AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

AXIS OF ABUSE: U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY TOWARD IRAN AND SYRIA, PART 2

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

SEPTEMBER 22, 2011

Serial No. 112–73

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs

Available via the World Wide Web: http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

68–447PDF WASHINGTON : 2011

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512–1800; DC area (202) 512–1800
Fax: (202) 512–2104 Mail: Stop IDCC, Washington, DC 20402–0001

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, Florida, *Chairman*

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey
DAN BURTON, Indiana
ELTON GALLEGLY, California
DANA ROHRABACHER, California
DONALD A. MANZULLO, Illinois
EDWARD R. ROYCE, California
STEVE CHABOT, Ohio
RON PAUL, Texas
MIKE PENCE, Indiana
JOE WILSON, South Carolina
CONNIE MACK, Florida
JEFF FORTENBERRY, Nebraska
MICHAEL T. McCAUL, Texas
TED POE, Texas
GUS M. BILIRAKIS, Florida
JEAN SCHMIDT, Ohio
BILL JOHNSON, Ohio
DAVID RIVERA, Florida
MIKE KELLY, Pennsylvania
TIM GRIFFIN, Arkansas
TOM MARINO, Pennsylvania
JEFF DUNCAN, South Carolina
ANN MARIE BUERKLE, New York
RENEE ELLMERS, North Carolina
VACANT

HOWARD L. BERMAN, California
GARY L. ACKERMAN, New York
ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA, American Samoa
DONALD M. PAYNE, New Jersey
BRAD SHERMAN, California
ELIOT L. ENGEL, New York
GREGORY W. MEEKS, New York
RUSS CARNAHAN, Missouri
ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia
THEODORE E. DEUTCH, Florida
DENNIS CARDOZA, California
BEN CHANDLER, Kentucky
BRIAN HIGGINS, New York
ALLYSON SCHWARTZ, Pennsylvania
CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY, Connecticut
FREDERICA WILSON, Florida
KAREN BASS, California
WILLIAM KEATING, Massachusetts
DAVID CICILLINE, Rhode Island

YLEEM D.S. POBLETE, *Staff Director*
RICHARD J. KESSLER, *Democratic Staff Director*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

STEVE CHABOT, Ohio, *Chairman*

MIKE PENCE, Indiana
JOE WILSON, South Carolina
JEFF FORTENBERRY, Nebraska
ANN MARIE BUERKLE, New York
RENEE ELLMERS, North Carolina
DANA ROHRABACHER, California
DONALD A. MANZULLO, Illinois
CONNIE MACK, Florida
MICHAEL T. McCAUL, Texas
GUS M. BILIRAKIS, Florida
TOM MARINO, Pennsylvania

GARY L. ACKERMAN, New York
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia
THEODORE E. DEUTCH, Florida
DENNIS CARDOZA, California
BEN CHANDLER, Kentucky
BRIAN HIGGINS, New York
ALLYSON SCHWARTZ, Pennsylvania
CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY, Connecticut
WILLIAM KEATING, Massachusetts

CONTENTS

Page

WITNESSES

Mr. Michael Singh, managing director, Washington Institute for Near East Policy 6
Mr. Mehdi Khalaji, senior fellow, Washington Institute for Near East Policy 17
Mr. Alireza Nader, international policy analyst, RAND Corporation 25
Mr. Tony Badran, research fellow, Foundation for the Defense of Democracies 32
Jon B. Alterman, Ph.D., director and senior fellow of the Middle East Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies 39

LETTERS, STATEMENTS, ETC., SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING

Mr. Michael Singh: Prepared statement 9
Mr. Mehdi Khalaji: Prepared statement 19
Mr. Alireza Nader: Prepared statement 27
Mr. Tony Badran: Prepared statement 34
Jon B. Alterman, Ph.D.: Prepared statement 41

APPENDIX

Hearing notice 56
Hearing minutes 57

AXIS OF ABUSE: U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY TOWARD IRAN AND SYRIA, PART 2

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2011

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:05 p.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Steve Chabot (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. CHABOT. The committee will come to order. I want to thank everyone for being here this afternoon. I apologize for being a couple minutes late. We had a big conference over there. I left early to get here. And I want to thank Mr. Ackerman for being here so early. Thank you.

I want to welcome my colleagues to this hearing of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, as well as our witnesses here and those in the audience. As our witnesses noted in their written statements, the human rights abuses being perpetrated at the hands of regimes in Tehran and Damascus are as horrifying as they are widespread.

In the aftermath of the stolen June 2009 so-called election in Tehran, the world watched as the Iranian regime beat, tortured, and raped and murdered its way through the protest that followed. Just over 6 months ago Syria, the Iranian regime's closest ally in the region, joined Tehran in its ruthless repression of prodemocracy protests.

As protests intensified, the Assad regime initiated a brutal crackdown that continues even as we speak. It is now estimated that over 2,700 Syrians have been killed and reports coming out of Syria speak of unconscionably heinous human rights abuses.

Today's hearing, however, was called to examine U.S. policy. Two months ago this subcommittee had the privilege of hearing Assistant Secretaries Feltman and Posner discuss the Obama administration's human rights policies toward Iran and Syria. Since our last meeting, the Obama administration has taken a number of steps for which they deserve credit, especially on Syria.

Although it took far too much time and far too many dead bodies, the administration has finally come out and called for Bashar al-Asasad's departure from power. It also implemented sanctions against various high-ranking Syrian regime authorities, many of which have been mirrored by our allies abroad.

Unfortunately, despite these recent developments, my concerns about our policy remains. This administration, the Obama administration human rights policies toward Iran and Syria have been, in my opinion, 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. Why, for example, have we sanctioned the leadership in Damascus and not the leadership in Tehran?

When the administration does take action, it is usually in the form of a strong statement such as President Obama's statement at the State Department in May. Yesterday at the General Assembly, for example, the President noted that we have, "sanctioned those who trample on human rights abroad."

But we haven't. At least not thoroughly enough. Indeed my concern is not as much with what the administration is doing as it is with what the administration is not doing. The result is a growing disconnect between our words and our actions.

As I am sure our witnesses will discuss, there are many steps which we should be taking which we are not, individuals we should be sanctioning, opposition groups we should be standing with, and regimes we should be condemning at every possible opportunity. That the administration continues to avoid calling for a transition to a democratic government in Iran 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 will, 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 the regime in Tehran, puts it in an untenable position. And from the outside it appears to be hedging rather than leading. And although the administration may think that to do so puts itself in an 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 regimes like the one in Tehran. Words, like many things, have a currency, and that currency is action. To highlight human rights abuses and then sanction only 11 individuals and 3 entities is unacceptable. To vacillate between condemning the Iranian regime and then later offering it a lifeline pits us against the people of those countries.

I fear, however, these missteps reflect a deeper problem: That the administration lacks any overarching strategy toward the region. The administration is fond of saying that although its foreign policy is guided by core principles such as the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights, each country is different and, as such, requires a tailored approach. Although it is certainly true that no two countries have the identical set of circumstances, this argument must not be an excuse for inaction or lack of strategic vision.

Until very recently, the Obama administration's policy toward Iran and Syria was characterized chiefly by its engagement with the ruling regimes. Although I did not agree with this policy at the

time, it is all the more wrong today. The Obama administration must realize that the U.S. can no longer do business with either of these regimes, they are both beyond salvation.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Chabot follows:]

******** INSERT 1-1 ********

Mr. CHABOT. At this time I would like to recognize the distinguished gentleman, the ranking member from New York, my colleague and friend Mr. Ackerman, for 5 minutes.

Mr. ACKERMAN. I thank the chairman and appreciate his remarks.

I would like to thank him for scheduling this second hearing on the subject of human rights in Syria and Iran.

While much of the world's attention is focused on the Palestinian's foolish and dangerous gambit to find a shortcut to statehood at the United Nations, the violence in Syria and the ongoing oppression in Iran, as well as that country's illegitimate nuclear ambitions which must be stopped, continue unabated and thrive in the absence of focused international attention.

As a global power and guarantor of security in the Middle East, the United States can't afford to take timeouts on critical issues such as these. The tyrants, torturers, and theocrats would all prefer we did. But our interest and responsibilities require us to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time, so they say.

Our interests in the Middle East are varied, but all of them are improved by the weakening of the regimes in Tehran and Damascus, and all would be significantly aided by the collapse of the axis between Syria and Iran. Whether it is aiding Israel's search for peace and security, or protecting Lebanon's sovereignty, or preventing Iranian hegemony, or undercutting Hezbollah and Hamas, or nurturing Iraq's development, or sustaining our partnership with Turkey, or just promoting the spread of democracy and human rights, every loss for these regimes is a gain for us and innocent people as well throughout the region.

The strategic partnership between these two criminal regimes has produced instability, terror, and violence in Lebanon, Israel, and Iraq, as well as frontally challenging the nuclear nonproliferation regime.

These two disgraceful, blood-soaked regimes must, and I believe they will, end up on history's trash heap with other discarded and disgraced models of government based on coercion, violence, and brutality. Iran's Ayatollahs will not rule Iran forever, and Bashar al-Asssad's days in Syria are likewise numbered. The collapse and failure of these regimes, when it occurs, will not be the product of our efforts or our intervention, but we will surely welcome these developments when they occur.

The jails or nooses that will hold the remains of Iran's misanthropic theocrats or the Assad mafia will be in the hands of free Iranians and Syrians, and we will celebrate from afar their liberation from the darkness of tyranny.

The question for us today is twofold: First, to consider what options are available for us to aid the people of Syria and Iran in their struggle to free themselves from the insidious parasites that have seized control of their government; and second, to think about the strategic implications of the Arab Spring on these two countries

and their so-called "axis of resistance," which has caused so much destruction in the region.

When it comes to providing direct aid to the people of Syria and Iran, I am leery about our prospects of doing too much. A great deal of our contribution to the freedom of these nations will come in the form of stringent economic and political sanctions to choke the life out of these oppressive regimes and prevent their efforts to acquire or proliferate weapons of mass destruction.

As much assistance as we can provide we should make available. We should provide technical assistance to undermine government control and surveillance of cyberspace. We should use the influence of the United States to name and shame and punish companies that break or backfill sanctions, or that provide critical enabling technologies or consulting services to the Syrian and Iranian mechanisms of oppression. We should help facilitate efforts by Iranians, Syrians, to organize themselves and encourage cooperation between different groups with the same objective of freedom. We must continue to advocate universal human rights and rule of law as essential underpinnings for true democracy.

But as essential as speaking for what we support, we must also denounce these regimes for their repression at home and their instigation of violence and terrorism abroad. Constantly pointing out that these regimes are devoid of legitimacy, that their leaders are murderers and torturers of innocents is not an expression of our opinion, it is a statement of fact. Ayatollah Khomeini is not a cleric, he is a butcher. Bashar al-Assad is not a political leader, he is a mob boss.

The motives of protesters in Syria and their predecessors in Iran are fundamentally the same as those of people everywhere; they want democracy, freedom, dignity, jobs, and respect for their human civil and political rights.

These things, we Americans know, are not gifts from governments to the people, but they are the very rationale for people to institute governments in the first place. These ideas which empowered our own Revolution are now transforming the Middle East, and we should have no compunctions about speeding the work in Syria and Iran.

I thank the chairman for the time, and the witnesses who I look forward to reviewing their testimony. And I apologize, I am going to be shuffling back and forth between two hearings at this time.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. We appreciate your opening statement, Mr. Ackerman. And let me mention that my colleagues are in a meeting now in the Capitol Building, going over the fact that our keeping the government funded for the next 6 or 7 weeks went down in flames yesterday. And what do we do, where do we go from here? And that was sort of a problem. So that is where they are. We will probably have members trickle in.

We also will have votes on the floor in the very near future as well. Rather than keep everyone waiting, we thought we would go ahead and move and then the members will be able to hear your testimony and read your statements as well at their own leisure.

So without further ado, I would like to go ahead and introduce our distinguished panel here this afternoon. If I mispronounce any names, please accept apologies in advance.

We first have Mr. Michael Singh, who is the managing director of the Washington Institute and a former senior director for Middle East Affairs at the National Security Council. He served in the NSC for 3 years as senior director for Middle East Affairs, and as director for Iran and for Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and North Africa. Previously Mr. Singh served as special assistant to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell, and was staff assistant to then-Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer at the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv. A member of the Harvard International Review's board of advisors, Mr. Singh has written extensively on Iran, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and U.S. National Security Strategy and Management. Mr. Singh holds an M.B.A. from Harvard University and earned his B.A. at Princeton University. We welcome you here this afternoon.

Mr. Mehdi Khalaji is a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, focusing on the politics of Iran and Shiite groups in the Middle East. Prior to his work at the Washington Institute, he was a political analyst on Iranian affairs for BBC-Persian, and later became a broadcaster for the Prague-based radio Farda. Mr. Khalaji is the author of five books. His most recent book, "The New Order of the Clerical Establishment in Iran," written in Farsi, was published in 2010, and we hope it is a big seller.

And our next witness is Alireza Nader who is an international policy analyst at the Rand Corporation and the author of "The Next Supreme Leader Succession in the Islamic Republic of Iran 2011." His research has focused on Iran's political dynamics, elite decision making, and Iranian foreign policy. His commentaries and articles have appeared in a variety of publications and he is widely cited by the U.S. and international media. Prior to joining RAND, Nader served as a research analyst at the Center for Naval Analysis. He is a native speaker of Farsi, and we welcome you here this afternoon as well.

Next is Tony Badran who a research fellow at the—you know I am going to butcher your name, then, if I got all of these right—at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) in Washington, DC. He focuses on Lebanon, Syria, and Hezbollah. His research includes U.S. policy toward Lebanon and Syria and Syrian foreign policy. Mr. Badran's other research has dealt with Syria's use of information warfare as well as with the Syrian opposition movement. Mr. Badran also specializes in Lebanese affairs and Islamic groups in the Levant. Mr. Badran appears regularly in the media both in the U.S. and abroad. Mr. Badran is currently completing his doctorate at American University. He is fluent in English, French, Arabic, and Greek and has working knowledge of German and Hebrew. Thank you so much for being here this afternoon.

