MR. PETER HUESSY: I want to thank you for being here this morning. Let me make one announcement. Jim Miller has asked that he move his breakfast to September, and that's just par for the course.

A couple of other things, I want to welcome our friends from the Russian Federation, Israel, Austria and the Czech Republic. I also want to thank our sponsors, the Reserve Officers Association of America, the Air Force Association and the National Defense Industrial Association. I’d remind you that Terry Benedict is speaking tomorrow.

And we are doing a symposium on the 13th of September on the strategic nuclear triad, deterrence and arms control. We're going to have a panel of Senators, including Senator Conrad, Senator Enzi and Senator Hoeven. And then we’re going to have a panel of what I call inside the government, which will be hopefully General Chambers, Admiral Benedict and either Madelene Creedon or Mr. Roberts; and then have an outside panel.

And I have so many good people that I have to figure out which ones we will do on that. And it will be in the morning. It will be at the Reserve Officers Association of America from 8 in the morning until about 11 o’clock over across from the United States Senate. And again, we’ll be doing that on the 13th of September.

Our speaker this morning is Barry Blechman. And as many of you know, he’s the founder of Defense Forecasting International and the Stimson Center. He ran a series of Air Force breakfasts here on Capitol Hill, which were very successful.

He was a member of the Strategic Forces Commission which was chaired by Mr. Schlesinger and Mr. Perry; and also a member of the Commission on the Missile Threats to the United States of America, known as the Rumsfeld Commission. Today, instead of talking about what he usually does, Global Zero and nuclear deterrence, he has asked to speak about the easy issue: and that is Iran. And I’m going to be interested to hear what he has to say.

For those of you looking for things to read, when Harvard University asked me to do this piece I thought they had the wrong Peter Huessy. But since I’m the only Peter Huessy in America – the only other one I know of is president of a large Swiss pharmaceutical company – and that’s not me. But today they’ve published “Missiles in America” which is a piece in the Harvard International Review: “Missile Defense in the Age of Terror.” It’s online now in case you want to read it.
So with that blatant self-promotion, I want to thank you, Barry, for being here today. And I want to welcome our guests and thank you for coming to talk with us. Would you all welcome Dr. Barry Blechman?

(Applause).

MR. BARRY BLECHMAN: Well, thank you all for coming out so early in the morning. Good breakfast, thanks, Peter. I usually have Nancy Reagan on my right shoulder. It give me inspiration. I’ll have to find it internally.

(Laughter).

I want to talk about five questions that we need to answer before coming to a position on how to stop Iran’s nuclear weapons program. It’s an essential issue in the broader context of nuclear proliferation and nuclear weapons. There can be no significant progress toward nuclear disarmament, in my view, until this issue is dealt with. Just politically, when I go on the stump and talk about Global Zero, the first point anyone says is, how can you be talking about that when we have new nuclear weapons states: North Korea and particularly Iran?

It also has huge implications for the nonproliferation regime. If Iran, a member of the treaty, is able to move through surreptitious and not so surreptitious actions to acquire nuclear weapons, it would be a mortal blow to the regime. And, of course, it has huge implications for U.S. global security leadership. We’ve taken the lead in trying to stop this program, and if we’re not successful it will be a big blow to our future leadership potential.

But the debate on what policy we should follow is usually fueled more by opinion and rhetoric than by facts and reason. We all have views, including me. But in fact we can’t be certain about many of the key factors that should determine our position.

And in particular I’d like to discuss five groups of essential questions. Have they decided to acquire nuclear weapons, and if so how long will it take them to build even a small arsenal and would we know about it? Can pressure alone persuade Iranian leaders to negotiate an agreement that reliably would warn us of a sprint on their part to a bomb? What would constitute an effective military option and what would be its effect on the program? What would be the consequences of exercising that option? And finally, is it better to live with a nuclear armed Iran, or with the consequences of a military action?

