This hearing of the Foreign Relations Committee

is called to order. Today we are delighted to welcome Ambassador

William Burns, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs,

and Ambassador Cofer Black, the Counterterrorism Coordinator,

for a timely review of United States foreign policy towards

Syria.

We also welcome our distinguished second panel: Dr. Patrick

Clawson of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy; Ambassador

Richard Murphy of the Council on Foreign Relations; Dr.

Murhaf Jouejati of the Middle East Institute; and Dr. Flynt

Leverett of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings

Institution.

Hopes that reform could take root in Syria after the fall of Saddam

Hussein have dimmed in the past few months. Instead, tensions

have increased between the United States and Syria, and a

cycle of retaliation and revenge has overtaken and derailed possible

progress in the Road Map to Peace for the Israelis and the Palestinians.

The Israeli retaliatory attack on an Islamic Jihad terrorist

camp in Syria underscored that the ‘‘no war and no peace’’

status quo in the region cannot be taken for granted.

Many experts thought that when President Bashar Al-Asad replaced

his father 3 years ago he would adopt a more pragmatic approach

to negotiations with Israel and to internal political and economic

reforms. Syrian cooperation with the United States in relation

to al-Qaeda terrorists held promise for cooperation in other

areas. Secretary Burns noted last June in his testimony that ‘‘the

cooperation the Syrians have provided in their own self-interest on

al-Qaeda has saved American lives.’’

But Syria’s failure to stop terrorist groups, including Hizballah,

Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, from using Syria as a

base for training and planning suicide bombings in Israel has con-

tinued. Syria also has failed to withdraw its forces from Lebanon

or open a dialogue for peace. It reportedly has continued to maintain

stockpiles of chemical weapons and to pursue development of

lethal biological agents. Moreover, Syria is working against coalition

forces in Iraq by refusing to release nearly $3 billion in assets

stolen from the Iraqi people.

The Senate’s discussions of the Syria Accountability Act have

been based on the presumption that the most effective response to

Syrian behavior is expanding sanctions against that country. This

is a natural conclusion, but Syria’s presence on the State Department’s

list of state sponsors of terrorism already brings with it a

number of sanctions and restrictions. More importantly, as we give

the administration additional sticks to use against Syria, we should

be careful about restricting our government’s flexibility in responding

to diplomatic opportunities that might present themselves.

Syria has shown some ability to make better choices: for example,

supporting UN Security Council Resolution 1441 following Secretary

Powell’s presentation in February and voting for the more

recent Resolution 1511, which calls upon all nations to support the

U.S.-led effort in Iraq.

Even as we tighten restrictions on Syria, we should be emphasizing

to the Syrians why it is in their best interest to recalculate

their approach toward the United States. Syria shares a 400-mile

border with Iraq. With more than 135,000 United States troops deployed

in Iraq, Syria needs to reconsider where its future security

interests lie.

This is not a threat of U.S. military action, but a statement of

the new reality on Syria’s borders. Moreover, Syrian forces that

continue to occupy Lebanon are draining the already stagnant Syrian

economy while providing few positive returns. Continued Syrian

occupation of Lebanon only invites further possible military action

from Israel.

The Syrian leadership also must adjust to the end of its underthe-

counter oil deals with Saddam Hussein. Syria must negotiate

new and transparent arrangements to meet energy needs. Syria’s

moribund economy will not survive without opening up to investment

and trade, particularly with Iraq. Significant benefits to Syria

could accrue from an economically vibrant Iraqi trading partner,

increased trade with Europe and the United States and even possible

membership in a Middle East Free Trade Agreement.

In this context, Syria may find motivation to return to the negotiating

table. A deal on the Golan Heights that would provide security

guarantees for Israel while respecting Syria’s sovereignty could

be a key to resolving a host of other problems, including Syria’s occupation

of Lebanon, its support of Palestinian terror groups, and

its economic and political isolation.

Although success of such an agreement would depend ultimately

on the parties themselves, I would be interested to hear from our

witnesses what the United States can and should do to promote a

viable settlement. We look forward to our witnesses’ recommendations

on the other issues and hope that the discussion will lead to

help inform our policy towards Syria.

I would like to call now upon the distinguished ranking member

of our committee, Senator Biden, for his opening statement.

