

**AXIS OF ABUSE: U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY
TOWARD IRAN AND SYRIA, PART 1**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
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WEDNESDAY, JULY 27, 2011

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST
AND SOUTH ASIA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2 o'clock p.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Steve Chabot (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. CHABOT. The subcommittee will come to order. I want to first apologize for running a little bit late here. We just had a series of votes on the floor so that's why we are not starting on time. This committee kind of prides itself in trying to start on time as often as possible, so my apologies.

I want to wish you all a good afternoon, and I want to welcome all of my colleagues and we will have more coming in, of course, to this hearing of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia.

Since taking office, the Obama administration's policy toward Iran and Syria has been characterized chiefly by its engagement with the ruling regimes. Whether or not that was the right policy at the time, the situation we face today with respect to these two countries is vastly different than it was in January.

Just over 2 years ago, the regime in Tehran perpetuated one of the most blatant incidents of electoral fraud in recent history. This sparked widespread pro-democracy protests, and the people of Iran took to the streets by the thousands to demand that their most basic rights be respected.

What followed made very clear, however, that this regime is not interested in the rights or wellbeing of its citizens. The world watched as the Iranian regime beat, tortured, raped and murdered its way through these protests.

It is perhaps even more horrifying to consider that many of these abuses are still occurring nearly 2 years later. The Iranian regime has been carrying out what former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Mark Wallace has called "One of the great human rights tragedies of the modern era."

Most notable is the incredible number of executions, which by some estimates now exceed 140 people, including children, a violation of international law. That this regime continues to claim legitimacy under the auspices of democratic elections is an insult, not only to the people of Iran, but to all those true democracies around

the world whose governments actually do reflect the will of their peoples.

Just over 6 months ago Syria, the Iranian regime's closest ally in the region, joined Tehran in its ruthlessly repression of pro-democracy protests. As protests intensified, the Assad regime initiated a brutal crackdown that continues even as we speak. It is now estimated that over 1,800 Syrians have been killed, over 10,000 have been jailed. Approximately 30,000 have been internally displaced, and nearly 12,000 fled to neighboring Turkey, where over 8,500 remain.

Reports coming out of Syria speak of unconscionably heinous human rights abuses, snipers targeting protesters, residents, including children and the elderly being rounded up, beatings, the use of electric shock to the genitals and torture of children, to name just several of the witnessed actions by the Assad regime.

I want to condemn in the strongest possible terms both the actions of these regimes as well as the regimes themselves. These regimes together form an axis of abuse whose wanton disrespect for even the most basic human rights is undeniable.

Today's hearing, however, was called to examine U.S. policy. My concern lays not so much with what the administration has done as with what it has not done. The Obama administration's human rights policies toward Iran and Syria have been both feeble and late. Rather than seizing the historic opportunity presented to it, the administration dithers by slowly inching toward challenging the legitimacy of these regimes in any meaningful way.

This begs the question of how many people have to be tortured or die before the administration is willing to call these regimes what they are, not only illegitimate but depraved. That the administration continues to issue calling for a transition to a democratic government in Tehran is evidence of one of two possibilities.

Either it still believes that a grand bargain on the illicit nuclear program is possible, or it is concerned that to do so, like in Libya, create a situation in which it must then ensure that the regime actually falls.

The fine line that the administration is walking by condemning but not seriously challenging puts it in an untenable position and from the outside appears to be hedging rather than leading. And although the administration may think that to do so puts itself in a strategically advantageous position, it seriously underestimates the impact its actions, or lack thereof, have on actual outcomes.

Indeed, the perception that calling for a democratic transition requires U.S. military operations to forcibly depose those in power is an excuse to avoid making a more permanent break with the regimes in Tehran and Damascus.

Words, like many things, have a currency, and that currency is action. To highlight human rights abuses and then sanction fewer than a dozen individuals in each country respectively, is unacceptable. To vacillate between condemning these regimes and then later offering a lifeline should they reform, pits us against the people of those countries.

The administration must realize two things. First, making no decision is in fact a decision in and of itself. And second, no matter

who ultimately prevails, the U.S. can no longer do business with these regimes. They are beyond salvation.

And I will now recognize the gentleman from New York, the ranking member Mr. Ackerman, for 5 minutes to make an opening statement.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank the chairman. I keep in my office a black and white photo of a place called Serock, Poland. It's where my mom and her family come from. Following the Nazi invasion in 1939, the Jews in Serock were rounded up, sent to the Warsaw ghetto and liquidated. Except for the desecrated cemetery, there are no Jews in Serock today.

There was no help for them. The free world claimed not to know, and even if it had it probably still would not have helped. In 1939 the troubles of Polish Jews were nobody's problem but their own.

Knowing that is part of me. It's one of the reasons I have always felt that serving on the Foreign Affairs Committee is important. Not because I expect another Holocaust, though the Iranian regime seems intent on preparing one, and it must be stopped, but because there will always be a grave concern that the cry of people in distress or danger of being slaughtered will go unheeded.

We said, "Never again." But it happened again. It happened in Cambodia. It happened in Bosnia. It happened in Rwanda, Congo, Sudan. It's happening today in Syria. And in each case governments, including ours, like guilty children look down at their shoes and say to no one in particular, "There's nothing we could have done."

But that wasn't really true then, and it isn't true now. Even the weakest nation can bear witness. The least powerful country can still report the truth to the world. The most isolated state can, with no authority but its own, impose political and economic sanctions. And we are far from weak or powerless or isolated. But with regard to Syria, we have nonetheless failed to act.

I have tried to explain our policy to Syrian Americans who were almost trembling with anxiety for their relatives, and I have failed, principally I think because our policy is so completely incoherent.

Somehow it manages to combine colossal moral failure and unimaginable strategic imbecility with the overpowering stench of hypocrisy, thanks to our feckless intervention in Libya. Congratulations, gentlemen, you have hit the policy failure trifecta.

History will record not only how we mostly ignored the people of Syria in their hour of need, but worse, how we overlooked our own blindingly obvious national interests in the demise of the Assad regime. Virtually every single interest that we have in the Middle East, whether it is aiding Israel's search for peace and security, protecting Lebanon's sovereignty, preventing Iranian hegemony, undercutting Hezbollah and Hamas, nurturing Iraq's development, sustaining our partnership with Turkey, or just promoting democracy and human rights is dramatically, even exponentially, furthered by the Syrian people getting rid of the Assad regime.

And to be very clear, I am not calling for U.S. military intervention in Syria. It is both unwise and unnecessary. But there is considerably more that we can and must do. First and above all, the President must call for Bashar al-Assad, that blood-soaked dictator, to step down. Trifling with the lives of the people of Syria with

nuanced lawyerly phrases like “President Assad must understand he is not indispensable,” is shameful.

Noting that Assad has lost legitimacy without calling for his immediate departure from power trivializes the deaths of thousands of Syrians killed by Assad’s thugs. And most importantly between the Syrian Accountability Act and the International Economic Emergency Powers Act, the President has at his disposal massive economic and political powers of coercion and punishment. The Obama administration has barely scratched even the surface of their utility in aiding the people of Syria in throwing off this regime of murders and thieves and torturers of children.

All bilateral trade with Syria should end immediately. All Syrian banks should be barred from the U.S. financial system immediately. All Syrian regime assets in the United States should be frozen immediately. All official Syrian travel to the United States should cease immediately. We must act.

I look forward with no joy to hearing from our witnesses’ efforts to defend the indefensible and to explain the inexplicable.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. The gentleman yields back. Any other members who would like to make opening statements will have 1 minute, and I believe the gentleman from New York, Mr. Higgins, was—you are next Mr. Higgins. You are recognized for 1 minute.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding this hearing today. A fundamental principle of democracy is the right of self determination and freedom of expression. The people of both Syria and Iran this right has been denied. They have been denied freedom of speech and freedom of expression by oppressive regimes clinging to power however they can.

This is an important time in our nation’s history. This is not only a regional conflict. It’s one of global consequence as well. The whole world is watching, civilian populations as well as authoritarian regimes, to see what the response of the United States will be.

We have a moral obligation to continue efforts to undermine Assad, to encourage his departure as quickly as possible, and I look forward to the expert testimony of our panel here today.

Thank you.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you, and the gentleman yields back. And the gentleman from Connecticut, Mr. Murphy, is recognized for 1 minute.

Mr. MURPHY. I look forward to the gentlemen’s testimony. I will waive my opening statement.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. The gentleman yields back. The gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Conolly, is recognized.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward very much to the testimony. I must say I respect you a lot, Mr. Chairman, but I don’t necessarily subscribe to your critique of the administration with respect to policy in Iran. I actually think we have been yielding some results in coordinating with allies and in enforcing the sanctions in a way that heretofore were not.

With respect to my colleague’s and my friend’s critique of the Syria policy, it is powerful and needs to be heeded, but a word of caution. This is not a unidimensional situation. It’s a multi-dimen-

sional situation and we have to not only worry about regime change, we have to worry about what takes its place.