So let’s turn to the first, which is the most factual, but publicly there’s not that many facts that are known. Have they already decided to acquire nuclear weapons, and if so how long would it take? Many people would say, of course they’ve decided to do so.

They perceive an existential threat to their regime, that the U.S. and Israel and its allies want to destroy the Islamic Republic, at least as the regime in charge of Iran. They definitely have ambitions in the Middle East and in the broader world that nukes would support. It would give them prestige.
They would be like a member of the Security Council. It would give them bargaining leverage in negotiations. It would give them freedom of maneuver because countries might be deterred from acting conventionally against their provocative actions in the region. And moreover, they have the recent history of Iraq and Libya, non-nuclear countries, regimes overthrown versus North Korea, a nuclear power state, and everyone seems to be accepting that.

And besides that, and to me the most telling argument, is they have proceeded with uranium enrichment far beyond any reasonable assessment of their requirements for their peaceful nuclear program. They have some need for 20 percent enriched uranium, but not the amount that they’re enriching. They don’t have the need now for the lower enriched uranium in the amount they’re enriching. And they seem, according to the IAEA at least, to be conducting experiments on the other prerequisites necessary to build a bomb. So there’s a strong case that yes, of course, they’re trying to build nuclear weapons.

But wait, their declaratory posture, which they repeat endlessly and has some consequences, is that they’re only interested in peaceful uses of nuclear weapons. And it’s hard to change a posture that’s articulated that frequently, unless you have some provocations to point to as the reason for it. This posture has also been enunciated in religious declarations, fatwas. I’m not sure how important that is, and there are different views, who you talk to, whether it matters or not, whether they’ve made such religious statements.

But most importantly, an Iranian leader thinking about building a bomb has to be aware of the huge perils he would be running in that sprint towards the bomb. Israel and the United States have made very clear that we would not tolerate an Iranian nuclear weapon and that we’re prepared to use all instruments of national power to stop it. And unless they could think they could do it totally secretly, they would be in grave danger of military attack. And they certainly would have to calculate that they would suffer at least very substantial damage.

Now my personal view, and let me emphasize these are all views because no one knows the answer to this question, is that they clearly decided long ago to master all the necessary technologies and to acquire all the essential equipment to make a decision to acquire a weapon possible. This was evident as early as the late ’90 when I served on the Rumsfeld Commission. But in all probability, I don’t believe they’ve yet decided whether or not to take those final steps, to actually assemble weapons. Governments, of course, put off difficult decisions until they have to, and there’s no reason for them at this point to make that decision.

So then the second question is, how long would it take them once they did decide? And you can see estimates across the board when you read unclassified literature, but they certainly could have enough 90-plus percent enriched uranium for one to two bombs in a period as short as two months. That seems to be, I think, the best estimate.

But then you have to wait again because just having enriched uranium doesn’t give you a bomb. And it’s not clear from unclassified literature whether they’ve mastered the other skills and components. Do they have an effective design? Well, probably, but we don’t know. Can they machine
highly enriched uranium into the necessary shapes? I notice they have not yet been able to machine their 20 percent enriched uranium into the fuel rods they need for the Tehran reactor. Although they keep claiming they have, we haven’t seen them do that. Have they mastered the triggering mechanisms necessary for an effective weapon? Again, we don’t know any of this.

You all, I’m sure, saw the recent statement by the head of MI6 that it would probably take them two more years, which is a similar estimate to U.S. official estimates of one to two years for a crude device, and more than that for a weapon that could go on a missile. There’s also the question, particularly in view of the North Korean experience, would they want to test a weapon? Would they be confident that whatever they put together would work?

The North Korean’s, as we know, first test seemed to fizzle out. The second test may not have been that great, either. So if you’re an Iranian facing a very hostile world around you, or certainly many hostile powerful countries, you might want to test your device before you actually put yourself in a position to be a declared nuclear power.

