Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman,

Senator Risch, Senator Corker. It is a privilege to be back here.

I agree with everything that you said already on Iran. What I

would like to do is to focus for the moment on Iraq, both our experiences

there and whether there are lessons that we can draw more

generally.

One of the major fields, as you indicated already, of troublesome

Iranian activity within the larger context is its behavior in Iraq.

Iran’s interests in Iraq range from those with some rationale,

avoiding a repeat of the devastating 1980 Iraqi attack on Iran, to

those which we must resolutely resist, using the whole gamut of

Iran’s capabilities for its strategic advantage, arming the Shia militias

that are under its tutelage and using them for terrorist activities,

putting the Iraqi Government under constant pressure, and

looking at the Shia population of Iraq as not an independent element

of a sovereign state, but rather as potential Iranian vassals.

Thus, a major element of our policy toward Iraq and Iran should

be, and has been, to counter this Iranian campaign, including but

going beyond its use of terror.

Here we can usually count on the Iraqi people and government

as our allies. In various polls, we have seen that the Iraqi people

reject close relations with Iran. They want to have a neighborly

relationship, but Iran is very unpopular in all the polls we have

seen. It has not been successful in penetrating the Shia religious

center in Najaf, and its commercial and investment activities in

Iraq, although significant, have not led to any dominance of the

Iraqi economy.

Meanwhile the Government of Iraq, despite Iranian pressure,

has struck out at Iranian-backed militias repeatedly, increased

crude oil exports significantly over the past 18 months, thus helping

to balance the reduction of Iranian exports on world oil markets

due to the sanctions. The government has cooperated with us

in the past year on a solution to the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, the MEK

situation of Iranians that are located within Iraq. It has supported

the Arab League position on Syria, and it has stopped likely arms

flights from Iran to Syria.

I would thus characterize Iran’s current posture toward Iraq as

one of an economy of force. Iran is comfortable with the overall

political situation in Iraq. It has good relations with all the Shia

and Kurdish parties. It does not see Iraq as threatening Iran at the

moment. But in return, it has not sought seriously to challenge the

various things that Iraq has done, which I just enumerated, nor

the United States close relations, particularly military and FMS

relations, with Iraq, including over $10 billion in FMS sales and

eventually 36 F–16 fighters.

Furthermore, several times Iran has pulled back its support for

terror and for these armed militias which it has set out to utilize

when we and the Iraqi Government have resisted strongly through

military, diplomatic, and other actions.

I do not want to overstate the resistance of Iraq to Iranian influence.

Many Iraqis have personal ties with Iranian leaders. There

is the religious connection between Najaf and Qom within the

larger context of Shia Islam. As then Senator Biden said in 2008,

‘‘The idea that we can wipe out every vestige of Iran’s influence in

Iraq is a fantasy. Like it or not, Iran is a major regional power and

it shares a long border and a long history with Iraq.’’

To sum up, first in Iraq, our overall strategy there, including

stemming strategic Iranian dominance of the country, has been

successful, despite the massive cut in resources, a cut that I supported,

over the past 2 years, withdrawal of troops, drop in our assistance.

This is a policy that we should continue bearing always

in mind that this success is fragile and should not be placed at risk

for wider policies. If Iranian pressure increases, we have tools to

counter it, but absent such an increase, we have far more promising

ways and places to challenge Iran strategically: Syria, as you

indicated, the oil portfolio, and U.N. sanctions on the nuclear portfolio.

More generally, the lessons you can draw from this, first of all,

are that Iran sees terror not the way we see it, but simply as one

of the many tools it uses in asymmetrical campaigns to achieve its

own influences.

Second, based upon my experiences in Iraq, when we push back

hard, including hard militarily, Iran usually pulls in its claws and

assumes a defensive posture, but that is usually when it is doing

something of an adventuresome nature. Whether it would do the

same when it sees its core interests challenged is another question.

So I will stop there, Senator. Thank you very much.

Very briefly, Mr. Chairman. Clearly Iran’s

pursuit of a nuclear weapons option, as my colleagues have pointed

out, is the most dangerous thing that they could possibly do and

the thing that gets this right up to the top level of U.S. national

security.

