Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am delighted

to be here this morning and, with your permission, I will submit

my prepared statement for the record and offer just a few brief

summary comments.

Mr. Chairman, our relations with Syria

today are poor. Six months ago, Secretary Powell outlined in clear

and candid terms for President Asad serious American concerns

about Syrian behavior in a number of areas. The Secretary made

equally clear our continuing commitment to comprehensive peace

in the Middle East, including on the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-

Israeli tracks. He stressed the new strategic possibilities in the region

with the liberation of Iraq and urged Syria to reconsider its

own interests and actions in light of those possibilities.

Unfortunately, Syria has failed to make the fundamental

changes that Secretary Powell emphasized last May. It is true that

Syria has taken some positive steps on Iraq in recent weeks. It

voted for United Nations Security Council Resolution 1511, it is

demonstrating cooperation on the issue of former Iraqi regime assets

in Syrian banks, and it has improved control of its border with

Iraq. While much more remains to be done, these recent steps are

welcome. They are in Syria’s interest as much as America’s because

Syria should have as big a stake as any country in a stable, unified

Iraq.

In other areas, however, Syria’s actions continue to pose profound

problems. Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of terrorist

groups harbored by Damascus. Groups such as Hamas and

Palestinian Islamic Jihad continue to operate out of Syria, directing

and supporting attacks on innocent civilians in Israel and the

occupied territories. Such attacks are reprehensible, deeply destructive

of legitimate Palestinian aspirations for statehood, and totally

contradictory to Syria’s professed commitment to comprehensive

peace.

Syria simply cannot have it both ways. It cannot claim an interest

in a political solution and the resumption of negotiations for the

return of the Golan and at the same time shelter terrorists determined

to do all they can to prevent such a political solution. And

it certainly cannot have it both ways with the United States in the

post-September 11th world.

It is true that Syria has offered valuable cooperation against al-

Qaeda. That is in both our interests and we welcomed it. But that

does not outweigh Syria’s continued support for other terror

groups. In concert with Iran, Syria supports Hizballah, an extremely

dangerous terrorist organization with global reach and the

ability to threaten coalition forces in Iraq. Beyond its support for

terrorism, we continue to have serious concerns about Syria’s continued

presence in Lebanon and its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Chairman, we take no particular satisfaction in highlighting

our continuing troubles with Syria. We ought to be able to work together

to revive hope for Arab-Israeli peace, shape the emergence

of a stable Iraqi neighbor, fight violent extremists who threaten us

all, and create a better economic future for Syria and its people.

Dialogue and diplomacy between the United States and Syria have

always been difficult and often frustrating. But in years past American

administrations have sometimes found solid ground on which

to build with Syria. I hope that our efforts at engagement can eventually

produce that again in the future.

But in the mean time, we face some real problems in Syrian behavior

that we cannot afford to ignore. Action on the Syria Accountability

Act certainly makes clear the depth of Congressional

concern on these issues and the consequences of inaction by Syria.

The administration will continue to work hard in our direct contacts

with Syria as well as in concert with our friends and allies

in the international community and the region to drive home to the

Syrian regime the need, in all our interests, for fundamental

changes in behavior.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to your

questions.

Yes, Senator Lugar. I think you are right.

I do not think, at least in my experience, sentiment has ever been

the driving impulse in Syrian foreign policy. I think there were a

number of miscalculations that the Syrian regime made in the period

just before Operation Iraqi Freedom and the beginning of military

conflict. A lot of activities across the Iraqi border which—

Either that there would not be an attack or

that it would be far more complicated and protracted than turned

out to be the case. I think certainly the rapid success of the coalition

militarily got the attention of the Syrian regime. I think that

was reflected in the nature of the conversation that Secretary Powell

had in early May when he visited Damascus.

In recent weeks, as I mentioned to you, Mr. Chairman, in several

areas connected to Iraq there have been some signs of Syrian actions

consistent with our interest in a stable, unified Iraq: the vote

in favor of Resolution 1511, cooperation over the last couple of

weeks with a team of Iraqi and American experts investigating frozen

assets in Syrian banks from the former Iraqi regime. There has

been a degree of cooperation that we had not seen before and, as

Ambassador Black also mentioned, improved efforts on the part of

the Syrians to control their border with Iraq.

So in all those areas there are at least some indications of a recognition

of the importance of responsible behavior with regard to

Iraq and of Syria’s interest, which ultimately is what is going to

drive Syrian policy, in a unified, stable Iraq and progress toward

the Iraqi people regaining control of their own affairs.

Much more remains to be done and we will certainly push hard

to see that performance, again in Syria’s interest as well as America’s,

strengthened and improved in the future.