So my view, and again strictly a guess, minimum of one year for a crude device, three years for a tested small arsenal, five years for a nuclear armed missile force. So that would give us time to act after they had decided to move to a bomb, if we know that that’s what they were doing, that they were actually building weapons. And the question therefore is, would we know if they began to sprint?

And they certainly have a history of secrecy in this program. They went pretty far in building these enrichment facilities in secret before they were exposed. This shows, you know -- on the other hand various intelligence agencies seem to have penetrated their program fairly well. So we don’t know what the balance is there.

This is the value of the NonProliferation Treaty with inspectors on the ground, at least at their declared facilities. We would know if they suddenly started enriching to weapons grade material or if they started moving materials from the enrichment facilities to secret facilities. They would have to throw out the inspectors, which would be just as sure a sign of what they intended as anything else. So for them to do this in secret without us knowing it, they would have to have a completely – a third completely secret fuel cycle that we don’t know about. And that seems unlikely, to me, given how much intelligence we have.

So my view is that yes, we would know if they began a sprint to a bomb. And so the question is, would we act militarily to stop them and should we act to do so? So that’s kind of the factual questions.

The second question is whether pressure alone: sanctions, threats, covert operations, can persuade Iran’s leaders to negotiate an agreement that reliably would provide ample warning of a sprint to a bomb? U.S. policy and the policy of our allies has been long on demands but short on inducements. We have demanded that they stop their program, stop their enrichment, but we’ve been vague even on when we would lift the sanctions. Essentially the position has been, at least the public position, you stop your program and we’ll consider lifting the sanctions. We have not provided positive inducements to do that.
This policy of pressure alone and ratcheting up pressure certainly seems to have succeeded in bringing them to the table. Can it bring them to an agreement? I don’t think anyone knows that, and I think it’s too early to know that. It’s certainly too early to chalk off the negotiations.

The effective sanctions have only been working for six to 12 months. Though we’ve had sanctions for years and they’ve helped in preventing them from getting certain materials and advanced military capabilities, in terms of hurting the economy it’s really within the last year when we began to act on the financial transactions, insurance transactions, that they’ve begun to hurt. They clearly are beginning to hurt. They talk about it publicly.

Whether this pressure is enough to bring them to an agreement, no one knows. To me, it will do that only if they come to believe, the leadership comes to believe, that the economy is hurting so much and the people are so unhappy that that will threaten the regime’s stability. And if they see that possibility -- and it’s not only the Green Movement in northern Tehran that’s out in the streets, but ordinary Iranians who are hurting economically and hurting so much that they’re unhappy enough to demand a change in the regime -- that they would be willing to reach an agreement.

So then you come to the question of, is such an agreement feasible in principle? And this is easier to answer because I think there’s no question that in principle one is. And essentially it has three elements.

First, of course, it’s a step-by-step agreement. It’s based on our acceptance of their right to enrich uranium, but enrichment only consistent with the requirements of their peaceful nuclear infrastructure. The NPT says you can, you know, do what’s necessary for peaceful uses of nuclear energy. They’re doing way more than what’s necessary.

So that means that they have excess stocks, which need to come out of the country, and particularly of the 20 percent enriched uranium. It means they never have to enrich beyond 20 percent. And so they need to suspend enrichment and draw down their stocks to make it consistent with the actual needs of a peaceful nuclear establishment.

They have plans for a bigger infrastructure and when that happens they can enrich more. But until then, they would have to withdraw. But, we accept their right to do so when it’s required. And this, of course, would be monitored by the IAEA and we can have high confidence of keeping track of those materials.

Secondly, of course they would have to adhere to the prohibition on weapons related experiments that they seem to have been carrying out. And this would have to be verified through the IAEA. But in order to do that, they have to accept the additional protocol to their safeguards agreement. The additional protocol give the IAEA not only the right to inspect declared facilities, but the right to challenge other facilities in which it’s believed they’re conducting nuclear experiments. And that would have to be implemented and strictly enforced as part of the agreement.
And thirdly, as those two measures were being implemented, the U.S. and its allies – beginning with the allies giving – legislation would start lifting sanctions in a step-by-step process, along with their reductions in their stocks and enrichment capabilities commensurate with their true peaceful needs. And I think you can see what an agreement would look like and how it would be implemented. The question is whether they or we are willing to make the compromises necessary to conclude such an agreement.

