

SEGL CASE STUDY / SYRIA / February 2012

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Note: This is a hypothetical case study using real events, facts, and people. The specific speeches, however, are hypothetical and constructed solely for this exercise.

CONTEXT

The wave of popular uprisings that began last spring in Egypt continues to bring instability, and opportunity, to many parts of the Arab world. A brutal dictator has fallen in Libya, and from Nigeria to Yemen, popular movements are challenging the status quo. But nowhere is the situation more volatile, more dire, or more dangerous than in Syria.

Not only is Syria an ally of Iran and a state sponsor of terrorists, it borders other countries critical to stability in the Middle East – Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel. For several months, the government of Syrian leader Bashar Al-Assad has violated human rights by suppressing dissent and using military and security forces to inflict violence on the Syrian people. More than 5,000 civilians opposed to the government have been killed during the uprisings. In international legal terms, the government's actions might constitute crimes against humanity. The country now seems on the brink of civil war.

Throughout this crisis, the United States and her allies have called on the Syrian dictator to stop killing his own people and to begin a process of democratic reforms. While much of the world, including the Arab League, has made similar pleas to Assad, the United Nations Security Council has not been able to pass a resolution of condemnation because two countries – Russia and China – have vetoed it. Earlier this month, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov visited Syria for talks, which led the Syrian regime to announce that it would engage in a dialogue with opposition leaders and begin reforms. However, the situation on the ground tells a different story. Violence against civilians has only escalated in recent days.

Against this backdrop, the U.S. Secretary of State will be giving a series of statements in different parts of the world where she will be expected to comment on the situation in Syria. Your assignment is to craft remarks that accurately convey the urgency of the situation in Syrian; reflect American values, including human rights; defend American interests, and enhance our standing as a global leader.

CASE # 1: Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

The Secretary must appear at a Senate hearing to discuss the US position on Syria and role going forward. Republican Senator John McCain has called on the US to arm the opposition in Syria to hasten the downfall of the Assad regime. There is general agreement that US air support of NATO operations in Libya, which lasted for seven months, was instrumental in leading to the ouster of Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi. At the same time, there is continued unrest in Egypt – where democracy activists trained and funded in part by the West were at the forefront of the Arab Spring popular uprisings that led to the fall of Hosni Mubarak. Particularly distressing since then have been the Egyptian military's assertions of power -- a reminder that the ouster of a dictator does not automatically lead to a smoothly operating democracy. Also fresh in senators' minds are our nation's costly adventures in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Assignment: In a brief opening statement, the Secretary must address the human rights situation in Syria, and outline what the US can and cannot do to support the opposition – all in the framework of our global and regional strategic and security needs.

STUDENT SPEECH FINAL DRAFT:

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Foreign Relations Committee, in the field of human rights we are standing at the brink of either disaster or progress. The conflict in Syria is currently a threat to itself and to the Middle East. Assad's regime is sponsoring terrorism and violating human rights. Our time is limited.

I don't want to look back at this moment, ten years from now and regret standing by while a schoolboy from Homs was butchered by his government. We have the ability to create a world where he can walk to school safely or he can become just another casualty.

I know what world I would choose not only as the Secretary of State, but also as a parent. I've fought so my daughter will grow up knowing that there are no exceptions to the protection of human rights. My job is to assure the security of the United States. An essential component of our freedom is the value we place on basic human rights.

We showed courage in Bosnia.
We were leaders for peace in Kosovo.
We spent 226 days supporting Libyan protesters.

So far, we've spent zero days in Syria
and already 7,000 lives have been lost.

Let us gather our assets and bring to the Syrian opposition, military training, intelligence capabilities, and the support that they need to bring down Assad. No country has perfect foreign policy and these aren't easy questions. We haven't always made the right decisions but now we have the chance to help the Syrians help themselves. It is not up to us to fight their battles but it is up to us to facilitate their endeavors.

Senators, congress people, members of the Foreign Relations Committee, Eleven months have already past. Our time is limited but our ability to preserve human rights is not.

