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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And I will now recognize the gentleman from New York, the ranking member

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

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

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

Okay. The gentleman yields back.

The gentleman from Florida, Mr. Deutsch is recognized.

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

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

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

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

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

We first have Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman who was sworn in as

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

Without objection, so ordered.

Thank you, very much.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And I would recognize either gentleman.

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

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

I recognize the gentleman from New York Mr. Ackerman.

The gentleman’s time has expired but if either of the gentlemen would like respond they can. Thank you. The gentleman’s time has expired.

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

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

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

Thank you. The gentleman’s time has expired.

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

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

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

The gentleman’s time has expired.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Indeed, some analysts believe that the administration has written off the Iranian opposition, believing that it is dead. Has the administration indeed

determined that the Iranian opposition movement is dead? And what is the administration actually doing beyond increasing programming and social media activity to assist the Iranian opposition movement?

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

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

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

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

We agree once again.

That was just Tweeted, Mr. Ackerman.

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

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

And the gentleman’s time has expired.

Without objection, so ordered.

Well, the gentleman——

Receives another minute and he yields to the gentleman from New York.

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

You can object.

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

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

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

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

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

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