So if now, we then have to consider the military options. So what would constitute an effective military option and how effective would it be? Some maintain that discrete selective strikes at only a few targets would set back the program significantly. Presumably, such an attack would focus on the enrichment facilities at Natanz and Fordow. It’s a difficult task but probably can be accomplished

But to me, this is like sticking your finger in a beehive, or it’s like going after a king but slapping him instead of chopping off his head. I mean, if you’re going to do this you should do it right. Presumably, we wouldn’t hit the working reactors at Bushehr and the Tehran reactor. But what about the heavy water reactor and the heavy water plant under construction near Iraq? When completed that reactor could produce plutonium, which in fact is much better for missile warheads. So we’d certainly want to get rid of that, so they couldn’t reconstitute quickly.

What about the uranium mines and the uranium conversion facilities that take the uranium, processes the ore and turns it into UF6? What about the sites of the nuclear-related research at the military bases and other research sites? You know, if you want to set them back and if you’re willing to take military action, you want to go all out and take the complete infrastructure out.

Secondly, presumably, we’d want to take down the air defense system first so we wouldn’t suffer losses. Maybe we could do this non-kinetically and have a very advanced system. I don’t know if that’s possible. It might require kinetic action.

What about missile development sites? We’re most concerned about their missiles. We’re going to go after their nuclear infrastructure, we should go after their missile capability.

And finally, shouldn’t we want to head off their possible retaliation with strikes on deployed missiles and support facilities, naval forces and naval bases so they couldn’t try to close the Straits, the IRG command structure and command forces to cripple their ability to strike back at us in Afghanistan or elsewhere? The list of possible targets could go on. And at least a couple of years ago, or a year ago, the advice from the U.S. military, anyway, was that if we were going to do this we should do this in a substantial way requiring essentially thousands of air missions over a period of weeks.

And I agree with that assessment. I mean, if there’s one thing we should have learned from Vietnam to Afghanistan to Iraq, if you’re going to take military action do it right. I’m all with Cap Weinberger and Colin Powell on this point. I think the mistakes we’ve made for decades now has been to try to get away with a military action on the cheap and start with small actions and then gradually escalate and then get trapped into a protracted situation.
So it would be a major military activity and it would be effective. I have no doubt that we could do this and we could shut down the program for years. It would take them years to reconstitute the program. It wouldn’t be a little pinprick if you did it this way.

Then you have to look at what would be the consequences of exercising such an option? As I said, it would have the positive effect of setting back their program, but what about the unintended consequences? And these are possibilities only. I don’t know if they would occur. No one knows. But you have to think of what might happen.

It could be a continuing conflict in the Middle East. Are the Iranians going to be cowed if we unleashed our airpower on them in this big way? Would they essentially say okay, we get the message, we give up?

Would their allies be cowed? Would Hamas, Hezbollah split with them? Hamas appears to have already over the Syrian situation. I don’t know about Hezbollah.

What would be the economic effects? Certainly the price of oil would spike immediately. I mean, it keeps going up day by day just because of the little tensions we see now about closing the Straits. It would go way up.

Would it stay up once it was clear that the U.S. was quite capable of keeping the Straits open? I don’t know. But it’s possible that oil prices could go up and stay up substantially. It would have terrible economic effects on recovery – the economies here and in Europe and elsewhere.

It would clearly have the effect of unifying Iran. Iran seems to be two societies now. I don’t know if you saw the film that won the Academy Award, “The Separation?” It showed the two Iranians.

There’s the westernized Iran. The couple that was at the heart of the film were professionals. They lived in a decent apartment in Tehran. They had a car. They had a kid. The woman wore a tiny little headscarf. She wanted to leave the country because she had a daughter and didn’t want to raise her in that society.

