

HUMAN RIGHTS IN SYRIA

HEARING
BEFORE THE
TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED AND TWELFTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION

JULY 12, 2011

Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.tlhrc.house.gov>

TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

JAMES P. McGOVERN, Massachusetts, *Cochairman* FRANK R. WOLF, Virginia, *Cochairman*

JAN SCHAKOWSKY, Illinois
DONNA EDWARDS, Maryland
KEITH ELLISON, Minnesota
TAMMY BALDWIN, Wisconsin

CHRIS SMITH, New Jersey
JOSEPH R. PITTS, Pennsylvania
TRENT FRANKS, Arizona

MIKE MCVICKER, *Democratic Lead Staffer/Brookings Legis Fellow*
KALINDA STEPHENSON, *Republican Staff Director*
LARS DE GIER, *Fellow*
JANN FUTTERMAN, *Intern*
MOLLY HOF SOMMER, *Intern*

CONTENTS

WITNESSES

Michael H. Posner, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State	8
Mona Yacoubian, Institute's Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention	18
Andrew Tabler, The Washington Institute	23
Mara Karlin, Instructor in Strategic Studies at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies	27
Radwan Ziadeh, Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy	36
Louay M. Safi, Syrian American Council	39

LETTERS, STATEMENTS, ETC., SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING

Prepared Statement of the Honorable James P. McGovern, a Representative in Congress from the State of Massachusetts and Cochairman of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission	5
Prepared Statement of Michael H. Posner	10
Prepared Statement of Mona Yacoubian	21
Prepared Statement of Mara Karlin	30
Prepared Statement of Louay M. Safi	41

APPENDIX

Hearing Notice	48
----------------------	----

HUMAN RIGHTS IN SYRIA: AN OVERVIEW

TUESDAY, JULY 12, 2010

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION,
Washington, D.C.

The Commission met, pursuant to call, at 10:00 a.m., in Room 340, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. James P. McGovern [co-chairman of the Commission] presiding.

Cochairman McGOVERN. Good morning, everybody. I want to thank everyone for being here today. I would also like to thank Jann Futterman and the staff of The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for coordinating this hearing, and I especially want to thank our witnesses for their attendance.

It is my hope that today's hearing will bring some much needed awareness to the human rights abuses currently taking place in Syria. I would also like to examine the current refugee situation that has resulted from the violence perpetrated by the Syrian Government.

As we sit here today, crimes against humanity are taking place in Syria. In its desperate attempts to cling to power, the authoritarian government of President Bashar al-Assad has carried out extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests, torture, denial of medical assistance to the wounded, and the deprivation of basic services to the civilian population.

The District of Dara'a in the south has been particularly hard hit by Syrian security forces, leading to over 400 deaths, while the overall death toll throughout Syria has risen to well over 1,500. There have been reports of security forces using live ammunition against unarmed civilians, of shootings by snipers positioned on rooftops of public buildings, and the deployment of tanks in densely populated areas.

Just recently, security forces have responded to protests in the western city of Hama, which is evidence that the protests, as well as the violence, is spreading. The situation has understandably spurred a mass exodus of refugees attempting to escape the violence by fleeing to Turkey.

The Syrian Government's military operation against cities in the north has reportedly led 15,000 Syrians to flee to Turkey, where 10,000 of them have been

relocated to refugee camps near the border. All the while, Syrian security forces have been violently trying to keep people from fleeing. Those who are lucky enough to escape Syria live in make-shift camps along the Syria-Turkey border where conditions are extremely difficult. In short, the human rights situation in Syria is dire.

Now sometimes when such grave human rights violations occur in real time, it makes it difficult to grasp the gravity of what is taking place. Sometimes we believe that there is a certain inevitability to it all. It is only when we take a step back that we realize what we have really witnessed.

I don't believe that the violence in Syria is inevitable. I believe that something can be done. We are not powerless. We have a responsibility to act. There is no inevitability to the atrocities being committed by the Syrian Government against the Syrian people.

I hope that this hearing will highlight the magnitude of the human rights violations taking place in Syria, as well as the urgency with which we need to act to prevent the continuation of such violations.

Before I introduce our first witness, I would like to also recognize and praise our U.S. Ambassador in Syria, Robert Ford, who traveled to the city of Hama on Friday, a dangerous trip, in and of itself, and was present to witness the peaceful protests.

The French Embassy, following the American lead, also went, and reports that this diplomatic presence spared the demonstrators from additional harsh reprisals by Syrian security forces, or at least for that day. It was the right thing to do, a good thing to do, and a courageous act on behalf of peaceful, nonviolent protest in support of basic human rights.

We are honored to have as our first witness Michael H. Posner, the Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, at the U.S. Department of State. We welcome you here, and you can begin your testimony. Thank you.
[The statement of Rep. McGovern follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE JAMES P. MCGOVERN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS AND COCHAIRMAN OF THE TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Rep. James P. McGovern (MA)
TLHRC Hearing: Human Rights in Bahrain
340 Cannon HOB
Friday, July 12, 2011
10:00 AM-11:30 AM

Good morning. I want to thank everyone for being here today. I would also like to thank Jann Futterman and the staff of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for coordinating this hearing, and I especially want to thank our witnesses for their attendance.

It is my hope that today's hearing will bring some much needed awareness to the human rights abuses currently taking place in Syria. I also would like to examine the current refugee situation that has resulted from the violence perpetrated by the Syrian government.

As we sit here today, crimes against humanity are taking place in Syria. In its desperate attempts to cling to power, the authoritarian government of President Bashar al-Asad has carried out extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests, torture, denial of medical assistance to the wounded, and the deprivation of basic services to the civilian population.

The Dara'a district in the South has been particularly targeted by Syrian security forces, leading to over 400 deaths, while the overall death toll throughout Syria has risen to well over 1,500. There have been reports of security forces using live ammunition against unarmed civilians – of shootings by snipers positioned on rooftops of public buildings – and of the deployment of tanks in densely populated areas.

Just recently, security forces have responded to protests in the western city of Hama, which is evidence that the protests, as well as the violence, is spreading.

This situation has understandably spurred on a mass exodus of refugees attempting to escape the violence by fleeing into Turkey. The Syrian government's military operation against cities in the north has reportedly led 15,000 Syrians to flee to Turkey, where 10,000 of them have been relocated to refugee camps near the border. All the while, Syrian security forces have been violently trying to keep people from fleeing. Those who are lucky enough to escape Syria live in makeshift camps along the Syria-Turkey border where conditions are extremely difficult.

In short, the human rights situation in Syria is dire.

Sometimes when such grave human rights violations occur in real time, it makes it difficult to grasp the gravity of what is taking place. Sometimes we believe that there is a certain inevitability to it all. It is only when we take a step back that we realize what we have really witnessed.

However, I believe that something can be done. We are not powerless. We have a responsibility to act. There is no inevitability to the atrocities being committed by the Syrian government against the Syrian people.

I hope that this hearing will highlight magnitude of the human rights violations taking place in Syria as well as the urgency with which we need to act to prevent the continuation of such violations.

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

Mr. POSNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this hearing. I have a rather lengthy written testimony that I would like to be made part of the record.

Mr. McGOVERN. Without objection.

Mr. POSNER. As you are aware, the Government of Syria continues to carry out a pattern of gross violations of human rights, despite its promises to stop. As Secretary Clinton said yesterday, from the U.S. perspective President Assad has lost legitimacy. She said, "President Assad is not indispensable, and we have absolutely nothing invested in his remaining in power. Our goal is to see that the will of the Syrian people for a democratic transformation occurs."

I want to give a little background on what has gotten us to this point and where we are today in trying to move forward with respect to Syria, a little bit on the background.

As you know, the large scale demonstrations started in mid-March in the southern town of Dara'a, which you just mentioned. Security forces fired on demonstrators calling for the release of children who had been held for weeks for writing political graffiti on walls. This brutal act sparked a collective will by the Syrian people, who have been oppressed for decades.

In response, thousands, tens of thousands of average Syrians organized peaceful demonstrations on the streets of towns, villages, and cities across Syria, which are now entering their fourth month. President Assad and his regime have responded to these peaceful protests with gunfire, mass arrests, torture and abuse.

Human rights organizations report that over 1,300, perhaps as many as 1,600 Syrians have been killed. Thousands more have been jailed, and Syrian people are being held hostage to a widening crackdown by security forces. But the Syrian people, remarkably, have lost their fear. They are not backing down in the face of this brutality.

They are continuing to take to the streets to demand freedom, respect for their basic rights, transition to democracy, and for dignity. Syrian military security forces of besieged communities cut off water, cut off the Internet, conducted mass arrests without due process, targeted emergency medical responders, shot peaceful protesters.

I would also note that our reports are that about 200 Syrian soldiers have been killed. We regret and condemn the loss of their lives, too, but the vast majority of the casualties have been unarmed civilians. By continuing to ban foreign journalists and observers, the regime seeks to hide these basic facts. Because the government has banned independent media, crimes committed by government forces have been reported

mainly through images and videos taken by brave demonstrators and smuggled out of the country.

Last week, President Assad sacked the governor of Hama and ordered his troops and tanks to surround the city, where they still are. At least 10,000 Syrians and perhaps many more perished at the hands of his father in 1982, and yet despite the city's tragic history and despite numerous provocations, the demonstrators in Hama have remained unbelievably peaceful.

As you know, last week and, as you said, Ambassador Ford visited Hama where there have been six weeks of demonstrations. He toured the city. He reported that protesters were peaceful. There are no attacks on government buildings or officials. However, the government continues to carry out sweeps. It has arrested dozens of peaceful demonstrators without judicial authority, and these roundups are contrary to President Assad's promises that proper procedures will be used.

The ambassador's travel to Hama is a demonstration of our solidarity with the people of that city, for their right to demonstrate and assemble, and for their continued demands for a more democratic future for Syria. While the Syrian government again today accused us of gross interference in Syrian affairs, the ambassador was greeted with flowers and cheered by city residents, and we continue to stand behind the people of Syria and their demand for a more just and open society.

Yesterday, as you know, a mob attacked our embassy and the French embassy. They threw rocks. They smashed windows. They raised the Syrian flag. They scrawled graffiti, calling Ambassador Ford a dog. We were able to restore order, the Marine guards, and we have strongly condemned this violation of diplomatic protocol.

We view these incidents as further evidence that President Assad's government continues to be the real source of instability in Syria. He has promised reforms, but he has delivered no meaningful changes. He talks about dialogue, but he continues to engage in violence that prove his rhetoric hollow.

Amnesty International has reported that killings and torture by security forces in the towns of Tel Kalil and on the Lebanese border in May resulted in scores of people being hurt, some elderly, some under 18 years old. Detainees were interviewed by Amnesty in Lebanon, and they described, as many others have, brutal torture, including beatings, prolonged use of stress positions, use of electric shock, etcetera.

So the situation remains grim. It is a situation which, among other things, we received numerous reports of attacks on children, perhaps the best known, a 13-year-old, Hamza Al-Khatib, whose torture and mutilated body was returned to his family by Syrian security forces in late April.

The United States has repeatedly raised our concerns. As you said, Mr. Chairman, we are very proud of Ambassador Ford's presence there. Since he has arrived

on the scene, he has raised individual cases of political prisoners, some of whom have been released, but we remain deeply concerned about the treatment of the thousands of detainees who remain in custody.

As you know, we have imposed sanctions. I am glad to speak about that, if you have questions. We have also been involved, and continue to be involved, both at the UN Human Rights Council and now in New York in trying to fashion an appropriate response in the UN Security Council.

I would end just by saying that we are clear, since the protests began, this is about the Syrian people and their desire to shape a new destiny. There are growing signs that civil society and opposition groups both inside and outside Syria are becoming more organized. A peaceful democratic transition will require the participation of and respect for all of Syria's ethnic and religious groups.

We want to see a Syria that is unified, where tolerance and equality are the norm. The Syrian people have shown that they will not cease their demands for dignity and a future free from intimidation and fear. The Syrian people deserve a government that respects its own people, works to build a more stable and prosperous country, and does not rely on repression at home or antagonism abroad to maintain its grip on power. They deserve a government that serves them. That would be good for Syria, good for the region, and good for the world.

In the meantime, the United States Government will continue to press for an immediate end to the violence and the beginning of a democratic, peaceful process. It is important for the United States that the Syrian people succeed in this endeavor, and we are going to support their efforts to bring a peaceful and prosperous future. Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. POSNER follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHAEL H. POSNER.

**Testimony of Assistant Secretary of State Michael H. Posner
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
House of Representatives
July 12, 2011 10 a.m.**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. I would like to thank you and the Members of the Commission for holding this important and timely hearing on the human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, and I appreciate this opportunity to testify.

Mr. Chairman, I ask that my full statement, and the written testimony, be made part of the record.

Mr. Chairman, as you are aware, the Government of Syria continues to carry out a pattern of gross human rights violations despite promises to stop. As Secretary Clinton said yesterday, from the U.S. perspective, President Assad "has lost legitimacy." She said: "President Assad is not indispensable, and we have absolutely nothing invested in him remaining in power. Our goal is to see that the will of the Syrian people for a democratic transformation occurs."

Let me begin with an overview of how the protest movement in Syria and the ensuing crackdown have evolved.

