[presiding]. The committee will come to order.

This may be my last opportunity to chair a hearing, Mr. Secretary,

so I’m going to take advantage of it. I have my papers in

order and it’s certified and legal that I can go ahead and bring our

committee together. My colleagues are on their way back, as you

know, from a vote and Chairman Biden said to get started, so we

wouldn’t hold you up any longer.

Thank you again, Mr. Secretary, for coming. As always, we appreciate

your good work and your leadership as well as your colleagues’.

I want to pick up on the line of questioning that Senator Lugar

had with you, Mr. Secretary, on some of the points that you had

made in discussing the recent P5+1 offer that had been delivered

by Secretary Solana and the Iranian response and in particular,

the point that both Senator Biden and Senator Lugar made about

American presence at the followup meeting, which I believe you

had said in response to Senator Lugar’s question that you thought

it would probably come in the next few weeks, that another meeting

would take place.

My question is, Has there been discussion within the administration

about an American representative at that next meeting? That’s

my first question.

That active involvement would include the consideration

of an American there with Solana on the next visit?

So then I take it from that answer that there’s

not been serious discussion within the administration about the

possibility of having an American representative at the next meeting

or at some point in the future with Mr. Solana?

Has there been any discussion as far as you’re

aware of a Russian presence at a followup meeting with Mr.

Solana?

Thank you.

You noted in your testimony—and I had an opportunity to read

your complete statement as well—as did Chairman Biden and Senator

Lugar, that the complexities within the Middle East and certainly

that are represented within Iran—I believe your comment

was something to the effect that the complexities that exist in its

society, in Iranian society, as well as the entire region—would dictate

a regional strategy and a context for that strategy, meaning

the Syrian peace, obviously, as you noted, Hamas, Hezbollah. We

have not really touched much upon Iraq here at this hearing, although

we have to some extent, as Chairman Biden noted, the current

Iraqi leadership in and out of Tehran. Ahmedinejad, as you

know, of course a few weeks ago was in Baghdad. Most of the

Malaki government had been exiled in Iran and have relationships.

And that has been ongoing, which I have always viewed that as

positive. But in that larger universe of strategic thinking and with

this administration having about 6 months left in office and, you

have noted, wanting to hand off to the next administration a position

that has us on some higher ground diplomatically, give me

your strategic context of how we are going about that?

I think you should include in that, as I’m sure you would, the

current engagement between Israel and Syria that was initiated,

brokered, by the Turks, and any other piece of that that you can

mention, because obviously that relationship between the Israelis

and the Syrians would have an effect, does have an effect, on the

Syrian-Iranian relationship, and all those factors that are in play

in this larger context.

So I know that’s a big wide-open question, but I think we should

try to focus that down and narrow that down, especially in regard

to what do you think this administration can accomplish, what do

you hope to accomplish in the next 6 months, with all those factors

now in play? And I think we all, most of us, if I heard your testimony,

recognize that this is going to require a regional strategy,

not country by country—that’s part of it, too—but the larger dynamic

and the larger context.

And obviously we’ve talked about Russia and China playing in

that, just as the 123 agreement is a good example. We need the

Russians. The Russians need us. They are critical to whatever we

can do advancing a diplomatic solution with Iran.

Thank you.

I have two—two questions after you’re finished.

Senator Kerry, thank you.

I just have one additional question, Secretary Burns. As we all

recognize, Iran shares borders with the two countries where America

is currently at war. We have 150,000 troops roughly in Iraq,

roughly 35,000 troops in Afghanistan, and we’ll be putting more

American troops in Afghanistan. And the common denominator,

among many, is that Iran shares a border with both Afghanistan

and Iraq.

We talked a little earlier this afternoon about Afghanistan obliquely

and I want to come back to that in a moment. But we referenced

more directly the Iraq-Iran connection with the current

leadership in both and their engagement. We can term it any way

we like, but it’s clearly engagement. I think, for all the flaws and

imperfections in this business, engagement is almost always preferable

to the alternatives.

Now, we recognize and you certainly do, even though your portfolio

didn’t have all the specific responsibilities when we first went

to war in Afghanistan the Iranians cooperated with us on different

issues, one being on illicit drugs crossing their border; unrest on

their eastern border. And they didn’t cooperate with us, as you

know, because, I don’t believe, they wanted to do us a favor or it

was President Bush’s or Vice President Cheney’s winning personality.

It may have been. But they did it very simply because it was

in their common interest. It was clearly in their interest and that’s

what engagement is about, because that’s what gets to a negotiation.

Both sides have to get something out of the deal. There’s a

reason for both sides to sit down, just exactly what’s going on in

North Korea today, the six-party talks. All six parties to those

talks have a reason to be there. It is in the common interest of all

six nations, just as it was in the interest of Libya and the United

States, and every conflict where we eventually resolve it with some

kind of a diplomatic resolution, just as General Petraeus told this

committee, as you know, 3 months ago, there is no military solution

in Iraq. Well, of course not.

So with that as a bit of a base to work from, I want to go back

to something that was mentioned, and I think you brought it up

and maybe it was in response to Senator Biden, in noting the most

recent P5+1 proposal Mr. Solana took to the Iranians. I think you

termed it suspension for suspension. Or another way I heard it is

freeze for freeze, that, as you have explained it, freeze in place or

suspend it in place, no more of this and this side will do no more

of this, and then hopefully we can start working our way towards

something.

Now, as far as I know that’s a new part of the proposal, and I’m

going to ask you to respond to that. This dynamic that was put

forth in this most recent proposal was something new, and my understanding

is that it was to try to get around, essentially get us

out of the diplomatic cul de sac we find ourselves in with Iran on

our insistence, the U.S. insistence, and our allies, that preconditions

be met before we will talk to you. And the Iranians have

said, no, we’re not going to do that.

I’ve never quite understood why we would do that to ourselves,

but nonetheless we are where we are and we’ve got to find a way

to back out of that so obviously all sides can save some face here

and we can get ourselves back onto some serious ground to try to

engage a serious issue in a serious way to find a serious resolution.

Now, would you enlighten us a little bit more on what you understand

that part of the proposal to be and what its significance is,

if there is any?

If I may—and thank you for the explanation. So

if this is accepted, and it may well be—I don’t know if the Iranians

have responded completely or affirmatively to this. But if it is accepted—

and I assume it’s been accepted by the six parties on our

side or it wouldn’t have been in the proposal. But if the Iranians

accept it, then what would be the next step?

Does this mean then that the United States would be directly engaged

in the next step with the Iranians or our partners? Or what

does this mean as to the next step?

Is Senator Feingold coming back?

Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary.