Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Lugar,

members of the committee. I am delighted to appear before you today.

As we have noted, the tentative cease-fire is already breaking

down, but the cease-fire was only ever a single component of a six point

plan, and the other five points have fallen by the wayside.

At this point, the world cannot allow Syria to waste time wrangling

over every preliminary element of implementing a cease-fire.

Without a rapid start to a political process that will lead to meaningful

change, including Assad’s departure from power, there is no

way forward for diplomacy to reduce human suffering and promote

lasting stability for Syria and the region.

Now, diplomacy still remains preferable to an escalation in violence

on the ground that carries dire human costs and risks of regional

consequences. But there is not much time and diplomacy

must be forceful to be effective.

I believe international diplomacy must, therefore, focus relentlessly

on bringing about a political transition and the establishment

of a Syrian Government accountable to its people, and I

would outline several key components of such a strategy.

First, sustain and scale up sanctions, accountability efforts, other

measures that apply pressure on the Syrian regime and those who

support it. Over time, such steps can help to erode the unity of

Assad supporters in the country and facilitate a transition that

puts Assad out of office. The Annan plan’s dialogue process is one

means, but not the only means, by which that could happen.

Second, I think we must focus diplomatic efforts with Russia not

on specific words or actions in New York, but on helping them

achieve the fundamental realization that my colleague just discussed,

that Assad faces a permanent challenge to his unaltered

rule and that they need to seek a way now to preserve their relationship

with Syria but not with Assad himself.

Third, I think it is important that we not try to impose an arms

embargo through the United Nations. We cannot halt or reverse

the militarization of the Syrian uprising. It has happened and it is

happening. An international arms embargo will not stop Iran’s resupply

of Syria. It will simply freeze in place a dreadful imbalance

of forces on the ground. Instead, I believe the United States should

lead in managing militarization, working with other governments

to try to shape the activity of armed elements on the ground in a

manner that will most effectively increase pressure on the regime

and contain, as much as possible, the spillover effects on Syria’s neighbors.

I do not believe militarization inevitably advantages Assad. He

does not need a rhetorical justification to resort to violence. He is

already perfectly willing to do so. His military so far has not been

particularly strained in dealing with this uprising. They have been

able to choose their battles, fight them largely one at a time.

Fourth, I think it is important to scale up support for the political

development of the Syrian opposition to help them improve

their internal cohesion and their ability to represent the Syrian

people. The factionalism that is evident among opposition activists

is an unsurprising outgrowth of the severe repression and political

stagnation of the Syrian context. This is a legacy that can be overcome

but not by fiat, and the international community, including

the United States, must invest strongly in helping opposition activists

build a vision for the future that can be used to unify and build

support. And we need to help them improve their communication,

especially with Syrians inside and outside the country.

But even with all these steps in place, coercive diplomacy may

well fail. Assad only acts under extreme pressure. We have seen

that already. Demanding his removal is an existential challenge.

So dithering over diplomatic measures while ruling out more coercive

options is the quickest path to irrelevance for U.S. policy. If

international pressure slackens, if the opposition fails to present an

effective alternative, then key Assad constituencies will stop thinking

that abandoning him may be their wisest path to self-preservation.

A weakened Assad still in place would be even more dependent

on Iran, and the Syrian people would suffer not only from his

continued rule, but from sustained isolation and economic hardship,

along with the insecurity wrought by an ongoing insurgency.

The other alternative outcome is a protracted and bitter civil conflict

possibly leading to state failure with all of the attendant dangers

not only for the neighborhood, but for Syria’s longer term future.

Neither of these outcomes are palatable to the United States.

That means we must do more now to prevent these outcomes from

coming to pass. Early consultation, planning, and preparation for

more robust steps would enable the United States to maximize the

extent to which others might participate in or even take the lead

in some of these actions.

Now, some would argue that this might begin a slippery slope to

direct intervention. I would argue instead that anticipating the

possible failure of diplomacy, preparing for more coercive options is

not only realistic, but it is also necessary to create the pressure

that will give diplomacy its best chance of success.

Thank you very much.

Well, Mr. Chairman, I think first of all, he would be

weakened. That would make him fall back increasingly on that Iranian

support. That would be his only lifeline. He would have absolutely

zero incentive to refrain from the kind of troublesome behavior

that we have occasionally intermittently seen from the Syrian

regime over the years.

I think that is the likeliest possibility if he hangs on.

Senator, I agree completely. I think that is precisely

why diplomacy needs to focus on how effectively to maximize pressure

on all of the supporters of the regime, whether it is military

officers, people within the Alawite leadership, people within the

business elites. All of these are important pillars of the regime, and

you have got to start to chip away at their cohesion. I think if we

can be successful at doing that, the likeliest outcome is not necessarily

a negotiated transition but some kind of power grab or

coup. And that would allow an opening for engagement with the

opposition. But we would have to remain on guard to ensure that

what follows is an open process.

