

HON. RON PAUL OF TEXAS BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES October 16, 2003

Statement Opposing Trade Sanctions against Syria Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my strong opposition to this ill-conceived and ill-timed legislation. This bill will impose what is effectively a trade embargo against Syria and will force the severance of diplomatic and business ties between the United States and Syria. It will also significantly impede travel between the United States and Syria. Worse yet, the bill also provides essentially an open-ended authorization for the president to send US taxpayer money to Syria should that country do what we are demanding in this bill.

This bill cites Syria's alleged support for Hamas, Hizballah, Palestine Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and other terrorist groups as evidence that Syria is posing a threat to the United States. Not since the Hizballah bombing of a US Marine barracks in Lebanon in 1983 have any of these organizations attacked the United States. After that attack on our Marines, who were sent to Beirut to intervene in a conflict that had nothing to do with the United States, President Ronald Reagan wisely ordered their withdrawal from that volatile area. Despite what the interventionists constantly warn, the world did not come to an end back in 1983 when the president decided to withdraw from Beirut and leave the problems there to be worked out by those countries most closely involved. What troubles me greatly about this bill is that although the named, admittedly bad, terrorist organizations do not target the United States at present, we are basically declaring our intention to pick a fight with them. We are declaring that we will take pre-emptive actions against organizations that apparently have no quarrel with us. Is this wise, particularly considering their capacity to carry out violent acts against those with whom they are in conflict? Is this not inviting trouble by stirring up a hornet's nest? Is there anything to be gained in this? This bill imposes an embargo on Syria for, among other reasons, the Syrian government's inability to halt fighters crossing the Syrian border into Iraq. While I agree that any foreign fighters coming into Iraq to attack American troops is totally unacceptable, I wonder just how much control Syria has over its borders -- particularly over the chaotic border with Iraq. If Syria has no control over its borders, is it valid to impose sanctions on the country for its inability to halt clandestine border crossings? I find it a bit ironic to be imposing a trade embargo on Syria for failing to control its borders when we do not have control of our own borders. Scores cross illegally into the United States each year - potentially including those who cross over with the intent to do us harm -- yet very little is done to secure our own borders. Perhaps this is because our resources are too engaged guarding the borders of countless countries overseas. But there is no consistency in our policy. Look at the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan: while we continue to maintain friendly relations and deliver generous foreign aid to Pakistan, it is clear that Pakistan does not control its border with Afghanistan. In all likelihood, Osama bin Laden himself has crossed over the Afghan border into Pakistan. No one proposes an embargo on Pakistan. On the contrary: the supplemental budget

request we are taking up this week includes another \$200 million in loan guarantees to Pakistan.

I am also concerned about the timing of this bill. As we continue to pursue Al-Qaeda - most of which escaped and continue to operate - it seems to me we need all the help we can get in tracking these criminals down and holding them to account for the attack on the United States. As the AP reported recently:

“So, too, are Syria’s claims, supported by US intelligence, that Damascus has provided the United States with valuable assistance in countering terror.

“The Syrians have in custody Mohammed Haydar Zammer, believed to have recruited some of the Sept. 11 hijackers, and several high-level Iraqis who were connected to the Saddam Hussein government have turned up in US custody.”

Numerous other press reports detail important assistance Syria has given the US after 9/11. If Syria is providing assistance to the US in tracking these people down - any assistance - passing this bill can only be considered an extremely counterproductive development. Does anyone here care to guess how much assistance Syria will be providing us once this bill is passed? Can we afford to turn our back on Syria’s assistance, even if it is not as complete as it could be?

That is the problem with this approach. Imposing sanctions and cutting off relations with a country is ineffective and counterproductive. It is only one-half step short of war and very often leads to war. This bill may well even completely eliminate any trade between the two countries. It will almost completely shut the door on diplomatic relations. It sends a strong message to Syria and the Syrian people: that we no longer wish to engage you. This cannot be in our best interest.

This bill may even go further than that. In a disturbing bit of déjà vu, the bill makes references to “Syria’s acquisition of weapons of mass destruction (WMD)” and threatens to “impede” Syrian weapons ambitions. This was the justification for our intervention in Iraq, yet after more than a thousand inspectors have spent months and some 300 million dollars none have been found. Will this bill’s unproven claims that Syria has WMD be later used to demand military action against that country?

Mr. Speaker: history is replete with examples of the futility of sanctions and embargoes and travel bans. More than 40 years of embargo against Cuba have not produced the desired change there. Sadly, embargoes and sanctions most often hurt those least responsible. A trade embargo against Syria will hurt American businesses and will cost American jobs. It will make life more difficult for the average Syrian - with whom we have no quarrel. Making life painful for the population is not the best way to win over hearts and minds. I strongly urge my colleagues to reject this counterproductive bill.