The hearing will come to order.

Thank you all very much for being here. I appreciate it.

The stakes for American values and interests in the unfolding

events, drama, tragedy, whatever you want to call it, with respect

to Syria are really important to us. At least 10,000 civilians have

died. Hundreds of thousands more have either been displaced or at

grave risk of harm. And the humanitarian crisis that has engulfed

Syria’s neighbors obviously has implications in the region, and we

know that refugees and displaced populations can be the spark for large-scale violence.

What happens in Syria will have a direct impact on our regional

stability and on the security of our friends and allies throughout

the Middle East. We all understand that a full-fledged civil war

there would have devastating consequences for Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan.

And increasingly I am concerned about apparent al-Qaeda involvement

in Syria and the disposition of the country’s biological,

chemical, and advanced conventional weapons.

Certainly Bashar al-Assad has lost all governing legitimacy except

what he achieves at the barrel of a gun or a tank, and it

seems clear that if he succeeds in holding onto the status quo, it

would not just be a moral outrage but a severe blow to the democratic

aspirations of the Middle East. It would also reinforce the interests

of both nations and groups hostile to transparency, to the

rule of law broadly shared by the population of a country or to peaceful transition.

Based on two strategic prerogatives—one, avoiding chaos while,

two, ensuring that the fundamental aspirations of the Syrian people

are met—it is clear that the best outcome would, in fact, be a

managed transition. Assad and the current regime under any circumstances,

it seems to me—it is very difficult to understand how

they could be doing anything except living on borrowed time. How

much time is obviously a serious question. The longer the end

game, the messier the aftermath. While our ultimate goal is an

open and inclusive political process that paves the way for a new

government, it is difficult to see an outcome acceptable to the people

of Syria that would involve President Assad remaining in power

for a prolonged period of time.

The question now then is, What can be done to send the message

clearly and effectively? While it is true that America’s influence all

by ourselves in Syria is limited in these circumstances, we are obviously

not without options, particularly in partnership with the

broader international community. Last weekend’s U.N. Security

Council resolution is a first step that puts the Syrian Government

on notice. The time for false promises is over, and the time to end

the violence is now.

We need to work with the Russians and the Chinese to help

them to understand that while we appreciate the positive involvement

in approving a monitoring mission for Syria, their responsibilities

do not end with a monitoring mission that is being put in

place. Progress will require both steps from all sides.

First, with the creation of the Friends of Syria group, there is

now a multilateral mechanism for supporting the Syrian National

Council (SNC) and other political groups with humanitarian aid

and nonlethal supplies, including communications equipment. I understand

that Secretary Clinton is meeting today with a subset of

the Friends of Syria in Paris. I urge our colleagues to support these efforts.

Second, there are still serious questions about the various opposition

groups, including the Syrian National Council and the Free

Syrian Army (FSA). We need to continue to work with these and

other groups to encourage them to coalesce into a viable and inclusive

political force. It may be that they cannot or do not unify as

an organization, but they certainly need to achieve a unity of purpose.

They urgently need to present to Syria and the world a coherent

vision of a tolerant and pluralistic post-Assad society.

And third, we need to consider how best to support the Free Syrian

Army. The administration has committed to provide nonlethal

assistance. In addition, we should work with the Free Syrian

Army’s leadership to promote professionalism and better integration

with the political opposition.

And finally, we should weigh the risks and benefits of establishing

safe zones near Syria’s border areas. Safe zones entail military

action and would require significant support from regional

powers and, therefore, obviously, require a more significant vetting

and strategic work-through. I believe the unity of the council and

coordination of the Free Syrian Army must develop significantly

before one could create those zones. But our interests and values

demand that we consider how they could be constructed and what

this might mean for Syria’s neighbors.

We also need to clarify what Syria’s neighbors, both immediate

and near neighbors, need to do here. It seems to me that the Arab

League needs to continue to lead. The GCC has provided leadership

and they must continue to also. And we obviously need to understand

what is achievable by all of us together.

Right now, we need patient, clear-eyed diplomacy, combining elements

of political and economic pressure to influence the calculations

in Damascus. But given the potential for further sectarian violence

and regional destabilization, we need to also think through

carefully what comes next, and we need to prepare for the worst

even as we hope for the best. That means no option can or should

be taken off the table. The Pentagon, appropriately, is drawing up

contingency plans for the transition, and obviously one needs plans

to guarantee the safeguard of both chemical and biological weapons.

