Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senator Risch, Senator

Corker. I say it every time and I mean it every time. It really is

an honor for me, a special honor, to come back to the committee.

I consider it really a pleasure.

I think we all agree on a lot of the basics here. Iran is probably

the most important state sponsor of terrorism in the world today.

There have been, in addition to the attack in Bulgaria last week,

an attempted attack in Cyprus the week before, seven additional

recent attempted attacks by Iran against a variety of targets

around the world, not just in the Middle East, in recent months.

So it is clear that Iran is stepping up its terrorist activity and not

too worried, by the way, about the consequences.

It is important to underscore that Iran’s relationship with terrorist

groups, which it manages through the IRGC, the Iranian

Revolutionary Guard Corps, and through the Quds Force is not just

one of support. It is operational. It is financial. It is political, and

it is military. The Iranian Government really does actually manage

some of the attacks that it conducts through its proxies. The best

example and the one that we have the most detailed public information

about was the attack by Saudi Hezbollah on our troops at

Khobar Towers. There is an indictment in the Eastern District

Court in Virginia that details the Iranian operational command for

that attack. Nothing has ever happened as a result.

Iran also foments conflict like the one between Hezbollah and

Israel in 2006. But there is another thing that it does that has

been very important during the Arab Spring, and that is that they

are free riders on Shia grievances throughout the region. The Shia

are largely oppressed in Sunni-dominated Arab governments, and

the Iranians have very cleverly managed to free ride on their legitimate

grievances in places like Bahrain and in Saudi Arabia, among

the Houthi rebels in Yemen and in many ways discredit the legitimate

claims of those Shia minorities, which has been opportunistic

and really a serious problem for those of us who see the importance

of supporting those minorities.

In terms of the depth and the financing and the interconnectedness,

I think we have all made clear, as did you, Mr. Chairman,

in your opening statement, that Hezbollah is the most important

terrorist proxy for Iran. It is unclear at this moment, I think, to

many of us how far Hezbollah would be willing to go to support

Iran. So, for example, in the event of an Israeli strike on Iran, none

of us are exactly sure what Hezbollah would do. On the one hand,

Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, who is the spiritual leader of Hezbollah,

has said in a speech last year that Iran would never ask Hezbollah

to do anything on its behalf in the event of an Israeli strike. On

the other hand, just a couple of nights ago, Nasrallah gave a huge

speech in which he extolled the virtues of their Syrian sponsors

and of Iran. So I think it is pretty unclear what any groups would

do in the event of an Israeli strike on Iran.

That does bring us to the question of Iran and the Arab Spring,

and I agree with my colleagues. In large part, the Arab Spring has

been bad news for Iran rather than good. You know, they have

tried to lay their mantel over it and call the Arab Spring an

Islamic Awakening, and absolutely nobody has either taken up that

name, nor have they frankly latched onto the Iranians as a model.

Their biggest hopes, I think, centered on Egypt, and in the immediate

wake of Mubarak’s fall, there was really quite a lot of talk

about renewing Egyptian-Iranian ties. So you heard it from the

Egyptians, from both the military and from the Muslim Brotherhood.

Yes, why not? Very positive, a lot of nice statements, promises

for mutual visits. But the bottom line is none of that has

happened. Now, we can suggest that that was because of gulf pressure

or because of U.S. pressure, but at the end of the day, none

of that rapprochement that I think the Iranians were pretty desperately

hoping for—and they made a number of very public, very

clingy, desperate statements that made it clear they had their

hopes vested in the new Egyptian Government. None of that has happened.

Syria. Again, I agree. I think we have a real consensus around

the fact that the fall of the Assad regime would be bad news for

the Iranians. That is really their only important Arab ally remaining.

I think there is some disagreement about what the impact

would be after the fall of Assad, and I am happy to talk about that

afterward. But it does seem clear that Syria has been the conduit

for weapons supplies to a whole variety of terrorist groups,

Hezbollah, but also Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and others.

Without that conduit, it is exactly right. They would have to use

Lebanon, and that has very complex implications for Lebanon. Lebanon

enjoys a different relationship with the United States right

now than Syria did. I am not sure they wish to become the new Syria in the region.

But whether it is the IRGC presence in Syria—they also have

done joint training on chemical weapons, weaponization. They may

have cooperated on nuclear weapons work. Just trade and economic

ties, clearly that was a very, very important relationship.

The problem for us is that just as the tide has turned against

Iran’s fortunes in the region and we have begun to ramp up sanctions

against Iran because of their nuclear program, the United

States is perceived to be pulling back in the region. And so that

has real implications for us and our ability to leverage the Iranians

on any number of questions, whether it is interference in Iraq,

whether it is interference in Syria, or anything else.

