

With that, Mr. Speaker I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you and the other members of our House leadership for introducing this important, bi-partisan resolution.

Tragically, our country will now be commemorating not only the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, but also the attacks on the United States consulate in Benghazi, Libya, that occurred on the same date last week.

The four U.S. citizens who lost their lives, especially Ambassador John Christopher Stevens, and those who were injured in this unjustified act of violence demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to our country's national security and Libya's democracy. I would like to convey my heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims.

I also want to express my ongoing support and gratitude for all the Foreign Service men and women who are promoting American values and interests abroad. It is on occasions such as this that we are reminded of the many sacrifices that they make in service to our country. In addition to living in foreign lands away from their families and adapting to new cultures and languages, many of them daily face the possible ultimate sacrifice of their lives. The violence that occurred last week at our diplomatic missions in several countries must renew our national commitment to doing our best to ensure their safety.

Mr. Speaker, there is no justification for the recent attacks on U.S. diplomatic missions and the taking of innocent American lives in Benghazi. All governments must take appropriate measures to ensure the security of U.S. diplomatic facilities within their borders, and to end these acts of terrorism.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 786.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

COUNTERING IRAN IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE ACT OF 2012

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3783) to provide for a comprehensive strategy to counter Iran's growing presence and hostile activity in the Western Hemisphere, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 3783

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) The United States has vital political, economic, and security interests in the Western Hemisphere.

(2) Iran is pursuing cooperation with Latin American countries by signing economic and security agreements in order to create a network of diplomatic and economic relationships to lessen the blow of international sanctions and oppose Western attempts to constrict its ambitions.

(3) According to the Department of State, Hezbollah, with Iran as its state sponsor, is considered the "most technically capable terrorist group in the world" with "thousands of supporters, several thousand members, and a few hundred terrorist operatives," and officials from the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Qods Force have been working in concert with Hezbollah for many years.

(4) The IRGC's Qods Force has a long history of supporting Hezbollah's military, paramilitary, and terrorist activities, providing it with guidance, funding, weapons, intelligence, and logistical support, and in 2007, the Department of the Treasury placed sanctions on the IRGC and its Qods Force for their support of terrorism and proliferation activities.

(5) The IRGC's Qods Force stations operatives in foreign embassies, charities, and religious and cultural institutions to foster relationships, often building on existing socioeconomic ties with the well established Shia Diaspora, and recent years have witnessed an increased presence in Latin America.

(6) According to the Department of Defense, the IRGC and its Qods Force played a significant role in some of the deadliest terrorist attacks of the past two decades, including the 1994 attack on the AMIA Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires, by generally directing or supporting the groups that actually executed the attacks.

(7) Reports of Iranian intelligence agents being implicated in Hezbollah-linked activities since the early 1990s suggest direct Iranian government support of Hezbollah activities in the Tri-Border Area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, and in the past decade, Iran has dramatically increased its diplomatic missions to Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Argentina, and Brazil. Iran has built 17 cultural centers in Latin America, and it currently maintains 11 embassies, up from 6 in 2005.

(8) Hezbollah and other Iranian proxies with a presence in Latin America have raised revenues through illicit activities, including drug and arms trafficking, counterfeiting, money laundering, forging travel documents, pirating software and music, and providing haven and assistance to other terrorists transiting the region.

(9) Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela expressed their intention to assist Iran in evading sanctions by signing a statement supporting Iran's nuclear activities and announcing at a 2010 joint press conference in Tehran their determination to "continue and expand their economic ties to Iran" with confidence that "Iran can give a crushing response to the threats and sanctions imposed by the West and imperialism".

(10) The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration concluded in 2008 that almost one-half of the foreign terrorist organizations in the world are linked to narcotics trade and trafficking, including Hezbollah and Hamas.

