Thank you. I will try to follow the Ambassador’s

model.

Senator Casey, members of this distinguished committee, thank

you for the opportunity to be here to testify before you today.

As you know, Iran has not only been a longstanding supporter

of terrorism, but its activities seemed to have increased in the last

year especially against Israel. Driving this, in part, has been the

developments of the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring shook Iran,

especially the events in Syria. Tehran has few allies really anywhere

in the world, but Syria is one of these, and the loss of Syria

would be a huge blow to Iran, reducing its ability to meddle in Lebanon

and in the Arab Israeli arenas. From Iran’s point of view, the

campaign against Syria is also part of a broader campaign against

Iran.

Also negative from Iran’s point of view has been a shift in Palestinian

politics. Hamas has largely left Syria, going to Egypt and

other countries, and some Hamas leaders have criticized the Assad

regime’s crackdown and, in so doing, implicitly criticized Iran’s support

for Damascus. So Iran has lost influence with its most important

Palestinian partner and lost support among Palestinians in

general.

Tehran also sees Israel and the United States as on the offensive.

The killing of Iranian nuclear scientists, explosions that

destroyed Iranian missile facilities, a cyber attack that set back

Iran’s nuclear program, and other covert measures are considered

part of a low-level, but nevertheless real war that the United

States and Israel are engaged in. From Iran’s point of view, its own

violence is a response to this war that is already being waged

against the clerical regime.

Yet, even as Iran feels this pressure, it also believes it can fight

back. Iranian officials see the United States as on its heels in many

ways because of the United States withdrawal from Iraq and coming

withdrawal from Afghanistan. In both these instances, the

United States initially vowed to transform these countries and isolate

pro-Iranian voices. In both cases, the United States is leaving

without achieving these very broad goals, especially with regard to

Iran, and from Iran’s point of view, one of the lessons is simple

which is if you keep the pressure on the United States, it will back

down.

Let me talk briefly about the nuclear program. From a counterterrorism

point of view, the question of how to respond on the nuclear

program is fraught with problems. The shadow war between

Iran and Israel has created a retaliatory dynamic with Iran responding

to what it feels is Israeli aggression, and as long as these

low-level attacks continue, we can expect an Iranian terrorist response.

If Israel and/or the United States did a direct military

strike on Iran’s suspected nuclear facilities, we should expect a considerable

Iranian response through terrorism. This would be

around the world with both Iranian assets directly and also

Hezbollah, and Tehran would also try to call in other favors from

groups like the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and also al-Qaeda with

whom it maintains ties, though not exactly friendly relations. And

we would also expect to see Iran step up support for anti-American

forces in neighboring Afghanistan.

But as you mentioned, Senator, in your opening remarks, should

Iran acquire a nuclear weapon, the picture could get much worse.

The nuclear weapon could provide Iran an umbrella giving it a

sense of security from conventional attack that emboldens it to

work even more with a range of substate groups and encourages

them to be more aggressive.

The silver lining, if we can call it that, is that under current circumstances,

Iran would not be likely to pass a nuclear weapon to

terrorist groups. Iran would not be likely to trust such a sensitive

capability to a terrorist group, and even a very bold Iran would recognize

that Israel and the United States would see this as a tremendous

risk and danger and that many of the constraints that

have so far characterized United States and Israeli behavior would

go out the window should this happen. One indication of Iran’s caution

on this score is that it has not transferred much less lethal

weapons such as chemical weapons, even though these have been

in Iran’s arsenal for over 25 years.

In my written testimony, I have a number of policy recommendations.

Let me just make a few points right here.

One is that one of the challenges for the United States is that

given the pressure on Iran’s nuclear program, which to me should

be the priority in the United States-Iran relationship, that this

pressure makes it harder to do additional escalation specifically related

to terrorism. There are efforts that can be done against particular

entities and should be done, but that said, there is already

tremendous pressure on Iran itself because of efforts to stop the

nuclear program and it is hard to dramatically escalate solely on

the terrorism front.

On Syria, the fall of the Assad regime is desirable for a whole

variety of reasons and would reduce Iran’s influence, but this

would not dramatically change Iran’s support for terrorist groups.