CASE # 2 – The presumed future leader of China, Xi Jinping, is on his first official tour of the United States. A few days afterward, the Secretary will be invited to travel to China for bilateral meetings with Premier Wen Jiabao, who also is China’s front man on Syria. After the meetings, there will be a “press availability” with reporters. Please craft her opening statement at the press avail.

The United States and China are engaged in an ongoing dance over human rights. The Secretary of State has not been shy about reminding the Chinese of the ways in which their government routinely violates the rights of its citizens – from limiting Internet access, to arresting dissidents, to controlling media, to oppressing various ethnic minority groups. The Chinese leadership, in turn, mocks our human rights assertions as the height of hypocrisy, given the levels of poverty and illiteracy in our country (while the Chinese government’s policies have generated huge economic growth and lifted 30 million people out of poverty). The Chinese also have established a presence all over the developing world, using their newfound economic strength to finance infrastructure and other projects that will reap greater economic rewards for them down the road. These projects reflect their growing stature in the world (something they crave), but little regard for the conditions of people in the countries in which they operate.

Given the potential for popular dissent in China (note: Tiananmen Square in 1989 and subsequent milder attempts to challenge the authorities), the Chinese are almost pathological in seeking to limit any civilian-led movements at home or supporting them overseas. (Just this week, there has been a crisis within the Communist Party leadership over the defection of a top adviser to a key party leader in Chengdu). The Chinese government continually preaches that no country has the right to intervene in the affairs of another sovereign nation. This concern has led the Chinese to oppose any effort by the UN Security Council to pressure the Syrian regime into reforms or a cessation of violence. Earlier this week, Premier Wen Jiabao said that the international community must work through the United Nations to prevent Syria from descending into civil war. Also as a subtext, the Chinese are preparing for a change in party leadership and governing of the country in 2013.

Assignment: Your statement must navigate this tricky landscape of Sino-American relations while making the case for why the Chinese should support the UNSC resolution and do more to pressure the Syrians to stop violating human rights and killing their own people.

STUDENT SPEECH FINAL DRAFT:

Good afternoon.

I am here on behalf of my country, to ask for your cooperation as a world power.

Remember, the United States and China are not unlike.

We are both invested in powerful economies.

We are both influential political figures.

We are both leaders on the world stage.

Together we made a commitment to the charter of the United Nations. As it states we must work to “unite our strengths to maintain international peace and security.”

Conflict in Syria is certainly a matter of international concern.

The country’s central location in the Middle East makes maintaining stability there even more important.

As you are well aware, a collapsed Middle East will have devastating effects on the international economy.

It is in the best interests of both of our countries to intervene and maintain positive ties with the region.

In recent weeks, the situation in Syria has deteriorated.

History remembers the triumphs but also the missed opportunities.

Let this not be the latter.

This brings us to your involvement on the world stage.

Your commitment to financing economic opportunities for your people is commendable.

But in such turbulent political times, we must work to ensure that our collective interests are not squandered in the chaos of near civil war.

If the situation in Syria continues on its present path, rest assured that we might not wake up to the Middle East we desire.

We, as world leaders, need to realize that our power comes from our ability to provide assistance when needed.

For the past 60 years the United Nations has been collectively responsible for maintaining a stable world order.

This order was established through cooperation from all sides.

In order to maintain this partnership, we must all respect the tenants it was built upon.

It is of the utmost importance for all nations to maintain this cooperation in order to effectively carry out the duties it was created to perform.

Your commitment to this partnership is crucial for assuring our collective future.

Today, the escalating crisis in Syria may very well leave a power vacuum in the Middle East, and it is important that the new political regime in Syria be sympathetic towards our countries.

Let us not stand on the sidelines.

We are the future,

We have the power,

We are in control,

But only if we act now.

CASE #3 – The Secretary will travel to Russia for what may be her last trip there as Secretary of State. She will hold a bilateral meeting with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and will then participate in a town hall with Russian students and faculty at Moscow University. Please craft a statement for her town hall about the crisis in Syria and the US and Russian roles in dealing with it.

