Well, I thank the chairman very much for holding

this important hearing and join him in welcoming Deputy

Secretary Steinberg.

Over Libya, we have once again witnessed the skill and courage

of the men and women of our Armed Forces. The warfighting prowess

of the American military is extraordinary in its capability and

execution.

But success in war depends on much more than the abilities of

our fighting men and women and the quality of their weapons and

equipment. Any member who has been here to witness the last 10

years should understand that wars are accompanied by mistakes

and unintended consequences. War is an inherently precarious

enterprise that is conducive to accidents and failures of leadership.

In the last decade alone, we have witnessed mission creep, intelligence

failures, debilitating conflicts between civil and military

leaders, withdrawal of coalition partners, tribal feuding, corruption

by allied governments, unintended civilian casualties, and many

other circumstances that have complicated our wars in Iraq and

Afghanistan and raised their cost in lives and treasure.

The last 10 years also have illuminated clearly that initiating

wars and killing the enemy is far easier than achieving political

stability and reconstructing a country when the fighting is over.

This is why going to war should be based on the United States

vital interests. It is also why Congress has an essential role to play

in scrutinizing executive branch rationalizations of wars and their

ongoing management. This holds true no matter who is President

or what war is being fought.

Congressional oversight is far from perfect. But it is the best tool

we have for ensuring executive branch accountability in wartime

and subjecting administration plans and assumptions to rigorous

review.

I offer these thoughts at the beginning of this hearing, because

I believe Congress has its work cut out for it with regard to Libya.

On March 7, 12 days before the United States began hostilities, I

called on the President to seek a declaration of war from the Congress

if he decided to initiate hostilities. He declined to do that. As

a result, the United States entered the civil war in Libya with little

official scrutiny or debate. I continue to advocate for a debate and

vote on President Obama’s decision to go to war in Libya. I do not

believe the President has made a convincing case for American

military involvement in that country. Declarations of war are not

anachronistic exercises. They force the President to submit his case

for war to Congress and the American public. They allow for a

robust debate to examine that case, and they help gauge if there

is sufficiently broad political support to commit American blood and

treasure and to sustain that commitment. Furthermore, they define

the role and strategy of the United States.

Neither U.N. Security Council resolutions nor administration

briefings are a substitute for a declaration of war or other deliberate

authorization of major military operations.

Actions leading up to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan at least

acknowledged that congressional authorization was vital to initiating

and conducting war. Despite deep flaws in the process of

authorizing those wars, there was a recognition that both required

a deliberate affirmative vote by Congress. There also was broad

agreement that both conflicts required extensive debate and ongoing

hearings in congressional committees.

President Obama’s intervention in Libya represents a serious

setback to the constitutional limits on the President’s war powers.

Historians will point out that this is not the first time that a President

has gone to war on his own authority. But the Libya case is

the one most likely to be cited the next time President Obama or

a future President chooses to take the country to war without

congressional approval. That future war may have far graver consequences

for American national security than the war in Libya.

With or without a debate in the Congress, the United States is

involved in a military intervention in a third Middle Eastern country.

This is a jarring prospect, given the enormous United States

budget deficit, the strains on our military from long deployments

in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the certainty that this won’t be the

last contingency in the Middle East to impact our interests. In fact,

even as the coalition drops bombs in Libya, the Syrian regime has

been shooting citizens in an attempt to repress peaceful protests.

Our commitments in Libya and those of our allies leave less military,

diplomatic, and economic capacity for responding to other contingencies.

We need to know, for example, whether the Libyan

intervention will make it even harder to sustain allied commitments

to operations in Afghanistan.

The President clearly was motivated by humanitarian concerns

about what could happen if Qadhafi’s forces were left unchecked.

But as many have observed, there is no end to the global humanitarian

emergencies to which U.S. military and economic power

might be devoted. The question now is, When is that humanitarian

mission accomplished, and has humanitarianism evolved into supporting

one side in a lengthy civil war?

In his March 28 speech, the President expressed hopefulness that

our intervention in Libya would have a positive effect on democratic

movements and regime behavior elsewhere in the Middle

East. Perhaps it will, but the President is guessing. Nowhere in the

world have we had more experience with unintended consequences

than in the Middle East.

A war rationale based on hopes about how U.S. military intervention

will be perceived in the Middle East is deficient on its face.

It is also uncertain whether pro-Western governments can result

from popular upheaval, especially in Libya where we know little

about the opposition. We also don’t know what this will mean for

our efforts to stop terrorism and defeat al-Qaeda, particularly since

Middle Eastern governments that are helping us with this problem

are among those who are repressing their people.