And so that's a challenge for American diplomacy, and I think we need to respect that while at the same time expressing our frustration with pace and tone and the words being used that my colleague rightfully criticizes. With that I yield back.

Mr. CHABOT. Okay. The gentleman yields back.

The gentleman from Florida, Mr. Deutsch is recognized.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for appearing today. I have long been concerned about the egregious human rights abuses taking place daily in Iran. Several months ago I introduced bipartisan legislation that would require mandatory investigations and impose sanctions on those who aided in the brutal crackdown following the June 2009 election.

The regime has made it clear that it will not hesitate to use violence and intimidation to suppress any threats to its iron-fisted rule. The number of executions in Iran has been steadily rising, with 39 just in the month of March.

The United States must show that we are serious in our commitment to fighting human rights abuses and to giving opposition the necessary tools to speak out and stand up to this brutal regime. I look forward to the witnesses' testimony on U.S. policy and the efforts being made to document and publicize cases of abuse in Iran and providing platforms for the opposition moving forward.

And I thank the chairman and I yield back.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman yields back. Thank you. The gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. Keating is recognized if—or did he walk out? Okay.

And then last but not least, I would ask unanimous consent that the gentleman from California, Mr. Sherman, who is a member of the full committee but not this subcommittee be entitled to all the privileges of the members of this subcommittee, except that he go last. So the gentleman is recognized for the purpose of making an opening statement for 1 minute.

Mr. SHERMAN. Happy to go last. Glad to see Assistant Secretary Posner, who's doing an outstanding job at DRL, and I thank the chairman for holding these hearings. I hope the Assistant Secretary would go back and talk to others at the State Department who are planning to issue a license to General Electric to repair the supposedly civilian aircraft of the Iranian airlines.

These aircraft have been used and will be used to ferry weapons to Iran and then ferry them on to Syria, where Iranian weapons deliveries have already resulted in the deaths of hundreds of brave Syrian people.

And I want to talk about the humanitarian crisis faced in Camp Ashraf. I want to commend to the Assistant Secretary's reading and to my colleagues for possible co-sponsorship, House Resolution 231. It was introduced by the chairman of the—chairwoman of the full committee and myself. And it urges that the United States do everything possible to ensure the physical security and protection of Camp Ashraf residents, noting that as recently as April 8th Iraqi forces initiated force against the residents of that camp. And apparently that some 34 people died, 300 were wounded.

And I would also point out that the Iraqi Ambassador in trying to disclaim any responsibility for this, points that the MEK happens to be listed on the terrorist list. We need to protect the people of Camp Ashraf.

I yield back and I thank the chairman.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman yields back. Thank you very much, and the chair would like to note the presence of quite a number of people here relative to the Camp Ashraf issue. And I would just commend those people and their associates for their dedication and relentless commitment to their cause.

And it has certainly been noted by many members of the Foreign Affairs Committee over the past weeks and months. And so we would just like to note that for the record, that they have been in attendance time after time after time, and it is duly noted for the record.

At this time I would like to recognize the two members of the panel who will be testifying this afternoon and introduce them.

We first have Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman who was sworn in as Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs on August 18, 2009. A career member of the Foreign Service since January 1986, he has served in Iraq, Israel, Tunisia and Lebanon, and was the Ambassador on the Ground in Lebanon during the Cedar Revolution in 2005.

Ambassador Feltman served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs from February 2008 to his present assignment, serving concurrently as Acting Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau since December 18, 2008. He received his Bachelor's degree in history and fine arts from Ball State University in 1981 and his Master's degree in law and diplomacy from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in 1983. And we welcome you here this afternoon.

And our other witness here this afternoon is Michael H. Posner, who was sworn in as Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor on September 23, 2009. Prior to joining State Department, Mr. Posner was the executive director and then president of Human Rights First. He played a key role in proposing and campaigning for the first U.S. law providing for political asylum, which became part of the Refugee Act of 1980, and was a member of the White House Apparel Industry Partnership task force.

Before joining Human Rights First, Mr. Posner was a lawyer in Chicago. He received his J.D. from the University of California, Berkeley School of Law, and a B.A. with distinctions and honors in history from the University of Michigan. And we welcome you here as well, Mr. Posner.

And as I'm sure both very witnesses are very familiar with, we have the 5-minute rule and you will both be recognized for 5 minutes. We have a lighting system. The yellow light will come on to let you know you have got 1 minute to wrap up and we would ask you to keep within that time if at all possible.

And Ambassador Feltman, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. CHABOT. Without objection, so ordered.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JEFFREY D. FELTMAN, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE, BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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. CHABOT. Thank you, very much.

Mr. Posner, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE MICHAEL H. POSNER, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE, BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Mr. POSNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and member of the committee for having us. I want to echo Jeff's appreciation for giving us an opportunity to speak to these issues which we feel so deeply about. These are two countries, Iran and Syria, that are violating every important international human rights standard.

The things that you on the panel describe, the various abuses, are things that we see, we agree with, and the question is now how to move forward.

I want to just take a minute and highlight one aspect of the situation in Syria, and that's the treatment of young people, of children. This set of demonstrations began in March in the southern city of Dara'a when security forces fired upon those calling for the release of children who had been detained for weeks simply for writing political graffiti on the walls. The regime responded with its usual methods, using gunfire, arrest, torture, abuse to kill and intimidate the protestors.

Again, in the past several weeks we have seen the attacks against children continuing, including a 13-year-old named Hamza al-Khateeb, who was tortured and mutilated and his body was returned by Syrian security forces. A 10-year-old boy, a 4-year-old girl were killed during raids on several towns around Homs. And on July 15th a 12-year-old, Tallha Dalal, was shot in the head by police officers in Damascus.

Horrific images of these bodies and those of other children have been smuggled out. Those responsible for these and other atrocities must be held accountable for their crimes.

We have gone into lots of detail in the written testimony. You can read that. But we have no doubt, as you say, that at least 1,600 Syrians have been killed, over 10,000 are now jailed. Security forces continue to hold people hostage to a widening crack down.

And yet incredibly the people of Syria have lost their fear. The demonstrations are continuing. They are expanding. And as we have said repeatedly, President Assad has lost legitimacy, and he needs and will be held accountable for his actions.

With respect to Iran, as my colleague, Assistant Secretary Feltman spelled out, we also are regularly reviewing the record of the government. We know how outrageous they have been and continue to be. They carry out, as Chairman Chabot, you pointed out, we think 190 executions this year, which is more than any country in the world except for China.

The government also continues to impose draconian restrictions on speech. Journalists and bloggers are targeted as are teachers, trade unionists and others. The list of abuse goes on and on.

Now, particularly troubling to us is the deep persecution of religious minorities. On May 1st the Revolutionary Court in the northern city of Bandar-e Anzali tried 11 Christians who were members of the Church of Iran, including the pastor of that church. We have seen this persecution not only against Christians but Sufis and the Baha'i. And I want to single out the Baha'i because they have been attacked repeatedly throughout the years.

The United States has imposed sanctions against both of these governments. But we start from the premise, and I think this may be where our approach is not understood as well as it should be. We start from the premise that in both of these countries there is a courageous populous, a courageous group of people who are challenging these repressive governments, and our support needs to be rooted in the assumption that change will occur from within both of these countries.

And we are doing a range of things both to support their ability to communicate among themselves and the world. We have extensive Internet freedom program. We have translated our materials into Arabic and Farsi. We are working to support non-governmental organizations who in both countries are severely persecuted. We are providing training to people. We are providing ability for them to organize and meet among themselves.

Our belief is that these two governments, these two regimes cannot stand the test of time because their own people are going to be ultimately successful in bringing about sustainable democracy and human rights.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Feltman and Mr. Posner follows:]

WRITTEN STATEMENT
MICHAEL POSNER, ASSISTANT SECRETARY,
BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR, AND
JEFFREY FELTMAN, ASSISTANT SECRETARY,
BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS
HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE
MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA
"Axis of Abuse: U.S. Human Rights Policy toward Iran and Syria: Part 1"
July 27, 2011

Chairman Chabot, Ranking Member Ackerman, Distinguished Members of the Committee: thank you for inviting us to appear before you today to discuss the Iranian and Syrian governments' continuing and worsening abuses against their own people.

As people across the region are taking stock of their governments, we see in the Syrian and Iranian regimes a parallel failure to respond to or respect the will of their citizens. Our concerns about these countries' horrendous human rights abuses are longstanding, but never has their repression been more flagrantly at odds with the realities of the region – the irrepressible demands for democracy and fundamental human rights that have already swept two leaders from power. The United States has played an essential leading role in demanding an end to this repression, enlisting the international community's support for fundamental human rights in the region, and leveraging our resources to support the peoples' demands for justice, freedom and dignity. We have used new authorities to single out and sanction those most responsible for these abuses and have encouraged other countries to do join us in this effort. Going forward, the United States will expand our efforts to answer the call of Syrian and Iranian citizens that their governments be held accountable for their actions.

