I ask unanimous consent to have these letters printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

THE AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS ASSOCIATION,
*Washington, DC, January 4, 2007.*

DEAR MEMBER OF CONGRESS: I am writing on behalf of the ALS Association to express our strong opposition to legislation that would eliminate the noninterference provision of the Medicare Modernization Act (MMA). Legislation that authorizes the federal government to negotiate Medicare prescription drug prices will significantly limit the ability of people with ALS to access the drugs they need and will seriously jeopardize the future development of treatments for the disease—a disease that is always fatal and for which there currently are no effective treatment options.

The ALS Association is the only national voluntary health organization dedicated solely to finding a treatment and cure for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). More commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease, ALS is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that erodes a person's ability to control muscle movement. As the disease advances, people lose the ability to walk, move their arms, talk and even breathe, yet their minds remain sharp; aware of the limitations ALS has imposed on their lives, but powerless to do anything about it. They become trapped inside a body they no longer can control.

There is no cure for ALS. In fact, it is fatal within an average of two to five years from the time of diagnosis. Moreover, there currently is only one drug available to treat the disease. Unfortunately, that drug, Rilutek, originally approved by the FDA in 1995 has shown only limited effects, prolonging life in some patients by just a few months.

The hopes of people with ALS—those living today and those yet to be diagnosed—are that medical science will develop and make available new treatments for the disease; treatments that will improve and save their lives.

However, The ALS Association is deeply concerned that the elimination of the MMA's noninterference provision will dampen these hopes and will result in unintended consequences for the thousands of Americans fighting this horrific disease. The potential impacts are significant and include:

LIMITS ON INNOVATION

While reducing the cost of prescription drugs is an important goal, it should not be done at the expense of innovation. Unfortunately, eliminating the MMA's noninterference provision will limit the resources available to develop new breakthrough medicines. This is especially troubling for a disease like ALS, for the development of new drugs offers patients their best, and likely only, hope for an effective treatment.

Additionally, by establishing price controls, Congress will undermine the incentives it has established to encourage drug development in orphan diseases, like ALS. As resources available for research and development become more scarce, there will be even less incentive to invest in orphan drug development.

LIMITS ON ACCESS

The elimination of the noninterference provision will have particularly cruel consequences for people with ALS. It means that even if a new drug is developed to treat ALS, many patients likely will not have access to it. That's because price controls can limit access to the latest technologies. Proponents of government negotiated prices cite the Department of Veterans Affairs as a model for how the government should negotiate prices for Medicare prescription drugs. Yet under that system, patients do not have access to many of the latest breakthrough treatments. For example, two of the most recently developed drugs to treat Parkinson's and Multiple Sclerosis, neurological diseases like ALS, are not covered by the VA due to the government negotiated price. Ironically, those drugs currently are covered by Medicare Part D.

Given this scenario, we are deeply concerned that any new drug that is developed for ALS will not be available to the vast majority of patients who need it. Instead they either will be forced to forgo treatment, or only will have access to less effective treatment options ones that may add a few months to their lives, but not ones that will add years or even save their lives.

PEOPLE WITH ALS RELY ON MEDICARE

A significant percentage of people with ALS rely on Medicare, and the newly established prescription drug benefit, to obtain their health and prescription coverage. In fact Congress recognized the importance of Medicare coverage for people with ALS by passing legislation to eliminate the 24-month Medicare waiting period for people disabled with the disease. This law helps to ensure patients have timely access to the health care they need. With the establishment of the Part D benefit, Congress also has now, helped to ensure that people with ALS have access to coverage for vital prescription drugs.

Yet this improved access is threatened by short-sighted and inappropriately cost driven efforts to remove the noninterference provision. If Congress makes this change, they will undo what the MMA sought to ensure: access to needed prescription drugs.

While The ALS Association appreciates attempts to improve access to affordable prescription drugs, we believe that Congress must consider the implications of its actions on coverage, access and the advancement of medical science. We fear that in an effort to control costs, Congress may limit treatment options, discourage innovation, and extinguish the hopes of thousands of Americans whose lives have been touched by ALS and who are fighting to find a treatment and cure. On behalf of your constituents living with Lou Gehrig's disease, we urge you to oppose legislation to eliminate the noninterference provisions of the Medicare Modernization Act.

Sincerely,

STEVE GIBSON,
*Vice President, Government Relations and Public Affairs.*

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MILITARY ORDER OF THE PURPLE HEART,
*Springfield, VA, January 10, 2007.*

Speaker NANCY PELOSI
*Washington, DC.*

DEAR MADAM SPEAKER: In the coming days the House will take up legislation that, if enacted will repeal the noninterference clause of the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003. The Medicare Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Act of 2007, H.R. 4, will require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate lower covered part D drug prices on behalf of Medicare beneficiaries. While there is no specific mention of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the favorable pricing they receive on pharmaceutical products through the Federal Supply Schedule (FSS), I would like to share with you the concerns of The Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH) as you consider H.R. 4.

As you know, Federal law currently enables the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to purchase pharmaceutical products for veterans through the Federal Supply Schedule (FSS). Because of the Veterans Health Care Act of 1992, the prices the VA pays through the FSS are substantially discounted from the prices private sector purchasers pay. Extending access to the FSS pharmaceutical discounts to larger groups would cause FSS prices to rise and would dramatically increase the VA's pharmaceutical costs. The Government Accounting Office and the VA have documented the magnitude of this effect in 1995, 1997 and 2000 in response to previous proposals to extend FSS prices to other entities. The studies estimate that the VA would incur many hundreds of millions of dollars in additional expenses.

Our concerns about such proposals were expressed in The Independent Budget of 2006 sent to every Member of Congress. Sixty-two veteran and allied organizations endorse The Independent Budget. Additionally, several veteran organizations have passed formal Resolutions opposing legislation extending FSS prices to Medicare or other programs because it would threaten discounts the VA currently receives.

MOPH is on record as supporting lower prescription drug prices for all Americans, but not at the expense of those veterans enrolled in the VA health care system and the favorable pricing that the VA receives through the FSS.

Respectfully,

THOMAS A. POULTER,
*National Commander.*

Mr. GRASSLEY. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SANDERS). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

## RECENT TRIP TO INDIA, SYRIA, AND ISRAEL

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I have sought recognition to report on the recent trip I made from December 13 to December 30 to India, Syria, and Israel.

The trip to India was a revelation to me—to see the vast economic progress that this gigantic nation of 1.1 billion people has made. For a long time, the nation of India resisted foreign investment, perhaps as a result of the colonialization by the British. But for most of the past two decades, India has been open for investment and trade. During the course of my travels there, which are detailed in a lengthy statement that I will include for the RECORD at the conclusion of my extemporaneous remarks, I have detailed the many U.S. plants we visited, such as GE and IBM, all showing a remarkable aptitude for the technology of the 21st century.

I recall, several years ago, being surprised when I sought a number from information and found out that the answering person was in India. I have since learned that this is a common practice because, whereas, it used to cost about $3.50 for a minute conversation between the United States and India, it now costs about 7 cents.

The Indians are very highly educated. They are able to take on jobs, so-called outsourcing, at a much lower rate of compensation. They have physician groups who are available to read, through the miracles of modern technology, x rays. They have a 10½-hour time difference, so they are prepared to do it on pretty much on an around-the-clock basis. While, obviously, there is a loss of jobs with outsourcing, I think our long-range benefits in trade with India—a major trading partner—and the strengthening of this democracy in Asia will provide a tremendous source of strength and assistance to the goals of the United States. I think it is especially important to see the Nation of India develop with its 1.1 billion people as a counterbalance, so to speak, to China with 1.3 billion people. We have in India a democracy, contrasted with the authoritarian government which prevails in China and, in the long run, the incentives and the productivity of free people in a democracy should be quite a counterbalance, if not a nation which will exceed the tremendous strides which China has seen.

A major topic of conversation on my trip to India was the recent agreement between the United States and India, where we will make nuclear technology available to the nation of India. When I first learned of that proposal, I had very substantial misgivings because India was not a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. But on examining the issues further and seeing that India had not joined that treaty as a matter of principle, feeling it was discriminatory, since the only people who were part of the so-called nuclear club, or were recognized to be part of the so-called nuclear club, were the five major powers. I think if the U.N. Charter were being written today, India would be included as one of the five major powers of the world. At any rate, that was a major topic of conversation.

The nuclear technology that the United States will make available to India will strengthen India's economy and will be a good bridge in cementing relations between the United States and India.

I had the privilege of meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India to discuss a wide range of issues. He expressed great pleasure at his relations with President Bush and with the signing of the nuclear agreement, and he made a comment that India did not want another nuclear power in the region and specifically said he was opposed to seeing Iran gain nuclear weapons. I thanked Prime Minister Singh in India for the vote which they cast in support of the U.S. position in the United Nations on the Iranian issue, and I think the agreement will be very helpful in promoting good relations between the United States and India.

I then traveled to Syria, which was my 16th visit to that nation, starting in 1984. During the course of those visits—I have had the opportunity to meet with former President Hafez al-Assad, on nine occasions, and with his successor, his son, President Bashar al-Assad, on four occasions. I recollect that the first meeting I had with Hafez al-Assad was in January of 1988, and it lasted 4 hours 38 minutes, discussing a wide range of issues on the Iran-Iraq war, which had just been concluded, and then on Syrian-Israeli relations and then on U.S.-U.S.S.R. relations, and I found President al-Assad at that time to be a very engaging interlocutor. I suggested, on a number of occasions, that I had taken a sufficient amount of his time, and he generously extended the time until we had discussed a very wide range of issues. I found those discussions with President Hafez al-Assad to be productive.

In 1996, when Prime Minister Netanyahu took office, he made a public announcement that he would hold Syria responsible for the Hezbollah attacks on northern Israel. Syria then realigned their troops. I was in Jerusalem, and Prime Minister Netanyahu asked me to carry a message to President Hafiz al-Assad that he wanted peace, and I did. Later, now Foreign Minister Walid al-Mouallem said that that comment helped to defuse the situation.

