Let me say at the outset, I have been impressed,

and I know others have been as well, with the fact that we now

finally have an ambassador in Damascus in Ambassador Ford, on

behalf of this administration, I would say to my friend from California,

who has put his life on the line to associate with the forces

arguing for opening up Syria to a democratic form of government.

And that is pretty bottom line basic.

So there are many ways for a great country and a great power

to express its views. Not all of them are pounding the dais here in

Congress. And there are diplomatic ways and there are nondiplomatic

ways. And I think the witness given by our Ambassador in

Damascus is very profound and to be commended and I think

speaks volumes, and I would regret any imputation of the administration

with respect to its communications in Syria.

Sometimes there are ways of trying to avoid strengthening those

forces we don’t want to strengthen. It would be easy, clearly, for

the United States at this time, for example, to outright call for regime

change in Iran. My guess is that strengthens the hands of the

Mullahs at precisely the time their hand may be weakening because

they can use it to great effect pounding about outside interference

in domestic politics in Iran.

It is a sensitive matter not easily traversed, and I think, as the

ranking member said in his opening statement, no administration

has been as forthright and as forceful in taking on Iran at every

level and using every lever at its disposal to do so. And, again, I

would regret any imputation to the contrary. It is not true. It is

not true.

We can be impatient about progress and results. I am sure that

is shared by our two witnesses today and by the Secretary of State

and by the President. But it is not because for want of trying at

many, many different levels, not all of which are public.

So speaking at least for this member, I take exception to the critique

we just heard. It is easy to do, but it in fact doesn’t reflect

the reality on the ground or the reality of American diplomacy.

Welcome both of our witnesses. Madam Under Secretary, let me

start with you, if I may.

The Qods force, what is our understanding of its relationship to

the Government of Iran? And I pray for concise answers, because

I have a couple more that I want to get to.

Of course.

And I assume you concur, Mr. Secretary?

So in light of that answer, we can’t treat this as

some rogue element that probably is separated from the

Ahmadinejad government and the clerical ruling elite.

What representation have we made through

third parties or directly to the Iranian Government, given that answer,

with respect to this incident which the administration believe

it has convincing evidence for?

My time is up. But, Madam Chairman, I point

out for the record since we are having this series of hearings we

had a witness the other day from Brookings who said it was premature

and inappropriate to assign responsibility and blame to the

Iranian Government at this time; and we have just heard official

United States Government testimony saying, actually, no, it isn’t.

It is perfectly appropriate, and it is time to assign blame, given the

relationship of the Qods force to this government.

I yield back.