If we look at the Iranian nuclear program, it seems pretty clear

that it will certainly embolden the Iranians on their support for

terrorism rather than the reverse. I do not think that they are

going to let go of these groups because of the nuclear sanctions,

and even if we manage to come to some agreement, there seems

no reason for them to abandon their support for terrorist groups

because they have never done so before and because they have

never really paid a high price for supporting those groups. Even in

the case of the loss of up to 1,000 servicemen’s lives in Iraq, the Iranians have paid very little price.

I am just going to take an additional couple of seconds and talk

about specific steps we might be able to take to help counter Iranian

support for terrorism in the Middle East.

It seems, first of all, that Syria is in fact much more important

than many will allow. We should be doing more to hasten the fall

of Assad, not just talking about a transition but in fact doing more

to support those who are fighting against him.

Second, on Lebanon, our Assistant Administrator for the Middle

East was just in Lebanon. Our aid programs to Lebanon have continued

unabated despite the fact that Hezbollah dominates the government.

That may be the right choice, but it is still something

worth discussing particularly if the Lebanese-Iranian relationship

ends up ramping up. We have not fought Iran on any of the ground

that it works on in the Middle East, its support for the Palestinians.

I mean, seriously, who has done more for the Palestinians?

Iran or the United States? Yet, you do not hear us engaging in

those kinds of arguments. We are not fighting Iran on the territory

that it has sought to take for itself. So I think it is time for us to

try and fight Iran at its own game and do it more effectively, more

vocally, let people be aware that we are not willing to tolerate this

continuing throughout the region, throughout the world.

Thank you very much.

Let me just add very quickly. I think the point that

Dan just made about al-Qaeda is really important. It is important

not to overstate it. You are right.

But the Iranians in April released Abu Hafs Al-Mauritani who

was believed to be at the table with bin Laden when he planned

the 9/11 attacks. He was released to Mauritania. Mauritania just

released him because he has ‘‘reformed.’’ What was he doing in

Iran under what is called a loose form of house arrest? There is

plenty of evidence.

The other thing—and I agree with my colleagues, but the other

thing that has not gotten mentioned enough is Iran’s willingness

to arm not just the special groups in Iraq in the past, but also arming

the Taliban against NATO forces in Afghanistan. Both the

United States and the British have spoken out very aggressively

against that. But the Iranians are trying to kill our soldiers everywhere

they find them.

As I had a piece in the Washington Post on this on

Sunday, I am going to spend a lot of time quoting myself, which

is an unattractive Washington habit.

I do not agree with Dan at all about the opposition. The Democratic

Party is fractured, and it has the White House and the Senate.

The Republican Party is fractured and it has the House and

a Presidential candidate people think might win.

The reality of opposition groups is opposition groups fight with

each other, and when they do not have a great power backing, as

the Libyans did, then they fight a lot more because there is no one

outside to hold out the sort of fruits of victory and explain to them

what that would mean and try and broker the disagreements that

occur. So instead, we spend all of our time as a matter of policy

saying, oh, they are very fractured. They really disagree. It is

really distressing. Obviously, they disagree. That is what countries

have is fractured oppositions and people who disagree with each

other. It is a democracy that can absorb those disagreements, and

that is what we hope Syria will become.

I would argue that if we continue to pay as little attention as we

have to the future of Syria, it will, in fact, be a problem and will

be unstable and will represent potentially a risk for our interests

in the region. If we get more involved and we work more closely

with our European allies and we work with all of the Syrian opposition,

not just the Turkey-based opposition, I think absolutely we

have an opportunity to help Syria move in the right direction, as

Libya has, as Tunisia has, and we hope as Egypt has. So I am not

as pessimistic and I think that the United States has an important

role to play if only we choose to play it.

I agree with Matt completely. We finished a report

at AEI just earlier this year about Iranian support for a variety of

groups throughout the region, and one of the things we saw was

that Iran’s economic troubles and the sanctions have definitely cut

the amount of money they are able to spend and they are able to

give to Hamas, to Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and even to the kind

of softer things that they were doing. Trade agreements and things

like that, really were not being fulfilled.

But Matt is exactly right. The problem is that that does not curtail

the ability of these terrorist groups that are supported by Iran

to continue undertaking acts of terrorism. One of the things we

really can do is do a much better job in outing the Iranians. The

fact that the President suggested that we see no threat coming

from Venezuela, where the Iranians and Hezbollah have been enormously

active on a variety of fronts clearly directed toward the

United States, is a disappointment.