Last but not least, we have Jon B. Alterman, who is the director and senior fellow of the Middle East program at CSIS. Prior to joining CSIS, he served as a member of the policy planning staff at the Department of State and as a special assistant to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. He is member of the Chief of Naval Operations executive panel and served as an expert advisor to the Iraq study group, also known as the Baker-Hamilton Commission. In addition, he teaches Middle Eastern

studies at the Johns Hopkins school of Advanced and International Studies and George Washington University. Before entering government he was a scholar at the U.S. Institute of Peace and at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. From 1993 to 1997, Alterman was an award-winning teacher at Harvard University where he received his Ph.D. in history. He also worked as a legislative aide to Senator Daniel P. Moynahan, Democrat, New York, responsible for foreign policy and defense.

As I said, we have a very distinguished panel here this afternoon. It is obvious just by reading their bios. As I am sure the members of the panel may be aware, we have a 5-minute rule here. You have 5 minutes to address the committee. There is a lighting system. The yellow light will come on when 4 of the 5 minutes is up, and a red light comes on when you are done. We would ask you to conclude by that time if at all possible.

So, Mr. Singh, we will begin with you.

STATEMENT OF MR. MICHAEL SINGH, MANAGING DIRECTOR, WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY

Mr. SINGH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ackerman, and distinguished members of the committee. Thanks very much for the opportunity to talk about the alarming state of human rights and freedom in Iran and Syria. It is a matter not only of moral urgency but also vital national security importance to the United States.

I am going to deliver a condensed version of my remarks in the interest of time. I would like to discuss the role that the systematic abuses of human rights play in the strategy of these two countries. We need to be clear, this is not a recent phenomenon in Iran or Syria, nor are any human rights violations there, some sort of excessive—just an excessive response to the recent uprisings in these countries.

These violations are not deviations from normal practice for these regimes. These are normal practices for these regimes. It is a matter of policy to abuse human rights both for Tehran and Damascus, and these things are instrumental in the establishment and maintenance of control, which is at the heart of their versions of authoritarianism.

It is vital that we in the U.S. foreign policy community arrive at a proper understanding for the nature of the regimes in Tehran and Damascus, and therefore why they engage in these atrocious human rights abuses we are here to discuss. The abuses are fundamentally about establishing and maintaining control and are common to most authoritarian regimes, past and present, in one form or another.

We must not only condemn the abuses that are a symptom of this authoritarianism, but the systems themselves which give rise to them. We must not only seek to prevent the abuses from happening, but to break the control of these regimes over their populations. Opposing human rights abuses in Iran and Syria, if such opposition is to be meaningful, means supporting democracy in these countries.

At first glance, these two regimes, Iran and Syria, seem quite different. One is a radical secular regime in Syria, one a radical reli-

gious regime in Iran. Yet these regimes are close allies, and in many ways their superficial dissimilarities mask fundamental similarities underneath the surface. Like so many authoritarian regimes, both of their systems of government are based on careful cultivation of certain illusions. I want to briefly mention three illusions, and then talk about what we can do.

The first is the illusion of democracy. Despite their deeply autocratic natures, both the Syrian and Iranian regimes have adopted the language and trappings of democracy which is troublingly common in modern authoritarian states. For its part, Syria has an elected Parliament and has a President who is confirmed, quote-unquote, by a referendum. Despite the fact that they have these trappings of democracy, they still have manipulation. A ridiculous 97.62 percent of Syrians reportedly voted to confirm President Assad in the last Presidential referendum.

Iran has the same democratic pretensions. It holds elections for both the Presidency as well as the Parliament, but in both cases there are parallel structures which are unelected and which trump the supposedly elected officials; that is, the Supreme Leader and the Guardian Council.

Even with these authoritarian safeguards in place, however, Iranian leaders still feel compelled to manipulate the results of these elections despite the fact the elected officials have little power. We saw this in June 2009 with the rigged Presidential election to which you referred, Mr. Chairman.

To be clear, however, even these trappings of democracy, meager as they may be, are illusory. True power in Iran and Syria lies not in the hands of elected officials, but with small cliques who enjoy the backing of massive and well-rewarded security apparatuses.

The second illusion is the illusion of prosperity. Both of these regimes have long-trumpeted a message of wealth redistribution, of championing the poor and dispossessed, and they still propound this message. We have seen this especially with Iranian President Ahmadinejad. He was mocked in Iran during a Presidential election for handing out potatoes in the countryside, but in fact he was able to generate some support through this sort of populism.

It is essential as well to the Supreme Leader of Iran, who talks a lot about class warfare in the way that he frames issues to his population. The reality, of course, is completely different. Despite the massive national resource wealth in Iran and despite the relatively significant economic growth that has happened in Syria, both of these countries are riddled with economic problems, poverty, income inequality, unemployment, and of course have massive corruption. They rank 127th and 146th, Syria and Iran respectively, out of 178 countries, according to Transparency International's corruption perceptions index.

Third is the illusion of stability. Both of these countries have known only two rulers apiece over the last several decades and both of these men, Bashar al-Assad and Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of Iran, have managed to increase their power over their tenures rather than see it wane. In a region notable for its tumult, these leaders can claim, superficially at least, stability in their countries. But this is also illusory, because they lack any mechanisms from which to release pressure, pressure for political change,

pressure that comes from economic discontent. And so the way they deal with this pressure is, of course, through repression and through human rights abuses which we are here to talk about.

The accomplishment of the protesters and the opposition in Syria and Iran is not just coming out of the streets and not just facing the bullets, which they have done courageously, especially in Syria, over these last since 6 months, but also in Iran after the June 2009 elections. Their great accomplishment is they have shattered these illusions and have exposed these illusions, and these regimes can no longer claim to be democratic, prosperous, or stable. And they won't be able to reconstruct those illusions or those images.

Let me just say very briefly what the United States can do to support them in trying to expose these illusions and trying to expose what the regimes truly are. First of all——

Mr. CHABOT. We want to follow up in questions, because we have gone over 5 full minutes at this point. We want to make sure we have enough time. We are going to be called for votes, but hopefully I will ask you that end question, what were your conclusions going to be? Maybe start off with that.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Singh follows:]

Testimony Prepared for Delivery to the

House Committee on Foreign Affairs

U.S. House of Representatives

"Axis of Abuse: U.S. Human Rights Policy

Toward Iran and Syria, Part II"

Thursday, September 22, 2011

By Michael Singh, Managing Director

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Mr. Chairman, ranking member Ackerman, distinguished members of the committee: thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the alarming state of human rights and freedom in Iran and Syria. This is a matter not only of moral urgency, but of vital importance to US national security.

I drafted this testimony sitting in a crowded coffee shop, with free and unfettered access to the Internet, on my laptop. I was not worried who might be looking over my shoulder at the screen, nor was I worried about the personal repercussions of what I might say. As I looked forward to briefing this committee, I understood that some of its members or my fellow witnesses might differ with me, perhaps even vehemently. But I had no worry that these issues would be settled through anything other than vigorous debate.

For Iranians and Syrians, none of these activities can be undertaken without significant peril. Freedom of assembly is proscribed. Access to the internet is restricted and its use is monitored. Security personnel are a pervasive presence. And expressing one's point of view on political matters is often treated as a crime, bringing with it harsh punishment. It is important that we keep this context in mind in order to maintain a proper perspective on this subject; the abuses and repression we are discussing affect not only activists operating on the ragged edge of political dissent, but everyday citizens engaged in everyday activities.

I do not intend to recount here the manifold instances of abuse and repression committed by the Iranian and Syrian regimes. This – the documentation of human rights violations – is a vital task, in which many fine organizations and brave individuals are engaged, and my fellow witnesses are more qualified than I am to relate the appalling catalog of abuses perpetrated by the Tehran and Damascus regimes.

Instead, I would like to discuss the role that the systematic abuse of human rights plays in the strategy of the Iranian and Syrian regimes. We must be clear – this is not a recent phenomenon in Iran and Syria, nor are human rights violations merely an excessive response to the recent uprisings in these countries. These violations are not deviations from normal practice which we must urge these regimes to correct. Instead, the abuse of human rights is a matter of policy for both Tehran and Damascus, and instrumental to the establishment and maintenance of control which is at the heart of their versions of authoritarianism.

The condemnations of Iranian and Syrian human rights abuses which are now in vogue only recently supplanted calls for engagement with these regimes. Visits to Damascus and even Tehran by Western officials were until only recently routine. The expressions of shock and indignation at events in Iran and Syria now emanating from Western capitals are appropriate and welcome, but dissidents in these countries could be forgiven for some measure of chagrin over such statements, given that the abuses have in fact been occurring for decades.

It is vital that we in the US foreign policy community arrive at a proper understanding of the nature of the regimes in Tehran and Damascus, and therefore of why they engage in the atrocious human rights abuses we are here to discuss. These abuses are fundamentally about establishing and maintaining control, and are common to most authoritarian regimes past and present in one form or another. We must not only condemn the abuses which are a symptom of this authoritarianism, but the systems themselves which give rise to them. We must not only seek to prevent the abuses from occurring, but to break the control of these regimes over their populations. Opposing human rights abuses in Iran and Syria, if such opposition is to be meaningful, requires that we support transitions to systems of government in which citizens'

opinions and aspirations are not seen as threats, and the rule of law not seen as an impediment. It requires, in other words, supporting democracy.

I would like to discuss briefly the nature of the regimes in Tehran and Damascus and of their systems of control and repression, how the recent uprisings in those countries have challenged that system, and what the United States can do to support Iranian and Syrian dissidents.

The Nature of the Iranian and Syrian Regimes

At first glance, the Iranian and Syrian regimes seem quite different. Syria's is an avowedly secular Ba'athist regime which is wary of religious zealotry. Iran's, on the other hand, is a clerical regime that has co-opted for itself the mantle of religious radicalism, and has little tolerance for faiths or forms of worship which do not conform to its own narrow preferences. Yet these regimes are not only one another's closest allies, they have deep similarities which belie their superficial differences.

Like so many authoritarian regimes, both the Iranian and Syrian systems of government are based on the careful cultivation of certain illusions. These illusions are maintained through systems of control and repression from which stem many of these regimes' human rights abuses. Three illusions in particular are important to Tehran and Damascus.

First, the illusion of democracy: Despite their deeply autocratic natures, both the Syrian and Iranian regimes have adopted the language and trappings of democracy, something which Freedom House has observed is troublingly common in modern authoritarian states. For its part, Syria has an elected parliament – but it is a single-party state. It has a referendum on the presidency – but only one candidate stands for "confirmation." Even with these extreme restrictions, however, the Syrian regime feels the need to manipulate the results of balloting, leading to ludicrous results such as the reported 97.62 percent of voters who supposedly voted to extend President Bashar al-Assad's term in the last referendum.

Iran also maintains democratic pretensions. Iran holds elections for both the presidency and the parliament, or majlis. However, in both cases the Iranian system provides for parallel institutions – the Supreme Leader and the Guardian Council, respectively, which are unelected and whose authority trumps those of the elected officials. Even with this authoritarian safeguard in place, however, Iranian leaders feel the need to manipulate elections. The candidate vetting process, through which the clerical Guardian Council weeds out reformists or any others who might express independent viewpoints, the voting process itself, and the ballot counting process are all heavily rigged to ensure that the regime's desired outcomes are realized.

To be clear, however, even these trappings of democracy, meager as they may be, are illusory. True power in Iran and Syria lies not in the hands of elected officials, but with small cliques who enjoy the backing of massive and well-rewarded security apparatuses. In Iran, this includes the Supreme Leader and his loyal lieutenants, along with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the Basij paramilitaries, the intelligence apparatus, and other organizations. In Syria, it consists of President Assad and his family and close confidants, and a number of security and military organs. In neither country do meaningful political freedoms exist.

Second, the illusion of prosperity: Both the Ba'athist regime in Syria and the clerical regime in Iran have long trumpeted a message of social justice to their citizens, promising to restore dignity and prosperity to

the poor and dispossessed. In the wake of Western imperialism in the Middle East, they vowed to restore to ordinary people the rich natural resources of the region, and overturn the class structure and elitism which they replaced.

Decades later, the regimes still propound this message. It was central to the presidential campaigns of Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was mocked by his peers for handing out potatoes to voters in the countryside, but who managed initially to secure at least some support with populist promises of wealth redistribution. It is central as well to the rhetorical fusillades of Ali Khamenei, Iran's so-called Supreme Leader. In promoting Iran's recent subsidy reform, for example, Khamenei claimed that the wealthy of Iran were benefiting disproportionately from government handouts, framing the policy action explicitly in terms of class warfare.

The reality, of course, could not be more different. Despite its massive natural resource wealth, Iran lags well behind other Gulf countries in most economic indicators. In particular, it is plagued by high unemployment and high inflation, and also has elevated levels of poverty and income inequality. Moreover, both Syria and Iran are massively corrupt, ranking 127th and 146th, respectively, out of 178 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. This corruption arises both out of the lack of institutional accountability that arises from both countries' systematic flouting of the rule of law, the regimes' need to secure the loyalty of security services and other constituencies, and straightforward rapacity.

In Iran, for example, the IRGC is deeply enmeshed in the national economy, controlling both state-owned industries and religious charitable foundations. Regime insiders, such as Ali Khamenei's son Mojtaba, are rumored to control massive wealth derived from similar sources. In Syria, a similar situation prevails. Key regime insiders and security officials control much of the nation's business activity, whether licit or illicit. The most renowned such regime crony is President Assad's cousin Rami Makhlouf, who is subject to sanctions by the United States. In neither Syria nor Iran can an ordinary citizen's economic aspirations be fulfilled independently of the assent of the regimes.

Third, the illusion of stability: both Iran and Syria have known only two rulers apiece for the last three decades, and against all odds these men – Ali Khamenei in Tehran and Bashar al-Assad in Damascus – have increased their authority rather than see it wane. In a region notable for its tumult, these regimes have touted their steadfastness in the face of regional and domestic challenges and international pressure. This, too, is illusory. Lacking any mechanisms to relieve or positively channel political or socioeconomic discontent – whether elections, free media, or often even simple freedoms to enjoy art or entertainment without state interference – these regimes keep a tight rein on their populations through increasingly harsh restrictions as well as by, as I have already detailed, various measures to secure the loyalty of the security services.