Mr. Chairman, I think success in Iraq,

which we are determined, as you know, to achieve, I think is crucial,

not just with regard to Syrian behavior, but with regard to our

interests throughout the region. I think the other argument that

we will continue to try and drive home and that we have made repeatedly

to President Asad and others in the Syrian leadership is

that Syria is falling farther and farther behind the global economy

and a recognition that I think is growing in many other societies

in the Arab world that economic, social, political modernization is

long overdue.

It is very interesting in recent reports, there have been development

reports that have been put out, a growing understanding in

the region that home-grown economic and political reform is absolutely

essential. There are things the United States could do to

help in the region in support of that effort, and our hope certainly

is that in Syria, as in other societies, there will be an appreciation

of self-interest in moving in those directions, though we have not

seen a lot of evidence so far.

Well, Mr. Chairman, it is not sinking in in

certain societies, you are absolutely right. The truth is that stability

in the Middle East, like anyplace else, is not a static phenomenon,

and societies in the Middle East, like other parts of the

world, that adapt, that adjust, that take the initiative on political,

social, economic reform and look ahead are going to succeed, and

those that do not are going to fall further and further behind and

ultimately become failed regimes.

I think that is simply the reality. It is not a function of American

preaching as it is facts and, as I said, realities that have to be absorbed.

Sir, I think there has been some incremental

change, as you mentioned. But the honest answer is it is

certainly short of the mark that Secretary Powell had emphasized

during that meeting in early May.

With regard to Iraq, as I said, there has been some recent movement

on 1511, on borders, on assets held in Syrian banks; still

more to be done. With regard to Palestinian terrorist groups—and

Ambassador Black may want to add to this—there were some essentially

cosmetic changes, as you mentioned, certain offices closing

down, but still cadre of people in groups like Palestinian Islamic

Jihad and Hamas continuing to operate, harbored by the Syrians,

continuing to be involved financially, logistically, in terms of planning

and direction of attacks against innocent civilians; a continuing

relationship with Hizballah.

You are right, Senator, the Secretary did emphasize, Secretary

Powell did emphasize, in early May the concerns we have about

Lebanon, the value of allowing the Lebanese armed forces to deploy

fully to the border, and we have not seen significant movement in

that direction.

Sure, I would be glad to try to, Senator

Biden. First, as you suggested, historically there is no love lost between

the Ba’athists in Damascus and the Saddam Hussein regime

in Baghdad. A long history of tension between the two of them. So

objectively in many ways it would seem at least to be in Syria’s political

interest to see that regime gone. Commercially, there has

been a lot of interaction in the past and in the future a healthy

Iraqi economy, a prosperous, stable Iraq, would seem to offer a

number of possibilities for all of its neighbors.

I think you are right, Senator, to suggest that, in fact I am certain

that, there are some well-entrenched interests in Syria who

view the prospect of a unified, prosperous, politically progressive or

democratic regime and system of governance emerging in Iraq as

threatening in some respects. But I think the bottom line probably

is the Syrian regime is looking very carefully at what is going on

in Iraq, and I think the real bottom line, as you suggested, is that

success in Iraq, defined as the Iraqi people regaining control of

their own affairs and living in peace with their neighbors, will

probably have as great an impact as anything else on the calculations

not just of the Syrian regime but others in the region. That

is why the President is so determined to help Iraqis achieve that

result.

But I think there is a certain conflict in the minds of many Syrians

in the regime about that outcome.

Yes, sir. First, I would say that I hope that

the impression that you heard from Turkish leaders is right. I hope

that we will see actions on the part of the Syrian leadership that

open up further possibilities in the future to work together on

issues, whether it is Iraq or in other areas.

As I said in my opening remarks, unfortunately we have not seen

that kind of a fundamental change in behavior so far. The administration’s

position, as you know, sir, with regard to the Syria Accountability

Act is that we are not going to oppose its passage. We

are quite appreciative of the efforts of the chairman and others to

look at ways in which the President’s flexibility in conducting foreign

policy and our policy towards Syria can be preserved, and we

believe that is very important, and we will take a careful look at

the language as it emerges.

I think finally, Senator, it is hard for me to assess right now

what the impact of passage of the Syria Accountability Act, should

it be passed by the Congress, will be on Syrian behavior, on our

relations with Syria. We have made very clear in repeated conversations

with the Syrian leadership that inaction in the areas

Secretary Powell first outlined last May is going to have consequences.

We have made equally clear, as I said before, our willingness to

build on issues or areas that should be of common concern for us.

So I can only hope, I guess to conclude, that we will begin to see

that kind of movement.

But in the mean time, we have to recognize that we have some

quite significant problems in the relationship and those problems

are reflected in the Syria Accountability Act.

Well, sir, as I said, we obviously hope that

not just the Syria Accountability Act should it pass, but the other

points we have tried to emphasize in our direct contacts with the

Syrians—and I would add also in what we have urged others, our

friends in Europe, in the Quartet, and in the region, to emphasize

to the Syrians in their own contacts, that that will have an impact.

