The hearing will come to order.

Thank you very much, everyone, for being here with us this

morning. And I am sorry I am running a little bit late.

Today the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and its Subcommittee

on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs

meets to examine the grave implications of Iran’s support for terrorism

and militant movements in the Middle East. Iran’s support

for terrorism is well known and documented and has become an

established fact over all these years. Iran provides political and

military support to militant movements like Hezbollah, Hamas,

and Islamic Jihad, and directly conducts terrorist acts throughout

the Middle East to advance its interests. Over the past year alone,

there appears to have been a sharp spike in Iranian-sponsored terrorism

around the world. The international community has been

clear in its resolve against Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon. We

must also, however, unite in opposition to Iranian use of terrorism,

an effort that will require heightened intelligence cooperation with

countries around the globe and enhanced efforts to discredit the

Iranian Quds Force and its patrons.

The committee today meets to examine at least three fundamental

questions. How does Iran’s use of terrorism directly impact

the national security of the United States of America and our allies

in the region, including the state of Israel? No. 2, what have the

historic political changes in the region and ongoing violence in the

Middle East meant for Iran’s position in the region and its use of

terrorism to project force? No. 3, if Iran were to develop a nuclear

weapons capability, how would this impact its behavior and relationships

with terrorist organizations?

Since its founding in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has

sought to compensate for its conventional disadvantage by resorting

to the use of terrorism and support for terrorist groups.

There are three areas that I would like to highlight where the

support has been most significant and done the most damage: the

support that Iran has provided to Hezbollah, Iraqi Shiite militant

groups, and the Assad regime in Syria.

The primary beneficiary of Iran’s support for terror has been

Lebanese Hezbollah, and as a member of this committee, I have

tried to bring sustained attention to this relationship and what it

means for U.S. interests. In June 2010, I chaired a hearing in

which former Assistant Secretary Jeff Feltman and Ambassador

Daniel Benjamin noted in joint testimony that ‘‘in 2008 alone, Iran

provided hundreds of millions of dollars to Hezbollah and trained

thousands of its fighters at camps in Iran. Iran continues to assist

Hezbollah in rearming and violating Security Council Resolution

1701. Iran has also been found to be in violation of U.N. Security

Council Resolution 1747 which prohibits it from exporting arms

and related material. In 2009, U.N. member states reported to the

U.N. Iran Sanctions Committee three instances in which Iran was

found to be transferring arms and related material to Syria, a regional

hub for Iranian support to terrorist groups such as Hezbollah.’’

That is what the Ambassador and the Assistant Secretary said in 2010.

This threat to Iran came into very sharp focus last week in Bulgaria

where five Israeli terrorists and a Bulgarian bus driver were

murdered in a vicious act of terrorism. I and other members of the

committee, offer our condolences to the victims’ families and also

to the people of Israel as they mourn this loss. The United States

will assist Bulgaria and Israel in any way we can to help bring

those responsible to justice.

Without objection, I would like to submit a statement for the

record on behalf of Chairman John Kerry which expresses some of

these same sentiments.

The authorities we know are continuing the investigation,

but Israeli officials have publicly accused Hezbollah of

conducting the attack. This is the latest and most deadly of a

string of attempted attacks allegedly perpetrated by Hezbollah and

Iran. Although both have not been definitively linked to all of these

attacks, many are pointing to the string of plots as an escalation

of Iran’s terrorist activities abroad and its growing antagonism to the state of Israel.

The United States does not differentiate between Hezbollah’s

political and militant wings, nor should our allies. More countries

should recognize Hezbollah for what it is, a terrorist organization,

and stand with the United States against Hezbollah in all its forms.

Over the past year, I and others have grown increasingly concerned

about Hezbollah’s increased level of terrorism activity

abroad while it has consolidated its political position at home in

Lebanon. I hope that more of our allies will recognize this reality

and work to address this threat posed by Hezbollah.

In Iraq, Iran has provided Iraqi Shiite militants and terrorists

with funding, weapons training, and guidance in order to protect

Iran’s strategic interest and threaten the remaining United States

presence in Iraq. We can never forget the scores of United States

troops who died in Iraq because of Iranian-supported militant

groups. The United States should continue to support the Iraqi

Government as it resists undue influence from Iran and fights terrorism within its borders.

Syria remains Iran’s key ally in the region. Iran continues to

support the Assad regime despite the terrible violence—the massacre

of thousands—it is inflicting on the people of Syria. We know

that Iran has sent weapons and equipment to bolster the regime.

Several shipments were intercepted in 2011. The Quds Force is

reportedly advising Syrian security forces on tactics to crush the unrest.

In response, the Treasury Department has sanctioned the Quds

Force for human rights abuses in Syria. Tehran, we know, has few

friends around the world. I and others have called for Assad to step

down as long ago as August 2011.

For the sake of the Syrian people and Iran’s position in the

region, the international community should maintain pressure on

the regime for political transition as soon as possible.