Ensuring the passivity of populations which are as desirous of their liberty as any of us requires the Iranian and Syrian regimes to impose and carefully maintain draconian systems of control and repression. The details of each are different – Tehran enforces adherence to its peculiar brand of politico-religious ideology while Syria sows fear of and loyalty to the state – but the means are largely the same. In both Syria and Iran, the freedoms enumerated in the universal declaration of human rights are systematically denied. There is no freedom of expression – in both places, speaking out against the regime is a crime subject to the most extreme punishments. There is no freedom of the press – journalists who dare to write

the truth take their lives into their own hands. There is no freedom of assembly or association – participation in organizations not officially sanctioned by the regimes is not tolerated. There is no freedom from arbitrary arrest or guarantee of fair trials, and no protection from cruel and inhuman punishment. Ethnic and religious minorities are not afforded equality, and in Iran in particular, religious minorities such as Protestants and Bahai are summarily rounded up and subject to punishment and even death.

These regimes' systems of control also extend to the tight regulation of information, which takes both defensive and offensive forms. Access to the Internet, to free local media, or to international media is blocked in both places. In addition, both regimes use the state media to push their own propaganda and deeply distorted version of local and international events, and reinforce the illusions and ideologies I have already detailed. In Iran's case, this propaganda offensive increasingly has an international arm as well, with state media organs such as Al-Alam, broadcasting in Arabic, and Press TV, broadcasting in English, targeting audiences abroad.

The list of human rights abuses and mechanisms of control goes on. Numerous organizations – whether the State Department, the United Nations, NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Freedom House, or local groups such as the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center – have catalogued these offenses in horrifying detail, and I urge you to study their work to grasp the full extent to which the Iranian and Syrian regimes brutalize their citizens. It is worth noting that in both places there is an iterative quality to the regimes' abuse and control – it is not just that security services monitor and oppress the citizenry, but that multiple overlapping security services monitor and report on one another, and that various regime loyalists are played off against one another. This iteration continues in ever tighter circles until responsibility for the entire system arrives at the feet of a single man.

The Current Uprisings in Iran and Syria

What is clear from this account is that the recent crackdowns in Iran and Syria, while certainly accelerated and undoubtedly horrific, are anything but new. They fit squarely with the pattern of behavior established by Tehran and Damascus over many decades, and should not take any of us by surprise. The notion, so popular until recently, that these regimes could be cajoled or persuaded to change their stripes revealed a troublingly short memory on the part of our foreign policy establishment regarding the nature of authoritarianism. Putting an end to their abuses means ceding their control, which these regimes necessarily worry would quickly lead to their demise.

What is new in Iran and Syria, then, is not the behavior of the regimes, but the accomplishments of the Iranian and Syrian opposition movements. What the opposition in Syria and the Green Movement in Iran have done – with enormous courage and at enormous cost to themselves and their families – is to expose the illusions upon which these regimes are based. The regimes have recognized the threat and have responded with predictable fury. The figures are stark – in Syria, 2700 protestors have reportedly been killed and tens of thousands detained over the past six months. In Iran, thousands have been arrested and hundreds executed. Such figures, while compelling, have an antiseptic quality to them. Behind each number is a story of bravery and bereavement which in many cases may never be told. Under closer examination, the details are shocking indeed: Whether the story of the schoolboys in Deraa, Syria, whose arrest for spraying graffiti and subsequent torture by security services sparked the Syrian uprising; or the

group of mothers of victims of regime abuse in Iran, who were themselves harassed and detained by regime thugs for having the temerity to call public attention to the deaths of their children.

Despite the regimes' extreme response, however, and despite Assad and Khamenei's apparent resilience in the face of protests, the Iranian and Syrian opposition movements have already achieved an important victory. In a sense, they have already succeeded. They have shattered the regimes' carefully cultivated illusions, which Tehran and Damascus will find difficult if not impossible to restore. Neither regime can any longer claim to be democratic: in Syria, the opposition has clearly called for an end to the Assad regime and swept away its pretenses of elected legitimacy; in Iran, the Green Movement has refused to abide a stolen election and rallied Iranians around the simple demand that their votes should count for something. Neither regime can claim to champion the prosperity of the ordinary citizen, as international sanctions and the work of domestic groups have shed a searing light on corruption and cronyism in both places. And neither regime can make a claim to stability, having been forced to wage war against their own peoples in a desperate attempt to maintain their viselike grip on power. In both Syria and Iran, the regimes' domestic support base is narrowing and thus becoming increasingly precarious, and their international support is also waning. It is impossible to say whether and in what timeframe these developments will lead to their demise, but it is irrefutable that the regimes are weakened and made more brittle as a result.

Next Steps for US Policy

It has often been asserted that the human rights situation in places like Iran and Syria, however alarming, is of little relevance to US interests. I take strong exception to this view, for two reasons.

First, we as Americans feel a deep sympathy for and moral obligation to people around the world who are struggling for their freedom. We are heirs to the great privilege and great burden of our own freedom, and we feel deeply our debt to our forebears and contemporaries who have laid their lives down so that we might enjoy liberty. Some of us are children of immigrants, and owe therefore an additional debt to parents or grandparents who bore great risk so that we could enjoy the benefit of that liberty. We cannot help but seek to support peoples around the world engaged in similar struggles for the same prize, or recognize the advantages that democracy brings to individuals and the world.

For those who cynically view this as sentimentality, I would briefly relate the story of Howard Baskerville. Baskerville, raised in the Black Hills and educated at Princeton, traveled to the city of Tabriz in Iran as a missionary and teacher in 1907. In 1909, when Iranians took up arms against their shah in response to his repression and corruption, Baskerville – in defiance of the admonitions of the American consul - organized a small volunteer force and fought alongside the people of Tabriz for the cause of democracy. For his efforts he met his death, shot and killed on the battlefield at age 24. Baskerville, who remains a hero in Iran, said this by way of explaining his choice: "The only difference between me and these people is the place of my birth, and this is not a big difference."

Foreign affairs is a messy and sometimes discouraging business. But there is something about the simplicity and clarity of Howard Baskerville's actions which resonates deeply with those of us who pursue American foreign policy, and indeed with Americans more broadly. We cannot simply turn away from people in whose struggle we see echoes of our own. It has been rightly observed that we cannot help everywhere, and that in some cases our help is not desired. But where we can help, we should.

There also, however, is a strategic reason for combating repression and human rights abuses in Iran and Syria. It is no coincidence that Iran and Syria, or for that matter other authoritarian regimes, not only terrorize their own people but also sow insecurity among their neighbors and threaten international security. Just as the freedom of their own people constitutes a threat to these regimes' control and thus survival, so too do foreign ideologies, and even in many cases foreign culture or commerce. Whether through economic empowerment, the demonstration of the benefits of openness and liberty, or even the simple relaying of objective facts through the media, the outside world holds a host of threats for the Iranian and Syrian regimes. By cultivating hostility with neighbors or foreign powers or cultivating myths about them, these regimes seek to deepen and strengthen their own control.

Thus, while we counter the external manifestations of the Iranian and Syrian regimes' pursuit of their own survival at the expense of international security, we should not neglect their domestic human rights abuses, which are just as essential to these regimes' power. Whatever temporary measures we arrive at to contain the destabilizing behavior of these regimes, supporting the struggle of the Iranian and Syrian people for democracy represents our best hope for long-term peace and stability in the region. This is not to say that democracies will always be good friends to the United States, or that they will not engage in abuses or hostility; simply that they are far less likely to define their own security in ways that are necessarily threatening to their own people and the world.

To this end, we must not simply condemn abuses and seek to prevent them. We must aid the Iranian and Syrian people in breaking the system of control of which the abuses are part and parcel. As I have mentioned, these regimes are increasingly brittle, and we cannot know when even a marginal or incremental increase in pressure might cause cracks within them to widen. In this effort, I see four primary tracks.

First, we should shed greater light on the struggle of Iranians and Syrians for freedom. I commend President Obama and his administration for the recent steps they have taken, particularly their calls for President Assad of Syria to step down and their targeting of Iranian and Syrian human rights abusers through sanctions. While it is difficult to reach these officials or their assets through sanctions, merely naming and shaming them is itself worthwhile. There is more we can do, however. We must not hesitate to speak out firmly and frequently regarding abuses in Iran and Syria, including on behalf of individual victims. We must not hesitate to meet with Iranian and Syrian dissidents, including in the Oval Office, when they are amenable. We must not refrain from using the bully pulpit of the White House, the State Department, and the United Nations Security Council to advance the cause of Iranian and Syrian dissidents.

Second, we should strive to break the Syrian, and particularly the Iranian, regimes' monopoly on information. This requires a multifaceted effort. We should step up our efforts to broadcast accurate and unbiased information into these countries via satellite, internet, and other means. We should increase our efforts to counter the regimes' efforts to interfere with those broadcasts. We should push back on the regimes' efforts to spread their own misleading propaganda domestically and internationally. And we should do that which is in our power to aid Iranians and Syrians themselves, most importantly, to disseminate news and information.

Third, we should deny to the Iranian and Syrian regimes the tools of repression, and provide their oppositions with the tools of resistance to repression. This means ensuring that Western technology

companies are not permitted to help these regimes maintain their control of media or communications technology, or to facilitate their propaganda efforts. It means strictly enforcing arms embargoes and identifying and cutting off the regimes' sources of revenue. For activists, it means doing what we can to provide them with the tools and training they need to organize and communicate, and helping them to protect themselves. The Obama Administration has already taken steps in this regard, and this effort should be stepped up and is worthy of full support from Congress and the private sector.

Fourth, we must continue to rally an international coalition against the Iranian and Syrian regimes. These regimes rely on international support, whether from multilateral institutions, friendly authoritarians, or potential clients and proxies who are recipients of Iranian and Syrian largesse. At the United Nations and other international organizations, we should push back on Tehran and Damascus. Around the world where Tehran and Damascus seek succor, we should combat their efforts to make inroads and disrupt their assistance to groups like Hizballah and Hamas. And we must in our diplomacy stress the repressive and authoritarian nature of these regimes to our allies, and urging them to act accordingly.

To this end, I am increasingly convinced that we should now withdraw the US ambassador from Damascus. I consider Ambassador Ford a respected colleague and I admire the courage and tenacity with which he has carried himself throughout the Syrian uprising. There can be little doubt that his activities have given some support to the opposition and proven nettlesome for the Syrian regime. However, this benefit must be weighed against the powerful statement that could be made by recalling him and reappointing him formally as an envoy to the Syrian opposition globally. While his continued presence as ambassador leaves open the possibility of a resumption of dialogue with Assad and provides cover for other countries to retain their diplomatic representation in Damascus, his withdrawal would herald definitively the end of the administration's engagement with the regime, sending the unmistakable message that there will be no returning to business as usual between the US and Syria.

Defending human rights in Iran and Syria, or for that matter defending against the destabilizing policies of the Iranian and Syrian regimes, also means defending democracy in these places. This inextricable linkage between human rights and democracy was best expressed by Natan Sharansky, who understands intimately the nature of authoritarian control. He said, "A commitment to human rights is above all a commitment to democracy and freedom and to the right to defend them… Only a combination of a robust defense of democratic life and a rigorous denunciation of abuses can uphold and defend human rights."

Mr. CHABOT. Mr. Khalaji, you are next and we would ask the members, if possible, to stay within the 5 minutes. Thank you very much.

STATEMENT OF MR. MEHDI KHALAJI, SENIOR FELLOW, WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY

Mr. KHALAJI. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ackerman, distinguished members of the committee, thanks very much for providing me this great opportunity to witness on the critical situation of human rights in Iran. I am not going to read my written testimony. I would like to summarize it and especially emphasize on two major points. The announcement by U.S. Government and other Western governments in condemning Iran's violation of human rights are very effective and necessary. But I think that it is not enough, because the problem in Iran is not accidental violation of human rights. The violation of human rights is systematic and especially it is coming from the legal system of the country. For example, despite the fact that Iran has signed the International Convention of Children's Rights, Iran continues to execute teenagers and underage people for various accusations. Yesterday in Karaj City near Tehran, a 17-year-old teenager was executed on the streets before the eyes of 15,000 people. So the problem is that the legal system of Iran legitimates such violations of human rights. The other example is stoning women and men for committing adultery.

Another important example is the anti-Bahai policies of the government. You know that the Iranian legal system is against Bahais and it deprives them of their basic rights. So it is very important not just to react to specific cases of the violation of human rights, but we have to encourage Iranian regimes to reform and change the legal system to adapt it more to human rights and democratic rules.

Another issue is that the sanctions on individuals for being involved in violation of human rights. It is very important. Especially a joint effort by the United States and European Union have been very effective. But first of all we have to publicize cases that these people have applied for visa and their visa application was rejected. In other words, we have to get benefit from these sanctions. We cannot just sanction them. Wee have to tell Iranian people and other people in the region that their activities and human rights activities have practical consequences.

The other issue is that it is good to target the Revolutionary Guard, the Basij militia, Iranian police, or Iranian judiciary officials who violate human rights in Iran. But we all know that the power in Iran is centralized around the Supreme Leader, and this is Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei who is in charge of domestic and foreign policy. And he is the final decision maker. The violation of human rights is primarily initiated and implemented by the Office of the Supreme Leader.

And I would suggest that important members of this office should be sanctioned, like Hossein Shariatmadari, Khamenei's representative at Kayhan newspaper, who is a famous person in oppressing critics, intellectuals, students and women's rights activists.

Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of Khamenei, who mainly runs his office.

Asghar Mir Hrjazi, another important member of his office, who is the security deputy of the office.

Vahid Haghanian, who is the right-hand person for Ayatollah Khamenei.

Muhammad Shirazi, who is the military advisor of Ayatollah Khamenei, and he supervises both the Revolutionary Guard and Army.

Ahmad Marvi, who is head of the clergy department in the Supreme Leader's office. And especially he is in charge of intimidating political opposition inside and outside Iran.

And finally, Hossein Mohammadi, who is in charge of designing censorship on different kind of media.

I think these are important people that should be singled out and be subject of sanction by the United States and European Union. Thank you.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. And I especially thank you for being so specific about who those are that you believe should be sanctioned.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Khalaji follows:]

Open Hearing

U.S. House of Representatives

Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia

"Axis of Abuse: U.S. Human Rights Policy

toward Iran and Syria, Part II"

Testimony by Mehdi Khalaji, senior fellow

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

September 22, 2011

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to be among the foremost countries in the world that systematically abuse human rights. The mechanisms of suppression in Iran have become so sophisticated that many of them are invisible. For instance, Iran is the largest prison for journalists in the world, yet a much larger number of journalists and political and human rights activists are not allowed to leave the country or lead an ordinary life even after being released on bail. They are also periodically subject to harassment by security and intelligence authorities. By enforcing its techniques of intimidation, the Islamic Republic has made society livable only for those who are loyal to the government.

The Western campaign against human rights abuses in Iran has proved to be extremely helpful. When Western governments or human rights organizations have responded in a timely and proper manner toward cases of abuse in Iran, the regime has felt the heat and become visibly more cautious. For example, **Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani**, initially sentenced to death by stoning, was saved only by pressures applied on the Islamic Republic by Western states and human rights organizations. In most of the cases in which prisoners' situations were publicized or Revolutionary Court sentences against political and religious victims were highlighted in the West, the Islamic Republic either backed down or became more aware of the consequences of its decisions and actions regarding these specific cases. For instance, the Bahai religious leaders who have been in prison for the last three years would likely have been executed if not for the public, Western campaign against the regime. They initially were accused of spying for Israel and convicted to twenty years in prison, but the appeals court reduced their sentence to ten years.

Both the legislative and executive branches of the U.S. government have properly reacted to human rights abuses in Iran with effective announcements and practical measures aimed at preventing the regime from oppressing its own people. In particular, America's joint efforts with the European Union in singling out and sanctioning officials who have been directly involved in human rights abuses were extremely helpful. These efforts sent a clear message to the Iranian government that the West cannot tolerate the brutality of a state against its citizens. They also sent a powerful message to the Iranian people that they are not alone, and that the free nations support their quest for democracy and liberal society.

Reacting to specific cases of human rights abuse such as Sakineh Ashtiani's is effective and necessary, but it is also important to target the Islamic Republic's legal system, which legitimizes the abuse of human rights. Stoning women for adultery, executing people for drug-related offices, executing underage people, depriving women from equal rights with men, and other abuses are embedded in the country's laws. We have to pressure Iran to reform its legal system in order to bring it into line with universal human rights.

Iran has the highest rate of execution in the world. Most execution cases are not political but rather for drug-related offenses. Since 1979, the Islamic Republic has executed approximately 12,000 people for such offenses. The effectiveness of the regime's drug detection program is in part due to the support it receives from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, which provides the country with drug detection technology. Since this program was launched in 2007, the regime has carried out more than 2,000 executions for drug offenses. Human rights activists in Iran are extremely concerned about the government's use of UN funds for torture and execution. Moreover, the authorities in charge of fighting drug crime in Iran are the same "police" forces placed in charge of abusing civil and human rights and oppressing women and youths. The United States and the EU should work together within the framework of the UN to make sure that the Iranian regime and its police do not use this fund to abuse human rights or execute more people.

It is important to mention that the Iranian government organizations primarily involved in human rights abuses are the same organizations that run the military and the nuclear program. In other words, those who oppress the Iranian people are also the ones who have generated international concern regarding the real intentions behind Iran's nuclear program and the regime's support for terrorist groups in the Middle East. It is very important to convey this to the Iranian people: the West is well aware that those who threaten the freedom and civil rights of the Iranian people also threaten security, stability, and peace in the Middle East.

If the United States wants to continue to act effectively against human rights abuses in Iran, it must work more closely with the European Union to expand cooperation in this field. It is vital for the Iranian regime to hear one unified, consistent, and persistent voice when it comes to human rights and political and religious freedoms. Toward that end, the United States and the EU should pressure the Islamic Republic to allow Mr. Ahmed Shaheed, the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, to enter the country and report on human rights abuses by examining the situation directly. The United States and EU should also continue to expand the sanctions list to encompass other important individuals involved in human rights violations in Iran.

Iran's power is centralized around Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader. He is the final decisionmaker on both domestic and foreign policy. Ayatollah Khamenei runs the country through his office, which consists mostly of military and intelligence senior commanders and officers. The Islamic Republic's policy to suppress political critics and restrict freedom of religion is designed in this office under the direct supervision and guidance of the Supreme Leader. When it comes to such oppression, all other institutions are under Ayatollah Khamenei's command: the judiciary, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the Basij militia, the police, the intelligence services, and the executive and legislative branches

of the government. Therefore, his office must be watched constantly and closely in order to find those who advise and influence him to crack down on the Iranian people and eliminate or intimidate critics of the regime's policies. As important as targeting individuals involved in the abuse of human rights is to enforce current sanctions and publicize cases in which such individuals applied for visas but were rejected or had their assets frozen.

In particular, the following regime figures should be added to the list of sanctioned individuals:

1. **Hossein Shariatmadari,** Khamenei's representative at *Kayhan* newspaper and a key advisor to the Supreme Leader in oppressing critics, intellectuals, students, and women's rights activists
2. **Mojtaba Khamenei,** the Supreme Leader's second son, who is directly involved in leading the Basij militia and the Intelligence Ministry in oppressive activities
3. **Asghar Mir Hejazi,** security deputy in the Supreme Leader's office and former deputy of the Intelligence Ministry, where he was in charge of assassinating dozens of opposition activists outside Iran
4. **Vahid Haghanian,** executive deputy of the Supreme Leader, a member of the IRGC, and a key element in coordinating security and military forces
5. **Muhammad Shirazi,** head of the military department of the Supreme Leader's office and a key advisor to Khamenei on IRGC and military issues
6. **Ahmad Marvi,** head of the clergy department in the Supreme Leader's office who is directly involved in designing and implementing Khamenei's policies with regard to religious figures, and who has played a key role in the arrest, torture, and intimidation of the regime's clerical critics
7. **Hossein Mohammadi,** propaganda advisor to Khamenei and a key figure in designing media censorship efforts and providing the regime's different bureaus with policy orientation on this issue.

In addition, since the right of freedom of expression includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of borders, the United States and the EU should also sanction all individuals and entities involved in restricting access to internet and satellite services in Iran. In this regard, three categories should be recognized:

1. All those involved in restricting access to the internet, such as **Minister of Information and Communications Reza Taqipour Anvari** and his deputies. **The Center for Fighting against Organized Crime** -- a branch of the IRGC in charge of controlling websites, blocking and hacking political sites, hacking e-mail accounts of political activists, and arresting bloggers and cyber activists -- should also be targeted, as should members of the Supreme Council for Cultural Revo-

lution who are mainly in charge of censorship in various fields, including cyberspace.

2. Despite the fact that the Islamic Republic is legally committed not to interfere with other countries' satellite broadcasting in Iran, the regime regularly jams transmission of television and radio satellite programming and violates rules set up by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). This is a clear violation of the Iranian people's right to receive and impart information and ideas through the media. Unfortunately, the ITU has little authority to enforce its rulings. Yet because Iran itself is using the same satellites -- including Eutelsat, Hotbird, and Nilesat -- to broadcast in other countries in different languages, Congress can pass a bill prohibiting Iran from using any service that interrupts other countries' usage in a manner that violates international law. U.S. and European satellite companies in particular should not provide services to Iran if the regime continues to jam satellite transmission of U.S. and European-based television and radio. Also, individuals who are involved in planning and executing the jamming of satellite transmissions should be sanctioned. Khamenei's media advisor, members of the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution, officials of the Ministry of Telecommunication and Information Technology, as well as **head of state television and former IRGC commander Ezzatollah Zarghami** are all involved in such violations of human rights.

3. Ayatollah Khamenei has warned of the "danger" of Western culture for a long time. For example, he had often asked officials to limit the teaching of humanities in the universities. Consequently, the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education has fired many humanities professors under accusations of being "secular." It has also halted the admission of students in such majors in order to change the textbooks and hire "committed Islamist" professors. Therefore, the Islamic Republic systematically deprives Iranian youths of learning humanities in universities or engaging in public debates about such subjects. It also enforces severe censorship on books and journals in these fields. Therefore, all individuals and organizations involved in violating human rights by placing any kind of censorship or restriction on the people's access to humanities in any form should be sanctioned. These include **Kamran Daneshjoo,** minister of culture and higher education; **Mohammad Hosseini,** minister of culture and Islamic guidance, which is the main body in charge of censorship; **Gholam Ali Haddad Adel,** the Supreme Leader's advisor on cultural affairs who played a key role in restricting humanities in the universities; **Rahim Azghadi,** another advisor to the Supreme Leader; **Muhammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi,** theoretician on violence and restricting humanities; and Khamenei's representatives in all Iranian universities, including **Alireza Panahian**

a leading ideologue of Islamist fundamentalism who is in charge of policy planning for restricting humanities in universities.

Although helping the Iranian people obtain full and easy access to the internet is crucial, we should bear in mind that the internet can be a double-edged sword. It gives individuals access to information, but at the same time it helps authoritarian governments monitor people more effectively, identify opposition figures, and break their circles. The Iranian government has been able to arrest or harass hundreds of people simply by hacking their emails or social media accounts. Therefore, besides providing technical help to Iranians to speed up their internet and bypass the filtering, the United States should help them with internet security. Iranians need to be able to use email and social media without fear that the government is spying on them.

Finally, the Iranian regime has also facilitated the brutal suppression of the opposition in Syria in several ways. The Islamic Republic's main contribution involves advising the Syrian regime on how to trace political activists through the internet and phones, and how to deal with such activists in general. What has happened in Syria in recent months -- from setting internet and phone traps for activists to holding Stalinist show trials for opposition figures -- is very similar to what has happened in Iran since the rigged election of June 2009.

The EU has already sanctioned IRGC commander-in-chief Mohammad Ali Aziz Jafari, Qods Force commander **Qasem Soleimani**, and IRGC intelligence chief **Hossein Taeb** for their role in violating the Syrian people's human rights and suppressing the opposition. And the United States should work with the EU to identify more military officials who should be added to both the EU and U.S. sanction lists. But it is also necessary to sanction the various political officials and diplomats who design Iran's policy toward Syria and actually order the military to help the Asad regime crack down on the opposition. Each of the following key officials has played a significant role in facilitating Syria's brutal violence against peaceful activists and opposition figures: **Ali Akbar Velayati,** the Supreme Leader's advisor and former minister of foreign affairs; **Mohsen Qomi,** international relations deputy in the Supreme Leader's office, **Muhammad Hassan Akhtari,** the Supreme Leader's advisor in Syrian affairs and former Iranian ambassador to Damascus; and **Mohammad Reza Raouf Sheibani,** the current Iranian ambassador to Syria.

Mr. CHABOT. I would like to note the presence of the gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. Keating, who has joined us here this afternoon.

Mr. Nader, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MR. ALIREZA NADER, INTERNATIONAL POLICY ANALYST, RAND CORPORATION

Mr. NADER. Chairman Chabot, Ranking Member Ackerman, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss Islamic Republic of Iran's human rights abuses. In addition I would like to discuss the Iranian regime's behavior in light of the Arab Spring, and current state and the future prospects of the opposition Green Movement. I will conclude with U.S. policy recommendations. And I will summarize my written testimony.

The Islamic Republic is one of the worst human rights abusers in the Middle East. The 2009 Iranian Presidential election, widely perceived in Iran as fraudulent, led to a dramatic increase in Iranian State repression. Iranians who opposed a clerical-led regime are routinely harassed, jailed, tortured, raped and executed. The Iranian regime has stepped up its use of force as it faces upcoming parliamentary elections in March 2012 and Presidential elections in 2013 that could become occasions for public demonstrations. The regime is also afflicted by deep internal divisions.

The Arab Spring has also heightened the regime's fears of similar revolts in Iran. The Islamic Republic has depicted the downfall of pro-American governments in Tunisia and Egypt as a major setback to American power in the region. That has also claimed that Iran's own revolution served as the Arab Spring's source of inspiration. But the reality is quite different. Arab populations are increasingly critical of Islamic Republic for poor treatment of Iranians and for the support it provides Basar al-Assad's regime as it commits mass violence against the Syrian people.

More importantly, the Iranian regime remains vulnerable to the very same forces that have led to the toppling of Arab dictatorships. Although the regime may have been successful in silencing the Green Movement's leadership, it has not been able to crush Iranian aspirations for freer and more democratic system of government.

Like many of their Arab neighbors, Iranians face a daily indignity bred by an increasingly oppressive system. Women in Iran are denied equal rights despite their educational, economic, and civic accomplishments. Iranian youth languish in frustration, bereft of the opportunities and freedoms afforded to their peers across the world. Ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities live in constant fear.

Conditions in Iran suggest that a Persian Spring is quite possible. But Iranians have not so far followed the footprints of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutionaries. One reason for this is that the Green Movement is divided and leaderless. But the Green Movement faces an even more fundamental flaw. It seeks to preserve the very same Islam Republic that oppresses it. Regardless, the Green Movement's inherent weaknesses have not given way to the total suppression of the democracy movement in Iran. The Iranians have increasingly engaged in acts of civil disobedience inde-

pendently of the Green Movement and its leadership. They need moral support more than ever before.

The intense U.S. focus on the Iranian nuclear program convinced many Iranian democracy activists that the United States is solely concerned with the security interest in their region rather than the plight of ordinary Iranians.

I would assert that a more balanced U.S. policy, with a greater emphasis on the regime's human rights abuses, could counter negative Iranian perceptions of U.S policies and intentions.

The United States has recently begun a shift in this direction by supporting the establishment of a U.N. human rights monitor for Iran. In addition, the United States has sanctioned higher-ranking Iranian security officials for their involvement in human rights abuses. However, additional steps should be taken. U.S. officials should denounce the regime's abuses more vigorously and more often. Stronger condemnations from senior U.S. officials, including President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton, will be reviewed by Iranian democracy activists as a sign of encouragement.

In tandem they naturally should sanction additional members of the Iranian security services, especially top-ranking and mid-ranking members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. and the Basij paramilitary forces.

Finally, the United States should also strongly question the legitimacy of Iran's upcoming parliamentary and Presidential elections. The 2009 Presidential election, which remains in dispute, effectively taints the results of future elections. The Islamic Republic has historically depicted elections in Iran as sign that it is a democracy and is therefore particularly vulnerable to internal and external accusations of legitimacy.

The Iranian regime faces great challenges today. Its survival as a cohesive and functioning system is hardly guaranteed. The United States can demonstrate that it is on the side of Iranian democrats who may rule Iran one day.