The second major threat that emanates from Iran has to do with

economics and specifically oil, not so much Iranian oil but its ability

to disrupt oil supplies from the Middle East as a reaction to

something we might do or something it could do at some point, for

example, if it felt that the sanctions were so pressuring its own oil

exports that it could basically revenge itself. There was an example

of this in the late 1980s when the Iraqi campaign against Iranian

exports was so successful that the Iranians then lashed out at shipping

all over the gulf. This led to a successful U.S. military operation

against Iran, but it kept the whole area in tumult for 2 years.

The third threat is a more general one, and this is where terrorism

is so important. Essentially it is a U.S. national interest to

keep a Middle East that is stable. Given the collision of religions

and cultures there, given its central place just from the standpoint

of transport with the Suez Canal, the Dardanelles, the Strait of

Hormuz, and on and on, given its oil riches and given the potential

danger from nuclear-armed or chemical weapons-armed states, it is

very, very important that something that resembles a rule of law

and an international order obtain there. It is one of the few areas

of the world where we do not really have that. We are constantly

engaged in military operations, big or small. We have done about

20 since 1979, Desert I. And the future looks like we may have to

do more.

So, therefore, Iran’s leading role in challenging an international

order and ignoring the U.N. and supporting terror and carrying it

out itself, taken together with its other two threats, the nuclear

threat and the economic threat, make this an A league problem

along with several others that we really have to focus on, and I

think we do.

Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Risch.

First of all, it is very difficult to divine what will come, but I

think that our experience elsewhere in the region indicates that we

should not be as worried as we may be about al-Qaeda or an

al-Qaeda-like Salafis force taking charge. I think we have very

good contacts with some of the people who are in the resistance,

and all in all, it will be a better place after Assad than it was with

Assad. Once again, I will use the example of Iraq. We have certainly

had our bad moments with Iraq since 2003, but all of us

know that the Iraq since 2003 and certainly the Iraq of today is

all in all a far better place and a far bigger contributor to a stable

Middle East than Iraq was under Saddam Hussein. So all in all,

I would say it is worth the risk, but once again, we do not know

exactly what will come out of it.

Where it will particularly be worrisome, even if you do not get

this extreme Sunni Islamic takeover that some people see, is, as

Danny Pletka mentioned earlier, the impact particularly on Iraq

but in the region generally between Shia and Sunni Islam. This is

a fault line that goes deeper than Iran, that goes deeper than

al-Qaeda, that goes deeper than most of the other things that we

look at in the Middle East. It is a little bit like, a decade-plus ago,

the Christian-Muslim split in the Balkans that was the driving

force for many of the specific campaigns, Bosnia, Kosovo, and several

others we managed to nip in the bud.

This is a very dangerous phenomenon. A flip in the government

in Syria would put pressure on all three groups in Iraq: the Sunnis

to take a more active role in politics because they would feel reinforced;

the Shia who would feel pressed against the wall because

ironically the Alawite minority, which is very secular and not very

Islamic, is still characterized as a part of Shia Islam; and the

Kurds who have been sitting on the fence both in Syria and in Iraq

as to which way things would go. So you would have a particular

impact on Iraq if you did get a change.

But again, my feeling is that this is probably inevitable. It is

probably, all in all, to our advantage. And at the detail level of how

much to our advantage, that is a question of good policy and good

diplomacy.

Senator, I agree with everything that my

colleagues have said.

Very briefly, indirectly these sanctions are very, very effective

against not only terrorism but the other tools that the Iranians

have. We have been involved for at least 30 years in a low intensity

competition, conflict, close to war with Iran on a variety of fronts.

One of the more common tools that they use as they see asymmetrical

warfare against us, against Western interests, against the interests

of the bulk of the states in the Middle East is terror. We

can counter that directly and we have at times and at times we

have not.

But more importantly, we are now effectively carrying out a variety

of steps that are squeezing Iran in its campaign, most importantly

the oil sanctions, but its general isolation through the U.N.,

the EU, and other activities, and third what is going on in Syria.

And to the extent that we continue to work closely with our gulf

allies, with Iraq, with Afghanistan, that we maintain as strong a

presence in the region as possible, supporting Israel, and looking

for every opportunity, we counter what is going on. It is very hard

to list all of the things we are doing and say this one blocks this,

this one deters that because it is a very broad campaign. But right

now, we are in many respects on the offensive, as are they in reaction

to us with their terrorist attacks.

I am not a military expert. One of the few

parts of Iran’s violent outreach that we did not have to worry about

in Iraq usually was the navy, although down in the south, we did

have some concerns about the terminals.