As a prime example of its contempt for dissent, the Iranian regime has held the de facto leaders of the Green Movement, former presidential candidates Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, under house arrest without charges since February. Many from the second-tier leadership of the Green Movement-affiliated entities remain imprisoned or have fled Iran, and their family members have been intimidated, attacked, and detained. This has left the Green Movement beleaguered and scattered. Although demonstrations are rarer, government intimidation didn't stop the Green Movement last February from demonstrating in

solidarity of their kindred spirits protesting government oppression across the Arab world.

In Syria, a committed, peaceful grassroots opposition movement has rapidly emerged in response to the Asad regime's brutality. Last March, security forces fired upon demonstrators calling for the release of children held for weeks for simply writing political graffiti. That brutal act sparked the collective outrage of the long-oppressed Syrian people. The growing momentum for change, which has drawn people from across Syria to participate in peaceful demonstrations, is now well into its fourth month.

President Asad and his regime have responded with gunfire, mass arrests, torture and abuse. Human rights organizations report that more than 1,800 Syrians have been killed and over ten thousand jailed, while security forces hold the Syrian people hostage to a widening crackdown. Through high-level intervention, Ambassador Ford and Embassy Damascus have secured the release of ten Americans who had been detained on security grounds since January.

Amnesty International has reported killings and torture by security forces in the town of Tell Kalakh near the Lebanese border in May. Residents reported seeing scores of males including some elderly and under 18 being rounded up. Detainees described brutal torture, including beatings, prolonged use of stress positions and the use of electric shock to the genitals. Human Rights Watch interviewed 50 witnesses to the weeks of violence in Daraa, and reported that member of various branches of the *mukhabarat* security forces and snipers on rooftops deliberately targeted protestors and that victims had lethal head, neck and chest wounds.

But in spite of this intense repression, the Syrian people have lost their fear. They have not backed down. They are continuing to take to the streets to demand freedom, respect for their basic rights, and a transition to democracy. Beyond demonstrations, we have also seen the opposition organize itself and begin to articulate an agenda for Syria's future, recognizing that the strongest Syria is one in which all citizens, regardless of faith or ethnicity, are equal participants. And for our part, the Obama Administration has articulated clearly that the United States has absolutely nothing invested in the Bashar al-Asad regime, which has clearly lost legitimacy, most importantly in the eyes of the hundreds of thousands of Syrians who have taken to the streets. A peaceful and democratic transition would be a positive step for Syria, the region, and the world.

It is up to the Syrian people to determine what the next chapter holds for Syria, as the pages turn toward a new future for this country. President Asad can delay or obstruct it but he cannot, however, stop it. As Syrians chart their own future, we hope to see the participation of and respect for all of Syria's ethnic and religious groups. The United States, and the international community, want to see a Syria that is unified, where tolerance, respect for human rights, and equality are the norm. This is the message that Ambassador Ford is delivering to the Syrian leadership and the Syrian people.

Even as the Syrian military and security forces have besieged communities, conducted mass arrests, targeted emergency medical responders, tortured children, shot peaceful protestors with impunity, cut off water, internet and telephone services, and barred an independent media, people have found ways to get their word out, through reports, images and videos taken by brave demonstrators and smuggled out.

In bearing witness to these terrible abuses, the United States has and will continue to play a crucial role. Demonstrators have peacefully protested for over a month in Hama, where over 10,000 Syrians were killed in 1982 by President Asad's father Hafez Asad. The people of Hama kept their peace despite their tragic history and the provocation of the government forces besieging the city. We know this precisely because our representative to the Syrian people, Ambassador Ford, toured Hama and reported seeing no protestors carrying weapons, nor damage to government buildings. We also know through Ambassador Ford's reports that, contrary to the promises from President Asad to end the emergency law and follow proper judicial procedures, the government has carried out sweeps and arrested dozens of peaceful demonstrators in Hama, and reports of torture in custody are well documented. Our diplomatic presence and watchfulness is an important way for us to gain independent knowledge of the facts, to show support for Syrians' rights, and to speak directly and plainly to the Syrian government about the need to change course.

Returning to Iran, more than two years since that country's disputed presidential election, Iranian authorities persist in harassment, arbitrary detention, torture, and imprisonment of their citizens, as well as some of ours. Targets include those who demand accountability from their government and who stand up for the rights of their fellow citizens; ethnic and religious minorities; journalists, women's rights activists, bloggers and students.

Unfortunately, the situation has only further deteriorated in 2011. Protestors were killed in Tehran in February and in ethnically-Arab areas in April; political prisoners are held in deplorable conditions with convicted murderers in former stockyards; those released from prison are forced to pay exorbitant bail sums or often released with conditions such as long bans on travel or work in their field; additional sentences were levied on those already in prison merely for sending letters to family members; mass executions of mainly ethnic minority prisoners have been carried out without their families' knowledge; at least 190 people have been executed this year, more than in any other country in the world except China; restrictions on speech have intensified; journalists and bloggers continue to be targeted by the regime for daring to write the truth; teachers and other workers are harassed and incarcerated when they seek freedom of association and payment of wages owed; trade union leaders remain imprisoned on questionable charges; politically-active students have been banned from universities; entire university faculties deemed un-Islamic face threat of closure; and, recently, female journalists and artists have been arrested for merely practicing their profession.

Particularly troubling is the deepening persecution of religious minorities. On May 1, the Revolutionary Court in the northern city of Bandar Anzali tried 11 members of the Church of Iran, including Pastor Abdolreza Ali-Haghnejad and Zainab Bahremend, the 62-year-old grandmother of two other defendants, on charges of "acting against national security." This month, Iranian courts ruled that Christian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani must recant his Christian faith or face the death penalty for apostasy. In March, over 200 Gonabadi Sufis were summoned to courts around the country to answer allegations that they were insulting Iranian authorities. In April, eight other Sufis were re-arrested on charges of disrupting public order – charges for which they had been punished with flogging and imprisonment. The Iranian government also continues to arrest and harass members of the Baha'i faith.

As the Iranian and Syrian regimes have expanded their repressive tactics, we have expanded the scope of our efforts to challenge these governments' deplorable human rights violations. We have designated 11 Iranian officials and three government entities for serious human rights abuses in accordance with the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions Accountability and Divestment Act and, as the act requires, we are actively seeking more information on possible targets. Separately, on July 8, the United States and the United Kingdom imposed visa restrictions on officials of the Government of Iran and other individuals who have participated in human rights abuses in Iran. Iranian officials subject to this visa ban include

government ministers, military and law enforcement officers, and judiciary and prison officials.

Responding to the atrocities in Syria, President Obama signed two executive orders. The first, E.O. 13572, signed on April 29, targets those responsible for human rights abuses and the repression of the Syrian people. The second, E.O. 13573, signed on May 18, targets senior officials of the Syrian government because of the ongoing crackdown and refusal to implement political reform. These two authorities were used to impose sanctions against President Asad and senior Syrian officials responsible for human rights abuses. In addition to President Asad, the sanctions so far have designated the Vice President, Prime Minister, ministers of interior and defense, the head of Syrian military intelligence, and director of the political security directorate. Other U.S. sanctions target President Asad's brother and two cousins, the Syrian military and civilian intelligence services, its national security bureau and the air force intelligence, as well as Iran's Revolutionary Guard Qods Force and senior Qods force officers that have assisted the Asad regime in suppressing Syrian civilians.

It is no coincidence both Iran and Syria have responded to their citizens with similar contempt and brutal tactics. As the latter designation shows, we know that the Syrians have employed Iranian help in curbing dissent. This has exposed a strident hypocrisy on the part of the Iranian regime, which has tried unsuccessfully to take credit for democratic movements in Egypt and elsewhere and laud protesters when it suited its strategic interests, but has materially helped the Syrian government crush its own protestors in order to preserve their ally. The Iranian regime's false narrative is further exposed even as the regime continues to smother its own domestic opposition.. Nevertheless, hundreds of brave Iranian citizens continue to engage in the most basic but critical of human rights work, documenting and reporting on abuses, with the hope that one day Iranian government officials will be held accountable for crimes they have committed against their fellow citizens.

In the case of Syria, we have seen the regime play a cruel double game designed to divert attention away from people's demands and justify the regime's monopoly on power. Asad is exploiting fears of sectarianism and factionalism by surreptitiously fomenting violence of an intentionally sectarian nature, while at the same time cautioning Syrians not to rock his carefully guided boat. As a consequence, deadly violence has at times taken a purportedly sectarian shade. This has only left more blood on Asad's hands.

We view these incidents as further evidence that President Assad's government continues to be the real source of instability within Syria. He has promised reforms but delivered no meaningful changes. He talks about dialogue, but continues to engage in violence that proves his rhetoric hollow. Assad has made clear that he is determined to maintain power regardless of the cost. And the human toll is mounting.

Nevertheless, the Syrian people will not be distracted - they have shown they will not cease their demands for dignity and a future free from intimidation and fear, and they are countering the regime's propaganda falsely accusing them of seeking that division and ethnic strife. Assad has made occasional conciliatory gestures, but to date these starts have not been credible, sustained, or made in good faith. The regime's promises of reform have been shown to be false by the continued arrests and shootings of peaceful demonstrators.

