Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for calling this

hearing, and I wish to extend a personal welcome to Secretary

Burns. Thank you for your service to this country and for your participation

today.

Our witness today says, to no one’s surprise, that Iran has ‘‘long

been the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism.’’ I note a curious

paradox. The lesson of the Iran-Contra Affair 20 years ago was

that we don’t negotiate with terrorists, specifically Iran.

Today it seems that many of the critics of President Bush and

the Bush administration want to know why we haven’t negotiated

with terrorists already, in this case specifically Iran. Similarly,

many in Congress and some on this committee agree that our ally,

Israel, should not negotiate with Hamas until they meet basic

standards of international conduct, and I agree strongly with that

principle, and yet we, the United States, I would ask should negotiate

with one of Hamas’ leading state sponsors in pursuit of what

exactly I would ask rhetorically.

Rarely has so much hope been placed in so little performance

with respect to the hope placed in these negotiations. I have concerns

about the wisdom of inviting Iran and Syria to talks with the

United States and the Iraqi Government. Their President continues

to be and to posture himself as a global menace.

Just today while some hailed negotiations, Iranian President

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called on Hamas ‘‘to continue resistance

until deliverance from Zionist Israel.’’ He went on to say, ‘‘The time

of fulfillment of the God-like promise is near. The Zionist regime,’’

meaning Israel, ‘‘is going through its worst phase and is on the

verge of,’’ his word now, ‘‘elimination.’’

It appears that the process involving the U.N. Security Council

resolutions on Iran and potential sanctions are giving us additional

leverage, and yet we are moving their direction, it seems from my

vantage point, in inviting them to a regional conference. What possible

commonality of interests do we think we share with them?

Iran has been implacably hostile for decades. The President

coined it as the axis of evil, one of only a handful of countries with

which we have no diplomatic relations. As Secretary Burns says,

‘‘confrontational ideology and blatant anti-Americanism.’’

As President Bush made clear at his press conference last month,

Iran is responsible for its weaponry through the Quds Force that

has been used to target United States troops in Iraq. Unclassified

reports link these armaments to perhaps 170 of the more than

3,000 American soldiers who have died in Iraq.

Given these facts, how we have any room whatsoever for discussion

is a matter of grave concern to me, and I am therefore greatly

interested in the testimony of our distinguished witness today and

yield back.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and, Ambassador, I would

echo the sentiments of my colleagues who have expressed gratitude

for your candor and your testimony today. It has been enormously

informative.

When I led a delegation a year ago to meet with Prime Minister

Nouri al-Maliki he described to a small group, a bipartisan delegation,

in his offices in the Green Zone what his first 1,000 days

would be, and one of the things that he described was that he

would reach out to Iraq’s neighbors.

I wrote down the words. I don’t know if I was supposed to, but

I did. He said I will reach out and offer good relations with our

neighbors ‘‘on the absolute precondition of noninterference in the

internal affairs of Iraq.’’

My question to you as we begin this process that will begin in

a couple of days first I think at the ambassadorial level and then

perhaps higher, because by my clock it has been almost 12 months

since that meeting. Is this, to your knowledge, the first approach

that Iraq has made and the government of Nouri al-Maliki has

made to Iran, or have there been other attempts to act on what the

prime minister described to me in that meeting? I would be very

interested in your candid assessment of that.

Question number two is clearly dialogue with the United States

has been a priority for the Iranian regime for some time. I understand

how it benefits them. What I am concerned about, as I said

in my opening statement, is how it benefits us.

I am particularly intrigued and I am prepared to listen to your

suggestion that ‘‘we will sit with Iran, Syria and other countries

and support strategies to end bloodshed in Iraq and divisive internal

struggles.’’

If you could respond first to what contact, if any, there has been

by Iraq to Iran. Secondly, what evidence does the United States

have at this point that Iran has any interest in ending bloodshed

in Iraq and why we should place any hope on these discussions

that could begin?

Maybe those two questions are interrelated, but I will yield the

balance to the Ambassador.

Okay.

Is there any evidence that they are interested in ending

bloodshed at this point?

Thank you.