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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I say it every time, and mean it every time: It is always a special honor for me to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, on which I served as a staffer for so many years.

Iran is the most significant state sponsor of terrorism in the world today. The Islamic Republic has held that title for many years, and as the attacks last week in Bulgaria against an Israeli tourist group, an attempted attack the week before in Cyprus, several failed attacks earlier this year against Israeli targets in Asia and a litany too long to read of incidents both directed by and perpetrated by Iran over the last three plus decades make clear, nothing is slowing them down.

As a technical matter, Iran's relationship with terrorist groups is generally managed through the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, and more specifically by its Quds Force headed by Qassem Soleimani. But that tasking should in no way be construed as separate from the Supreme Leader and Iran's government. The IRGC acts for the regime.

Iran's relationship with terrorist groups – about which I will be more specific below – is operational, financial, political and military. Iranian government officials have been known to direct, manage and support attacks throughout the world. Nor have Israelis been Iran's only victims; at the hands of Iranian supported special groups in Iraq, more than a thousand American soldiers lost their lives. At the hands of Hezbollah, we have lost diplomats, CIA officials, servicemen and civilians. Iran was directly behind the attacks on Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996 that killed 19 U.S. servicemen. Even now, Iran is arming the Taliban in Afghanistan even as it opposes the group for political reasons.¹

The Iranian government foments conflict, such as the one between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006, but also free rides on legitimate Shi'a grievances in a region overwhelmingly dominated by Sunni Arabs. As a result, we see Iran's hand in the recent Bahraini uprising – something that has discredited a legitimate quest for

¹ "Hague fury as 'Iranian arms' bound for Taliban seized," *BBC News*, March 9, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12694266>.

equal rights for the Bahraini Shia; we have seen Tehran supporting Houthi tribes on the Saudi-Yemeni border; and most prominently at the national level, we have seen IRGC forces working hand in hand with the Syrian regime to take down the Syrian rebellion and protect their most important ally in the region, Bashar el Assad.

The groups with which Iran is most prominently associated right now are Hezbollah, both a political party that now dominates the Lebanese government and a terrorist group with years of vicious attacks to its credit; Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip and has also been responsible for the death of hundreds of civilians; and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, a smaller group operating in the Palestinian territories. Over the years, Iran has also supported numerous other terrorist groups such as Saudi Hezbollah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command and others.

In terms of depth, financing, and interconnectedness, Iran's relationship with Hezbollah is clearly the most important. Hezbollah was created with Iranian sponsors in 1982, and continues to be – for the most part – loyal to its patron. Directly because of Iran, Hezbollah is now the most lethal terror group in the world, armed with long-range missiles capable of carrying chemical munitions and using guidance systems to hit a target.² This despite UN Security Council Resolution 1701 which, in the wake of the 2006 war with Israel, forbade the transfer of arms to the group.

It is unclear just how far Hezbollah would go for its friends in Tehran; Hassan Nasrallah, the group's spiritual leader, has claimed that Iran would never ask Hezbollah to step in in the event of an Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities. On the other hand, he has been increasingly frank about the depth of Hezbollah ties to Iran in recent years, and the group has certainly proven itself willing to fight for its friends: witness Hezbollah's role in Syria, and Nasrallah's speech last week extolling the virtues of the Assad regime.³

This brings us neatly to the question of Iran and the Arab Spring. On balance, whatever you may choose to call this moment in history – the Arab Spring, the Arab Awakening, the Arab Revolts – one thing is clear: It has been bad for Iran. Ironically, in the case of Libya, Tunisia, Bahrain, Yemen and especially Egypt, the Tehran government has tried almost desperately to claim that the popular revolutions that have swept the Arab world are inspired by Iran. The regime has tried without

² Thomas Donnelly, Danielle Pletka, and Maseh Zarif. *Containing and Deterring a Nuclear Iran* (Report by American Enterprise Institute, December 2011), 22.

³ "Nasrallah Hails Slain Syrian Officials as 'Martyrs,' says Relation with Aoun Strategic," *Naharnet Newsdesk*, July 19, 2012, <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/47064>.

success to popularize the term “Islamic Awakening” for the events of the last two years.

Iranian hopes for the Arab Spring have centered on Egypt. Some in the West and many in Tehran believed that the overthrow of the Mubarak guard in Cairo and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood would mean an end to the animosity that has existed between the two countries since the Islamic revolution. And at the outset, there was indeed a lot of talk of renewing ties, mutual visits, new beginnings and beautiful rapprochement. Iranian military vessels were permitted to pass through Suez for the first time, and have passed through since.

But none of the anticipated flowering of Egyptian-Iranian relations – none – has come to pass. No visas, no mutual visits, no nothing. Indeed, it’s safe to argue that the Muslim Brotherhood dislikes Iran about as much as its predecessors in Egypt’s presidential palace.

And then there is Syria, Iran’s most important relationship in the region. There has clearly been little applause in Tehran for any “awakening” in Damascus. Remember, the Assads have toed Tehran’s line for many years; even when Hamas decided to abandon its longtime perch in Damascus, Tehran was unswayed. Damascus has been the conduit for most weapons flows from Iran to Hezbollah, its most important diplomatic friend; even when, in 2009 and 2010, there were suspicions that Damascus would defect to the West and make a separate peace with Israel, it was only a small blip in an otherwise congenial relationship between Tehran and Damascus.

Whether it was the IRGC presence in Syria, joint training on chemical weapons and weaponization, possible cooperation on nuclear weapons work, or simply mundane trade and economic cooperation, the two countries have maintained the appearance and many of the trappings of a strong partnership. Tehran will work hard to preserve the Assad regime. It will fail, in my opinion, but it will work hard. Even as it has become clear that Assad is on his way out, the Iranian leadership has stuck by him.

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Ironically, just as the tide has turned against Iran’s fortunes in the region, and just as we have begun to seriously ramp up sanctions because of its nuclear weapons program, the United States appears to have drawn back from the Middle East. Yes, we have several carriers in the Gulf, and yes, various cabinet secretaries have wended their way through both the Gulf and the Levant in recent months; nonetheless, the perception in the region (among Arabs and Israelis), in Europe and among many here in Washington is that the United States has disengaged from the Middle East.

Strategic guidance from the White House has insisted upon the so-called “pivot” to Asia, which is taken by most – including inside the administration – to mean a turn away from the last decade, and with it the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a result, at a moment when Iran is arguably as isolated as it has been in its history, the United States is talking up the Pacific.

We don’t know what will happen in the coming months; there could be a military strike against Iran’s nuclear program. If there is not, most credible analysts agree that Iran will soon have sufficient low enriched uranium to fashion more than one nuclear weapon in fairly short order.

There has been a sterile debate in Washington about whether Iran will “break-out” with its nuclear weapons program or content itself with the knowledge that it can ultimately break-out with an enhanced second strike capability. We have no idea which option Iran will choose, though intelligence agencies reportedly lean toward the latter.

No matter the trajectory of its nuclear program, it seems clear that Iran will not abandon its terrorist proxies. Tehran has shown no sign that it is rethinking support for any group, though among Palestinians it is clear that Hamas is in bad odor for having abandoned the Assad regime. Nonetheless, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which has received substantial amounts of what passes for love from the Islamic Republic in recent months, has insufficient capacity to be Iran’s sole proxy in the battle against Israel.

So how will Iran behave once it possesses either a nuclear weapon or the capacity to fashion one or two in short order? None of us can predict, but we have ample indication from past history to guess how Iran will behave. The use of proxies has been immensely rewarding for Tehran. The regime has paid a very low price for sponsorship of terrorist attacks from the Marine Barracks bombing in 1983 to the attacks of this last week. Iran has the capacity to attack from Argentina to Venezuela, in Asia, in Europe, and throughout the Middle East. It seems naïve to believe it does not have the capacity to launch attacks in the United States.⁴

Iran has rarely seen justice for its support for terrorism: an indictment for the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing sits uselessly in U.S. District Court.⁵ It has hardly paid a price for flouting Security Council strictures on exporting weapons to Hezbollah.