Again, I thank the subcommittee for the opportunity to testify before you today and I look forward to taking your questions.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much, we appreciate it.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Nader follows:]

Alireza Nader[1]
The RAND Corporation

Iran's Human Rights Abuses[2]

Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on The Middle East and South Asia
United States House of Representatives

September 22, 2011

Chairman Chabot, Ranking Member Ackerman, Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee: thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss the Islamic Republic of Iran's human rights abuses. In addition, I would like to discuss the Iranian regime's behavior in light of the Arab Spring and the current state and future prospects of the opposition Green Movement. I will conclude with U.S. policy recommendations.

The Islamic Republic is one of the worst human rights abusers in the Middle East. The 2009 Iranian presidential election, widely perceived in Iran as fraudulent, led to a dramatic increase in Iranian state repression. Iranians who oppose the clerical-led regime are routinely harassed, jailed, tortured, raped, and executed. The leaders of the opposition Green Movement, including former Prime Minister Mir Hussein Mousavi, have been placed under house arrest and isolated from their families and followers.

The Iranian regime has stepped up its use of force as it faces upcoming parliamentary (March 2012) and presidential elections (2013), which could become occasions for public demonstrations. Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has admitted that elections remain a "challenge" for the Islamic Republic. The regime is also afflicted by deep internal divisions. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his allies are regularly accused of challenging Khamenei's authority, and the stability of the political system.

The Arab Spring has also heightened the Iranian regime's fears of similar revolts in Iran. The Islamic Republic has depicted the downfall of pro-American regimes in Tunisia and Egypt as a major setback to American power in the region. It has also claimed that Iran's own revolution

[1] The opinions and conclusions expressed in this testimony are the author's alone and should not be interpreted as representing those of RAND or any of the sponsors of its research. This product is part of the RAND Corporation testimony series. RAND testimonies record testimony presented by RAND associates to federal, state, or local legislative committees; government-appointed commissions and panels; and private review and oversight bodies. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.
[2] This testimony is available for free download at http://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT362/.

served as the Arab Spring's source of inspiration. But the reality is quite different. Arab populations are increasingly critical of the Islamic Republic due to its poor treatment of Iranians and for the support it provides Bashar al-Assad's regime as it commits mass violence against the Syrian people.

More importantly, the Iranian regime remains vulnerable to the very same domestic forces that have led to the toppling of dictatorships across the Arab world. Although the regime may have been successful in silencing the Green Movement's leadership, it has not been able to crush Iranian aspirations for a freer and more democratic form of government.

Like many of their Arab neighbors, Iranians face the daily frustration and indignity bred by an increasingly repressive system. One does not have to be a member of the Green Movement to feel the regime's oppressive power. Women in Iran are denied equal rights despite their educational, economic, and civic accomplishments. Iranian youth languish in frustration, bereft of the opportunities and freedoms afforded to their peers across the world. Ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities live in constant fear.

Recent revelation of massive corruption in Iran, including banking embezzlements by individuals closely tied to the regime, shows that the Islamic Republic has deviated from its self-described mission of erasing the social inequality that existed under the monarchy. Iran today is a nation of the haves and have-nots. Those with close connections to the government live in luxury while the rest of Iranians endure climbing inflation and increasing unemployment.

Conditions in Iran suggest that a Persian "Spring" is quite possible. But Iranians have not, so far, followed the footprints of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutionaries. The 2009 presidential election and the birth of the Green Movement saw the most serious challenge to the Islamic Republic since its creation in 1979. Yet the massive protests in 2009 and the demands of the Green Movement have not led to any positive political or economic changes in Iran.

The Green Movement today is divided and leaderless. Mousavi, along with prominent Green Movement leader Mehdi Karroubi, have little contact with the outside world. They have asked Iranians to boycott the 2012 parliamentary election, while another prominent Green Movement leader, former President Mohammad Khatami, has called for reconciliation with the regime.

But the Green Movement faces an even more fundamental weakness. It seeks to preserve the very same Islamic Republic that oppresses it. The Green Movement's leadership has stated its adherence to and belief in the Iranian constitution, which does entail democratic principles. But

the constitution also empowers unelected and unaccountable governing bodies that prevent free and fair elections.

Finally, the Green Movement does not appear to have an ultimate objective. It wishes to pursue reforms, yet the regime has banned it from participating in the political system. It has encouraged protests, but it has not called for changes that can truly transform Iran's repressive political system, including a drastically altered or even new constitution.

Regardless, the Green Movement's inherent weaknesses have not given way to the total suppression of the democracy movement in Iran. Iranians have increasingly engaged in acts of civil disobedience independently of the Green Movement and its leadership.

Thousands of Azeri Iranians have protested against regime policies that have led to the erosion of Lake Orumieh in northwestern Iran, one of the largest saltwater lakes in the world. The lake, which is in danger of disappearing in the next several years, is a symbol of Azeri history, culture, and pride. Furthermore, Iranian youth have used social media to organize water fights--using plastic guns and balloons-- in Tehran's parks. These water fights not only relieve the frustration and ennui felt by Iranian youth, but also represent the growing civil disobedience against an abusive state. As expected, the water fights have been violently disrupted by the Iranian regime.

The regime, however, is not totally dependent on force and violence. It does maintain support among a sizeable portion of the Iranian population, many of whom view the Islamic Republic as a force of "resistance" against what they perceive to be U.S. "imperialism" in the Middle East. Iranians are a nationalistic people, and many of them are resentful of past U.S. interference in Iran, including the 1953 U.S. sponsored coup against Iran's democratically elected government and subsequent U.S. support for the Iranian monarchy.

The regime has exploited Iranian nationalism to buttress its own legitimacy and authority. In particular, it has depicted the Green Movement, in addition to other civil rights actors, as "pawns" of Western powers. The Islamic Republic has also portrayed U.S. and international policies on the Iranian nuclear program as part of an effort to deny Iran both advanced technology and its perceived place among the world's great nations.

Thus, U.S. opposition to the Iranian nuclear program, while necessary given the threats posed by a potential Iranian nuclear weapons capability, has also had the effect of strengthening the regime among its core supporters.

The intense U.S. focus on the nuclear program may have also convinced many Iranians that the United States was solely concerned with its security interest in the Middle East, rather than with the plight of ordinary Iranians. Unfortunately, past U.S. efforts to engage the Iranian regime have met with little success. The Iranian regime continues to make steady progress on the nuclear program while undermining U.S. interests in the Middle East. Moreover, U.S. efforts to engage the Islamic Republic have also diminished efforts in strongly condemning the regime's human rights abuses. This is not to suggest that the United States should abandon all efforts of diplomatic engagement; Iran's isolation serves the regime's interests by cutting Iranians off from the outside world. Rather, the United States should be more balanced in pursuing its objectives regarding Iran.

Recently, the United States has begun a shift in this direction, putting a greater emphasis on the Iranian regime's human rights abuses which can thereby counter negative Iranian perceptions of U.S. policies and intentions. For instance, the U.S. government has supported the establishment of a special UN human rights monitor for Iran. In addition, the United States has sanctioned high-ranking Iranian security officials for their involvement in human rights abuses.

However, additional steps should be taken.

U.S. officials should denounce the regime's abuses more vigorously, and more often. Stronger condemnations from senior U.S. officials, including President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton, will be viewed by Iranian democracy activists as signs of encouragement. In tandem, the United States should designate additional members of the Iranian security services, especially top-ranking AND mid-ranking members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and the Basij paramilitary forces.

U.S. criticism of Iran' human rights abuses will also carry more credibility if the United States is similarly outspoken regarding the failings of other Middle Eastern regimes, including those which enjoy some degree of U.S. support.

The United States should also strongly question the legitimacy of Iran's upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, especially considering the political suppression and human rights violations carried out by the regime. The 2009 presidential election, which remains in dispute, effectively taints the results of future elections. The Islamic Republic has historically depicted elections in Iran as a sign that it is a "democracy", and is therefore particularly vulnerable to internal and external accusations of illegitimacy.

But direct U.S. intervention in Iranian affairs, including support for Iranian opposition groups within Iran and abroad, will only be depicted by the Islamic Republic as a plot to undermine Iran's independence. The Iranian population, much like the Tunisians and Egyptians, is capable of challenging its government on its own. It does not need direct material or financial aid, of an overt or covert nature.

The Iranian regime faces great challenges. It has lost much legitimacy since the 2009 election and is internally divided. Moreover, it is increasingly unable to meet the political and economic aspirations of its own people. Its survival as a cohesive and functioning regime is hardly guaranteed. The United States may not be able to dissuade the Islamic Republic from continuing its nuclear program through engagement and sanctions, but it can demonstrate that it is on the side of Iranian democrats who may rule Iran one day.

Again, I thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify before you today and I look forward to taking your questions.

Mr. CHABOT. Mr. Badran, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MR. TONY BADRAN, RESEARCH FELLOW, FOUNDATION FOR THE DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES

Mr. BADRAN. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Ackerman and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to today's hearing. I will keep my comments brief and ask that my lengthier statement be part of the record.

We have reached a critical moment in the Syrian revolution. Seven months after it erupted, the Syrian protest movement has shown remarkable resilience and bravery. There are now questions as to whether peaceful protest will be enough to dislodge Bashar al-Assad as his regime's brutal repression persists and pressure to arm the revolution intensifies.

Since President Obama's August 22nd statement calling on Assad to step down, there has been little high-level movement on Syria. The President has publicly shown little personal investment in the Syrian uprising. His remarks at the U.N. yesterday were the first he has made publicly in months. The administration deserves credit for slapping a series of sanctions on the Syrian regime. However, it is unclear whether new ideas and contingency plans are being developed. Given the strategic importance of the Syrian revolution and its impact on Iranian influence in the region, U.S. leadership is critical.

Though they have had some impact, sanctions cannot substitute for an integrated American policy guided by clear strategic goal. That goal can only be Assad's departure and breaking up the Iranian alliance system. At the outset, the Obama administration adopted a hands-off approach to the Syrian revolution. One reason was deference to Turkey. Reticent to take the lead, the administration effectively subcontracted the policy to the Turks, who for months urged President Obama not to call on Assad to step down.

To its credit, the administration finally broke with Turkey and endorsed the policy of regime change in Syria. It has not, however, pressed Ankara to follow suit. Nor has the administration convinced Turkey to take punitive measures against Assad. In the past 2 days the Turks have said that they would be discussing sanctions with the State Department. What specific measures they will adopt or when they will do so remains to be seen.

The administration has recently done a commendable job in working with the European allies to increase the heat on the Syrian regimes, but has not done the same with regional allies such as Jordan and Iraq. The Syrian Central Bank recently executed a number of cash transfers in Jordan designed to help evade future sanctions and potential asset freezes. The Syrians have also turned to the Iraqis to secure cheap oil. Convincing our Jordanian allies to freeze such accounts and dissuading Iraq from extending a helping hand to Assad are but two options the administration could pursue.

The New York Times reported on Monday that the administration remains apprehensive about appearing to try to "orchestrate the outcome in Syria." The absence of U.S. Leadership opens the door for regional middle-range powers to vie for position and ad-

vance their own agendas which could come into conflict with U.S. Interests.

Washington should be quarterbacking the transition and directing the actions of players like Turkey and Qatar. Qatar, for instance, has recently advanced its own political initiative to end the crisis in Syria, but it had to run this initiative with the Iranians and assure them that their interests in Syria's "security doctrine," meaning its support for resistance movements that Iranian supports will be insured. Without U.S. leadership, Iranian will fill the role.

The administration has been working toward a peaceful transition to democracy, mainly relying on tools such as sanctions, while urging the opposition to unite around a platform that all Syrians could endorse. But the mechanism for this transition has not been properly articulated. The administration's assessment now is that the current stalemate could last for a while, increasing the likelihood of violent conflict.

The strategic stakes high, the Iranians note this is a war for their position in the eastern Mediterranean. The Obama administration needs to frame the Syrian situation in such strategic terms and to make it a priority in its regional agenda.

Mr. Chairman, the strategic calculus is simple. An outcome other than Assad's ouster would be a blow to U.S. Interests and a boost to Iran. The administration should continue with hard economic pressure. Specifically, it should pressure regional allies to impose sanctions. It should also consider targeting banks in the region used by the regime to circumvent sanctions. Moreover, the ban on investment in Syria should be expanded to include foreign companies. Finally, as the probability of an armed conflagration in Syria increases, the administration needs contingency plans. Deferring such difficult decisions by subcontracting policy to regional players is likely to fail again. The U.S. has to take the lead.

Mr. Chairman, I will conclude. Ensuring the end of the Assad regime in Syria must be viewed as an opportunity to break the Iranian alliance system, which will do a great deal to advance the interests of the United States and its allies in the region.

I thank you again for the opportunity to testify here today.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Badran follows:]

Congressional Testimony

Axis of Abuse:

U.S. Human Rights toward Iran and Syria, Part II

Tony Badran
Research Fellow
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Hearing before House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia

Washington, DC
September 22, 2011

1726 M Street NW • Suite 700 • Washington, DC 20036

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, thank you for inviting me to take part in today's hearing. I also would like to commend you for holding this hearing at a critical time in the ongoing Syrian uprising against the regime of Bashar Assad. I will keep my comments brief and ask that my full statement be made part of the record.

We have reached a potentially dangerous moment in the Syrian revolution. At the same time, there is now a rare opportunity to change the political landscape in the entire region. If we take this opportunity, and if we succeed, Syria can be rid of a murderous ruling family, which has both Syrian and American blood on its hands. More importantly, Iran's influence not only in Syria but throughout the region would be severely curtailed.

The uprising has reached a stalemate. Seven months after it erupted, the Syrian popular protest movement has shown remarkable resilience and bravery in the face of unspeakable violence. While this movement shows no signs of relenting, and is intensifying its efforts at more effective organization, the most recent demonstrations have begun making general, unspecified calls for "international protection." In addition, there are now questions as to whether the option of peaceful protest will be enough to dislodge Assad, as the regime's brutal repression persists and pressure to arm the revolution intensifies.

The momentum of US policy has also stalled. Since President Obama's August 22 statement calling on Assad to step down, there has been little high-level movement on Syria, even on the level of declaratory policy. In contrast to President Obama's stance on Egypt and Libya, he has publicly shown little personal investment in the Syrian uprising.