(11) In October 2011, the United States charged two men, Manssor Arbabsiar, a United States citizen holding both Iranian and United States passports, and Gholam Shakuri, an Iran-based member of Iran's IRGC Qods Force, with conspiracy to murder a foreign official using explosives in an act of terrorism. Arbabsiar traveled to Mexico with the express intent to hire "someone in the narcotics business" to carry out the assassination of the Saudi Arabian Ambas-

sador in the United States. While in the end, he only engaged a U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency informant posing as an associate of a drug trafficking cartel, Arbabsiar believed that he was working with a member of a Mexican drug trafficking organization and sought to send money to this individual in installments and not in a single transfer.

(12) In February 2011, actions by the Department of the Treasury effectively shut down the Lebanese Canadian Bank. Subsequent actions by the United States Government in connection with the investigation into Lebanese Canadian Bank resulted in the indictment in December 2011 of Ayman Joumaa, an individual of Lebanese nationality, with citizenship in Lebanon and Colombia, and with ties to Hezbollah, for trafficking cocaine to the Los Zetas drug trafficking organization in Mexico City for sale in the United States and for laundering the proceeds.

SEC. 3. STATEMENT OF POLICY.

It shall be the policy of the United States to use a comprehensive government-wide strategy to counter Iran's growing hostile presence and activity in the Western Hemisphere by working together with United States allies and partners in the region to mutually deter threats to United States interests by the Government of Iran, the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the IRGC's Qods Force, and Hezbollah.

SEC. 4. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) WESTERN HEMISPHERE.—The term "Western Hemisphere" means the United States, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, South America, and Central America.

(2) RELEVANT CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES.—The term "relevant congressional committees" means the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate.

SEC. 5. REQUIREMENT OF A STRATEGY TO ADDRESS IRAN'S GROWING HOSTILE PRESENCE AND ACTIVITY IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State shall conduct an assessment of the threats posed to the United States by Iran's growing presence and activity in the Western Hemisphere and submit to the relevant congressional committees the results of the assessment and a strategy to address Iran's growing hostile presence and activity in the Western Hemisphere.

(b) MATTERS TO BE INCLUDED.—The strategy described in subsection (a) should include—

(1) a description of the presence, activities, and operations of Iran, the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), its Qods Force, Hezbollah, and other terrorist organizations linked to Iran that may be present in the Western Hemisphere, including information about their leaders, objectives, and areas of influence and information on their financial networks, trafficking activities, and safe havens;

(2) a description of the terrain, population, ports, foreign firms, airports, borders, media outlets, financial centers, foreign embassies, charities, religious and cultural centers, and income-generating activities in the Western Hemisphere utilized by Iran, the IRGC, its Qods Force, Hezbollah, and other terrorist organizations linked to Iran that may be present in the Western Hemisphere;

(3) a description of the relationship of Iran, the IRGC, its Qods Force, and Hezbollah with transnational criminal organizations linked to Iran and other terrorist organizations in

the Western Hemisphere, including information on financial networks and trafficking activities;

(4) a description of the relationship of Iran, the IRGC, its Qods Force, Hezbollah, and other terrorist organizations linked to Iran that may be present in the Western Hemisphere with the governments in the Western Hemisphere, including military-to-military relations and diplomatic, economic, and security partnerships and agreements;

(5) a description of the Federal law enforcement capabilities, military forces, State and local government institutions, and other critical elements, such as nongovernmental organizations, in the Western Hemisphere that may organize to counter the threat posed by Iran, the IRGC, its Qods Force, Hezbollah, and other terrorist organizations linked to Iran that may be present in the Western Hemisphere;

(6) a description of activity by Iran, the IRGC, its Qods Force, Hezbollah, and other terrorist organizations linked to Iran that may be present at the United States borders with Mexico and Canada and at other international borders within the Western Hemisphere, including operations related to drug, human, and arms trafficking, human support networks, financial support, narco-tunneling, and technological advancements that incorporate—

(A) with respect to the United States borders, in coordination with the Governments of Mexico and Canada and the Secretary of Homeland Security, a plan to address resources, technology, and infrastructure to create a secure United States border and strengthen the ability of the United States and its allies to prevent operatives from Iran, the IRGC, its Qods Force, Hezbollah, or any other terrorist organization from entering the United States; and