The European Union and other nations have joined the United States in enacting sanctions on key regime figures in Iran and Syria to hold their leaders accountable for the violence. We continue to urge more nations to join our call, in bilateral and multilateral settings, to shine a spotlight on these countries' gross violations of human rights. We also urge other countries to press Iran on its abuses in their bilateral diplomacy. An international consensus is forming to mobilize greater diplomatic pressure on these regimes. We successfully prevented both governments from joining the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) after they had announced their candidacies and have appropriately used this forum to draw the world's attention to their offenses. And in the U.N. General Assembly last year, we helped win passage of a Canadian-led resolution condemning Iran's human rights abuses by the largest margin in eight years. At the March session of the HRC, we led a successful effort to establish a Special Rapporteur on Iran, the first country-specific human rights rapporteur created since the Council came into being, and last month, the Council confirmed former Foreign Minister for the Maldives Ahmed Shaheed at that position. This historic action sent an unmistakable signal to Iran's leaders that the world will not stand passive in front of their systematic abuse of their own citizens' human rights. More importantly, the Special Rapporteur serves as a critical voice for those Iranians whose own voice is repressed because of their political, religious, and ethnic affiliations.

In a Special Session in April, the HRC also condemned the ongoing violations by the Syrian authorities. The Council called on Syrian authorities to release prisoners of conscience and those arbitrarily detained, and to end restrictions on Internet access and journalists. It also established an international

investigation led by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, though President Asad refuses to allow the monitors mandated by the Council to enter Syria. In the June HRC session, the United States joined Canada and more than 50 other countries in a forceful joint statement that again condemned violations committed by the Syrian authorities and called for credible, independent, and transparent investigations into these abuses, accountability for those who perpetrated such abuses, and unfettered access to the UN High Commissioner's mission to investigate the many allegations of human rights abuses. The High Commissioner will present a report on the human rights situation in Syria in the September session.

We have been working assiduously with other members on the UN Security Council to obtain a resolution condemning the ongoing atrocities being committed by the Asad regime. We are aware that some key Council members oppose such a resolution, but we are moving to forge consensus and will press for a vote.

Our efforts to support the Iranian and Syrian people as they seek to exercise their rights have been consistent and sustained. Just as we do throughout the region, we work with civil society organizations to support their efforts to defend human rights and to advocate for change. We help them expand political space and hold their government accountable. We provide training and tools to civil society activists in Iran and Syria, and throughout the world, to enable citizens to freely and safely exercise their freedoms of expression, association, and assembly on the Internet and via other communication technologies. In cases like Iran and Syria, where governments have good reason to fear the spotlight on their activities, access to technological tools allows the people to tell their story to the world. Despite both government's ramped up activities to try to suppress information flows, the days are gone when governments could brutalize their people without the world knowing.

As Secretary Clinton has said, "we stand for a single internet where all of humanity has equal access to knowledge and ideas. ... This challenge may be new, but our responsibility to help ensure the free exchange of ideas goes back to the birth of our republic." Our Internet freedom programming is aimed at making sure that voices for peaceful democratic reform across the region can be heard.

Countering such regimes' increasingly active Internet surveillance and censorship efforts requires a diverse portfolio of tools and training. State Department grants will support more advanced counter-censorship technologies, including circumvention tools in Farsi and Arabic, secure mobile communications, and technologies to enable activists to post their own content online and protect against

cyber attacks. We also have trained 5,000 activists worldwide, including many from the Middle East, in cyber-self defense. And we plan to expand these efforts to teach democratic activists, journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders and others how to protect their online privacy and their data – so that they in turn can train others. Given the evolving state of technology, no single tool will overcome the efforts of Internet-repressive regimes, and that is why we have invested in incubating a diverse portfolio of technologies and digital safety training. This way, even if one particular tool is blocked, other tools will still be available. Likewise, we work to prevent all repressive governments from acquiring sensitive technology to repress its citizens.

A strong, representative government can be responsive to popular demands; an autocratic one is threatened by empowered publics. But these crackdowns also indicate a basic lack of understanding that free speech – whether it’s supportive speech or subversive speech – is harder than ever to suppress in the Digital Age. The young people who have taken to the streets across the Arab world this year understand what their governments are suppressing. It’s not just the Internet, it is people – it’s their demands for dignity and a say in the political and economic future of their countries.

The United States will continue to stand with those who struggle to assert their fundamental humanity. It is essential that these brave people know that the international community supports them, just as it is essential that human rights abusers in Damascus and Tehran know that we are watching them. Until such time as they are held accountable by domestic authorities, it is our responsibility to hold them accountable at the international level.

Similarly, we hope that today’s hearing will serve as further evidence that the American people and our government in Washington stand united in our admiration and support for those across the region who have boldly assumed the duty and made the sacrifices to advance their rights. For this opportunity, we wish to thank the Committee again, and welcome your questions.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. We appreciate your testimony, and we will now begin our questioning, and I recognize myself for 5 minutes for that purpose.

As I am sure we can agree the numbers that were mentioned in both your testimonies are astonishing. What is more, just this morning the death count continues to rise. According to news reports, Syrian tanks surrounded a town near Damascus, killing 11 and arresting 300 in one what one human rights activist called an "act of vengeance."

Still even as Israel now stands up and says Assad must go, as it did yesterday, unfortunately we continue to vacillate. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton came close when she said that "from our perspective, he has lost legitimacy." But the very next day President Obama walked back from this position by suggesting that Assad had not in fact lost legitimacy but was losing it in the eyes of his people.

As I read stories like this I found myself asking what I had said in my opening statement, you know, how many more people have to die before we have the courage to stand up and say that Assad is illegitimate and he must go? He must leave.

Additionally, I don't see why we are willing to stand up and call Gaddafi what he is, a ruthless murderer, but we don't do the same for Assad. When asked about this very issue, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said that Libya was a "unique situation." We had a Gaddafi regime that was "moving against its own people in a coordinated military fashion and was about to assault a very large city on the promise that the regime would show that city and its residents no mercy." That was his quote.

Is this not what is happening right now in Syria? President Obama himself said of Syria that "We are not anywhere near the kind of situation that drew all the international support for Libya." Although the situation has intensified since the President said that, our policy doesn't seem to have changed accordingly.

People are still tying and we still have not called for Assad's departure. It is not enough to say that we are not committed to him and then to condemn his actions. It is time for us to say that Assad must go. Why does the administration still refuse to do this?

Also, why did we call Gaddafi illegitimate but not Assad? What makes the two of them different? How are they different than the regime in Tehran for that matter? And I will leave it there at this point.

And I would recognize either gentleman.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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

Mr. POSNER. I would just add to that. You know, I am very focused having worked 30 years in the human rights movement. I know the importance of our working with civil society, with human rights activists, the people that are standing on the street and risking their lives every day. And preparing for the moment when the transition does come, does occur and allowing us to go forward to create, to help support a democratic transition, that is the focus for us.

We are listening to people on the ground. Ambassador Ford 2 weeks ago or 3 weeks ago when he went to Hama was greeted as a hero because we were standing in solidarity with the people on the street. When he went back to his Embassy, our Embassy in Damascus, government supported thugs attacked the Embassy.

That tells you—that gives me a sense that we are doing the right thing and we are going about this in a way that reinforces those who are on the front line. That is what this is about. There is no doubt for the people standing in the streets in many now Syrian cities, that we are on their side.

Mr. CHABOT. Well, actually I don't have time to ask another question at this time. I appreciate your responses, however, I think that many of us do believe that we ought to be very clear that Assad has to go now as we made that pretty clear with Gaddafi.

I wouldn't say that our actions ultimately met that statement sufficiently because he's obviously still there. But we are going to have a second round. My time has expired.

I recognize the gentleman from New York Mr. Ackerman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I thank the chairman.

This shouldn't be that hard. You know, we didn't get involved in World War II because of the Holocaust. We didn't get involved when 1 million Jews were killed or 2 million or 3 million or 4 million or 1 million who weren't Jewish killed or 2 million or 3 million or 4 million or 5 million.

We got involved because the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and shame on us for waiting.

We can't just be sitting here while these people are being slaughtered and maimed, where children are being killed because we think it is better to observe the diplomatic niceties in our approach. Tell that to people whose kids or kids whose families and parents are being killed. It is unfair. It is inhumane. It is unworthy of us as a society.

I can understand we are waiting for the appropriate time, but for other people the time is too late. It is in our every foreign policy interest for this guy to go.

I know what you are waiting for. You are waiting for, just like we waited on all the others, for the guy to be everything but out

the door before we say you should go out the door, to be able to go “whew” and blow him off the edge of the cliff so that there is no risk. He is already really out. Who is going to appreciate that? People appreciate you coming to their aid when they are at their most vulnerable.

We are kind of risk averse here. But you know, this has to be done. You know what the outcome is going to be, and it is not the romantic in me that says in the end democracy is going to win and the streets will win out. It is the mathematician in me that tells me that.

