Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senators. Thank you

for having us here.

I had the opportunity to read the testimony given to you on

Tuesday by Richard Haass, and I agree with its generalized approach.

Therefore, I am going to focus much more narrowly in my

own comments on the negotiating process with Iran that the President

intends to undertake.

It seems to me that the negotiating process can be seen as guided

by essentially alternative strategic objectives. At one extreme,

the negotiating process can be designed deliberately to fail, but to

do so in a manner that places the onus for the failure directly on

the other party. That can be an objective of negotiations. At the

other extreme, the negotiating process can be deliberately designed

to seek a formula for an acceptable compromise that satisfies the

basic interests of both parties.

To be specific, if the goal is to encourage, for example, the Iranians

to be intransigent and in effect deliberately to strengthen the

role of extremists, thereby justifying alternative courses of action

than negotiations because the negotiations have failed, the United

States should publicly, first of all, insist that Iran meet certain

basic preconditions even prior to the negotiating process, in effect

seeking Iran to make fundamental concessions prior to the negotiations.

Second, we should publicly threaten Iran with more sanctions if

Iran is not compliant in the negotiating process.

Third, we should keep asserting publicly that force and the use

of force remains an option that may be exercised against Iran.

We can also, fourth, keep saying publicly that it is one of our political

objectives to achieve regime change in Iran.

Last but not least, we should continue publicly to label the Iranian

Government as a terrorist entity, thereby inflaming the public

mood in Iran, and impose time limits on the duration of the negotiations.

Such an approach would certainly achieve its obvious objective:

to make certain that the negotiations are not productive and that

Iran’s intransigence is the cause of the failure.

The alternative approach, of course, should be rather different.

It should seek to engage Iran in a process in which there emerges

the possibility of some consensual arrangement. That of course

means that we can and should consult privately with our allies regarding

the consequences of the lack of progress, including the possibility

subsequently of imposing more stringent sanctions. We can

evaluate, to the extent that it is feasible, other options, perhaps of

a more coercive character. But we also have to be very careful not

to set restrictions on ourselves which dramatically limit our choice

of action and impose on us a pattern of conduct which could lead

us in the direction of an eventual collision.

Obviously, the achievement of a nuclear capability by Iran would

be a disaster, and I’m quoting President Sarkozy, who said exactly

that. But President Sarkozy also said that the military collision

with Iran, the bombing of Iran, would be a disaster, and hence our

strategy has to be guided by the central strategic objective of avoiding

both disasters.

That means that we have to approach the negotiating process

with some degree of patience, prudence, and with a deliberate effort

to shape the atmospherics of the engagement because atmospherics

of the engagement are not only important to the negotiating

process itself, but they affect Iranian public opinion, and that

there is a latent Iranian public opinion, and we do know that a

great many people in Iran are not in sympathy with the attitudes

so perversely expressed by Ahmadinejad, more recently even by the

Supreme Leader, either regarding us, the Holocaust, or Israel.

In that context, I think we should be prepared to exploit an opening

which, probably unintentionally, the Iranians are giving us. I

have in mind a striking contrast between the North Korean approach

to the negotiations and the Iranian approach to this issue.

The North Koreans have said publicly: ‘‘We want nuclear weapons,

we are seeking nuclear weapons.’’ Indeed, at one point or another:

‘‘We have achieved nuclear weapons.’’ The Iranians are saying to

us: ‘‘We do not want nuclear weapons; we do not seek nuclear

weapons; our religion forbids us to have nuclear weapons.’’

I don’t say that this is necessarily a credible statement, but it is

a statement which can be picked up in the sense that our response

to the Iranians can indicate: ‘‘We are prepared to explore the veracity

of these assertions; we have grounds for being suspicions; we

need to be reassured. But if you’re serious about these statements,

then by all means let us examine means that will make us and the

international community certain that you are not seeking nuclear

weapons, that in fact you don’t want them, and that, as you claim,

your religion forbids them.’’

That seems to me to be a goal that the negotiations should be

designed to pursue; and therefore, we should be very careful to

avoid any approach which in advance impedes the process of negotiations,

inflames the context in which they’ll be pursued, and

makes it easier for people like Ahmadinejad to goad the United

States and to undercut public support for the negotiating process

in the United States and in the international community.

What I have now said does collide with some of the advice or

some of the considerations that are currently being discussed in the

United States. It seems to me that we run the risk of wanting to

have our cake and eating it too; of engaging in polemics and diatribes

with the Iranians while at the same time engaging seemingly

in a negotiating process. The first is not conducive to the second.