So our hope is, not just in terms of disincentives, which the Syria

Accountability Act represents, but also in terms of the potential for

a more normal kind of relationship, which we believe to be very

much in Syrian self-interest, that taken together those steps will

have an impact. But our position on the Syria Accountability Act

remains as I described it.

Well, Senator, a very complicated issue

which we now continue to wrestle with. Obviously, success in Iraq,

success in our other policies in the region, is critically important,

as both Senators Lugar and Biden emphasized.

Second, we continue to stress our commitment to comprehensive

peace in the region. It is important for us to continue to do everything

we can to revive some hope in the Road Map and in prospects

for peace between Palestinians and Israelis and to keep the door

open on the Syrian and Lebanon tracks as well.

It is important for us in our conversations, not just directly with

the Syrians but also with the Quartet, with the other European

friends, with other partners in the region, to work with them to

help drive home those same points in Syria, because this is not just

an interest of the United States. It is I believe a widely shared interest.

We hope also that that longer term need, which is as true in

Syria, at least as true in Syria, as any other society in the Arab

world, to modernize economically, to open up more educational and

political opportunities, is going to be a direction in which that regime

wants to move.

So again, I do not have any magic formula to offer, Senator. It

requires an awful lot of hard work. It requires a lot of very candid

discussions. It requires us drawing lines where we have to draw

lines on aspects of Syrian behavior, and that is what we are determined

to do.

Yes, sir, Senator. The only thing I would

add to that is that is particularly true with regard to the legitimate

aspirations and interests of Palestinians in moving toward a state.

The actions that groups like Hamas and Jihad have taken have

done as much to undermine those aspirations as anything else,

made it that much more difficult for the Palestinian Authority to

pull itself together and provide the kind of leadership that the Palestinians

need and deserve.

That is a message that the Syrians need to hear, not just from

us but from others as well.

I think it is a very important point, Senator.

Obviously, the Syrians need to hear, if we are going to have any

impact on their behavior, not just from the United States, but from

others. I think some of our friends in Europe have been pretty direct

with the Syrian leadership about some of the concerns that I

described to you today, again simply because they reflect real concerns

on the part of Europeans as well.

That is certainly true with regard to Syria’s support for terrorist

groups. I think it is increasingly true also with regard to the negative

impact that Syrian harboring of those groups has had on the

chances to revive the Road Map. Some of our Quartet partners

have also been pretty direct with the Syrians about those concerns.

At the same time, we have all tried to make clear that the door

is open toward comprehensive peace, that this administration, like

its predecessors, is committed to doing everything we can to work

with the parties to revive progress on that track as well. So I guess

to answer your question, Senator, I think there is potential to do

more with our friends in Europe on the issue of Syria. I think we

need to keep working hard at it. I would not want to pretend to

you that our interests and approaches are identical because they

are not, but I think there is a fair amount of overlap, which we

need to keep working on.

Yes, sir. We have had extensive conversations

with the Egyptians, with the Jordanians, as well as with the

Saudis and others, about this issue. It was a subject, for example,

in Secretary Powell’s meeting with President Mubarak about a

week ago in Sharm el Sheikh. So it is natural for us to consult

carefully with our friends in the region.

We do not always see eye to eye on these issues, but I think

there is a shared interest in trying to drive home the message

about working as hard as we all possibly can to fight terrorism and

violence, which again have done so much to obstruct our deep interest

in reviving hope in the Road Map. I am sure those consultations

will continue and I am sure efforts will continue on the part

of our friends in the region.

Thanks, Senator Boxer. I think we have

worked very hard, and I do not think anybody has worked harder

than Secretary Powell, to try and speak the plain truth on these

issues, as candidly and directly as we could with the Syrian leadership.

We continue to hope for changes in Syrian behavior and we

will continue to work hard to achieve them, but hope alone is not

a reliable basis for policy. The administration has recognized that

there are elements of Syrian behavior right now which cause real

problems for our interests, as they have for years.

It was against that backdrop that the White House took the decision

that we would not oppose the passage of the Syria Accountability

Act. As I said, it is very hard—as I said, I am sorry, Senator

Boxer, before you came—

Not at all, no.

It is hard to predict what the impact is going to be. We certainly

hope that the passage of the act, should it be passed, as well as

our continuing direct efforts with the Syrians, our efforts with the

Europeans and others, is going to have an impact, a positive impact.

It is an accumulation. I am not sure if it

was an all of a sudden decision as much as it is an accumulation

of efforts on our part that did not produce, have not yet produced,

all the results we want to see. We are going to keep at it, keep

open the possibility of more normal relations, but that is going to

require tangible actions on the part of the Syrian leadership.