Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am truly

very honored to be here. Thank you for inviting me.

Almost exactly 1 year ago, teenagers that sprayed graffiti on the

walls of their school in Daraa were arrested. And the following day

their fathers tried to get them out from the security center, but

they were told by Atif Najib, the cousin of Bashar al-Assad and the

man in charge of security there, that they should go home, forget

about their children, and if they are not men enough to make children,

then to bring him their wives so he can make children for

them. This is the kind of relationship that exists today between the

state and society in Syria.

Since that time, until the present time, as you said, Mr. Chairman,

there are over 10,000 people killed, 1.5 million internal refugees,

130,000 refugees outside of Syria. Since the Kofi Annan plan,

1,500 have been killed, and since the so-called cease-fire on April

12, there have been hundreds of people killed and there continues

to be shelling by tanks and artillery of civilian neighborhoods in

Rastan, in Homs, in Hama, in Deir-ez-Zor, and in Daraa.

I am going to only speak to the parameters of the questions that

were posed to me here.

With regard to the opposition, the opposition is fragmented, but

it is not as fragmented as the international media has made it out

to be. All opposition groups are united in calling for an end to the

Assad regime and for the establishment of a free, pluralistic, and

democratic Syria.

Some groups that the media have counted in the opposition include

Rifaat Assad’s group. Yet, Rifaat Assad has absolutely no

credibility inside Syria. Nor does the ‘‘National Salvation Front’’ of

Mr. Abdel Halim Khaddam.

Those that do count, of course, are the Syrian National Council,

which is the largest umbrella organization of the opposition, and

the Free Syrian Army. And I am happy to say that recently the two

have been coordinating efforts. There has been the establishment

in the Syrian National Council of a military bureau in order to effect

this. The Free Syrian Army has recognized that the Syrian National

Council as the political umbrella, and the Syrian National

Council has pledged to assist the Free Syrian Army.

There are divisions between the Syrian National Council and the

National Coordinating Committees (NCC). That is very true. But

although the purpose of both is the same, namely the downfall of

the Assad regime and the establishment of a democratic Syria, it

is in methodology that they differ. The NCC does not want any

international intervention. The SNC wants at least an international

intervention for humanitarian relief.

The differentiation between internal and external opposition, I

think, is also exaggerated. The Syrian National Council meets outside

of Syria, and that is because its members are unable to meet

inside Syria, lest they be made heads shorter. The Syrian National

Council is a coalition of political forces, and many of its component

groups operate on the ground inside Syria. This includes the Local

Coordinating Committees (LCC) which has, in addition to its representation

in the general assembly of the Syrian National Council,

a seat on the Presidential Council of the Syrian National Council.

Here again there are some differences: the LCCs have a difficult

time understanding that international intervention requires a lot of

diplomacy. Given the divisions in the international community, this

is an uphill battle.

However, the longer this crisis takes place, the more splintering

there will be in the opposition, and, potentially, the more

radicalization. We now hear, for example, of a ‘‘Free Syrian National

Army.’’ This is not good. Again, the longer the crisis in Syria,

the more there is going to be the emergence of groups and the more

radicalized people become. This would invite all sorts of unwanted

elements, unwanted either by the Western democratic world or the

Syrian people themselves.

The Assad regime is cohesive, but it is not as cohesive as it is

made out to be. There are fissures that are beginning to appear.

Until today, there have been 25 generals that have defected from

the Syrian Armed Forces. There are other defections in the Baath

Party, in the ministerial cabinet, in the government bureaucracy.

And we do have now business groups that are supportive of the opposition,

and they are beginning to coalesce under the umbrella of

the Syrian National Council. If there continues to be regime cohesion,

it is because of the confidence of the regime that the international

community is divided and will do nothing to force its collapse.

Sanctions are hurting. Syria has lost around a third of its annual

revenue from sanctions against the oil exports. The Syrian pound

has lost value. Inflation is increasing rapidly. Unemployment is increasing

exponentially. The reserves of the Central Bank of Syria

are down by half.

But in and of themselves, sanctions will not bring down the regime,

especially that Iran is assisting Syria financially and otherwise.