To its credit, the administration has slapped a series of sanctions on the Syrian regime. However, it is still unclear whether new ideas and contingency plans are being developed. Most importantly, the Obama administration, preoccupied with other urgent matters, such as the Palestinian bid for statehood at the UN and Turkey's role in the region, is yet to assert the leadership required at this important juncture. Given the strategic importance of the outcome of the Syrian revolution and its impact on Iranian influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, US leadership is critical.

This leadership, to be effective, must include a clear strategic path forward. Though they have had some impact, sanctions cannot substitute for an integrated policy guided by a clear strategic goal.

Apart from economic pressure, aggressive regional diplomacy is important to ensure all US allies are in line behind our policy objective. And that objective can only be one thing: Assad's departure and the breaking up of the Iranian alliance system.

As the prospect for a protracted violent confrontation—one that could devolve into a regional proxy war – increases, there is a need for a review of the administration's Syria policy.

The Administration's Turkish Mistake

At the outset, the Obama administration adopted a hands-off approach to the Syrian revolution. Skeptical at first that the protest movement had legs, the administration kept its distance. When it became apparent that there was a serious challenge to Assad's rule, the administration struggled with the reality that its policy of engagement with Assad had collapsed. However, its adjustment was slow and its desired objective lacked clarity for several weeks.

One reason for this reluctance and confusion was the administration's deference to Turkey. In sharp contrast with its handling of the Egyptian revolution, the Obama administration appeared very reticent to take the lead on Syria. Instead, it effectively subcontracted the policy to Turkey, under the belief that Ankara had the most influence with Assad and could persuade him to respond to the protesters' demands. President Obama maintained close contact with Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and repeatedly heeded his counsel to delay calling on Assad to go.

It was a critical mistake to cede leadership to the Turks, just as it was an error to assume they shared our interests. For months, Turkey urged President Obama not to call on Assad to step down even as he repeatedly snubbed the Turks' every initiative, and the President deferred to Ankara's wishes. Still, as recently as early August, the Turks, without consulting with Washington, extended Assad another two-week window to stop the violence and begin reforms. Needless to say, Assad pressed ahead with his murderous campaign.

To its credit, the administration finally broke with Turkey and endorsed a policy of regime change in Syria, calling on Assad to leave power. It has not, however, pressed Turkey to follow US policy. Indeed, Ankara to this day has not publicly called on Assad to leave power. Nor has the administration been able to convince Turkey to take concrete punitive measures against Assad, even as the US has worked with our allies in Europe to impose more sanctions on the Syrian regime.

Lining Up Regional Allies

The Obama administration now needs to make up for lost time. Having lacked assertiveness, and with the Turks having failed to generate a positive outcome on our behalf, the administration has allowed a leadership vacuum to emerge.

The administration has recently done a commendable job in working with European allies to increase the heat on the Syrian regime, but it has not done the same with regional allies such as Iraq, Jordan or the Gulf states.

As several tranches of international sanctions targeted Assad, his regime began adjusting by turning to several regional states in order to bypass their effect. For example, on Sunday, September 18, 2011, a Jordanian paper reported that the Syrian Central Bank recently executed a number of cash transfers in Jordan meant to help it evade future sanctions and potential asset freezes.

The Syrians have also turned to the Iraqis for cheap oil, and there have been reports that Baghdad has agreed, though there is confusion as to the quantity (some claiming 150,000 bpd, others saying only 10,000 bpd).

Convincing our Jordanian allies to close or freeze such accounts and dissuading our friends in Iraq from extending any helping hand to Assad are but two quick examples of avenues the administration could pursue. If Iran is capable of pressuring regional players, including Turkey and Iraq, not to push hard in Syria, then the US ought to be applying its considerable leverage to push in the opposite direction.

Balancing Regional Agendas

As a *New York Times* report noted on September 19, 2011, the administration remains apprehensive about appearing to "[try] to orchestrate the outcome in Syria." However, only the US can balance the complex and competing agendas of the region's multiple players.

Moreover, the absence of US leadership opens the door for regional middle-range powers to vie for position and advance their own agendas, which could come into conflict with US interests.

For example, while Qatar has played a helpful role in highlighting Assad's crimes on Al Jazeera, withdrawing its ambassador, and suspending its investments in Syria, it now seeks a preeminent role in shaping the political transition. To that end, it has hosted Syrian opposition meetings and has tried to market its own political initiative to end the crisis. But the Qataris also ran their initiative by Tehran, in order to assuage its concerns and to secure its support. Indications are they tried to assure the Iranians that Syria's "security doctrine"—meaning its policy of support for so-called "resistance movements" sponsored by Iran—would remain intact.

Similarly, the Arab League has floated its own initiative. However, this initiative allows for Assad to stay on for the remainder of his term before new elections are held in 2014.

Both these initiatives run counter to US interests and the declared policy of a democratic Syria without Assad. They serve as examples for the need for assertive US leadership in the region. Washington should be quarterbacking the transition and directing the actions of Turkey and Qatar. Without US leadership, Iran will fill that role.

Preparing for the Worst

The administration has been working to try and bring about a peaceful transition to democracy, mainly relying on tools such as sanctions, while urging the opposition to unite and present a leadership and a platform which Syrians—especially minorities and business elites weary of the alternative to Assad—could endorse. In addition, the hope is to create cracks in the regime that would provide possible mechanisms for the transition. US Ambassador Robert Ford is said to be the point man on the outreach to the opposition, but it is unclear which cadres he is actually able to meet, given the tight security restrictions.

The administration's assessment now is that the regime, thanks to Russian intransigence and full Iranian support, can hang on for a while, increasing the likelihood of a violent conflict. The strategic stakes are quite high, as such a conflict is likely to draw in competing regional actors. The Iranians, who are directly involved in Assad's war against his people, have already announced plans for a military base in the coastal city of Latakia. The Iranians know this is a war for their strategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Obama administration needs to frame the Syrian situation in such strategic terms—as a battle to break up Iran's axis—and, accordingly, make it a pressing priority in its regional agenda.

As the probability of an armed conflagration in Syria increases, the administration would do well to begin developing adequate responses and contingency plans. Deferring such difficult decisions by subcontracting policy to reluctant and/or vulnerable regional players is likely to fail again. The domestic challenge to the Assad regime is a strategic opportunity that the US must not fail to exploit. An outcome other than Assad's ouster would be a blow to US interests and a boost to the Iranian bloc.

To ensure and hopefully accelerate such an outcome, the administration should continue with hard economic pressure. Specifically, it should pressure the Turks and other regional allies to impose sanctions. Also, it should consider targeting banks in the region used by the regime to circumvent sanctions. Finally, the ban on investment in Syria should be expanded to include foreign companies.

Beyond targeting the Syrian regime economically, the US should also target its tools of propaganda and information warfare. The spearhead of the regime's apparatus in the US is Syria's ambassador, Imad Mustapha. Expelling him from the United States, where he is suspected of surveilling and threatening dissidents, would be a good start.

In addition, although it is an undesirable scenario, the US should start planning for a possible conflict in Syria, especially as calls by protesters for international protection become louder. Pooling the resources of allied neighbors of Syria will be critical. But the US also has to take the lead in order to balance out these players' agendas.

Mr. Chairman, I will conclude. Aside from upholding US values of freedom and democracy, the strategic prism through which the situation in Syria must be viewed is that of an opportunity to break the Iranian alliance system. The end of the Assad regime will enhance the standing and interests of the US and its allies in the region.

On behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, I want to once again thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee today.

Mr. CHABOT. And our final witness here this afternoon will be Mr. Alterman, and you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF JON B. ALTERMAN, PH.D., DIRECTOR AND SENIOR FELLOW OF THE MIDDLE EAST PROGRAM, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Mr. ALTERMAN. Chairman Chabot, Ranking Member Ackerman and distinguished members of the committee. Syria and Iran have a big problem. On the one hand they have crafted strategies that cast themselves as the voice of the common man in the Middle East, standing up against Western oppression and protecting Palestinians. On the other, they are emerging as oppressors of their own people, cynical authoritarian holdouts in a world increasingly inspired by popular protests against oppressors.

Now the Middle East is changing. The caricatures they drew of other regional leaders are dissolving, as those leaders either lead efforts toward reform or are swept away by a tide of protests. Meanwhile, the leaderships of Syria and Iran themselves have come to typify a rotten status quo that manipulates public emotions but does not serve them.

Shifting circumstances in the Middle East begged the question of what the United States should do about it. There is an understandable instinct to revel in hostile countries' difficulties, to capitalize on their weaknesses, and to exploit their contradictions. Few in these populations would mourn the fall of their governments, and the United States should do nothing to prop them up.

At the same time, the greatest favor the United States could do for these regimes is to somehow make their problems into a confrontation with the United States rather than ones that arise out of the internal contradictions of these countries' own governance. An ability to concentrate attention on the United States and a foreign power would be a lifeline to these governments, shifting the focus from their own repression and allowing them to sound nationalist themes and boost their own popular support. An overt U.S. Embrace of opposition groups would certainly lead to accusations that these groups are agents of the United States or that their success somehow serves Israel's interests, thereby reducing their influence and their credibility.

To be clear the United States should not remain passive or mute in the face of sustained repression; our history and our values call for us to do more. Yet no government looks anxiously at finely honed U.S. Statements when its very survival is at risk, nor do protesters look to Washington for a sign when deciding whether or not to risk their lives in the street. Ultimately it is not about us; it is about them, and we do a disservice to them when we act as if it is all about us. Instead we need to do what we do in the company of other governments, especially from the Middle East, which are distressed by events in Syria and Iran and have sounded the alarm.

The key strategic asset that these governments have to nurture is their legitimacy. Regional voices have far more credibility with a targeted population than governments halfway around the world. This is not abdicating leadership nor leading from behind; rather, it is a quiet and confident leadership that arises from the under-

standing that these governments' repression stripped them of their legitimacy, and that in today's world it is increasingly hard to maintain control merely through repression.

None of this is to say that anti-Americanism or anti-Israel sentiment in the Middle East is about to go away. What we have seen in Egypt and elsewhere is an important indicator that many of these trends will be with us for some time. But it does signal trouble for the particularly murderous and vociferous forms of anti-American and anti-Israeli sentiment that these governments have tried to nurture through proxies in the Levant and elsewhere. I would be the last to forecast the date and manner of the change of government in Syria and Iran.

The Government of Egypt which was a more robust government than either Syria or Iran fell in a mere 18 days, but dislodging Muammar Qadhafi took 6 months and considerable NATO airpower.

Even so, these systems are increasing frayed. Regional trends are clearly moving against them and the demands of their own populations are rising. The contradictions of their rule are apparent, and protestations in favor of the oppressed ring increasingly hollow as it becomes apparent that they oppress their own people.

A dictum of politics is if your opponent is shooting himself, don't stop him. We would do ourselves a disservice if we threw all the instruments of a national power into hastening the demise of these regimes. Such an effort would be more likely to have the opposite affect. Because we have been so appalled by the actions of these regimes over the last several decades, we have only very few ties with them and there is little else of value to them that we can jeopardize on our own.

Our instinct is surely to trumpet our disapproval. Our interests require a different strategy, however. The quiet and difficult work of building broad coalitions is likely to yield much better results than noisy condemnations that can be easily tuned out. There is little we can achieve immediately but much we must accomplish in the longer term.

Thank you, sir.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much, Mr. Alterman.

[The statement Mr. Alterman follows:]

Statement before the House Foreign Affairs Committee,
Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia
Jon B. Alterman
Director and Senior Fellow, Middle East Program, CSIS
September 22, 2011

Chairman Chabot, Ranking Member Ackerman, members of the Committee. Syria and Iran have a big problem. On the one hand, they have crafted strategies that cast themselves as the voice of the common man in the Middle East, standing up against Western oppression and protecting Palestinians. On the other, they are emerging as the oppressors of their own people, cynical authoritarian holdouts in a world increasingly inspired by popular protest against oppressors.

Syrian and Iranian strategy is not casual in this regard. Syria's entire foreign policy is premised on its being the beating heart of Arab nationalism, a front line state against Israel that refuses to accept the status quo, and the supporter of Hezbollah, which it touts as the only military force able to defeat Israel in battle. Drawing from a history of Ba'athism, the Syrian government's defiant Arabism is part of its defining myth, its touchstone and its raison d'etre. Arabism is at the heart of the Syrian regime's legitimacy. And yet, the Syrian government is killing Arabs.

For Iran, opposition to the United States and Israel are two of the only remaining pillars of the 1979 Islamic revolution (the chador being another). Iran has strategically used its position on Israel, in particular, to make it a mainstream Middle Eastern state rather than a marginal, Shia, Persian one. President Ahmedinejad's and Ayatollah Khamenei's statements on Israel are often calculated to catch the attention of Arab audiences at least as much as Iranian ones. They are an appeal to the street, and an implicit criticism of the accommodation of other regional governments toward Israel and the United States. The Iranian goal has been to portray these governments as somehow illegitimate, with Iran standing up for the sentiments of the man in the street.

The repression currently underway in Syria and Iran makes plain that reality is much different. Tens of thousands of peaceful Syrian demonstrators regularly take to the streets, only to be attacked by the security forces. Thousands have died, yet the government has shown little sign of relenting. Iran's burst of protest peaked two years ago, with a similar result—blood in the streets and no change in the halls of power. Conditions in Syria have become so dire that the Iranian government has sought to distance itself from them, appealing to President Assad to use a restraint that eluded Iran's own leadership during a wave of public protest two years ago.

What is becoming abundantly clear is that these regimes are merely about power, not the causes they espouse or the slogans they trumpet. Full of corruption, sweetheart deals and a disdain for the views of their own populations, these governments' cynical approach to governing is becoming increasingly clear to their own populations as well as to the regional audiences whose support they covet.

Their treatment of their own citizens demonstrates their insularity from popular demands; the callousness with which they spill the blood of their own people illustrates their disdain for the calls of the street they purport to represent.

Under their feet, the Middle East is changing. The caricatures they drew of other regional leaders are dissolving as those leaders either lead efforts toward reform or are swept away by a tide of protest. Meanwhile, the leaderships of Syria and Iran themselves have come to typify a rotten status quo that manipulates public emotions but does not serve them.