There are many, many more things that we ought to be doing to

be frank about it. We can absolutely do more on the visa front,

even on that very simple front, with our allies to ensure that

Iranian officials really cannot travel. We can do more about Iran

Air, which is still able to fly to many places around the world and

is used by the Iranians to transport weapons and personnel for a

whole variety of nefarious purposes. So those are two simple things

that we might start with.

Thank you, Senator.

I do not have an American security clearance, let alone an Israeli

one, so I have not seen the evidence and I do not know. What I

do know is that the Bulgarians say that this was a very sophisticated

operation, that as many as five people were to believed to

have been involved in it, that they flew into the country perhaps

even a month before.

Given the large number of attempted attacks—I said in my opening

testimony that there had been nine in recent months—I think

that it is not unreasonable to suppose that the Iranians are helping

to coordinate it. In some cases, the attacks that we saw particularly

against Israeli diplomats were exact mirrors of the attacks

against Iranian scientists that we saw taking place in Tehran.

There were bikers going by with sticky bombs trying to attach

bombs to cars to blow them up. Now, perhaps that is a coincidence.

You know, Iran is capable of undertaking terrorist attacks on its

own with its own Quds Force personnel, but for them, the lesson

of the last 30 years is if you do it through a terrorist group,

through a proxy like Hezbollah, you are much less likely to pay any

price for it because there will be that confusion, that sort of fog in

the conflict. And that is what you see right now.

You see that while Netanyahu is very aggressively going out and

naming names and accusing, that the U.S. Government, for whatever

reason, is being very reticent about that. I am reluctant to

believe that we have less good intelligence or that the Israelis have

not shared it with us. Nonetheless, we seem reluctant to say

exactly who was behind it. That is part of our problem. We are

always reluctant to say who is behind it even when we have them

dead to rights.

I encourage everybody to go—I linked it in my testimony,

so it is online. Go and read the indictment in the Khobar

Towers case. I cannot remember what was not classified and what

was, so I do not want to say anything inappropriate. But let us just

say that we had Iranian Government officials spot-on, dead to

rights involved in the coordination of the attack at the time it took

place, and nothing has happened. Nothing.

Iran is obviously very active on the ground. I mean,

there are IRGC forces on the ground fighting with the regime

against the rebels. I think we have ample videos. They are available

on YouTube. You can see them. In fact, Iran is so deeply

involved, that the bombing that killed four now senior Cabinet officials

in the Syrian Government was rumored to have also killed

Qasem Sulemani, the head of the Quds Force. I do not know what

the news is today, but he has not surfaced since then and he was

in Damascus at the time. So I do not know whether it is reliable

or not, but that is how deeply involved the Iranians are in their

defense of the Assad regime.

I would, I think, respectfully disagree a little bit about a post-

Assad Syria. I think that Iran has had its fingers so clearly

involved in the continuation of the Assad regime and the Assad

regime is so profoundly hated by the vast mass of the Syrian people

that the odds that Iran will have any influence other than

through violence or sponsorship of terrorism inside Syria in a post-

Assad scenario I think is very limited.

The real question is——

We are not, obviously, here to talk about Afghanistan

that much, but one of the additional tools that the Iranians

bring to bear is the fact that they are home to more than a million

Afghan refugees. Now, that is a very substantial burden for them.

So on the refugee side, let us say good that they are there. They

are in refugee camps along the Afghan border. And one of the

things that they regularly do to destabilize the Karzai government

and to try and complicate the economic situation and the political

situation in Afghanistan is threaten to dump all the refugees back

in Afghanistan. So it is not just a weapons strategy. They have a

very sophisticated political, economic, and military strategy vis-avis

Afghanistan that is interested in ensuring that the country

remains unstable.

We can each of us be more succinct because we

agree with our predecessors. So I agree with both Jim and Dan on

this.

I do think we can do more to deny Iran and its proxies operational

latitude in Lebanon, in the West Bank, and in Gaza, and

in other places where they operate. So that is an additional factor

where we actually do have some leverage.

I think we could do much more to push out the Assad regime and

to help ensure that a future Syria is stable and will not, in fact,

be an ally to Iran and will not be so unstable that it will end up

helping Iran anyway.

And last. And I am going to quote Matt’s colleague, Dennis Ross,

who did an event with us last week, who said that for as long as

Iran is persuaded that we want the nuclear talks more than they

do, they are never going to give us anything. And I thought he was

exactly right when he said it. We are engaged in these low-level or

lower level talks between the EU and the Iranian designate in

Istanbul. They have been going on. We have not set a next meeting,

and yet no one is willing to say or put any pressure on the

Iranians that in fact the nuclear talks are failing because no one

wants to have to do what it might require when they fail. So we

are playing Iran’s game and we should stop playing Iran’s game.