I am not naive enough to think that the negotiating process

would be productive quickly. I am not certain that it will be productive

in the long run. But I know that if we prejudice its chances

in the short run, we will not have the opportunity to push the process

over the longer run. That means that we should avoid time limits

on the negotiations because they create a sense of urgency and

pressure which is inimical to serious exploration of the issues. We

should consult very quietly with our allies about what alternative

means of pressure we may choose at some point to apply. But

we should start the negotiating process on the basis of a serious

determination to explore the degree to which there are openings for

accommodation.

There are ambiguities in the Iranian posture. There are some indications,

according to various reports, that the Iranians are not

moving at full speed to acquire nuclear weapons. They may be

seeking the capability to be a proto-nuclear country, but not to

cross the threshold of actual weaponization or a level that would

make weaponization possible in the near future.

We should also be very careful also not to become susceptible to

advice from interested parties regarding how we ought to proceed.

There is a fascinating article in yesterday’s Haaretz on the advice

that Secretary of State Clinton was given in Jerusalem yesterday

on how we ought to proceed with the negotiating process. I would

suggest that members of the committee become acquainted with

that advice. I have some reservations regarding parts of it because

it seems to me that if we follow it closely we will be sucked into

a process in which escalation of tensions and mutual accusations

will poison the effort at negotiations even at the very start.

When I say that there should be no timetable,

I’m not suggesting that we should engage in indefinite, endless negotiations.

What I am saying is that openly imposing time limits

in advance creates a degree of pressure which is not conducive to

a serious negotiating process.

Throughout the entire negotiating process, however long it lasts,

whether it’s months or several years, we will be in a position always

to ask ourselves, are we being strung out? Is the other side

doing things outside of the negotiating table that jeopardize the

whole negotiating process and justifies its abortion? We always retain

that right. But I’m saying don’t set time limits in advance.

That is the advice, for example, that Secretary Clinton was given

yesterday: A time limit must be set for the talks. Well, if there is

a time limit set for the talks, can we keep it secret? What is its

impact if it’s announced in advance? I think it is damaging to the

negotiating process.

We can also do things outside of the negotiating process which

help to create a greater degree of security and confidence, not only

on our own part or of our immediate allies engaged in this venture,

but also in the region. For example, I am of the view that as we

go into the negotiating process we should at some point make it

clear that we are prepared to extend the nuclear umbrella to all

of our friends in the Middle East because for different reasons

there are misgivings both in Israel and in the Arab countries,

whether it be the Emirates or even Egypt and Saudi Arabia, about

what the Iranians are doing. A U.S. nuclear umbrella would reemphasize

the importance of deterrence.

I think we have to some extent lost sight of the relevance of our

very extensive experience with nuclear deterrence. It has worked.

It worked with the Stalinist regime which was ominous, tyrannical,

and murderous. It worked with the Chinese, whose leader at one

time talked about a nuclear war not being so serious because it will

kill only 300 million people. The Indians and the Pakistanis have

managed to deter each other, knock on wood, so far.

In brief, the experience with deterrence gives us some grounds

for not being under tremendous time limits. And in any case, we

know that deterrence is predictable if it works. Military action sets

in motion unforeseeable circumstances, which in the present

context of the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and

Pakistan would be absolutely devastating to the American national

interest.

I think there’s a lot of evidence for that. Even

the Nobel Prize winner for literature——

There’s a lot of evidence for what you said. Even

a winner of the international Nobel Prize for Literature, the Iranian

lady, who is a critic of the Government, has stated publicly:

‘‘We all support the nuclear program. This is a matter of principle,

of pride, for many Iranians of national well-being.’’ So we have to

be careful about that, because if we are awkward in our approach,

if we’re one-sided, if we seem to be seeking negotiations in order

to impose, we’ll simply unify the Iranians and make it easier for

them to do what they’re doing. So that’s point No. 1.

Point No. 2: I do think that taking the position publicly that the

United States guarantees the security of every potentially threat-

ened country in the Middle East with its own nuclear deterrent,

would have a lot of credibility and it would reduce this threat that

concerns many Israelis, that they’re existentially threatened.

Actually, I don’t think they are existentially threatened because

I don’t see Iran the moment it gets its first nuclear weapon using

it in a suicidal act, because the retaliation would be totally destructive.

In fact, we were under a much greater existential threat when

Brent was sitting in the White House, when I was sitting in the

White House, and we were involved in helping the President coordinate

the nuclear response in the event of an attack. We could

have been devastated in 6 hours and still faced the option of

whether to respond or to be finished up completely because of the

size and the followup potential of the Soviet nuclear arsenal. We

lived in that reality for years without claiming that we have to disarm

the Soviet Union somehow in order to continue. So I think deterrence

can help a lot.

