I come in support. I have a couple of brief

introductory remarks if that is acceptable.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the

committee, for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss

Syria’s role as a state sponsor of terrorism.

There is no doubt that many past Syrian actions are in dire conflict

with U.S. interests in the region and that the current posture

of the Syrian government towards terrorism continues to be wholly

unacceptable. As a state sponsor of terrorism, Syria has repeatedly

shown an unwillingness to fundamentally change its behavior regarding

support for terrorism.

While we continue to have hope for eventual improvements in

Syrian attitudes, policies, and actions, we see little at this time to

indicate that Syrian support for terrorism is diminishing. Syria remains

a security concern not just because of terrorism, but also because

of their pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. Since Under

Secretary John Bolton has recently testified on the latter, which is

in his area of expertise, I will discuss briefly the former.

The threat to our country posed by states who both sponsor terrorism

and pursue weapons of mass destruction is one which we

cannot and will not ignore. Syria, a sponsor of numerous terrorist

organizations, is a country whose actions we must follow carefully

in this regard. While there is currently no information indicating

that the Syrian government has transferred weapons of mass destruction

to terrorist organizations or would permit such groups to

acquire them, Syria’s ties to numerous terrorist groups underlie the

reasons for continued attention.

The threat posed by Syria can best be understood by addressing

three areas: border security, which is directly related to the security

of our forces in Iraq; Syrian government support for Palestinian

rejectionist groups; and Syrian support for Lebanese

Hizballah. Obviously, many of you share these concerns, which is

why the Syria Accountability Act is under consideration in Congress.

Regarding Iraq, Syria took a series of hostile actions towards coalition

forces in Iraq. Syria allowed military equipment to flow into

Iraq on the eve of and during the war. Syria also permitted volunteers

to pass into Iraq to attack our servicemembers during the

war. In the period following the conclusion of major military action,

foreign fighters have continued to transit into Iraq from Syria.

While the situation on the Syrian border has improved in recent

weeks, it is still a major source of concern for us. We see indications

that the Syria-Iraq border is more secure now than it has

ever been. To put the issue in proper context, in the past there was

not the security need for the Syrian government to secure the border

to the extent that they must do so now. That is only one factor

in this problem.

While it is understandable that the Syrian authorities may have

had initial problems in ramping up, what we have found unacceptable

was the manner in which the Syrians delayed taking effective

action. We are cautiously optimistic that the situation will continue

to improve along the border.

We also remain concerned about the possibility of anti-coalition

activity being organized inside of Syrian territory. As we have said

for some time, Syria provides a safe haven and material support

for several Palestinian rejectionist groups, including Hamas, Palestinian

Islamic Jihad, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-

General Command, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of

Palestine, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the

Abu Mousa Organization, and the Popular Struggle Front.

The Syrian government maintains that the offices of these

groups are used solely for press purposes and play no leadership

or operational role in the conduct of terrorist attacks. We reject

this argument, have seen evidence that some of these offices are in

fact used clearly for operational purposes. Even if this were not the

case, we would continue to insist that the Syrian government close

these offices, which maintain vocal public support for these nefarious

organizations. Syrian tolerance of Palestinian rejectionist

groups’ offices in their country shows a lack of commitment to support

reasonable efforts towards a comprehensive peace between

Israel and Palestine.

Syria also continues to provide safe haven and a policy cover to

Hizballah in Lebanon, which has killed hundreds of Americans and

numerous others in the past. Syrian support for Hizballah continues

to be a major impediment towards progress in our

counterterrorism efforts. Syria allows resupply of Hizballah from

Iran via Damascus. Syria also allows wanted Hizballah terrorists,

including Amag Mugniyah, to transit Syria and find safe haven

there. The Syrian military presence in Lebanon supports Hizballah

actions there.

In Syria we see a convergence of hostile rhetoric and a history

of support for terrorism. Our bilateral relationship with Syria is a

complex one. We share Congress’ concerns with respect to Syria

and have been engaged in extensive direct dialogue with the highest

levels of the Syrian government on a full range of issues, including

terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, Lebanon, and Iraq.

Unfortunately, these conversations have borne little fruit in

changing Syrian actions on support for terrorism. While there may

have been areas of cooperation on certain counterterrorism issues

between our two governments, this is not sufficient to counter our

grave concern about Syria’s continued support for group such as

Hamas, PFLP-GC, PIJ, Hizballah, and others.

It should be noted that what we ask of Syria is not unusual nor

is it exceptional. We ask them to join the community of nations

which reject terrorism as a political tool. We ask them to cease support

for groups whose only goal is to kill and to maim in the pursuit

of policies which seek to destroy rather than support peace.

We remain optimistic that continued engagement with Syria will

one day lead to a change in Syrian behavior, a change that will

allow them once again to interact with us on a normal footing. But

that change must come from the Syrian government. We will judge

them on their actions.

Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for allowing me to make my

opening statement.

Senator, I could only echo what Assistant

Secretary Burns said, but also what you have said. I think it is

right on the mark. They are very pragmatic. They assess their environment

and they will attempt to encourage those relationships

and those situations that are in their interest.

I think we all would hope that they would appreciate that a free

Iraq that is prosperous, that is a good trading partner, on the

whole is clearly to their advantage.

I appreciate the question. I will have to take

it for the record. I specialize in counterterrorism. Weapons of mass

destruction is the preserve of others. If I may, Senator, let me take

that for the record and get back to you on that.

[The information referred to above was not available before this

hearing was sent to press.]