Let me begin by explaining to our visitors that

the reason why this hearing has begun so late is there were a series

of unexpected votes on the floor of the U.S. Senate. And every

time we came back over to begin the hearing, there were a series of procedural votes.

And I apologize to our distinguished witness, Secretary Burns,

who is someone who is listened to with real interest and viewed

with overwhelming respect by all members of this committee. He

said he had time, and I pointed out I’d rather him be out negotiating

than in here. I—and I appreciate his being here.

This testimony that Secretary Burns is about to give, and hopefully

the exchange we’ll have with him, comes at a very important

moment. Tensions with Iran are rising. Its government refuses to

release 15 British servicemembers it illegally detained last week.

And in Iraq, the Iranians are accused of supplying deadly weapons

to militias who have attacked our troops. We’ve arrested some Iranians

in Iraq who we believe are part of that process.

The President has dispatched two aircraft carrier battle fleets to

the Persian Gulf. And they are currently in the midst of extensive

military exercises, as we see, and Americans see when they turn

on their television sets. And President Ahmadinejad’s incendiary

threats to wipe Israel off the map, and his denial of the Holocaust,

combined with Iran’s nuclear ambitions, have led to a very legitimate

concern, not only here, but in the region, around the world,

of the intentions of the Iranian President.

Iran’s perceived expansionism, including its support for

Hezbollah and Hamas, has sparked deep fears, not merely in

Israel, but across the Arab world. Iran and Saudi Arabia—Iran and

the Sunni-Arab States are on opposite sides of a growing Sunni-

Shia rift that extends from Lebanon through Iraq to the Gulf

States and into South Asia. One of the things we’re going to be

asking—I’m going to be asking the Secretary today is to help, sort

of, quantify some of these things, give a sense of how close to the

edge some of these concerns that I’m raising are. All of this contributes

to a regional tinderbox that could, with the wrong move, ignite

a physical conflict. And an otherwise minor incident has the potential

to spiral out of control. I’m not suggesting that will happen, but

I’m suggesting we should talk about it.

My dad used to have an expression, ‘‘The only war worse than

one that’s intended is one that wasn’t intended.’’ I’ll alter it

slightly, ‘‘If there’s anything worse than a poorly planned intentional

war, it’s an unplanned unintentional war.’’ So, we need very

cool heads to prevail, and we have one of the coolest heads and best

negotiators and most talented men in the State Department before us today.

My view is, I think we have to be patient, and we need some

hardheaded diplomacy, not based on any naive assumptions, but

just hardheaded diplomacy. And that is what you have pursued at

the U.N. Security Council, Mr. Secretary. Last May, the administration—

I would have characterized it as, ‘‘reversed course,’’ but

maybe that’s not fair, and joined forces with our European allies.

Since then, you personally have secured two unanimous U.N. Security

Council resolutions, which have not been easy to do, sanctioning

Iran for its defiance on its nuclear program. And although

the critics say these have been modest, the point is, they have been

modest, but incremental. You’ve kept the world onboard.

One of the discussions you and I had a long time ago was the—

I think one of the objectives is to make sure that Iran is viewed

as the world’s problem, not us viewed as the problem. And keeping

the world onboard has not been easy.

The sanctions, in my view, have highlighted Iran’s international

isolation, and I think they have helped reveal some severe cracks

in Iran, in their political establishment. Ahmadinejad is no longer

riding so high, in my observation. I’m going to ask you about that.

He’s increasingly constrained, as other power centers in his country

criticize him for his diplomatic and economic failures. There is—I

won’t call it an ‘‘economic meltdown,’’ but there is not an—it’s not

happy times in Iran right now. Your efforts, and the efforts of the

administration and the President, have had some positive impacts

on making it clear to the Iranian people and to the business community

that there are prices to pay for irresponsibility. There are

more open challenges of the regime. In recent weeks, Iranian

women bravely took to the streets to challenge the government’s

discriminatory policy.

And, in short, Mr. Secretary, I support what you’ve been doing,

and I applaud you for what you’ve accomplished thus far. But, Mr.

Secretary, after all that has happened in Iraq, with everything

that’s happening here at home—with notable exceptions, the administration

has—let me put it more diplomatically—has considerably

less credibility and goodwill than it started with several years

ago, or 5 years ago. Many people, here and abroad, are skeptical

that the administration—whether it’s actually made a fundamental

break with its past policies, and that it’s really focused on results,

as opposed to ideology. I know you too well. I don’t want to hurt

your reputation with the administration, but you’re the furthest

thing I know from an ideologue. You’re an incredibly well-informed

and tough-minded diplomat who seeks objectives, and is pretty

good at achieving them.

So, I hope you can answer a couple of questions relating to the

administration’s strategy, going forward.

The first is: Is the administration’s goal in Iran regime change

or behavior change? Now, some would argue they’re not inconsistent,

but I would argue there is a distinctive difference between

regime change and seeking behavior change. Your counterpart, in

Korea, who’s been given, it seems to me, a pretty wide berth, has

made similar progress. But it seems to rest, in my view, on having

moved off of the insistence on regime change and focusing more on

behavioral change. No one likes this regime, but I hope we keep

our eye on the first prize, as preventing Iran from developing nuclear

weapons. And so, how can we tell Iran not to go nuclear, but

then, in the next breath, say, ‘‘After you commit to not go nuclear,

we’re going to change your regime’’?

So, the second question I’m going to—I’d like you talk about, as

well, when it comes my turn, is—the pressure we’re applying: Is it

aimed at improving our position and weakening Iran in any future

negotiations, or is it designed to prepare the battlefield for war? I

realize that’s always an option any President has to leave on the

table, but these are central questions, which I know our constituents

are being—are asking us and I’d like an opportunity to have you discuss.