Well, thank you very much, Senator Biden.

Gentlemen, before I ask for your testimony I need to announce

that we are going to have a roll call vote in about 3 minutes. So

it is the intent of the chair to recess the hearing so that members

who are here can vote. Some of our colleagues, we presume, are

proceeding to the floor to vote and will be returning. In this way,

your testimony will not be conflicted with people coming and going.

We will be back because we look forward to hearing from you.

Now, let me just say at the outset that your statement and that

of our following panel will be placed in the record in full. Be prepared

to present as you wish your material in some summary form

that would expedite the questions of the committee.

We are likely to have another roll call vote, I am advised, at

12:30. So hopefully between these two roll call votes we will have

an excellent hearing. If we are not finished at that point, we will

continue after that vote so that all members have an opportunity

to ask their questions of the witnesses.

But for the moment, the hearing is recessed and we will be back

very shortly.

The hearing is called to order again. The vote

was postponed again and again, as you may have surmised, but is

taking place and members will be rejoining us.

Ambassador Burns, we welcome you. We appreciate your coming

and look forward to your testimony. Would you please proceed.

It will be published in full.

Thank you very much, Ambassador Burns.

Ambassador Black, do you have testimony at this time or have

you come in support of Ambassador Burns?

Fine, I would appreciate that.

Thank you very much, Ambassador Black.

The chair would suggest a first round of questioning of maybe 7

minutes for each of us, and we may wish to have another round

if members have not asked all the questions that they would like.

Let me begin by commenting that I appreciated Senator Biden’s

opening statement. He will probably amplify that further on his

own, but it would appear to me that cooperation with Syria immediately

following military activity in Iraq looked more promising

than does that activity today. Now, without having any thermometer

with which to gauge why people become more interested in cooperating

and why they begin to slack off in that, it would appear

to be that the Syrian government, including the chief leader, the

president of the country, as well as advisers for his father and for

himself, may be more tentative in their judgment about our success,

that of the United States and the coalition, in Iraq.

To what extent in your judgment are they inclined over the

course of days or weeks to take more of a wait and see attitude as

opposed to taking activities that are more in consonance with the

foreign policy objectives that you have stated? I gather, from reading

your papers and those of our other witnesses, that most see the

Syrians as a pragmatic people, without necessarily oversentimental

ties with the Palestinians or with al-Qaeda or with others who are

out there.

But where do their interests lie and to what extent will our success

in Iraq lead them back to a path of more cooperation and then

perhaps to some fulfillment pragmatically of their own foreign policy

objectives? Do you have a thought on that, Ambassador Burns?

Were there miscalculations perhaps that there

would not be military activity, in other words that there would not

be an attack on Iraq at all?

What other factors could influence Syria to become

more cooperative, in addition to contributing to its perception

that the coalition is being successful in Iraq? Thus far it does not

appear that economic difficulties in the country have led to particular

changes. I suspect that the Senate is likely after this hearing

to act on the Syria Accountability Act, which you have mentioned,

and that it probably will pass the act, as the House of Representatives

did. That would impose additional sanctions, hopefully

with flexibility for the administration in the event that diplomatic

activity becomes more promising.

In fact we already have a number of sanctions on the country

now and it does not appear that economic changes seem to be operative

or at least determinative in terms of their activities. What

else, in addition to success in Iraq, might change the picture?

Ambassador Burns, it appears that economic indicators

show that many, if not most, states in the Middle East

continue to have deteriorating economic circumstances. This does

not appear to have been determinative of their foreign policy. In

other words, a growing gap occurs with the rest of the world, sliding

downhill very rapidly.

Some persons come to us and come to you and they say: Well,

these are autocratic regimes, people who have their own agendas

quite apart from the ordinary needs of common people for jobs and

economic progress. But these regimes are supported. We are accused

of supporting them, of propping them up, even in the midst

of total default.

In other words, Syria is not an archetype of this, but it is another

case in which the economy is not quite a disaster, but heading

rapidly to the rocks and shoals comparatively. Yet at the top

there does not appear to be any change that is affecting any of

that.

Now, we may be right that we can try to cajole them: You ought

to do more to help your people and we will do something here. But

I am not sure that is working. That is why I probe this a little bit

further.

