Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking

Member Ackerman, members of the committee, Assistant Secretary

Posner and I appreciate this opportunity and we ask that our full

written statement be included in the record.

This hearing is really important. It’s very

timely. In our view it is absolutely critical that audiences in the

Middle East see that the United States has not and will not ignore

those who are struggling for their rights.

And the fact that you have placed Syria and Iran together in the

same hearing shines a spotlight on two governments that share

shameful records on abusing their own citizens and on playing destructive

and destabilizing roles in the region.

Mr. Chairman, you were right. The actions that these countries

are practicing are depraved.

It is no accident that Iran is Bashar al-Assad’s best friend and

that Syria is Iran’s best friend and that neither have any other

true allies in the region.

First, a few words on Syria. As Arab demonstrators demanded

their rights, first in Tunisia and then in Egypt, Bashar al-Assad insisted

to the world that he was different, that he was a reformer,

that he was in touch with his people. Well, after months of protests

and brutal crackdowns, the reality is clear. Bashar al-Assad is not

a reformer but someone whose rule relies on terror, theft and torture.

The regime’s violent response to protests has crystallized the

protestor’s demands around freedom and the dismantling of the security

apparatus. None of Assad’s reforms, so-called reforms, has

resulted in the changes the Syrians want to see on the ground.

The Syrian people now refuse to be subject to house-to-house

raids, indiscriminate arrests, torture, shooting, behavior that Assad

and his brutal security thugs seem incapable of unlearning. Demonstrators

seek freedom, and the Assad regime responds with bullets

and billy clubs.

To consolidate his monopoly on power, Assad foments violence of

an intentionally factional nature, seeking to hide the nature of his

regime by exploiting the Syrian public’s latent fear of communal

strife. As a direct consequence of Bashar’s approach, deadly violence

has at times taken on a sectarian shade, such as the recent

tragedy in the city of Homs.

But change is coming to Syria. Bashar al-Assad can try to obstruct

it. He can try to delay it, but he cannot stop it. The opposition

is not waiting. They are organizing themselves. They are beginning

to articulate an agenda for Syria’s future, one in which all

citizens regardless of faith or ethnicity are equal participants.

For our part, we have articulated clearly that the United States

has nothing invested in the Bashar al-Assad regime and that we

want to see a Syria that is united, where tolerance, respect for

human rights and equality are the norms. This is the message that

Ambassador Ford is delivering to the Syrian leadership and the

Syrian people.

I will turn in a minute to Syria’s best friends, Iran. Iranian leaders

are shameless, dangerous hypocrites. They claim to be on the

sides of Arab demonstrators in some countries, while sending advisors

and material to Syria to aid brutality there.

And they use a merciless iron fist against their own citizens who

attempt to exercise their rights to demonstrate and to speak openly.

We are not passive chroniclers of the horrors the Syrian Government

is inflicting on its people or of Iran’s brutality.

Our written statement details our promotion of political and

human rights and what we are doing to push back against these

abuses of protestors in both countries.

We hope today’s hearing will serve as further evidence that the

American people and our Government stand united in admiration

and support for those who have boldly assumed the duty and made

the sacrifices to advance their rights. For this opportunity we

thank the committee again.

But finally, I must conclude by expressing our deep and continuing

concern for the safety and the wellbeing of all American

citizens currently detained in Iran. In particular, we urge the Iranian

Government to release at once Shane Bauer and Josh Fattal

so that they may return to their families. We also ask Iran again

to provide all information on missing American citizen Robert

Levinson and to cooperate in reuniting Mr. Levinson with his family.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Posner, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I mean first, let us be clear. We all agree what is happening in

Syria is absolutely deplorable. It is appalling. It is unacceptable.

Democracy is Syria’s future. Bashar al-Assad is Syria’s past, and

the sooner that we get to that past, the sooner that he is relegated

completely to the past the better. I think we all agree.

You know, when I look across the region that falls into the Bureau

that I head, NEA, from Morocco through Iran, I see a lot of

common elements, but I also see a lot of differences. And there is

basically no one size fits all solution in the region that I oversee.

We are looking for the best tools to support the people on the

ground. What is the best way to promote democracy in Egypt, in

Tunisia, in Libya, in Syria? It is different. And the main thing is,

again, what helps those people on the ground at the, you know,

right time? When is the right time for us to make a statement like

that?

