

U.S. Supports Negotiated Political Solution in Syria

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Mission of the US to Geneva

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The Obama administration believes that the best end to the crisis in Syria will come about through a negotiated political solution between the Syrian opposition and members of the government “without blood on their hands” to form a mutually agreeable transitional government to guide the country to elections.

In her prepared testimony to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee April 11, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Beth Jones said it is currently not in the interests of the United States or the Syrian people to provide opponents to Bashar al-Assad’s regime with lethal support.

“The judgments we make must pass the test of making the situation better for the Syrian people and must also take into account the long-term human, financial and political costs for us, Syria and the region,” she said.

“Our assistance to the Syrian opposition, at the national and local levels, from local councils in liberated areas to civil society, is enabling these groups to plan for the future while providing essential services and extending the rule of law inside liberated areas of Syria now,” Jones said.

Jones said the Assad regime bears the “overwhelming responsibility” for the suffering of the Syrian people and the destruction of their country. She said at least 70,000 Syrians have been killed since the beginning of the two-year-old crisis, with 3 million to 4 million displaced from their homes and at least 1.3 million Syrians living outside the country as refugees.

She warned that the number of displaced and refugees “could double or even triple by the end of 2013,” which “would amount to nearly one-third of Syria’s population.”

The United States is giving nearly \$385 million in humanitarian assistance inside Syria and for refugees, to provide them with emergency medical care and supplies, blankets, food, clean water and shelter.

“We are sending flour to 50 bakeries in Aleppo and sponsoring food and sanitation projects for the desperate families in Atmeh refugee camp. But this is not enough

to meet the overwhelming need,” Jones said. She urged countries to fulfill pledges made at a January 30 donors conference, where more than \$1.5 billion was promised to help Syrians in need.

As the result of economic sanctions imposed by the United States, the Arab League, the European Union and others, the Assad regime’s finances “have never been so weak,” and it “has never been so isolated in the world community,” she said.

“With each passing day, the regime’s grip on power weakens. Territory slips from its grasp, and, in a growing number of towns and villages, a new Syria is being born. The regime of Bashar al-Assad must and will go. The sooner he steps aside, the better for all Syrians,” she said.

In his prepared remarks to the committee, Treasury Department Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing Daniel Glaser said U.S. sanctions have frozen close to \$80 million of the Assad regime’s funds in the United States and have blocked nearly 100 individuals and entities identified as key regime supporters from the U.S. financial system, as well as disrupting their access to financial services beyond the United States.

Sanctions “are not a silver bullet in ending the Assad regime’s vicious war on its own people,” but they are playing an important role within the broader international strategy, he said.

“While the U.S. government has implemented our own robust set of measures, it is important that we continue working with our partners around the world to multilateralize the effort to pressure the Assad regime. Ideally, such efforts would start at the United Nations,” he said.

Glaser also said the Obama administration has been working with the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces to prepare the groundwork for lifting sanctions once the Assad regime steps aside. This is aimed at helping facilitate the country’s economic recovery, he added.

“We will need to be ready both to help the legitimate new authorities rebuild the country and constrain those actors that either profit from continued bloodshed, like Iran and Hizballah, or thrive on instability, like the al-Nusrah Front,” he said.

U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford said the Syrian people themselves are starting to plan for a political transition. The country’s future, Ford said, will depend on its ability to build a tolerant society that respects the dignity and rights of its many sectarian and ethnic communities.

“To effectively make the transition beyond the Assad regime, the opposition will need a vision for a pluralistic Syria that abides by the rule of law, subordinates the military to civilian authority, and guarantees the rights of all of its citizens while preserving continuity of the state and its institutions,” Ford said in his prepared remarks.