Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much

for inviting me to be here today.

What brings me here also is a love for my native Syria and my

love for my being a U.S. citizen, of which I am very proud. This

love for the two, though, is mixed with a lot of frustration, all the

more so that I think the U.S. and Syria have really at the end of

the day the same objectives, which is peace and stability in the

Middle East.

What I will do here, again since it is in my written testimony,

I will just gloss over and in very general terms, in the hope that

we can get to specifics in the question and answer session. Before

I do, may I just correct just a few misconceptions that I have heard

this morning.

Certainly, with respect to the Syrian economy, Syria is gradually

liberalizing its economy. Syria seeks membership in the WTO.

Syria has several free trade agreements with numerous Arab countries

and Syria is currently negotiating with the EU to become an

associate partner in the year 2010.

Yes, there are U.S.-Syrian tensions. Certainly there are U.S.-Syrian

tensions, but I think these have first and foremost to do with

the Arab-Israeli conflict and, as Senator Boxer said earlier, the

truth will set you free. I think it has to do with U.S. support to

Israel despite Israel’s continued occupation of Arab territories and

this despite the United Nations resolutions.

We explored what is wrong with the Syrian approach. Let us, if

I may, let us also explore what may be wrong with the U.S. approach

towards Syria. When we in the United States use the old

stick approach with Syria, the best we can get is halfhearted cooperation.

This is true in Lebanon and, although there has been to

date four redeployments of Syrian troops, although Syria has kept

the peace in Lebanon for quite a long time, although Syria has put

the lid on Palestinian fighters in Palestinian refugee camps and

also curtailed Hizballah activities in the south of Lebanon, Syria

needs to withdraw from Lebanon. So it is a halfhearted cooperation.

In Iraq there is Syrian cooperation with the United States and

this General Petraeus can talk more about it than I. Syria is, for

example, supplying electricity to the north of Iraq, specifically

Mosul. We can talk also to Sir Jeremy Greenstock, who is the top

British official in the U.S. occupation authority in Iraq, who has

very recently said that he was astounded by Syrian cooperation.

But there too we have a problem with Syria. Yes, Syria did—or at

least there was smuggling across the border of night vision equipment,

and so on.

With terrorism we have a major problem. Part of the problem is

that Syria and the Arab world and the third world at large simply

do not see it the way we see it, this question of Palestinian, quote

unquote, ‘‘terrorism’’ when the Palestinians are defending their legitimate

rights to determine their future.

But on the question of terrorism—here the distinction becomes

very clear—Syria has been probably one of the closest partners

with the United States in the war against al-Qaeda, so much so

that senior American officials, including this morning, have said

that Syria has saved American lives.

By using the stick, Mr. Chairman, we are unwittingly delaying

the reforms in Syria that we are hoping for. We are unwittingly

uniting the new guard and the old guard, and there is, there is

that division in Syria between new guard and old guard, and as we

are applying the stick to Syria this can only bring them together

in fear. We are uniting the state and society, whereas there was

a gap between state and society, and society now increasingly is increasingly

vocal in demanding change in Syria.

By applying pressure to Syria, which is seen on the Syrian street

as doing Israel’s bidding, it is only delaying that movement of democratization.

The case in point of the U.S. stick delaying reforms

in Syria is the very recent cabinet reshuffle in Syria, in which

President Asad wanted to make major changes, including the appointment

of a non-Ba’athi prime minister, a man who is the president

of the Damascus chamber of commerce. According to my information,

President Asad wanted to overhaul the whole foreign policy

apparatus. But this had not been done at the end of the day and

he appointed again an old guardist in order not to seem or to give

the appearance that he is bowing to American pressure.

Furthermore, using the stick against Syria is going to further aggravate

Arab public opinion, which is already very inflamed at our

unconditional support to Israel and our occupation of Iraq. It is

going to give, this stick against Syria, to give further munition to

Islamic fundamentalists. Again, the Syria Accountability Act is

going to be seen as the U.S. doing Israel’s war against Arabs and

Moslems.

Finally, that stick against Syria and that anti-Syrian rhetoric

that is coming out of Washington is going to—and I hope not, but—

to bring the Middle East to the precipice. The case in point is that

this has encouraged Israel to strike deep inside Syria, as it had on

October 5th. And although Syria was restrained, the Israelis have

threatened more strikes, at which point I think Bashar Asad would

be under tremendous pressure to reply in kind, and this will set

off a spiral of violence that we will not be able to control.

Mr. Chairman, if we want Syria’s total cooperation we can get it.

All we need to do is to convince Syria that its security interests are

not threatened, this not only with word but by deeds. This entails

the resumption of the Middle East peace process based on Resolution

242, based on the Saudi plan, which all the Arab states have

accepted and which the U.S. has endorsed.

