Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to follow up on Dr. Wittes’ point.

But let me thank you for these hearings. We have had a series

of hearings on Syria, and I have found them all extremely helpful,

including the panel we have here today.

There is, I think, a growing understanding of the dilemma that

we face. We need to see a regime change in Syria. I think that is

not just the assessment of the United States, but the international

assessment.

And, Dr. Alterman, you make an observation which I share. Having

met Assad, I agree that the likelihood of President Assad step-

ping aside voluntarily is rather remote. That is probably the least

likely way that we would get a regime change.

We could get a regime change by the opposition becoming so

strong that it overthrows the Government. We have been talking

about that now for several months, and there is no indication that

that could happen anytime soon for many reasons, a lot of which

we have talked about before.

So it seems to me the most likely scenario for a regime change

in the shortest amount of time is that there is a fracturing of the

regime, as Dr. Wittes points out, where there is an acknowledgment

among the rulers that we better cut our losses and do the

best we can and Assad has got to go. I mean, I think that is the

most likely scenario in the short term.

What worries me, Dr. Alterman, by your observation is that we

have to pace ourselves. I think that is the term you used. To me

that sounds like a frozen conflict, and that is not good for the

United States. That is not good for the international community.

Misery will continue. People will be killed. And we have not even

talked about the displaced people, the tens of thousands that are

no longer living in their homes, some of which are in surrounding

countries causing a problem within the surrounding countries.

We have talked about that a frozen conflict helps Iran. They become

more relevant, and they very much would welcome the instability

in Syria.

And of course, it promotes fear and instability in the region, all

of which are against U.S. interests.

So a frozen conflict is not in our interest. We need to get things

moving, which brings me to how do you bring about a change as

quickly as possible. And I think, Dr. Wittes, you pointed it out. The

stronger the opposition becomes, the more likely the Government

will recognize that they have a serious problem that has to be dealt

with and the more likely it is that they will get rid of President

Assad. I think that is what we are all saying.

Now, the challenge here—and I think that Senator Corker pointed

this out—is that as long as the level of opposition is manageable,

President Assad can likely maintain his control in the country.

But as the level gets to a point that really challenges the ability

of Assad to keep control, we will, I think, reach that tipping

point where we have the best possible chance for a regime change.

So it comes back to the point we have all been sort of tiptoeing

around. It seems like the United States has been very timid in its

helping of the opposition. Now, we all understand we do not want

to get involved in a military conflict. We know that. We are not

talking about boots on the ground. But there are a lot of options

short of that that the United States could take a stronger leadership

position in order to facilitate the opposition, making it more

likely we can get to a regime change sooner rather than later.

And I think that is the point, Mr. Chairman, that we have been

all sort of talking about and how can we do that. We know we have

heard a lot of reports about the opposition, how they are fractionalized.

They have their own little niche. They need to work together.

They need to be trained. They need to be able to communicate.

They need to be able to do this in a safe environment. And I under-

stand the challenges of maintaining territorial integrity for them to

train, but there are other issues that also could be done.

So I guess I am just putting out what I think is the observations

here and ask the panelists are there specific areas where the

United States could exercise stronger leadership that could embolden

the opposition to facilitate a regime change in Syria. Specific areas.

Dr. Alterman.

That is right.

And Mr. Chairman, I think we are heading towards

a frozen conflict which is the worst of all scenarios with

Assad staying in power unless we try to change the equation.

and stay over there and preside up until 11:00.

Let me ask about the situation with the unarmed observers. Are

they really capable of keeping the peace? And should the United

Nations be considering armed peacekeepers as part of a cease-fire

agreement? And would such a plan be feasible given the likelihood

that China and Russia may oppose such a plan? Please, any of the

panelists on that.