Large scale demonstrations started in mid-March in the southern town of Dara'a, when security forces fired upon demonstrators calling for the release of children being held for weeks for writing political graffiti. That brutal act sparked the collective will of the Syrian people oppressed for decades. In response, average Syrians organized peaceful demonstrations on the streets of towns, villages, and cities throughout Syria which are now entering the fourth month.

President Assad and his regime responded to the Syrian people's peaceful protests with gunfire, mass arrests, torture and abuse. Human rights organizations report that over 1,300 -- and as many as 1,600 -- Syrians have been killed, thousands jailed and the Syrian people are held hostage to a widening crackdown by security forces.

But the Syrian people have lost their fear. They are not backing down in the face of continued brutality. They are continuing to take to the streets to demand freedom, respect for their basic rights, and a transition to democracy.

Syrian military and security forces have besieged communities, cut off water, internet and telephone services, conducted mass arrests, targeted emergency medical responders, and shot peaceful protestors with impunity. As the Syrian government largely barred independent media from Syria, these crimes have been reported mainly through images and videos taken by brave demonstrators and smuggled out.

Last week, President Assad sacked the governor and ordered his troops and tanks to surround the central city of Hama, where at least 10,000 Syrians and perhaps many more perished at the hands of his father, Hafez Assad, in 1982. Despite the city's tragic history, and despite provocations, the demonstrators in Hama have remained peaceful.

As you know, on July 7th and 8th Ambassador Ford visited the central city of Hama, where for six weeks demonstrators have been bravely protesting in a peaceful fashion to express their dissent. Ambassador Ford toured the city and reported seeing no protestors carrying weapons, nor damage to government buildings. There have been no attacks on government buildings, soldiers or government officials. However, the government has carried out sweeps and arrested dozens of peaceful demonstrators without judicial authority to do so and without due process. These roundups are contrary to the promises from President Assad that proper judicial procedures would be followed in dealing with the unrest.

Ambassador Ford traveled to Hama to demonstrate our solidarity with the people of the city, and our firm support for their right to assemble and express themselves peacefully. The lack of unfettered international media access in Syria has made the Ambassador's personal observations particularly important to Washington policymakers.

While the Syrian government accused Ambassador Ford of "gross interference" in internal Syrian affairs, the Ambassador was greeted with flowers and cheers by city residents.

Yesterday, a mob began assaulting the U.S. Embassy in Damascus. They smashed windows, threw rocks, raised the Syrian flag, and scrawled graffiti calling Ambassador Ford "a dog." The Marine guards and our regional security officers reacted quickly and prevented the attackers from breaking into compound buildings or injuring embassy personnel. The attackers then moved on to the French embassy, whose ambassador had also visited Hama. Some used a battering ram to storm that embassy. Syrian security forces did not intervene in a timely fashion to stop these attacks.

The United States strongly condemns this outrageous violation of diplomatic protocol and has demanded that Syria uphold international treaty obligations to protect foreign diplomatic missions.

We view these incidents as further evidence that President Assad's government continues to be the real source of instability within Syria. He has promised reforms but delivered no meaningful changes. He talks about dialogue, but continues to engage in violence that proves his rhetoric hollow. Even as he talks about dialogue, his security forces started new arrest sweeps in the third largest city, Homs where there also have been months of protests. Assad has made clear that he is determined to maintain power regardless of the cost. And the human toll is mounting.

Amnesty International has reported killings and torture by security forces in the town of Tell Kalakh near the Lebanese border in May. Residents reported seeing scores of males including some elderly and under 18 being rounded up. Detainees who were released and interviewed by Amnesty in Lebanon described brutal torture, including beatings, prolonged use of stress positions and the use of electric shock to the genitals. Relatives who were ordered to a military hospital to collect the corpses of eight detainees reported that the bodies bore the marks of torture.

Human Rights Watch interviewed 50 witnesses to the weeks of violence in Dara'a, and reported that member of various branches of the *mukhabarat* security forces and snipers on rooftops deliberately targeted protestors and that victims had lethal head, neck and chest wounds. Among the deadliest incidents Human Rights Watch reported were an attack on protestors in al-Omari mosque from March 23-35, 25 demonstrators killed during two protests on April 8, and at least 34 people during a protest and funeral procession in the town of Izaraa on April 22 and 23.

There are also numerous reports of attacks on and killings of children. Perhaps the best known is the case of 13-year-old Hamza Ali Al-Khateeb, whose tortured and mutilated body was returned to his family by Syrian security forces after he was rounded up on April 29 in a village near Dara'a.

The U.S. Government Response

Mr. Chairman, we denounce these horrific abuses in the strongest possible terms and call on the international community to do the same.

On May 19, President Obama said Assad could either lead a democratic transition or get out of the way. Hundreds of needless deaths later, it is now perfectly clear that a huge portion of the Syrian population perceives that Assad cannot or will not lead. If he has any respect for the people he purports to govern, he will stop his government's lawless, violent behavior. The government must stop shooting demonstrators, allow peaceful protests, release political prisoners, stop unjust arrests, give access to human rights monitors, and start an inclusive dialogue to advance a democratic transition.

Instead, however, President Assad and his leadership have apparently chosen to emulate the repressive tactics of Iran, and have received material help from Iran in doing so. We have condemned this course of action in the strongest terms, and have imposed sanctions on those responsible for the violence.

The United States has repeatedly raised our concerns about human rights to Syrian officials. From the moment he arrived, Ambassador Ford began raising the significant number of cases of prisoners of conscience with President Assad when he presented his credentials and then constantly with the Syrian Office of the President. Several prominent human rights defenders have since been released. They include Haythem Maleh, an 80-year-old former judge who was imprisoned for charges of “spreading false news that could weaken the national morale” and Muhannad Hassani, a former president of the Syrian Human Rights Organization. However, we are deeply concerned about the treatment of the thousands of detainees who remain in custody.

Amb. Ford also repeatedly pressed Syrian officials to allow the opposition freedom to operate, highlighting for example, the importance of the June 27th meeting of the opposition, which was permitted to take place.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to note that Ambassador Ford’s steadfast commitment to human rights and his ability to press for change and report on developments like the situation in Hama underscores the value of having a U.S. Ambassador in the country, now more than ever.

U.S. Government Sanctions

President Assad’s future is the hands of the Syrian people. And the proper role for the United States and the international community is to support the Syrian people in their aspirations for political reform.

On May 18, President Obama signed an Executive Order imposing sanctions against President Assad and senior officials of the government responsible for human rights abuses. In addition to President Assad, the sanctions designated the Vice President, Prime Minister, ministers of interior and defense, the head of Syrian military intelligence, and director of the political security directorate. Other U.S. sanctions targets President Assad’s brother and two cousins, the Syrian military and civilian intelligence services, its national security bureau and the air force intelligence, as well as the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Quds Force and senior Quds force officers.

These individuals and entities were selected because they bear direct responsibility for crimes against their own people. The European Union and other nations have enacted similar sanctions on these key regime figures to hold Syria’s leaders accountable for the violence.

International Action

In a Special Session in April, the UN Human Rights Council condemned the ongoing violations by the Syrian authorities. The Council called on Syrian authorities to release prisoners of conscience and those arbitrarily detained, and to end restrictions on Internet access and journalists. It also established an international investigation led by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. In the June Human Rights Council session, the United States joined Canada and more than 50 other countries in a forceful joint statement that again condemned violations committed by the Syrian authorities and called for credible, independent, and transparent investigations into these abuses, accountability for those who perpetrated such abuses, and unfettered access to the UN High Commissioner’s mission to investigate the many allegations of human rights abuses. The High Commissioner will present a report on the human rights situation in Syria in the September session. However, President Assad continues to refuse to allow the monitors mandated by the Human Rights Council to enter Syria.

The United States continues to work with our partners on possible U.N. Security Council action condemning the Assad regime.

Regional Context

Inspired by the protest movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and elsewhere, Syrian people are demanding their universal rights and rejecting a corrupt government that rules through fear. Syrian officials continue to complain about foreign influences. But as Secretary Clinton said yesterday, “They are clearly trying to deflect attention from their crackdown internally and to move the world’s view away from what they’re doing.”

It is true that some Syrian soldiers have been killed. We have reports of about 200 such deaths. We regret the loss of those lives too. But the vast majority of casualties have been unarmed civilians. By continuing to ban foreign journalists and observers, the regime seeks to hide these facts.

A Syria that is unified, pluralistic, and democratic could play a positive and leading role in the region, but under President Assad the country is increasingly becoming a source of instability. UNHCR and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) last week estimated there were about 30,000 internally displaced Syrians because of the ongoing unrest. Almost 12,000 Syrians fled the violence to Turkey in the end of June and over 8,500 still remain in six camps run by the Red Crescent.

President Obama and Secretary Clinton have made clear time and again that respect for human rights and pursuit of national security interests are not in conflict; to the contrary, they are best advanced in tandem. A strong and prosperous Syria, governed with the consent of all of its people, would be a positive influence on the stability of the region.

Syrian Opposition

The Administration has been clear since the protests began that Syria is headed toward a new political order — and the Syrian people will shape it.

There are growing signs that civil society and opposition groups inside and outside Syria are becoming more organized. However, minority populations, including Christians, Druze and Kurds, have legitimate concerns that uncertainty and insecurity surrounding a fall of the Assad regime could endanger them. A peaceful democratic transition will require the participation of and respect for all of Syria's ethnic and religious groups. We want to see a Syria that is unified and where tolerance and equality are the norm.

The Way Forward

The Syrian people have shown they will not cease their demands for dignity and a future free from intimidation and fear. The Syrian people deserve a government that respects its people, works to build a more stable and prosperous country, and doesn't rely on repression at home and antagonism abroad to maintain its grip on power. They deserve a government that serves them.

That would be good for Syria, good for the region and good for the world.

In the meantime, the United States will continue to press for an immediate end to all violence and the beginning of a peaceful democratic process.

It is important for the United States that the Syrian people succeed in this endeavor, and we will support their efforts to build a peaceful and prosperous future.

Mr. McGOVERN: Thank you very much for your strong statement, and we also appreciate the statement of Secretary Clinton yesterday as well.

You mentioned that it has been very difficult to get information out of Syria to the rest of the world. I guess my first question is are there additional things that the United States can do or the international community can do to provide assistance to kind of circumvent the regime's censors in order to help activists be able to better broadcast information about the violation of civil and human rights, so that the world can see more clearly the brutality of what is happening there?

Mr. POSNER: I think that a couple of things are important. One is that we maintain our embassy's presence. For us, our eyes and ears are through Ambassador Ford and his staff, and they are doing an extraordinary job in a difficult circumstance.

Secondly, I think it is important that we continue to support an open Internet. Syrians, like many people in the Middle East and around the world now, activists are using these new technologies to communicate with each other and with the world, and some of what we have been doing and are doing to support Internet freedom, I think, is an important piece of this.

I think we need to keep pressing our allies and other governments, both in the region and elsewhere, to continue pushing for greater access for journalists and for others to be able to come in and out of the country, because it still is a very controlled environment, and journalists don't have the access they need to help tell the story.

Mr. McGOVERN: As I mentioned at the beginning, as you mentioned in your statement, we commend our Ambassador's showing up and witnessing firsthand some of the peaceful protests that are going on. Let me just ask you a question about the ability of the embassy to be able to interact with the Syrian government during this difficult time. Does the ambassador have access to President Assad? If there are people that have disappeared and we are trying to raise the issue, is the Syrian Government giving us the ability to be able to communicate that or have we been cut off at this point?

Mr. POSNER: I think the answer to that is that Ambassador Ford has on occasion been able to meet with President Assad, but he has certainly met with people and does meet with people in the government and in the President's office on a regular basis.

Whether they listen to him is another question, but one of the things that is quite - - I spoke with him yesterday morning, and one of the things that is quite clear is the constant raising of specific cases, which he is doing, including some elderly prisoners and others with humanitarian needs, has had an impact.

He was very adamant and very persistent in pushing for the June 27th meeting of the opposition, which in the end was permitted to take place. I think the ambassador played a role in that, and again visits like the visit to Hama last week send a signal to the Syrian people that we understand their plight and that we stand beside them and behind them as they try to demonstrate peacefully for a democratic transition.

Mr. McGOVERN: Do we have any reason to believe that, within the government, that there is varying points of view and some concern over the tactics of the security forces? Do we see that there are some people that are beginning to -- who have been associated with President Assad, who are beginning to rethink their position or express concern that maybe they are going down the wrong road here?

Mr. POSNER: No government is a monolith, and our assumption is -- I can't give you chapter and verse, but our assumption is that what in April or even May people may

have assumed was a short lived resistance or protest movement has now evolved into something much more significant. If you look at the map and you see the various dots on that map, those are all the places, all over the country, where people have demonstrated. This is not just happening in one sector, one corner of the country.

So I would imagine, if people are reality testing in the Syrian Government, they are beginning to realize that this is a widespread movement representing deep dissatisfaction with the way the government has operated for a long time, and that it is not about to abate. So my estimate would be that there are those discussions going on with the government.

Mr. McGOVERN: Amongst the Syrian people, do we believe that everybody knows what is going on? Do we think the Syrian people, by and large, as a group understand the brutality of their government? Are there any differences along ethnic or sectarian or geographic or class lines in terms of how the people are responding to what is unfolding?

Mr. POSNER: I think there are at least two bits of what you have asked there. One is I do think people are aware of what is going on, probably in varying degrees. The media is certainly tightly controlled, but we do live in the Internet age, and people have amazing resilience and ability to ferret out the facts of what is happening. So the images they see on their cellphones or on their computers are the images of their fellow countrymen being beaten up by the police and by security forces.