We also, it seems to me, ought to be more active internationally

in promoting nuclear disarmament, because part of the charge

against us in many parts of the world is that we’re seeking to preserve

a monopoly for ourselves, maybe for two or three more countries.

So I think these are the kind of things we can do to mitigate

some of the problems that we face.

Well, actually, on that point, curiously enough,

what the Iranians say publicly is consistent with our position. They

say they don’t want nuclear weapons. We have reason to suspect——

That’s right. So we have reason to suspect——

We have reason to suspect that this is a mendacious

assertion. But as long as they claim that this is truly their

fundamental position, we are in a position to say to them: ‘‘In that

case, let’s negotiate an arrangement that makes it absolutely credible

to the world at large that in fact you are not seeking nuclear

weapons and you will not have them.’’

Yes. The potential for nuclear dissemination I

think is the real threat, not that they will use their first bomb to

start a war in which they will perish.

I have somewhat mixed feelings. I think the essence

of the regime makes it inclined to be wary of a closer relationship

with us because to them we are the Great Satan, and that

in a sense justifies their own role in Iran.

But one also can note at times some shades of disagreement between

the Supreme Leader and Ahmadinejad. I think many Iranians

think that Ahmadinejad is a bit of a nut and that he’s damaging

Iranian standing in the world, that his verbal exercises suggest

a high degree of dementia, and this does not fill a country

with genuine historical pride in itself with much respect.

So there are these differences. I think our task is to avoid becoming

engaged directly in their political contests while creating an external

international context which favors the evolution of the Iranian

public in a more and more moderate direction. We do have

plenty of evidence that, particularly in the large urban centers,

among the younger people, among the intellectuals, there is a sense

that the extremist agenda is counterproductive to Iran’s wellbeing

as well as to its international standing.

We have no choice, because there is a Supreme

Leader and he is in charge. If we negotiate with the Iranians, we

are presumably negotiating ultimately with him. But our objective

ought to be in the process to create the conditions in which it becomes

evident to the top people in the Iranian elite that it is in

their own domestic political interest to move in a somewhat more

moderate direction.

Let’s not forget, while we have, rightly so, a very negative assessment

of the Iranian theocracy, it is a theocracy wedded to a political

process that’s considerably more democratic than Russia’s. The

elections in Iran are much more of a real contest and they’re much

more open, and there is a much greater degree of competition between

the key alternatives in Iran than there is in Russia.

The Supreme Leader, as well as the entire Iranian

leadership, has to also consider the overall condition of the

economy, the question of social stability, the wellbeing of the people.

There is, after all, some reciprocal relationship between the

rulers and the people, even in an autocracy, in which there is a

sense of kind of commonweal, common destiny.

This is a country with genuine traditions of statecraft and historical

and cultural pride. It is also a country in which the social indicators

suggest that it is a country moving toward an increasingly

higher level of modernity, certainly comparable in many respects to

Turkey in the level of literacy, access to universities, particularly

of women, amount of women in law, medicine, and so forth, there

is even a woman who is a vice president of the country. Most

Americans probably don’t know that.

This is a country in which increasingly large numbers of people

go on vacations, particularly to Turkey, less so to Europe, but towards

the West. In other words, this is a country in which some

of the social dynamics, not very visible under this super-overlay of

theocratic fanaticism, are actually evolving. And even the Supreme

Leader, to the extent that he wishes to remain a leader, has to take

these considerations into account.

If we can subtly encourage that process by avoiding a posture

which is easy for him and his associates to translate to the public

as being dedicated to unlimited hostility toward Iran, I think we

help the interests that we’re anxious to promote, and we help perhaps

even in the long run to revive at some point in the future the

traditional amity, even at one point alliance, between Israel and

Iran.

Israel and Iran were in a close relationship under Golda Meir,

including the beginnings of the nuclear relationship. Iran received

help from Israel during the Iran-Iraq War under Prime Minister

Begin. Prime Minister Rabin once said that Israel and Iran are

natural allies, I assume because of the principle that the neighbor

of my neighbor is my friend, and it’s a perfectly sensible and welltried

principle.

So I am simply saying we should not lock ourselves into a posture

in which we view the current enmity with Iran as something

indefinitely enduring, and that we do have some subtle means to

try to alter that, with some receptivity in Iran that we can nurture

as well.

Right. And let’s not be deceived by the word ‘‘Supreme.’’

He is the leader, but supremacy in every system has some

limits. In their system it has more limits, let’s say, than in some

others.

Let me just add this, and perhaps this may be

a little controversial. We’re talking about a relationship and you

mentioned the issue of threat. There is an American-Iranian relationship

and if you look at the relationship you have to ask yourself

in what way, to what degree, they’re affecting us adversely, but you

also have to ask yourself: How does it look to the Iranians? Who

threatens whom more? Are we more threatened by the Iranians or

are the Iranians more threatened by us?

For example, who talks about the use of force a lot? And who has

infinitely more force? So it’s a little more complicated than, ‘‘are

they a big threat to us?’’ Yes, some of the things they do affect our

interests adversely, but some of the things we do probably are a

source of very major concern to them.

There’s a further consideration involved here. We have become

extremely casual in the use of the word ‘‘terrorism.’’ We don’t like

somebody, well, of course he’s a terrorist. That’s a slippery slope

and it doesn’t help to really deal with the complexities of the

issues. It also eventually reduces the word ‘‘terrorism’’ to political

convenience. Note, for example, our negotiations with North Korea,

a terrorist state; but if they agree to what we say to them on plutonium,

we’ll take you off the list as a terrorist state. What’s one got

to do with the other?

In my view, they need not be sequential. They

could be parallel. I recently commented publicly on President

Obama’s timetable for withdrawal from Iraq. My point was that for

that to be effective and to minimize the potentially destabilizing

consequences of our departure we ought to launch simultaneously

with the withdrawal process an effort to engage all of Iraq’s neighbors

in regional security negotiations, because every one of Iraq’s

neighbors will be affected adversely if Iraq becomes destabilized.

That includes Iran and Syria. So I favor security talks which include

the Iranians regarding Iraq. Similarly, I think we had a rather

constructive relationship briefly with the Iranians late in 2001

and in 2002 regarding the Taliban issue in Afghanistan. I think

that could be resumed as well. And at the same time I do favor the

initiation of talks directly with the Iranians involving us particularly,

not just through our European friends, regarding the nuclear

program. I think that should be initiated before too long. I’ve already

tried to articulate the context and the manner in which this

should be done.

But I’m also of the view—and I think this question was raised

either by Senator Kerry or Senator Lugar and we didn’t respond—

that we not delay these talks, unless the Iranians want to delay

them, past the Iranian selections. I would rather start them at a

low level, a low key fashion, before the elections, so that

Ahmadinejad cannot claim in the course of the elections that the

Americans are waiting to negotiate with Iran after he is defeated,

which would then perhaps help him. So let’s start the process now,

which woul d, of course, under the mandate of the Supreme Leader

in any case.

So I hope that’s responsive to what you asked.

I would put it this way. If I had to make a categorical

judgment, I would say that they are probably at this stage

aiming at having a capability somewhat similar to that of Japan,

which is an NPT signatory, which is not in violation of the treaty,

but which has reached a threshold in which it is what I call a

proto-nuclear power, that is to say one that could rapidly move towards

effective nuclear weapons capability if there is a political decision

to that effect, but will not cross that threshold in the near

future.

Could I just add one sentence?

This is exactly what we should not be saying,

and I quote: ‘‘They have declared they want to have a nuclear

weapon to destroy people.’’ A statement by the President of the

United States in March 21 of last year. It’s absolutely false. They

have never declared that.

That hurts us.

March 21, 2008.

I agree with that.

Well, obviously if Iran had a nuclear weapons

capability it would probably be emboldened, and this is why we do

not desire that outcome and we are prepared to work against it.

The question is how are we going to be effective in working against

it. In my view we should not rule out the negotiating process, especially

given the repeated commitments by the Iranians to the effect

that they don’t want nuclear weapons, but they do want a nuclear

program.

I think we ought to try to see whether it is possible to find a formula

whereby these seemingly incompatible objectives are somehow

squared. We shouldn’t overdramatize the immediate international

effects of having a bomb. I agree with Brent that the most

important effect will be the impetus towards proliferation in the region,

but it’s not going to be some sort of a suicidal nuclear war.

That is really an extreme, fundamentally irrational assumption for

which there is no proof, and simply anxiety and uncertainty cannot

be the basis for serious action.

This is, whether we like it or not, a serious country of 70 million

people, with a tradition of responsible statecraft by and large. It is

a country that is profoundly aware of the fact it’s totally vulnerable

to an attack by us, or even eventually by the Israelis; if push came

to shove and they had to use their nuclear weapons against Iran

they could greatly damage that country. There’s no evidence that

Iran as a country, with its traditions, its self-interest, its pride, is

bent on committing suicide.