For many years, President Hafez al-Assad refused to negotiate with Israel unless all five of the major superpowers sponsored the international conference. Israel's Prime Minister Shamir was opposed on the grounds that he would attend the conference sponsored by the United States and the U.S.S.R. but not when the odds were stacked 4 to 1 against Israel. I discussed that matter on a number of occasions with President Hafez al-Assad, whether my urging him had any effect. The effect is that President Hafez al-Assad agreed to go to Madrid in 1981 to a conference sponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union. I had urged President Hafez al-Assad to allow the Syrian Jews to leave. I made a point to him in the early to mid-1990s that the Jewish women in Syria had no one of their own faith to marry. He made an interesting suggestion. He said that if anyone will come and claim a Syrian Jewish bride, she could leave the country. I translated that offer to the large Syrian-Jewish community in New York and, regrettably, there were no takers. But after a time, President Hafez al-Assad let the Jews go on his own, which was a constructive move.

I first met President Bashar al-Assad at the funeral of his father. I was the only Member of Congress to attend the funeral. It was a 33-hour trip—15 hours over, 3 hours on the ground, and 15 hours back. I made the trip to pay my respects and to meet the new President. On this occasion, I met extensively for more than an hour with Foreign Minister Walid al-Mouallem and the next day for a little over an hour with President Bashar al-Assad. President Assad said that he was interested in undertaking peace negotiations with Israel. He said he was obviously looking for a return of the Golan but that he had a good measure of quid pro quo to offer Israel and assistance on the fragile truce which Israel now has with Hezbollah and also assistance with Hamas. In my formal statement, I go into greater detail on that subject.

I pressed President Bashar al-Assad on the obligations Syria had to abide by U.N. Resolution 1701 to not to support Hezbollah, and he said Syria would honor that requirement, that obligation. I, also, pressed him on allowing the U.S. investigation into the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri, and again I received assurances on that subject. It is always difficult to know the validity of the assurances, but I think the dialog and the conversation and pressing the point is very worthwhile.

With respect to Iraq, President Bashar al-Assad said that Syria would be interested in hosting an international conference attended by the warring factions in Iraq and that Syria had already gained the concurrence of Turkey to participate and Syria would invite other Arab countries to such a discussion. I realize that there is some disagreement with the issue of dialog with Syria, but it is my view, developed over many years of foreign travel, that dialog and talk is a very important and worthwhile undertaking.

My trip there followed visits by Senators BILL NELSON, CHRIS DODD, and JOHN KERRY. I think all came away with the same conclusion that the dialog was very much worthwhile. I then traveled to Israel, where I had an opportunity to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Olmert. I relayed to him the interest that Bashar al-Assad had in dialog. Prime Minister Olmert had been reportedly cool to any such discussions subsequent to my visit. Some more positive statements were coming from Israeli officials about possible negotiation also with Israel, but Prime Minister Olmert insisted on having some display of good faith on the part of Syria before even considering undertaking such discussions.

We also met with Foreign Minister Livni and former Prime Minister Netanyahu and our conversations are detailed in my written statement.

We then traveled to Ramallah to talk to Salam Fayyad and Hannan Ashrawi, members of the so-called Third Way, a very small Palestinian party but a very able people and very stalwart advocates for peace. Those comments are contained in my written statement.

I ask unanimous consent that the full text of my prepared statement be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

REPORT ON FOREIGN TRAVEL

Mr. President, I have sought recognition to report on foreign travel, as is my custom, from December 13 to December 30, 2006.

I traveled to India, Syria, and Israel with overnight travel stops in the United Kingdom, Qatar, and Italy. I was joined by my

wife Joan, my aide Scott Boos, Colonel Gregg Olson, United States Marine Corps, and Dr. Matthew Needleman, United States Navy.

UNITED KINGDOM

On December 13, we departed Dulles International Airport outside Washington, DC. Our first stop was in London, England where we landed at Heathrow International Airport after a flight of just over 7 hours. Upon arriving in London, we were greeted by Mr. James Sindle of the American Embassy in London. After a brief overnight stay, we headed back to the airport and departed for Mumbai, India, the next morning.

INDIA

Upon arriving in Mumbai in the early morning hours of December 15, we were greeted by Mr. Wilson Ruark, from the U.S. Consulate General in Mumbai. Mr. Ruark, a Vice Consul at the Consulate, was assigned to be our Control Officer. Being that it was 2 a.m. local time, we quickly headed to our hotel for some much-needed rest after two full days of air travel.

Among other issues, our meetings throughout India focused on the U.S./India Nuclear Deal, business outsourcing, and India's relationship with the U.S. and its neighbors, including Pakistan.

On the afternoon of December 15, we received a Country Team Briefing with the Consul General, Mr. Michael S. Owen, and his staff: Mr. Wilson Ruark, Vice Consul; Mr. Matthew B. Sweeney, a special agent of the Diplomatic Security Service; Mr. Glen C. Keiser, Consular Chief; Mr. Bill Klein, Consul; and Ms. Elizabeth Kaufmann, Public Diplomacy Chief.

I was pleased to hear that U.S. relations with India are at an ''all-time high,'' much in part to the U.S./India Nuclear agreement, part of a new ''global partnership'' entered into on July 18, 2005, by President Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Completion of the final terms of the deal will allow the U.S. to engage in peaceful nuclear cooperation with the world's largest democracy, one that commands respect in an important part of the world. When the United Nations was created in 1945, the 5 permanent members of the Security Council were the United States, Britain, France, China, and Russia. If that decision were made today, there is no doubt in my mind that India would be among the world powers considered for membership. With a population of 1.1 billion, an educated young workforce, and an ever-expanding economy, India provides an important counter-balance to China in its region of the world.

On the U.S./India Nuclear deal, the President characterized the agreement as ''hugely important'' for our strategic relationship with India, and I agree. By way of background, U.S. nuclear energy cooperation with India goes back to the mid-1950's when the U.S. assisted in the building of nuclear reactors in Tarapur, India, and allowed Indian scientists to study in the U.S. During negotiations of the 1968 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), India refused to join the NPT on grounds that it was discriminatory and only recognized 5 nations with the right to possess nuclear weapons. All other signatories are required to dismantle their nuclear weapons operations. I heard this same sentiment expressed with many of the people I met with in India. However, after India tested a nuclear device in 1974, the U.S. and other nations tightened export controls leaving India in a difficult position without sufficient access to supplies for its civilian nuclear program. An additional test by India in 1998, and a subsequent counter-test by Pakistan, certainly did not advance their ability to obtain fuel and equipment from world suppliers.

On August 26, 1995, on travel with Colorado Senator Hank Brown, I met with India's Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. He stated his interest in negotiations which would lead to the elimination of any nuclear weapons on the Indian subcontinent within ten or fifteen years. Two days later, I raised the issue with Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. She expressed genuine surprise over the content of my discussion with Prime Minister Rao. She stated that this was the first time that she had heard any such commitment from India and she asked if we had it in writing. I suggested to Prime Minister Bhutto that the U.S. serve as an intermediary to facilitate dialogue. I wrote a letter to President Clinton summarizing the meetings and suggested that it would be very productive for the U.S. to initiate and broker discussions between India and Pakistan. Unfortunately, he did not share my interest in the issue, perhaps because his attention was focused on the election. After the election, I raised the issue again with the President, but again he did not show interest.

Despite being a non-signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), India has complied with most of its main tenets. It should be noted that India, unlike its neighbor Pakistan, has not shared its technology or weapons with outside nations. They have been a responsible nuclear weapon state, though not recognized under the NPT like the 5 acknowledged nuclear weapon states: U.S., Russia, France, Britain, and China.

For India, a deal with the U.S. will provide India much-needed credibility and the potential for energy security with access to equipment, fuel, and other assistance for its civil nuclear power program. The international community is likely to follow the lead of the U.S. In return, India, which does not currently have International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards on all nuclear material in peaceful nuclear activities, agrees to open its civil nuclear power reactors to inspection.

Congress recently approved authorizing legislation, with some controversial modifications regarding Iran which I will discuss in more detail later in this report, setting the stage for a final cooperation agreement. The legislation retains the prerogative of Congress to vote on the actual cooperation before it takes effect.

U.S. business ties with India are also on the rise, and have been for some time. India recently hosted 240 American businessmen and women, representing 190 companies—the largest delegation of its kind ever. New Delhi appears to be taking additional steps to embrace trade and has loosened various trade restrictions in recent years.

The Consulate explained that several societal and political functions appear to be restricting the advancement of the country. The risk of ''political paralysis'' has become an issue among competing political factions in the 543-seat Lok Sabha (People's House). No single political party has come close to a parliamentary majority in recent times and coalitions have become necessary to wield greater influence over national affairs. Currently, the National Congress Party occupies more parliamentary seats (145) than any other party, and through alliances with powerful regional parties, leads India's government under the United Progressive Alliance coalition. Congress party chief Sonia Gandhi, the daughter-in-law of assassinated former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and widow of assassinated former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, has considerable power over the ruling coalition's policy-making process. The Bharitiya Janata Party (BJP), associated with Hindu nationalism, is the country's largest opposition party and controls eight state governments. Meanwhile, the government is led by Manmohan Singh, a Sikh and India's first-ever non-Hindu prime minister.

We discussed India's history and the arrival of the British, who brought rule of law to India despite flagrant disobedience which exists today. Politically controlled by the British East India Company from the early 18th century and directly administered by Great Britain starting the mid–19th century, India became a modern nation-state in 1947 after a struggle for independence marked by widespread use of nonviolent resistance as a means of social protest.

I was surprised to see that the Indians would have built a ''Gateway of India'' monument to celebrate the arrival of King George V and Queen Mary in 1911. Completed in 1924, the massive structure sits atop the port of Mumbai on the Arabian Sea. It did not make sense that the Indians would have built such a structure to celebrate those who were there to exploit their interests, and I was right. As it turns out, the British built the Gateway of India.

While Muslims represent just 15 percent of India's population, the 140 million Muslims places India behind only Indonesia and Pakistan among countries with large Muslim populations. Eighty percent are Hindu, but they represent a diverse mixture of regional characteristics with numerous languages. Three percent of Indians are Sikh; around one percent are Christian. The Jewish population has declined as a result of emigration to Israel since 1948. Currently, 5,000 Jews live in Mumbai and another 4,000 live elsewhere in India.

The Consulate explained the numerous challenges to India's desire to expand its economic base. India has not spent enough money on roads, rail, ports, power, and water infrastructure. The weight of 1.1 billion people has strained India's physical infrastructure, clearly evident driving to meetings throughout Mumbai and along the route to the airport. While India has numerous world-class schools, the Consular staff explained that access to education in rural areas has been getting worse. India recently surpassed South Africa as the country with the most individuals living with HIV and AIDS, registering at over 5 million persons.

Immigration is a highly emotional subject, with some objecting to Indians taking jobs from U.S. workers. However, it is worth noting that these are very bright people and that we are a nation of immigrants. There is a desire to see the U.S. lift its cap on H1B visas, highly sought by Indians in the Information Technology (IT) industry. The current cap is at 65,000 and some are expressing a desire to see that number lifted to 125,000. Overall, the Consulate in Mumbai issued 120,000 visas last year, 15,000 to highly skilled workers. They expect steady and double-digit annual increases in demand.

Finally, we discussed India's relations with Pakistan and the threat of terrorism that exists in India. Continuing violence in Kashmir remains a major source of interstate tension. Both India and Pakistan have built large defense establishments—including nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs—at the cost of economic and social development. Little substantive progress has been made toward resolving the Kashmir issue, and New Delhi continues to complain about what it views as insufficient Pakistani efforts to end Islamic militancy that affects India.

On July 11, 2006, a series of explosions on seven crowded commuter trains in Mumbai left more than 200 dead and at least 800 injured. On December 1, 2006 Indian police filed formal charges against 28 suspected members of the connected to the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), a Sunni militant

group fighting in Kashmir and designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S. Police also have alleged that Pakistan's Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence was behind the bombings. Pakistan has denied the accusation. Thirteen of the accused are in police custody, and the rest are at large.

Later in the afternoon on December 15, I met with several impressive Indian business executives for a roundtable discussion on outsourcing—a word which has picked up a negative connotation resulting from lost jobs in the U.S. which have been shipped to India. These men were very knowledgeable and I was amazed at their rise to such important positions at such young ages—the four men ranged in age from 38 to 42. Anish Tripathi of KPMG, heads the knowledge function in India and reports directly to the Director and CEO. He explained his firm's role in advising U.S. firms on whether, and how, to outsource their operations to India and elsewhere in search of a lower-cost operations base. Saurabh Sonawala, the head of business processing outsourcing for HindiTron, a travel software producer and outsourcing advisor to over 20 major airlines, explained, ''It's not always about cost. India can do a better job.'' Manish Modi, Managing Director of Datamatrix Technologies Ltd., described the process of outsourcing certain accounting functions for the auto industry. While the actual invoice must be handled and mailed in the U.S., a scanned copy on a computer screen in Mumbai allows an Indian worker to perform related accounting tasks. Satish Ambe of KALE Associates also was present in the meeting.

They explained that 80 per cent of outsourcing consists of so-called ''call centers,'' where English-speaking Indians perform various functions from India. I asked how it would make sense to pay the cost of a phone call to India and still achieve cost-efficiency. They explained that 12 years ago, the cost of a phone call was $3.50 per minute. Today it is only 7 cents per minute. The cost of a data connection has also become much cheaper. Ten years ago a 64K line would have cost $10,000 per month. Today it is only $50 to $100 per month.

Other factors contribute to the desirability of using India as a base for operations. The time zone difference allows companies to employ low-cost labor instead of paying the ''graveyard shift'' in the U.S. At a management level, labor costs only 30–40 percent of that in the U.S. At an entry-level, labor in India costs only 10 percent of that in the U.S. The gentlemen I met with claimed that India's workforce is better skilled and better educated. In the U.S. it is difficult to find someone with an accounting degree to man a phone line. However, in India, a degree has become a prerequisite due to the heavy competition for employment. In addition, India has a very large labor pool of young workers. The average age in India is 25, compared to an average age of 35 in China. Finally, workers in India speak English, a characteristic not often found in low-cost labor markets.

Our discussion extended beyond outsourcing to India's economy in general. It was represented that 200 years ago, India's economy accounted for 26 percent of the world's GDP. Today it is only 2 percent, leaving room for expansion. I question the ability to gauge such a statistic, but it still shows the power of the East India Trading Company.

We discussed the similarities and differences between India and China. They explained that perhaps a totalitarian government is most effective in propelling a nation of over 1.3 billion people. Regardless, China's economic expansion began about 10 years before India's and India is likely to eventually surpass China, due in large part to its large population of young workers. However, they explained that the ''aspiration level'' is easily understood—of workers in India is relatively low. Indians who really ''aspire'' move to the U.S. The men agreed that the impending U.S./India Nuclear deal was an important symbolic event which will solidify the relationship between our nations.

On December 16, I met with Julio Ribeiro, Head of Enforcement for the Indian Music Industry (IMI), to discuss issues related to copyright infringement, copyright enforcement and to discuss the IMI's experience in anti-piracy efforts. Mr. Ribeiro was a very impressive man with a long resume of achievement. He joined the Indian Police Service in 1953 and served as Mumbai's police commissioner in the 1980s, commanding a force of 35,000 officers. From 1989 to 1992, he served as Indian Ambassador to Romania. IMI members include major record companies including Saregama India Ltd., Universal Music, Sony BMG Music Entertainment, and Virgin Records. Mr. Ribeiro explained that the copyright laws in India are good, but are not well understood. ''Education is key to enforcement,'' according to Mr. Ribeiro. Corruption in India is a huge obstacle and without proper supervision enforcement of copyright laws becomes a low priority. When I asked who was being bribed, Mr. Ribeiro replied, ''You tell me who is not being bribed.''

That same afternoon, we sat down for a lengthy meeting and lunch with the Director (Projects) of the state-owned Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL), Mr. S.K. Agrawal to discuss the nuclear power industry in India, its growth prospects, its role in upholding India's non-proliferation regime (outside of the NPT), and the commercial prospects for U.S. companies should the U.S./India civil nuclear agreement become reality. I also pressed Mr. Agrawal on some of the more politically sensitive issues surrounding the agreement, particularly with respect to Iran and its nuclear intentions. Overall, Mr. Agrawal said that his company is ''euphoric'' over the U.S./India Nuclear deal.

The NCPIL has ambitious expansion plans, and hopes to procure more technology and hardware abroad once the U.S./India Nuclear deal is complete. Mr. Agrawal explained that with India's massive population and thirst for energy in an expanding economy, it will need 700GW of electricity capacity by 2032. India's 16 nuclear power reactors currently cover only 2 percent of India's electricity demand, but their goal is to reach 10 percent by 2031 and 30 percent by 2050. The NCPIL has a capacity of about 3.9GW and, if its current construction and future plans for additional reactors come to fruition, it will reach 60GW by 2031. Over 20 foreign reactors will be necessary to achieve this goal. Thermal (coal and gas) currently provides over 80GW of electricity, but India's reserves of fossil fuels are going down. Hydro-electricity provides another 33GW and renewables provide only 6GW.

Mr. Agrawal claims that India already has sufficient know-how to build additional plants, but because India is not a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Agreement (NPT), foreign countries will not sell reactors. He explained that the leverage of the U.S. trusting India and making a deal will send a strong signal to other countries who will also be interested in exporting its reactors. Mr. Agrawal explained that there is enough business for everyone and that India ''can accommodate France, Russia, and the U.S.'' He also assured me that imported uranium would be used ''only for civilian purposes and not for any para-military'' purpose and that the reactors will be open for IAEA inspection.

I raised the issue of Iran with Mr. Agrawal. The Senate version of the U.S./India Nuclear deal included a requirement that the President determine that India is fully and actively supporting U.S. and international efforts to dissuade, sanction, and contain Iran's nuclear program. Due to heavy pressure from New Delhi, the Conference Report included a watered-down version which only requires an annual report to Congress on India's efforts in this regard. Regardless, this provision has raised opposition and debate over the deal in India. When I asked Mr. Agrawal for his feelings on the matter, he initially claimed that it was not his place to comment, that he was ''just a utility company.'' However, when I pursued the issue, he said that India does not support nuclear proliferation in Iran. He explained that ''India has a uniform policy'' and that it doesn't ''pick and choose'' when, and for whom, to oppose proliferation. I responded that it's appropriate to pick and choose when a country threatens to wipe another country off the face of the Earth, as Iran's President has done towards Israel. During Senate consideration, I supported an even more stringent amendment which would have required Presidential certification that India has agreed to suspend military-to-military cooperation with Iran, including training exercises, until such time as Iran is no longer designated as a state sponsor of terrorism. Regardless, I told Mr. Agrawal that I know that India is a responsible nation and that we wouldn't solve the problem over lunch. I was pleased to see Mr. Agrawal be candid with his views, and those of his country, on this, and a number of related issues.

Mr. Agrawal explained that no final approval would be necessary from the parliament in India, but that a two-day debate would take place on December 18–19. He said that we would see the two sides of public opinion, those who support the deal, and those who question India limiting its ability to freely act on its own foreign policy. Mainly, the discussion will try to answer the question, ''Did the U.S come through with the July agreement'' between Prime Minister Singh and President Bush, or ''did Congress change it too much,'' referring to the Iran report requirement. An article appeared in the Times of India newspaper on the day of our meeting written by ex-scientists claiming that the deal denies India the opportunity for full cooperation in civil nuclear energy. Unlike the U.S., India wants to reprocess its spent nuclear fuel for new experimental reactors for which technology will be ready for development in 15–20 years. However, the Congress included language in the legislation to prohibit such a practice. The legislation passed by Congress also includes a termination clause should India export nuclear-related mater, equipment, or technology—though a Presidential waiver is available. Also, while India hasn't said whether or not it will conduct a nuclear test again, the deal would terminate should a test occur. Despite the article, Mr. Agrawal assured us that the scientists did not represent the majority opinion of Indians.

When I asked why India won't become a signatory to the NPT, he explained that it is a discriminatory arrangement whereby only the 5 acknowledged nuclear weapon states are permitted to possess nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, its neighbor Pakistan, also not a signatory, has been an irresponsible nuclear weapon state and, according to Mr. Agrawal, India is ''not ready to eliminate its weapons'' because it needs them as a deterrent to offset those possessed by its neighbor. In order for India to join the NPT and enjoy the benefits of civil nuclear cooperation, it would be required to draw down its arsenal. Unlike Pakistan, India has shown its global

aspirations. India paid a price for supporting the U.S. already when Iran was referred to the Security Council. A pending deal to build a much-needed natural gas pipeline through Pakistan was put on hold. The deal shows that India needs to be recognized in a realistic way as a nuclear weapon state, because they do in fact possess them. I said I am pleased to see the U.S./India Nuclear deal moving forward. Once complete, India's massive population will be able to enjoy the benefits of peaceful civil nuclear cooperation.