So I do think people are well aware, and that explains in some way why there is this protest movement that has spread from one end of the country to the other. There are, to be sure, divisions within the society, but I think at this stage I can't characterize exactly how this group or that are feeling, but there is certainly a deep dissatisfaction by a broad swath of the population.

Since, again, people's dignity hasn't been respected, they haven't been allowed to participate in a meaningful way in the political life of their country. The economic opportunity is, in some respects, limited. So I think there is a growing sentiment that things have to be fundamentally different.

Mr. McGOVERN: You mentioned the role the United States plays within the United Nations. We are member of the United Nations Security Council. In your opinion, should the situation in Syria be referred to the International Criminal Court? Should President Assad and members of the inner circle be indicted on charges of committing crimes against humanity?

Mr. POSNER: We are at this stage, I think, reflecting and reviewing a wide range of options, and some form of accountability, justice is certainly a piece of that. It could be a piece, but I think for us the most important thing at this stage is to find a common reference point that will generate support within the UN and the Security Council, in particular, to deliver a message, and the message is we stand behind the Syrian people. The Syrian people are demanding fundamental change, and that the world community is not only aware of that, but supportive of their demand.

Mr. McGOVERN: You mentioned the sanctions that we have against Syria at this particular point. Can you talk a little bit about them, and what additional tools or leverage do we have at our disposal to increase the pressure on the government to stop the killing?

Mr. POSNER: Well, as you know, on May 18th President Obama signed an Executive Order that imposed sanctions not only on President Assad but a number of senior government officials who were responsible for the abuses, the Vice President, Prime Minister, ministers of interior, defense, head of the Syrian military intelligence, director of the political security director.

So we have done quite a bit. We are constantly reviewing that list and trying to explore whether there are other kinds of sanctions that we can employ, and we are open to that discussion going forward.

Mr. McGOVERN: I talked initially in my opening statement about the refugees that are fleeing into Turkey, and I wonder if you might want to comment on the relationship between Turkey and Syria and the unrest and how these refugees, who are fleeing a very difficult situation, how they are being treated, and are there additional things that we should be doing to make sure that we are responding to what is becoming a humanitarian crisis -- what is a humanitarian crisis, I should say.

Mr. POSNER: Yes. Mr. Chairman, not only refugees fleeing, but also internally displaced, and it is often the case that those who are internally displaced within their own country are even more vulnerable.

The UNHCR and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent last week estimated there are about 30,000 now displaced Syrians within the country because of the unrest. About 12,000 Syrians at one point have fled to Turkey, but now we think the number is down to about 8,500. Those refugees that have crossed into Turkey are in six camps that are run by the Turkish Red Crescent, and we certainly appreciate the humanitarian efforts by the Turkish Government to provide them shelter and provide humanitarian assistance. We stand ready to help and assist in any way we can, but at this point the Turkish Government seems to be wanting to do this on their own.

Mr. McGOVERN: I think for this Commission, the interest is in how we can better support the plight of the Syrian people, those who are engaged in peaceful protest. Part of the reason why we are doing this hearing is because we want to continue to call attention to what is happening. We want people to be -- We want the Syrian Government to realize that the United States Congress is paying attention to what is happening, that we are not going away.

Again, I appreciate what the Secretary of State, what you and Ambassador Ford have done in terms of, I think, being pretty forthright in terms of condemning the brutality that is ongoing. So we here want to find ways to be supportive of that. We don't want to do anything that is going to have the opposite effect. Sometimes good intentions don't always produce the results that we desire, but we would appreciate the administration's continued input on how we can best help you call attention to what is happening and help encourage more respect for human rights and, hopefully, maybe a peaceful transition to true democracy.

Mr. POSNER: Well, Mr. Chairman, I want to commend you for holding this hearing. I think the act of raising the public profile on these issues, expressing our concern about the violent disruption of peaceful demonstrations is an important piece of what we need to do.

I think we are all mindful of the fact that the ultimate outcome here is in the hands of the Syrian people, but this is a moment where we can help amplify their voices, provide protection, as I think Ambassador Ford did last week, by standing with them

when they demonstrate peacefully, and recognizing that this is a critical moment for Syria, and we need to be providing whatever support we can to Syrians who are trying to promote a democratic transition.

Mr. McGOVERN: Again, I would just say, I appreciate your testimony. I appreciate the Secretary of State's comments and Ambassador Ford's standing and watching a peaceful demonstration take place. I think it is important, not just for Syria, but for the world to know that this country here, if we stand for anything, we ought to stand out loud and four square for human rights. It is up to the Syrian people to determine what their future is going to be, but at this very difficult time that they are all experiencing right now, we are watching very, very closely, and we certainly do stand with the peaceful protestors, and we urge the Syrian Government to respect their rights.

Now before I let you go, this is a little bit off topic, but we did a hearing not too long ago in this commission on Bahrain, and I know you were just in Bahrain. I am curious what your assessment of the situation is there, and maybe you can tell us how it compares to what you are seeing in Syria.

Mr. POSNER: I am always reluctant to make comparison, because these countries are so different. Let me just say a few words about Bahrain, though. We continue to support the process of dialogue, which the King has initiated at the beginning of this month. It is unclear at this stage where that dialogue is going to lead, but it is certainly a useful thing that there is a broad discussion going on within the body politic of Bahrain now, and it does at this point represent a wide range of voices.

We continue to have concerns about the detention of a number of people without charge or trial or without access to their families. Numbers vary widely. The government, I think, released something on the order of 150 people earlier this week, which is a positive sign, but a number of people are still being detained, perhaps several hundred.

We continue to have concerns about some of those who have been prosecuted in the special national safety courts, including some political leaders, journalists, doctors and nurses. Some of those cases are ongoing, and will be reinstated in the fall.

We have concerns about some of the firings of people who participated in the demonstrations in February and March, perhaps 2,000 people. The government has made a commitment to return many of them, but it hasn't happened very quickly. So we are monitoring that very closely as well.

So it is a mixed picture, honestly. Again, it is a country in a very critical moment. We are going to continue to urge the dialogue to go forward so that some of the larger political and social issues can be addressed in a meaningful way, but we are going to also be pressing on some of these human rights issues where we see unresolved problems.

Mr. McGOVERN: Do you know whether they have allowed the Red Cross to enter the country and be able to interview some of the people that are in detention?

Mr. POSNER: My understanding is that that is now under discussion, and the government is revisiting its views on that, but there are some discussions going on.

Mr. McGOVERN: Well, thank you very much for being here. We appreciate your time and your words on this issue. Thank you.

Mr. POSNER: And thank you for your leadership.

Mr. McGOVERN: Our next panel will consist of Andrew Tabler with The Washington Institute; Mona Yacoubian with the Institute's Center for Conflict Analysis

and Prevention; Mara Karlin, the Instructor in Strategic Studies at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.

Mona, we are going to start with you and go from left to right. We welcome you all here, and please feel free to summarize your statements. They will all be included in the record, but we welcome your testimony and, Ms. Yacoubian, we will begin with you.

MONA YACOUBIAN, U.S. INSTITUTE OF PEACE, CENTER FOR CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND PREVENTION

Ms. YACOUBIAN: Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much for inviting me to take part in this morning's hearing. I want to commend The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for holding this very important hearing on an issue of mounting concern, the human rights situation in Syria.

I was asked to address the Syrian Government's response to ongoing protests and the resulting human rights challenges. I am going to keep my comments brief, and ask that my prepared statement be made part of the record.

Mr. McGOVERN. Without objection.

Ms. YACOUBIAN. Please note that my comments are my own, and do not reflect the views of the U.S. Institute of Peace, which does not take positions on policy.

When a Tunisian fruit vendor's self-immolation last December ignited a wave of uprisings across the Arab world, few, if any, observers expected the Arab Spring to reach Syria, and yet since mid-March, as has been noted, Syria has witnessed unprecedented popular protests, bringing tens of thousands of people to the streets in cities and towns across the country.

The Syrian regime has responded to these largely peaceful demonstrations with harsh repression, giving rise to accusations that the Syrian Government's brutal tactics, including systematic torture, indiscriminate killing, and arbitrary detentions, constitute crimes against humanity. International human rights organizations estimate that more than 1,400 Syrians have been killed, and more than 10,000 arrested over the past four months.

The government's violent crackdown has also provoked significant refugee flows, with more than 10,000 Syrians taking refuge in Turkey, and another 5,000 in neighboring Lebanon. In some instances, Syrian security forces have fired on fleeing civilians in an attempt to prevent their escape.

The Turkish Government should be commended for providing assistance to the refugees. Nonetheless, conditions in the tent camps are difficult. In Lebanon, the Lebanese army was accused of detaining fleeing Syrian refugees in late May. While the Lebanese Government asserts the detainees have been released, conditions for Syrian

refugees in Lebanon also remain poor. Moreover, the Syrian uprising's potentially destabilizing spillover effect in Lebanon could be significant.

A larger scale influx of refugees could easily tip Lebanon's delicate sectarian balance. In addition, sectarian violence in the restive city of Tripoli has already erupted in connection with the Syrian unrest. On June 17th, pro Syrian Alawites clashed with Sunnis demonstrating against the Assad regime, leaving seven dead. The Lebanese army was mobilized to restore calm. Yet sectarian unrest could well resume in Tripoli and possibly elsewhere in Lebanon over the coming days and weeks, particularly if the situation in Syria continues to worsen.

Numerous reports indicate the Syrian authorities have resorted to a number of deeply disturbing tactics in their efforts to put down the uprising. Particularly concerning is the extent to which children have been victims of the violence. As Assistant Secretary Posner noted earlier, the syrian uprising itself was sparked by popular indignation at the regime's arrest of a group of teenagers in Dara'awho scrawled graffiti calling for the regime's downfall.

Most disturbing, a shocking YouTube video documents the brutal torture and killing of 13-year-old Hamza al-Khatib, who was arrested by Syrian security forces in late April. His mutilated body was returned to his parents three weeks later, a cruel attempt to intimidate others from joining the protests. Instead, the video went viral, served to galvanize the protesters, attracting more to the streets.

The Syrian government's widespread human rights violations underscore that Bashar Assad's regime is not salvageable. Hollow promises of reform and cosmetic attempts at dialogue with the opposition are belied by the regime's blatant brutality on the streets.

In its most recent effort, the Syrian Government sponsored a two-day national dialogue that concluded yesterday. However, most opposition groups boycotted the talks, citing the regime's ongoing repression and its imprisonment of thousands of political activists. Indeed, at the same time that the talks were being conducted, Syrian troops stormed into homes, firing on demonstrators. Instead, protestors are insisting that the regime cease its violent repression, release all political prisoners, and ultimately step down from power.

Any basis for Western engagement with Syria has now vanished. The regime's brutal response to popular demands for dignity and freedom has rightly earned it widespread international condemnation. Yet more must be done to pressure the regime to cease its repression and cede the way for a genuine democratic transition in Syria.

While the United States does not wield the same leverage with Syria as it did with Egypt, it can still spearhead a multi-lateral effort targeting the Syrian regime. For a variety of reasons, military intervention is not appropriate in the Syrian case, and indeed

Syrian opposition figures, both inside and outside the country, have stressed that they do not favor this course.

Referring Syria to the International Criminal Court, while perhaps warranted by the regime's behavior, is also not likely to succeed, and may obstruct more potent venues for pressuring the Syrians. Instead, international efforts should focus on the regime's critical vulnerability, namely, the cost to an already weakened economy, of heightened international isolation.

Even prior to the current unrest, the Syrian economy was reeling from years of drought and economic mismanagement. The current uprising has already exerted a toll on the Syrian economy. The country's foreign exchange reserves are reportedly running low, and the economy has virtually ground to a halt. Syria is now on track to post negative GDP growth for this year.

In conclusion, I would recommend the following. Specifically, the United States should accelerate efforts with Russia, South Africa, and Brazil to pass a United Nations Security Council resolution condemning Syria and laying the groundwork for broader international isolation.

Second, we should seek European trade restrictions and ultimately multi-lateral sanctions targeting Syria's oil and gas sector, which is a particularly resilient segment of the Syrian economy.

Third, the United States should coordinate with regional powers, particularly Turkey, which is a key trading partner for Syria, and the Gulf states to ensure Syria's regional economic isolation by discouraging their trade and investment with Syria.

Fourth, the U.S. should seek broader support for an international arms embargo on Syria.

Fifth, the U.S. should ensure the continuing presence of the Ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford. His courageous trip to Hama last week, along with his French counterpart, is credited with having possibly abated more violent repression of protest.

Finally, the U.S. should continue to pressure Syria to allow a United Nations Human Rights Commission delegation seeking to investigate Syria's human rights violations entering into the country.

In closing, I want to reiterate the importance of the deteriorating human rights situation in Syria. While the wall of fear has certainly crumbled, the Syrian regime's reflexive reliance on repression appears unwavering. The United States and the international community more broadly should support the protestors' calls for change in Syria, for their right to dignity, respect for human rights, and democracy.

I once again want to express my appreciation for the opportunity to address the Commission. Thank you for holding this hearing today.

[The statement of Ms. Yacoubian follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MONA YACOUBIAN

Testimony for the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
“Human Rights in Syria”
July 12, 2011, Cannon House Office Building
Mona Yacoubian
Senior Program Officer – Middle East, U.S. Institute of Peace

Good Morning, Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. Thank you for inviting me to take part in this morning’s hearing. I want to commend the Human Rights Commission for holding this very important hearing on an issue of mounting concern—the human rights situation in Syria. I was asked to address the Syrian government’s response to ongoing protests and the resulting human rights challenges in Syria. I will keep my comments brief and ask that my prepared statement be made part of the record. Please note that my comments are my own and do not reflect the views of the U.S. Institute of Peace which does not take positions on policy.

When a Tunisian fruit vendor’s self-immolation last December ignited a wave of uprisings across the Arab world, few if any observers expected the “Arab Spring” to reach Syria. Yet, since mid-March, Syria has witnessed unprecedented popular protests, bringing thousands of demonstrators to the streets in cities and towns across the country. The Syrian uprising began in Dera’a, a sleepy town near Syria’s border with Jordan. It spread to the coastal cities of Baniyas and Lattakia and then to Syria’s Sunni heartland, notably to Homs and Hama. Significant unrest has also been reported in northwestern Syria, near the Turkish border, as well as the country’s eastern hinterlands, near the Iraqi border, in cities including Deir Zor and Abu Kamal. Protests have also erupted in the Syrian capital, Damascus, and its second largest city of Aleppo, although these have not yet garnered critical mass in the tens of thousands.

The Syrian regime has responded to these largely peaceful demonstrations with harsh repression, giving rise to accusations that the Syrian government’s brutal tactics, including systematic torture, indiscriminate killing and arbitrary detentions, constitute crimes against humanity. Given the Syrian government’s foreign media blackout and its repressive policies, independent reporting on conditions inside Syria has been difficult to obtain. Nonetheless, based on eyewitness accounts, YouTube videos and reporting from local Syrian human rights groups, international human rights organizations estimate that more than 1,400 Syrians have been killed and more than 10,000 arrested over the past four months. Victims are typically unarmed civilians, including women and children. In addition, conscripts who refuse to fire on civilians have also been killed, according to reports from army defectors.

The government’s violent crackdown has also provoked significant refugee flows, with more than 10,000 Syrians taking refuge in Turkey and another 5,000 in neighboring Lebanon. In some instances, Syrian security forces have fired on fleeing civilians in an attempt to prevent their escape. The Turkish government should be commended for welcoming the refugees, providing them with shelter, food and medical care through the Turkish Red Crescent. Nonetheless, conditions in the tent camps are difficult.

In Lebanon, the Lebanese army was accused of detaining fleeing Syrian refugees in late May. While the Lebanese government asserts the detainees have been released, conditions for Syrian refugees in Lebanon remain poor. Moreover, the Syrian uprising’s potentially destabilizing spillover effects on Lebanon could be significant. A larger scale influx of refugees could easily tip Lebanon’s delicate sectarian balance. In addition, sectarian violence in the restive city of Tripoli has already erupted in connection with the Syrian unrest. On June 17th, pro-Syrian Alawites clashed with Sunnis demonstrating against the Assad regime, leaving seven dead. The Lebanese army was mobilized to restore calm. Yet, sectarian unrest could well resume in Tripoli and possibly elsewhere in Lebanon over the coming days and weeks, particularly if the situation in Syria continues to worsen.

Numerous reports indicate the Syrian authorities have resorted to a number of deeply disturbing tactics in their efforts to put down the uprising. Particularly concerning is the extent to which children have been victims of the violence. In this context, it is important to recall that the Syrian uprising itself was sparked by popular indignation at the regime's arrest of a group of teenagers in Dera'a who scrawled graffiti calling for the regime's downfall. In its recent report on the Syrian government's crackdown on Tel Kalakh – a Syrian village near the Lebanese border – Amnesty International documented the arrests of at least three teenage boys. In Hama, as Syrian troops sought to reassert control last week, witnesses recounted that those killed included a 12-year-old boy. Most disturbing, a shocking YouTube video documents the brutal torture and killing of 13-year-old Hamza al-Khatib who was arrested by Syrian security forces in late April. His mutilated body was returned to his parents three weeks later, a cruel attempt to intimidate others from joining the protests. Instead, the video, which went viral, served to galvanize the protestors, attracting more to the streets.

The Syrian government's widespread human rights violations underscore that Bashar al-Assad's regime is not salvageable. By refusing early on to respond to popular demands for change, and instead attempting to brutally quash the protests, the regime has sown the seeds of its own demise. Hollow promises of reform and cosmetic attempts at dialogue with the opposition are belied by the regime's blatant brutality on the streets. In its most recent effort, the Syrian government sponsored a two-day "national dialogue" that concluded yesterday. However, most opposition groups boycotted the talks, citing the regime's ongoing repression and its imprisonment of thousands of political activists. Indeed, at the same time the talks were being conducted, Syrian troops stormed into Homs, firing on demonstrators. Instead, protestors are insisting that the regime cease its violent repression, release all political prisoners, and ultimately step down from power.

Any basis for Western engagement with Syria has now vanished. The Syrian regime's brutal response to popular demands for dignity and freedom has rightly earned it widespread international condemnation. Yet, more must be done to pressure the regime to cease its repression and cede the way for a genuine democratic transition in Syria. While the United States does not wield the same leverage with Syria as it did with Egypt, it can still spearhead a multilateral effort targeting the Syrian regime. For a variety of reasons, military intervention is not appropriate in the Syrian case, and indeed, Syrian opposition figures both inside and outside the country have stressed that they do not favor this course. Referring Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC), while perhaps warranted by the regime's behavior, is also not likely to succeed and may obstruct more potent venues for pressuring the Syrians. By creating more bluster than real impact, an indictment of Bashar al-Assad and other members of his regime could detract from serious efforts at pressure that could yield measurable results.

Instead, international efforts should focus on the regime's critical vulnerabilities – namely the cost to an already weakened economy of heightened international isolation. Syria does not possess the vast natural resource wealth necessary to sustain itself over a lengthy period as an international pariah. On the contrary, even prior to the current unrest, the Syrian economy was reeling from years of drought and economic mismanagement. The current uprising has already exerted a toll on the Syrian economy. The country's foreign exchange reserves are reportedly running low, and the economy has virtually ground to a halt, with trade at a trickle and unemployment on the rise. Syria is now on track to post negative GDP growth.

Specifically, the United States should undertake the following measures:

- Accelerate efforts with Russia, South Africa, and Brazil to pass a United Nations Security Council resolution condemning Syria and laying the groundwork for broader international isolation;
- Seek European trade restrictions and ultimately multi-lateral sanctions targeting the Syria's oil and gas sector, a particularly resilient segment of the Syrian economy;
- Coordinate with regional powers, particularly Turkey—Syria's key trading partner—and the Gulf states to insure Syria's regional economic isolation by discouraging their trade and investment with Syria;
- Seek broader support for an international arms embargo on Syria;
- Ensure the continuing presence of U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford. His courageous trip to Hama last week, along with his French counterpart, is credited with having possibly abated more violent repression of protests

- Continue to pressure Syria to allow entry to a United Nations Human Rights Commission delegation seeking to investigate Syria's human rights violations.

In closing, I want to reiterate the importance of addressing the deteriorating human rights situation in Syria. While the wall of fear in Syria has certainly crumbled, the Syrian regime's reflexive reliance on repression appears unwavering. The United States and the international community more broadly should support the protestors' calls for change in Syria, particularly an end to the government's brutal repression of peaceful demonstrators and the release of all political prisoners.

I want to once again express my appreciation for the opportunity to address the Commission. Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today on such an important topic.

STATEMENTS OF ANDREW TABLER, THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE

Mr. Tabler. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for the opportunity to testify here today before The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission on the Assad regime's four-month brutal crackdown on Syria's pro-democracy protestors.

Throughout my seven-year career as a journalist and analyst based on Damascus, I followed Tom Lantos' often critical words on the Assad regime's policies with great interest, and it is good to know that this body continues to carry on his good work.

The Assad regime's response to the protests in Syria which Mona has just outlined, I could generally define as a policy of the iron fist in the velvet glove. On the one hand, the regime continues to use live fire to gun down protesters, whose death toll now is around 1,500 or so, and it has arbitrarily arrested around 12,000 more.

Widespread reports of beatings and torture abound, many of which have been verified by human rights activists on the ground in Syria. Internet videos show the horrific torture of some of those arrested and killed under torture as well, including 13-year-old Hamza al-Khatib whose dramatic torture Mona described a little bit earlier.

On the other hand, the Assad regime continues to offer "dialogue" with what it calls "legitimate protesters," but blames most of the unrest on what it calls armed gangs roaming the Syrian countryside. The Syrian opposition isn't buying it, with most, if not all, boycotting the dialogue until the regime withdraws its security forces from major cities and towns and agrees to a process whereby President Bashar Assad launches a transition to true democratic rule.

Recently, I journeyed to Lebanon's Wadi Khaled to visit with Syrian refugees who fled the Sunni Muslim village of Tel Khalak which is surrounded by a constellation of villages dominated by Alawites, the heterodox offshoot of Shia Islam from which the Assad regime hails.

What I found was appalling, a people traumatized by roving gangs predominantly made up of Alawites called the Shabiha or ghosts, who threaten to kill or assault protesters in the Syrian countryside and around Syria's coastal cities, sporting shaved heads and black outfits mixed with camouflage. These groups are believed to report directly to members of the Assad family.

This wasn't the first group of refugees I have interviewed in my career, but they were the first to have video footage on cell phone cameras ready for me, where moving images speak a million or more words. They showed me clips of the Shabiha's handiwork, including the ransacking and burning of Tel Khalak villagers' houses and farms.

They showed me footage of snipers shooting at them as they crossed the Great Southern River, which is nothing more than a small stream in American terms, into the Wadi Khaled pocket in Lebanon. They also told me of the Syrian regime's use of cannon fire against their village the previous week, a fact confirmed to me by western correspondence who were in Wadi Khaled at the same time and heard the assault firsthand.

This followed similar stories found in western press in the weeks running up to my visit that cannon fire had been used around Dara'a the southern Syrian city where the protests essentially began on March 18th.

The refugees from Tel Khalak are afraid to return home, and they are sure that the regime's security forces will quickly arrest them and usher them away for questioning and sure torture. For Syrian Sunnis, this conjures up memories of the trauma of the 1982 Hama massacre where the regime used artillery to level large parts of Syria's fourth largest city, killing up to 30,000 people.

At the same time, the regime used the assault on Hama to justify arrests of any critical opponents. Many of those arrested were never heard from again, which today make up the country's disappeared. As I drove along the perimeter of the Wadi Khaled pocket adjacent to the Syrian border, the sight of Syrian security forces mingling with Shabiha gangs clearly justified the refugees' fears, and it was also clear to me that the Assad regime's use of the Shabiha was provoking the sectarian war that it publicly said it wants to avoid at all costs.

Since then, similar assaults have taken place in Idlib governorate located in northwestern Syria along its border with Turkey. Peaceful protesters in the city of Jisr ash-Shugur calling for the fall of the Assad regime were assaulted by regime security and military forces. In the face of the assault, some of Jisr Shugur's residents fought back.

Given the sectarian tensions stirred up in the area by the regime, this should not come as a surprise. In addition, all of Syria's border zones are smugglers' dens where residents are often armed. The ensuing fighting in Jisr Shugur and neighboring villages has sent over 12,000 Syrian refugees into Turkey.

Ankara has thus far welcomed the refugees with open arms and good facilities, but has shied away from allowing reporters into the camps. Journalists have been able to reach refugees stranded in the border zone between the two countries, however. While the exact details of what happened at Jisr Shugur are still unclear. What is clear is that

the refugees fear returning home and incurring the wrath of the Assad regime security forces.

Turkey is now preparing to receive more refugees as protests grow in size and strength. Ankara is also now rumored to be considering establishing a buffer zone inside of Syria to better deal with the refugee issue.

In terms of U.S. response, to date Washington has made it clear that it supports freedom of speech and freedom of assembly in Syria, and that it clearly condemns assaults on peaceful demonstrations, renewed arrest sweeps, failures to fulfill promises to release thousands still held in deplorable conditions in jail for political reasons, as well as the unleashing of thugs against civilian protestors and foreign embassies, the latest episode taking place yesterday when pro-Assad supporters attacked the American and French embassies in Damascus.

As the Assad regime's panicked and ruthless iron fist and velvet glove approach to the uprising continues to fail, all eyes are now focused on the August 1st start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan when the minority Alawite regime's slaughter of predominantly Sunni Muslims could transform the uprising into the sectarian blood bath that many are predicting.

To help end the bloodshed, Washington will need to be equally ruthless in its approach. If the United States and its European allies really seek to force the Assad regime to lead a democratic transition and facilitate the Assad regime's eventual exit from the political scene, they will need to target Syrian energy, as Mona mentioned, to deprive the regime of vital foreign exchange earnings and curtail economic bailouts from Arab Gulf monarchies that have historically prevented the regime from instituting genuine change.

There is an opportunity to target Syrian energy. Syrian oil production has been in steady decline since the 1980s and now is around 390,000 barrels a day. Syria exports around 148,000 barrels a day, with revenues directly accruing to the state. According to the IMF and the U.S. Government, oil revenues make up about a third -- between a quarter and a third of revenue, with the remainder of taxes coming from corporate and public sector employee taxes.

