Mr. President, the

President of the United States is pursuing

a strategy towards Iran that is

badly flawed, dangerous, and likely

doomed to failure. I am deeply concerned

about Iran’s nuclear program

and its support for terrorism, and by

indications that it is aiding groups in

Iraq that are killing American troops,

but the administration has so far failed

to come up with an effective way to address

these very serious matters.

For instance, less than 2 weeks ago

the administration designated the Quds

Force of the Islamic Revolutionary

Guards Corps as a material supporter

of terrorism, and the IRGC for proliferation

activities. I support sanctions

that target proliferators and have

introduced legislation that would

strengthen our sanctions regime, but

the designation of Iranian government

entities raises new policy questions

that do not seem to have been fully explored,

and it may very well be counterproductive.

Moreover, this poorly timed action

undermines efforts to win support for

multilateral initiatives. Instead of acting

alone, we should maintain and

strengthen the international community’s

collective ability to counter Iranian

ambitions, including with regard

to its nuclear program.

Iran’s actions pose serious threats to

our national security. But aggressive

saber-rattling is not an appropriate or

effective response. The administration

has shown repeatedly that it is too

quick to turn to military power, and

its threat, to address problems overseas.

It has also shown time and again

an inability to see the big picture. And

it still seems to prefer unilateral over

multilateral approaches. All of these

are mistakes we cannot afford to have

repeated.

We can’t focus on Iran in isolation,

the way the administration has focused

for so long on Iraq without considering

a broader context or taking a more

comprehensive approach.

Instead of repeating the myopia of

Iraq, the administration should approach

the problem of Iran through a

more strategic lens one that incorporates

a broader and more integrated

vision, that takes into account regional

concerns, and that is consistent

with our top national security priority,

which is the fight against al-Qaida and

its affiliates. We need a national security

strategy that addresses al-Qaida,

Iran, Iraq, and the many other problems

we face. Instead, the administration

prefers to focus on Iraq, and now

Iran, as if we had the luxury of addressing

these challenges in isolation.

We must vigorously oppose any efforts

by Iran to acquire nuclear weapons

and its support to terrorist organizations

that goes almost without saying.

But we must curb these actions by

seeing the whole board and by using

more of the tools at our disposal. And

that is not happening. Instead, the administration

is taking an unnecessarily

belligerent approach that runs

the risk of increasing our vulnerability,

both at home and abroad.

The United States should be working

in unison with the international community,

which shares our concern over

Iran’s nuclear program. At the same

time as the new sanctions were announced,

the European Union’s foreign

policy chief, Javier Solana, was meeting

in Rome with Iran’s negotiators to

discuss Tehran’s nuclear program and

discussions among the EU+ 3 comprised

of France, Germany and the UK plus

China, Russia and U.S.—are likely to

continue at the end of November following

the completion of another IAEA

report.

In the past, Secretary Rice and others

at State have publicly supported

these talks and expressed confidence in

the negotiations. But the administration’s

hard line position is unlikely to

win over Russia and China, without

whom there can be little progress.

The administration should be trying

to persuade our friends and allies to increase

their economic pressure on Iran,

ideally through the U.N. Rather than

imposing unilateral sanctions, we

should be pressing the EU to announce

multilateral sanctions, which would

have a much greater impact given that

we have not traded or invested in Iran

for nearly 30 years. Instead, our bellicose

rhetoric and hard-line approach

could be undermining our ability to

gain support from—Russia, China and

even from some EU countries—to implement

multilateral sanctions that

Iran cannot ignore.

Trying to unilaterally isolate Iran

further is unlikely to curb its nuclear

program. And it won’t make sure that

Iran does not aid the proliferation of

and access to weapons in Iraq. Veiled,

and not-so-veiled, threats of military

action aren’t likely to work either.

They are, however, likely to embolden

Iran’s hardliners as they seek to

thwart moderates in that country who

might otherwise encourage dialogue or

political reform.

Instead of using the Iraq focused bilateral

talks that have occurred in

Baghdad as a platform from which to

build, we are launching ourselves on to

a collision course that may further endanger

U.S. troops in Iraq in the near

term. And that might only be the beginning.

Our massive presence in Iraq

undermines our ability to deal with

Iran. It is draining our resources, exhausting

our troops, exposing them to

potential Iranian attacks, and undermining

our credibility.

We should redeploy our troops from

Iraq so that we can deal with Iran from

a position of greater strength. Instead,

the President is leading us deeper into

the quagmire that his misguided policies

in Iraq created.

It is essential that those of us here in

Congress condemn the violent and defiant

statements coming out of Iran. But

we also have a responsibility as a coequal

branch of government to respond

to this administration’s aggressive

words, ill-considered decisions and ad

hoc policies, particularly when they

may undermine our own national security.

Dealing with Iran is a daunting

task. But we are only making it more

difficult with our counterproductive

policies of isolation and warmongering.

We cannot again succumb

to the shortsightedness that keeps us

fixated on Iraq and drains the attention

and resources needed to combat

threats to our national security around

the world.