During lunch, Mr. Agrawal explained that the NCPIL would be creating a new university for nuclear training in Mumbai. A state department official who joined me in the meeting expressed interest in possible cooperation with U.S. universities.

On December 17, we departed Mumbai for Cochin, located in the southern state of Kerala. Upon arrival, we were greeted by Mr. Fred Kaplan, Ms. Kelly Buenrostro, and Mr. Finny Jacob of the U.S. Consulate General in Chennai. They provided excellent support and arranged good meetings through my travel in south India.

We departed the airport and drove into Cochin for tea and a tour of the Mattancherry Synagogue with Samuel Hallegua, the leader of the Jewish community. Mr. Hallegua is a former businessman who came from a wealthy Jewish family whose ancestors had migrated to Kerala in 1692 from Spain, by way of Aleppo, Iran, and held large areas of land in Cochin. He explained that his ancestors in Kerala were in the rope trade business and cultivated coconuts and rice on their estate until land reform in 1917 when they were forced to give up land. Once a vibrant community of 2,500 Jews, Cochin now has only a very small Jewish population—32 individuals in the city and another 20 in the suburbs. Entire families and congregations departed for Israel upon its statehood in 1948. I was pleased to hear Mr. Hallegua say that Jews in Cochin have enjoyed ''total religious freedom.'' I asked, ''If it's so good here, why did everyone leave for Israel?'' He explained that they were ''observant Orthodox Jews'' and that they ''felt they could be more observant'' in Israel.

After tea in Mr. Hallegua's 200-year old ancestral home, he walked us through the neighborhood to the Mattancherry Synagogue. Built in 1568, it is one of the great historic places of interest in Cochin. Mr. Hallegua showed us scrolls of Jewish scriptures, copper plates in which the privileges granted by the Cochin Maharajas to the Kerala Jewish community are recorded, and the building's antique chandeliers and Chinese hand painted tiles. As I signed my name into the guest book, I noted that Queen Elizabeth of Britain visited the synagogue in 1997 and signed the same book. I was later told that Mr. Hallegua drew a curious look from the Queen when he told his wife ''Queenie'' to ''hurry up, Queenie.''

That evening I attended a dinner with 12 member of the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce (IACC) in Kerala, including Mr. C.P. Sebastian, CEO of Excel Globe and current President of the Chamber. Founded in 1968, the IACC serves as a link between the businesses in India and the United States and seeks to promote bilateral trade, investment and technology transfer, and other joint ventures. The Kerala branch of the IACC was established in 1992 and has over 60 members. We discussed a number of issues related to the process of outsourcing American jobs to India at a lower cost. They explained that while jobs may be lost in America, India provides a benefit to the American consumer with lower costs for products and services. Our conversation extended into other areas including the U.S./India Nuclear deal. We discussed their views on the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty as discriminatory and how it confers second-rate status on Indians, the crisis in the Middle East and the problems in Iraq, relations with China, and intellectual property rights. We toasted the good relations between our nations, and I extended an invitation for the executives to visit the U.S.

On the morning of December 17, we departed our hotel for a boat tour of the Cochin area. Along the way, we saw Chinese fishing nets. Cochin is the only place in the world outside of China where these nets are in use. We also toured areas affected by the tsunami. I was curious to know that the tsunami hit the west coast of India. In Cochin, water was sucked away from land for 45 minutes and then the water rushed back to land killing 80 people and destroying many houses.

I joined 8 area business executives who are members of the Cochin Chamber of Commerce for a working lunch. The Chamber President Mr. Jose Dominic, Managing Director of the CGH Earth Hotels, told me that the Chamber is celebrating its 150th anniversary. Commerce in the region began with English traders in the Cochin area. Today, the region specializes in shipping, agriculture, and tourism. The locals refer to the area as ''God's own country.'' Kerala's economy grew by 9.2 percent last year, largely in part to a growth rate of 13.8 percent in the services sector. Due to the lack of industrial investments, Kerala has a major unemployment problem with over 4 million people out-of-work. Again, we discussed a mixture of business related issues and other issues of international importance. Almost all of the executives had visited the U.S. and many had children in our universities. They remarked that it is ''amazing'' that our 2 big democracies haven't been closer sooner. We discussed the effect of the ruling Communist government and how it restricts the flow of trade. They explained that state funds going into investment are not providing an adequate return. However, the schools and healthcare are exceptional. ''If you were a poor person, Kerala would be a good place to live,'' one man said.

Later that afternoon, I met with Chief Justice V.K. Bali and 4 senior judges of the Kerala High Court in Cochin, the highest court in the state. In India, one cannot be a Chief Justice in their native state to avoid any allegations of impartial rulings influenced by area relationships. To become a judge at the High Court, lawyers who practice at the court are chosen by the Chief Justice based on their daily performance. The Chief Justice explained that 45 is a good starting age and that judges are bound to retire at age 62–65 for the national Supreme Court. I told them that in the U.S., Oliver Wendel Holmes served on the federal bench until he was 91. They explained that in India, everything is open to judicial review, including actions taken by the Prime Minister. In the U.S., President Bush campaigned in 2004 on nominating judges that would not legislate from the bench. When I asked if judges in India legislate from the bench, they explained that sometimes it is necessary to ''fill in the gaps,'' and they do so despite the criticism. They gave me an example where a public smoking ban was put into effect by the High Court based on a provision in their constitution providing a ''right to life.''

On December 19, I met with the Editorial Board of the Malayala Manorama, one of the largest circulated newspapers in India with 1.4 million copies sold daily. We discussed the good relations between the U.S. and India bolstered recently by the nuclear deal. They also asked questions about how the deal relates to their relations with Pakistan, Iran, and India's ability to decide foreign policy without foreign influence. We also discussed the Middle East and my view that we should be willing to talk to our adversaries if we intend to solve the problems at hand. I was asked questions about religious freedom, personal privacy in the U.S. since 9/11, the 2008 Presidential election, trade policy with India, relations with Pakistan, and my views on India as an investment destination. I was very surprised by the newspaper's account of my interview, as published on December 20. The board of editors grossly mischaracterized my statements on the war in Iraq, the war's relationship with the Muslim community, treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay, and my view of India in the world. I would certainly rethink granting another interview with the Malayala Manorama newspaper on any future visit to Kerala. I wrote the Managing Editor, Mr. Philip Mathew, and explained the misrepresentations in their reporting. I ask consent that a copy of my December 22, 2006, letter be included at the end of these remarks.

Later that day, we drove into the backwaters area of Kerala for a boat tour of the region.

On December 20, we departed Kerala for Bangalore, India, a city of nearly 10 million people. The state of Karnakata has around 60 million people and all of south India has nearly 250 million people. Again, we were accompanied by the very able officers of the U.S. Consulate in Chennai. Also joining us from the State Department on this leg of the trip was Mr. George Mathew who provided helpful information on the local issues.

Upon our arrival, I hosted a lunch with former Chief Justice Malimath of both the Karnakata and Kerala High Courts, the Indian equivalent of a state supreme court in the U.S. However, the Chief Justice earned his distinct reputation for his leadership of a judicial reform committee focused on criminal procedures which recently published a report bearing his name. Among the recommendations to reduce the backlog of criminal court cases and bring order to the system was the introduction of plea bargaining, which was absent in the Indian Criminal Procedure Code. That recommendation has been adopted. He explained that police interrogation techniques in India often involve torture because police are not aware of proper methods. When a detainee dies in custody, suicide is usually given as the reason for death. Reforms to the system now require police to report any instance of death with reasons and must perform a video-recorded postmortem. Another recommendation pending approval is the creation of a witness protection program. The Chief Justice explained that in India only 7 percent of serious offenses end up in conviction because witnesses are afraid to testify. The Chief Justice also headed a comprehensive study of child trafficking in India for the National Human Rights Commission. Its recommendations have been enacted into a government program to disrupt such networks.

We also discussed procedures for confessions, double jeopardy, and the lack of a right to a trial by jury. I was interested to learn that the Chief Justice has a daughter living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

We then visited the IBM Global Operations Center in Bangalore, located in a massive commercial office park with many other U.S. based corporations. The operations center enables IMB to use the high quality workforce at a low cost of labor to remotely troubleshoot and maintain computer networks for clients at locations around the world. For example, during Hurricane Katrina, their monitoring system identified server outages throughout the Gulf Coast. They explained the challenges that come with working in India, including poor infrastructure of roads, ports, and power supply,

exemplified by the lights going out during the presentation. Delayed decision-making of coalition politics and labor laws limiting work hours also are not well suited to the information technology (IT) industry. Still, the Chairman and CEO of IBM, Sam Palmisano, recently announced that over the next 3 years, IBM will triple its investment to $6 billion in India.

Later that afternoon, we visited the General Electric (GE) Jack Welch Technology Center, where over 3,000 scientists and support personnel conduct various research and development operations. The center holds 30 patents. One such innovation breakthrough is the development of a digital railway system where wireless information technology (IT) logistics can be used to monitor operations. The center is also responsible for the development of a diagnostic imaging device where the bone can be taken away from a CT scan. I received a demonstration of the machine and saw very advanced 3 dimensional digital scan a human brain.

On December 21, we departed Bangalore and traveled south to Thiruvananthapuram, India, better known as Trivandrum. We were joined on this leg of the trip by David Hopper, the Consul General of the U.S. Consulate General in Chennai.

Our first meeting was a working lunch at U.S. Technologies, a 100 percent U.S. owned, California-based information technology (IT) firm, specializing in IT consulting and development services for healthcare, retail, financial services, manufacturing, utilities, transportation, and logistics clients. We were greeted at the door by 2 elephants and an indigenous music arrangement consisting of horns and drums. Established in 1999, U.S. Technologies' goal is to become a $1 billion company with a workforce of 30,000 employees by 2010. Already the largest employer in Kerala, they explained that they have a 99.24 percent defect-free process and strive for quality and happy employees. One of their major clients is Blue Cross Blue Shield, based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Later that afternoon, we met V.S. Achuthanandan, the 83-year old Chief Minister of Kerala, India. A Chief Minister in India is equivalent to a governor in the U.S. The Chief Minister assumed the position in May 2006 and is a prominent leader, and true believer, of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI–M). He had been a Communist party worker for 66 years and the party's politburo member for 10 years. In India, the CPI–M politburo is a policy making committee which advises the government on how to rule. The CPI–M has a history of anti-U.S. rhetoric, especially when it is the opposition party. After the death of his father, the Chief Minister left school after just 7 years to assist in his brother's business. Our conversation covered a number of topics including Communist thought and dialect materialism, the policies of President Bush, China, and Cuba.

In between events, we stopped briefly at Trivandrum's Napier Museum where we saw a vast collection of antique, cultural, and artistic artifacts.

Early that evening, I visited his Highness Marthanda Varma Maharaja, the head of the Royal family of Travancore, and other members of the Royal Family for high tea at the Kowdiar Palace. The Royal Family used matrilineal succession. Marthanda Varma's elder sister, Lakshmi Bayi, uses the palace as her residence along with her two daughters Gouri Parvathi Bayi and Gouri Lakshmi Bayi, and their children. Marthanda Varma's brother Bala Rama Varma was the last member to hold power. When Lakshmi Bayi's uncle died, he became King as a small boy in 1941. After his death in 1991, his Highness Marthanda Varma assumed the role as head of the family. Next in line would be her son, a 50 year old doctor in Bangalore. Travancore was a princely state which covered most of central and southern Kerala during the British period. . After independence, the Royal Family lost political power and the princely state merged with other Malayalam language-speaking areas in south India to form Kerala. We discussed the challenges of holding power and how it is different from the current democratic government structure.

On December 22, we departed the southern areas of India for the eastern city of Bhubaneswar, located in the state of Orissa. I was greeted by Mr. Doug Kelly, Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. Consulate General in Calcutta.

Our first meeting was a working lunch with Mr. Vishambhar Saran, Chairman of VISA Steel, and numerous Orissa government officials, at the home of Mr. Saran's son, also an executive at VISA Steel. The lunch provided an opportunity to interact with senior businessmen and state officials and get their insights on Orissa's current economic, political, and social issues. Mr. Saran was a educated to be a mining engineer, served as Director of Raw Materials for TATA Steel, and has over 37 years experience in the mining and steel industry. He explained that the demand for steel in India is growing at a rate of 10 percent and India faces competition from China and the Ukraine. Power is an important issue for their mining and steel-making operations. He told me that India has 300–400 years of coal remaining, but that the quality is not as good as the coal in Pennsylvania. Mr. Saran explained that India is currently producing 42 million tons of steel. By 2012, it will produce 80 tons and by 2020, it will reach 110 tons or more. During lunch we also discussed the situation in Iraq and India's relations with Iraq. Mr. Saran told me that he has been to Pittsburgh several times to visit family.

After lunch, we visited Infosys where I was briefed on company operations by Mr. Ardhendu Das. He also led me on a tour of the Infosys campus which includes cafeterias and recreational areas for employees. Infosys provides clients with business management consulting, information technology (IT) consulting, reengineering and maintenance support, and outsourcing and offshoring services. The company was created in 1981 with 7 employees and $250. Today, it operates in 18 countries and 50 major cities, employing over 66,000 workers with 476 clients. The Infosys CEO was recently named Forbes Asia Businessman of 2006. We discussed India's well-educated labor pool and business comparisons with China.

I met with Orissa Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik to discuss the state of affairs in Orissa and elsewhere in the world. The Chief Minister, head of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD)-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) coalition, was first sworn in on March 2000 and then again in March 2004. He began his political career in 1997 after the death of his father. He also served in Prime Minister Vajpayee's Cabinet as Minister in charge of Steel and Mines. Prior to his political career, Mr. Patnaik was a writer. We discussed the U.S./India Nuclear deal, the growing information technology (IT) industry, steel and mining, tourism, the difference between elections in India and the lengthy process in the U.S., and global issues including the war in Iraq.

Later that evening, my wife and I attended a dinner hosted by Baijayant (''Jay'') Panda, a Member of Rajya Sabha, India's parliament. We discussed world affairs with some 20 prominent citizens of Bhubaneshwar and toasted the successful relationship of our two countries. Born in 1964 and educated in the U.S., Mr. Panda has a very bright future ahead and is one of New Delhi's prominent young parliamentarians. His wife Jaggi runs a cable television network in Bhubaneshwar.

On December 23, I departed Bhubaneshwar for the capitol city of India, New Delhi, where I was greeted at the airport by Mr. Geoffrey Pyatt, Deputy Chief of Mission, and Ms. Karen Schinnerer, consular officer and our control officer.

After some difficulty landing in New Delhi due to fog, I immediately drove to the residence of India's Prime Minister where I was joined by the U.S. Ambassador to India David C. Mulford for a meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. My meeting was the first U.S. visit with the Prime Minister since President Bush signed legislation earlier that week allowing the U.S. and India to move forward with civil nuclear cooperation. The Ambassador told me that 680 million people watched the ceremony on 11 stations, attesting to the interest in the expanding relations between our nations. In between the signing and our meeting, harsh skepticism was voiced in parliament against the U.S./India Nuclear deal. I urged the Prime Minister to move forward quickly with the remaining technical terms of the agreement, which I am told should not be too difficult. The U.S. Congress must still give final approval of the technical terms of the deal. We also discussed the Presidential signing statement and my belief that Congress should be able to sue if the legislation is changed by a statement.

We discussed the strong relationship between India and the U.S. and the good relationship with President Bush. We also discussed the diversity of India, a country with the world's second largest Muslim population. He spoke of his commitment to the rule of law including freedom and human kindness. On the issue of India's relations with Pakistan, I asked the Prime Minister if U.S. involvement could be helpful in mediating the differences between the countries. I explained that I had tried to have President Clinton invite the heads of state of India and Pakistan to the Oval Office in 1995, but without success. The Prime Minister explained that he has had several meetings with Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf and there has been talk of normalizing relations.

I expressed my appreciation for India's vote on Iran in the U.N. on nuclear proliferation. The Prime Minister expressed that India is not in favor of another nuclear state in the region and would oppose Iran having nuclear weapons. We also discussed, more broadly, the difficult situation in the Middle East including the war in Iraq, the struggles in Israel, and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

We also discussed relations with China, Afghanistan, and Israel, the future direction of economic cooperation between the U.S. and India, and Indian students in the U.S. We also exchanged stories about our children and grandchildren. One of the Prime Minister's daughters graduated Yale Law School and now works on civil rights in New York City. I previously met with the Prime Minister in 2001 when he served as the opposition leader in parliament.

Following my meeting with the Prime Minister, I joined the Ambassador at his home for a country team briefing with his staff. We discussed the nuclear proliferation agenda of Iran and North Korea and its relation to India, which has stopped a cargo ship from North Korea to Pakistan with equipment for nuclear weapons.

We discussed in more detail the U.S./India Nuclear deal and the political fallout the Prime Minister is facing due to language in the bill passed by Congress requiring a Presidential report on India's efforts to keep Iran

from becoming a nuclear power. We also discussed economic ties with India, outsourcing of American jobs, and China's practice of currency manipulation. He explained that in the coming years, the U.S., China, and India will continue to emerge as the world's largest economic powers.

QATAR

On December 24, I departed India for Al Udeid Air Base near Doha, Qatar, as a stopover on the way to Damascus, Syria. Upon arrival I was greeted by U.S. Ambassador Chase Untermeyer and Michael Ratney, Deputy Chief of Mission, who briefed me on overall relations between the U.S. and Qatar and the importance of our air base there. While at Al Udeid, I had an opportunity to visit with Pennsylvania troops stationed there. We exchanged stories, took photographs, and I wished them a happy holiday.

SYRIA

On December 25, I arrived in Damascus, Syria. My 16th visit included my 4th meeting with President Bashar al-Assad. I had previously met his father, President Hafez al-Assad, on nine occasions and attended his funeral in 2000. During the course of my previous visits, I have found the dialogue with the Syrian officials to be very helpful and have carried messages to other foreign leaders, including Israeli prime ministers, and back to the President of the United States. These visits have contributed to the discussion of many issues with my colleagues in the United States Congress.

Upon arrival I was greeted by the Chargé d'Affaires, Mr. William Roebuck, and our State Department Control Officer, Mr. Hilary Dauer. Our first meeting was a Country Team Briefing at the U.S. Embassy in Damascus with Mr. Roebuck, Mr. Dauer, and the rest of the State Department staff: Maria Olson, Acting Political/Economics Chief; Allen Kepchar, Acting Consul General; Adrienne Nutzman, Acting Public Diplomacy Chief; David Hughes, Political Section; John J. Finnegan, Jr., Management Counselor; Michael Mack, Regional Security Officer; and Mike McCallum, Acting Defense Attaché.

We discussed the difficulties associated with controlling a large border between Syria and Iraq and a recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the nations to control the traffic of foreign fighters from Yemen, Algeria, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere seeking to fight the U.S. forces in Iraq. They explained that the Syrians have increased troops on the border and have built new guard positions, but that serious difficulties still remain.

We discussed the public stance taken by Syria on their willingness to negotiate ''without preconditions'' with Israel. The State Department officials explained that in reality, the Syrians are interested in starting any negotiations from where they previously left off. This includes a return of the Golan Heights, occupied by Israel, as a ''basis'' for negotiations to resume. They explained that since Prime Minister Sharon took office, negotiations have been ''frozen'' with little interest on the Israeli side. We discussed many issues including the Golan and Syrian interests in Lebanon.

We discussed the perceived power of Bashar al-Assad as compared with the influence of his father. The State Department officials feel that he is not as strong as his father was and does not rule with the same ''iron fist.'' However, they explained that there is not much opposition to President Assad within Syria. I asked if he is, or was, concerned with a U.S. attempt at regime change. They felt that he is less concerned now than when U.S. troops first entered Iraq. Ongoing U.S. problems in Iraq and Afghanistan have eased fears that the U.S. would turn next to Syria.

