This hearing will come to order, and today we

meet to review the Syrian crisis.

It was 2 years ago last week that on the nightly news we saw

those protestors walking through the street chanting, ‘‘Peaceful,

peaceful.’’ And the thing the world saw next was that the Syrian

forces opened up with small arms fire on the marchers. Over the

ensuing weeks that was followed by artillery barrages, followed by

tanks flattening villages, followed eventually by aerial bombardment,

and finally by Scud missiles into cities.

We are now 2 years into that Syrian uprising, and for 2 bloody

years U.S. policy has been adrift. Initially, the Obama administration

saw Assad as a reformer in their words. Once the revolt started,

it backed U.N. diplomacy, and then bet on Moscow to play a

constructive role. Predictably, none of this has worked. Yet even

today, Secretary Kerry talks of Assad coming to the table.

This is the Assad who is bombing villages in Syria. This is the

Assad who is ordering teenagers tortured and, frankly, is engaged

in murdering his populace.

The ancient city of Homs is now in ruins. Seventy thousand Syrians

are dead. A million refugees have spilled into neighboring

countries, destabilizing those countries. And there are troubling reports

that Assad may be moving to unleash chemical weapons.

The U.S. has been generous in supporting suffering Syrians, but

perhaps naively so. Much of our humanitarian aid has been funneled

through the U.N. and through other international organizations

that are largely restricted to areas controlled by the Syrian

regime. Now, that is absurd.

Only recently has the U.S. begun to push food aid directly to the

Syrian opposition. That shift, frankly, should accelerate and accelerate

dramatically. I really wonder about providing any humanitarian

aid through the U.N. that ends up going through the regime

at all because it indirectly helps Assad and, therefore, presumably

prolongs the conflict and prolongs the human suffering.

Syria is today a humanitarian nightmare. It’s also a great strategic

challenge. At the end of the day, it might be an opportunity

for reform in society in Syria, but it’s also an opportunity with

Assad gone because then Iran would lose a key ally, one critical to

its terrorist operations, including against Israel. And that’s why

Iran and Hezbollah are massively stepping up their support of the

Assad regime providing a lifeline of weapons and providing fighters

on the ground. Much of this weaponry, by the way, flows through

Iraq, and that can’t continue without consequences.

Unfortunately, jihadist groups are gaining strength and popularity

in a portion of Syria. They’ve been able to convince too many

Syrians that they are on their side. Al-Nusra and aligned radical

groups fighting to remove Assad are also preparing for the day

after his fall. They are competing with the civil society groups behind

the free Syrian Army. Syrian extremists are translating their

battle success into authority over society as a whole influencing

courts, schools, and mosques, but I should say that most of those

extremists are from outside Syria. This is something very vexing

to civil society in Syria who have shared with us their concerns

about the influx of these foreign fighters. Their concern is that

these extremists are making inroads.

To avoid such a hostile future Syria armed with chemical weapons,

we need to help better organize and empower the Syrian opposition—

those Syrians who began the revolt by chanting, ‘‘Peaceful,

peaceful.’’ We have let them down, and let our strategic interests

down.

Some believe that it is time to provide arms to vetted opposition

groups. Others worry about a potentially lengthy and deepening

engagement and note that many weapons are already flowing into

Syria. But the British and French have come to realize the biggest

winner in the arms embargo has been Assad. Everything should be

considered, but the U.S. could have the greatest impact through

training, intelligence, and logistics.

It has been said that the U.S. has no good options in Syria, and

that’s probably true. Stay away, as we mainly have, and bad things

are guaranteed to happen. Get more involved, as some are calling

for, and good things might happen. All of it is incredibly unpredictable.

The best we can do is know what we can, realize what we

can’t, and make decisions as we must.

I’ll now turn to Congressman Ted Deutch, who fills in for Ranking

Member Engel. Big shoes to fill today, especially given Mr.

Engel’s efforts on Syria over many years, which has helped move

the administration to more actively consider the range of U.S. options

in recent weeks. Mr. Deutch.

. Thank you, Mr. Deutch. We’ll yield 3 minutes

to the chairman of the Middle East Subcommittee, Ileana Ros-

Lehtinen.

. Thank you. Let me introduce our panel here,

representatives from the State Department and the United States

Agency for International Development.

Ambassador Robert Ford is the American Ambassador to Syria.

In his 27-year Foreign Service tenure, he has served as Ambassador

to Algeria and as the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S.

Embassy in Baghdad.

Ms. Anne Richard serves as the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau

for Population Refugees and Migration at the State Department.

Prior to her appointment, Ms. Richard worked for the International

Rescue Committee, an agency committed to refugees and

internally displaced persons.

Nancy Lindborg is the Assistant Administrator for the Bureau

for Democracy Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance for USAID.

Before joining USAID, she was president of Mercy Corps.

So, we welcome all of our distinguished witnesses here today,

and without objection, the witnesses’ full testimony, your full prepared

statements will be made part of the record. Members may

have 5 days to submit statements and questions for the record. And

to our witnesses, I’d just ask you to summarize your testimony

within those 5 minutes. We’ll begin with Ambassador Ford.

. Thank you very much, Ms. Lindborg.

I want to ask a question of Ambassador Ford, and it goes to the

Director of National Intelligence’s comments here to Congress quite

recently. He said, ‘‘An increasingly beleaguered Syrian regime

might be prepared to use chemical weapons against the Syrian people.’’

I’d note that, you know, many of us doubt that the Syrian Government

would risk triggering foreign interference by deploying

chemical weapons, but there are reports yesterday of chemical

weapons use, as you have seen. And I was going to ask you, Ambassador,

what could you tell us on that?

. What would those consequences be, Ambassador?

. Let me raise another point, and that is to the

transfer of weapons going through Iraq, either over airspace, or by

land into Syria. Last week we had a report in Reuters that the Iranian

regime was increasing its assistance to the Assad regime.

And, clearly, the observation has been that this is the lifeline. It’s

not just the foreign fighters, but it’s also the munitions that are

being flown in, and it’s being flown in by civilian aircraft. Personnel

are flying in, by the way, through airspace, as well as the

weapons, so we see that, we see at the same time Hezbollah on the

ground now in Syria.

This has been raised, as I understand it, several times with the

government in Iraq, but still the government there is ramping this

up. If we really grasped the strategic opportunity here, it seems

like one of the easiest things we could do would be to lean on the

Iraqis and get this process halted.

So, I was going to ask, how hard has the administration weighed

in with the Iraqis? What has been tried to get them to cease and

desist? And how might Congress help make this job a little easier

for the administration, if that’s what’s necessary here?

. You know, it seems to me that with our capacity

to put pressure on other governments with respect to trying to

bring change in Syria, we are certainly missing an opportunity

here given that the flow of these fighters are over Iraqi territory,

and they are not assisting. We’re missing the opportunity in terms

of a direct conversation about the security assistance we’ve provided,

and the means whereby we could frankly force Iraq to at

least be part of the solution, rather than part of the problem here.

Again, can you think of anything definitive that has been shared

with the Iraqis on that front?

. Thank you. Mr. Deutch.

. Thank you. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen.

. Thank you. We’ll go to David Cicilline.

. We’ll go now to Mr. Steve Chabot.

. We’ll go now to Mr. Albio Sires.

. Adam Kinzinger.

. Bradley Schneider

. Mr. Scott Perry.