Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have heard a lot of

opinions and conclusions and rhetoric, most of which I agree with,

by the way. I think we are taking a position without the facts.

It was Secretary Breeza that said that it is relatively unimportant

who started it. Well, I disagree with that. I think it is absolutely

essential that we determine the facts on the ground, and

that has not been the case. There have been opinions expressed

right out of the box that clearly have an anti-Russian tone, and I

believe that that is unfortunate.

I would also suggest that reports today in the newspapers, there

is speculation, for example, that Saakashvili made the decision to

launch a military strike against Georgia because then it would become

a fait accompli, and the Russians would not respond, and yet

we are being asked to reward that, if that is accurate, with a $1

billion appropriation. I have very serious and profound reservations.

With that, I yield back.

Welcome, Mr. Secretary. You spoke about a

struggling democracy. I think it is important. I reviewed the Country

Report on Human Rights for Georgia, and, obviously, you are

familiar with that report. It is certainly struggling when it comes

to human rights, particularly under the Saakashvili Government,

and I am just going to read one excerpt here:

‘‘While the government human rights record improved in some

areas during the year, the record worsened in other areas, especially

during the fall of 2007, and serious problems remain.’’

Freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and political participation

has worsened. There clearly was a response to the protests

that was suppressed, rather violently, and a snap election was

called. OSCE, in a report issued back in December, reported allegations

of political intimidation, personal, and violence against opposition

activists, including the New Rights Party. Operations were

suspended at three TV stations—on and on and on and on.

I mean, I think that we have got to get an understanding of the

current conditions and status, in terms of democracy. We are not

there, as others have suggested, to defend a democracy. Democracy

is very nascent in Georgia, and, clearly, over the course of the past

several years, democratic institutions and practices by the existing

government have eroded.

Are you aware that there is a petition being circulated requesting

an independent inquiry into the facts surrounding the Georgian

foray into Ossetia by members of the opposition and individuals?

You are familiar with that.

I mean, I just want to give that certain clarity.

Let me proceed with a question.

You referred to ‘‘spheres of influence,’’ but that is no longer part

of our foreign policy. That is a concept that is no longer viable, yet

I think it was Mr. Sires that asked you about these reports coming

that there could be an enhanced relationship, if you will, bilateral

relationship, between Cuba and Russia. And there have been suggestions

made that that could involve a different, in terms of qualitative,

relationship militarily between Russia and Cuba, such as refueling

stops, et cetera.

I do not want to suggest that the Russians would be foolhardy

enough to place nuclear devices or weapons in Cuba. But you are

telling me that we would respect that. We would not have any

issue because no longer is Cuba within our sphere of influence.

I understand, but that is not my question.

Okay, but my question is, would we not have an

issue with a different qualitative, bilateral relationship enhancing

the military aspect of that relationship between Cuba and the

United States?

Let me just ask one final question, if I can. It

was reported in the New York Times, I think, yesterday or today,

that you, Secretary Fried, had a conversation with the Georgians

asking them not to commit forces into South Ossetia. Is that accurate?

And they ignored you.

They ignored you. Thank you. I yield back.

If you would yield maybe 20 seconds, I do not

disagree with my friend, the chairman, but what we heard here

today, or what we read in the newspaper, is that there is a thriving

democracy in Georgia, and yet we read our own human rights report

on Georgia, and the record of the Saakashvili regime is not

particularly a positive one, and there has been a suppression of the

opposition, there has been closing down of media outlets, and let

us not think that we are here just simply because it is a small

country that has democratic impulses.

Mr. FRIED. There are a number of ethnic groups. The population

is about 5 million, but I will get you an exact number.

It is majority ethnic Georgian. There are Armenians, Abkhaz,

South Ossetians, and other groups.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think the frustration

that I hear from my good friend from California and the ranking

member of the subcommittee which I chair is that Putin is a

thug, the Russians are the aggressor, and there is this almost

dismissive, throw-away line about, ‘‘Well, they made a mistake.’’ I

am referring to the Georgians. It was a tactical blunder, and yet,

when you read the reports coming out of South Ossetia, people

were killed. Bodies were not moved because there was fear that if

civilians went out, that the Georgian soldiers would kill them.

I mean, I think, to quote a phrase, the American people and

Members of Congress are not receiving a fair and balanced picture.

Is Saakashvili a thug? Was he a thug during the elections when

he closed down those TV stations, when he sent the riot police in?

Who is Saakashvili?

Now, we know he is well connected here in Washington. We

know that Georgia has a very effective lobbyist in Mr. Sherman.

I guess what I am saying is, all I hear is this rather black-andwhite

depiction and my instincts say, I am getting a sales job. And

then I read stories from reporters whom I respect, and this is from

the New York Times, again referring to Saakashvili:

‘‘He made the return of the separatist areas to Georgian control

a central plank of his platform. American officials said

they repeatedly and bluntly told their Georgian counterparts

that the Iraq mission should not be taken as a sign of American

support or as a prelude for operations against the separatists.’’