President Obama has not provided estimates for the cost of our

military intervention. Nor has he discussed whether the United

States would incur the enormous potential costs of reconstruction

and rehabilitation of Libya in the aftermath of war. By some estimates,

American military operations in Libya may already have

expended close to a billion dollars. The President has not set these

costs in the context of a national debt exceeding $14 trillion, or

indicated whether he is seeking contributions from the Arab

League to offset costs of the war, as I have suggested.

We find ourselves in a situation where Congress is debating cuts

in domestic programs to make essential progress on the deficit,

even as President Obama has initiated an expensive, open-ended

military commitment in a country that his Defense Secretary says

is not a vital interest.

The President must establish with much greater clarity what

would constitute success. He has not stated whether the United

States would accept a stalemate in the civil war. If we do not

accept a long-term stalemate, what is our strategy for ending

Qadhafi’s rule? Without a defined end game, Congress and the

American people must assume U.S. participation in the coalition

may continue indefinitely, with all the costs and risks of escalation

that come with such a commitment.

These questions require the type of scrutiny that Foreign Relations

Committee hearings have provided for the wars in Iraq and

Afghanistan. I know the chairman intends a new series of hearings

in the coming weeks on Afghanistan, and I support such an inquiry

based on principles that I have just cited. I believe that the Foreign

Relations Committee should also take on the burden of detailed

oversight of United States involvement in Libya, and I thank the

chairman again for initiating that process today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Steinberg, there’s a published article in the New York

Times this afternoon, with the headline: ‘‘NATO Warns Rebels

Against Attacking Libyan Civilians.’’ It points out that as NATO

has taken over control of air strikes in Libya, the coalition has told

the rebels that the fog of war would not shield them from possible

bombardment by NATO.

The point NATO is making is that, although the President may

have rationalized our involvement in Libya on the basis of humanitarian

concerns pertaining to civilians in Benghazi, many Libyan

civilians, even in Benghazi, have been moving out, and, depending

upon which side they are on, taking up arms, as they attempt to

involve themselves in at least some military action in other cities

of Libya.

In short, NATO is saying this has got to be a fair fight. If those

armed by the rebels attack civilians, then they’re subject to NATO

bombardment. Now, that’s sort of a new twist, but it is not totally

unexpected.

It simply makes my point again that we are in a situation in

which we in the United States have to be very clear, even in the

context of our role as a NATO coalition partner, precisely why we

are conducting operations in Libya and furthermore what outcome

we would see as success. Now, the President has indicated Qadhafi

must go. Secretary Clinton has discussed other countries that

might offer him exile.

But here we have a situation in which there’s a civil war going

on. People are arming each other. And we know that on the eastern

side of the country, a fair number of persons are now armed, and

while these are supposedly Libyan civilians, they are, in fact,

rebels, some of whom were fighting against us recently, either in

Iraq or Afghanistan. These are people who do not wish the United

States well.

Now, at the end of the day it may be the will of the President

and the Congress that Libya is of sufficient importance that we

devise a military strategy to obtain the ends that we want and

achieve victory; and subsequently, try to organize the country, find

who the opposition people are in a disparate number of cities, and

bring them into some sort of government and attempt at least to

fashion, if not nation-building, a more stable situation there.

If so, this would be a road we have been traveling in two other

instances recently. But in the initial planning, I don’t see this sort

of strategy being developed thus far. That being said, our goals in

Libya remain unclear, which is why continued dialogue with the

administration, both in the context of this hearing and otherwise,

is very important.

We all have a stake in this. It’s not my purpose to try to make

life difficult for you or the President. However, I do believe that

this committee must raise substantive and sometimes difficult

questions, even with regard to the nature of our alliance with

NATO and the passing over of authority.

Now, at what point do you believe it’s possible that the administration

will come forward with a comprehensive plan of what we

believe should occur in Libya, one that clearly answers questions

with regard to our own forces, our allies, our goals, a definition of

success, potential budgets to pay both for the war inself and any

efforts following its conclusion, and finally, also attempts to gain

the support of the American people behind this endeavor?

Without such a plan, I fear this will not be the last unusual

headline to appear in the New York Times or elsewhere which

details that hostilities have taken very unusual turns and that the

United States has not made clear a definition of success in Libya.

This seems to me to require really intensive thought at this particular

point.

Do you have some general agreement with that proposition?

What happens if they don’t agree with that? This

is the point of the story now. NATO is saying we could bomb them.

Well, we thank you again for your distinguished

service.