We never felt that about the Chinese. We never felt that about

the Russians. The Pakistanis and the Indians have managed to

control their mutual anxieties. I don’t see any evidence that the

Iranians, the moment they have a bomb, which I think we can

postpone or avoid, are going to plunge head-long into suicidal adventurism

I basically agree. I think they work at the margins,

but they don’t work on fundamental issues. Look at ILSA. It

really hasn’t achieved its objectives in a strategic sense. In the

present economic crisis, I think there could be also complications

with our friends if we are arbitrary about them.

As Brent just said, just think what it would do to the European

quest for energy security diversification if we could get Iranian oil

and gas to be really exported at full capacity, particularly to Europe.

So in fact let’s be careful not to throw the baby out with the

bathwater.

Well, I would certainly avoid the things I talked

about early on in my testimony. I think we have to approach these

talks as a serious, potentially a very important undertaking. And

we ought to do it in a fashion which respects the interlocutor.

I would start with the Iranians simply by trying to first of all

draw up some sort of a mutually agreed agenda regarding an analysis

of the record in the nuclear area—in what respects the Iranians

have been compliant with NPT and with IAEA; what are the

accusations against noncompliance; what are the areas in which

suspicions and concerns can be narrowed—pointing then to some

perhaps mutual advantages in accommodation, beginning to spell

out the benefits to Iran of an accommodation in which we have assurances

that they’re not doing what they say they’re not doing and

in which their compliance with standards gives them tangible benefits.

The joint memo of the ministers of the Five of last June I think

outlined a potential agenda, and I think this could be then examined

in much more detail. That process probably would take us into

the summer. By then there will have been elections in Iran. We’ll

see what the political situation is and then we can again reassess

and see how we go from there.

We will not get much assistance from the Chinese or the Russians

unless we are prepared to be patient. The Chinese are extraordinarily

vulnerable to a crisis in the Persian Gulf, extraordinarily

vulnerable. This is where their position is somewhat different

from the Russians. The Russians, who may have reservations

about Iran going nuclear, would be financially massive beneficiaries

of an American-Iranian crisis.

I’m sure he was doing us a favor.

We may have narrowed our disagreement by

what you just said. First overtures, of course they have to be done

quietly. How else can we do it? We’re not going to do it on television

or radio. So yes, preliminary discussions quietly.

But once the negotiating process starts, I would favor conducting

it openly, not necessarily with open sessions, but sessions that are

publicly known, maybe even some press briefings afterwards if

there is agreement about press briefings. My reason is this: If you

do it secretly, first of all there’ll be a lot of suspicions by outsiders

as to what’s going on. Second, you place yourself at the mercy of

the party that is prepared to leak and to distort. And given the negotiating

record of the Iranians, with whom, sadly, I have to say,

I had to negotiate, I don’t have that much confidence that the process

would be protected and that the secrecy wouldn’t be exploited

at some moment to create something awkward for us.

Off the table.

These would have to be extreme circumstances,

because we know what it takes to maintain deterrence and we can

reinforce it, and I’ve tried to suggest today how we could reinforce

it by giving guarantees to Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and so

forth—the full American umbrella. We cannot predict the consequences

of a military action with Iran, except that we can anticipate

that they’ll be very difficult for us in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in

the Persian Gulf, more generally financially and economically, and

perhaps in terms of renewed global isolation.

So I think as a serious proposition the use of force ought to be

reserved in most cases either to anticipate and prevent at the last

moment someone else’s use of force or in response to an attack. But

I think preventive warfare is not a good bargain in the nuclear age,

nor is it a good bargain for the United States when we’re already

running the risk of being bogged down for the next 10 years, maybe

20 years, in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

What would be the impact where?

I think it would be very mixed, but probably in

an overall sense it would intensify anti-Americanism, because it

will be interpreted as another case of the United States going to

war against an Islamic country. And there are a number of Shiites

of some significance in Pakistan. I think more generally it will be

part of this feeling, which is already pervasive, that we have locked

ourselves into a kind of anti-Islamic posture which is in their view

very one-sided, and which is I think becoming more pervasive, sad

to say, in Pakistan in general, and is thereby transforming the Afghan

problem for us into an Afghan-Pakistani problem, making it

increasingly difficult to resolve.

I just think that if we got into a military conflict with Iran—and

I have no hesitation in saying this publicly—it would absolutely

devastate the historical legacy of the Obama presidency and damage

the United States, which is even more important.

And it’s unpredictable.