We discussed Syria's role in Lebanon, its influence over Hezbollah, and its cooperation with U.N. Resolution 1701 regarding the flow of arms to Hezbollah in south Lebanon. They explained that Syria is a ''corridor window'' for Iran to Hezbollah with strong support through Damascus, and that high level political contacts play a role in the tensions in Lebanon through street protests and other actions. They explained that President Assad has taken various positions on his influence in Lebanon in his recent visits with Senator Bill Nelson, and then with Senators Christopher Dodd and John Kerry.

We discussed the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the ongoing U.N. investigation into the matter. The State Department staff described second-hand accounts of threatening conversations between President Assad and Hariri. They explained that the Syrians are experts at removing the command structure from the evidence, making it difficult to establish facts to back up allegations. The first two reports U.N. reports by Detlev Mehlis described Syrian interference in the investigation. However, the most recent reports by Serge Brammertz have described Syrian cooperation with the investigation.

Later that evening, I sat down with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Mouallem. He had not accepted my offer for a meeting until I called him on the phone that afternoon. We discussed a variety of issues including the U.S. presence in Iraq, Syria's influence with Hezbollah, peace negotiations with Israel, the Hariri assassination, Syrian relations with Iraq, and Iran's influence in the region. We also discussed the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, and the complications of a government led by Hamas. We recounted our previous visits and agreed that only through dialogue can we achieve a common ground on the difficult issues at hand.

The Foreign Minister told me that it is time to rethink U.S. policy towards Syria. He told me that isolating Syria was not working and that we are isolating ourselves at the same time. He blamed much of the instability in the Mideast to the Bush Administration. He explained that in Syria, the number one priority is peace in the region, including an end to the Arab/Israeli conflict. When I asked why a peace agreement has not been completed with Israel, he told me that there is a ''lack of political will'' in Israel since Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in 1995. He told me that Syria is willing to negotiate with Israel without preconditions, but not without the ''basis'' of ''land for peace.''

I asked if the problems with Hezbollah could be solved through a peace agreement between Syria and Israel. He answered, ''Without a doubt,'' but then explained the need to resolve the issue of the Golan Heights and, in particular, Shebaa Farms, a small area of disputed ownership located at the junction of Israel, Syria, and Lebanon controlled by Israel since 1967. When I asked if U.N. Resolution 1701 would be observed in the absence of an Israel/Syria peace agreement, the Foreign Minister told me that in history, no ceasefire can stand without a political solution. Thus, he said, it cannot stand forever. When I explained the distrust in the U.S. with Syria's position that they do not supply arms to Hezbollah, Mouallem asked me to present proof to the contrary. He told me that Syria would respond quickly with corrective action if the allegation could be founded with documentation.

On the issue of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, Mouallem explained that Hariri was a friend to Syria and denied involvement in his murder. ''No wise man can shoot his own finger,'' he said. He told me that Syria is cooperating fully with the investigation and he expressed suspicion of political motives in the initial U.N. Mehlis investigative reports, which said Syria was not fully cooperating.

We discussed then-Secretary Colin Powell's 2003 visit when, according to Mouallem, Powell arrived with six ''take it or leave it'' demands of Syria, including closing the borders, ending support for Hezbollah, ending support for Hamas in Damascus, and ending its chemical program. He explained his preference to seek solutions through dialogue, not through demands and a threat of U.S. troops in Iraq next turning to Syria. He explained that after their meeting, Powell held a press conference at a nearby hotel explaining that Syria was not willing to work with the U.S.

Despite this history, Mouallem told me that he is ''ready to turn this page'' and seek constructive dialogue with the U.S. with the objective of peace.

We discussed Syrian relations with Iraq and the recent establishment of an embassy in Baghdad. According to Mouallem, Syria has taken in one million refugees from Iraq and took another 300,000 Lebanese during the conflict with Israel this past summer. Regional stability is sought by the Syrians, he explained. He discussed the recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for border and security cooperation between Iraq and Syria focusing on information exchange and improved presence and training on the borders. In our meeting, the Foreign Minister declined my request to have a copy of the MoU. He suggested I get a copy from the Iraqis.

The Foreign Minister pointed to U.S. mistakes in Iraq including our being unwilling to open dialogue with all factions of Iraqis including the Saddam-loyalists. If we don't attract the ex-officers, he said they will simply train the resistance. ''They need to eat,'' he said. He said that the Maliki Government needs to be strong and decisive in dismantling militias and that constitutional modifications are needed to assure unity in Iraq. On the issue of a U.S. timetable for withdrawal, he said that it would be immoral for the U.S. to leave now and leave Iraq in the hands of terrorists. He said that Syria, too, wants real leadership in Iraq. He said that a timetable would oblige them to take over and not leave a vacuum.

On the influence of Iran in the region, the Foreign Minister was careful not to speak for Iran, but noted that the U.S. may have missed opportunities to deal with more moderate leadership in the past. We discussed Iran's efforts to achieve a nuclear weapon and he said there is a double-standard when we allow Israel to possess a nuclear weapon. I responded by telling him that unlike India which has recently been recognized by the U.S., Iran is not a responsible country and has threatened to wipe Israel off the face of the Earth.

On the following morning, I met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad at his Presidential palace in Damascus. Despite the Administration's policy of isolating Syria, I believe dialogue is important. My meeting with President Assad in Damascus is part of increased Congressional oversight in fulfilling our constitutional responsibilities in foreign affairs as a reaction to unprecedented turmoil in the Mideast.

We discussed ways that Syria could help provide stability in Iraq by controlling the border and the flow of fighters into, and out of, Iraq. Assad said that both sides must make an effort, but Iraq is currently unable to fully enforce its border. However, a recently signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two nations, which I had also discussed with the Foreign

Minister, might help the situation. President Assad agreed to provide a copy of the MoU.

President Assad explained that Syria has an interest in a stable Iraq, but that U.S. policies have created instability by ignoring political issues and instead focusing on security issues. He attributed much of the sectarian violence in Iraq to the Iraqi Constitution, as it is currently written. He discussed a national conference which could be held in Damascus that would bring all relevant groups in Iraq together in an attempt to stop the violence. He explained that U.S. involvement would be important, but that the conference could not be seen as having been organized by the Americans because of our poor image with many Iraqi factions. He told me that the Prime Minister of Turkey has already agreed, in principle, to participate. President Assad expressed the importance of Iran's participation in the national conference. Iran, he said, is a nation which also does not want complete chaos in Iraq.

We discussed the possibility of resuming peace talks with Israel, continuing my discussion from the night before with the Foreign Minister. President Assad explained that negotiations without preconditions means that any further negotiations must start from the foundation of the Madrid peace conference in 1991 and on where negotiations with former Israeli Prime Minister Rabin left off. When I asked what Israel would get in exchange for the Golan Heights, President Assad said that Israel would get normal relations and peace with both Syria and Lebanon, and that issues related to Hezbollah would be ''solved simply.'' He acknowledged the importance of the U.S. in the peace process, but said that there is currently ''no vision for peace.''

We discussed Syria's role in Lebanon and allegations that it was involved in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. President Assad told me that despite the conflicting reports in the Melhis and Bremmertz investigations of the Hariri assassination, Syria will continue to give its full support to the U.N.'s investigation. President Assad denied any threatening conversation in which he threatened to break Lebanon over the head of Hariri, as was recounted by various second-hand witnesses in the U.N. reports. He described some concerns with a U.N. tribunal on the Hariri assassination and stressed that it should follow the Lebanese constitution.

On the issue of Syria allowing arms shipments to Hezbollah, President Assad said that such allegations should be backed up with evidence. He said that missiles could not be smuggled discretely ''like drugs on the back of a donkey,'' but could only be transported by truck. On a related note, President Assad warned that a decreased presence of Hezbollah in Lebanon would mean an increased presence of al-Qaeda, which is already active in northern Lebanon. Overall, he told me that Syria still has considerable influence in Lebanon, but that Syria's ''happiest day'' was when his army left Lebanon.

We discussed issues relating to Hamas in the peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis. While unity would be needed among the Palestinians, he noted that Hamas is now talking about the so-called ''line of 1967'' as part of future negotiations, a softening of position. He said that without a comprehensive peace agreement including everyone in the region, we would have a ''time bomb'' waiting to happen.

I asked President Assad about the two Israeli soldiers captured at the beginning of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah on Israel's northern border this past summer. He said that they are ready to negotiate a release in exchange for some 20 individuals captured by Israel, but that a mediator was needed. I also asked President Assad about an Israeli soldier, Guy Hever, who went missing in the Golan Heights in 1997 and is suspected to be in a Syrian prison. He said that perhaps the soldier was lost in the high mountains during the winter.

I asked President Assad about the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his comments about wiping Israel off the face of the earth. President Assad said that he is not as radical as we think and that we should talk to him. He said that his denial that the Holocaust occurred is his own opinion. President Assad expressed his opposition to nuclear weapons in Iran, or any other country in the region, including Israel.

I raised the issue of the security of the U.S. Embassy in Damascus. He explained that his own office is very close to the U.S. Embassy and that the entire area is well protected. Closing the street, he said, would not improve security as it would still be vulnerable to missile attack. Instead, he suggested that the Embassy move to a new area outside Damascus and a pledge of timely approvals and availability of land was made.

President Assad told me that he wanted to travel to the U.N. General Assembly meeting in New York in 2005, but the U.S. government would not issue a visa.

Before leaving Syria on December 26, I held a press conference at the airport to discuss my meetings.

ISRAEL

On December 26, we departed Damascus for Israel. Our travel required a technical stop in Amman, Jordan. Upon our arrival in Israel, we were met by Peter Vrooman of the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv who briefed me on the current issues while on the long car ride to Jerusalem. Along the way, we stopped at my father's gravesite in Holon, Israel.

On the morning of December 27th, I met with the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, Richard H. Jones. I briefed the Ambassador on my meetings with the Syrian Foreign Minister and President in Damascus. We discussed the details of the land issues related to the Golan Heights and Shebaa Farms, the fragile ceasefire created under U.N. Resolution 1701 and the need for a political solution, the perception that the U.S. would seek regime change in Syria following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the U.S. policy of pressuring Syria through isolation. We discussed the threat posed to Israel by Iran and discussed the positive impact of Saddam Hussein's removal for Israel.