And in fact, even though the Lebanese Hezbollah would lose an

important patron should the Assad regime change, Iran would be

likely to double down on Hezbollah and that Hezbollah would become

even more important. Iran would have fewer assets in the

Arab world that have credibility, and this relationship would be

even more important. Unfortunately, even though Syria is an

important transit point for weapons to Lebanon, Lebanon is not a

particularly difficult place to smuggle things in and out of, and I

would not expect to see a dramatic change overall in Hezbollah’s

arsenal.

In the end, Iran’s lack of strategic options and desire to respond

with what it sees as a hostile world will lead Tehran to continue

to work with a range of terrorist groups. U.S. policy can reduce the

scope and the scale of this, but it is not likely to end it altogether.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, let me add briefly. Iran’s use of terrorism

has potential to destabilize allies that may be, I will say,

tottering or at least weak for other reasons, particularly with

regard to the Arab Spring. When you take political protests and

introduce a small amount of violence, it can lead to a cycle of

escalation where the regime legitimates a crackdown. That crackdown

in turn produces more violence. And since Iran has the ability

to stir up violence in a number of states, especially in the region,

that is of grave concern.

But let me also add two things.

One is that Iran has the ability to try to disrupt the peace process

between Israel and the Palestinians. Right now effectively there

is no peace process. So that does not matter in a sense. But should,

as I hope, there be a peace process, Iran has consistently in the

past seen the peace process as, from their point of view, morally

wrong, but beyond that, as a threat to Iran as a way to isolate Iran

and has been successful in helping disrupt it.

Iran also, I would say, got away very lightly with planning a terrorist

attack on United States soil. It seemed it was a bungling

attempt that came nowhere near completion, but had the attack

succeeded, it would have killed a number of Americans, as well as

an ambassador of a very important ally. And because it did not

succeed, there was no response, and to me that is not the appropriate

way to do this. You have to think about the intention because

with terrorism sometimes things will succeed and sometimes

things will go wrong, and you do not wait until success to respond.

And on this broader point, Iran right now is serving as a de facto

haven for al-Qaeda, and I do not want to exaggerate this. It is not

like the Taliban’s Afghanistan. But you have a number of senior

al-Qaeda figures that enjoy a certain degree of immunity within

Iran, and ironically as the drone campaign has made Pakistan a

very dangerous place for al-Qaeda figures, having even a place simply

to not be killed is quite beneficial to the organization. And Iran

has played an important role.

To emphasize the obvious, we do not know, of course,

what is going to happen in Syria, I would say, next week let alone

a year from now or 5 years out. But I think it is fairly safe to say

that any state that emerges is going to be very weak and very

prone to instability. We have seen growing sectarianism in the conflict.

War has created a dynamic that exacerbated what was

already there.

And of particular concern to me is that a post-Assad Syria might

not actually be a post-Assad regime Syria, that we might see this

regime lose power in much of the country and essentially hunker

down in certain cantonments and parts of it while the opposition

fights among itself.

What has really been striking in a disheartening way in Syria

has been the lack of unity within the opposition. We are over a

year into what has become the bloodiest part of the Arab Spring,

and right now we see a lack of unity politically. We see a lack of

unity militarily. The United States has been working, I will say,

mainly with external voices that appear to have relatively little influence

within Syria, and frankly, from what I can tell, our policy

of working with the external voices has not even succeeded on that

limited basis. So I am very concerned we are going to see a fractured

Syria and one that will be a source of instability for not only

Syria but for the region in general in the years to come.

One silver lining is I think almost no matter what comes out of

Syria, it is going to be bad news for Iran. A year and a half ago,

they had a good, dependable ally at the heart of the Arab world,

and if this ally is weakened, that is a good thing. If this ally falls,

that is a good thing. And beyond that, Iran has been further discredited

because it is seen as supporting the forces of oppression.

So this is one of the silver linings that has come out of what is a

very tragic situation.