Then when the U.S. uses the stick with the recalcitrants, either

Arab or Israeli, then we might move the region toward peace. Then

there will be no more terror. Then we will be doing Israel a favor

as its security policy has failed. Then we will do Syria and the

Arabs a favor and, most of all, Mr. Chairman, we will be doing ourselves

a favor.

Thank you.

Thank you, Senator Biden. Israel would have to

not so much please the whims of Syria, but to abide by UN resolutions.

To withdraw totally to the June 4th lines of 1967

from the Golan Heights and to see on the Palestinian-Israeli track

at least some positive developments that might lead in the end to

the establishment of a Palestinian state very much in conformity

with the vision of President Bush.

This is a longstanding Syrian demand, and where I do disagree

with Dr. Clawson when he says about the old guard and the new

guard, here on this very issue I believe the old guard and the new

guard are very, very much united. President Asad, the late President

Asad, had he been able to obtain from the Israelis that commitment

to withdraw to the June 4th lines, I think there would

have been peace between Syria and Israel. I do not think Bashar

Asad can accept any less, though.

Right. In other words, Syria—Syria by virtue of its

past, by virtue of its national role conception as the champion of

Arab rights, cannot be seen, I believe, because this would hurt the

legitimacy of the regime, cannot be seen as operating in isolation,

as having a separate peace treaty with Israel.

Well, let me try to be more clear than I have been.

I think—and I may be wrong—that President Asad when he went

to Geneva to meet with President Clinton to talk about all this, I

think at the end of the day he would not have signed a peace treaty.

He would have waited for further development on the Palestinian

track. But his—from his angle, from his Syrian angle, he

would have been satisfied that Israel had delivered to Syria what

Syria demands.

And I think the same applies to this President.

Senator, what Syria will give in return—you ask

what will Syria deliver. That is the normalization of relations with

Israel, and normalization here—and it has been talked about between

Syrians and the Israelis on the official level—would be the

establishment of diplomatic relations—

With an Israeli embassy in Damascus, with an

Israeli flag waving over it.

Moreover, Syria will have a mutual security arrangement

with Israel on the Golan Heights. There would be a

joint water-sharing mechanism on Lake Tiberias.

And when there is peace, Senator, between Syria

and Israel, there is no need for PIJ to have an office in Damascus,

there is no need for Hamas to—

No, I do not think there is any room for confusion.

Israel—Syria, rather, Syria has accepted de facto Israel within its

’67 boundaries and so have all the Arab states.

There are marginal groups, Senator, like Hamas

and PIJ and so on—

What stops them to—what gets them to stop supporting

these groups is peace with Israel, and that assumes Israel’s

withdrawal from occupied territories.

These groups as far as Syria is concerned and I

think as far as all Arab states are concerned would then occupy a

very, very marginal position. Inside Syria it would then be illegal

for any group that wants to wage war against Israel to exist on

Syrian soil.

May I, Senator? On the question of Iraq, I think

Syrian cooperation has been increasing in the past and what the

Syrians are comforted by is that they have—they are seeing now

the beginnings of a timetable. This is especially true—

Factually, Senator, first of all, the assets that the

Iraqis have are reported to be far less than $3 billion. This is number

one.

Two, according to my understanding and to the information I

have, yesterday a senior official of the Department of Defense invited

the Syrian charge d’affairs in Washington to thank him for

Syria’s cooperation on that score, on the unfreezing of the assets.

The new-found cooperation is of course in the presence

of those Treasury Department folks who are in Damascus and

who have talked with the Central Bank of Syria folks, and as a result

we have now, at least in the Department of Defense, some

happy people according to them and the Syrian charge d’affairs.

This is on one level.

On the other level, again I can only speak to what General

Petraeus is saying—my information is not from the Syrian government—

and also to Sir Jeremy Greenstock, and they seem to be

very happy with Syrian cooperation first on the score of trying to

stop the jihadists from going to Iraq. And the Syrians do not succeed

all the time because it is a long and porous border and because

they do not have the necessary resources.

Two, again, Syria—and this is, it is making money out of it, of

course, but it is providing the area of Mosul with electricity and

that has a stabilizing effect. So again, Syrian cooperation, Syria’s

increased cooperation if I want to be more accurate, on the score

of Iraq, as a result that now there is a comfort that the United

States has a timetable for a constitution and for this and that, and

this was not the case earlier.

Senator BIDEN. I hope you are right. There is decreased cooperation

in al-Qaeda. There is decreased cooperation in other areas, but

it is kind of interesting. But go ahead.