Later that morning, the Ambassador and I met with former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. I told him about my trip and my meetings with Syrian President Assad. We discussed the Syrian President's interest in resuming peace negotiations from where they last left off, with the obvious inclusion of the Golan Heights in any discussion. Netanyahu explained that peace is based on deterrence and that once you give Syria the Golan Heights, one must ask themselves what remains to keeps President Assad to his word of providing normal relations and peace. He told me about his 1998 discussions with Hafez al-Asad which abruptly ended in disagreement over the Golan Heights. The former Prime Minister told me that, unlike the statements of Syria, he does have preconditions to talking with Syria, namely that they stop waging war against Israel. ''They are killing my countrymen,'' he said.

We also discussed the Iranian President's comments regarding the Holocaust never happening and his desire to see Israel wiped off the earth. I related Iran's nuclear ambitions to those of India, a country which can be trusted. He told me that President Bush is doing a good job of pressuring Iran, but said that the ''noose must remain tight.''

On the afternoon of December 27th, we met with Israel's Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. We discussed President Assad's interest in negotiating a peace agreement with Israel. She suggested that while President Assad may be sending signals for negotiations, in reality he may just want to ease the international pressure that currently exists on Syria due to the Hariri investigation and allegations of arms transfers to Hezbollah. She said that Syria's intentions must be clearly understood before engaging in talks. I told her that President Assad said a mediator was needed to allow for the release of the two captured Israeli soldiers. She said that Kofi Annan had already tried, but little progress is actually being made.

Overall, she said little progress is being made right now on either the Israel/Syria front or between Israel and the Palestinians. ''Only headlines,'' she said. She said there is a desire to negotiate with Palestinian moderates towards a two-state solution and said she ''smelled signs'' of progress, as evidenced by a recent December 23rd meeting between Prime Minister Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. When I noted that we live in a changing world where terrorist groups want to participate in politics, she suggested that rules should be established to prevent such practices.

We discussed Israel's decision-making process and its practice of consultation with the U.S. before taking action. Foreign Minister Livni explained that the U.S. and Israel share many of the same values and interests in the region and it does not benefit either country to surprise the other without first consulting on an issue. I agreed. I urged Israel to be independent and to follow its own interests.

On the issue of Iran, Foreign Minister Livni said that the world cannot afford to allow Iran to possess nuclear weapons. She expressed her fear that a ''domino effect'' could occur where others in the Mideast will either appease Iran in the interest of safety, or they will seek nuclear weapons of their own for deterrence. She cited the need for stronger, ''real'' sanctions against Iran.

That evening the Ambassador and I met with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert at his offices in Jerusalem. I briefed the Prime Minister on my meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. I told him that President Assad says he wants to negotiate with Israel and that he says he can be helpful in dealing with Hamas and Helzbollah. The Prime Minister said he was ''more than interested'' to hear this message, but also said, ''I don't want to fool myself and my friends.'' He cited Syrian support for terrorist groups including Hamas, a group whose leader Khaled Mashal ''sits in Damascus.'' He said Israel would need a ''credible sign'' that Assad is sincere before giving him legitimacy that he currently doesn't deserve.

The Prime Minister described resolving the conflict with the Palestinians as his top priority. The Prime Minister told me about his meeting on December 23rd with President Mahmoud Abbas. He described it as an important bilateral step without the assistance of the U.S., or anyone else. He characterized the meeting as ''very difficult, but very significant.'' As a result of that meeting, he said $100 million would be unfrozen for humanitarian and security purposes.

On the issue of U.S. involvement in Iraq, he said he was glad that Saddam Hussein is gone. He would not give his opinion on whether the U.S. should draw back its forces. He did note that pulling out prematurely ''would encourage radical countries.''

On the issue of Iran, the Prime Minister described Ahmadinejad as a ''madman'' in

control of a nation of over 70 million people. He suggested that economic measures should also be taken outside of the U.N. Security Council to pressure Iran, particularly from European Union member countries.

Despite the regional difficulties, the Prime Minister told me that the economic situation in Israel is better than ever. Over the last year, Israel has seen a positive balance of trade with overall growth of 4.8 percent and low inflation. Before the conflict in south Lebanon, growth was projected at only one percent.

On the morning of December 28th, I held a press conference at the David Citadel Hotel in Jerusalem to discuss my foreign travel, particularly my meetings in Syria and in Israel.

Following my press conference, I was joined by Michael Schreuder of the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem, and by Jake Walles, Consul General and Chief of Mission in Jerusalem. We traveled into the West Bank for several meetings in Ramallah.

Our first meeting in Ramallah was with Salam Fayyad, a Palestinian in the Third Way party who was the Finance Minister of the Palestinian National Authority in the Fatah government in 2002. He holds a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Texas at Austin and has lived in the U.S. for over 10 years. He explained his interests in decency and fundamental human values, qualities which will help the Palestinian people be better neighbors to Israel.

We discussed his successful reforms in his three and a half years as Finance Minister. He explained that many of those reforms are not being carried out by the current government.

He explained that despite the undesirable outcome of the January 2006 elections, he and other like-minded people are still trying to make progress with Israel and are focusing on providing security. He noted that Hamas is having many problems because of their lack of governmental experience, but still found it difficult to see how elections could be held in the near future. Hamas, he said, is a real problem, because they do not recognize Israel and they judge right and wrong based on ideology and fixed notions of the world. He acknowledged that Hamas will always be part of the system, but he hoped it would not continue to be a majority.

We discussed the recent meeting between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert. We also discussed the threat posed to Israel by Iran and Syria's behavior in Lebanon, which he characterized as ''disgusting.'' Fayyad said he has a harder time believing President Bashar al-Assad than he did his father.

We then joined Hannan Ashrawi, also a member of the Third Way party, for lunch in Ramallah. She explained that under the Hamas government, the ''republic has become polarized,'' alternatives have not been permitted to rise, and people have lost their sense of volunteerism. According to Ashrawi, there is currently no process for peace and there hasn't been since 2000. However, she explained that some options exist for President Abbas to negotiate, even though the powers of the President were reduced in 2002 when the position of Prime Minister was created.

We discussed the Palestinian distaste for Israeli occupation within the West Bank. She said that Israeli occupation includes control over the airspace, borders, and checkpoints. She described the difficulties of carrying out even the most mundane tasks as a Palestinian, such as going to the airport. She described the checkpoints as being there ''to humiliate.'' We discussed the technicalities of what appears to be a new settlement in the West Bank, which Israel claims is only an expansion inside an existing area and not in violation of its commitment to the U.S. of no new settlements.

We discussed my meeting with Syrian President Assad, the potential for future talks with Israel, the difficult situation of a Hamas majority in government, the possibilities for new elections, and the need to engage in dialogue with Iran.

Early that evening back in Jerusalem, I met with the mother of an Israeli soldier, Guy Hever, who is believed to be a prisoner in a Syrian jail. Mr. Hever disappeared on the Golan Heights near the Syrian border on August 17, 1997. I previously met his mother on November 6, 2002, and wrote President Assad asking for an inquiry into Mr. Hever's whereabouts. I raised the issue in person with the Syrian President on January 3, 2003, and again in my most recent meeting on December 26, 2006.

That evening in Jerusalem, I met with Saeb Erakat, Head of the Negotiations Affairs Department for the Palestine Liberation Organization. We discussed my visit to Syria and its stability under the rule of President Bashar al-Assad. He told me that Hafez al-Assad used to ''play Iran as a card, but now Ahmadinejad plays Assad as a card.''

On the situation with Hamas, he said there is no alternative but to seek elections. However, he said that Fatah needs to change in a short period of time. It was beaten by a ''party without a program.'' If Hamas sees that Fatah remains weak and does not come up with a plan, it may call for elections again and take more power in government.

We discussed the December 23rd meeting between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert, a meeting Mr. Erakat attended. He explained that many Palestinians did not want to see the meeting occur and it fell into place at the very last minute. He praised the courage and leadership of President Abbas for ''sticking his neck out'' to start something. Permanent solutions were not on the table. Rather, four committees focusing on security, economy, prisoners, and sustaining the ceasefire were created to attempt to answer the question of ''where do we go from here.'' He explained that a third party in negotiations is helpful, but that the ''real work'' must be done on a bilateral basis. He expressed his optimism that future negotiations can succeed despite interference and violence spurred by Hamas.

Mr. Erakat requested that the U.S. Congress ease limitations on aid to Palestinians, citing the need to show that President Abbas can deliver for his people.

We also discussed Iran's emerging influence in the region and its impact on the Palestinian people. Mr. Erakat suggested adding another nation to the maps instead of Ahmadinejad's suggestion that Israel be wiped off the map.

ITALY

On the morning of December 29th, we departed Israel for a stopover in Rome, Italy, on the way back to the U.S. Upon our arrival, we were greeted by our State Department Control Officer Mikael McCowan. We drove to the U.S. Embassy and discussed a variety of issues during a Country Team Briefing with the embassy staff headed by Ms. Anna M. Borg, Deputy Chief of Mission. Ambassador Ronald P. Spogli was not in Italy during my visit.

We discussed U.S. relations with the new ''left of center'' government which has withdrawn Italy's 3,000 troops from Iraq. We discussed other forms of military cooperation between the U.S. and Italy, including ties with American businesses selling arms to Italy. Elsewhere, Italy has some 8,400 troops stationed around the world. Following on the summer conflict in Lebanon between Hezbollah and Israel, Italy has played a major role in the peacekeeping operation by providing 2,400 troops, the largest contingent of any country. They are also playing an important role in Afghanistan with some 2,000 troops. Italy also has some 3,500 troops stationed in the Balkans.

We also discussed the judicial structure in Italy where there are three independent levels of jurisdiction, the latest developments on the reported Italian cooperation with CIA renditions, Italy's economy, and its relations with Iran. They explained that Italy, which has a sizeable amount of trade with Iran, has been put in a difficult situation by having to support sanctions against Iran for its nuclear proliferation efforts.

On December 30, 2006, we departed Rome, Italy, and returned to the United States.