Her visit coincides with increasing internal tensions in Russia as the presidential elections loom in early March. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin faces growing popular dissent over corruption of the political process and has shown increasing militancy toward opponents. Russian dissidents have long faced grave threats in Russia, and many outspoken and courageous journalists have been killed there, most likely by security squads linked to Putin or the oligarchs who rule Russia's economy. For Russia, the situation in Syria is an emblem of what can happen when civilians rise up against the state. Like China, Russia claims to object to interventions in the affairs of other sovereign nations, despite its own costly military engagements in Afghanistan and in the breakaway republic of Chechnya. And also like China, Russia is determined to be viewed as a key player in international affairs.

Although Russia and Syria have not always been close allies, they have mutual economic and strategic interests. Russia is the main supplier of arms to Syria (to the tune of several billion dollars) and has lucrative contracts with Syria for natural gas and other sources of energy. Additionally, Russia's only external military base is in the Syrian port city of Tartus.

Assignment: The Secretary must consider the sensitivities of the current political scene in Russia while making a compelling case (on Russian soil) that the Russian government's continued support of the Assad regime is not a recipe for success but for failure – for Russia and the Middle East.

STUDENT SPEECH FINAL DRAFT:

Thank you foreign minister Lavrov and the Putin administration for welcoming me here today.

I had the opportunity to speak about the current state of Russia, and of the country's strengths. More importantly, how Russia and the United States can work together to lead the international community.

Thank you students for being here today -- your voice is important -- for you all are the foundation and future of this country.

We know that it is in the best interest of America and of Russia to have a strong relationship. We know that we are two great nations that have the potential to make great change.

Not only must we realize the importance of the Russian and American governments, but also that of the Russian and American people.

Being global leaders means being global citizens. Being global citizens means that our people should be able to look after other people, as our students should be able to look after other students.

Young people everywhere want the same things. You all seek education, opportunity, and prosperity. You, along with not only American students, but students all over the world, work in your universities in pursuit of these things.

Right now, while you sit here in safety, students in Syria have fled from their classrooms to dodge bullets.

It is time for us to recognize the current struggle in Syria, and work together as leaders to help a nation and a people transition to stability and peace.

We the international community must step into the situation -- condemn President's Assad's actions -- and work together to help Syrians reclaim their liberties.

It is in our political, strategic, and economic interests to protect human rights.

Russia has critical veto power and a strong trade partnership with Syria, making Russia a pivotal player.

She has the power to fix this situation and call for Assad to step down. It is time for us as global citizens and as global leaders to take action. We have the power to set things straight.

CASE #4 – The Secretary must speak to the United Nations later this week, following the veto by China and Russia of a UN Security Council resolution to prohibit further violence by the Assad regime in Syria. Please craft her statement about Syria.

The UN Security Council is divided, with permanent members China and Russia blocking any resolutions calling on the Assad regime to cease violence against the Syrian people. The Russian and Chinese resistance has continued despite support of from key Arab nations – the Arab League – for a resolution. The United States has often tried to use the bully pulpit of the UN to isolate or pressure nations into complying with international will. But it is a tight-rope, as the US must also balance Syria with other concerns that come before the UN, such as North Korea's nuclear ambitions, sanctions against Iran, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Assignment: Please craft a brief statement that the Secretary will deliver at the UN Security Council's next meeting and which considers the realities of the Chinese and Russian positions and the potential for the UN to force change.

Honorable members of the Security Council,

We are here to discuss a pressing situation. Syria is in a state of chaos.

The Syrian government has been attacking civilians. These people are being attacked simply because they are demanding their basic rights. We, as a committee of modern nations, are brought together in order to preserve international security and uphold basic human rights.

We signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights over sixty years ago. We have based our foreign policies on these ideals, which were designed specifically for cases like that of Syria. We must continue to uphold these values. We cannot give up now.

Certain members of this committee have resisted condemning Syria in order to continue respectful negotiations. I commend you for your respect, however, the Assad regime is no longer worthy of respect. In November, Assad made a commitment to peace. This promise was used to bide time. It was a measure to pacify the international community while he continued to slaughter masses of innocent citizens.

Syria has been expelled from the Arab League. Syria's neighbors are demanding that the international community gets involved. Now is the time to act.