It may be that we are going to make a statement such as you

suggest, such as you would like to see us now. But we have the

drama of that once and when is the right time? When will we make

sure that the story remains about the Syrian people and not about

us? You want to

Congressman Ackerman, the Syrian people

know where we stand. That is why Robert Ford had his vehicle

pelted with flowers as he was going through Hama. People know

where we stand in Syria. They see what we are doing. And also

this idea that we are hedging our bets, I don’t know how you calculate

it but I calculate that, you know, it is not going Bashar’s

way.

He cracks down more he is going to enrage the people more.

Demonstrations pop up all over the country in new places. They

come closer and closer to the center of Damascus. He pulls back as

he should and stops the torture and stops the torture and the

shooting and the killing and the arrests. Then you have enormous

momentum like you have in Hama.

He is losing, but that doesn’t mean that he is losing because of

our words. He is losing because of what he is doing and because

of the fact that the Syrian people are at last waking up from the

political coma he has tried to keep them in for 40 years. And they

have transcended their fear and they are standing up for a better

future for them. He is the past.

We are trying to move Camp Ashraf.

Mr. POE. Tell me about the loudspeakers. I don’t want to hear

about that yet, about being moved.

What we are trying to do is to address a

very real human rights situation in Ashraf that affects 3,400 individuals

and that could get a heck of a lot worse by the end of the

year. You have a state within a state that——

Well, I’m sorry that that’s the litmus test

for whether we care about human rights in the Camp Ashraf or

not.

I’m not aware. I’m not aware of anything

because we are focused on——

The larger human rights. We

are——

Congressman, I would like to separate the

FTO designation from Camp Ashraf. We have a pending potential

crisis, catastrophe in Camp Ashraf.

It’s still—the lawyers are still working on

it. There were documents that were recently declassified to give to

the lawyers of the MEK so the process is still ongoing. It’s taking

a while because the declassification process, the need to make sure

that both sides have full documentation. It’s an ongoing process.

In the meantime, as you know——

I’m not a lawyer. I don’t know, Congressman.

But as you know, the DC Circuit Court of Appeals did keep

the FTO designation in place while the review goes on. But the review

is ongoing. Documents are being declassified, passeC to the

lawyers of the MEK to make sure they have the information as

well.

We are trying to do a two-part program,

Congressman, where the residents of Camp Ashraf will ultimately

be relocated to a third country, which is what they have told us

they would like.

Our FTO designation has no impact on

Europe, for example. So it has nothing to do with the European

willingness to take in the residents of Camp Ashraf or not. And

it——

You know, the situation is complicated to

talk about in 9 seconds, but they have no status in Iraq. We are

trying to come up with something by which 3,400 people are protected,

that they participate in the discussions about how they can

be protected, where they stay with their leaders which is what they

have said they wanted to do, not to be dispersed. Where they stay

as a group.

We are trying to find a way, Congressman, believe me, by which

we avoid a real problem that could happen at the end of the year

because Iraq is sovereign now. So we are trying to come up with

a way by which—and I hope that the friends of those in Camp

Ashraf will talk to their leaders about our plan isn’t that bad. Our

plan is

I certainly support what my colleague and

friend Mike Posner just said, and I go back to what I said before.

There is no one-size-fits-all solutions to the transitions taking place

in the Middle East. We had a 30-year strategic partnership with

President Mubarak of Egypt. When President Obama said essentially

that it is time for Mubarak to step aside, we knew that those

words would mean a lot to President Mubarak because of the long

relationship with him.

And we knew they would have the impact that they should have

coming from the President, coming from the White House. We don’t

have the same sort of relationship with Bashar al-Assad, but I

don’t think that he is under any illusion of where we stand when

it comes to him. And certainly as we have said, the people on the

street in Syria know where we stand.

Our goal would be to see a different sort

of government, a government that was not playing a destabilizing

role in the region but a positive role in the region, that was not

funding Hezbollah and trying to dominate Lebanon, that was not

shipping terrorists to Iraq. That was not abusing its own people.

A government that is accountable to its own people, that represents

the rich diversity of Syria at peace with its neighbors, respectful

of human rights. That is the Syria that the opposition has

been saying they want to see. That is the Syria we want to support.

And that is the Syria that is coming.

No, you are absolutely right. This regime

has been a strategic enemy of the United States and has abused

its own people. And a different sort of Syria can play a much better

role bilaterally with us and in the region, as well as in protecting

its own people.

