Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, for holding

this timely hearing as the 2-year anniversary of the Syrian conflict

just passed.

After years of violence and internal struggle, the fighting in

Syria continues, and the refugee crisis threatens the stability of our

allies in the region. With over 70,000 dead and over 1 million refugees,

the numbers continue to rise as there is no clear end in sight.

What started as a popular uprising where Syrians took to the

streets in protest against the Assad regime’s corruption, human

rights abuses and brutality has turned into a full-scale sectarian

conflict that pits the Assad regime against Islamists who seek to

establish an Islamic state in the wake of Assad’s removal.

The secular moderate elements have been forced to a periphery,

and their movement has been co-opted by the extremists. That is

why the United States must take and must take with extreme caution

any action that deals with opposition forces in Syria.

While I respect the opinion of my colleagues, I sincerely do not

believe that it is time for the U.S. to arm the rebels. Too many

questions remain about who the rebels are, and with whom they

will swear allegiance. The unknown can be dangerous and the vetting

of the opposition is not enough when it comes to providing lethal

aid that could be used against our allies, such as Israel, or

even the United States in a post-Assad era.

I’m also deeply concerned about Assad’s stockpile of WMDs that

were they to fall into the wrong hands could jeopardize the entire

Middle East region, as well as our own U.S. national security. We

must examine also those regimes that continue to help Assad stay

afloat.

Last week the Director of National Intelligence testified that,

‘‘North Korea’s export of ballistic missiles and associated materials

to several countries, including Iran and Syria, and its as-

sistance to Syria’s construction of a nuclear reactor destroyed

in 2007 illustrate the reach of its proliferation activities.’’

To address this national security threat, Congressman Brad

Sherman and I introduced the Iran, North Korea, and Syria Non-

Proliferation Accountability Act, and this bipartisan bill prohibits

assistance to any government that has provided assistance to Iran,

North Korea, or Syria, or has failed to prevent individuals or entities

under its sovereignty from aiding in the proliferation activities

of those three states. We welcome cosponsors to our legislation.

Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And

thank you to all of the panelists.

I wanted to ask three questions, first on the rebels, who are

these guys? WMD, and thirdly, on the countries that are aiding

Assad, Russia, Iran, North Korea among them. On the rebels, the

Syrian rebels lack a cohesive command and control structure, and

they continue to expand their operations, but to what end? Ambassador

Ford, do you believe that there’s great cohesion in the Opposition

forces? And, if so, will that stick.

In the last few months, some Syrian rebels have been designated

as foreign terrorist organizations linked to al-Qaeda. They’ve captured

and detained U.N. peacekeepers after later being released, so

the U.S. must take necessary precautions to conduct proper oversight

and due diligence regarding any aid to these rebels.

Can you give us more information about the Opposition? They’re

not just Syrian Nationals, as you point out. You said that they’re

foreign fighters who also have Islamic militants from neighboring

countries, so who will govern in a post-Assad Syria?

And on weapons of mass destruction, are the reports correct that

the Syrian regime may possess up to 50 tons of weapons-grade nuclear

materials in its stockpile? And to inspect, if those reports are

true, will the U.S. call for an emergency meeting of the International

Atomic Energy Agency to discuss this? And if Assad does

not grant IAEA inspectors immediate access to all nuclear facilities

and stockpiles so that they can be protected and sealed, will the

U.S. impose immediate comprehensive and painful sanctions? Will

we do so acting with the European Union? Will we do so only

through the U.N. Security Council?

And, lastly, on the countries that are aiding the brutality of

Assad’s regime, these countries continue to provide military assistance,

weaponry. These are North Korea, Russia, Iran, and they

seek to further the illegal weapons program and supporting these

foreign terrorist organizations.

What can we do to hold these regimes accountable for supplying

the Syrian regime with arms, helicopters, military equipment during

this human rights crisis? In light of Russia’s policy in Syria, I

believe that the Obama administration’s string of concessions to

Moscow must stop, and I wanted to hear your thoughts on the

rebels, WMD, and what will we do with countries that are helping

Syria?

Thank you. And you can address that at another

time, the other question. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the

time. Thank you, Ambassador.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN [presiding]. Thank you very much, Ambassador.

Thank you, sir. Mr. Faleomavaega.

Thank you so much, Mr. Faleomavaega, Ambassador.

Thank you.

Thank you so much, Randy. Ms. Bass of

California is recognized.

Thank you very much. Thank you, Ms. Bass.

And Mr. Messer is recognized.

Thank you so much, Mr. Messer. Mr. Vargas

is recognized for 5 minutes. Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Mr. Vargas. Judge Poe is recognized

for 5 minutes.

Thank you. Yes, you had him at he’s a

Texan. Mr. Marino is recognized.

Thank you, Mr. Marino. And Mr. Lowenthal

is recognized. No, sir? Thank you. And now we will go to Mr.

DeSantis, my Florida colleague.

Thank you very much, sir. Mr. Collins of

Georgia is recognized.

Thank you very much, Mr. Collins, for excellent

observations. Thank you to our panelists on behalf of Chairman

Royce for explaining the humanitarian crisis going on. And,

Ambassador Ford, the committee looks forward to continuing the

conversation with you about the conflicting reports of weapons,

chemical weapons being used. Thank you for your clarification.

And with that, Chairman Royce would like for me to say that the

committee is adjourned.