Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome to the witnesses.

We had an opportunity in the last several weeks to visit the region

and in our trip to Turkey we were fortunate enough to meet

with Prime Minister Erdegan, and I asked him about the Syria Accountability

Act, what would his advice be. He said that Asad really

wants to steer his country more towards the middle—and of

course Turkey shares a long border, of course, as you know, with

Syria, and you might argue who would know better than someone

who shares that long border with Syria the dynamics there.

He said, as I was saying, that Asad wants to steer his country

more towards the middle, and of course he has some political dynamics

and some generals that make it difficult, but he does want

to go in that direction; and by passing this bill it just will make

that harder.

According to Congressional Research Service, most if not all of

the sanctions contemplated by the Accountability Act, the Syria Accountability

Act, can already be imposed by the administration.

Through the good work of Chairman Lugar, the House-passed

version of the bill will be amended here in the Senate to give the

President more flexibility in waiving the bill’s sanctions. This

means that a bill that a bill is widely perceived as a crackdown on

Syria, but it has little substantive effect.

So is this legislation really a lose-lose for the United States? Are

we getting little additional muscle against Syria while further antagonizing

the Arab world? I also say on our trip to the region, the

same was true in Jordan; we heard the exact same thing: This passage

would be a mistake; we are doing exactly what I said, forcing

Syria to react in the opposite direction, and that the timing is not

good.

Can you comment, Secretary Burns?

As you testified, you do not know how Syria

will react. So is it not worth the risk, if already the President has

the powers to impose sanctions? Why take the risk on a high profile?

We all know how these types of legislation get high visibility

in the Arab world. Why even risk it if you do not know how they

will react? The President already has the powers. Is it just the

train is going down the track, you know the votes are going to pass,

and you cannot stop it, so you are just having a not-opposed attitude?

But why take that risk?

All right, very good. Thank you.

Thank you.