And as somebody, and I think we all are, people who believe in the values that we espouse, and that you have articulated so well here today, so what’s the result of all of that reasoning and thinking and hemorrhaging from our hearts? What are we waiting for? Who does it hurt?

Are you worried about—are we worried about hurting his feelings? We are hedging our bet here just in the odd chance that he is going to be able to hang on so that we can continue to do business with a murderer. Push him. Say it. Do it. He may not leave when you say it, and it is no embarrassment to us if not. The embarrassment is if we don’t say it. Can we say it, question mark?

Mr. POSNER. Congressman, I share your sense of urgency and outrage. I don’t think it is right or fair to say that we are standing still and hedging our bets. If we want to hedge our bets with a government we don’t call them barbaric. We don’t constantly on a daily basis talk about the reprehensible—

Mr. ACKERMAN. And names will never harm me.

Mr. POSNER. Well, there is more than names. This is a—we are extremely focused. I am focused. Jeff is—

Mr. ACKERMAN. What is the down—Yes, I understand but what’s the downside to saying to him get out?

Mr. POSNER. What we are saying is—

Mr. ACKERMAN. Are we going to be embarrassed if he doesn’t listen?

Mr. POSNER. No. We are saying at this moment that we are standing behind the Syrian people and their demand for political change. This is about them. It is not about us.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Send them a Hallmark card.

Mr. POSNER. No, it is not because it is backed by action. And the action is an American Ambassador who takes the risk of going out and standing in the street in Hama.

Mr. ACKERMAN. That was important and courageous.

Mr. POSNER. And appreciated by the people who were standing there. It is our activity, supporting the ability of the opposition to meet, to meet in Turkey, to meet inside the country. It is our effort to try to give them the tools to be ready for the day when change will occur. And it will occur.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I’m saying—

Mr. POSNER. All of those things are part of a strategy and the strategy, not unlike what you are saying, is the expectation, the realization that President Assad has lost—

Mr. ACKERMAN. Why not lay down your cards—

Mr. POSNER [continuing]. His legitimacy.

Mr. ACKERMAN [continuing]. And go through all the rest of it anyway? Tell him to get out and then continue with what you are doing? But let people know where we stand and not be unambiguous as we have been.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired but if either of the gentlemen would like respond they can.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired.

The chair would just note that I would like to say this is one of those rare occasions when the Republican chair and the Democratic ranking member agree but actually we actually agree quite often on this committee and I share the ranking member's frustration here relative to this matter.

And I would at this time recognize the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Poe, for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for—

Mr. CHABOT. Excuse me. Prior to that I—if the gentleman would yield. The gentleman is in the same position as the gentleman from California, Mr. Sherman, a member of the full committee and not a member of this subcommittee so I would ask unanimous consent that he also have the privileges of a member of this subcommittee. Although he went last and since he's last on this side at this time, the gentleman is recognized.

Mr. POE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for allowing me to join this hearing. My questions will be to you, Mr. Feltman. This is the third time you and I have talked. We talked once in November. We talked second in March and now here we are again.

Those previous times, in my opinion, I didn't get a straight answer. I think really you were just trying to kill the 5 minutes and not give me an answer at all. There are still loudspeakers in Camp Ashraf. What has the State Department done, if anything, to remove the loudspeakers that are blaring into Camp Ashraf?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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—

Mr. POE. Has the State Department—just answer the question. Has the State Department done anything in opposition or protesting the loudspeakers blaring into Camp Ashraf? It is either a yes or it is a no.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Well, I'm sorry that that's the litmus test for whether we care about human rights in the Camp Ashraf or not.

Mr. POE. It's either a yes or a no. I will get to the human rights.

Ambassador FELTMAN. I'm not aware. I'm not aware of anything because we are focused on—

Mr. POE. So the State Department hasn't—I will reclaim my time.

Ambassador FELTMAN [continuing]. The larger human rights. We are—

Mr. POE. Thank—I will reclaim my time, Mr. Ambassador. The State Department hasn't done anything about the loudspeakers. Thank you. Finally an answer that I first asked in November.

Since we last talked, the Iraqi Government has invaded Camp Ashraf and murdered 34 people and injured more than 70. My opinion is one of the reasons they use for an excuse is the fact that the State Department continues to list the MEK as a foreign terrorist organization. When is the State Department going to make a decision as to whether to remove them from the list or not?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Congressman, I would like to separate the FTO designation from Camp Ashraf. We have a pending potential crisis, catastrophe in Camp Ashraf.

Mr. POE. Just answer the question that I asked, not—don't answer one that I didn't ask.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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—

Mr. POE. When do you think it will take place was my question?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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, passed to the lawyers of the MEK to make sure they have the information as well.

Mr. POE. The residents of Camp Ashraf don't want to be removed, and I'm sure that you are aware that the full committee of the Foreign Affairs Committee passed my amendment by unanimous voice vote, that the House of Representatives through the Foreign Affairs Committee does not want Camp Ashraf moved somewhere else.

This will pass. It will be legislation. But the State Department, your position is the State Department wants them moved. But of course, Iraq wants them moved and so do the folks in Iran. Is it

still the State Department's position to move the Camp somewhere else in Iraq?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. POE. Wouldn't it be true—would it be correct that if the designation was removed, the Foreign Terrorist Organization designation, against the residents of Camp Ashraf, the MEK, it would be easier for them to disperse and go throughout the world? Many of them are citizens in other countries. Wouldn't that be easier for them to do it?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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—

Mr. POE. Reclaiming my time. Reclaiming my time. When I went and visited with Mr. Maliki and for almost 2 hours with other members of this committee and wanted to go see the residents at Camp Ashraf and get their side of the story, we were, of course, denied that. We didn't want to—he didn't want us to hear the other side, possibly the truth.

He said one reason that the people in Camp Ashraf are treated the way they are treated by Iraq is because the State Department continues to designate them as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. Now, that is what he says. Do you agree with that statement?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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

Mr. POE. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Once again, I didn't get an answer. We will meet again and we will ask the questions again.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired.

The gentleman from New York, Mr. Higgins, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HIGGINS. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. The communication coming from the panel indicates that the civilian population of Syria is comfortable and supportive of the United States' position relative to Assad. Is that an accurate assessment?

Mr. POSNER. You know, realistically, the opposition in Syria is a very multiple—multifaceted group. They don't have one opinion. I think it is overwhelmingly the case, though, that people that are risking their lives, who are out on the streets, recognize that we

are trying to amplify their voices. We are trying to provide protection.

Ambassador Ford is every day talking to relatives, talking to people who are on the receiving end of violence and trying to advocate on their behalf. They understand this litany of things that we have said suggest—don't just suggest. They say very strongly this government has lost legitimacy. We are standing with the people that are in the street.

Mr. HIGGINS. Got it. You know, Assad is a bad guy. He lacks legitimacy. He murders his own people. His father destroyed Hama in 1982, some 10,000 people were killed. Streets were plowed down. It would seem to me that a strong declarative statement by the United States with respect to Assad stepping down would send the appropriate message to the international community and authoritarian regimes throughout the world about what is going to be tolerated and what is not.

Is there not a concern, a public policy concern within the State Department about not taking that decisive step and calling explicitly for his removal?

Mr. POSNER. Congressman, I spend a good part of my day in internal debates and discussions within the State Department about the use of language in public statements. When we say not only that he has lost, President Assad has lost legitimacy, is not indispensable, when we say that he has placed himself and his regime on the wrong side of history, when we call him barbaric, when we say his conduct is reprehensible, in the world in which I live that is about as strong language as I get. And it is the language that says we have absolutely lost faith in this government.

We are moving in a very deliberate way to support the will of the Syrian people who are out on the street. I am very comfortable with the fact that at this moment that the United States Government is doing what it can and should, positioning ourselves to help a democratic transition in Syria. That is the message we are conveying here. And I think it is the message the people of Syria understand full well, and they are appreciative of it.

Mr. POE. All right.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. POE. I will yield back.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. The gentleman yields back. I think the gentleman from Virginia Mr. Connolly was next and is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Posner, I take your point that the fine art of diplomacy sometimes involves the parsing of sentences and the careful perception of precise words or sometimes deliberately ambiguous words.

But surely you can appreciate that there are many audiences when the State Department speaks, and as you have heard from this dais, there are one audience, Members of Congress who hear in that language hedging, unwillingness to call out, you know, violent murderous acts by a government against its own people for what it is, and a clarion call for regime change. How would you respond?

Mr. POSNER. Well, to go back to what I said earlier, I don't think there is any ambiguity about the extent to which we have condemned the violence. We have condemned it in broad strokes, barbaric, reprehensible. And we have condemned it in detail. We have condemned it at the level of the President and the Secretary of State, and we have condemned it throughout our Government. So there is no doubt about the facts and our understanding of those facts.

Mr. CONNOLLY. So it is your position that there is absolute clarity about U.S. policy and U.S. intent with respect to the Assad regime?

Mr. POSNER. I think if you are standing on the streets of Hama there is no doubt that the United States Government has been on the side of the people helping both amplify their voices, protecting them. That is what Ambassador Ford was doing. He was protecting people who were facing down guns and who were likely on that Friday to be shot at. His presence there made a difference.