I have this very uneasy feeling that because we have got 2,000

Georgian troops, that was a message to Saakashvili, and the socalled

‘‘inner circle’’ around him, that he could really, you know, do

some strutting and had a swagger, and I think that was a very bad

message to sell.

His group, and I know both of you are aware of it, the International

Crisis Group, is a group that I respect. I think their work

is solid and good, and they do the pro forma criticism of Russia.

But then they go on to say this:

‘‘Georgia, too, has mishandled its relationships with Russia,

South Ossetia, and Abkhazia since 2004, abandoning real confidence

building and often following confrontational policies toward

the conflict regions. With patience, it might have demonstrated

that the regions would be better served by enjoying

extensive autonomy within an increasingly prosperous and

democraticizing Georgia. Instead, President Saakashvili and a

small inner circle of bellicose officials used menacing and arrogant

rhetoric that made the dispute with Moscow and the conflict

regions bitter and personal. All sides bear responsibility

for the humanitarian consequences of the violence, as tens of

thousands of civilians in these regions and the rest of Georgia

have been displaced amid disturbing reports of atrocities.’’

I mean, who is Saakashvili? I am just really concerned. We heard

testimony earlier from Secretary Fried: ‘‘Do not go in.’’ He was ignored.

They are in, and, for that, we are going to reward them with

a check for $1 billion. That makes me very, very nervous. I do not

know if that is the message that we want.

Now, there are groups within—I think I alluded to this earlier—

a popular opposition Member of Parliament has called for an investigative

commission. ‘‘Eighty organizations and individuals have

signed a petition calling for a broad debate, and most opposition

leaders refuse to sign a government pledge of unity,’’ according to

a newspaper:

‘‘Critics also accuse the government of dishonesty in its characterization

of the war’s income. Several have blasted the government

as staging celebrations during and after the war and for

claiming the conflict was an international public relations victory.’’

I do not want to get involved in a public relations war. I always

remember, you know, Ahmed Chalabi saying, ‘‘Well, you know,

there were heroes in error.’’ Enough. I do not want to go down that

route anymore, and I do not want to write a check out for $1 billion

for someone whom, it appears to me, there are serious questions

about his judgment.

Are we going to ally ourselves with someone who certainly ignored

this administration that has been very supportive of him and

went in? We talk about Russia being the aggressor. Mr. Rohrabacher

is correct. Who lit the match? I know it is not an academic

policy issue, but it is the question that most Americans will probably

ask, if they understood that Georgia was a country and not

where Atlanta and Savannah are situated. Who started it? It is

really kind of common sense. Who started this all? It is gray.

You know, I am willing to advocate for the U.N. or some independent,

international body to go in and do an independent inquiry,

if that can be accomplished. But how about some facts? How

about some real thorough review, where the tanks and the tunnel,

if we listen to Mr. Fried, well, they told us that they believed. You

know, we have heard great strategies before. We have read a lot

of books, and we ended up in Iraq, as a result, the gathering storm

and weapons of mass destruction.

This is about war and peace. This is about money that we do not

have. This is about letting us do this in a thoughtful, measured

way. We are not all Georgians. I represent the United States. I represent

the American people, and I am interested in our national security.

I presume it is like our other ally, Uzbekistan.

Really?

Okay.

Mr. McFaul, I do not disagree with you. I agree,

and I have to because, to be honest, I am not, obviously, as conversant

with the region. I do not have the breadth of knowledge that,

for example, the chairman of the full committee has on this particular

issue. So I have to accept a lot of what you are saying. I

will make the effort to immerse myself and understand this. Okay?

But what I am seeing, as an observer and somebody who has to

cast a vote, is an unbalanced perspective here, and it sounds to me

an awful lot like, as Mr. Rohrabacher said earlier, ‘‘Russian bashing,’’

because it is in vogue. Let us be honest. It is in vogue.

Putin bashing.

Would the gentleman yield for a minute? I interpret

that as a ‘‘yes,’’ and I thank the chair.

You know, we talk about the psychology of the

post-Cold War, in terms of Russia, the humiliation. We use these

kinds of terms. I find it interesting that foreign policy expertise has

this psycho-analytical expertise to it as well, and I want to compliment

both of you on your expertise, in terms of divining the Russian

psyche, or, at least, the post-Cold War, post-traumatic syndrome,

I guess, is a way to put it.

But I think my own interaction with heads of state and with Foreign

Ministers is that words make a difference, and if those words

are bellicose in tone, if we continue to call those with whom we disagree

‘‘thugs’’ and other such language, it makes it that much more

difficult to sit down and have those conversations when there are

real issues of substance that must be discussed, when we do not

have an option other than to have a conversation.

This is what I see emerging, in terms of the bilateral relationship

between Russia and the United States, and that is why I went on

earlier about having a more balanced—we talk about Putin, and we

talk about him in very derogatory terms, and I am sure, when the

Duma sits, or when he is there, and he is now becoming very personal,

it becomes almost, if you will, adolescence in a sandbox, and,

boy, that is dangerous when you are dealing with issues of war and

peace and the international order, and I would welcome a comment

from either one of you.

Maybe we can borrow money from that Iraqi surplus

of $70 billion, Mr. Chairman.