Trade deals with Iraq, the exportation of Venezuelan oil to

Syria, these things are propping up the Assad regime and are diluting

the effect of sanctions.

Sanctions are hurting the people—are beginning to hurt seriously

the people, but not the Assad family. And Mrs. Assad has

much imagination in continuing to buy Louboutin shoes. So this

does not hurt the Assads.

Opportunities for diplomacy. I truly identify with the statement

that Secretary of State Clinton said yesterday that the Kofi Annan

plan is the last opportunity. It is the last opportunity because it follows

a number of diplomatic initiatives to stop the killing, including

Turkish and Arab attempts, all of which, as you know, failed.

The Annan plan is the last opportunity although it suffers many

flaws. It calls for a political dialogue without mentioning that

Assad must step down, although the Annan plan is rooted in the

Arab initiative. The Annan plan does not provide a timetable and

Assad cannot go on killing indefinitely without consequences. The

Annan plan does not define failure although many would contend

that it has already failed. There has been no significant pull-back

of heavy armor from towns. The regime does not allow international

media still. It does not allow humanitarian relief, and it

is continuing to shoot at demonstrators. Case in point: Yesterday

in the town of Arbine, civilian demonstrators in front of U.N. monitors

were shot by security forces.

Nonetheless, the Annan plan is all that we have got, but the

Annan mission does need an enforcement capability or else it is

sure to fail. And that should be linked to a threat of force. The

threat of force has a great psychological effect. Let me remind you

that there is one United States Senator who recently said in the

media that air power needs to be used, and the same day, four Syrian

generals defected. The same day, the Syrian pound to the dollar

jumped from 50 to 103. So the threat of force might work.

Now, perhaps this is not the best option. Perhaps Assad, even

with the threat of force, might continue to dig in his heels, but I

think allowing the Annan plan to fail without any consequences for

the Assad regime would be far worse.

Thank you.

It would become even more formidable of a power.

It would have a tremendous psychological boost and also a military

boost in the area as it continues to have a reach into the Arab-

Israeli conflict through the Syrian conduit. It would be emboldened

vis-a-vis Gulf Arabs. If Bashar al-Assad survives, this is a major

victory for Iran. It is a major victory for Hezbollah. If, on the other

hand, Assad falls—and I never like to be clear-cut, but I think it

is inevitable because there is simply no going back to business as

usual—if he falls, that will greatly weaken Iran as it would no

longer have that reach into the Arab-Israeli conflict. It would weak-

en Hezbollah, and I think then the Lebanese people can breathe

freely.

I think when the Assad regime collapses, things

will get worse before they get better. I think there will be many

vendettas, a lot of vengeance killings. I think there will be many

remnants of the regime who would want to show that there was

stability under Assad and instability now through car bombs and

IED’s and so on.

We have to be cautious and moderate, but every

day of moderation and caution costs hundreds of lives. The Syrian

people seek freedom, something that we stand for.

Assad must go because he is a mass murderer. There is a difference,

of course, between Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria in that in

Egypt and Tunisia historically the army has been at least semiautonomous.

In the case of Syria, the army is an instrument of regime

power and that is because the ranking officers, whether in the

Syrian army or in the Syrian intelligence services, are family and

cronies and so on. When Assad goes—and he will go—this top layer

will go with him, so that this powerful Syrian Army will be no

more powerful. And we are seeing this by the defections of hundreds

of soldiers on a weekly basis. The army will collapse.

Really there is no room to sit and negotiate with Assad for a

transition toward democracy because the mind set in Damascus is

not there. The mind set is that of security. And we see this very

evidently through the cosmetic reforms that Assad has tried to put

in place, whether it is a new constitution that takes, albeit, one ar-

ticle away, the dominance of the Baath, but gives all the authority

to the President. Or in his party law in which the establishment

of political parties is contingent upon the approval of his minister

of the interior. So the mind set is that of security, and you cannot

negotiate towards a transition to democracy with a mindset like

this.

Syrians want freedom. They want democracy. And they have

been ruled for the past 48 years with an authoritarian fist, single

party, and for 41 years with family rule. Syrians, after independence,

did taste freedom. They know what it is and they want to go

back to the days of democracy. God knows we at the Syrian National

Council are experiencing how democracy is messy, but that

is good and we want it.