When the families of victims, families of people who have disappeared, families of people who are being tortured come into the Embassy, they understand that the United States Government is trying to help alleviate their pain and their suffering.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Posner.

Mr. POSNER. That is really what this is about.

Mr. CONNOLLY. No, it isn't. No, it is not. Foreign policy isn't just about an audience in Hama. Foreign policy is also about the domestic audience here that supports or doesn't support our foreign policy. What you have heard from this dais is Members of Congress have trouble understanding what you just said. So it may be clear in Hama. It is not so clear in the halls of Congress, and that is your responsibility as well as ours. That is my point.

You have many audiences. That is an important one and I respect it. But you need to, you, collectively, need to respect this one. Otherwise you are going to erode confidence in what you are trying to do.

And so I would commend to you, you know, parse those sentences and select carefully those words for precision or deliberate ambiguity with this audience in mind as well.

Mr. POSNER. You know, and I appreciate that.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you.

Mr. POSNER. And we appreciate the fact that you are having this hearing. I think it serves the interests that we both share, which is a move for change.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Ambassador Feltman, what is our goal in Syria, understanding that peace and goodwill to mankind is not a foreign policy?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. CONNOLLY. So Mr. Ambassador, therefore, implicitly we should conclude logically we favor a regime change because this regime can't do anything else.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And I have got 34 seconds, but are we concerned that with the best of intentions in calling for that regime change we need to be concerned about what takes its place?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you. My time is up.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired. The gentleman from California, Mr. Rohrabacher is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes, thank you very much. Pardon me for being late. I, as you know, run in and out of different meetings at the same time. And I know that some questions have already been raised, but I would like to be a little more specific on first of all the massacre that took place in Camp Ashraf in April.

What have you done to—I mean you are human rights here. You are the guy at the State Department who is supposed to be concerned about human rights. What have we done to prevent another massacre since then? Whoever?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So what have we done to prevent another massacre?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Security arrangements? What security arrangements?

Ambassador FELTMAN. I mean we have—I think you are aware, Congressman.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. What specifically? What security arrangements are you talking about?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Correct.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Right.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, right, well okay.

Ambassador FELTMAN. relocate them as a preliminary step for the relocation effort.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. Got it, got it, so we are talking. We are talking. We are talking and we haven't reached a decision yet. There was a massacre of 35 people who were intentionally killed by Iraqi troops. This is not an unknown bomber. This is an act of a sovereign government deciding that it will kill unarmed civilians in order to achieve an objective.

We are now working with them or talking with them. We have, what, 50,000 troops still in Iraq?

Ambassador FELTMAN. It is a little lower than that, 40 some now.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. And up until this time, up until the time before the massacre we had made a pledge to the people of Camp Ashraf that we were going to protect them from such things as massacres from the Iraqis. Is that correct?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes. But we have 50,000 troops in Iraq, and if there is—and I would hope that this isn't like the Dutch did down in the Balkans when—well, you know, this really isn't our jurisdiction so we are going to let these guys come in and massacre unarmed people right in front of us.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes, well, okay—

Ambassador FELTMAN [continuing]. We are trying to find a solution now.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay, one of the—look. One of the options, of course, is taking the people of Camp Ashraf to a third country. That is one option that we need to talk to them about. But no third country is going to take them as long as we designate this group as a terrorist organization. And the State Department has been dragging its feet for years on redesignating this group.

We have designated them a terrorist organization in order to curry favor with the Mullah dictatorship in Iran and it has resulted in a massacre of 35 innocent people who were unarmed and the wounding of hundreds of others. At the very least the State Department should be working overnight and tomorrow to issue the fact that they are no longer on the terrorist list because that is the problem.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, are the European governments the only ones that have options of where we might be able to take these people?

Ambassador FELTMAN. No. The FTO designation applies to the United States.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Right.

Ambassador FELTMAN. But for Camp Ashraf it is a number of things, such as they don't—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. It applies for a lot of other countries when the United States designates a group as terrorists, on a terrorist list, and we are asking them to take people into their country who are on a terrorist list. Now, if you want to do your duty in terms of responsible overseeing of a human rights standard, we should start with taking actions like this that would be easy to take that action which would prevent future massacres.

And I am watching and I don't see that for whatever reason it is. It is still this politics of leaving these people on the terrorist list that is keeping them at risk of another major disaster where maybe this time hundreds will be killed rather than just 35.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you. The gentleman from Florida Mr. Deutch is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Feltman, I would like to join you in calling for the immediate release of Robert Levinson. Robert Levinson and his wife Christine are constituents of mine. It has been now more than 4 years since he disappeared in Iran. They are awaiting word. I will ask you here to share whatever information you can with us. If it is more appropriate to share that privately I would ask that you come to my office and provide the most detail possible.

Ambassador FELTMAN. I would prefer coming to your office and talk about Robert Levinson, Congressman Deutch. Thank you.

Mr. DEUTCH. We will arrange that. Secretary Posner, what is the status of the opposition movement in Iran at the moment?

Mr. POSNER. As in many countries where there has been a lack of political space to operate, the status of the opposition is fragmented and diffuse. There are very few opportunities for them to exercise their political muscles. But they are, I would say, increasingly frustrated. Obviously frustrated by a government that is repressive in every way, a government that allows them little space to speak freely, to get out into the streets, to meet privately even to discuss political issues.

Mr. DEUTCH. What are we doing to support them?

Mr. POSNER. Well, we are doing several things. I mean one of the things that I am very involved in, and Congress has been very supportive of this, to build capacity for people using the new tools of technology, the Internet and social media to communicate with each. Again, in a place where you are not allowed to go to the street and where government has security forces at every corner, it is very important for people to be able to communicate.

We have got a very aggressive Internet freedom program that includes wide translation of materials into Farsi, training of activists both on how to use the technology, but also how to protect themselves from a government that spends a lot of time and money trying to disrupt their ability to communicate and makes it dangerous.

We are working also constantly to try to allow Iranian groups to communicate in and out of the country, to meet, to gather, to begin to think about what is Iran going to look like after this nightmare ends? And we are very, very focused.

Mr. DEUTCH. At the same time, I think there is more that we could do to crack down on the human rights abusers. Part of the new legislation, around the legislation, is bipartisan legislation that I had introduced that will do just that. I look forward to working with you on that.

I want to switch back to Syria for a second. Secretary Feltman, there were some reports, published reports earlier in the month that Syrian mission personnel under the Syrian Ambassador were conducting video and photographic surveillance of people participating in peaceful demonstrations in the United States. They were effectively, according to these reports, watching. They were effectively spying on American citizens.

The Ambassador was called into the State Department by one of your colleagues, and I have been unable to determine what happened as a result. And what the status of the State Department's investigation of these very serious charges is?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

And he called him in because of the seriousness of these charges and made it clear that this is not behavior, these allegations demonstrate behavior that is not behooving of diplomatic status here. It was to the charge, by the way—

Mr. DEUTCH. Yes, excuse me.

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

Mr. DEUTCH. Excuse me 1 second. Excuse me for 1 second. It is—it goes well beyond—

Ambassador FELTMAN. It's not—

Mr. DEUTCH [continuing]. This is not becoming of diplomatic behavior.

Ambassador FELTMAN. No, it is not consistent with his diplomatic mission is for sure. There is another—

Mr. DEUTCH. But the accusation is that they have been spying on American citizens.

Ambassador FELTMAN. There is another investigation that is under way that we would have to talk about in a different setting.

Mr. DEUTCH. Okay, well, and I look forward to that. But I'm simply asking—

Ambassador FELTMAN. Well, it is—

Mr. DEUTCH [continuing]. When the Ambassador was called in—

Ambassador FELTMAN. It was the charge d'affaires. The Ambassador wasn't there.

Mr. DEUTCH. Well, by all reports including the report coming from the State Department, it was the Ambassador who was called in.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Perhaps you are right, Congressman Deutch. I believe it was the charge d'affaires, though.

Mr. DEUTCH. If I—Mr. Chairman—

Ambassador FELTMAN. The Ambassador has been—the Ambassador was on—was out of the country at the time I believe.

Mr. DEUTCH. So the—I am going to—I am going to claim a few extra seconds to continue.

Ambassador FELTMAN. No.

Mr. CHABOT. Yes, go ahead. Without objection, the gentleman is recognized for 1 additional minute. Thank you.

Mr. DEUTCH. I appreciate that, Mr. Chairman, thank you. The statement that came out of the State Department said that the Assistant Secretary for Diplomatic Security Eric Boswell called Syrian Ambassador Imad Moustapha into the State Department on Wednesday, July 6th to express a number of our concerns with reported actions of certain Syrian Embassy staff in the U.S.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Yes.

Mr. DEUTCH. Are you—you are telling me that that—

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. DEUTCH. And we can speak further—and we can speak further about the investigation. I am asking if you are not at liberty to discuss the status of that investigation here we can do that in my office. What I am asking about is since there were reports, including a statement from the State Department publicizing this meeting that took place, I am simply asking what transpired in that meeting since we have not seen any reports of that that have come out since? And can you confirm the Ambassador was at that meeting or not?