To reach agreement on realistic options going forward, we need

to continue the consultation process that is taking place. I might

add even the act of developing the contingency plans I think helps

to send the right message to all parties involved that we are serious

about the prospects of transition.

So there is a lot to discuss here this morning, and to help us explore

these issues, we want to welcome our distinguished witnesses.

We have Dr. Tamara Cofman Wittes. She is director of the

Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution

and until recently was the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for

Near Eastern Affairs. Dr. Murhaf Jouejati is a Syrian-born expert

in Middle East affairs and professor of Middle East studies at the

National Defense University’s Near East South Asia Center for

Strategic Studies. And Dr. Jon Alterman holds the Zbigniew

Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy and is director

of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and

International Studies. We thank all of you for taking the time to

come today and bringing your expertise to the committee. Senator Lugar.

Thanks so much. Thank you, Senator Lugar.

Dr. Jouejati, if you would go first, Dr. Alterman, Dr. Wittes. Thank you.

Thank you very much, Doctor. Dr. Alterman. Thank you.

You are batting clean-up there, Dr. Wittes.

Well, thank you very much. All of these views

are very helpful, and I think they sort of set the stage for us to

probe the thinking here a little bit.

I mean, just as an overall comment, my reaction is that we have

had purposefully different sort of views about where we are going

to go here, but that does not make a policy. We have got to kind

of pull it together into something coherent. And it strikes me that

you have really got to sort of decide what our strategic interest is

and what is, obviously, achievable and how do you go at this.

Now, do you all agree that—I mean, the rhetoric has been really

clear by leaders here and elsewhere that Bashar al-Assad cannot

stay and that one way or the other, he is going to go. I mean, it

may be a prolonged, messy, bloody process, but ultimately most

people are suggesting that there is an end. Is that correct? Are we

all in agreement on that?

What is the implication if he did not go? If he

succeeds in putting this down and he stays on, what are the implications

for American policy for the Middle East? Ms. Wittes.

Well, let us be more explicit. So support for

Hezbollah, threats to Israel, movement of Scuds, arming of people

that we do not want to have arms, a whole bunch of other things,

I assume you make the judgment, they would then be empowered

and be more threatening to our interests. Would they not?

Would not Iran take very, very significant confidence-

building sense of whatever empowerment, et cetera if he

did? What would it mean to Iran, Dr. Jouejati?

So if you have an Alawite minority of about—

what—11 percent of the population that is continuing to run the

country with a Sunni majority and then a mix of others making up

the rest of the population, what does that portend once this—I

mean, this has been unleashed now. And it is not purely sectarian.

I do not want to define it in that term, and I think you would all

agree. It is not purely sectarian.

But if you have this awakening, spring, whatever you want to

call it, this desire for change, desire for something different and the

fact that you have a million and a half people displaced internally,

130,000 who are refugees outside, people with weapons who are

going to continue to arm and fight, and 10,000 people to date

killed, and as you have said, five of the six principal components

of the Annan plan not being implemented and the sixth kind of

viewed by most people as a delaying tactic as people are obviously

being killed right in front of monitors, it seems to me that you have

almost got a certainty guaranteed that struggle is going to continue.

Does anybody here disagree with that?

But that is assuming they were in utter collapse.

What I talked about in my opening, that conceivably diplomacy and

pressure efforts with China, Russia—and if the Russian attitude on

this changed and the Chinese attitude on this changed, I rather

suspect that a lot of attitudes are going to change in Damascus and

elsewhere. And then the question is could you conceivably have a

more orderly transition process that is, in fact, negotiated and

structured, not unlike Saleh in Yemen or some other examples we

have seen in the past. So does it have to be a choice between an

utter collapse and civil war or the continuation of the regime?

But as you move towards that, if the economic

pressures were to be increased and you changed the dynamic with

respect to the Free Syrian Army and the National Council, and you

have this unity of purpose between the Turks, the Jordanians, the

Emiratis, the Qataris, the Saudis, et cetera, plus the West, you

have a pretty significant dynamic beginning to develop. Then the

calculations. I mean, you have already talked about the numbers

of generals who have defected. I know for a fact there are a lot

more colonels who have defected and a lot more people at lower levels.