It is not acceptable to let tanks roll down city streets, crushing anything and anyone that comes in their way.

It is not acceptable for military personnel to open fire on unarmed protesters who are demanding their natural rights.

It is not acceptable for young people to be taken into custody and tortured to death simply because they decided to fight for a better future.

We must condemn these actions. Violating human rights is never acceptable and the actions of the international community must echo that standard.

The clock is ticking. With each tick, another injustice and another human rights violation burden the conscience of the global community.

Let us now stand up for our fellow brothers and sisters. Let us end the reign of terror that threatens the human rights that all people are entitled to. Every hour of inaction is another hour of injustice.

CASE #5: The Secretary will be on foreign travel to the Middle East during the latter part of February. She will stop in Amman, Jordan and then conduct official visits with Israeli leaders in Tel Aviv. She will also visit with a group of peace activists – Israelis and Palestinians – in Jerusalem. Please craft her statement about Syria as she opens her meeting with the activists.

The Secretary has long been viewed as a strong ally of Israel, from her days as First Lady and in the US Senate, and now as Secretary of State. She also enjoys the confidence of many Palestinians, having traveled several times to the Palestinian territories and having supported very early (before it was official US policy) the creation of a Palestinian state. For America's top diplomat, Syria looms large in any and all discussions of the Middle East. Although Israel has full control of the Golan Heights (territory formerly in Syrian hands), memories of the past (when Syrian and Israeli forces engaged in full-scale war in that region) remain fresh in many Israelis' minds. Similarly, Syria is believed to help finance Hamas, the former terrorist organization that now governs one of the Palestinian territories, the Gaza Strip. Syria is also an ally of Iran, and Israel has been making noises about a possible attack later this spring on a suspected Iranian nuclear facility. While Assad is no friend of Israel, he also has been a bulwark against Islamic extremism (such as al Qaeda).

Assignment: The Secretary must use this opportunity to underscore the importance of democratic reforms in the region, while also recognizing the danger to Israel and others if there is a political vacuum in Syria once the Assad regime falls. She must appeal to the sensibilities of Israelis and Palestinians – and the more hawkish Israeli leadership.

STUDENT SPEECH FINAL DRAFT:

Thank you for welcoming me here today. Each time I return to the sacred land of Jerusalem—a land that promises shalom and salaam for all—I hold close to my heart the unshakeable bonds I have developed with both Israel and Palestine since my time as first lady. I am so proud to see two strong, independent peoples represented before me. As we stand together on this common ground, I would like to address the ongoing conflict in Syria.

My Israeli and Palestinian friends, continued conflict in Syria is hurting us all. From Golan Heights to Gaza, Syrian corruption has impaired your efforts to provide peace for your people. For over fifty years, you have stood in the line of fire, risking your own lives to protect the basic freedoms of others. As peace activists, you have been champions in fighting for the rights you deserve. Today, I am asking you to join me in the fight for those same human rights for your Syrian neighbors.

Every person standing before me understands what it is like to live in fear. **Now**, your neighbors in Syria are living in this *same* fear. Every day, they fear that their homes will no longer be a shelter, that every goodbye may be their last, that they will be laying their children down in graves, not cradles.

Just as you are striving for peace in your homelands, the citizens of Syria want peace as well. Assad is causing terror for his people. This terror *can* and *will* be ended with your combined support in a peaceful overturn of the Syrian government. Assad's regime is soon to collapse and the largest danger will come as a search for a new government begins. Supporting a transition into a stable Syrian government will not only secure your safety, but will also secure your freedom.

Coming together to stabilize Syria will be one step closer to bringing peace to Israelis, Palestinians, and Syrians alike. There are three reasons why establishing a stable Syrian government will aid your peace efforts: First, it will provide security around your borders. Second, it will exemplify the ability to establish peace in a hostile environment. Finally, working together will allow both Israelis and Palestinians to put their differences aside in pursuit of a shared vision, bringing you one step closer to ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. So, let us leave this common ground with one common goal—end Syrian oppression, bring peace to the Middle East.