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired, but if you can answer the question go ahead.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired. We are going to go through a second round here and I recognize myself for 5 minutes.

I would like to first talk about Iran. What actually is our policy on Iran at the moment? Are we trying to negotiate a deal with the regime? Are we trying to undermine it or both? If we are trying to negotiate a deal with it, at what point would the administration conclude that this regime is beyond salvation? And I would ask your answer to that. Are we at that point yet that it is beyond salvation?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. CHABOT. No, let me come at it a little different way. Again, Iran, in the aftermath of the June 2009 election, protestors in Iran coalesced into a broad-based pro-democracy opposition. The administration, however, offered no significant, tangible or moral support really at the time. And current support I would argue is half-hearted at best.

Indeed, some analysts believe that the administration has written off the Iranian opposition, believing that it is dead. Has the administration indeed determined that the Iranian opposition movement is dead? And what is the administration actually doing be-

yond increasing programming and social media activity to assist the Iranian opposition movement?

Are we providing technical, monetary or other such tangible assistance similar to what we did with Solidarity in Poland? And if not, why not? And what needs to happen before the administration would consider throwing meaningful support, and I mean meaningful support, behind the Iranian opposition movement? And I would yield.

Mr. POSNER. Let me answer that. I think there are three aspects to what we are doing. One, we are providing support, both through the new social media but also support to civil society activists. We don't, you know, put lists on the rooftop, but we are certainly mindful of the variety of democrats, democratic forces in Iran. And we are supporting them in a range of ways.

Secondly, we are extremely outspoken, and this includes the President and the Secretary of State. I think we have made more public statements about Iran than any other country. And those statements continue including with this hearing, and again, we appreciate that.

The third aspect which we haven't talked about is that we have really ramped up our efforts not only to impose sanctions, which we have done against key leaders, but against—but also to bring others along. And we are starting to succeed at that.

We led an effort at the U.N. Human Rights Council to have a special expert, a rapporteur appointed several months ago. The United States is taking a lead in a range of diplomatic fora and we will continue to do so to isolate Iran and to make clear that not only we but our allies need to be part of this effort.

So it is a combination of support for the activists, public commentary and work at the United Nations.

Mr. CHABOT. Okay. I have only got 1 more minute, so let me just—one other issue relative to Iran, the three American hikers who were detained by the Iranian Government back on July 31, 2009, nearly 2 years ago to the day. That is longer than the 444 days of the original Iranian hostage crisis.

They are being held on trumped up espionage charges and are awaiting trial before what will, without a doubt, be a kangaroo court. What is the administration doing to secure their release? What consequences will the Iranian regime face should it not release them? And what consequences has the Iranian regime faced to date as a result of this outrageous behavior? And I will yield.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. CHABOT. Okay. I thank you, and my time has expired. I recognize the ranking member Mr. Ackerman for 5 minutes.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have tried to get you to say regime change, something that you would not be unhappy with from the tone of your explicit remarks. And the administration doesn't want to get too far forward in its skis, and despite the fact that we have tried everything short of waterboarding and we may want to try that later.

Mr. CHABOT. We agree once again.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Come to our office.

Mr. CHABOT. That was just Tweeted, Mr. Ackerman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I will move off of that, but getting it done, you don't have to say the words I supposed to get it done. In my opening statement I referenced a list of things that I thought we should be doing now that would more than ratchet up the pressure. It would be hopefully to deal a more crushing blow to the regime, encouraging its abdication.

What is wrong with those suggestions and why haven't we done that? I know we have had some sanctions on some individuals from within the Syrian leadership, but why aren't we ending all bilateral trade? Why aren't we barring all the Syrian banks from our U.S. financial system? And why aren't we freezing the assets of Syria, all of the assets of Syria? And why aren't we imposing a travel ban on all of their government officials?

You can do them one at a time if you like. And wouldn't that be helpful in getting the thing done without us saying the unthinkable?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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

Mr. ACKERMAN. Let's go straight to oil imports.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Okay. Good question. We had a long discussion today

Mr. ACKERMAN. And financial institutions.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. ACKERMAN. When can we—when can we see a recommendation to freeze all the assets? Or would you prefer that we send that over to you?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. ACKERMAN. These are—these are tools that you have. I mean you don't have to go "Mother may I?"

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Why—

Ambassador FELTMAN. There are a lot of—

Mr. ACKERMAN. Let's get precise.

Ambassador FELTMAN. We have—

Mr. ACKERMAN. Why don't we freeze all of the Syrian assets in the United States tomorrow and all bilateral trade with possibly the humanitarian stuff exempted? And why don't we ban all travel?

Ambassador FELTMAN. And we are looking at a wide variety of tools—

Mr. ACKERMAN. How long are we going to look?

Ambassador FELTMAN [continuing]. 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—

Mr. ACKERMAN. Yes, but it will have—it will have some impact.

Ambassador FELTMAN [continuing]. It won't make that much of a difference.

Mr. ACKERMAN [continuing]. If we do it, whether we do it together with them or not. And if we do it maybe they will do it. Why not start?

Ambassador FELTMAN. Well, I think we have started. And the fact that we have designated 27 individuals and entities since this all started—

Mr. ACKERMAN. Are you going to freeze all the Syrian assets in the United States any time soon?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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—

Mr. ACKERMAN. You are viewing this as a peep show. You are looking at this. You are looking at that, and people are dying.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Yes, I guess I would just respectfully disagree with the fact that we are sounding inactive.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I am not saying you are inactive. I am saying you are not as effective as you should be, or could be, or have to

be, or are morally obligated to be. We should be doing—if you don't want to say the magic words I understand that. I really don't, but I will say that I understand that. But I don't understand why you are not using all the tools at your disposal besides looking at them.

Mr. CHABOT. And the gentleman's time has expired, but I don't know if the gentleman want to answer the question or—

Mr. POSNER. You know, Congressman, I listened carefully to your list and we will go back and look at each of the things you raise. And I will make a commitment that we are going have the conversation about each of them and see if—what more we can do. As Jeff said, as Assistant Secretary Feltman said, you know, virtually every senior Syrian official has now subject to sanctions and so you are suggesting there are other things we can do. We will look at them and see if there are ways to ratchet it up.

Mr. CHABOT. The time has expired. The gentleman from California Mr. Rohrabacher is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, I would just like to note that I am as frustrated by this interview as Mr. Ackerman. Let me just—I am just hearing these words, "We are looking and we are talking." I just hear that repeated over and over again. "We are looking and we are talking."

And let me note there is a difference between being proactive and being reactive, and especially if reactive means that you are looking and talking that doesn't come up with of the kind of movement in the direction that I believe will make this a peaceful and free world.

One thing, one note about our last discussion a few moments ago, let me just state for the record that the representatives of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees to the United States, Vincent Cochetel was in my office 2 weeks ago and specifically told me that the terrorist designation by the United States of the people of Camp Ashraf was the major stumbling block in getting these people relocated.

And so let me—that's on the record for you now and you can try to go around it each way. You are sitting on a solution. Now, I take it that neither one of you gentlemen have made the decision, but whoever has made the decision that we are not going to take them off the terrorist list and probably, as I say, due to whoever that person is wanting to curry some kind of favor with the mullah dictatorship, is playing with the lives of unarmed people who have already gone through a massacre.

And I hope you go back to the State Department and just let them know if there is another massacre it is you guys who are responsible for the death of these unarmed people because we are not—something as easy as taking them off of the—I mean it is easier to take them off the terrorist list than it is to freeze all the assets of Syrians in the United States for Pete's sakes.

This is something you can do and you are not doing it.

Unknown. Would the gentleman yield?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Posner, are you—do you believe in a moral equivalency between the United States and, let's say, Communist China?

Mr. POSNER. My view is, and I am quite involved in a set of conversations with the Chinese authorities about prison conditions,

about recent arrests that have happened since the beginning of the year, about restrictions on religious freedom, about a whole range of problems relating to treatment of workers.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Right. I found that during the Cold War that when we were discussing the very things you are talking about—

Mr. POSNER. Yes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER [continuing]. That it undermined our progress when we tried to find something that we could hold up as an example of where we are actually just as bad over in this area. And I have a quote from you in a briefing that says that you have brought up the Arizona immigration law early and often. You said it was brought up early and often with the Chinese and that there was a troubling trend in our society that it was an indication of discrimination and potential discrimination.

Do you—by the way, do the Chinese just permit to come into their society illegally and don't kick them out?

Mr. POSNER. Let me respond to that. That was a year ago when we—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes.

Mr. POSNER [continuing]. Did that bilateral discussion on human rights. The issue of Arizona was raised not on the merits. It was raised to say by a range of our Government officials, including a Supreme Court judge, that when we have a controversial issue like immigration, we debate it openly. People file lawsuits. Lawyers aren't disbarred for that.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, you designated it as a troubling trend of our society and it deals with issues of discrimination and potential discrimination. You think that trying to maintain border controls and if we don't preventing people from pouring into our country is a violation of their human rights?