Shifting circumstances in the Middle East beg the question of what the United States should do about it. There is an understandable instinct to revel in their difficulties, to capitalize on their weaknesses and to exploit their contradictions. Few in these populations would mourn the fall of their governments, and the United States should do nothing to prop them up.

At the same time, the greatest favor the United States could do for these regimes is to somehow make their problems into a confrontation with the United States, rather than ones that arise out of the internal contradictions of these countries' own governance. An ability to concentrate attention on the United States would be a lifeline to these governments, shifting the focus from their own repression and allowing them to sound nationalist themes and boost their popular support. An overt U.S. embrace of opposition groups would surely lead to accusations that these groups are agents of the United States, or that their success somehow serves Israel's interests, thereby reducing their influence and credibility.

I believe the administration was justified in not rushing to call for Bashar al-Asad's resignation, not because such a resignation was not desirable, but because it was important that the call not be a distraction from the fundamental processes underway in Syria. Similarly, I have been impressed by the statements of Ambassador Robert Ford, which have been admirably firm but also in concert with other diplomatic missions in Damascus.

Iran is a harder case, in part because we have no official presence in Iran, in part because the United States remains such a politicized factor in Iranian politics, and in part because the Iranian government's list of objectionable behaviors—from human rights abuses to nuclear proliferation to promotion of regional instability—is so long. The Obama Administration's ability to marshal an international consensus on Iran is an important achievement. Iranians should have no doubt where the United States stands on these issues, but we should avoid turning this into a battle of wills between two equal rivals. Iran is neither our equal nor our rival.

To be clear, the United States should not remain passive or mute in the face of sustained repression. Our history and our values call for us to do more. Yet, no government looks anxiously at finely honed U.S. statements when its very survival is at risk, nor do protestors look to Washington for a sign when deciding to risk their

lives on the street. Ultimately, it is not about us, it is about them, and we do a disservice to them when we act as if it is all about us.

Instead, we need to do what we do in the company of other governments, especially from the Middle East, which are distressed by events in Syria and Iran and have sounded the alarm. The key strategic asset that these governments have tried to nurture is their legitimacy. Regional voices have far more credibility with the targeted populations than governments halfway around the world. This is not abdicating leadership nor "leading from behind." Rather, it is a quiet and confident leadership that arises from the understanding that these governments' repression has stripped them of their legitimacy, and that in today's world, it is increasingly hard to maintain control merely through repression.

The governments of Syria and Iran clearly fear becoming more isolated, and they are less confident in the mutual support that has given each succor in recent decades. Further, rather than being able to portray themselves with popular opposition to Israel, they are increasingly seen as being on the wrong side of repression. Should one of the governments falter, it would send shock waves through the other, not only because the remaining country would feel isolated, but also because it would feel exposed to the same forces that doomed its ally.

None of this is to say that anti-Americanism or anti-Israel sentiment in the Middle East is about to go away. What we have seen in Egypt and elsewhere is an important indicator that many of these trends will be with us for some time. But it does signal trouble for the particularly murderous and vociferous forms of anti-American and anti-Israeli sentiment that these governments have tried to nurture through proxies in the Levant and elsewhere.

I would be the last to forecast the date and manner of a change in government in Syria and Iran. The government of Egypt, which was a more robust government than that of either Syria or Iran, fell in 18 days, but dislodging Muammar Gadhafi took 6 months and considerable NATO airpower.

Even so, these systems are increasingly frayed. Regional trends are clearly moving against them, and the demands of their own populations are rising. The contradictions of their rule are apparent, and protestations in favor of the oppressed ring increasingly hollow as it becomes apparent that they oppress their own people.

A dictum of politics is, "If your opponent is shooting himself, don't stop him." We would do ourselves a disservice if we threw all the instruments of our national power into hastening the demise of these regimes. Such an effort would be more likely to have an opposite effect. Because we have been so appalled by the actions of these regimes over the last several decades, we have only a few ties with them, and there is little else of value to them that we can jeopardize on our own.

Our instinct is surely to trumpet our disapproval, our interests require a different strategy. The quiet and difficult work of building broad coalitions is likely to yield much better results than noisy condemnations that can be easily tuned out. There is little we can achieve immediately, but much we must accomplish in the longer term.

Mr. CHABOT. I would like to thank all five of the witnesses here this afternoon for what I felt were excellent statements from each and every one of you. We appreciate that. Your full statements will be made a part of the public record, without objection.

I also note the presence now of the distinguished gentleman from the Commonwealth of Virginia, Mr. Connolly, this afternoon as well.

Now we are going to begin our 5-minute questioning and I will start with myself, and we will also hold ourselves to the same 5 minutes that we held you all to. We may go to a second round depending on votes on the floor, which could happen at any time.

Mr. Nader, I will begin with you if I can. In your testimony you note that "The Islamic Republican has portrayed U.S. And international policies on the Iranian nuclear program as part of an effort to deny Iran both advanced technology and its perceived place among the world's great nations. Thus, U.S. opposition to the Iranian nuclear program, while necessary given the threats posted by a potential Iranian nuclear weapons capability, has also had the effect of strengthening the regime among its core supporters."

Mr. Khalaji, you also I believe raised a similar point, noting that it is very important that we convey to the people of Iran "that the Iranian Government organizations primarily involved in human rights abuses are the same organizations that run the military and the nuclear program."

The concern you both raise that the American policy toward the nuclear program could inherently weaken our credibility with Iranian people is a real and legitimate concern. Both issues, however, are central to U.S. interests, and neither can nor should be abandoned at the expense of the other.

Can you and anyone else who is interested suggest how we can strike a balance between these two priorities? How can we best manage this tension? And I would like to hear from both of you if we could, Mr. Nader.

Mr. NADER. Thank you. I do think there has been for obvious and necessary reasons a focus on the nuclear program. It presents a fundamental challenge to U.S. and allied interests in the Middle East. However, the Islamic Republic has used this issue to portray the U.S. policy toward the nuclear program as part of an effort against the Iranian people, against Iran's perceived rightful place in the Middle East.

And I do think that recently, as I suggested, there has been a shift in terms of focusing on human rights, depicting the regimes abuses. I think the United States needs to do more of this in terms of striking a balance.

You mentioned the possibility of a grand bargain between the United States and Iran. I do not think a grand bargain per se is a possibility at this stage. I don't think we should give up efforts of engagement with the Islamic Republic. It is a valuable tactic in terms of the United States achieving its objectives. I think Iran's total diplomatic isolation benefits the regime actually, because it isolates the Iranian people. But, again, I think engagement is increasingly an unsuccessful strategy, if you will.

So highlighting human rights is very important. I do think that the Islamic Republic is very unstable. It is not going to escape the

effects of the Arab Spring. To some extent, I do think that the 2009 election in Iran influenced the Arab populations. The Iranians have been influenced by Arab populations in return, and the Islamic Republic is not going to last forever.

We have the opportunity to slow down the Iranian nuclear program through sanctions, through political pressure, and other means. Various U.S. assessments have shown that an Iranian nuclear weapons capability is not eminent.

So if we come out on the side of the Iranian people and the side of Iranian democrats and strike a balance in a U.S. policy, we could achieve our objectives in a more efficient manner.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. Mr. Khalaji.

Mr. KHALAJI. It has been 32 years that Iranian Government tries to portray the United States as the main enemy of the Iranian people rather than an enemy of the Iranian regime's policy. So it is very important to strengthen public diplomacy for the Iranian people.

Since we don't have a diplomatic relationship with Iran and we don't have physical presence in Iran, it is very important to capitalize on different sources of the public diplomacy we have. Especially I think it is very important to raise the budget for the Persian section of Voice of America and try to make it more professional and convey our messages to Iranians. It is very important to communicate with the Iranian people and explain to them if we are critical of Iranian policy, why is this criticism and why is the international community so concerned about Iran's nuclear ambition.

Also we have to be more supportive to different groups of human rights activists in the United States and in Europe who work on Iran issue. It is very important that people-to-people exchanges, it is important to facilitate visas for Iranian citizens. You know that Iranians are among the few nations in the world that cannot get visa for the United States very easily. And when they get it, it is only one entry. The initiation by the State Department to give some—to let Iranian students to get multiple visa was very important, and it sends a message to the Iranian people that United States is a friend with Iranians, and only we have problem with the government.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. My time has expired. I would like to yield now 5 minutes to the gentleman, also from a commonwealth, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. I think four of our States are commonwealths and two of them are represented here today.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Chairman, I come from both of them. I was born in Boston.

Mr. CHABOT. There you go. Amazing. What do you have against States anyway?

The gentleman from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Mr. Keating, is recognized.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Quickly I just want to go back with Mr. Bedran just to clarify something, I'm not sure. You used the term that the U.S. should direct Turkey in terms of joining with us in our efforts in Syria and with Iran. Could you de-

scribe the means by which we could do that or what actions we could take in that regard?

Mr. BADRAN. Thank you. I did say that we should be directing the actions of Turkey and Qatar in the sense as we saw in August, as recently as early August, the Turks took an initiative on their own to go to Syria to talk to Assad, extend him a 2-week window with which to ostensibly change his behavior, after we had already come out and said he has lost his legitimacy and so on. So that kind of action undermined our policy at the time.

What tools do we have? Obviously, quiet diplomacy among allies is clearly the most effective, but also the Turks have been asking the United States for a number of asks with regards to their fight with the PKK, for instance. In Iraq, they have asked for predator drones to be based in Turkey to use against the PKK, and other intelligence cooperation.

So there are multiple avenues that we share with the Turks that could be easily used to establish a mutual relationship in that regard.

Mr. KEATING. Well, thank you. This question to any of panelists. One of the concerns, despite the despicable treatment Syria has shown to the demonstrators, has been the treatment and detainment of innocent journalists at the hands of the Assad regime.

Can the United States do more to use its leverage to protect foreign and domestic journalists on the ground, to help make sure that there is free press—a freer press? Certainly the second part of the question is, do you think the social media can be helpful in that regard, too?

Mr. BADRAN. It would be great to be able to assist foreign journalists in Syria were they able to go to Syria. The problem is the regime has shut down the ability of the foreign observers except the ones that it picks and chooses. They even invited CNN reporters and others to come in, but they have very severely curtailed their ability to move.

With regard to domestic journalists, they have definitely born the brunt of the repression, those who have actually come out. But what is interesting about the Syrian uprising is that it has developed really remarkable creativity and other creative methods to lay out its version of the events or the facts of the brutality of the regime to the outside world, using, as you mentioned, the social networks and YouTube and Facebook and other such instruments. And that would be one of the ways we could help them by establishing, say, WiFi zones in neighboring countries that could extend their ability to continue to do that in other secure communications so they could continue to report.

Mr. KEATING. Good point. Thank you.

Mr. ALTERMAN. Mr. Keating, one of the things that I think has been of increasing concern in the last several weeks is the number of reports of Western countries who have sold equipment and software to intelligence services in the Middle East, which were then used to report—monitor all these groups. There was a report recently about a British firm who sold equipment to the Government of Egypt. Certainly with Libya, we have understood the extent of the monitoring.

I am sure that an open hearing is not the place to discuss it, but I certainly would hope that people in Congress would think about what ways Congress has to the influence the ability of authoritarian regimes to use these tools unmonitored.

Mr. KEATING. The deep packet, technology.

Mr. ALTERMAN. Absolutely.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you. I don't think I have much time for response, but just the apparent contradiction with the Arab lead, where they joined in a multilateral action in Libya, but their inability to act here.

Any thoughts on how that could be encouraged at all or if that is at all in the offing?

Mr. ALTERMAN. I think it is much harder because Muammar Qadhafi had always walked away from his Arabism, only to come back. Bashar al-Assad has always tried to wrap himself in his Arabism.

With that being said, I think we have seen a number of indicators in the last several months. Certainly the Gulf States, Saudis, and others have grown increasingly alarmed at the direction that Bashar al-Assad has taken. I think you are not going to see the same repudiation that you saw of Muammar Qadhafi, because in many ways it followed many episodes of repudiation by Qadhafi himself, but certainly there are opportunities to get more solidarity on a number of issues from the Arab league that I think we should actively pursue.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you. My time has expired.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. Thank you. The gentleman's time has expired. The gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Connolly, is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

I am going to ask all of you a simple question—I know it is not a simple analysis—and then I want to talk about Iran. A simple question rating high, medium, low, the probability of regime change in Syria given the events going on. Mr. Singh, why don't we start with you?

Mr. ALTERMAN. What time frame, Mr. Connolly?

Mr. CONNOLLY. You can pick one. Let's say in the next 3 to 6 months. But if you want to say a year, I will need a year, that is fine too. Mr. Singh.

Mr. SINGH. I would say medium. That sounds like a safe response. What we haven't seen so far—we have seen great courage by the protestors coming out, facing the bullets every day, which is a remarkable decision to make. I think we need to recognize that. What we haven't seen yet is what we saw very quickly in Libya, which are sort of the high-level defections, the real cracks forming in the regime, and that is frankly what I would look for.

My hope is that it falls tomorrow, but I think so far it has proven that it is able to hold itself together so far. And there are lots of reasons for that which I won't go into right now.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Okay. Mr. Khalaji.

Mr. KHALAJI. I am not an expert on Syria.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you very much. Mr. Nader?

Mr. NADER. I would like to pass on that, please.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Badran.

Mr. BADRAN. I believe that the Assad regime will fall. The assessment now of the United States administration is that he has a good chance of hanging on for a while, although he has no ability to come back from the trajectory he is on. It all depends on the course that the revolution is going to take. For now it has been peaceful.

There is a lot of, you know, agitation now and questions whether it should be armed, moving forward. And this is the thing that I raised, the issue that I raised with regard to the mechanism that the administration has in mind for how to move forward. As Mike said, basically now the hope is that there will be cracks in the regime, a unified opposition that could rally support from members within the regime and the elites, and hopefully somehow that will translate into a transition. Unfortunately, there is a good possibility that it doesn't work out that way and that it goes into a much more violent course, in which case we will see regional players involved.

Mr. CONNOLLY. But in any case, your bet is we will see regime change?

Mr. BADRAN. I do believe so.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Okay. Mr. Alterman.

