Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this

hearing on United States policy toward Iraq.

I am distressed by the resignation on the part of too many individuals

that there is nothing that can be done to address this security

threat and that we just have to take whatever happens to us.

That is the absence of policy, not the presence of a coherent strategy

to advance U.S. national security interests.

The continuing exchanges of fire between United States warplanes

and Iraqi air defense forces have made it clear that the

threat posed by Saddam Hussein is not going to diminish unless

aggressive action is taken to undermine his government. In that respect

I agree with you wholeheartedly that he is the problem.

Since December Iraq has violated the no-fly zones at least a hundred

times. Its ground forces have fired 20 missiles at U.S. war-

planes. Frankly, I commend the administration for keeping the

pressure on Saddam over the last few months, but the outlines of

a long-term policy to deal with the root of the problem, Saddam’s

continued rule, have not yet emerged.

It is precisely the lack of a consistent strategy to encourage a

change of government in Baghdad that has cost the United States

so dearly in the Persian Gulf. Maintaining a U.S. force in the region

to contain Saddam has cost us over $6 billion in real dollars

since 1993, with no end in sight. And because policies have not

been followed to address the real threat, there is little prospect

that the 20,000 troops we keep in the Persian Gulf will return

home any time soon.

Keeping our forces on the front lines in the Persian Gulf without

focused and committed political leadership in Washington is a disservice

to the soldiers and it undermines American credibility

abroad.

Over the last 6 years we have taken the path of least resistance

in our policy toward Iraq. We supported the opposition until Saddam

attacked them in 1996. We supported firm containment until

advocates of appeasement at the United Nations opposed us in the

Security Council. We condemned Saddam’s brutal repression and

used the strongest rhetoric against his weapons of mass destruction,

but were more than happy to undermine our own diplomacy

to accept new promises of compliance by Saddam last fall.

It is astounding to me that, after more than a year of constant

provocation from Saddam and in the midst of almost daily live fire

exchanges between Iraqi forces and U.S. warplanes, the administration

agreed in January to review sanctions on Iraq and also proposed

lifting the caps on the oil for food program.

If it were a real review of sanctions it might even be different,

but ‘‘reviewing sanctions’’ for me is a code word for lifting or downgrading

sanctions. I wonder if our review of sanctions would ever

result in a strengthening of the sactions regime.

These tactical retreats at critical junctures, coupled with a lack

of a long-term policy to encourage a new government in Baghdad,

are the reason that Saddam, I think, is stronger today than he was

at the end of the Gulf war. I would be pleased to learn that he is

not that strong.

Aggressors around the world have taken note of our lack of resolve

when it comes to Saddam Hussein. They have taken note that

the administration has not spent a single dollar of the $97 million

authorized by the Iraq Liberation Act to train and equip the Iraqi

opposition. Supporting the Iraqi opposition certainly has risks, but

the alternative is the resurgence of the most dangerous dictator in

the Middle East and a severe blow to our credibility abroad.

The administration has compared Saddam to Hitler, but U.S. policy

made 1999 the year of Munich in the Persian Gulf. The President’s

policies are laying the basis for diminished U.S. credibility

in the region and the rise of aggressive states hostile to U.S. interests

and allies.

The fact that the administration apparently has no immediate

plans to equip or train Iraqi opposition forces does not lead me to

believe that a genuine commitment to remove Saddam is present.

I think we need a commitment to changing the leadership there.

Merely deferring this crisis until the next administration while

Saddam works to rebuild weapons of mass destruction and erode

international sanctions, that is not the kind of foreign policy legacy

that we need to leave to the American people.

So I thank you for having this hearing Mr. Chairman. We need

to try and find a way as a Nation to protect our interests far more

aggressively and to deal with the root problem we have in Iraq.