Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this

hearing. It is obviously important and extremely timely.

Secretary Armitage, it is a pleasure to have you here. I always,

I know, diminish your reputation when I tell people that in all the

years I have been here in the Senate, there is no one who I have

higher respect for because you always give us the unvarnished

facts as you know them, you say what you know, you indicate what

you do not know, and you are straightforward. And this is a commodity

that is very much desired here both from the Congress, as

well as from the administration.

Iran poses, to state the obvious, a vexing set of challenges to our

security. It also holds the possibility of evolving in a more positive direction.

It is hard to argue about the geostrategic importance of a country

that shares a long border with Afghanistan, as well as with Iraq,

and sits in the heart of the oil-rich and politically turbulent region of the world.

We have good reason to be suspicious about Iran. It continues to

actively support, as stated by the chairman, Hezbollah, Hamas,

and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. It refuses to surrender al-Qaeda

members who are in custody. It has been developing a nuclear

weapons program, as well as long-range missile capability, and because

it is one of the few countries with which we have no diplomatic

ties and no regular dialog, we have a tougher time understanding

its intentions, a problem made worse by the obvious internal

disputes that are going on.

Yet over the last several years, the reform movement has sought

to alter Iran’s policy. It has met with only limited success because

of the hard-line establishment that refuses to follow the will of the

Iranian people. Just this month, the Nobel Committee, as mentioned

earlier, awarded the Nobel Prize to a courageous Iranian reformer

who has been pushing for democratic change, especially the

rights of women and children, within Iran. This has brought joy

and hope to millions of her fellow countrymen and has raised the

question of whether or not her view is one that is widely held and

whether or not there is any democratic prospect within Iran in

light of the control that seems to be exhibited by the Supreme Leader.

We do have a profound stake in the outcome of this internal dispute,

and we should have a policy of hard-nosed and hard-headed

engagement with Iran to do what we can to promote positive policies

in Iran without kidding ourselves about our ability to profoundly affect the outcome.

When I was in the seat now occupied by the chairman, I extended

an invitation to meet anywhere, anytime with our colleagues

in the Iranian parliament, as did my colleague, Senator

Hagel. We were told that the offer itself generated the most intense

discussion internally regarding ties with the United States and

that the discussion got very heated. Reformers in Iran welcomed

the invitation while hard-liners clearly felt threatened and condemned

it loudly. I was pleased, I might note for the record, that

Dr. Rice, speaking for the President, has consistently, repeatedly

supported the idea of this parliamentary dialog and engagement.

In a speech, when I issued that invitation, I recommended five specific steps.

First, remove regulations that prevent private American groups

from supporting the struggling democratic movement in Iran.

Second, discuss matters of possible mutual interest such as Afghanistan and Iraq with Iran.

Third, allow Iran to join the World Trade Organization to promote positive change.

And fourth, indirectly help Iran on refugees and narcotics matters

where we share common interests. And fifth, encourage citizens exchange.

Certainly there is a great deal to discuss with Iran. The Iranian

reformers tell us that their interests in Iraq are identical to ours

and that the Iranians were one of first to recognize the Governing

Council in Iraq. Others in the Iran establishment take a more pernicious

view of our presence, and the question is, should we test

Iran to see whether it is willing to promote stability in Iraq by engaging in discussions?

In Afghanistan, we can see the same kind of ambivalence. Iranians

in the elective branch of the government worked closely with

our officials during and after our military campaigns. Others di-

rected their support not to the central government but to friendly

warlords. With the Taliban regrouping and warlordism on the rise,

it makes sense to have a dialog, it seems to me, with Iran over

matters related to Afghanistan.

At the same time, we have to face the matters on which we have

fundamental disagreement, particularly terrorism and weapons of

mass destruction. Iran’s continuing support for terrorism will impede

any improved relations, and its vagueness about al-Qaeda and

the suspects it is holding is downright dangerous.

France, Germany, and the United Kingdom recently gained an

agreement, as was referenced earlier, from Iran to suspend nuclear

enrichment activities and to provide much more transparency

about its nuclear programs. I will not repeat, but I concur with the

chairman’s call for very intense oversight by the international community

of this agreement. Of course, Iran’s pledges will have to be

tested, and the chairman who penned an op-ed piece last week in

which he called for super inspections I think is the way to go. But

that is all predicated on the idea that this Bush policy of containment,

which is not fundamentally different than previous administrations—

containment requires cooperation. Containment requires

cooperation with our allies for it to have any prospect of bearing fruit.

So I look forward to hearing from you, Mr. Secretary, on what

our policy toward Iran’s nuclear program is, what diplomatic initiatives

we have been working on with our allies in Europe and Russia.

Mr. Chairman, there is much more to be said, but let me conclude

by saying that we do not have the luxury of ignoring the very

real challenges and opportunities that are presented by Iran even

as we find ourselves preoccupied with Iraq, Afghanistan, and the

Israeli-Palestinian situation, the war on terrorism, and North

Korea. That is a lot to have on your plate when any one of those

issues could be all-consuming. Unfortunately, they are all interrelated

and we ignore any one of them at our peril. But if we handle

Iran well, success there could have a very beneficial spill-over

to the other challenges we face in the region.

Let me say in closing, Mr. Secretary, that the panel that follows

you is a group of very enlightened and informed people. I hope they

are going to be willing to explore with us what the possibilities are.

We have a tendency these days to be somewhat cabined in our view

about what we are willing to discuss and what kind of chances we

are willing to take. I hope we will have an open discussion without

anyone being fearful or concerned that they may be a little bit too

soft or not tough enough in this era of us having to demonstrate our military mettle.

There only seems to me to be three options.

One, there is an internal change within Iran that is beneficial

that we may, on the margins with others, be able to help promote.

Two, we engage in an open dialog with the Iranians and raise

questions that we are generally reluctant to raise publicly.

Third, we conclude that the only option to a misbehaving Iran

that becomes more radicalized is ultimate confrontation. Although

it does not seem to me to be all that complicated in what our options

are, it is incredibly complicated in what the possibilities are.

So I am told by the chairman, since we are about to vote, that

I should recess the hearing now for roughly 10 to 15 minutes. Then

we will come back and begin with the opening statement by the Secretary.

Again, Mr. Secretary, it is an honor to have you here. We look

forward to your testimony and I want to thank the second panel

for being willing to devote their time. We are anxious to hear from you as well.

We will recess now until the call of the chair, which I expect will

be within 10 to 15 minutes, depending on whether the Senate votes goes off as scheduled.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Secretary, Iran is a hard nut and we have a whole lot on our

plate with Iran. My observation has been that sometimes the policy

of states takes a lot longer to adjust to changes that have taken

place around them than, when viewed from hindsight, it should have taken.

We have somewhat limited options relative to Iran, although the

options are real and at least one of which is very lethal.

So one of the things that I have been trying to discern is how

much of, in an international sense, the antisocial behavior of the

Iranian Government is the consequence of their feeling isolated,

and from a purely self-interest point of view, the conclusion is

reached that they have to do certain things.

For example, I can remember—I hate to admit it. I was here

when the Shah was there—from the Shah on, Iran has been seeking

nuclear weapons. The idea that the continued pursuit of nuclear

weapons—and I am not saying you are suggesting this—is

part of an extremist Shia Muslim clerical leadership that somehow

is different than has been the instinct of every government that I

have been aware of since I got here in 1973 is somewhat misleading.

Now, they may have different designs on the reasons why

they want a nuclear capability.

And one of the things we do not often examine, at least out loud,

is whether or not there is any potential for a grand security bargain

with the Iranians that might serve their purposes as well as

ours. When I say ‘‘their,’’ that is even problematic. Who is ‘‘they’’?

Because there is this internal dispute. But one thing everybody

seems pretty well set on, from the ‘‘democratic’’ reformers to the

ayatollahs, is the desire for Iran to have weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

So I am wondering. I do not expect a specific answer but a generic

answer. Are there folks at State and Defense, the National

Security Agency that have examined this in the overall context of

U.S.-Iranian relations as opposed to specifically their initiatives on

weapons of mass destruction, their initiatives with regard to ter-

rorist organizations, their initiatives with regard to Iraq, Afghanistan, et cetera?

Because if you were sitting in Tehran, whether you are a democratic

reformer or you are the supreme leader, for whom democracy

is antithetical to everything that you believe, there are certain imperatives.

They are at the moment surrounded by forces that seem

somewhat hostile to them. Our assertions have been very straightforward

about the threat we think they pose to the region and to

us. I am not suggesting that justifies any of their actions.

I am just trying to figure out what are the broad policy prescriptions

that have been debated internally within the administration

other than what seems to be essentially one of two options: Their

first option is to contain them, but containment only works if we

have really wide international support for that containment. Obviously,

the Europeans have concluded that it is better to take a shot

at trusting but verifying, to use Reagan’s phrase, and we will see

how tough that verification is. And in this setting I do not quite

understand what containment, absent their support, gets us.

On the other side of the equation, we always have the option of

the hammer, which is what we did in Iraq, which I think would

probably not generate a lot of U.S. public support right now.

So what are some of the other dynamics that are in play internally

about—what are some of the big questions you guys are raising?

I am not even looking for the answers. I want to get a sense

as to how you are trying to get your arms around the problem. And

I should say, I do not think a single one of us up here would suggest,

if we were making the decision, we would know with any degree

of certainty exactly how to proceed either. But I am trying to

get a sense of what the nature of the debate is internally and what questions are being raised.

Well, my time is up.

I begin to question how much of their support of terror relates

to keeping us off balance in Iraq and Afghanistan and the region

and how much of it relates to not wanting to see the emergence of

a peace agreement in Israel and an Israeli state that is secure. But

I will come back to that later, if we have time.

I thank you for engaging that question.

Thank you.

You indicated, Mr. Secretary, that the way to support democracy

in Iran is to make the facts available to the Iranian people. How

do you do that if there is not direct engagement with them? How

does that get done? We do it through radio messages?

And did your counterparts in France and Britain and Germany

convey to you any request for steps that would help them arrive

at last week’s agreement? In other words, if so, did we take any

steps? Did we convey via the Europeans or through any other channels

any steps? Was there any discussion about security assurances?

Are our fingerprints on any of that? I do not mean that as

accusatory. I mean in a positive way.

So the first question is, how do we communicate this? And second,

were we contemporaneously informed? Did we have any input?

I will conclude with this, Mr. Chairman. Are the

Europeans asking us for any assistance from us in this run-up to

the IAEA November meeting?

How do we get the ‘‘facts’’—I think we all agree—

to the Iranian people without engaging them?

Thank you.

Thank you.

Now, wait a minute. I like you too.

Thank you.

Take whatever time you want.

Well, gentlemen, first of all, thanks for the testimony.

There is a thread of agreement that runs through what all

of you have said, which is basically that, to use an old term that

no longer has much meaning, we have to engage more here.

Let me be the devil’s advocate for a minute here. First of all, to

the best of my knowledge, none of you have met with any Iranians,

nor have I. I have, but none of us has met with any Iranians that

make any decisions, that have the power to make any decisions. Is

that correct? Have any of you met with anyone, in any of the meetings

you have had, who you think has the ability to affect events

in Tehran? I am curious. I just want to know whether you have.

No, I understand that. But look, I have been

doing this for 31 years like you.

Yes. I have talked with senior Iranian officials

outside the United States as well, but the bottom line is those senior

Iranian officials are people who can only wield influence in the

margins if events begin to move in a direction that they can impact

on. I do not want to pursue it. I am not saying this to be critical.

I just want to make sure there is a sense of the type of person to

whom we are speaking.

The second point I want to make is that, being the devil’s advocate

again, I view this in terms of priorities with the Iranians. Obviously,

a long-term and important priority is our hope, expectation,

desire, and resolve not to have Iran as a possessor of nuclear

weapons, particularly with a long-range delivery capacity. But no

one that I have spoken to indicates that that is a realistic possibility

within the very near term, meaning in the next year or several

years. I have not found anyone who has told me that. It does

not mean that it is not an incredibly important concern.

My concern, in the meantime, is if our relationship with Iran

continues to deteriorate, there are an awful lot of things that can

happen in the near term which are of incredible consequence to us,

starting with Iraq, moving to Afghanistan, impacting upon our relationship

indirectly our European allies, with whom we have a

very tenuous relationship now at best.

So I am wondering whether we shouldn’t be encouraging the Europeans

to continue their dialog and agreements with the Iranians

relative to the IAEA and inspections, but move more rapidly on try-

ing to figure out whether or not there is a common ground we can

find with the Iranians, the U.S.-Iranian dialog, on very specific, immediate,

and serious concerns?

We have all been doing this a long time, some of you with greater

expertise than me and others on this committee. But the idea

that we can eliminate the capacity of Iran to acquire nuclear weapons

sometime in the future is extremely doubtful.

And when the tipping point comes, if they decide to move from

capacity to the reality of acquiring and producing a nuclear weapon

we will be left with a very, very stark decision to make. But it

seems to me that our ability to impact that outcome, moving from

capacity to reality, depends upon our relationships with the rest of

the world at the time. If we have further fractured our relationships

with our NATO allies and with the European Community

and with the Security Council and with Russia and with China, et

cetera, as we seem wont to do, we will have much less leverage in

impacting upon that decision, if it is reached, of moving from capacity

to possession of nuclear weapons. So I put a high premium

in the coming weeks and months in trying to get on the same page

with regard to Iran as the Europeans are, as the Russians are, as

the Security Council may be.

If you look at the Iranian interests relative to their neighbors,

relative to their long-term future and security, they are not at all

inconsistent with U.S. interests. Obviously, to have a non-threatening

and stable regime in Iraq and in Afghanistan is as much in

our interest as it is in Iran’s interest. Obviously, having a stable

and not teetering and/or radicalized Pakistan is as much in the interest

of Iran as it is in the interest of the United States of America, and so on.

So what do we do near term to get beyond the point where we

are literally unable or unwilling to discuss very specific things

where there is a common interest? Should we be sitting down?

Should we have, as I raised about a year ago in a hearing when

some of you were here, be talking and should we have talked to in

advance and should we be talking now very specifically with the

Iranians about our plans in Iraq? Specifically, not generically.

Should we be prepared to give assurances relative to our presence in Iraq?

Similarly with regard to our plans and commitments in Afghanistan,

should that discussion be taking place? Or does that pollute

the possibility of getting other things going?

Is there any one thing that would make any of you suggest that

we should not be talking one on one with the Iranian Government;

i.e., if they fail to be more accountable on the al-Qaeda or if they

continue to support Hezbollah or Islamic Jihad? Are these issues

a reason in and of themselves that we should not be talking to

them about other things? Or does it need to be this grand sort of

negotiation to take place before we discuss anything? I agree.

Bob, I know that this is not your, quote, ‘‘brief,’’

but you have been there. Would this administration be able to politically,

in terms of international as well as domestic opinion, initiate

a high-level contact with the Iranians to discuss specifically

the circumstances on the ground and the future of Iraq? Politically

would that be able to be done?

I am sorry. When you? That is heartening.

I guess we are going to stop talking with China then. Right?

Able or willing?

Florida cleanup hitters have done very well, unfortunately, lately.

Can I make one concluding point? I am sorry to

trespass on your time so much.

Iran is almost 70 million people. And 70 percent or more are

under the age of 30. None of you have, but there are those who talk

about a military option. It seems to me there is no doubt that we

could militarily, quote, defeat Iran. But what in God’s name do we

do next in Iran? What is there that would lead anyone to believe

that there would be a coalescence of this great democratic middle

that would rise up in the military defeat? The President is not suggesting

a military defeat, but there are some, if you read the oped

pages and the like. Is there’s any reason to believe that if—it

was not us, anyone—somehow there was an overthrow from the

outside of the Iranian Government, that there would be a quickly

emerging democracy in Iran?

No, I do not think they would be willing. I was

asking the question of whether or not it would be wise.

Thank you, gentlemen.