(B) within Latin American countries, a multiagency action plan, in coordination with United States allies and partners in the region, that includes the development of strong rule-of-law institutions to provide security in such countries and a counterterrorism and counter-radicalization plan to isolate Iran, the IRGC, its Qods Force, Hezbollah, and other terrorist organizations linked to Iran that may be present in the Western Hemisphere from their sources of financial support and counter their facilitation of terrorist activity; and

(7) a plan—

(A) to address any efforts by foreign persons, entities, and governments in the region to assist Iran in evading United States and international sanctions;

(B) to protect United States interests and assets in the Western Hemisphere, including embassies, consulates, businesses, energy pipelines, and cultural organizations, including threats to United States allies;

(C) to support United States efforts to designate persons and entities in the Western Hemisphere for proliferation activities and terrorist activities relating to Iran, including affiliates of the IRGC, its Qods Force, and Hezbollah, under applicable law including the International Emergency Economic Powers Act; and

(D) to address the vital national security interests of the United States in ensuring energy supplies from the Western Hemisphere that are free from the influence of any foreign government that would attempt to manipulate or disrupt global energy markets.

(c) **DEVELOPMENT.**—In developing the strategy under this section, the Secretary of State shall consult with the heads of all appropriate United States departments and agencies, including the Secretary of Defense, the Director of National Intelligence, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Attorney Gen-

eral, and the United States Trade Representative.

(d) **FORM.**—The strategy under this section shall be submitted in unclassified form, but may contain a classified annex if necessary.

SEC. 6. SENSE OF CONGRESS.

It is the sense of Congress that the Secretary of State should keep the relevant congressional committees continually informed on the hostile actions of Iran in the Western Hemisphere.

SEC. 7. RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.

Nothing in this Act shall be construed to limit the rights or protections enjoyed by United States citizens under the United States Constitution or other Federal law, or to create additional authorities for the Federal Government that are contrary to the United States Constitution and United States law.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) and the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material into the RECORD on this measure.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support today of H.R. 3783, the Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012, a bill introduced by my good friend, Mr. DUNCAN, an esteemed member of our Foreign Affairs Committee. I would like to thank him for his hard work on the issues addressed in this important bill.

In February, the Committee on Foreign Affairs held a hearing entitled “Ahmadinejad’s Tour of Tyrants and Iran’s Agenda in the Western Hemisphere” in order to examine the threat to U.S. national security posed by Iran and Iranian-sponsored activities in the Western Hemisphere. One month later, this bipartisan measure was unanimously adopted by our Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, as we have witnessed in the last few weeks, the violence perpetrated by extremists in the Middle East against our embassies and our consulates undermines our foreign policy objectives, and we must prevent these vicious attacks from occurring in our region.

Let us not forget that 18 years ago, Iranian so-called diplomats readily partnered with Hezbollah, a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization, to carry out a deadly attack against the AMIA Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Iran has only increased its subversive action since then, and over the past decade the regime has increased diplomatic and economic ties between Iran and the radical regimes in Latin America.

Iran’s Ahmadinejad made two trips to Latin America this year to visit his fellow tyrants: the Castro brothers in Cuba, Ortega in Nicaragua, Correa in Ecuador, Chavez in Venezuela, and Morales in Bolivia.

In an attempt to promote its extremist propaganda, the Iranian regime recently launched a Spanish television network to reach a larger international audience centered in the Western Hemisphere. More embassies and cultural centers have opened in Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Colombia, Chile, and Uruguay, in addition to its existing diplomatic missions in Cuba, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela.

According to a U.S. intelligence analyst, these diplomatic missions are simply fronts for Iran to carry out its nefarious activities in the region and a potential platform to increase the presence of the Qods Force operatives, a designated foreign terrorist organization and an arm of the Revolutionary Guard of Iran.

□ 1450

According to media reports, Hezbollah, which is Iran’s proxy, has established a training base in Nicaragua. It is also concerning that the Ortega regime in Nicaragua does not require any visas for Iranian officials to enter the country, which can then become the gateway to enter the United States through our southern border. Ten days ago, there were news reports stating that several alleged Hezbollah members were arrested in Mexico. Iran has worked tirelessly to promote its extremist ideologies and support efforts to undermine the democratic governments throughout the region.

H.R. 3783 requires the Secretary of State to outline a U.S. Government-wide strategy to fight the aggressive actions of Iran and its proxies such as Hezbollah in the Western Hemisphere toward a comprehensive policy stance that will protect U.S. security interests.

This legislation calls for the administration to develop a plan to secure the U.S. borders with Canada and Mexico and to prevent operatives from entering the United States. It also calls for a plan to isolate Iran and its proxies from their sources of financial support, and it addresses efforts by foreign persons, entities, and governments in the region that may be assisting Iran in evading sanctions.

Lastly, it develops a plan to protect U.S. interests and assets in our Western Hemisphere, including embassies, consulates, businesses, and cultural organizations. We must ensure that the United States is actively monitoring this threat and that it takes appropriate steps to counter the Iranian regime’s agenda in our hemisphere. I strongly support the passage of this legislation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in strong support of H.R. 3783, the Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012.

I would like to thank the sponsor of this legislation, Mr. DUNCAN, and the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN, for their leadership on this issue.

This bill makes available \$1 million of Andean counternarcotics funding for the State Department to generate an assessment of the challenge posed to our country by Iran's presence and hostile activity in the Western Hemisphere, as well as a strategy to address whatever threats we may face from the Iranian regime.

Tehran's pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability, its continued support for international terrorism, and its abuse of basic human rights require the United States to maintain extreme vigilance in monitoring and countering its threats around the world. Though our goal has not yet been realized, thanks to the leadership of Congress and the Obama administration, more pressure has been placed on the Iranian regime than ever before. While Iran's behavior poses a clear and obvious danger to its own people, its neighbors, and to our ally Israel, its presence closer to our shores also deserves watchful attention.

The Foreign Affairs Committee has heard significant testimony on this issue from both the administration and private sources. In my capacity of first as chairman and now as ranking member of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee on the Foreign Affairs Committee, I think there is ample evidence that Iran is up to no good in the Western Hemisphere.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has openly and defiantly signaled to the U.S. in his six trips to our hemisphere that he is trolling for friends. Although it seems what Iran actually places on the table of the countries he visits is a stack of unmet promises, it is important that the U.S. Government remain vigilant and dig much deeper into the nature and effectiveness of these Iranian regime actions.

None of this occurs in a vacuum. Iran was complicit in the horrific bombings of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires and of the AMIA Jewish Community Center, also in Buenos Aires, which I have visited on numerous occasions. This happened in the first half of the 1990s, so it can easily be said that the first terrorist attacks on Latin American soil happened with Iran in control. We also have evidence of Iran's increasing willingness to conduct an attack on U.S. soil, such as the discovery this year of a twisted Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador here in Washington.

We must be alert to any Iranian attempts to circumvent sanctions and stand against efforts to curry favor with our neighbors to loosen those sanctions. We should continue to monitor intelligence links and watch the

Iranian diplomatic corps, given its historical involvement in nefarious acts. We should keep a close eye on financial transactions; the chaotic nexus of drug money and terrorism in this region, in particular, deserves serious notice.

Finally, it is important to express that my support for this legislation is not in any way an indication that the Obama administration has not taken this issue seriously. The President has himself stated that his administration will continue to monitor Iran's activities in the Western Hemisphere closely, and I have personally engaged enough administration officials to be persuaded that they understand the gravity of the situation and are giving it the attention it deserves.

Still, we must be particularly vigilant toward the relationship between Iran and Venezuela, given the opacity of the ties between the regimes governing each country and the anti-American bombast of their leaders. However, there are some positive notes in our region. I would like to extend my appreciation to Brazil, the largest democracy in the hemisphere outside of the United States, which, under President Rousseff, has significantly cooled its relationship with Iran and has cast important votes in the U.N. Human Rights Council critical of the Iranian regime.

Today's polarization and bluster in Washington on so many issues can have the effect of making it difficult to separate fact from fiction. We cannot let that happen here. The stakes are too high. So, with this legislation, we provide both a strong signal to the administration to continue to monitor this situation closely as well as the resources to look across U.S. agency efforts and enforcement capabilities to make sure they are in lockstep.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I proudly yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. DUNCAN), a member of our House Committee on Foreign Affairs as well as a member of the Homeland Security and Natural Resources Committees. More importantly, he is the author of this bill today.

Mr. DUNCAN of South Carolina. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, for your leadership on this very important issue.

I want to pause to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. HIGGINS) for his leadership on the other side of the aisle.

Last week, Congress took a rare break from our work here and from partisanship. We came together to remember those who died on 9/11 and during the war on terrorism. We stood together on the Capitol steps, and we pledged that we would never forget the heartbreaking events of that fateful day. One of the ways we can honor the memory of those who lost their lives is to be prepared so that our country will never again experience such a tragedy.

Mr. Speaker, that's why I'm standing before you today, thanking you and the Members of the body for putting partisanship aside and for working together to keep our families and our communities safe from new and emerging threats to our Nation.

We are all aware of the Iranian nuclear threat in the Middle East and globally, but there is another potential threat from Iran and its proxies that is closer to home. That threat is an emerging Iranian-backed terror network here in the Western Hemisphere. What we already know is very alarming.

We know about last October's foiled Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the U.S. here on American soil.

We know that Iran has vastly expanded its diplomatic and economic footprint in Latin America. For example, we know about the Department of Defense's 2012 Annual Report on Iran that stated:

During the past three decades, Iran has methodically cultivated a network of sponsored terrorist surrogates capable of targeting U.S. and Israeli interests.

Just this month, the Brazilian journal *Veja* and others reported on a police seizure in Bolivia of 2 tons of minerals believed initially to contain uranium but more likely tantalum, which is the mineral that is in demand for, among other things, nuclear reactors and missile parts.

We know that 2 weeks ago an Israeli news organization revealed that Iran has established a Hezbollah terrorist training base in northern Nicaragua with operatives "being trained at the base to attack Israeli and U.S. targets in the event of a raid on Iranian nuclear installations."

□ 1500

And we know that just last week, press reports revealed that three suspected Hezbollah members were arrested just south of our border in Mexico.

None of this should come as a surprise. Iran has publicly stated that increasing their presence and ties to Latin America is one of their top foreign policy objectives; however, we must have the capabilities to defend ourselves from potential Iranian attacks here on the homeland. We must be able to clearly identify this emerging threat and develop strategies which include working with our neighbors here in this hemisphere to prevent Iran from being a danger to our country here at home.

Mr. Speaker, that's why this bill, H.R. 3783, establishes a strong U.S. posture, policy, and relationship with Latin American countries. It protects U.S. interests and assets in the Western Hemisphere, such as embassies, consulates, energy pipelines, and cultural organizations, including threats to U.S. allies. It addresses the vital national security interests of the United States by ensuring that energy supplies from the Western Hemisphere are

free from the influence of any foreign government that would attempt to manipulate or disrupt global energy markets.

This bill requires a secure U.S. border with the U.S. working in coordination with the governments of Mexico and Canada to prevent Iranian operatives from entering the United States. This bill counters the efforts by foreign persons, entities, and governments in the region which may assist Iran in evading U.S. and international sanctions.

Mr. Speaker and Madam Chairwoman, I urge that Members of this body come together and vote for this very important issue, H.R. 3783.

Last week marked the 11th anniversary of al Qaeda's attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Al Qaeda, responsible for the tragic deaths of nearly 3,000 people on 9/11, has long operated with extensive ties to the Government of Iran. The 9/11 Commission documented that al Qaeda operatives traveled to Iran to receive training in explosives in the 1990s, that "Iran facilitated the transit of al Qaeda members into and out of Afghanistan before 9/11, and that some of these were future 9/11 hijackers." This past February, the Treasury Department designated the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security for its support of terrorist groups including al Qaeda.