They got in conflict with the housekeeper, a woman they had hired, who was the complete opposite: totally covered head to toe; consulted religious authorities before making any decisions; lived in a completely different circumstances. I have no idea – and I’d love to hear if anyone else does – is Iran split 50-50 among these two groups? Are 90 percent of them westernized, just waiting for us to free them from the Islamic Republic? Or, is it the opposite? Are most people like the people I watched in ’79 when Khomeini came back from France, the millions that were in the streets supporting the regime?

I haven’t seen anything which has reliable information about which Iran it is. But certainly you would think that if there was this massive attack, reinforcing the founding myth of the republic that the West wants to destroy Iran, you would think the population would unify behind the government.
Another thing we know, in terms of an inadvertent conflict, is that a military action would fracture the coalition. Certainly the Chinese and the Russians would have nothing more to do with it. I suspect some of our European allies would say whoa, wait a minute, we didn’t sign up for this. There’s the rule of law and so forth and you guys – unless we had gone to the Security Council and gotten authorization for this, which obviously isn’t going to happen with Russia and China sitting there. So it would fracture the coalition and Tehran would be in a better position to start rebuilding its program, to start rebuilding its armed forces, to start rebuilding its economy and so forth.

And it certainly would have probably or conceivably, I don’t know, could have negative political consequences for the U.S. throughout the Islamic world. Whatever government authorities in these countries would think, no matter how pleased Saudi rules and the UAE rulers would be that we had acted against Iran, they would have to respond to the street, to the people. And if the U.S. attacks yet a third Islamic country in 10 years, it would cause, one would think, great popular unhappiness and these governments would have to put some distance between them and us, at least for a time.

So you have to consider the inadvertent consequences of military conflict. And that brings us to the last question, which is, is it better to live with those consequences that might or might not occur, or with a nuclear armed Iran, presuming they did make this sprint for nuclear weapons?

On the one hand you can argue easily that a nuclear armed Iran is intolerable. It’s an existential threat to Israel because only a few weapons could completely decimate Israel. Many argue its leadership is irrational, suicidal. Would that matter? And even if they weren’t willing to risk a nuclear attack, they would become much more aggressive in terms of pursuing their aims in the Middle East believing that we have these nuclear weapons to avoid strong actions from the U.S. and other countries.

And, of course, the effect on proliferation could be horrendous. The Saudis would certainly act to acquire nuclear weapons, perhaps quickly through their friends in Pakistan. Perhaps it would take them longer. And other countries, such as Turkey or Algeria or who knows who, might also pursue a nuclear weapons capability.

So that’s the argument on one side. But wait, on the other hand are Iranian leaders really irrational and suicidal? They think suicide is great for foot soldiers, but I haven’t noticed any Iranian or al Qaeda or other terrorist group leaders strapping on the vests. It’s for the dopes, right? They put on the vests and the good cause.

Given the size and diversity of Israel’s nuclear arsenal, much less our nuclear arsenal, if Iran ever used a nuclear weapon it would be suicidal, and they would know this. And it would destroy all the hopes, all the aims, all the goals of Iran’s leaders. Their goals to make Persia a world power, certainly a regional power, and a world power would be destroyed. And they know they would be destroyed, even by Israel alone, and certainly if the U.S. joined into retaliation.

If there is anything to the theory of deterrence, if deterrence worked against Soviet and Chinese leaders who were willing to sacrifice to kill millions of their own countrymen, why wouldn’t it work
against Iranian leaders? You can’t have it both ways. If you believe that deterrence won the Cold War, at least prevented nuclear war during the Cold War, you have to believe it would work against Iran.

The U.S. lived under an existential threat, a threat just as bad as the threat to Israel, when the Soviet Union had 10,000 warheads from the mid-60s to the mid-80s, essentially when they were threatening us on a daily basis, making just as fierce statements as Ahmadinejad has been making over the past year. Remember Khrushchev coming to the UN and banging his shoe on the table saying how he was going to destroy us. We were vigilant militarily. We confronted Soviet aggression when it occurred. But we were also unafraid to negotiate with the adversary and to reach agreements with them.

We reached agreements on communications channels to reduce the risks of inadvertent war. We reached agreements on regional conflicts. We reached agreements on economic issues and on human rights. And eventually, the Cold War came to an end.

And we depended on deterrence to prevent nuclear war during that period. So to my mind, it’s long past time to talk to Iran and to provide incentives for agreement and to end this terrible situation before they move toward a nuclear weapon. And with that I’ll stop and hear why I’m all wrong.

(Applause).

MR. HUESSY: I do have one question. Is it not true that deterrence is tough to use if a weapon is used surreptitiously?

MR. BLECHMAN: Certainly. It certainly would be because you wouldn’t know where it came from. But this is a different issue, whether a country which has invested so much to develop a weapon would then trust it with a surrogate?

People often argue that the North Koreans would give a weapon and ship it over here into a U.S. port, for instance. I think it’s unlikely, that having done all this, risked so much to acquire weapons, that the Iranian leadership would hold onto them as tight as they could to the inner circle and not do something like that. But if they did, it certainly would be difficult to know where it came from.

MR. : Right now the U.S. has not shown the will to start a new war. The Iranians are, obviously, fully aware of that, so whatever threat we might put out right now for a deterrent is not working. We are fully aware that they were responsible for the bombing of the Marines barrack in Beirut. It was traced back to the Iranians. The Khobar Towers, the Jewish community – so Iran has been waging a proxy war through their secret service and allies like Hezbollah and Hamas. Whatever we have done so far has not worked. And we basically give them a free pass and we keep giving them a free pass.

MR. BLECHMAN: Well, I would disagree with that. I’m certainly no apologist for the Iranian regime. They’ve done terrible things. And apparently the event yesterday is just the latest in a long series of horrendous things. And they’ve killed many Americans in the Marine barracks, at the embassy, at Khobar Towers through their proxies.
But they have their own – you know, there’s two sides to this war. There’s the assassination of their scientists. There’s our support of Iraq in the war against Iran, including our keeping quiet when they used chemical weapons. Our provision of intelligence. There was the war, the tanker war in the Gulf. The shoot-down of their airliner, an accident, but nonetheless – so there are things on both sides.

I think our threats – I think they have to take our threat seriously. They’d be stupid if they don’t take them seriously. I mean, in a way, Obama was pushed into a corner and made much stronger statements than he had before. He has stated unequivocally that he will not permit Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon at that last meeting with Netanyahu. And they have to take that seriously. We have been deploying more military forces to the Gulf, conducting exercises. I don’t know what they think, but we have acted many times and they should take it seriously.

MR. : Barry, two small changes in emphasis perhaps that I would have that would I think radically alter the outcome of your analysis. The first is you lay a great deal of blame on the West, on the United States, for not laying out inducements to Iran and not being willing to talk. I think it bears revisiting that history, going back to the time of negotiations, the inducements that were laid on the table, the willingness in recent years of this administration to engage with Iran and to lay inducements on the table if the Iranians were serious about negotiations.

And the question fundamentally you have to start with is, they’re the ones who signed the NPT. They’re the ones who signed up to the safeguards regime. They’re the ones who’ve been violating this for about two decades. And how much do we have to offer to get someone to live up to their obligations, as opposed to an offer in a final negotiation? That’s sort of one set of questions.

The other question that I think in terms of a change of emphasis would be, if you went back to 1949 and said with these actions we could eliminate the Soviet nuclear threat, you still might say that deterrence is a better outcome than having engaged in a war on the Eurasian landmass with the Soviet Union. It’s a very different scenario than the situation with respect to Iran. And I think that I would weigh a little differently the negative consequences of a nuclear Iran, particularly with respect to the things that our president has indicated he cares about the most; that is, going to a nuclear free world one day, the opportunity for moderation in the Middle East. I mean, all sorts of things that have nothing to do with Israel, but have to do with our whole concept of the world. If you had the chance to act, and if you felt you could be successful, it would weigh somewhat differently, I think, than a war on the landmass of Eurasia against the Soviet Union.