As the protests have hit the Syrian economy and currency hard and are expected to substantially decrease tax receipts, Damascus is likely to become increasingly relying on oil revenue.

The primary instruments at Washington's disposal concern depriving the Assad regime of critical foreign exchange earnings. These measures could include pressuring purchasers of Syrian oil. The Obama administration could prod the chief buyers of Syrian oil, companies in Germany, Italy, France, and Holland, to stop purchasing the regime's heavy Souedie crude.

Second, pressuring for foreign energy companies to divest: The Obama administration, together with the European Union, could pressure western multi-national energy companies involved in Syria, including Royal Dutch Shell, Total, Croatia's INA nafte, and Petro Canada, to divest their Syrian operations.

Third, interrupting tanker payment and clearance mechanisms: Syrian oil sales are largely handled through the state owned Commercial Bank of Syria, Syria's largest bank by far in terms of assets. Washington sanctioned the Commercial Bank in 2004, and forced U.S. banks to close their correspondent accounts.

Many European banks closed their correspondent accounts as well, but a number have left them open. If the Obama administration could press the European Union to sanction the CBS or just persuade individual European banks to stop doing business with the CBS, it could effectively close off the way the regime processes its money.

Next, sanctioning tanker traffic: In the past, the United States has targeted shipping vessels as part of strengthening of sanctions on its adversaries, including the Helms-Burton Act on Cuba. Washington, together with the European Union, could issue a decision by which any ship hauling Syrian oil would be banned from any future business in the United States or the European Union.

Next, targeting imported refined gasoline and diesel products: Syria became an importer of oil four years ago, years ahead of industry estimates. Diesel is Syria's Achilles heel in terms of energy. Everything from irrigation pumps to home furnaces and trucks burn diesel, which is heavily subsidized by the state; but Syria's upper and middle classes rely much more heavily on gasoline, primarily to fuel automobiles.

While targeting either fuel is a blunt instrument, it could be used at a critical time, especially as part of any attempt to pressure Damascus and Aleppo's trading families to cut ties with the regime, but using such measures too soon in the wrong way could end up hitting the Syrian population as a whole, thereby playing into the regime's repeated pattern of blaming the uprising on a U.S. conspiracy, which it did last week in response to Ambassador Robert Ford's overnight visit to Hama.

Last, Washington could pressure Arab monarchies to hold back oil bailouts. Syria often turns to its regional states for crude oil and oil revenue charity when it is in a bind, most notably Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran. In the face of the regime's increasingly brutal crackdown, the United States should persuade Baghdad, Riyadh, and Doha to withhold oil or petro-dollar support from the Syrian regime.

In conclusion, targeting Syrian energy as part of a coordinated unilateral and multi-lateral political and diplomatic strategy would help create necessity in the Syrian regime to institute the kind of political reforms necessary to lead the country toward the democratic transition.

Thus far, European allies have voiced some concerns of sanctions fatigue as a result of Washington's earlier effort to impose measures on Iran to change its behavior, a process that so far has had mixed results. To overcome European reticence, the United States should start with as pinpointed a measure as possible, widening its approach in tandem with the scope of the Assad regime's crackdown on its own population.

Very finally, I would like to commend the recent actions by Ambassador Robert Ford inside of Syria. From someone who lived in Syria for a very long time, nothing beats being there on the ground. It helps you read the texture of what is going on, and it is not just about engaging the regime. Ambassador Ford is also meeting with opposition figures on the ground in Syria, and should be commended for that.

Most importantly, his visit to Hama as well as his statements on Facebook following the attack on the U.S. embassy show that Ford's placement in Damascus helps put America's adversaries and the Assad regime into dilemmas which define them and corner them in policy terms.

Thanks very much.

Mr. McGOVERN. Ms. Karlin?

MARA KARLIN, INSTRUCTOR IN STRATEGIC STUDIES, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY'S SCHOOL OF ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL STUDIES.

Ms. Karlin. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this important hearing. I am pleased to be here, and I have submitted a written testimony which I request be put in the record so that I may be brief. Thank you.

Let me make three observations about the state of affairs in Syria. First, over the last four months, human rights violations in Syria have increased considerably. At least 1,500 Syrians have been killed, and countless more wounded, tortured, arrested, intimidated, or harmed in some other way.

Second, protests throughout Syria will likely continue for the near future and, unfortunately, so will the Syrian regime's brutal response to the Syrian people's calls for freedom.

Third, most importantly, the Syrian regime itself, particularly President Bashar Al-Assad, is directly and wholly responsible for this tragic state of affairs. Its response is further evidence that Assad is not, and will not, be a partner in a better Middle East.

Before the protests and subsequent violence erupted in Syria a few months ago, the international community primarily focused on Syrian actions outside of its borders.

For decades, the Syrian Government has been a state sponsored terrorism, maintaining an increasingly intimate relationship with terrorist groups and rogue states,

particularly Hezbollah, Hamas, Iran, and North Korea. For nearly four decades, the Syrian leadership has undermined freedom and democracy in Lebanon.

Since 2003, it has helped to destabilize Iraq, often serving as the primary transit point for jihadis determined to harm countless Americans and Iraqis, and just a few years ago, the Assad regime covertly built a gas cooled, graphite moderated nuclear reactor with North Korean assistance, an effort in direct contravention of Syria's nonproliferation obligations.

Now the focus has shifted inside Syria's borders. Events over the last few months have demonstrated that Syria's domestic policy cannot be ignored. Smaller protests in early 2011, spurred by events in Tunisia and Egypt, gave way to more fervent demands for freedom by the Syrian people. After some Syrian youths were detained and tortured by their government simply for painting graffiti that criticized the Syrian regime, the Syrian people's frustrations reached new heights.

Since then, a steady stream of increasingly massive and largely peaceful protests has erupted throughout much of the country. Unfortunately, the Syrian regime has responded with violence, repression, and insufficient reforms. Killings and arbitrary detentions have escalated. Reports emanating from around the country tell tales of mass arrests, gruesome torture, attacks on religious sites, killings during peaceful funeral marches, and the murder of young Syrians. The injured have been denied medical attention. Indeed, on occasion, Syrian security forces have taken over hospitals in an effort to better target and eliminate protesters.

Key portions of the Syrian security services, particularly the Fourth Armored Division and the Republican Guard led by Maher al-Assad, the President's brother, have been responsible for many of the atrocities to date. With heavy materiel like tanks and helicopter gunships, Syrian protesters are being killed and wounded for demanding their rights, the freedom of speech, the ability to determine their leadership, and the power to seek better lives for themselves and their children. Others have faced the wrath of the Shabiha, ruthless gangs intimately connected to the Syrian regime, who have also viciously harmed protesters.

Let me be clear. The situation in Syria is grim. It is tragic, and there should be no doubt. Syrian President Assad, working through these forces, is responsible for the countless human rights violations that we are witnessing in Syria today. Time and time again, across the generations, the Syrian regime has demonstrated its willingness and its capability to systemic, indiscriminate brute force against its own people.

The mission of The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission is to promote, defend, and advocate internationally recognized human rights norms. Today, the Assad regime's actions run utterly counter to that effort. At this time, it appears that the bloodshed will continue. The Syrian regime has repeatedly sought, so far unsuccessfully, to divide the protesters and incite mass sectarian violence. importantly, it has also refrained from making any real reforms that could stem protesters' demands.

Given the regime's unrepresentative nature and the brutality of the crackdown, it is difficult to conceive of any reforms by Assad that will be anything more than a facade. What options does this leave for the international community?

In a strictly humanitarian sense, Syrian refugees, those in isolated towns, would benefit from the free flow of much needed assistance. Given limitations on medical services, protesters in particular would benefit from blood clotting bandages which have saved lives in Iraq and Afghanistan; but such as it is, simply providing humanitarian assistance is not a panacea.

Given the nature of events in Syria, the only way to truly halt the bloodshed beyond total acquiescence to the Assad regime is a holistic response involving key members of the international community, working together to push Assad from power while pulling in a new leadership. Such a strategy starts with two critical realizations.

First, the United States and the international community cannot afford to be indecisive or unclear. Hedging is particularly harmful, as it emboldens the regime and discomfits the protesters. It must be made clear to the Syrian regime that the world will not allow the status quo to continue.

Second, even if Syrian President Assad survives the current turmoil, a very real possibility, he is clearly no longer someone the international community can or should deal with. The violence in Syria has been horrific. It has also been clarifying. Events in Syria over the last few months have demonstrated, once and for all, the nature of the Syrian regime led by President Bashar Al-Assad.

Nearly two months ago, President Obama said that Syrian President Assad can lead the transition or get out of the way -- excuse me -- can lead that transition or get out of the way. Assad has clearly made his choice. Change in Syria will not be easy, bloodless, or satisfying. It could involve elements of the regime remaining in power, but at a minimum, it is clear that the leadership of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad has failed the Syrian people.

To conclude, one year before Tom Lantos founded the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, the world stood by as Syrian President Hafez al-Assad massacred thousands of his people in the city of Hama. Nearly 30 years later, is the world ready to again sit on the sidelines while his son follows in his footsteps?

I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I am ready to answer any questions you may have.

[The statement of Ms. Karlin follows.]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARA KARLIN:

Mara E. Karlin
Instructor in Strategic Studies
Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies
Testimony to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
“Human Rights in Syria”
12 July 2011, Canon 340

Ms. Karlin. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this important hearing. I am pleased to be here, and I have submitted a written testimony which I request be put in the record so that I may be brief. Thank you.

Let me make three observations about the state of affairs in Syria. First, over the last four months, human rights violations in Syria have increased considerably. At least 1,500 Syrians have been killed, and countless more wounded, tortured, arrested, intimidated, or harmed in some other way.

Second, protests throughout Syria will likely continue for the near future and, unfortunately, so will the Syrian regime's brutal response to the Syrian people's calls for freedom.

Third, most importantly, the Syrian regime itself, particularly President Bashar Al-Assad, is directly and wholly responsible for this tragic state of affairs. Its response is further evidence that Assad is not, and will not, be a partner in a better Middle East.

Before the protests and subsequent violence erupted in Syria a few months ago, the international community primarily focused on Syrian actions outside of its borders.

For decades, the Syrian Government has been a state sponsored terrorism, maintaining an increasingly intimate relationship with terrorist groups and rogue states, particularly Hezbollah, Hamas, Iran, and North Korea. For nearly four decades, the Syrian leadership has undermined freedom and democracy in Lebanon.

Since 2003, it has helped to destabilize Iraq, often serving as the primary transit point for jihadis determined to harm countless Americans and Iraqis, and just a few years ago, the Assad regime covertly built a gas cooled, graphite moderated nuclear reactor with North Korean assistance, an effort in direct contravention of Syria's nonproliferation obligations.

Now the focus has shifted inside Syria's borders. Events over the last few months have demonstrated that Syria's domestic policy cannot be ignored. Smaller protests in early 2011, spurred by events in Tunisia and Egypt, gave way to more fervent demands for freedom by the Syrian people. After some Syrian youths were detained and tortured by their government simply for painting graffiti that criticized the Syrian regime, the Syrian people's frustrations reached new heights.

Since then, a steady stream of increasingly massive and largely peaceful protests has erupted throughout much of the country. Unfortunately, the Syrian regime has responded with violence, repression, and insufficient reforms. Killings and arbitrary detentions have escalated. Reports emanating from around the country tell tales of mass arrests, gruesome torture, attacks on religious sites, killings during peaceful funeral marches, and the murder of young Syrians. The injured have been denied medical attention. Indeed, on occasion, Syrian security forces have taken over hospitals in an effort to better target and eliminate protesters.

Key portions of the Syrian security services, particularly the Fourth Armored Division and the Republican Guard led by Maher al-Assad, the President's brother, have been responsible for many of the atrocities to date. With heavy materiel like tanks and helicopter gunships, Syrian protesters are being killed

and wounded for demanding their rights, the freedom of speech, the ability to determine their leadership, and the power to seek better lives for themselves and their children. Others have faced the wrath of the Shabiha, ruthless gangs intimately connected to the Syrian regime, who have also viciously harmed protesters.

Let me be clear. The situation in Syria is grim. It is tragic, and there should be no doubt. Syrian President Assad, working through these forces, is responsible for the countless human rights violations that we are witnessing in Syria today. Time and time again, across the generations, the Syrian regime has demonstrated its willingness and its capability to systemic, indiscriminate brute force against its own people.

The mission of The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission is to promote, defend, and advocate internationally recognized human rights norms. Today, the Assad regime's actions run utterly counter to that effort. At this time, it appears that the bloodshed will continue. The Syrian regime has repeatedly sought, so far unsuccessfully, to divide the protesters and incite mass sectarian violence. Importantly, it has also refrained from making any real reforms that could stem protesters' demands.

Given the regime's unrepresentative nature and the brutality of the crackdown, it is difficult to conceive of any reforms by Assad that will be anything more than a facade. What options does this leave for the international community?

In a strictly humanitarian sense, Syrian refugees, those in isolated towns, would benefit from the free flow of much needed assistance. Given limitations on medical services, protesters in particular would benefit from blood clotting bandages which have saved lives in Iraq and Afghanistan; but such as it is, simply providing humanitarian assistance is not a panacea.

Given the nature of events in Syria, the only way to truly halt the bloodshed beyond total acquiescence to the Assad regime is a holistic response involving key members of the international community, working together to push Assad from power while pulling in a new leadership. Such a strategy starts with two critical realizations.