So, I mean, the people’s calculation begins to shift depending on

how determined the outside world is. If the outside world is feckless

and casting about and kind of, ‘‘oh, my gosh, we do not know

what we can do, we cannot do much,’’ et cetera, et cetera, boy, is

that a message to them to go kill a few people and continue to do

what they are doing. Is it not?

Well, there are more questions. Let me turn to

my colleagues. My time is up, but I think we have to start getting

into a sort of reality track here rather than bouncing around the

way everybody has been a little bit here.

The National Council is going to be here. Next week, this committee

will be meeting with its members and I hope all our members

will take the opportunity to come and meet with them and

have this kind of discussion, and I think we can learn a great deal

in doing so.

Senator Lugar.

Thank you very much.

Senator Menendez.

Senator Corker.

Thank you, Senator Corker.

Senator Cardin.

So what will persuade them, Jon, if I can just

intersperse with the Senator. What would persuade them? You say

we’ve got to persuade them. What is going to do it?

Supposing you hold out the best vision in the

world and Assad continues to kill people and holds the dominant

power.

How does it matter who we are willing to work

with or not work with if Assad is in a position just to sit there?

So basically what you are banking on is just an

internal upheaval. You are banking on a coup.

That is it.

What else are you banking on if you are not

banking on that? What else is going to happen if all you do is hold

a vision out

there and say do this? If there is not a coup, nothing

happens.

Well, OK, massive demonstrations.

How are they going to have massive demonstrations after all of

this which has gone on? They cannot have a massive demonstration

now. And if Assad is in a stronger position because the only

thing held out there is a vision, it seems to me he is going to say,

boy, I got the best of this deal. Let us go out and kill them.

Anyway, I do not want to go around and around.

Senator Udall.

Thank you very much.

Senator Lugar, do you have more questions?

Folks, this has been helpful in, obviously, clarifying

what is unclarifiable. There are some unknowns here, needless

to say, and that complicates this. But I think it has been good

to vet how there are some very specific things that need to be

pinned down more carefully in the near term, and I think that is

part of the reason for the meeting with the National Council. That

is part of the reason for people now looking very carefully at what

the options are, kinetic and otherwise, because if anything is certain,

we have to act in a way that does address our interests. And

I think everybody accepts that stability is key and there may be

differences as to what will bring stability.

But I think there are things we can do. I think there is more

there than meets the eye. I think that there are ways to bring significant

pressures to bear and change people’s calculations. And I

think that is the key thing to kind of work through now very, very

carefully. I do not think any of you agree that we should sit there

and do nothing or that there should be a status quo, and that is

an important message in and of itself. Secretary Clinton is meeting

I think right now in Paris, as I mentioned earlier. I think we need

to see what the results of those discussions are and other discussions.

I was in Qatar recently. I met with the Emir, the Prime Minister,

and they were very clear about what they are willing to do.

I have talked to the Foreign Ministers of both Jordan and Turkey.

They are very concerned and are prepared to do things. People are

prepared to put both money and forces into a place of opposition

to this status quo.

And it is also not unimportant at all that the Arab League has

taken the steps that it has and that the GCC—they are leading.

So nobody should think that this is the United States casting about

for how do we something on our own. The Arab world is very concerned

about this, and for the League to expel or suspend relations

with a member is no small step, and for the GCC, likewise, to have

expressed its concerns and need to do something. Now, obviously,

there is a lot of geopolitics involved in all of those steps, but they

are not inconsequential.

So what is important is we are beginning to really give this the

light of day that it needs. There is a lot of thinking going on, and

we need to try to pull those thoughts together as rapidly as possible.

So we thank you very much for sharing.

We are going to leave the record open for a week. Colleagues

may want to submit some questions in writing and complete the

record here.

And we are very grateful to all of you. Thanks for coming. Dr.

Alterman, thanks for coming back. Glad to have you on the other

side of the table. I think you have a lot wisdom in a lot of things

you said here today about past experiences and cautions about

what our expectations ought to be. And we need to measure all of

that together with Dr. Jouejati’s and Ms. Wittes’ clear sense of

what will make a difference and what will not. So that is our task.

Thank you very much.

And we stand adjourned.