Well, Senator, let me start by saying one general

word, which is that fundamentally the American interest here is in

stability. This crisis is deeply destabilizing. The longer it goes on,

the more destabilizing it will be for Syria, for its immediate neighbors,

and for the region as a whole. And I think the longer it goes

on, the more likely it is to become intensely sectarian in a way that

will be deleterious to our interests over the long term.

The second aspect of stability and the quest for stability here relates

to the fundamental lesson of the Arab Awakening, which is

that lasting stability in the Arab world is only going to come when

citizens feel that they have governments that are responsive and

accountable. And until that happens, you are going to see these

forms of dissent continue to emerge with all of the attendant consequences.

So having recognized those two realities on the ground, if you

will, I think our interest is in finding a resolution to this that

brings that new foundation for stability about as quickly as possible.

And when it comes to the options for using coercive force to

put more pressure on the regime and bring about a quick transition,

we should not be thinking about acting alone. Syria’s neighbors

are the ones who are already suffering the consequences of

this instability. They have the most direct stake. We are in very

close contact with them, and we need to be sure that that conversation

includes these types of options which they would have to be

very directly involved in.

Thank you, Senator. It is an excellent question and a challenging one.

But when I think about Russian interests in Syria, I think there

are a couple of key points. One is the naval base at Tartus, and

I think they would look for some assurance that they would be able

to maintain access as a base for their Mediterranean operations.

More broadly, I think they want to know that it is not the intent

of Western powers or of the other Arab States to shut Russia out

diplomatically, economically of a future Syria, a Syria that is reintegrated

into the Arab region. And I think it is partly through

dialogue with us, partly through dialogue with the other Arab governments

in the region, and partly through dialogue with the Syrian

oppositionists that these assurances can be given.

Senator, my argument would be that until there is

a change at the top in Syria, there will not be stability. Thank you, Senator.

I guess two things. On the issue of safe zones or humanitarian

corridors, I think it is important for us to have firmly in mind what

is our goal in doing this. Is our goal to provide an arena in which

armed opposition can organize and train? Is our goal to provide humanitarian

relief and a way in which refugees can get out of

endangered zones? Is our goal to ensure the security of Syria’s neighbors

in the course of the spiraling instability of this conflict?

And I would argue that the third is probably the most important

function for any moves along these border areas. If nothing else, we

must contain the impact of this conflict on the region. We must

contain the possibility for ripple effects. And that means that I

think we want Turkey, we want Iraq, we want the other neighbors

to lead here. What is most important to them? What are they willing

to have on their territory and what are they willing to do in

order to ensure the security of their own borders?

Senator, first of all, I do not think that direct American

involvement, certainly not in the form of boots on the ground,

is necessary. I think in the other cases that Dr. Alterman mentioned,

we did not have military boots on the ground as we were

arming these insurgencies.

What I would say, though, is that insurgencies very rarely succeed

in overthrowing governments. The goal here would not be to

arm oppositionists so that they can overthrow the regime. The goal

would be to help these oppositionists use military pressure to fracture

the regime. And so it is less a question of——

The other point I think it is important to make is that they are

getting weapons. They will get weapons. If we do not organize the

means by which they get means to use force and the ways in which

they use it, others will do that, and they will not necessarily do it

in a way that is going to be helpful to stabilizing the situation or

achieving the goals we seek.

I think we need to be dealing with those who are

already very interested in doing that and maybe even already

doing it and trying to corral their efforts.

I will just add very briefly I think Jon is exactly

right on this point, and this is why I think it is so important that

we support the opposition in developing clear visions for what a

post-Assad Syria will look like. It is that vision that will help build

bridges amongst these fractious groups. They may not be able to

agree on ideology or on identity, but they can agree on some things

about what Syria should look like. And it is that vision that will

provide assurances to those constituencies inside Syria that are

right now sitting on the fence, whether it is the commercial elite,

ethnic minorities, or others. Thank you, Senator.

The effectiveness of a cease-fire is entirely dependent on the will

of Bashar al-Assad to comply with it. So far, that has proven to be

extremely limited. So I think the hope among those who supported

the Annan plan was that a cease-fire would allow the resurgence

of peaceful protests and generate the kind of pressure that Dr.

Alterman has been talking about. That appeared to be a bit in play

on Friday when there were many large demonstrations across

Syria, but the escalating violence since then I think has proven the

limits of that strategy. And the more time we spend arguing with

Assad over what the rules will be for the monitors, how many monitors,

where they are allowed to go, how they will be protected, and

so on, the more opportunity he has to persuade those around him

that he is there for good and they just need to accommodate themselves

to that fact. So I think if what we are looking to do is fracture

the pillars of the regime, banking on a cease-fire and monitors

is going to send us in the wrong direction.