MR. BLECHMAN: Well I agree with your second point. The consequences of a nuclear Iran are quite severe, and it’s not only the – it goes well beyond their threat to Israel and their ambitions in the Middle East. It certainly, as I said at the beginning, would affect profoundly our nonproliferation goals.

On the first point, I have a different view, because I think there were opportunities during the Bush administration when the P-3 then were negotiating with Iran to reach an agreement which the U.S. was not willing to go toward, which involved lifting sanctions. And then again, in 2002, when the Iranians apparently offered a more wide ranging set of negotiations with us, which we were unwilling to
pick up. The current talks, as I understand them, we have not been willing to say that we will enter into this step-by-step process.

We continue to have the position that you have to suspend your activities, and then we will consider lifting the sanctions; rather than saying okay let’s lay out a series of steps that we each could take which will lead to that kind of scaling way back and inspections verifications of their program in exchange for not simultaneous but a clear pathway toward lifting at least many of the sanctions. I don’t think we’ve come that far. Clinton keeps hinting at it in public statements, but apparently at the table – and again it’s hard to tell from the outside – the P-5 plus 1 haven’t been willing to go that far.

MR. : Do you think it would have made any difference in the long run if Iran had accepted the swap offer in October of 2009 to send out low enriched uranium for fabrication for the Tehran research reactor fuel? That would have reduced Iran’s low enriched stockpile to less than the amount needed to be re-enriched into a nuclear warhead. It looked very good, but of course the Iranians (elected ?) in the long-run to keep on producing the low enriched uranium and have substantial amount more, as it does now. But maybe they screwed up by not accepting this offer at that time. Would it have made a difference?

MR. BLECHMAN: Yeah, it would have made a difference. This is the logical first step. You get rid of the 20 percent, which is the most – which greatly compresses the time to get to weapons grade. And then you can start talking about the rest.

And they screwed up by – you know, they accepted it in Geneva and then it got turned down in Tehran. And that was a function of Iranian politics, because Khamenei had not yet defeated Ahmadinejad, who was posing a threat for power in Tehran. And it was Ahmadinejad’s people that negotiated the agreement and came back and Khamenei said, what part of supreme don’t you understand? I’m negating this agreement. And that was a lost opportunity.

And the current, you know, it’s their internal politics, just like it’s our politics now, I think, that’s keeping us from being more forthcoming on the lifting of the sanctions. You know, the administration does not want to be seen in the least to be weak on Iran. It will harm the re-election campaign. So I think that’s keeping us in a tougher position than is necessary to come to an agreement. And we will probably see this continue through the election.

We’re the victims of our own internal politics. The interesting thing is that in the Cold War, you know, we had all the negative aspects. We had proxy wars. We had covert operations. We had economic warfare. We had threats and nasty diplomacy.

But we also were able to talk to each other, at least beginning in the mid-50s. I mean, Eisenhower sent General Twining, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, to Moscow in the mid-50s to start mil-to-mil exchanges. But for some reason, maybe because politics have become so much more intense than they use to be, it doesn’t seem to be possible.
MS. : (Off mic) – are we planning under the guise of weapons of mass destruction – (off mic) -- why Israel needs to have 200 nuclear weapons for its defense, but no other country with 100 million population or 50 (million) or 20 (million) population should dare to defend themselves? And we are (raising false flag ?) to make an excuse to destroy countries. Iran would never forget World War I when they helped the allies and then the British had a plan to starve all the population – (off mic) – over 30 percent of the population, to starve and totally destroy.