Well, we certainly have our views about

what should take its place. The opposition is becoming increasingly

organized, articulate a positive vision going forward, the sort of

Syria that we have discussed that we would like to see. We have

no crystal ball that can guarantee an outcome, but we certainly can

try to help shape that outcome.

I mean, as we have said multiple times, change is coming. And

the current situation where you have Syria with Hezbollah, Syria

exporting terror to Iraq, Syria abusing its own people, it is not a

friend of the United States.

Congressman, thank you. It is we have

condemned what happened in April. Obviously you certainly saw

the condemnation, but what we are trying to do now is to prevent

more such incidents.

Well, what we are doing now is we are

trying to negotiate with the leadership and the residents of Camp

Ashraf about security arrangements that would protect the 34 individuals

that are there, abide by their demand that they not be separated

from their leadership, and provide safety going forward.

I mean we have—I think you are aware,

Congressman.

What we are trying to do is to find a way

by which we can allow the Iraqis to exercise the sovereignty that

is their right on, you know, sovereign Iraqi territory.

While protecting the rights, the human

rights of 3,400 people who are at Camp Ashraf who don’t have any

status inside of Iraq.

And by working with the residents and

the leadership of the Camp, the ICRC, the Iraqi Government, to

come up with a way by which the residents and leaders of Camp

Ashraf themselves are participating in decisions that affect their

future. Right now they are sitting there waiting and who knows?

We don’t want to see another massacre happen, but something

could happen. So we are trying to work with them to

relocate them as a preliminary step for

the relocation effort.

It is a little lower than that, 40 some

now.

Well, Congressman, the fact is that from

January 1, 2009 the Iraqi Government itself has been responsible

for security inside of Iraq. We are no longer there providing security

inside of Iraq.

But Congressman, what we are really trying

to do is we are looking at the calendar. We have a security

agreement with which we will comply. Our troops will be out under

the terms of that security agreement by the end of December. At

the end of December we will no longer be there the way we are

now, so——

We are trying to find a solution

now.

Congressman, I respectfully disagree. We

have talked to the European governments about this. They don’t

take into account our FTO designation at all. They take in——

No. The FTO designation applies to the

United States.

But for Camp Ashraf it is a number of

things, such as they don’t——

I would prefer coming to your office and

talk about Robert Levinson, Congressman Deutch. Thank you.

Congressman Deutch, thanks for the

question, because they are serious charges. They are extremely serious

charges. And the colleague that called him in was Assistant

Secretary of State Eric Boswell who heads up our diplomatic security

bureau, but also oversees the Office of Foreign Missions, which

deals with Embassies that are located here which is why he was

the counterpart.

It was the charge not—it was not the Ambassador.

It’s not——

No, it is not consistent with his diplomatic

mission is for sure. There is another——

There is another investigation that is

under way that we would have to talk about in a different setting.

Well, it is——

It was the charge d’affaires. The Ambassador

wasn’t there.

Perhaps you are right, Congressman

Deutch. I believe it was the charge d’affaires, though.

The Ambassador has been—the Ambassador

was on—was out of the country at the time I believe.

No.

Yes.

No, that must be—I’m sorry. I am sorry,

Congressman Deutch. I will stand corrected by the State Department

statement. Let me just—I can just go there—we share your

concern about this. This is—these allegations, if proven true, demonstrate

outrageous abuse of diplomatic status in this country.

So we share your concern about this. There is an investigation

under way.

No, you know, I am sorry—I am sorry for

being wrong about who he met with. I have obviously got the meeting

confused, but there has been an ongoing investigation. It is

under way into the allegations. We are not aware of new allegations

since the time of the meeting. We haven’t—new allegations

of events like that that have taken place since then we are not

aware of any.

The Ambassador himself, who was the subject of some of these

allegations, is currently out of the country, scheduled to come back

some time in August, but the investigation is under way.

I am not quite sure even if we conclude

that because if you look at their—if you look at their repugnant behavior

in the region, how they have defied the international community

and all sorts of things from human rights to international

nuclear regulations and law. The defiance of the Security Council

regulations.

If we declare that they are—if we have decided that they are beyond—

that they have gone beyond acceptable behavior which they

clearly have, well then what? We still have to deal with the reality

that Iran is playing a destabilizing, destructive role in the region

and how best do we confront it? We have to confront it through security

alliances in the region.

Chairman, thanks for the question because

that is one of the reasons why I closed my own opening statement

with mentioning these, the two hikers, was to reinforce the

point that we are working every day to try to secure the release

of these two hikers. There is a lot of diplomatic activity that is

going on about these two hikers. Of course, one was released. One

of the three was released thanks to some of our friends in the region

and beyond.