First, the United States and the international community cannot afford to be indecisive or unclear. Hedging is particularly harmful, as it emboldens the regime and discomfits the protesters. It must be made clear to the Syrian regime that the world will not allow the status quo to continue.

Second, even if Syrian President Assad survives the current turmoil, a very real possibility, he is clearly no longer someone the international community can or should deal with. The violence in Syria has been horrific. It has also been clarifying. Events in Syria over the last few months have demonstrated, once and for all, the nature of the Syrian regime led by President Bashar Al-Assad.

Nearly two months ago, President Obama said that Syrian President Assad can lead the transition or get out of the way -- excuse me -- can lead that transition or get out of the way. Assad has clearly made his choice. Change in Syria will not be easy, bloodless, or satisfying. It could involve elements of the regime remaining in power, but at a minimum, it is clear that the leadership of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad has failed the Syrian people.

To conclude, one year before Tom Lantos founded the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, the world stood by as Syrian President Hafez al-Assad massacred thousands of his people in the city of Hama. Nearly 30 years later, is the world ready to again sit on the sidelines while his son follows in his footsteps?

I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I am ready to answer any questions you may have.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you all very much, and I want to be brief, because we have another panel here, but let me thank you, too, for a whole bunch of recommendations. There are a lot of things that you have laid out on the table that not only the United States but the international community can pursue that, hopefully, will pressure the authorities in Syria to accede to a peaceful, democratic transition.

Let me just ask a question then. Anyone, all three of you or any of you could answer it. Is the United States moving fast enough on this issue? Are we implementing policies and using our leverage at an appropriate pace or do we need to pick up the pace?

Ms. YACUBIAN. I will take a first crack at that. I think what we have seen as we have seen the situation in Syria deteriorate at an accelerating pace, I think, as was noted by Secretary Clinton's remarks yesterday, I do think we are seeing a calibration of public statements that reflect that. However, as I think you have seen in all of our statements, I think what is critical is seeking multi-lateral cooperation in pressuring the Syrian regime.

From my perspective, the key question is how do we achieve that? How do we get that? While we may have our European allies on board with us, we really need to work with other political players, namely, Russia, regional powers such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

So I think that the Obama administration should be commended for noting and ratcheting up its public remarks with respect to the situation, but we also do need to be working very hard behind the scenes to ensure that we actually are effective in terms of pressuring.

Mr. McGOVERN. Mr. Tabler.

Mr. TABLER. Over the last few weeks, there has been a transformation behind the scenes in U.S. Syria policy. A shift in policy, especially the degree to which the swing that we have seen over the last few months from a peace process based strategy of trying to facilitate a treaty between Israel and Syria to one now focused on human rights, in bureaucratic terms has been enormous.

Also, I think that there is a bit of -- The reason why more has not been made public is because of tremendous criticism from Capitol Hill, specifically targeted on Robert Ford and his placement. As someone who has spent a lot of time in Syria and on Syria over the last decade, I think criticizing U.S. Syria policy is completely fair game and something that I have spent a lot of time doing myself, but to focus attention so much on the placement of one man, I think, skewed the debate and made perhaps the administration a little bit defensive; but overall I see the secretary's statements yesterday, combined with Robert Ford's Facebook postings, as a step in the right direction.

Ms. KARLIN. Mr. Chairman, I would concur with Andrew's assessment. The last few weeks have been transformative in U.S. Syria policy. The challenge is that this has lasted for four months now, and when you look at U.S. statements and actions against other rogue actors like Ben Ali, Mubarak, Saleh or Khadafi, over the last few months the response vis a vis Syria has been much more slow.

Of course, part of that, I do believe, is attributed to the fact that the events in Syria shocked so many people, even those of us who have much expertise in Levantine affairs; but exactly as Andrew said, over the last few weeks, the U.S. has absolutely -- the administration, excuse me, has absolutely ratcheted up its statements. The statement of

Secretary Clinton yesterday, I think, was a long time coming, and I am optimistic at this stage.

Mr. McGOVERN. Tell me a little bit about the opposition. How unified are they? How does it split up in terms of ethnic or geographic distinctions? Is this a unified opposition or is it not so unified?

Ms. YACOUBIAN. I will take a quick crack at that. I think the opposition in Syria today that is out on the street is not the traditional opposition. This is a trend we have seen throughout the Arab world. There have been longstanding issues in Syria with the opposition being somewhat divided and incoherent, and I think that continues.

I think what is most powerful about what we are witnessing in Syria today is the fact that it is the youth, it is citizens, it is everyday people that are out in the streets.

Traditional opposition figures themselves will sometimes say, we don't really know exactly who is out there. They appear to be organizing better through the local coordination committees and other sort of venues, but I think, because of the repression and other things, it has been a very difficult situation for them, but my sense is -- and I will defer to other as well at the table -- that we are dealing with an opposition that is diverse, that is still somewhat unorganized, and that very much represents the people in all of its diversity.

Mr. TABLER. I would agree with Mona. Syria had one of the highest population growth rates in the world in the 1980s and the early 1990s. All of those people are now entering -- It has led to what they call the youth bulge, a wave of young people that have entered society and changed the demographic make-up of Syria.

They are the ones who make up the backbone of the protesters, and there are organizations such as the local coordinating committees as well as some local leaders as well who serve as the backbone of the protests. The divisions that you are speaking about and referring to primarily involve the historic divisions and backbiting in the exiled opposition, which has been a tremendous problem for sometime. However, I will say that over the last month or so, the exiled opposition has tried very strongly to come together and to come to some sort of unified position.

It is tough. It takes time. There are a lot of rivalries. They are also reaching out to the local coordinating committees on the ground, and progress is being made, and this is the most I have seen the Syrian opposition coalesce in over a decade of covering the subject.

Ms. KARLIN. Mr. Chairman, to concur with the previous speakers, the opposition is diverse, and it is also organizing, both of which, I think, are very positive when we look at it from a U.S. perspective. They have held critical conferences over the last few weeks and are continuing to do so. So we are seeing this on an upward, positive trend.

There are certain things, though, that I think the international community could do to help them coalesce. Given that so much of the opposition is internal to Syria and also so much of it is young, they would particularly benefit from training by organizations such as NDI or IRI and others.

Using the Internet and other social media type tools, the U.S. can help give them some of the skills to leverage this coalescence.

Mr. McGOVERN. Let me just ask another question, a practical question. What can be done on the ground within Syria, in terms of NGOs entering the country and being

present? I know we have all praised Ambassador Ford's courageous act, but what are the restrictions being imposed on NGOs and their ability to operate in Syria during this time?

Ms. YACOUBIAN. I will speak just very briefly to that question. My understanding from those that are operating in nearby Lebanon is that the situation is extremely difficult for NGOs. Certainly, for American or foreign NGOs, it is virtually impossible, I think, to operate or certainly to gain entry to the country, if they are not already there.

My own sense is I am a little bit skeptical about how much those of us outside can do with respect to helping organize and train Syrian oppositionists inside the country. I think we have to be very realistic about the very difficult conditions that pertain. So my own sense is that is a very difficult thing to achieve at this point.

Mr. TABLER. Through my conversations with activists on the ground and in Lebanon, there is an opportunity to interact and perhaps train with Syrian opposition members via the Internet. In fact, the Syrian opposition local coordinating committees meet regularly, using Skype combined with some encryption tunnels on the Internet that allow them to share ideas freely and get around the regime's Internet firewall.

So there are possibilities there, but there are also sensitivities as well. The activists in Lebanon pointed out to me that concerning -- At the moment, they are uploading most of their videos that we see on YouTube via satellite telephones, which they have purchased on the open market, as well as subscriptions to those telephones.

They said that oftentimes activists will come in with -- or people will come in with videos, but they will ask if the equipment being used is American or Israeli. So there is that sensitivity. At the same time, the same activists, when I asked them what exactly is it that you need, they said bluntly, we need more sat phones; we need more Internet equipment.

Ms. KARLIN. If I may just add one point, sir. While there is clearly a need to be cautious, there is much we can do, and though analogies are at times difficult, free movement was clearly inhibited in the Soviet Union, and yet those outside parties who sought to enhance freedom and democracy there found ways to do so.

Mr. McGOVERN. Let me just, in the interest of time, ask two last questions here. One is how would you compare Lebanon's reaction to the Syrian refugees to that of Turkey's?

The other question: With the Syrian economy becoming increasingly weak, and if we continue to move with some of these items that you have all suggested, how long do you believe that the government could sustain itself and sustain such widespread suppression of the protesters?

I think, here there is this kind of unrealistic view that we can take care of everything in a week; if only we did X, Y and Z, everything would just happen. So I am just curious. If we were to implement some of the steps that you all suggested, how long of a protracted struggle do we see here or is that something we can't even guesstimate? So let me end with those two questions for any or all of you.

Ms. YACOUBIAN. I will take a brief, quick stab at both.

In terms of Lebanon's response versus Turkey's to the Syrian refugees, very, very different, and I think it is reflective of the fact that the relationships between those countries and Syria are very, very different.

As you may recall, Syria has had a longstanding hegemonic relationship with Lebanon, having occupied the country for some nearly 30 years. So we have seen tremendous cautiousness on the part of Lebanon, concern among Lebanese political actors about potential retribution from Syria. So I think for the most part, you are seeing many of the Lebanese actors keeping their heads down.

Syria's traditional allies, such as Hezbollah, has been, I think, caught in a difficult place and, therefore, are also kind of remaining somewhat quiet. I think, going forward, I think the concern again, as I noted earlier, in Lebanon is the potential spillover, destabilizing spillover impact. I think we are going to need to watch that very closely.

I wouldn't pretend to guess how long it would take for these sorts of international economic sanctions and other things to take a real bite out of Syria. I think we have learned, unfortunately, over time that autocratic regimes can be rather longstanding and resilient.

That said, I think, unlike Iran, for example, Syria does not have vast natural resource wealth. So one has to ask the question, whether it really can withstand its status as an international pariah, which is, I think, the direction it is heading in, for an extended period of time. I think it is really, frankly, anybody's guess.

Mr. McGOVERN. Mr. Tabler?

Mr. TABLER. Based on my trip to Lebanon, speaking with the refugees who were in Wadi Khaled, most were very concerned about the Lebanese army at first deploying in the area and protecting them, and then withdrawing. They were clearly afraid of Shabiha attacks across the frontier.

Turkey has been much more straightforward, I think, in their support for the refugees, although I think both countries have supported the refugees within certain confines. Syria has more influence in Lebanon than it does in Turkey, direct influence, and that has affected that response.

Second, in terms of the economy, Syria has about \$17 billion in reserves. That is about eight months, seven and a half-eight months of imports, combined with other measures. Of course, as Mona mentioned, regimes can hold on much longer than that, but the good news is that the limited changes that Bashar Assad had implemented in Syria over the last 10 years have primarily come in the areas of trade and finance, and he had to do that, as his oil production went down.

Syria needs the international community more than the international community needs Syria, and there are a number of measures which, I think, have been mentioned around this table today, which could be put forward as a concerted effort with allies to help coax the Assad regime toward the kind of transition that President Obama has outlined. How long that will take, though, is anyone's guess.

Ms. KARLIN. Mr. Chairman, on the Lebanon-Turkey question, the relationship between Lebanon and Syria is very much not one of equals. Indeed, Syria only recently opened an embassy in Lebanon, and it still will not fully demarcate the border, because it seems Lebanon as part of its own country. The Lebanese are concerned about stability for a host of reasons, and this is very much playing into their hesitancy.

On the economics question, I am a bit more skeptical, because it is very difficult to find an example where a regime has really been brought down by solely economic sanctions.

Even if we look at South Africa, we have had almost total international sanctions. It still took years and years. I am not confident that the Russians and the Chinese will get on board with sanctioning the Syrians. Indeed, they won't even let a U.N. Security Council resolution pass. So I highly doubt they will want to harm their state industries.

So on the economic questions, this could absolutely take a long time.

Mr. McGOVERN. I want to thank all three of you for being here. I appreciate your time and your expertise, and we will circulate all your testimony to all the members of the commission, but we appreciate it. Thank you very much.

Our final panel is Radwan Ziadeh from the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy; and Louay M. Safi, Common Word Fellow at Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University.

Just for the record, I am assuming I mispronounced everybody's names. If you could just state your name for the record so that it is clear, I don't want to misrepresent. Did I do okay? Am I close?

Mr. SAFI. You did well on my name. My name is Louay M. Safi.

Mr. McGOVERN. I get something right today.

Mr. ZIADEH. Yes. They say my name Radwan Ziadeh.

Mr. McGOVERN. Mr. Ziadeh, why don't we begin with you, and we welcome you both here, and please proceed.

STATEMENTS OF RADWAN ZIADEH, CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

Mr. ZIADEH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I really appreciate this opportunity to speak on behalf of -- as a Syrian citizen before that, and a Director of the Moscow Center for Human Rights Studies, to speak and to share with you ongoing human rights violations in Syria.

As my colleagues before actually pointed out the ongoing situation in Syria, I will only focus about the torture that has been used in Syria as a tool to suppress the uprising in Syria and to terrorize the Syrian people. Let me begin with that.

The UN committee against torture in May 2010 after the first review on Syrian Government has concluded that there are numerous and ongoing consistent allegations concerning the routine use of torture by law enforcement and investigative officials, in particular in detainee facilities, and this is as it was in May 2010, and this is as it was before the Syrian uprising started.

As the committee mentioned, that this is the daily life of the Syrians. When the Syrians rose up against the Assad regime to stop these practices, the Assad regime responded with policies beyond our imagination, especially in the methods of the torture that has been used against the peaceful protests.

The case of Hamza al-Khatib, the 13-year-old, is only one case, but there are other cases like his friend Thamer al Sahri, 15-years-old, but here I want to share with you the case of Dr. Sakher al-Hallak. He is a prominent physician in Aleppo. He was here in Pennsylvania to attend a medical conference, and when he back to Syria after he

had been arrested by the Syrian security police on Wednesday, May 25th. On his way back from his clinic to his home, they arrested him at night at 11:30, according, of course, to his brother who is here in Pennsylvania.

On Thursday, next day, his wife called a person she knew. He is a member in the Syrian parliament, and he assured her that he is a secret police in Aleppo, and he ensured that he will be released soon, and Dr. Hallak himself called from the office of the branch of the security service to one of his friends, and he said to him that he is a secret police detention, and he will be released after a couple of days.

Next day, on Friday, the secret police interviewed Dr. Hallak's wife and daughter, and they told them that everything was okay, and he will be released on Saturday, next day.

On Saturday, his wife called again, and she was told that he will be on his way home, but he had stopped at the courthouse to sign some documents. Suddenly, on Saturday his body was found, freshly dead on Friday at 6:00 p.m. in village 20 miles south of Aleppo. It was dumped in a ditch in an area that was very hard to find.

On Saturday evening, the coroner's office of the family told the family that to check if this body belonged to Mr. Hallak. Indeed, the body was of Dr. Hallak, Sakher Hallak himself. There was evidence of multiple injuries, consistent with torture and direct trauma to the head. His eyes and his penis were mutilated. All the bones in his body were broken, and marks from four different types of foods were imprinted in his body. He died by strangulation. There were rope marks in his fingers, suggesting that he was trying to get the rope off his neck.

Next day, the Syrian secret police told the family that they never had Dr. Hallak in his custody, but that instead they found him dead on the street. The Syrian secret police denied that they never arrested Dr. Hallak, and they said that they found him on the corner, and they forced the family, the wife and the daughter, to sign some documents to say that he has been killed by armed gangs.

This is the story of Dr. Hallak. It is being the story, and to be assured that Dr. Hallak has never participated in any demonstrations against the government, has never been famous as a politician, and this became the torture used against the ordinary people in a way to terrorize the people not to participate and to discourage the undecided people not to participate in anti-government demonstrations, and this is why the message that the government has wanted to send to the Syrian people.

This is why, not to be long, just to go directly to the recommendation, I think that it is important for the United States to take on this. First, that I think it is important for President Obama to make live on television statements calling Bashar Assad to step down immediately.

Secretary Clinton said yesterday that Bashar Assad lost his legitimacy, and we share this statement, but I think that the statements coming by the administration, it should be focused more that Bashar Assad should -- he lost his legitimacy as a president of Syria, and he should step down immediately.

President Obama, he made statements pushing for immediate transition in Egypt in several public remarks or speeches on Libya, but in Syria the rhetoric was actually a little bit slowly, and this is why we need President Obama to make a speech on that to encourage more leaders on the international community to have the same position.

Second, that the United States should take the leadership at the UN Security Council. Until now the United States leaves the negotiations for the Arabians, and they are leading from behind. Until now, it has been 14 weeks of ongoing protest, and the Security Council failed to have only resolution of condemnation. After 11 days on Libya, the Security Council came up with the resolution 1970 with condemnation of the Khadafi government and with sanctions on al-Khadafi and other Khadafi officials, and later on they fell to the international criminal court.

In Syria, until now the Security Council failed to have resolution, and this is why one of the issues that the United States should take the leadership at the Security Council, not leading from behind, but leading from the front.

Thirdly, the United States should continue to pressure Syria at the UN Human Rights Council. With the efforts of the U.S. administration, succeed to have the resolution on April 29th in Geneva, which actually dispatched the fact finding mission in Syria to investigate all the human rights abuses in Syria. Until now, the Syrian government refused to give the mission access to enter Syria, but I think the United States should continue to engage with the UN Human Rights Council to appoint special rebuttal on Syria to follow the situation in human rights cases very closely, and also the United States to work with other nations at the Security Council to refer Assad to the international criminal court.

Currently, Russia, China, Brazil and South Africa and India oppose a strong UN Security Council resolution, but a demanding report from the UN Human Rights Council may help convince them otherwise. The United States has announced that it will oppose Syria to succeed in tendency to have a seat at the UN Human Rights Council.

Thirdly, the U.S. ambassador should engage with the civil society in Syria. His last visit to Hama, it was incredible, and he has been received by flowers and by talking everyone for Syrian on the ground. I see that how much especially in Hama with all the history of Hama, how much this visit appreciate by the Syrian people, even that the Syrian regime used this visit as a pretext and to see that the U.S. is leading the process, but it has any impact on the ground and especially the people in Hama has been received that this visit was significant change in the U.S. position.

Last, working with Turkey to arrange for a transfer of power in Syria. In receive years, Turkey and Syria have grown increasingly close. Since the protests broke out, the

Turkish Government has sent officials to Damascus twice to encourage the Syrian regime to reform, with no results. While Turkey has a strong relationship with Assad, the Syrian army has cooperation and needs cooperation operations with the Turkish army.

It is also deeply a concern with the instability on its borders. Last week, more than -- The last month, more than 15,000 Syria refugees crossed the border into Turkey. There is no visa requirement between the two countries, and this is why it is important to engage with Turkey regarding the situation in Syria, with some concern in some refugee's camp about the situation.

The treatment there wasn't very good. This is why it is important to engage with the Turkish Government, to have good treatment and to allow for the international organization to have access to the camps to have the Syrian refugees there. Thank you very much.

LOUAY M. SAFI, COMMON WORD FELLOW, PRINCE ALWALEED BIN TALAL CENTER FOR MUSLIN-CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Mr. SAFI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a written statement testimony, and I would like to make it part of the record.

In addition to being a Senior Fellow with Georgetown, I am the Chair of the Syrian American Council. This is an American organization made of Syrian Americans who are concerned about what is happening in Syria. We were formed in 2005 especially to engage the Syrian Government, hoping that we can persuade them to start a process of democratization, but despite all the efforts, nothing happened.

So I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on the rampant violations of human rights in Syria. The human rights conditions, bleak ever since the Assad regime was established by the late Hafez al-Assad, have deteriorated tremendously in the last four months. As many have testified already, March 15th the uprising started as a peaceful uprising demanding reform, and that peaceful uprising could be seen for the slogans that were chanted by the protesters, "Freedom, freedom, peaceful, peaceful" indicating that we are determined to remain peaceful. Also, "All the people of Syria are one." The latter was intended to counter the regime claims that the protests harbor sectarian sentiments and objectors.

Three days later on March 18 the small demonstrations were transformed into very huge demonstrations in Dara'a, the southern city of Dara'a, with thousands protesters calling on the regime to start the reform. Now the regime responded very violently.

We have heard the number of dead and injured, but estimates were 300 injured, the fatal casualties about 1,750 so far, and with thousands in detention, and I have in my

written testimony some figures citing also two reports that were put out by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. The first was called We Have Never Seen Such Horror, crimes against humanity by security forces, and definitely if one looks at all the records, one can see that crimes against humanity have been committed.

The Assad regime actions that qualify as violation of human rights and possibly crimes against humanity fall into five categories: Number one, systematic killing of peaceful protesters; two, looting private property and vandalism, many accounts and testimonies have been provided; ill treatment of relatives of protesters: We have here heard some of those earlier, including forcing the relatives to sign papers so that they would not disclose the information or even trying to have them sign on papers that would blame the killing on the protesters themselves; 1 massive and arbitrary arrest; and finally, torture and humiliation.

Let me say a few words about the Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Turkey. There are about 19,000 Syrian refugees. Of course, the number has dropped a bit, but we still hear more refugees are moving across the borders.

Most of them are in Turkey, with a few in Lebanon. Definitely, the treatment of the refugees in Turkey is much better than Lebanon, for the reasons that were cited, although we feel that Turkey has not been open to outside civil society organizations to come in and to help with the efforts, and we have really received reports that there are needs for more medical attention, and we are in communication with the Turkish government as Syrian American Council to see whether we can send physicians. There are about 7,000 Syrian American physicians in this country, and they are eager to help.

Finally, I would like to make a few recommendations. The Assad regime has committed the most egregious violations of human rights and needs to be held responsible for the crimes against humanity it has committed. The Obama administration has placed the regime of targeted sanctions. We believe that those sanctions need to be expanded and tightened up.

The regime has been relying heavily for financing its operations, particularly those paramilitary operations that have been playing a major role, and we believe these are responsible for killing both demonstrators as well as security forces who did not cooperate with the regime to kill unarmed civilians.

In addition to that, the free people of Syria have created tremendous pressure internally, but the regime still feels that the international community is not serious in confronting its excesses. We, again, would like to add our voice to those who have already asked for the United States to take a unilateral approach, and trying to work with Russia and some other international players to bring a UN resolution, UN Security Council resolution, for the Syrian case to the ICC, the International Criminal Court.

I would like to conclude by commending your work and looking to responding to the questions.

[The statement of Mr. Safi follows.]

Human Rights in Syria
Testimony
Louay Safi Chairman, Syrian American Council
Statement before Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission of the House of Representatives
Washington, DC
July 12, 2011

Chairman James McGovern and distinguished Members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. I would like to thank you for holding this important and timely hearing on the human rights conditions in the Syrian Arab Republic. I ask that my full statement, and the written testimony, be made part of the record.

Mr. Chairman, I do appreciate the opportunity to testify on the rampant violations of human rights in Syria. The human rights condition -- which was bleak under the dictatorship of the late Hafiz Assad and remained poor when his son, Bashar Assad, took over the regime -- has deteriorated tremendously in the last four months.

On March 15, a crowd of courageous Syrians organized a small demonstration in downtown Damascus calling on the Assad regime to open up the tightly controlled political system, chanting for freedom and dignity. The words they chanted became later the slogans of the ongoing Syrian revolution including such phrases as "freedom, freedom," "our rallies are peaceful," and "all the people of Syria are one." The latter was intended to counter the regime's claims that the protests harbored sectarian sentiments and objectives. Three days later on March 18, the small demonstration of few hundred protestors in Damascus was transformed into large rallies in the city of Dara'a, attracting thousands of protesters who called for political freedom and peaceful reform.

The large demonstrations in support of political freedom that erupted in Dara'a and spread to every town and village caught everyone by surprise. No one thought that the Syrian people after four decades of systematic repression and political indoctrination would be able to challenge a security regime that has a track record of using brutal tactics against opponents. The record includes a 1982 massacre in the city of Hama in which the Assad regime killed thousands of civilians who opposed the dictatorship. The exact figure is not known, but estimates run from 15,000 to 40,000 slaughtered.

From the beginning of their protests, the people of Syria were determined to replace the dictatorial rule of Bashar Assad with freedom and replace the favored slogan of the Assad supporters, "God, Syria, Bashar, and nothing else," with the slogan "God, Syria, freedom, and nothing else." And from the beginning, the Assad security regime was determined to use excessive and lethal force to suppress protests. Over the last four months, the security forces have fatally shot over 1750 Syrians, have arbitrarily arrested over 14,000, subjecting many of them to brutal torture and detention. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has put the number of casualties since the unrest began at 1,400 civilians and 350 security and military forces.

The regime has not spared anyone from its iron fist policy against critics, not even children. The Dara'a protests were triggered by the detention and torture of 15 young boys accused of painting graffiti slogans calling for the downfall of the regime on the wall of their school. The security forces are targeting even the wounded, firing on ambulances, and have imposed a siege on several towns depriving their populations of basic commodities and services.

The nature and scale of the human rights violations has been documented by many local and international human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch ("We've Never Seen Such Horror: Crimes Against Humanity by Syrian Security Forces") and Amnesty International ("Crackdown in Syria: Horror in

Tell Kallakh”). Their reports show that the abuses are systematic and part of a state policy. They all conclude that the abuses qualify as crimes against humanity. Despite the Syrian government’s claims that the protests are led by violent criminal gangs, all eye witness accounts insist the protests have been peaceful, “with demonstrators often carrying olive branches, unbuttoning their shirts to show that they had no weapons, and chanting “peaceful, peaceful,, to indicate that they posed no threat to the security forces.”

Eye witness testimonies have been corroborated by video footage that shows that protesters have been peaceful, and that violence erupted in very few instances and only against the security forces and government property in response to unprovoked killings.

The Assad regime’s actions that qualify as violation of human rights and possibility crimes against humanity fall into five categories:

1. Systematic killing of peaceful protestors
2. Looting and vandalism of private property
3. Abuse of relatives of protestors
4. Mass arbitrary arrests
5. Torture and humiliation

Systematic killing of peaceful protestors

The Syrian security forces have used live ammunition to disperse protestors since day one. There is plenty of evidence that the killing is systematic and deliberate, as security forces have used snipers to target protestors. Many of those who were killed received fatal shots in the head and the chest.