Tightening sanctions would be a good thing and

especially when it is done in concert with other nations so that

there are no loopholes. Targeted sanctions are very good. The bad

news is that by doing these targeted sanctions, this layer of people

that have been targeted now will want to resist, will not want to

defect anymore, therefore increasing the cohesion of the layers at

the top.

But those who are really feeling it now are the people and the

regime is justifying this by saying that the United States is the

enemy. ‘‘It is the United States that is impoverishing you. And anyway,

we in Syria, according to the regime, who have been in the

axis of resistance for a long time and have been paying for our

principal foreign policy—we are used to sanctions. And so let the

U.S. and let Western powers impose sanctions. That is fine with

us.’’ Again, the Assad family does not feel it. It is the people.

Sanctions alone will not work, and there really needs to be a diplomacy,

but a diplomacy backed with teeth.

Well, I am very happy for the targeted sanctions

against Bashar al-Assad and his wife and mother and so on. Some

of the generals, however—and again, they need to be punished because

they have blood on their hands. But I think this made a difference

for them between defecting and not defecting. Those who

have not had sanctions imposed on them I think are now in that

area and considering if they can defect if this does not hurt their

families.

The Assad regime thrives on instability, and if it

were to collapse, then there could be a real chance for stability.

If I may, Senator. Thank you very much for this.

Yes. It is not only that the stronger the opposition, the weaker the

regime, but I think we should be making the regime increasingly

irrelevant and that is by these safe zones and safe corridors. Now,

remember, there are neighborhoods in cities like Homs who have

not received medicine in over a month and no electricity and no

water. If we are able to make safe corridors to funnel to them humanitarian

relief, then the Assad regime in this area of Syria

would become irrelevant and therefore weak.

With regard to arming the opposition, let us not forget this started

as a peaceful revolution and the Free Syrian Army emerged only

as a result of defected soldiers who would not accept to shoot at

their fellow citizens. Now the opposition is armed. Do we leave

them twisting in the wind with a huge imbalance of power? And

as you mentioned, Senator, Russia is arming the Syrians, so is

Iran, even the Mahdi Army making a presence in Syria, Hezbollah.

I am a man of peace and I wanted this to be a peaceful revolution,

but then imagine the perception on the Syrian street of the

United States not helping those who are trying to fight for their

freedom. Yesterday, literally yesterday, I had a phone call with

folks on the ground in Syria, and they asked me if the United

States is in cahoots with the Assad regime.

And so these safe zones and safe corridors I think could make

the Assad regime irrelevant in those areas. And again, engaging

with the opposition, whether the Free Syrian Army or the Syrian

National Council, would be a good thing. Let us not forget the Syrian

National Council is the product of—it was established only in

October, and it is remarkable that the Syrian National Council has

crossed the distance that it has knowing that the Syrians have not

been able to do politics for the past 50 years.

Monitors are good only in the sense that they expose

the Assad regime. Assad cannot allow peaceful demonstrations.

He will shoot at them. He knows of no other way. And so it

is good to have monitors there. Yesterday is a case in point as

there was a peaceful demonstration in Arbine. The demonstrators

were shot at in full view of the six monitors that are in Syria, by

the way. There are an expected other 30 monitors. That is less

monitors in a state in which there is war than in a soccer match;

FIFA sends usually more monitors than this.

At any rate, it is a good thing to have monitors again to expose

the Assad regime. It is not only in terms of pulling back heavy

armor. We want to see international journalists with unfettered access

in Syria. We want to see international humanitarian relief,

and we want to see civilian demonstrators peacefully demonstrating

without being shot at. And it is only monitors on the

ground that would be able to support such a thing.

Caveat: The Assad regime wants to be in charge of the movement

of these monitors, wants to be with them, and even wants to

impose the nationality of these monitors. Now, the Syrian Government,

for example, is very happy that some of the monitors are

Russian and Chinese because, according to the Foreign Minister of

Syria yesterday, ‘‘these are from neutral countries.’’

I think armed or unarmed, the Assad regime will

continue to try, as best as is possible, to manipulate these monitors

because this is the only game it is used to.