The main threat, as I understand it—but again there are people

who know a lot more about this than I—of the Iranian Navy comes

from its, again, asymmetrical warfare capabilities. These include

the speed boats which can swarm on a target and, if nothing else,

divert crews from other activities; the small, but very lethal fleet

of midget submarines that they have; mine-laying capabilities; and

the antishipping missiles that they have located at various points

along the coast that are basically focused on the gulf, and all of the

traffic in the gulf is within range of it. So it is a multifaceted threat

that they pose. It is not a navy that could slug it out with us. They

tried that in 1987–1988 and they lost across the board. But these

asymmetrical capabilities that their navy has, particularly the Revolutionary

Guard Navy which has the lead in the gulf as opposed

to the regular navy which is down in the Indian Ocean, I think are

quite considerable and quite a lot of concern to us, sir.

Right, exactly. Basically they look at laying

mines, speed boats, terrorist activities, espionage—they look at

all of these things as counters to the conventional capability that

we, Israel, and the Sunni Arab States of the Gulf all have over

them.

Right. Having dealt with Iraq, an ally of

ours, on some of the bad days, as well as good days, with it as an

ally, I am a little bit cautious about predicting that what will

emerge from Syria would be an ally.

What I would say is that Iran—and here I agree 150 percent

with Danny—is totally committed to the Assad regime and its

maintenance of power because if the Assad regime falls and a

Sunni government takes over, Iran first of all fears that it will lose

its influence that has brought it to the Mediterranean, gives it an

ally in what it sees as its struggle against Israel. But also, as I

mentioned earlier, there is this fissure bubbling underneath the

surface in the Middle East between Sunni Islam and Shia Islam,

and Iran sees itself as the champion of Shia Islam, and ironically

it sees the Alawite regime as an outpost of Shia Islam. And so this

would be a terrible blow to it under any and all circumstances.

I mean, I would characterize Iran’s position with Syria with the

United States position toward Egypt. At times, we are trying to

nudge the Mubarak administration along; at times, we are reaching

out to the opposition. At the end of the day, we figured regardless

of what happens, we will try to have a relationship, including

a military relationship, with the new regime. I do not see Iran

playing a similar role in Syria. They are committed to keep this regime

in power and they will do anything and everything they can,

I believe, to do so.

Judging from my experience in Iraq and

my general following of what is going on in Afghanistan, I think

you can count on Iran, particularly as it is pressured ever more

with what is going on in Syria, with what is happening internationally,

with what is happening with its oil trade, to find ways to

strike back. One way that it will see a vulnerability will be in

Afghanistan. It has long had good relations both with the people

of the Northern Alliance that overthrew the Taliban, but more recently,

as we have discussed earlier today, it has been providing

arms to Taliban and Taliban-associated groups that have been

attacking us and NATO forces in the south of the country, and I

think it will continue to play that role. It is an economy of force

role, as with Iraq. It allows them, with a relatively limited amount

of money and weapons and personnel, to maintain a presence on

the ground. I think you are going to see that. I think it is a challenge

but it is not something that we cannot deal with. We dealt

with it in Iraq. We are still dealing with it in Iraq, and we can deal

with it in Afghanistan as well.

It is very short, sir, because again, Iran is

not to terror as al-Qaeda is to terror. It is one of the tools in its

toolbox that it uses in this long-term campaign. We are engaged,

I think, quite effectively at the moment in a countercampaign

against it. So it is a question of tweaking that counteroffensive that

we are underway with.

More work on the sanctions. We have been very successful and

we have had a crushing impact on the Iranian economy. That is a

good thing.

Second, Syria is an opportunity unparalleled in the last 30 years

for us, and if we can play a more active role there, I think that that

would be very, very beneficial not simply through the Turks. For

example, the chemical weapons threats that we have been hearing

emanating from Syria—that begs the question of what will we do

if they threaten chemical weapons again. It is a relatively easy

thing for us to take a strong position on.

And again countering by speaking out, by using counterterrorist

tools that we have had for many years, as this campaign goes on,

because it will go on, against Israeli and American and possibly

Saudi and other Sunni Arab interests.

But at the other hand, the one tool that we also have to be aware

of is this fissure line between Shia and Sunni Islam. It is very,

very important that we not see ourselves or have ourselves positioned

on one side of that versus the rest of the region because the

rest of the region includes large minorities in Bahrain and in

Yemen and elsewhere and, of course, a majority of the population

in Iraq. So it is a very, very touchy subject.