Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Fried, thank you for testifying.

I’d like to talk for a minute about the state of democracy in Russia.

You said at a May hearing with the Helsinki Commission, that

Secretary Rice is well informed of issues of civil society and democratization

and the Russian political scene, and that she had extensive

discussions both with President Putin and Foreign Minister

Lavrov about these issues.

So, how seriously does the Russian Government take United

States concerns about these issues, and has there been any relaxation

of current restrictions on civil society and political organizations?

And, if there has, which elements are due to U.S. initiatives,

and if not, how does the administration intend to engage with Russia

on these essential democratic tenets?

Thank you for that candid answer.

I’d now like to briefly touch on the Russia-Iran relationship and

its relevance to the United States. I understand you believe Russia

has been a cooperative player as of late with regard to sanctioning

Iran. In the past, Russia has been a principal source of assistance

in Iran’s development of nuclear power, but now seems to have reversed

course of late by informing Iran that it expects ‘‘spent’’ nuclear

fuel to be returned. Russia has also refused to deliver nuclear

fuel to Iran, stopped construction on a nuclear plant, and agreed

to U.N. Security Council sanctions, albeit somewhat weak ones.

What do you think accounts for this reversal? What is driving Russia’s

apparent about-face, and can we take it at face value?

Well, in that vein, obviously a critical component

dealing with Iran is forging a strong multilateral consensus,

which some elements of this administration seem to embrace and

others do not. And it seems to me that this needs to include a positive

and active engagement from Russian, which you were just

talking about. If Iran continues to move forward in the direction

it is currently headed, and does not cease uranium enrichment, do

you think Russia would be supportive of more punitive sanctions?

I don’t know if that’s what you were referring to when you just

talked about——

The next phase, but, through the

U.N. Security Council on Iran even though, in the past it has resisted

harsher measures?

Thank you, sir.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman.