

**The Honorable Steve Chabot, Chairman  
Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia**

**“Confronting Damascus: U.S. Policy toward the Evolving Situation in Syria, Part II”**

**April 25, 2012**

As has been well-documented, the human rights abuses being perpetrated by the regime in Damascus are simply horrifying. Recent reports suggest that nearly 10,000 Syrian civilians have now died, approximately 75,000 have fled the country, and over 200,000 are internally displaced within Syria itself. This is now the fourth hearing that this Subcommittee has held on Syrian human rights violations and I am deeply saddened that each time these numbers continue to grow by leaps and bounds. What is more, the situation shows no signs of improving anytime soon. The English language does not have words strong enough to adequately condemn the horrifying abuses that have been committed by the Assad regime and its allies against the Syrian people. Beyond questions of legitimacy, these despicable acts are proof that the Assad regime is morally depraved and it is my belief that we—and all other responsible nations—have a moral imperative to ensure that Bashar al-Assad is removed from power as soon as possible.

Today’s hearing is being called to examine U.S. policy options to address the continuing crisis. This Subcommittee has had the privilege of hearing testimony from Assistant Secretaries Feltman and Posner as well as Frederic Hof, Special Coordinator for Regional Affairs and one of the Administration’s point people on Syria. Although the Administration has taken a number of steps on Syria for which it deserves credit, I am deeply concerned that none of these will actually lead to a resolution of the current crisis. While the sanctions that have been implemented by the U.S. and its allies around the world are certainly having an effect, I fear they will not achieve the stated goal: to actually bring about the removal of Assad from power.

Some today are looking to Kofi Annan’s Six-Point-Plan for Syria, the Assad regime’s recent acceptance of a ceasefire agreement, and the passage of UN Security Council Resolutions 2042 and 2043 establishing an observer mission with optimism. I am afraid that I do not share this optimism. Although diplomacy must always be given an opportunity to succeed, I do not see one iota of evidence to suggest that the Assad regime is sincere in any of its international commitments. Recent reports reference satellite imagery which indicates that the regime has not yet removed all heavy weaponry from population centers in violation of the ceasefire agreement. If it continues—as it has for years—to shirk its international commitments regarding its nuclear program, why should we expect it to honor this agreement now? And if years of sanctions and international isolation have not yet altered the Assad regime’s calculations, upon what are we basing the hope that they will now when the regime views itself as in a struggle for its very existence? Hope may be an effective campaign catchphrase, but it is not an effective policy.

Indeed, we had all hoped for a clear path forward, that there might be some way—through a combination of pressure and enticements—to convince Assad to leave power. Those days are long gone. I fear that those who are advocating for the Annan plan are doing so not because they believe it has any chance of succeeding, but because they do not want to make a far harder—even if necessary—decision. One lesson that this Administration appears not to have learned in over three years is that making no decision is in fact a decision in and of itself. And the cost is real. As a former official recently noted, “Suppose the administration had not sat on its thumbs and had started delivering non-lethal aid one or two or six months ago. By now, we would in fact know a great deal more about the opposition: Who is real and who has no military capacity, who can get things into Syria and who can’t, who is corrupt and who is effective. ... that we know so little about the opposition is not so much an intelligence failure as a deliberate policy.” Our chief priority must be to get Assad out of power as soon as possible. The longer Assad is allowed to stay in power, the greater the number of innocents killed will be and the higher the likelihood of the conflict devolving into a full-scale civil war will be. Furthermore, Assad’s removal would deal a massive blow to the regime in Tehran and the terrorists it funds, like Hezbollah.

As our witnesses will outline today, what remains before us are a series of options that range from bad to worse. As we examine these options, however, we must not allow ourselves to be deluded into thinking that Assad is something that he is not—that he can be coaxed out of power, or that he can lead any kind of transition or reform process. He is beyond salvation.