I would ask unanimous consent, in the interest of time, the remainder

of my statement be put in the record, and conclude by saying

I have no doubt in my mind, Mr. Secretary, there are those in

Iran who prefer confrontation to cooperation. But it seems to me

it’s pretty important for the Iranian people—beyond their government,

the Iranian people—to understand that our hand is extended,

that we’re not the ones standing in the way of peaceful coexistence,

and possibly even fruitful cooperation.

So, I compliment you for the—what you have accomplished thus

far. I think the government in Tehran has a fundamental choice to

make. As Iran’s new year begins, I hope they begin to make the

right choices with the proper prodding from you and our diplomatic corps.

Senator Lugar.

Thank you very much.

Secretary, we welcome you and are anxious to hear what you

have to say. And take as much time as you want, but, as you know,

your entire statement, if you choose not to read it all, will be placed in the record.

No, no, it’s very——

Well, thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.

You’ve just, in a very short time, made the case, in my view, why

I think you’re one of our superior diplomats.

I don’t think I’m misrepresenting, I think you’ve expressed a

view that has been shared by at least the senior members of this

committee for some time, and I say it’s about time. And I would

say, to those who suggest that you haven’t, ‘‘accomplished it yet,’’

that—dealing with their nuclear program—that this is a process,

and it’s the only rational process.

Let me—and I just—we should start the clock. I’m sorry, Bertie,

thank you. We’ll do 7 minutes, if we can, each round here.

And let me get right to it. We had a very brief discussion, Mr.

Secretary, in the anteroom, before you came in. And if every American,

in my view, could hear what you just said—there is such a

logic to it, I suspect you—we would dampen down concerns about

the motives of the administration and their—it’s not a secret to

suggest, some question the motives—what the intention is, whether

this is a prelude to another circumstance similar to Iran. You’ve

laid out, clearly, a strategy which, at least—speak for myself—I fully embrace.

One of the—a key phrase you used, I think, is the phrase that

I’d like you to elaborate on, off of which everything else pivots, and

that is, you said, ‘‘We have some time.’’ If you listen to some quarters

within the administration, as well as here in the Congress, as

well as in the think-tank community, as well as from some of our

friends abroad, is—the argument is, ‘‘We have no time. We have no

time, as it deals with the nuclear program. And, as a consequence,

we have no time to focus on anything else, because that’s the—that

is the 800-pound gorilla, that is the gigantic issue, that is the ultimate

objective of the Iranians to pursue it, and us to stop it.’’ And

one of my—one of the things—and I think, in a sense, maybe we’re

a little responsible for this not being clear—is that—I don’t think

the American public, nor the majority of our colleagues, have a

really, sort of, unvarnished, clear-eyed view of Iranian capability

and Iranians’ present circumstance. Everyone’s sort of still in the

mode that they are riding high, that they are 10 feet tall, that

they’re on the verge of being able to mount a nuclear warhead on

top of a missile, that they have an economic—they’re an economic

juggernaut, that all of their oil puts them in a position where they

are impervious to sanctions, that—and the list goes on and on and

on, when the reality is, when I say to constituents, ‘‘You know,

look, the Iranians import most of their refined oil,’’ they look, and

they go, ‘‘Huh? I didn’t know that.’’ If you listen to what’s going on

out there, these guys are this gigantic juggernaut that the only

thing that can stop them is physical power.

And so, without going into all those areas, and before my time

expires, I’d like to ask you to speak to two things, Nick, if you

would. There is, again, in—I think, a sense among many of our colleagues

in both houses, in both parties, as well as the public at

large, that the Iranian President is in total control of the Iranian

Government, that he controls all the security apparatus, that he

calls all the shots; and he is obviously someone who is viewed by

a lot of people as not being particularly stable. His denials of the

Holocaust, his talks about wiping Israel off the map, his absolute

insistence about the way he’s going to proceed with nuclear capability,

I think, feeds a sense that we don’t have time. And when

people think we don’t have time, then they say, ‘‘Well, there’s not

much time for diplomacy.’’ So, I think these are connected. Would

you speak a little bit for the record about the relative power and

position, as best we know it, of the Iranian President versus the

Supreme Leader versus political opposition that exists within Iran?

And the last point I’ll make is, the most important point I think

you made today is the way we’re viewed by the Iranian people. My

greatest criticism of the administration is, we basically pushed the

mute button when it came to discussions. Now, you’ve pointed out

you’re going to be looking for—$180 million, I think your number was? $108.

I think—you will have no trouble with this chairman,

and I think you’ll have no trouble with this committee, getting

that, and possibly more, which, if you fold into my question

about Ahmadinejad—Why is it, if you’re reaching out—why does

the administration continue to oppose our proposal to expand

American NGOs, exempt them from sanctions, that without—with

those sanctions in place, it makes it very difficult, if not impossible,

for them to be engaged in supporting democratic movements and

human rights activities within Iran. Are they inconsistent? Is it inconsistent

to propose, as I have, that the NGOs be able to engage

in Iran and engage the human rights community, engage the democratic

movement within Iran, and what you’re calling for?

So, I—with—I’ll yield the floor, with a minute or so left here, and

ask you to respond, if you would, generally, to those two points.

Nick, are American-based NGOs able to work

with NGOs based in other countries as, not the front, but participating

in efforts to promote human rights and democracy and other

laudable efforts within Iran, or are they permitted, as you read the

law now—prohibited from being able to do that?

Well, I would hope we could work out an

arrangement whereby we would reduce the legal barrier, to the

extent that it requires a signoff. But if—anyway, my time is up. I

appreciate your answer. And I yield to my colleague.