Today, the Iranian regime continues pursuing nuclear weapons against U.S. and international sanctions. It warns of striking U.S. military bases with its ballistic missiles in the event of an attack on Iran. It bullies the global energy market with its threats to block the Strait of Hormuz. Last October's foiled Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the U.S. revealed, as DNI Director Clapper stated, a change in "calculus" and a willingness "to conduct an attack in the United States." This year alone, a string of assassination attempts by Iran and Hezbollah in Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Thailand, Georgia, and Kenya have only intensified this drumbeat.

Add to these dangers a growing Iranian presence in the Western Hemisphere and we have a serious security threat that demands a U.S. response. Since 2005, Iran has increased its embassies from 6 to 11 and built 17 cultural centers in Latin America. Iran's diplomacy has led to soaring trade with Latin American countries. Brazil increased its exports to Iran seven-fold over the past decade to an annual level of \$2.12 billion. Iranian trade with Argentina and Ecuador has grown, and economic contracts between Iran and Venezuela have exploded to more than \$20 billion in trade and cooperation agreements.

Iran has also boosted its military ties with Latin America. The Defense Department assesses "with high confidence that during the past three decades Iran has methodically cultivated a network of sponsored terrorist surrogates capable of targeting U.S. and Israeli interests." The U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute has labeled this threat tied to the explosion of relationships between transnational crime and criminalized states in Latin America an "emerging tier-one national security priority." Two weeks ago, an Israeli news organization published a story that "Iran has established a Hizbullah terrorist training base in northern Nicaragua" with operatives "being trained at the base to attack Israeli and

U.S. targets in the event of a raid on Iranian nuclear installations." Last week, press reports revealed that three suspected Hezbollah members were arrested in Mexico.

None of this should come as any surprise to us. Iran has publicly stated that "the promotion of all-out cooperation with Latin American countries is among the top priorities of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy." A 2009 dossier by Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs put it bluntly: "since Ahmadinejad's rise to power, Tehran has been promoting an aggressive policy aimed at bolstering its ties with Latin American countries with the declared goal of 'bringing America to its knees.'"

The U.S. must have the capabilities to defend itself from a potential Iranian attack on the homeland. We must have a strong posture in our region and deepening relationships with our neighbors, so we can protect U.S. interests and keep the Western Hemisphere free from hostile agents of foreign influence. We must have secure borders to prevent Iranian operatives from entering the U.S. It is unconscionable that we should let Iran use Latin American countries as a base to prepare for potential attacks against the U.S. homeland. Iran poses an incalculable risk to the safety of the U.S. homeland. Our duty is to ensure we provide for the defense of this country, and the American people expect no less. I ask for your support of this legislation.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I now yield 4 minutes to my friend and colleague from the great State of New York, who is the lead Democratic sponsor of this bill, Mr. HIGGINS.

Mr. HIGGINS. First, I want to thank JEFF DUNCAN for his leadership and friendship on this issue and for his hard work on this. It's a very important bill that obviously enjoys bipartisan support.

I rise in support of H.R. 3783, the Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act. This important legislation is of particular interest to western New York, and it addresses a pressing national security concern for the United States.

Mr. Speaker, Hezbollah, otherwise known as the "party of God" in Arabic, is a militant Shia organization committed to violent jihad. It is based in Lebanon, but serves as a proxy for Iran, Syria, and Venezuela. During hearings in the House Committee on Homeland Security, we heard expert testimony linking Hezbollah to criminal activity throughout the Western Hemisphere. We learned that there are roughly 80 Hezbollah operatives in the 15-nation region of Latin America and that it is involved in the South American drug trade and radicalization efforts in Mexico.

We also learned that Hezbollah has an active presence in four cities in Canada and 15 cities in the United States. I questioned the witnesses about Hezbollah's activity in North America. I asked, If Hezbollah is not targeting the United States, what are they doing here? The response was that these activities were not significant because they were largely limited to fundraising. Mr. Speaker, I don't see the distinction between terrorist activity

and fundraising for terrorist activity. If Hezbollah and, by proxy, Iran are using safe havens in and around the United States, we must have a strategy to address it.

As I said, this is of particular concern to western New York because one of the communities in which Hezbollah has a presence is Toronto, which is 90 miles north of Buffalo. The Buffalo-Niagara region is within 500 miles of 55 percent of the United States population and 62 percent of the Canadian population. Our Peace Bridge is the busiest border crossing between the United States and Canada. Our Niagara Power Project is the largest energy producer in New York State, and the Department of Homeland Security, citing budgetary constraints, just dropped our preparedness funding. You can understand if we don't feel comfortable with Hezbollah 90 miles away for those who live in Buffalo.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would address the threat Hezbollah poses to communities like mine. It requires the State Department to conduct a thorough assessment of the threats we face and to develop a strategy in coordination with our allies and partners in the region to address Hezbollah's growing presence and activity in the Western Hemisphere.

Again, I want to thank my colleague, JEFF DUNCAN, for his work on this issue and his leadership on this issue. I also want to thank Chairwoman ROS-LEHTINEN and Ranking Member BERMAN for their support.

I urge passage of this bill.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from New York (Mr. TURNER), a member on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Veterans' Affairs, and Homeland Security Committee.

Mr. TURNER of New York. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from South Carolina for introducing this resolution.

I rise today in strong support of H.R. 3783, the Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act.

Last week's events in the Middle East and Africa are a stark reminder of how fragile peace can be. Iran's leaders have not been afraid to let the world know they will attack the United States and our allies, even going so far as to claim that they will wipe Israel off the face of the Earth.

Iran is emerging as a threat much closer to our shores in South America. Earlier this year, Iran's President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, embarked on a trip that Chairman ROS-LEHTINEN accurately characterized as a "tour of tyrants." He traveled throughout South America, where he met with Venezuela's President Chavez and attended the presidential inauguration of Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua before going on to Cuba and Ecuador.

Iran continues to deepen its relations with Latin America through its ties to the international Islamic Shia group,

Hezbollah, a State Department-designated foreign terrorist organization. According to the Congressional Research Center, Hezbollah, along with Iran, has been linked to two bombings against Jewish targets in Argentina—the 1972 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires that killed 30 people and the 1994 bombing of the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people.

While increasing tensions between the United States, Israel, and Iran, we cannot simply afford to ignore the threats that are looming in South America. The Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012 will ensure that threat assessments are conducted, that a cooperative strategy is put in place between the United States and her allies in the region, and our borders with Canada and Mexico are more secure. These efforts will allow our country to better protect our citizens and our interests both on our own soil and abroad.

As we have seen, the threat is real and American lives are at stake. We cannot afford to ignore the potential threats to our national security that may stem from this area of the world.

Mr. ENGEL. At this time, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH).

Mr. KUCINICH. I condemn all the violence that has been talked about here, and I also had the opportunity years ago to visit the synagogue in Buenos Aires that was the subject of that attack, and I paid my respects.

I want to say that as I've heard this debate, there are two things that occur to me: number one, Congress has a right to ask for reports. It's our constitutional obligation to find out what the administration is doing. I support Congress' right to get information. But at the same time, when the debate takes us in a direction to where suddenly we're at odds with Latin America, it is an argument for Congress to take a strong stand for diplomacy. I hope that as we get these reports, that we're going to underscore the importance of diplomacy not only with respect to Latin America, but also with respect to Iran. The American people do not want another war, and we need diplomacy to take us in a direction that makes war not likely.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, at this time we have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ENGEL. I also yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise to offer my strong support to H.R. 3783, Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act, which provides for a comprehensive strategy to counter Iran's growing presence and hostile activity in the Western Hemisphere. I would also like to thank the gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. JEFF DUNCAN, for introducing this legislation highlighting the very real threat of Iran at America's front door.

If we have learned anything from the complete lack of progress in negotiations to keep

Iran from making a nuclear weapon, it is that Iran is persistent in hostile action and insistent on establishing itself as a counterweight to U.S. power and ideals.

Iran has engaged the U.S. through its Iran Revolutionary Guard Corp (IGRC) in Iraq, resulting in the deaths of American men and service women. Iran is buttressing the morally bankrupt Assad regime in Syria as Syria massacres its own people. And Iran is attacking our friends and allies through its proxies, like Hezbollah, which boasts and arsenal of 60 to 70,000 rockets, many of which were supplied by Iran and are aimed at Israeli neighborhoods.

Iran has earned its title as a state sponsor of terrorism. No target is off limits, and simply being of Jewish descent is apparently provocation enough. In 1994, Iran orchestrated one of the worst terrorist attacks in the Western Hemisphere against the AMIA Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires, murdering 85 people and injuring 300 more. The peace of 200,000 Jewish individuals, many of whom fled to Argentina during WWII, was shattered by this barbarous attack.

Media reports over the last few years have shown an alarming trend of increased Iranian IGRC Qods force presence and activity in Latin America. Iran's President Ahmadinejad, famous for his repeated denials of the Holocaust and dedication to wiping Israel off the map, has made visits to Latin America to cultivate alliances with Chavez, Ortega, Morales, Castro, and Correa.

These leaders have stated their commitment to Iran's nuclear activities and their faith that "Iran can give a crushing response to the threats and sanctions imposed by the West and imperialism." There is no question that Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela are helping Iran evade the sanctions intended to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear sponsor of state terrorism. The question is, what are we doing about it?

If Iran succeeds in creating a nuclear weapon, it is all too conceivable that these allies of Iran in the Western Hemisphere would be willing to provide a local launch pad, as Cuba did during the Cold War for Russian missiles aimed at the U.S.

Mr. Speaker, these threats are all too real and all too proximate. With H.R. 3783, the Administration will be required to create a coordinated, inter-agency plan to ensure that the United States is working effectively to counter Iran's hostile aspirations in the Western Hemisphere. I urge my colleagues to support this important and timely legislation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3783, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title was amended so as to read: "A bill to provide for a comprehensive strategy to counter Iran's growing hostile presence and activity in the Western Hemisphere, and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1510

EXPRESSING SENSE OF HOUSE TOWARD ESTABLISHMENT OF A DEMOCRATIC AND PROSPEROUS REPUBLIC OF GEORGIA

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 526) expressing the sense of the House of Representatives with respect toward the establishment of a democratic and prosperous Republic of Georgia and the establishment of a peaceful and just resolution to the conflict with Georgia's internationally recognized borders, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 526

Whereas a democratic and stable Republic of Georgia is in the political, security, and economic interests of the United States;

Whereas the security of the Black Sea and South Caucasus region is important for Euro-Atlantic security, transportation, and energy diversification to and from Central Asia;

Whereas Georgia has been a reliable partner and ally in enhancing global peace and stability with its significant contribution to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan;

Whereas the United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership, signed in January 2009, outlines the importance of the bilateral relationship as well as the intent of both countries to expand democracy and economic programs, enhance defense and security cooperation, further trade and energy cooperation, and build people-to-people cultural exchanges;

Whereas in October 2010, at the meeting of the United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton stated, "the United States will not waver in its support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity";

Whereas successive United States Administrations have supported Georgia's aspirations to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO);

Whereas it was declared by the Heads of State and Government participating in the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, and reaffirmed in 2009 at the Summit in Strasbourg and Kehl and in 2010 at the Summit in Lisbon, that Georgia is a NATO aspirant country, and will become a member of NATO;

Whereas the North Atlantic Council Foreign Ministers, meeting on December 7, 2011, applauded the significant operational support provided to NATO by aspirant partners Georgia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina;

Whereas the August 2008, military conflict between Russia and Georgia resulted in civilian and military casualties, the violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and increased the number of internally displaced persons there;

Whereas large numbers of the Georgian population remain forcefully displaced from the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions of Georgia as a result of the August 2008 military conflict as well as the earlier conflicts in the 1990s;

Whereas since 1993, the territorial integrity of Georgia has been reaffirmed by the international community in 36 United Nations Security Council resolutions;

Whereas the August 12, 2008, ceasefire agreement negotiated by the European