahead, I think that with Obama's re-election, he is now more free to make certain decisions. I think, as I mentioned, the European position and other countries, certainly the Qataris and the Saudis, are much more advanced than the American position on Syria. The Qataris and Saudis are providing arms to some of the rebel groups, as well as other assistance. However, I think that the tendency now is that as long as Bashar al-Assad's regime hangs on and



the bloody tragedy continues on the ground in Syria, they will be more assertive with international action. That is going to have to be the result of the deliberations among the Europeans and the Americans. However, the tendency is towards a more assertive intervention and action in Syria. I think that will be the scenario, unless events overtake everything and something happens in Damascus that changes the equation overnight. Then, events will just be accelerated.

However, the major question remains. Who takes over and how will a political transition in Syria evolve? That is what we should be thinking about, because remember that Syria – and certainly the French know Syria very well – is a multi-confessional society of Muslims, Christian, Kurds, Druzes and Jews. It is a good example of a multi-confessional society and it should not be destroyed. Therefore, how do you preserve this culture and not have the worst-case scenario, which will affect the whole region in a very serious way? If Syria implodes into real sectarian warfare, then Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Israel will all immediately be impacted. I think the time has come for the Europeans and our friends in the Middle East to start preparing a coherent policy for post-Assad. How do we put together a structure, a political transition, that will end up representing Syria's multi-confessional society.