Thank you very much, Ambassador.

Senator Biden.

Thank you, Senator Biden.

Senator Chafee.

Thank you very much, Senator Chafee.

Senator Coleman.

Thank you very much, Senator Coleman.

Senator Biden.

Thank you, Senator Biden.

Let me just carry that one step further. Are any of our allies, or

at least countries with whom we have very strong relations, in addition

to our European allies, active with us in our diplomacy with

Syria? For example, have Egypt, the Saudi Arabians, or anyone

else in the neighborhood, for maybe their own national interests,

been involved with us in moving the Syrians toward a more constructive

situation?

I join all members of our committee in thanking

you—

Yes, I am sorry.

Senator Boxer.

Exactly.

Well, thank you very much, Senator Boxer, for

coming to the hearing at a timely moment.

Well, we thank you both again, and we will now

proceed with our next panel. That panel includes Dr. Patrick Clawson,

the Honorable Richard Murphy, Dr. Murhaf Jouejati, and Mr.

Flynt Leverett.

Gentlemen, thank you very much for joining us this morning. I

would like for you to testify in the order that I introduced you, and

that will be first of all Dr. Patrick Clawson. Please proceed.

Well, thank you very much, Dr. Clawson.

Ambassador Richard Murphy.

Thank you very much, Ambassador Murphy.

The chair would like to recognize now Dr. Murhaf Jouejati.

Well, thank you very much, Dr. Jouejati.

Mr. Leverett.

Thank you very much, Mr. Leverett.

What would be wrong with that? Why is that not

in the best interests of the world, for that to happen?

Well, let us say that we did try to understand

their legitimate interests, which might be settlement of the Golan

Heights dilemma, for example. Can you parse that type of activity

as to simply street antipathy to Israel, in which finally you try to

work out various things pragmatically? Syrian leadership may be

influenced by the street or maybe the other way around—I do not

know, maybe both—and just simply say: We do not like Israel; as

a matter of fact, we just wish they were not there.

Therefore we get back again and again to the question of, why

are you in the United States interested in an Israel that is finally

accepted by everybody and that lives in peace and negotiates, as

opposed to taking a position of indifference, that Israelis just have

to fend for themselves and the United States will not be involved?

I mean, is there ever any way out of that kind of dilemma, perhaps

simply by working through the other elements of the settlement

of the Syrian situation?

That point of view is an important one. It is held

by a good number of people who have studied this area a long time,

in the same way that some of the same people hold the view that

we know what a Palestinian-Israeli settlement will look like. We

have been down that trail many, many times before.

So in other words, in our minds’ eyes we have an idea of what

the settlement is. But then you get back to the problem. Nevertheless,

even though we have pronounced the Road Map strategy and

even got steam rapidly generated behind that, we may not know

how it all ought to come out or whether it is off track. We are back

to a situation which all of you have described today, which, to say

the least, is disheartening.

Let me ask Dr. Clawson: in your analysis of the new leadership

you were more oblique about that than perhaps your panel members,

and maybe correctly so. But if this is a new regime, with a

new president who has problems that are even greater, what might

bring him back into this framework that we are talking about, in

which we finally realize some objectives from the past, deal with

the reality, and move on? Is that in the cards at all with this leadership?

So you might make headway there? In other

words, it is not just a question that the new leader has to be there

for quite a long while before he consolidates his own authority, confidence,

and what have you?

Thank you.

Senator Biden.

Let me start my questioning just by responding,

or rather allowing each of you to speak. Dr. Jouejati.

Let us get it straight. There is no straight line

cooperation. There is no straight line cooperation. Let us get it

straight now. There is some cooperation in some areas and less cooperation

in other areas. There is no straight line here factually.

There is none.

Ambassador Murphy, will you have any comment?

Dr. Clawson.

Let me intrude at this point, because we would

enjoy continuing the dialogue for a long time, but a roll call vote

is under way. There are 7 minutes left to go and Senator Biden

and I will need to do our duty in another forum.

But we thank you very much for coming to this hearing.

It has been very, very helpful for our understanding,

we hope for those who have joined us in the hearing room

and for the American people who watch this on C-SPAN. Thank

you very much.