Mr. ALTERMAN. I think the odds are low in the near term. I think they get up as we move out the timeline. Because I know you well enough from our working together 25 years ago, you like the creative stuff. I think at some point—see, it is true. At some point it is not unlikely there is a military coup in Syria. I don't know what precipitates it. I don't know what part of the military does what. I don't know if there is any external involvement in any of this. But I would say it is very likely sometime over the next 5 years that there is a different government in Syria, probably over the next 2.

Whether they are much different in their orientation is unclear, because it seems to me that a huge number of the external actors, including the Israelis, would actually be okay with a government that is not terribly, terribly different from the government of Bashar Al-Assad in its orientation toward regional foreign policy.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you. And if I may, Dr. Alterman, start with you on this one. What are we to make of the apparent friction, if not break, between the ruling Muslim clerics in Tehran and President Ahmadinejad? After all, he began as their guy. And we see all kinds of political statements and actions seem to rein him in and maybe even isolate and embarrass him. Or is that just wishful thinking by a western press?

Mr. ALTERMAN. I know my friends well enough that I am just going to talk very briefly, and Mehdi and others can talk eloquently about this. It seems to me two things are going on. One is Mahmoud Ahmadinejad isn't who he was when he first came up. They feel he has gotten too big for his britches, that he doesn't understand what his role is, and there is an effort to provide a comeuppance.

It seems to me as well, there is a genuine possibility of a split in the clerical establishment in Iran, that it is not just Ahmadinejad against the clerics, to some extent it is cleric against cleric. And again, if you want to be creative and look forward, it

seems to me the most likely cause of a change of Government in Iran is some sort of split in the clerical establishment which takes down the legitimacy of this regime which he has been clinging to since the Islamic Revolution.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Can I just interrupt you 1 second? I really think this is an important question, Mr. Chairman, but I do not wish to impose on the chair. Would he indulge the panel to be able to answer this question?

Mr. CHABOT. Yes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the chair. Thank you, Mr. Nader.

Mr. NADER. I do think that the divisions between Ahmadinejad, President Ahmadinejad and the Supreme Leader are very serious and indicate the deep trouble the Islamic Republic is in today. President Ahmadinejad is challenging the Supreme Leader's authority. And the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, has been challenged from the left and the right. And this shows that the Islamic Republic as a system lacks legitimacy.

When you have somebody like Ahmadinejad, who owes his Presidency to a large degree to Khamenei, challenge him in this fashion shows that even figures like Ahmadinejad realize that the system is in trouble. And I think this provides opportunities for the United States. Not direct action necessarily, but it shows that Iran, which is I think sometimes portrayed as a more—as a stronger form of government than it is, faces a very uncertain future.

Mr. KHALAJI. I have a structuralist understanding of Iran politics. I think that the fate of Mr. Ahmadinejad is not much different than the fate of other Iranian Presidents. Even Ayatollah Khamenei, when he was President in the first decade of Islamic Republic, he had lots of problems with the Supreme Leader at that time, and he was weakened by different mechanisms implemented by the Supreme Leader.

All Iranian Presidents come to office with an ambitious agenda, whether economic or political, reformist or hardliner, but they leave the office very, very weak. And the story of Mr. Khatami, the foreign former President, and the story of Rafsanjani is repeating again this time. The hard core of power in the Islamic Republic is the Supreme Leader. Supreme Leader relies on Revolutionary Guard and armed forces, intelligence, and judiciary. That would not change. And I think as long as the Islamic Republic is in place, we would not see any major political shift in Iran.

Mr. SINGH. I will just say I am in large agreement with Mehdi. I think that the Iranians in many ways are their own worst enemy. I think that President Ahmadinejad is a good example of that. He is his own worst enemy. He also has made life very difficult for the Iranian regime in many ways.

I do think, though, that we tend to focus too much on President Ahmadinejad. And it is worth looking underneath the surface at what has actually happened inside the regime. Their base of support inside Iran, inside Iranian elites, has narrowed. It is a regime that now relies largely on simply the hardliners and the IRGC and the broader security apparatus, and you don't have the reformists and the traditional conservatives inside the inner circle anymore. To me this is both dangerous for the regime itself, because it suggests a regime that is more brittle and has less support. It is also

dangerous for the world and for us, however, because that element which still supports the Supreme Leader is the most dangerous element, the most militarized element.

Mr. CHABOT. Did you get everybody, Gerry?

Mr. CONNOLLY. Pardon me?

Mr. CHABOT. Did you get everybody?

Mr. BADRAN. I am going to pass.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you very much. And thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your indulgence.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. We will go to a second round. And I will recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Let me begin, if I could give you maybe a minute, minute and a half, Mr. Singh, I cut you off right at the beginning, and you were getting ready to say here is what the United States can do to meet these challenges, one, two, three, or whatever. Now I would like to hear what we can do to meet those challenges—and if you can recall what the challenges were.

Mr. SINGH. There are so many. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will say I want to say something in response to your earlier question about balance. And I think that balance is the wrong way for us to think about our policy with respect to Iran. I don't think it is a matter of there is a spectrum between the nuclear issue on the one hand and human rights on the other. I think we need to be fully focused on both issues.

You know, the goal is not to get, frankly, the Iranian opposition on board with our agenda. They, frankly, will not have the same view we have on the nuclear issue. And frankly, Mir Hossein Mousavi, the opposition leader, probably scored some political points by taking a position which was against ours on the nuclear issue.

Our goal really is to just help them do what they want do anyway, which is to topple their regime, frankly, which is to change the nature of the system of government in Iran. And I think we can do both.

My points about sort of what should we be doing with Iran and Syria are fourfold. And I will just go through them extremely quickly so my colleagues have a chance to talk.

First, I do think we need to use our bully pulpit, the White House, the State Department, Security Council, to shed greater light on what is happening inside these countries. You know, I take a slightly different view from some of my fellow panelists here that sanctions are great, but they are—frankly, it is very hard to reach many of these individuals through sanctions. And I think we need to be frequently making statements about individual cases, individual situations of human rights activists and dissidents inside these countries.

Second, I think we need to try to break the control that these regimes exercise over information. And this gets to a couple of the questions which have been asked. And that has both offensive and defensive components. I think we need to push back on the propaganda effort of these regimes, which is now extremely aggressive. And we need to deny them space on satellites and so forth to the extent we can. But we also need to give people inside these countries, actors inside these countries, the tools they need. Frankly,

the Obama administration has done some good things on that front, and that deserves more support and more funding to the extent it is available.

Third, I think we need to deny the Iranian and Syrian regimes the tools of repression to the extent we can. And here I agree with Dr. Alterman about trying to deny them technologies, and trying to provide technologies to the activists.

And then fourth, very simply, I think we need to deny these regimes international cover. They seek support outside when they can't find it inside or in their region. So they seek support at the United Nations, in multilateral institutions, with proxies and allies and so forth, and we need to be very aggressive all over the world in pushing back on that. Thank you.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. I guess there is about enough time to get one more question in here. Mr. Badran, in your testimony you note that, and I will quote this, "In sharp contrast with its handling of the Egyptian revolution, the Obama administration appeared very reticent to take the lead on Syria. Instead, it effectively subcontracted the policy to Turkey, under the belief that Ankara had the most influence with Assad, and could persuade him to respond to the protesters' demands. It was a critical mistake to cede leadership to the Turks, just as it was in error to assume they shared our interests."

Could you expand on that a bit? How do our interests and those of the Turks, especially vis—vis Syria, diverge? And what has been the consequence of this retreat of American leadership? And I would invite your response, and maybe yours, Mr. Singh, as well on this, if you would like to comment on that.

Mr. BADRAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I believe that the assessment by the administration on Turkey's—the extent of Turkey's influence and leverage, and also the misassessment of their vulnerability with regard to Syria, was at the basis of their ceding the leadership to Turkey. Meaning they thought that because Turkey had established such a close relationship because of its engagement with Syria—I mean Syria was really at the heart of Turkey's "no problems with neighbors," or zero problems with neighbors policy. And Prime Minister Erdogan and Assad developed even a close friendship. So it was assumed that somehow Turkey could persuade him to change course and that its soft-power "influence" would be able to make him reform and so on. And the administration went with that for a while.

It was a critical error from the beginning. On the one hand, and as we saw, Turkish soft power really was completely irrelevant in this case. And for the last 6, 7 months now, we have not yet seen a single actual concrete punitive measure by Turkey against Assad, economic or military or otherwise until now. Now we are starting to hear that Turkey may consider doing sanctions and so on. So that was the error, I believe.

Mr. CHABOT. Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. Singh, would you comment very briefly on that, because my time is exhausted at this point, so like 30 seconds.

Mr. SINGH. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I think that Turkey is simply not in a position to assemble or lead any kind of regional or international coalition on Syria. That is something the United States is

going to have to do. And we are going to have to be at the front of that effort. And there is a trade-off here between trying to seek regional and international cover, and being willing to stick our necks out and provide leadership to this effort. And I think we have to do the latter.

You know, to the member's point about waiting for the Arab League, we would be waiting for the Arab League for a very long time to provide us cover on Syria. And I think the same is true with Turkey. So U.S. leadership is really needed here.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. My time has expired. And I would go back to the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Connolly, if he would like an additional 5 minutes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the chair. Did the chair want to finish his line?

Mr. CHABOT. No, I am good.

Mr. CONNOLLY. All right. Let me ask, what should we read in recent statements and actions by the Turkish Government? And let me preface it by saying that, you know, we are elected officials, sometimes called politicians. We surely can understand domestic political pressures and why somebody says or does something that may not be for international consumption. Nonetheless, we are big boys and girls, and we understand that our words can have consequences nonetheless.

What should we read in recent Turkish actions and words? And how serious do you think the breach between Turkey and Israel is? I happen to believe a serious breach between the two is very harmful to Middle East peace prospects, and that the relationship is critical for the United States and for the two partners. Dr. Alterman, begin with you.

Mr. ALTERMAN. Thank you. I think Turkey is trying to reposition itself. Turkey had been a fellow non-Arab power in the Middle East, trying to get into Europe, and saw itself as a natural ally of Israel. As Turkey has been rethinking its role in the Middle East, its relationship to the Middle East, its relationship to Europe, I think it has decided to rethink its relationship to Israel, among others, not because it wants to cut its relationship with Israel, but it wants to be less close. I think what we have seen in many ways is an alignment less toward Israel, more toward Saudi Arabia, which in the case of Syria and Iran is not all against U.S. interests. Because having Turkey, a country on the border of Syria and Iran, with trade with Syria and Iran, a lot they can hold hostage to Syria and Iran, creates an opportunity to have tremendous influence on the calculations of these governments as they think about the relationship to the outside world.

I don't think Turkey is a lost cause. I think Turkey is repositioning itself. I think Turkey is perceived, in the absence of a strong government in Iraq, in the absence of a strong government in Egypt, is perceived as the only potential Middle Eastern power which can really help the Saudis, in expanding power in the Middle East. I think we have to guide the development of Turkey's outreach into the Middle East, partly looking at how its relationship with Saudi Arabia develops, partly how its relationship to Egypt develops. I think Turkey is going to be a growing factor in the Middle East over the next decade or so. And we are well to try to en-

gage with that in a constructive way rather than getting into a name-calling exercise that tries to have them respond to our diktats. At a time when we had much more power in the Middle East, we tried to have our troops go into Iraq from Turkey, and we were unsuccessful.

Mr. BADRAN. Thank you. I think something that Mr. Singh said earlier is very pertinent here, that Turkey is a regional power, but Turkey is not a great power. But nevertheless, Turkey has self-conceptions of itself as a great power. And the problem that Syria exposed with regard to Turkish foreign policy was how fragile its central doctrine of zero problems with neighbors was.

If you now survey Turkey's relationships with Cyprus, with Greece, with Israel, with Syria, and to a certain extent uneasiness with Iran, you see that you have a set of failures, or definitely much more failure than success in all of them. So a lot of this is due to Turkish domestic constraints, the civil-military relationship, the very deep structural identity issue that Turkey has, is trying to redefine itself, specifically with regard to its relationship with its Kurdish minority.

And as now Erdogan and the AKP government lead a campaign against the PKK and Iraq, for instance, this is coming to the fore, exposing the rifts inside Turkish society. So I think to make Turkey into a regional pillar has to be very delicately handled, because it is a very vulnerable regional ally.

Mr. NADER. Turkey increasingly sees itself as a major regional power. And especially under the Justice and Development Party, Turkish foreign policy has changed quite a bit in response to domestic issues. But I do think that Turkey and its ruling party now have this vision of perhaps a new Ottoman policy, that Turkey can have influence in the Middle East in areas where it ruled before, whether in Syria and Iraq, or in Libya.

I do think that sometimes our interests converge, and sometimes they diverge. Turkey is a NATO ally, but at the same time it has used hostility toward Israel in the region to gain popularity among the Arab populations. In some ways, it may be even trying to take Iran's place as one of the key players on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. At the same time, as it challenges Iran, it has strengthening relations with Iran, economic relations, security relations. So this shows in a lot of ways that, although Turkey is a U.S. ally, its path may diverge from our interests in the future.

Mr. CHABOT. Okay.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. CHABOT. The gentleman's time has expired. Without objection, members will have 5 days to submit statements or questions for the record, or make revisions thereof.

I want to thank this very distinguished panel for their statements this afternoon and answering the questions. We appreciate it. You have given us, I think, tremendous insight.

And if there is no further business to come before the committee, we are adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 3:22 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

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

September 19, 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: Thursday, September 22, 2011

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: Axis of Abuse: U.S. Human Rights Policy toward Iran and Syria, Part II

WITNESSES:

Mr. Michael Singh
Managing Director
Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Mr. Mehdi Khalaji
Senior Fellow
Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Mr. Alireza Nader
International Policy Analyst
RAND Corporation

Mr. Tony Badran
Research Fellow
Foundation for the Defense of Democracies

Dr. Jon B. Alterman
Director and Senior Fellow, Middle East Program
Center for Strategic and International Studies

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON MESA _____ HEARING

Day Thurs Date Sept 22 Room 2172

Starting Time 2:05 Ending Time 327

Recesses [ ] (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chabot

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session [✓]
Executive (closed) Session [ ]
Televised [ ]

VOICE of AMERICA
Electronically Recorded (taped) [✓]
Stenographic Record [✓]

TITLE OF HEARING:

Iran Syria 2

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chabot / Ackerman, Keating, Connolly

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

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 _____

Subcommittee Staff Director