Finally, this committee must examine the relevant influence of

Iran amid the political changes that have swept the region since

the beginning of 2011. Iran has clearly grown more aggressive as

it lashes out against Israel and United States interests. But what

is not clear is Iran’s ability to influence countries in the region that

have increasingly rejected Iran’s form of authoritarian government

and use of violence. I look forward to hearing from the witnesses

about how Iran will seek to exert its influence in this increasingly

uncertain regional environment.

In closing, we are all very concerned about a nuclear Iran. If past

behavior is any indication, a nuclear Iran would act more aggressively

to exert its influence across the Middle East. Even if it did

not ever use an atomic weapon, a nuclear Iran would feel empowered

to conduct more terrorist attacks against United States and

Israeli targets, provide more lethal assistance to Hezbollah and

Palestinian militant groups, and give the Quds Force greater freedom

to support terrorist groups across the Middle East.

I look forward to hearing the views of our witnesses on these issues.

We are, indeed, honored to be joined by four distinguished

experts to help us assess these issues and evaluate policy options.

First, we welcome Ambassador Jim Jeffrey who recently retired

from the Department of State after a long career of public service.

Thank you, sir, for being here. Ambassador Jeffrey served as U.S.

Ambassador to Turkey and most recently as Ambassador to Iraq

until June of this year.

Second, Dr. Matthew Levitt is a senior fellow and director of the

Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at the Washington

Institute for Near East Policy, as well as a lecturer at Johns Hopkins

University Nitze School of Advanced International Studies.

From 2005 to early 2007, he served as Deputy Assistant Secretary

for Intelligence and Analysis at the U.S. Department of Treasury.

Dr. Levitt is the author of a forthcoming book, ‘‘Hezbollah: The

Global Footprint of Lebanon’s Party of God.’’ Thank you so much,

Doctor.

Third, we welcome Dr. Daniel Byman, senior fellow and director

of research at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the

Brookings Institution, as well as professor in the Security Studies

Program at Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown. Thank

you very much.

And finally, we welcome Ms. Danielle Pletka, vice president for

Foreign and Defense Policy Studies at the American Enterprise

Institute and expert on the region’s complex politics. Ms. Pletka is

a former staff member of the Foreign Relations Committee and testified

at our 2010 hearing on Hezbollah. Welcome back to our

committee.

We thank our witnesses and look forward to their insights today

on this very important topic.

And I would like to turn now to our distinguished ranking member,

Senator Risch, for his opening statement.

Thank you, Senator Risch.

We will now turn to opening statements from our witnesses. I

would encourage all of our witnesses to keep their remarks brief

and succinct. Your entire statement will be made part of the

record, but if you could summarize, that would help us. We will try

to keep it between 5 and 7 minutes. I have a gavel not a gong, but

we will try to exercise restraint.

I think we will start with Ambassador Jeffrey. Thank you for

being here.

Mr. Ambassador, you are off to a really good

start here. On time. We usually do not have people that keep time

like that. That is great.

Dr. Byman.

Thank you, Doctor.

Ms. Pletka.

Thanks very much.

Dr. Levitt.

Doctor, thank you very much.

I want to thank all of our witnesses.

We will go to our first round of questions. And the admonition

on time will apply to the members of the panel as well, and I will

try to do it by way of example.

I wanted to first ask a broad question, and I know that answering

this is difficult in a short timeframe. I wanted to ask you to

look at the threat posed by the Iranian regime in the context of our

national security interests. I would ask any member of the panel.

We can start with the Ambassador and go down the panel. The

question is, What activities or relationships that Iran engages in

demonstrate the most significant threat to our national security

interests? And No. 2, what should we do about that?

Anybody else on that question?

Thanks. Doctor.

Thank you. Senator Risch.

Thank you, Senator Risch.

Senator Menendez.

Thank you, Senator Menendez.

Senator Lee.

Thank you, Senator Lee.

Senator Cardin.

Thank you, Senator Cardin.

Senator Udall.

Thank you, Senator Udall.

I know we have to wrap up. I want to pose one question and ask

for 30- to 45-second answers, if you can do that, and I know it is

not enough time.

The predicate for the question—and I am not sure there is much

disagreement—is that we have established, even prior to this hearing

and certainly on the record in this hearing, that No. 1, the possibility

that Iran could develop nuclear capability is a direct threat

to the United States and certainly to the Middle East even more

directly. No. 2, on a separate track, Iran is the backer and the

banker of all the bad guys in the region. And No. 3, they export

terrorism beyond the region.

So if you look at this challenge on those three tracks, the question

that I have—and I am sure many others do as well—is what

should the United States do on the track related to Iran’s support

for terror in the region and beyond the region, even in the absence

of nuclear capability which, of course, we cannot discount?

Mr. Ambassador, I will start with you. If you had a short list for

what the United States should do, what would it be?

Thanks so much. Doctor.

Ms. Pletka.

Thank you. Dr. Levitt.

Thanks very much. We have more questions. We

will submit them for the record. The record will be open for at least a week.

I want to thank Senator Risch and our witnesses for being with

us. Thank you very much for your time.

We are adjourned.