⁴ Suzanne Kelley, “Experts: Hezbollah positioned for attack in US,” *CNN.com*, March 21, 2012. <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/21/house-panel-hears-testimony-on-hezbollah-in-u-s/>.

⁵ United States District Court Eastern District of Virginia, Alexandria Division. Khobar Indictment. June 2001. http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/khobar/khobar_indictment.pdf

It has never paid a price for the 1000 U.S. servicemen's lives taken by Iranian groups in Iraq.⁶ Would Tehran really feel less empowered once it has a nuclear weapon or the materiel to create one?

Does that mean that nukes would be on the way to Hezbollah, or Hamas or others? Certainly, the sophistication and range of weaponry Iran has been willing to supply to Hezbollah has been remarkable, and has escalated dramatically in recent years. But no one can answer that question with any reliability. There are some who are persuaded that the Syrian nuclear weapons program that was attacked by Israel in 2007 was, at least in part, pursued in cooperation with Iran⁷, though we have not seen any public evidence to confirm that's the case.

Ultimately, we have no reason whatsoever to believe that Iran understands there are consequences to its behavior. And it is only such a belief that would comprise a credible deterrent to a nuclear Iran.

In terms of options for the United States, it is clear that disengagement at this time is exactly the wrong choice. More than ever, there are democrats in the Middle East who are clamoring for our support – whether moral, political or economic. The right choice is to double down on democratic revolutions – even those that do not result in governments we would ourselves choose. We are interested in rule of law, not specific rulers.

Regarding specific steps we could take to counter Iranian support for terrorism in the Middle East, first and foremost let's look at Syria. Many disagree about what to do about the fighting there. One thing few disagree about is that the fall of the house of Assad would be devastating to Iran. So we clearly have an interest in Syria's future.

Second, it seems only natural that Iran will turn to Lebanon as its only remaining option for a proxy in the Arab world. There are constraints on Hezbollah that could prevent it from making Lebanon the new Syria, including powerful opposition groups; but you would never know it to listen to U.S. policy. Our aid programs of more than \$100 million per annum have continued unabated. Our silence regarding illegal weapons transfers to Hezbollah has rightly been taken as indifference to the fate of the Lebanese state.

⁶ Michael Christie, "Quarter of US Iraq Deaths due to Iran-groups envoy," *Reuters*, August 26, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/08/26/idUSLDE67P22D>

⁷ Avi Issacharoff, Barak Ravid, and Amos Harel, "Syria: There are no N. Korea-Syria nuclear facilities whatsoever," *Haaretz*, September 12, 2007, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/syria-there-are-no-n-korea-syria-nuclear-facilities-whatsoever-1.229277>

Nor have we fought Iran on its own ground on the issues it hold so dear. Who is the tribune of the Palestinian people? Iran? Really? We have done more for Palestinians over the last decades than Iran ever did. We could begin to further undercut groups like Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad by insisting that Palestinians begin moving out of refugee camps and by emphasizing rule of law and institution building, rather than the peace process.

We could rethink our decision to cede Iraq to Iranian influence and begin to embrace the notion of Iraq as the Shi'a leader of the region rather than Iran.

The time has come to undercut Iran at its own political game, all the while holding Tehran responsible for the terrorism it sponsors. If Hezbollah wants to continue as Iran's proxy, then aid to Lebanon needs to be reconsidered. If some among the Palestinians wish to continue to play footsie with Iran, then we, and the Arabs, and the Europeans need to ensure that Iran is their only donor.

Our policy is one, in effect, of tolerance for Iran's sponsorship of terrorism. Tehran will only be more emboldened by advanced weapons. Neither Supreme Leader Khamenei nor President Ahmadinejad are persuaded we will truly fight back. Perhaps it's time to consider doing just that on every possible front.

Thank you.