There is also evidence of mass execution-style killing of civilians. A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report cites eyewitnesses who testified that the security forces executed 26 detainees during the siege of Dara’a. The discovery of mass graves in Dara’a on May 16, after a two-week siege of the city by security forces, has reinforced the eyewitnesses’ claims. Five bodies were identified as members of the Abazeid family. “Syrian government officials denied the existence of a mass grave, but al-Watan, a Syrian newspaper closely affiliated with the government, acknowledged that five bodies had been found,” according to the report.

Media blockade and banning of journalists

The Syrian regime insists that the killing is done by armed gangs affiliated with protestors and is outside the control of the regime. The government has, however, failed to back up these claims except with forced confessions of detainees. These claims also run contrary to a preponderance of evidence in the form of video records presented by the protestors that seems to back the opposition’s claim that the armed gangs move freely and frequently accompany security personnel. The government account has been further weakened by its failure to open the Syrian borders to human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International as well as to international journalists and other independent observers. The Syrian government has also refused entry to a team assigned by the UN Human Rights Council on 29 April 2011 to investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law and crimes committed against civilians in Syria.

Looting and vandalism by soldiers and security personnel

In a report documenting human rights violations, Amnesty International documented eyewitness accounts of government forces looting and vandalizing many houses and shops on May 16 and 17 after the government deployed security forces to in Tell Kalakh. Amnesty International cited testimonies by displaced families in northern Lebanon, including testimony by a woman who fled her neighborhood on May 15 and decided to stay at her daughter’s house in a safer neighborhood. “She decided the following day to risk returning to her home to collect the family’s identity cards.” When she reached the downtown district, she saw military vehicles and soldiers and noticed that houses and shops were being vandalized. She decided to quickly leave and return to her daughter’s home. On May 19 she went again to check on her home, only to find that the interior of her house was vandalized and many of her appliances were destroyed by sharp objects.

Abuse of relatives of protestors

Security forces often kidnap those they suspect of actions against the regime, and their parents frequently learn about the deaths of their sons from the office of the mayor or local police. Human rights organizations show systematic abuse to the families of detainees. Families often receive contradictory information about the fate of their children and the location of the bodies, adding to their distress. In addition, family members are subjected to verbal abuse when they go to identify the bodies of their slain relatives. They are additionally pressured to say that their relatives were killed by “armed gangs” and are often forced to agree in order to receive the body. No information about the circumstances and causes of death is given. Amnesty International reported that two families were forced to submit written statements saying that opposition armed elements had killed their relative as a condition to receive the bodies. Others testified that they were told to keep the number of mourners at funerals under 10, and to remain silent during funeral processions and refrain from chanting religious slogans that may suggest that the deceased died as a martyr.

Mass arbitrary arrests

Many of the arrests since March have been arbitrary and on a mass scale. HRW documented in a campaign of mass arrests in the province of Dara’a after the city came under siege on April 25. Witnesses described sweeping operations conducted by security forces resulting in hundreds of arbitrary arrests. Meanwhile, security forces continued their usual targeted arrests of activists and their family members.

HRW reported that people arrested in Dara’a “were initially held in various ad hoc detention facilities before being transferred for interrogation in military intelligence or political security departments in Dara’a. Many were then sent to Damascus.”

Similarly, Amnesty International reported that on May 16, 17 and 18, Syrian troops conducted house-to-house searches in Tell Kalakh, arresting scores of male residents, including men older than 60 and boys younger than 18. All of them were “arbitrarily detained and some tortured or otherwise ill-treated at the moment of arrest or in detention, including during interrogation.”

Humiliation and torture

Torture is the preferred tool of the Assad regime for forcing confessions. Many of those who were detained testified after their release that they were subjected to various forms of torture and degrading treatment. According to a HRW report, torture methods “included prolonged beatings with sticks, twisted wires, and other devices; electric shocks administered with tasers and electric batons; use of improvised metal and wooden “racks”; and... the rape of a male detainee with a baton. Interrogators and guards also subjected detainees to various forms of humiliating treatment, such as urinating on the detainees, stepping on their faces, and making them kiss the officers’ shoes. ...”

Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Turkey

There are about 19,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Turkey who fled their towns and villages fearing the Assad regime’s retribution for voicing their opposition and calling for freedom. The refugees in Turkey feel safer, as the Turkish government has provided security forces for their protection and built several camps to accommodate them.

Refugees in Lebanon have experienced more uncertainty, as the Lebanese military forced some of the Syria refugees back to Syria despite the great risk they face upon return. Some of those forced back were military personnel who fled Syria after refusing to fire on protestors.

Recommendations

The Assad regime is implicated in the most egregious violations of human rights and needs to be held responsible for the crimes against humanity it has committed. The Obama administration has implemented a policy of targeted sanctions that has put pressure on the Syrian regime, but they need to be broadened and increased.

The courageous people of Syria have placed tremendous pressure on the Assad regime from within the country, but the regime still feels that it can continue to kill with impunity as the outside world has stopped short of calling it to account. The United States should take the lead in isolating the Assad regime diplomatically and should work to bring the regime principals to the International Criminal Court (ICC)

through a UN Security Council resolution.

Mr. McGOVERN. I want to thank you both for being here, and I want to thank you for your patience as well, but I appreciate very much your testimony, which is very, very helpful to all of us.

Let me just ask a question. Has the government repeal of the emergency law had any tangible impacts on human rights in Syria or is it just a matter of semantics?

Mr. ZIADEH. I think the word on all the Arab Spring was the trust. When the trust broke in between the Syrian people and the Syrian regime, there is no way, actually, back to the trust. The Syrian government lift the state of emergency on April 20. Next day they killed 112 on the ground Friday, which when all over, it was actually random killings in different 16 cities that day, and this is why the comments by Human Rights Watch about the first evidence about having crimes against humanity.

This is why the proposal of the dialogue with the Syrian people or with the Syrian opposition yesterday where they came up to have amendment of the constitution and other laws has no impact on the ground. Even that if the Syrian Government had the best democratic constitution, it still has Bashar Assad in power, has no trust that he will amend the constitution later on for the national interest, and this is why, as the trust broke in between the Syrian people and the only demand of the Syrian people right now, for Bashar Assad to step down.

Mr. McGOVERN. Mr. Safi.

Mr. SAFI. I would say that the pressure has increased after lifting the marshal law, the emergency laws, and we have to remember, this is not a government of laws. I mean laws mean nothing for them. In fact, what we are starting to see is that the number of killing has increased, and the use of snipers.

Many of those who died were died because of injuries in their head and chest. So you can tell that the regime had the iron fist policy, intentionally killing people, hoping that they will disappear. In addition to that, clearly, the regime moved to use its military force from using the security forces to using the military divisions to deal with the uprising and with the demonstrators.

Mr. McGOVERN. Is it fair to say that both of you believe that the current regime is unreformable, that basically, that we are past the point of trying to work out some sort of arrangement that would allow them to stay in power, that basically they have kind of passed the point of no return in terms of crossing the line in terms of brutality, and demonstrating that they are not interested in democratic reforms? That is a fair thing to say, right?

Mr. SAFI. This is a fair statement, and in fact, if you look at the regime, this is a family affair. There is no more one party system. The party has been marginalized. So you have the Assad and Makhoulouf family, the cousins of the Assad family, in control of key positions within the security apparatus. In fact, this is not a political government. This is a security regime in control of everything.

Mr. ZIADEH. All the promises that the Syrian regime gave was like dialogue is only actually to gain some time. The main structure of the Syrian regime, how to actually crack down the protest in any way, to stop the protest, because this is actually the real power on the ground in the hand of the people and in the hands of opposition.

Let me mention only one case of Hama. Last week they have half a million on the ground. Next day, the Syrian Government deployed more troops, and looking for a guy -- his name, Ibrahim Kashoush. Ibrahim Kashoush actually is an ordinary Syrian, a

singer. He was a singer, very famous singer, against Bashar Assad. They looked for him, and they arrest him, and they killed him, and they pull out his throat in a way to say that this is what -- because in the YouTubes you will see that his song is all over Syria.

This is the way that they need to send the message, everyone became Ibrahim Kashoush right now as a symbol of the Syrian uprising like Hamza Al-Khatib in the last month. This is the way that the Syrian regime is dealing with the Syrian people, the only way, actually, to stop the protest. Otherwise, they can give them a new constitution, give new laws. That has no impact on the ground.

Mr. McGOVERN. Let me ask you another question. Clearly, this protest that we see organically grown. The people of Syria are trying to make their voices be heard, and as we heard from Mike Posner and others, we need to respect the will of the Syrian people. This is about the Syrian people determining their own future.

We heard from the previous panel. I think you have concurred with a number of their recommendations of things that we can do, not just the United States but the international community, that we need to push forward in the United Nations.

I am also very sensitive of the fact that sometimes brutal regimes try to use any kind of intervention as a way to appeal to nationalism within a country, to say this is not about what is -- this is not locally grown; this is the United States telling us what we should do or this is somebody else telling us what we should do.

There are some countries around the world where, quite frankly, our support for dissidents has kind of backfired sometimes, some of the programs that we have done. I am thinking in particular of Cuba.

So I guess my question to you is: Do you kind of caution us against the measures that we might take that might actually be counterproductive? Again, I don't want our support to be used as an excuse to say it is outside meddling. We want to make sure that the focus is on the fact that the people who live in Syria want change. It is not the United States wants change. We are just standing in solidarity with the people.

I am always very sensitive that sometimes you cross that line where good intentions and well intentioned efforts can sometimes backfire, and I want to make sure we are sensitive to that. I would be curious to your guidance on some of that stuff.

Mr. ZIADEH. I think this argument absolutely true in the beginning of the uprising, but as soon as the killing has continued, the Syrian people are looking for help in any way. None of the Syrian opposition, inside and outside, calling for military intervention, but all of them asking for, actually, please put pressure on the Syrian regime to stop the killing.

Myself, I have been in Moscow and Russia. I met with the Russian officials. I just back yesterday from South Africa. I met with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in Pretoria in South Africa, and those Russian and South Africa -- and I am going to Brazil also next week -- they have concern about the resolution Libya has been interpreted from protecting the civilians to a regime change. But they have no actual position toward the Syrian people, and they have already contact with the Syrian regime to stop the killings, but I mean, if the United States addressed the concern of these nations, they will agree on the resolution in the Security Council, and this is the most important step for the Syrian people right now to see.

The Syrian people have been burning the Russian flag, Chinese flags, and the Iranian flags, in a way because they are following what is going on in New York, and it is

important for the United States right now to take the leadership to be on the right side of history. Any Syrians expected that the American ambassador would be greeted in Hama by flowers, but the Syrian people, they have been seeing the bloodshed every day on the street.

They are looking for any help, and this help comes from the United States. As a superpower, it means a lot for them, and this is why the United States should continue working on that, and this will be, actually, the right message to send to the Syrian people.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you. Mr. Safi.

Mr. SAFI. I would say that the opposition is in agreement that military intervention would be counterproductive, will not help anybody, but destabilize the whole region, and will play into the hands of the Syrian regime.

Now there is also a lot of concern about broad economic boycott or banning, but there is an agreement that targeted economic sanctions on corporations and certain sectors of the economy that is used by the regime like the oil and gas would be helpful, will dry out a lot of the finances that the regime is using.

I would like also to add, I know that the concerns here in Washington and in other countries, including Turkey -- and I have visited Turkey and met with the foreign minister. The concern is that the opposition doesn't seem to work together, and that it is not clear who is who. That is changing, and this weekend would be a large conference that will bring many leaders of the opposition together inside Syria and outside Syria. There will be Internet communication.

It is important for the United States, particularly the Obama administration and the leadership, to start meeting with leaders of the opposition. That will really weaken further and delegitimize further the Assad regime, and will make many people who are around him, trying to support him, particularly the merchant class, to take another look at the relationship and maybe withdraw their support.

Mr. McGOVERN. I want to thank you both for being here. Let me just close by saying to you, please stay in touch with the commission if there are concrete actions that we in Congress can take. If there are opposition leaders that leave, are able to get out and that we can avail ourselves to meeting with, I think there are a lot of us who would be interested in those kinds of meetings.

So again advice and any suggestions along the way would be greatly appreciated. I thank you all very much, and that concludes this hearing. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 11:45 a.m., the commission was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission (TLHRC)
Hearing**

Human Rights in Syria

**Tuesday, July 12, 2011
10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Cannon 340**

Please join the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for a hearing on the current human rights situation in Syria.

In March 2011, the Arab Spring arrived in Syria, putting President Bashar al-Assad on the defensive for the first time in his 11-year presidency. In order to suppress the demonstrations, the government responded brutally. In addition to at least 1,500 arbitrary and unlawful killings, Syrian security forces have enforced politically motivated disappearances as well as tortured and physically abused prisoners and detainees. Furthermore, the recent protests have set off a mass exodus of Syrian people seeking refuge in Turkey.

This hearing will examine the numerous, systemic, and grave human rights abuses by the Syrian government. In addition, the Commission will focus on the serious refugee crisis.

The following witnesses have been invited to testify:

Panel I

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

Panel II

- Andrew Tabler, The Washington Institute
- Radwan Ziadeh, Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy
- Mona Yacoubian, Institute's Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention
- Mara Karlin, Instructor in Strategic Studies at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies
- Louay M. Safi, Common Word Fellow at the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University *(added)*

If you have any questions, please contact Jann Futterman (Rep. McGovern) or Kalinda Stephenson (Rep. Wolf) at 202-225-3599, or send an email to tlhrc@mail.house.gov.

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, TLHRC

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, TLHRC