The Swiss currently represent our interests in Iran and they are

very active with this portfolio in looking for ways to persuade the

Iranians to release them. We also are in touch with the international

partners who have relations with Iran, those that go to

Iran. I travel a lot in the region, for example, and this is near the

top of my agenda list when I see people who I know are going to

Iran is you need to make it absolutely clear to the Iranians that

this is essential for us that these two hikers get home.

Congressman Ackerman, thanks for the

question. Part of what we are—because we are looking at exactly

these things you are looking at. I mean we start from the reality

that Syria is one of the most sanctioned countries in the world

when it comes to trade and relations with the United States. Trade

between the United States is quite low. It consists of only five

areas, food, medicine, medical supplies, some civil aviation safety

parts and communications equipment. The communications

Okay. Good question. We had a long discussion

today

We had a long discussion today with our

European colleagues because what we are trying to do is to move

together with our European colleagues. You know, if we do oil and

gas sanctions ourselves we don’t have oil and gas trade with the

Syrians it is not going to amount to a whole lot.

There are, you know, questions about how much it hurts the Syrian

people versus hurts the Syrian regime is an ongoing discussion,

but we are—what we are trying to do it to work multilaterally so

that we and some of our other—and some of our other partners in

Europe and elsewhere are taking the same steps in tandem because

we will have a much greater impact to do this together.

It goes back to the fact that Syria has very few friends left, so

other countries are looking at doing some of the same things that

we are doing now.

Well, I mean, we welcome all tools we can

have to try to put pressure on this regime, you know, leaving some

flexibility with—in the—leaving the flexibility in the President’s

hand for foreign policy.

No, we are—as I say, we start from the

fact that it is a heavily sanctioned country already so a lot of the

stuff that the Europeans are doing now we did years ago because

of the terrorist support.

There are a lot of——

We have——

And we are looking at a wide variety of

tools——

Congressman Ackerman. You

know, we are—we are rolling out different sanctions, different designations

all the time on Syria. But again, to the extent that we

do this in partnership with others, that we take parallel steps it

is going to have a far, far greater impact because there is just not

that much trade between the United States and Syria. We shut it

all off tomorrow, it will have——

It won’t make that much of

a difference.

Well, I think we have started. And the

fact that we have designated 27 individuals and entities since this

all started——

You know, we are looking at the steps to

take, Congressman. That is all I can say. You know, we are constantly

looking at more and more designations as appropriate tools

to pressure——

Yes, I guess I would just respectfully disagree

with the fact that we are sounding inactive.

it is a very complicated subject, but right

now our own Immigration and Naturalization Act, the INA, would

pose complications, even if there was no FTO designation any

longer because of people who have received paramilitary training

from what was considered a foreign terrorist organization at the

time. So it is a very complicated issue. I am happy to talk more

about it when we have time.

First, Congressman Fortenberry, thanks a

lot of coming to Michael Corbin’s swearing in the other day. It was

a real honor to have you there.

There are a number of options that we

have taken. There are more options that we are looking at there

is a lot of diplomacy under way. The, you know, as I said, we started

off with Syria being one of the sanctioned countries on the planet

in terms of the United States so we started off with a really high

level of sanctions already in place, very little bilateral trade, a lot

of Syrian regime figures already sanctioned for their outrageous interference

in Lebanon for the support of terrorism, et cetera.

What we have done since then is we passed executive orders that

have allowed us already to designate 27 different individuals and

entities. We are looking at more now. We will—that list will expand.

It is not exhaustive.

Included in that 27 it is really important are three Iranian entities,

Iranian entities who are helping Bashar al-Assad kill, torture,

arrest, maim his own people. And this highlights for the world

that, you know, what Iran is doing inside Syria, holding Iran accountable

for it as well, and it has gotten a lot of notice.

We also have prevented Syria from taking a seat on the Human

Rights Council in Geneva. Syria should have never even been considered

given it record, but it was considered. We were able to diplomatically

prevent them from getting on the Council. We were also

able to get the Council to pass two resolutions condemning Syrian

behavior. And also calling for an investigative mission into Syria

which so far the Syrian regime has not taken.

But these things all are noticed diplomatically. They are noticed

inside Syria. What we are doing is we are providing the accountability

that the Syrian people are demanding of their own government

that the Syrian Government is not doing. I travel a lot and

I am also in touch with all of Syria’s neighbors. I tell you, Syria

really has no friends left, and this is important.