I ask unanimous consent that the following be included in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD as if read on the Senate floor:

1. My letter to Philip Mathew, Managing Editor of the Malayala Manorama in Kerala, India, dated December 22, 2006
2. An article from the Jerusalem Post headlined ''Arlen Specter 'would meet' Ahmadinejad'' dated December 28, 2006
3. An article I wrote for the Philadelphia Inquirer for January 5, 2007 publication
4. My letter to President Bashar al-Assad dated January 5, 2007

U.S. SENATE,
*Washington, DC, December 22, 2006.*

Philip Mathew,
*Managing Editor, Malayala Manorama, Kerala, India*

DEAR MR. MATHEW: I was very surprised by your newspaper's account of my interview with your board of editors on December 19, 2006 in Kerala, India.

Contrary to your report, as to the war in Iraq, I said only that had the U.S. known Saddam didn't have weapons of mass destruction we would not have gone to war. Once there, we could not precipitously withdraw and leave the country destabilized.

I did not say that the U.S. war was widely characterized as being against the Muslim community.

The U.S. has already explained that faulty intelligence led to the conclusion that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. Beyond faulty intelligence, I did not say that U.S. policy required more thoughtful consideration.

As to Guantanamo Bay, I said that the U.S. should allow habeas Corpus to determine if detainees are properly treated.

As to a permanent seat for India on the U.N. Security Counsel, I said that if the U.N. was being organized today India would be considered as one of the World's five greatest Powers.

Your reporting would certainly make me rethink granting another interview to your editorial board on any future trip to Kerala, India.

Sincerely,

ARLEN SPECTER.

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[From the Jerusalem Post, Dec. 28, 2006]

ARLEN SPECTER ''WOULD MEET'' AHMADINEJAD

(By Herb Keinon)

Senator Arlen Specter, a Republican from Pennsylvania who broke ranks with the Bush Administration and met Syrian President Bashar Assad earlier this week, said Thursday in Jerusalem that he would now like to sit down and talk with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Asked by The Jerusalem Post if he would like to meet the Iranian President, Specter—in Jerusalem for a series of meetings as part of a regional tour—replied, ''You bet I would like to, and give him a piece of my mind.''

The present US policy is not to engage in high-level dialogue with either Syria or Iran,

even though the recently published Baker-Hamilton report advocated actively engaging those two countries. Bush has said he would not change his policy regarding those two countries; Specter thinks he should.

''I disagree with the policy of not dealing with Iran,'' he said.

''When he [Ahmadinejad] says he wants to wipe Israel off the face of the earth, I'd like to tell him how unacceptable that is,'' Specter said, explaining what he would tell Ahmadinejad.

''When he says there was no Holocaust, I'd like to tell him about the Holocaust survivors I've talked to, and about how much evidence there is about the Holocaust. Yes I'd like to see the president of Iran, he could use some information,'' he said.

Specter brushed aside the criticism of his trip to Damascus that was voiced by some in the Bush Administration who argued that his visit, as well as recent visits by three democratic senators, granted legitimacy to the Syrian government. Specter said that as a member of the powerful Senate appropriations committee that sends billions of dollars each year to the Middle East, he was dutybound to see first hand what was happening in the region.

Specter said that while he acquiesced to the Bush Administration's request not to visit Damascus on previous tours to the region last December and August, ''this year in coming it seemed to me that the Administration's program is not working.''

Regarding what he hoped to achieve by going to Damascus, Specter said, ''I believe that all the wisdom doesn't lie with the Administration, there are others of us who have studied the matters in detail, have made contributions in the past, and have something to add here.''

The senior Pennsylvania senator said that while he had a great deal of respect and admiration for US President George W. Bush, there were issues with which he did not agree with the president, and that it was his responsibility ''to speak up, and do so in an independent way.''

Specter said he did not believe that his visit ''alters the issue of legitimacy'' regarding Syria, and pointed out that the US talked to the leaders of the Soviet Union even though there was a Cold War for decades, and that the US talked with the Chinese despite disagreements over slave labor.

Specter reiterated what he said in Damascus earlier this week, that the Syrians were interested in entering into negotiations with Israel without preconditions, and that Syrian President Bashar Assad had told him that in return Syria could be helpful in dealing both with Hamas and Hizbullah.

Specter said that Assad denied that arms were being smuggled into Lebanon through Syria.

Asked whether he believed Assad, Specter, who has met with him five times and with his father Hafez Assad nine times, said, ''I don't know, I can not make the judgment on that, the Israelis will have to do that.''

Specter, who has served in the senate for 26 years, said that the situation in the Middle East is more problematic now than at any time since he was first elected.

''I do not see anyway out except through dialogue,'' he said. ''I do not think there are any assurances that dialogue will succeed, but I think there are assurances that without dialogue there will be failure.''

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[From the Philadelphia Inquirer, Jan. 5, 2007]

WHY CONGRESS CAN AND MUST ASSERT ITSELF IN FOREIGN POLICY

(By Sen. Arlen Specter)

My recent meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus is part of increased congressional oversight in fulfilling our constitutional responsibilities in foreign affairs as a reaction to unprecedented turmoil in the Middle East. As I mentioned in an extensive Senate speech in the July 16, 2006, Congressional Record, and also in an article in the current issue of the Washington Quarterly, significant results have flowed from my meetings with foreign leaders (some of whom have been unsavory), over the last two decades.

The starting point is a senator's constitutional duty to participate, make judgments, and vote on foreign affairs. In 26 years in the Senate, I chaired the Intelligence Committee in the 104th Congress and have served on the appropriations subcommittees on defense and foreign operations. Senators vote on ratification of treaties, on the confirmation of cabinet offices including the Departments of State and Defense, and on appropriations of $8 billion a month for Iraq and Afghanistan and more than $500 billion annually for military and homeland defense. Under the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers, senators are purposefully independent of the executive branch to provide checks and balances. Accordingly, Congress has a vital role in the formation and execution of foreign policy.

My foreign travels have included 16 visits to Damascus since 1984 involving nine meetings with President Hafiz al-Assad and four with his son, President Bashar al-Assad. When the administration asked me not to go to Syria when I was in the region in December 2005 and August 2006, I deferred to that judgment. But now—with the Middle East embroiled in a civil war in Iraq, a fragile cease-fire between Hezbollah and Israel, and warfare between Fattah and Hamas undercutting any potential peace process between Israel and the Palestinians—I decided it was time for Congress to assert its role in foreign policy. My decision was influenced by the 2006 election, which rejected U.S. policies in Iraq, and by the Baker-Hamilton Group report on Iraq, urging direct dialogue with foreign adversaries including Syria.

My talks with Assad, following his meetings with Sens. Bill Nelson (D., Fla.), Chris Dodd (D., Conn.), and John Kerry (D., Mass.), produced his commitment to tighten the Iraqi-Syrian border to impede terrorists and insurgents from infiltrating Iraq. In my meeting, Assad made a new offer for Syria to host an international conference with all factions in the Iraqi conflict and other regional powers to try to find a formula for peace. I carried a strong State Department message to Assad concerning Syria's obligations under U.N. Resolution 1701 not to arm Hezbollah, and Syria's obligations to cooperate with the U.N. investigation into the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was interested in the nuances of my conversation with Assad on Syria's potential assistance with Hezbollah and Hamas as part of an Israeli-Syrian peace treaty involving the Golan Heights. When I met with Olmert, he appeared to be moderating his prior opposition to Israeli-Syrian peace talks, perhaps as a result of many voices, including mine, urging him to do so.

In previous trips to Damascus, especially in the 1990s, I relayed messages between then-President Hafiz al-Assad of Syria—who initially refused to participate in an International Conference with Israel unless sponsored by all five permanent members of the Security Council—and then-Prime Minister Itzhak Shamir of Israel. Shamir would attend such a conference only if it were organized by the United States and the Soviet Union. Shamir did not want to deal with four adversaries and only one friend. Whether my efforts to persuade Assad to accede to Shamir's terms had any effect is speculative, but it is a fact that Syria went to the Madrid Conference in 1991 sponsored by the United States and the Soviet Union.

Shortly after becoming Israeli prime minister in 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu announced that Israel would hold Syria responsible for Hezbollah's attacks on Israel. Syria then realigned its troops near the border with Israel, creating considerable tension in the region. Netanyahu asked me to carry a message to Assad that Israel wanted peace, which I did. I was later credited by Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem with aiding in relieving the tension.

In many visits to Damascus, I urged Assad to let Syrian Jews emigrate. Assad at first refused, saying it would be a brain drain. It is hard to say whether my appeals influenced Assad's later decision to let the Syrian Jews go. These and other results from my many trips to Damascus are cited in contemporaneous Senate floor statements reporting on those visits.

More, rather than less, congressional attention is needed on U.S. foreign policy generally and on the Middle East in particular. While we can't be sure that dialogue will succeed, we can be sure that without dialogue there will be failure.

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U.S. SENATE,
*Washington, DC, January 5, 2007.*

His Excellency BASHAR AL-ASSAD,
*President, Syrian Arab Republic,*
*Damascus, Syria.*

DEAR PRESIDENT ASSAD: I am writing to thank you for your hospitality during my recent visit to your country. I found our discussion to be very insightful and believe it will prove useful as I continue to advocate for a renewed dialogue between our governments. I would also like to renew a request for your assistance in determining the fate of Mr. Guy Hever, an Israeli soldier who disappeared from the Golan Heights on August 17, 2006. I have raised this matter with you on several occasions, most recently during our meeting on December 26, 2006.

According to information provided to my office, at the time of Mr. Hever's disappearance, he was dressed in army fatigues, wore a military disk numbered 5210447, and carried a key chain and identification papers (Geneva Convention Card). Despite a thorough search, no trace of the missing soldier has ever been found. Some have suggested that Mr. Hever may have illegally crossed the Israeli-Syrian border, leading to his detention in a Syrian jail.

I have twice met with Mr. Hever's mother, most recently on December 28, 2006. The long interval of time which has passed since Mr. Hever's disappearance has caused his family great pain. Given that your personal intervention could potentially end the Hever's family's search for answers, I respectfully request that you order an inquiry to determine if any Syrian authority could assist in resolving Mr. Hever's whereabouts and well being.

Thank you once again for your hospitality and your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

ARLEN SPECTER.

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## PRO BONO REPRESENTATION FOR GUANTANAMO DETAINEES

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I note another Senator in the Chamber waiting to speak, so I will be relatively brief in comments on one other subject.

I note that an official in the Department of Justice has challenged the attorneys who have been doing pro bono