Thank you both for being here today. And, Ambassador

Ford, thank you. I know everyone is telling you that, but

thank you for your service. It is one thing to sit here and talk

about these things. It is another thing to be there and be the target

of some of some pretty vicious stuff. So thank you for your service

to our country and for this cause.

A quick question before I want to get to the bigger one. I read

in Bloomberg Business this week that the head of the Venezuela

national oil company said that the company is not prohibited from

shipping oil to Syria under current sanctions. I do not know if that

is correct or not. We will just follow up with you and see if that

is the case under the current system.

And that is a conversation for another day. But

one of the things we can talk about is how can we reduce third party

support for the Assad regime, and this just brought that to light.

But what I really want to focus on is more of the U.S. national

interests. What I want to do is kind of posit a view of it to you and

see what you both think about it. We look at something in a country

that for many, many years has been kind of a transit point and

haven for terrorists. Especially Damascus has been kind of the hub

of all that, in addition, a state sponsor of terrorists themselves and

a key ally of our biggest problem in the region, not just for us but

for the world—Iran. Now, the people there say we want to get rid

of the guy that runs this place, and obviously there is a lot of internal

divisions. We have talked about the complexities of all of that.

But in the midst of all this, it seems to me that as much as anything

else—and clearly this is about regime change. This is clearly

about a change of direction for the country. But from our strategic

point of view, it is also a competition for future influence; in essence,

who is going to influence the direction that Syria goes in the

future? Islamists, al-Qaeda, and others see that. They see this

chaos and they say we can go in there and take advantage of this

chaos to our advantage, create an even better place for us to operate

in. And on the other hand, nations like ours see this potentially

as an opportunity to go in and influence the Syrian people to embrace

what you, Ambassador, have said what you think is their

widespread sentiment, which is rule of law, a functioning democracy,

a country that decides they want security, that they do not

want to be a haven for terrorism. They just want to be normal people

living in a normal country with normal and everyday aspirations.

And so as much as anything else, our involvement, I think, is

about what influence our view of the world, which we think is better

for the Syrian people, could ultimately play in that country.

And my guess is, having only been on this committee for a year,

having traveled, for example, to Libya in the aftermath of what

happened to Libya—I know there are big differences between Libya

and Syria, as the Secretary pointed out a couple of days ago.

But one of the things I was struck by, as you drove through the

streets of Libya, is pro-American graffiti on the walls, people walking

up to us in the street, who I know were not staged, to thank

us for the role America played, even though some of us wanted us

to even do some more in that regard.

And my point is I think it is going to be really hard 5 years from

not, not impossible—anything is possible and I am certainly not an

expert on the culture, but I think it is going to be really hard for

an Islamist to go to one of these young guys who was thanking us,

who thought America was on their side, and convince them to join

some sort of anti-American jihad in a couple years. On the other

hand, I can tell you they are really angry at the Chinese. They are

really upset at some of the countries that turned their back at

them.

And I think that is kind of happening here too, I hope, that people

in Syria clearly know that the American people, that this Senate,

that the people of the United States are on the side of their

aspirations. We cannot decide who wins and who is in charge and

how they balance all these internal conflicts that they have, but we

clearly want them to be able to pursue their peaceful aspirations,

and we want them to have a country that prospers. And I think

in the national interest of the United States, it is critical that future

generations and Syrians in the future say, hey, you know,

America was on our side. We do not have a problem with the

American people and we want no part of these strange movements

that would have us join some anti-American sentiment. And we

hope that one day that means they will also be not so anti-Israeli,

maybe even pro, although that is wishful thinking. But I think that

is what our national interest is here in the big picture.

I know I took longer than I wanted to to explain it, but I wondered

if you would agree with that or criticize it or share your

thoughts in that regard.