It reinforces this analysis that basically Bashar is losing.

I think—I analyze that he can’t win this.

He cracks down more he enrages the public more. He pulls back,

which is what—he should pull back and stop the killing and then

the momentum of the demonstrations grow. He pulls his own

friend that he can draw on is Iran. He pulls Iran in to help him

with technical support, with material, with advisors, with financial

support, that enrages the street.

There is an anti-Iranian, anti-Hezbollah flavor to these demonstrations

so his one tool makes, in fact, his problem worse. He

is left with only three friends, Hezbollah, a great friend to have,

Iran and then the crazy Lebanese politician Michel Aoun who for

some reason has allied himself with Bashar al-Assad. That is not

a whole lot of friends left to support you.

The Green Movement has been, you

know, suppressed brutally by the Iranian regime and it is still

there below the surface. It is a diffuse organization. It does not

have—it is two main symbolic leaders have been under house arrest

for months, but it is still there. And we are trying to create

the political space in which people can communicate with each

other, where they are able to get the tools to evade the Internet

censors in there.

They are not all—let us not kid ourselves. These people are not

all in love with the United States or United States foreign policy,

so we are not trying to back the Green Movement per se. We are

trying to back the accountability they demand from the govern-

ment, the political space they need to operate, the communications

tools they need to be effective.

the internal conflict is real. You know,

the press reports, you know, reflect what we understand to be the

situation. You know, we don’t have an Embassy there so we rely

on a lot of different information to analyze, but the internal conflict

is there. But we don’t think that the internal conflict by itself poses

any real threat to the regime at this point.

You know, there could be connections but

it is largely related to power between the——

Senior guys.

Congressman, thanks for the question.

You raise a very important topic that is related to our relationships

in the Gulf more generally. I have been to Bahrain eight times

since February. My colleague, Assistant Secretary Posner was

there in I believe June? So we—and this shows both the depth of

the partnership we have with Bahrain and the level of concern we

have with some of the developments that have taken place there.

We have stressed the need for the type of transparent steps toward

reconciliation that will allow Bahrainis to feel that, you know,

that the governing structures are reflecting, in fact, their aspirations

for their future.

There was, you know, a terrible situation in February and

March. I happened to be there, in fact, when the Saudi troops that

you mentioned came across the causeway from Saudi Arabia into

Bahrain. It was a terrible situation at the time where you basically

had the extremists on all sides setting the agenda, extremists on

the Sunni side, extremists on the opposition side, hardliners in the

government.

What is happening now is you are seeing the moderate voices

start to come out again, the moderate voices that represent the

center in Bahrain. There have been some important steps that the

king has taken in order to try to establish a positive vision of Bahrain

going forward. There has been a commission of inquiry set up

to look into what happened back in February and March.

This has the sponsorship of the king. It has respected international

jurists. It has a broad mandate to look into what happened.

To the extent that this commission operates with transparency

and can bring some accountability, I think that the Bahrainis

themselves will feel assured about their future.

The Ministry of Labor is looking at and has been announcing

some job reinstatements of people that were determined to have

been wrongly dismissed from their jobs. We encourage these sorts

of steps going forward. So we are encouraging basically the moderate

voices to stand up, who represent the majority, what we understand

the majority of Bahrainis to take these sorts of reconciliatory

steps to put the events of February and March behind us.

Yes, I would say that in all honesty that,

you know, the record is mixed. That there have been positive announcements,

positive steps like the commission of inquiry is extremely

important. The transfer of court cases from security courts

to civilian courts is a very positive—is a very positive move.

There have been people released from detention. There is more

that needs to be done. There was a national dialogue to look at reform

issues. We were disappointed that the major opposition party

pulled out of that national dialogue. We think that all parties

should be participating in a genuine dialogue about Bahrain’s future.

We have a strong partnership with Bahrain. We will continue to

be working with all parties involved——

Yes.

Secretary Clinton was in Cairo at the

time when those troops went in. and as I said, I was actually in

Bahrain at the time and she made a very strong statement that got

the notice of the Saudis and the Emiratis. But there is a real—as

Secretary Posner said, there is a real distinction here which is that

not only do we have a strong relationship with the government

itself but we have a head of state who is trying to take steps to

heal the divisions, to avoid a repetition of what happened in February

and March.

We don’t see the same thing happening in Syria and in Iran.