Very briefly I want to emphasize a point that Matt

made about publicizing this. But a part of the key to me is to publicize

it within Iran. Support for a number of these groups is not

at all popular in Iran and in part due to sanctions and in large part

due to mismanagement, Iran itself has huge economic problems,

and so sending money overseas to support a range of groups is not

something that average Iranians strongly support. And simply

highlighting again and again to the Iranian people that the choices

their regime makes are negative on a daily basis for ordinary

Iranians in a bread and butter sense to me is very important. And

terrorism is actually a very good one to do. I think there is probably

more support among the Iranian people for the nuclear program

than there is for support for a range of extremist groups.

I think anything that comes directly or indirectly

from U.S. officials will be questioned. That is not an issue. The

thing to me is you are forcing a debate. You are forcing the

Iranians to discuss the issue, to deny it.

Iran is actually tremendously open from a media environment

point of view if you look at the large number of Iranians in exile

who are in regular contact with friends and family back home, if

you look at the tremendous availability of technology within Iran.

So the key to me is not—this is not North Korea. It is not a problem

of getting messages in. What you want to do is force them to

respond to it. They will still say it is all lies, but nevertheless, simply

having that debate puts them on the defensive.

Senator, that to me is one of the biggest concerns

about what we have seen in Iranian behavior in the last several

years. From my take, it is not a direct desire to target the United

States within the U.S. homeland. It is much more a willingness to

kill Americans as part of other operations, so going after Israeli or

Jewish targets in India or elsewhere, some of the plots being concerned

would have led to deaths of Americans. Most important, the

attack on the Saudi Ambassador in the United States, had it succeeded,

would have killed many Americans dining in the same restaurant,

and that would not have been the target, but the fact that

that did not stay their hand, to me is actually rather dramatic.

That is a very big change from what we have seen recently. As the

Ambassador can testify much more authoritatively than I can,

Iran, of course, is responsible for backing an array of groups in Iraq

and also Afghanistan that have gone after Americans. So we have

seen them be more aggressive in a variety of ways and a willingness

to inflict casualties on Americans. So to me this is of tremendous

concern. It is different in some way than the 1996 Khobar

Towers bombing where it was a direct ‘‘we want to kill Americans

in Saudi Arabia.’’ But it is moving more toward that direction. It

shows Iran is more willing to take risks. It shows it is willing to

be more confrontational, and this is a shift that to me is quite

dangerous.

Iran has been involved in various civil wars in

Afghanistan really since the beginning of the Islamic republic. It

has not been very successful. It has worked with a wide array of

groups, but most of them took their money, took their weapons,

and then went and did what they had planned to do in the first

place. And I think this experience has taught Iran some caution.

Their goals in Afghanistan are quite real but they are limited. A

colleague of mine said that talking about Iranian support for these

groups is a bit like talking about illegal immigration from Canada,

you know, that when you compare it to Pakistan which is so involved

really up to its neck in supporting a wide array of very anti-

American, anti-Karzai groups, that the Iranian role by comparison

is minor.

But Iran is focused, I would say, also logically enough along its

border, and as a result, Iran does not want a strong central Afghan

Government. It is fine with having a certain degree of instability

along its border, and with that guaranteed instability elsewhere in

the country, if it sees the regime is hostile.

As the U.S. forces draw down, there is likely to be a void. I do

not see many credible expectations that the Afghan Government

will be particularly robust when this happens. And in this void, in

part to counter Pakistan, in part to counter the Taliban, Iran may

act, but conversely if other factions are strong that Iran opposes,

Iran may end up working with these various groups. So I think

Iran will be very flexible. But I also think the good news is it may

not be very successful.

As the Ambassador noted in his earlier remarks, if

you push back hard on Iran, it does respond, and to me, unfortunately,

we have not been as aggressive as we should be. So much

of what we discussed during this hearing, publicizing what Iran

does rather than trying to play it down. If there are failed attacks,

treating them seriously, not waiting for successful attacks to

respond. Responding promptly. And so there is a certain political

window and diplomatic window after violence to do something that

dissipates over time.

And with al-Qaeda, we have a campaign. We have a worldwide

effort. It involves a wide array of allies in very different and often

creative ways. And with Iran, it is more ad hoc. It is quite serious,

but I would say on terrorism, it needs to be more comprehensive.

And this is going to vary by region and country, but it should be

done in a more systematic and sustained way.