Mr. POSNER. No, it is a controversial issue but it is one that I am very proud of the fact that we debate openly. Newspapers report on it. Editorial writers speak their mind, and people don't go to jail for that. And that we were making the contrast with what happens in China where dissidents, people who criticize the government, are punished for their activities.

That was the point of that discussion. We never got into the details or the merits of our internal debate about that.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, it wasn't one discussion. Apparently you suggested that you had brought it up "early and often," so we are not talking about one discussion.

Mr. POSNER. No. It was raised by several people. We did not have a substantive discussion of that subject. I am a believe, Congressman, that the United States is and has always been a leader in the field of human rights.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. that is correct.

Mr. POSNER. We believe in universal human rights. We helped to create the framework at the United Nations of the Universal Declaration. We lead by example.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Right.

Mr. POSNER. And so I am proud to represent this county. I am proud to be part of a government that takes these things seriously.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. But that does not include—

Mr. POSNER. And I will continue to do that.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. But you weren't putting—

Mr. CHABOT. And the gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I would ask for 1 additional minute?

Mr. CHABOT. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. In that and by the way, obviously I agree with that statement and obviously that is something we all agree on, but are you putting the right to go into another country illegally and reside there and receive all the benefits of the citizens of that country, is that a human right?

Mr. POSNER. No, every country has the obligation and the commitment to enforce its borders. How we treat people, how a country treats immigrants is a subject that we could have a whole hearing on. But I have no doubt that there is an obligation of every country to have border control.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes, yeah, we are not talking about immigrants now. We are talking about illegal immigrants.

Mr. POSNER. I understand.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. That is a big difference. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Would the gentleman yield?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Certainly. I have 20 seconds—15.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Could we extend that to another minute?

Mr. CHABOT. Well, the gentleman—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I request another 1 minute.

Mr. CHABOT [continuing]. Receives another minute and he yields to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I certainly do.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you. I wasn't sure which you were referring to of illegal immigrants in a country. Was that the Mexicans in Arizona or the Iranians in Iraq?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I would suggest that in both cases you have a situation, and I recognize there is no disagreement that I have with these gentlemen that Iraq has a right to control their territory with people in it. They do not have a right to shoot people down and we do—are not shooting people down. And—

Mr. ACKERMAN. Amen.

Mr. ROHRABACHER [continuing]. We do not prevent—designate those people in our country with a specific designation that permits them—prevents them from going home.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Let me try to—let me try to figure out our position here. The Mujahidin I believe was declared—was listed I think under the Clinton administration at the printed reports say under the suggestion of the Iranians at the time who we were trying to move into whatever position. The designation was continued

Mr. CHABOT. Without objection, the gentleman is granted another minute if he—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, he—

Mr. CHABOT. You can object.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I was going to say this will be the—the chair would tend to not give an additional minute, but you have got an additional minute.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you. The question is if they were delisted on the—during the Obama administration, which I hear you asking

for, if they were delisted from the terrorist list that would present the opportunity of absorbing them in other countries.

Mr. ROHRABACHER [continuing]. That would—that would facilitate—

Mr. ACKERMAN [continuing]. Including our—

Mr. ROHRABACHER [continuing]. That would facilitate them—

Mr. ACKERMAN. Would the gentleman—

Mr. ROHRABACHER [continuing]. With a broader range of places to go, yes.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Would the gentleman be willing to establish a quota for a reasonable number to come to the United States?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes. Yes. Yes, I think that we have—that we have in our history taken in people who are running from tyranny and escaping injustice and that is different than having a mass migration into our society

Mr. ACKERMAN. Let me—let me—

Mr. ROHRABACHER [continuing]. For people who are coming here for economic reasons.

Mr. ACKERMAN. The Secretaries, would these people be considered refugees because they could not go back to Iran because Iran was the one who considers them terrorists?

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's has expired. If you can wrap it up in 10 seconds that is fine. The gentleman from Nebraska is waiting so you want to say something in 10 seconds?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. CHABOT. And the gentleman's time has expired. The gentleman from Nebraska, Mr. Fortenberry, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Mr. Ambassador, Mr. Secretary, thank you for coming today. I am sorry I didn't have the benefit of your earlier testimony. Let us go back to the Syria question. Is there hesitancy on the part of the administration to further pressure Syria? Are you out of options? The U.N. Security Council you have proposed a condemnation there, but you have run into obstacles.

Are you using leverage on those, particularly the Russians and the Chinese to overcome those obstacles? That is my first question if we can take a minute on that I will move to some others.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. It was a great privilege to be invited. Thank you for welcoming me, yes.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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 its 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.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. How deep is his trouble?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Let us turn—thank you. Let us turn quickly to Iran. Could you assess the green movement's chances?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Well, if I could inject that, something right there, it is clear that the Iranian people have been throughout their history very attentive to the concept of justice. And if we can ask for a more moderate form of government that actually does justice for its people I think that is in the interest of global stability and that may be the best outcome we can hope for.

But at the same time is this in any way related to the conflict or the potential conflict between the Supreme Leader and Ahmadinejad that has arisen, at least in press reports, the internal pressures, the internal dynamics of that?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Is it related to the internal pressures from the Green Movement and new political space potentially developing or unrelated?

Ambassador FELTMAN. You know, there could be connections but it is largely related to power between the—

Mr. FORTENBERRY. All right.

Ambassador FELTMAN [continuing]. Senior guys.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Thank you.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired, and the final questioner probably unless somebody else shows up, is the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Manzullo.

Mr. MANZULLO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was in a financial services hearing and was not able to come in order to listen to your testimony. I would like to ask you a question that doesn't deal with Syria or Iran but it is a vital part of Mid East and just get your thoughts.

Saudi Arabia and UAE sent troops into Bahrain to buttress the Sunni king, and reports of what is going on in Bahrain haven't really reached us, but there is a very serious issue as to the stability of Bahrain. And of course that is where the Navy is, the U.S. 5th Fleet is anchored.

And I would just like your dialogue on where you think we are going to go on Bahrain? And I know it is off the topic, but I know that both of you are respected in the fields of the entire Middle East.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. MANZULLO. Are you satisfied with any progress that you may be observing as a result of that?

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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—

Mr. MANZULLO. Let me—let me interrupt you because I would like to get Secretary Posner's take.

Ambassador FELTMAN. Yes.

Mr. MANZULLO. Thank you.

Mr. POSNER. Thank you. I share Jeff's assessment. I do—I am concerned about continued detentions, a number, perhaps several hundred people are still detained without charge. We continue to press on that. I am concerned about the dismissals, but as Secretary Feltman said, they have begun to reintegrate those people back to their jobs.

I think we are at a critical place right now and again, in contrast to the countries we have been talking about, there is a strong relationship with Bahrain. We do have a very open dialogue, and I think it is important for us both to keep re-emphasizing the

strength of the partnership and at the same time have an honest discussion about the need for general reconciliation and for moving forward in a way that does really allow all segments of that society to participate in the political life of that country.

So this is a critical moment and I am glad that you are paying attention to it.

Mr. MANZULLO. Mr. Chairman, if I could have just another minute?

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman, without objection, is recognized for an additional minute.

Mr. MANZULLO. I don't recall the response, if any, that the U.S. Government gave when Saudi Arabia and UAE sent troops in.

Ambassador FELTMAN. 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.

Mr. CHABOT. Okay. the gentleman's time has expired. We want to thank the panelists this afternoon for answering our questions, sometimes to our satisfaction and sometimes not, but that is not that unusual in this committee and many committees around this place.

But obviously very important issues. Thank you for dealing with them. And all members will have 5 days to submit reports for the record, and if there is no further business to come before the committee, we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:03 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X



MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia
Steve Chabot (R-OH), Chairman

July 22, 2011

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building **(and available live, via the WEBCAST link on the Committee website at <http://www.hcfa.house.gov>)**:

DATE: Wednesday, July 27, 2011
TIME: 2:00 p.m.
SUBJECT: Axis of Abuse: U.S. Human Rights Policy toward Iran and Syria, Part 1
WITNESSES: **Panel I**

The Honorable Jeffrey D. Feltman
Assistant Secretary of State
Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
U.S. Department of State

The Honorable Michael H. Posner
Assistant Secretary of State
Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
U.S. Department of State

By Direction of the Chairman

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COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Middle East and South Asia HEARING

Day Wednesday Date July 27, 2011 Room 2172

Starting Time 2:00 PM Ending Time 4:10 PM

Recesses (to) (to) (to) (to) (to) (to)

Presiding Member(s)

Mr. Chabot

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session

Electronically Recorded (taped)

Executive (closed) Session

Stenographic Record

Televised

TITLE OF HEARING:

Axis of Abuse: U.S. Human Rights Policy toward Iran and Syria

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chabot, Rohrabacher, Fortenberry, Manzullo, Ackerman, Higgins, Connolly, Murphy, Deutch

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)

Poe, Sherman

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes No
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED 4:10 PM


Subcommittee Staff Director