That is an Iranian holocaust. They are forgetting, they are putting it under the rug. But every human being in the world, whether it has anything to do with holocaust or not, they have to pay a huge price. Are we controlling, America, are our politicians controlling America or are we under the influence, a larger massive, for whatever reason, controller – (off mic) – which I have as a medical scientist, I’m not a politician, but I have to have a straightforward answer when I pose my question. We don’t see this larger picture. So what if Iran --

MR. HUESSY: Ma’am I think if you want to give a speech I’ll have you on for a breakfast series, but I think you’ve asked your question and Barry can answer it.

MR. BLECHMAN: There’s a long and nasty history of relations between Iran and the West that goes back to the First World War if not earlier. To my view, it’s time both sides get past that. We each have legitimate grievances. But we need to look to the future and what’s going to happen to the future and where we are now.

Israel developed its nuclear arsenal at a time when it was weak conventionally, apparently, relative to all its neighboring states. It didn’t have peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan and so forth. And it’s a fact of life, but it’s time to move past these historical things and look at the future.

MR. : Thank you very much for an excellent presentation on the pros and cons of military action and living with (a nuclear Iran ?). The second scenario that you didn’t address is this (the Israelis acting alone ?) because the Israelis retain the option. And the second scenario only works – how would you address that possibility?

MR. BLECHMAN: Well, I don’t believe the Israelis have the capability to do the kind of sustained air campaign that I believe is necessary to make a meaningful difference on the Iranian program. The Israelis have the potential to hit a selected number of targets, set back the program a little bit, but then that sets in motion all the negative things. It will isolate Israel more in the world and not achieve its goal, except for a limited period of time. It’s not like Iraq or Syria where they just had to knock out a single reactor. If Israel acts it will act in the hope or expectation that the U.S. will feel compelled to join in and help it out. And I certainly hope they don’t do that.

MR. WILL CURTIS: I’d like to address briefly that fifth option that you presented, because I think when you reveal the history of the Cold War, that relation between the Soviet Union and the U.S. during that period, it’s something that exists that I call nuclear induced rationality. You recall, as Stalin was working on it – (off mic) – we had a negative view of that. Consequently, we take the same course with the Chinese. But it seems to me when you reveal the history of each of those, at one point we’re
arguing that these guys are essentially terrorists. They are aggressive. They’re not risk adverse and they’re crazy.

Once they acquire at least a small arsenal of nuclear weapons, we make the adjustment. That’s what I mean by nuclear induced rationality. Both sides realize that there’s a price to be paid once you develop those systems.

And the idea of rationality – and I guess this gets to the heart of my question – regarding whether or not we can tolerate a nuclear armed Iran. Maybe we can take a lesson from the history of the relationship during the Cold War between the Chinese and the U.S. and Soviet Union. So this idea of rationality in a sense with the Soviet Union – I think both countries, both leaderships, had a western perspective of rationality. I think the doubt now is whether or not deterrence based upon our definition of rationality is different now between our perception of what the definition of rationality is in Iran and the Middle East. So it might be possible, although I don’t advocate this, that nuclear induced rationality may also occur in the leadership of those countries.

MR. BLECHMAN: Well, that’s a whole other subject and deterrence is fraught with risks. You have, for deterrence to work, you have to know who the decision maker is, what the decision maker values. You have to be able to threaten those values credibly. He or she has to receive those threats and believe those threats. And there’s all kinds of things that could go wrong.

So I’d rather not have them have nuclear weapons and not have to run those risks. I mean, you could imagine scenarios where say the Syrian conflict spills over. There’s a war that spills over into Lebanon. Hezbollah is fighting. Israel gets involved. If Iran has nuclear weapons things are escalating. Threats are made. Things get out of control. People don’t believe one another and nuclear weapons are used. As far as I’m concerned, even one use of a nuclear weapon is catastrophic.

MR. CURTIS: I want to make one thing clear, sir. I’m not advocating that.

(Laughter).

MR. HUESSY: Thank you, Barry.

(Applause).