This hearing of the subcommittee will come to

order.

I want to thank everyone for being here. We’re getting started

almost exactly on time, which is a good thing for us to do once in

a while around here.

I’m grateful for this opportunity to chair this hearing, and grateful

to our witnesses for providing their time and their testimony

and their work. I’m also grateful to those in the audience for joining

us today.

I think it’s an understatement to say that we’re witnessing a historic

time in the world, especially as it relates to the change in the

Middle East. We know that, earlier this year, few could have predicted

that the popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt would soon

spread to neighboring countries, such as Libya, Yemen, Bahrain,

and most recently to Syria. The so-called ‘‘Arab Spring’’ has inspired

prodemocracy movements across the region and activists

across the world. Given these momentous political changes, it’s all

the more important that we take a closer look at the status of

democratic reform in Iran, where authoritarian regime forces

continue to repress political opposition activists and commit

deplorable—deplorable—human rights violations against their own

citizens.

Iran’s opposition movement poses perhaps the most significant

challenge to the Islamic regime. And I think that it is the most significant

challenge that we’ve seen since the regime was founded in

1979. The prodemocracy movement gained momentum in the wake

of the 2009 disputed Presidential election, as protestors filled the

streets of Tehran, demanding an end to government oppression and

calling for democratic reforms such as freedom of speech and

assembly—the same freedoms being demanded by scores of

protestors across the Middle East today.

While Iran’s deplorable human rights record predates the postelection

crackdown, the human rights crisis has deepened significantly

in recent years. Since the demonstrations in 2009, security

forces have used live ammunition to suppress protestors, killing at

least seven and arresting more than 600 individuals, according to

Human Rights Watch.

Many of us recall with outrage the horrific death, in 2009, of

Neda Soltan, a young protester shot to death in the streets of

Tehran during the post-election crackdown. Neda is just one of

many innocent victims of the Iranian Government’s relentless use

of force and oppression against Iranian citizens. As we sit here

today, scores of activists are imprisoned for their efforts to bring

political change to Iran.

Let me describe just a few. As you can tell, we don’t have our

posters, yet, with pictures. But, we will have them, momentarily,

to help us to go through and to highlight not just facts and information

about these individuals, but a little bit about what they

actually look like. And I think that that is something we need to

do more often.

The first person that I’ll highlight is Nasrin Sotoudeh, a lawyer

and a women’s rights activist currently serving an 11-year sentence

for her work defending juveniles and women in Iran. She is the

mother of two and has been held in Iran’s notorious Evin Prison

since September 2010. Nasrin has been on hunger strikes three

times to protest her mistreatment, which has increasingly diminished

her health. And her husband has been pressured, threatened,

and detained for advocating for his wife.

Next, the second person that I’ll highlight this morning is Navid

Khanjani, who is a 23-year-old student activist and defender of the

rights of the Baha’i community, Iran’s largest non-Muslim religious

minority, which has been the victim of state-sponsored persecution

since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Navid faces a 12-year prison

sentence, the longest that Iran has given to a human rights activist

for speaking out against the government’s ban against members of

the Baha’i community attending universities. Navid spent 65 days

in Evin Prison, the first 25 of which were in solitary confinement.

He was forced to record false confessions and experience brutal

beatings and torture.

I should also mention that seven members of the Baha’i group,

the Yaran-i-Iran, meaning ‘‘Friends in Iran,’’ were also arrested

and imprisoned 3 years ago. They are currently serving a 20-year

sentence in Evin Prison.

Third, I’ll highlight one more person this morning. And, of

course, we could highlight many, but we don’t have time for hundreds

here today. Mahdieh Golroo, a 25-year-old women’s rights

activist, was imprisoned, along with her husband, in November

2009, after security forces raided their home. After being expelled

from her university and denied her degree, Mahdieh received a 28-

month prison sentence for ‘‘antistate propaganda’’ and ‘‘assembly

and conspiracy to disturb public order.’’ Those are the charges that

have been lodged against her, which she, of course, denies. She is

currently being held in the women’s ward of Evin Prison and has

been repeatedly denied visitation rights and the right to medical

treatment for medical problems, which her family says pose serious

dangers to her health. She, too, has gone on multiple hunger

strikes to protest her treatment.

So, these are just a few—very few—of those who are suffering in

Iranian prisons as we speak, as we gather here today, with all the

freedoms we enjoy in this country.

Now more than ever, the United States must stand in support

of these brave activists, just as we supported the courageous political

dissidents, like Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Andre Sakharov,

who spoke out against the repressive Soviet regime. It is our duty

to bear witness to the truth of the plight of the Iranian opposition,

and signal our unwavering support for their ongoing struggles

against this repressive regime.

The United States must also work with the international community

to hold the Iranian regime accountable for human rights

abuses. In 2010, I introduced a bipartisan resolution calling for a

renewed focus on the Iranian regime’s violations of internationally

recognized human rights, as found in the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights. The United Nations establishment, in March, of a

Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran is a welcome step,

but more needs to be done to address these serious concerns that

we all have. People from both political parties and from all walks

of life have these very serious concerns.

In September 2010, the administration sanctioned eight Iranian

officials determined to have committed serious human rights

abuses in the post-2009 crackdown. And I was pleased to see the

addition of the Tehran prosecutor, Abbas Dowlatabadi, and the

commander, Reza Naqdi, in February of this year.

However, as I and Senator Menendez and Senator Cardin wrote

in a letter to Secretary Clinton on April 20, we must enhance our

efforts to prioritize the humane treatment of the Iranian people

through the framework of existing United States sanctions on Iran.

The European Union’s recent sanctioning of 32 regime officials involved

in human rights abuses, including asset freezes and travel

bans, is a welcome development. And we should continue to work

with our European partners to ratchet up the pressure on the

regime.

The United States can assist the Iranian opposition movement by

enacting measures to prevent the Iranian Government’s suppression

of electronic communication. International companies have reportedly

provided goods and technologies, including cell phone monitoring

equipment and Web-spying capabilities that help the regime

suppress Iranian citizens. I firmly support current and future

efforts to hold these companies accountable and to help prodemocracy

forces in Iran circumvent the regime’s efforts to disrupt and

prevent their communications with activists in Iran and around the

world.

Let me be unequivocally clear. The United States must continue

to engage our international partners to find ways to support the

democratic movement in Iran and to hold the Iranian regime

accountable to its international human rights obligations. We must

not be reluctant to support political activists who are courageous

enough to demonstrate in the face of extreme government repres-

sion. The United States has a moral obligation—let me say that

again—the United States has a moral obligation to stand in support

of the Iranian people’s struggle for democracy.

Today’s first panel will include testimonies from two State

Department officials who deal with these issues on a daily basis.

Michael Posner is the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy,

Human Rights, and Labor. He leads the State Department’s

comprehensive efforts to support Internet freedom around the

world, an initiative that I strongly support. And, before joining the

administration, he was the executive director, and then president,

of Human Rights First.

Next we have, from the administration as well, Mr. Philo Dibble

who is Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern

Affairs and a career member of the Foreign Service. He has

served in the Near East Affairs Bureau since 2003.

I look forward to hearing both of their testimonies today about

how we assess the political strength of the opposition movement in

Iran, ways the administration is working to highlight human rights

abuses there, and steps we can take to support democratic reform

in the country.

Now, our second panel includes three individuals with intimate

knowledge of the political environment inside of Iran.

Mr. Kambiz Hosseini is a cohost of ‘‘Parazit’’, which is the popular

Persian-language satirical television show broadcast on Voice

of America’s Persian service. Launched prior to the 2009 election,

it is a reference to the Iranian Government’s repeated attempts to

jam foreign satellite programming.

Mr. Andrew Apostolou is a senior program manager at Freedom

House, where he chairs the Iran Strategy Task Force, which serves

to formulate new approaches to the United States foreign policy on

Iran, with a focus on human rights.

And finally, Ms. Rudi Bakhtiar is communications director for

the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, an organization

that seeks to gather support for human rights activists and

defenders in Iran. She is also an Iranian-American journalist who

has over 10 years of experience working for international news

networks.

I welcome all of our panelists today and look forward to hearing

their assessment of how the U.S. Government can work to support

democratic reform in Iran.

And now I will move to our first witness for an opening statement.

I know that, as members come in, we’ll have not only questions

from members, but we may have some statements, as well.

But, let’s move, first, to Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy,

Human Rights, and Labor, Michael Posner.

Your statement will be submitted. As would be

true of anyone submitting a statement today, your full statement

will be made part of the record.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Dibble.

Thank you very much. And I appreciate both of

your testimonies, as well as your expression of solidarity that you

just outlined.

I want to make sure that we properly identify the pictures that

were put up after my opening statement.

The first picture on the audience’s left and my right, is the gentleman

I spoke about before, Navid Khanjani. Again, he’s a 23-

year-old student activist and defender of the rights of the Baha’i

community in Iran.

Next to him, closer, on my right, on your left, is the first individual

I spoke of, Nasrin Sotoudeh, who is a lawyer and women’s

rights activist currently serving an 11-year sentence for her work

defending juveniles and women in Iran. She’s, of course, being held

in Evin Prison, as I mentioned before.

And then, finally, on my left, your right, is the third individual

I mentioned, Mandieh Golroo, a 25-year-old women’s rights activist

who was imprisoned, along with her husband, in November 2009,

after security forces raided their home.

So, that’s just a very limited spotlight on real people suffering

the most brutal kind of repression that any of us could imagine.

And that’s one of the main reasons we’re here this morning: those

individuals, who have given, in some cases, some people in the

streets gave their lives, but also those who have been imprisoned

and have given up their rights, have been forced to do things we

can’t even imagine in this country.

So, let me get to the questions for our panelists.

You both highlighted some of the actions the administration has

taken in response to the Iranian regime’s human rights violations.

And I’m reading from the prepared statement that, as you said, is

a fuller statement of your testimony. You assert here that the

administration’s efforts to address Iranian human rights abuses

have been both consistent and sustained, that the administration

has provided training and tools, and has trained 5,000 activists,

and you also mention the help on technology. So, there is a lot

happening.

But, here is one of the concerns that I have, and I think this is

shared by a lot of people. We need to know who, in the U.S. Government,

is taking the lead on this. I know the State Department

plays a role, and I know the National Security Council plays a role,

but who is the lead on this? Because like anything else in life, unless

there is one person or one office charged with the overall responsibility,

I think there will be some concerns that will continue.

Well, I’d urge you to keep that up and to amplify

it, because repetition is very, very important here in Washington,

and, I think, around the world. And, if anything, we need to see

more repetition, more emphasis.

I know that, on March 24, the U.N. Human Rights Council

decided to take action against Iran, through the establishment of,

as you and I both highlighted, the Special Rapporteur to investigate

and report on human rights abuses in the country. The resolution

was the first new country-specific mandate for monitoring

human rights since the Council was established, in 2006.

How will the establishment of this Rapporteur in Iran help pressure

the regime to abide by its international obligations to uphold

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

Sure.

Tell us more about how this individual will work.

It is a significant achievement that this action was taken. But, tell

us more about the how and the when. When will that person be

operational in terms of what they’ll be able to do on the ground?

Can they get on the ground in Iran, itself? If we’re saying that this

person is the individual that’s going to help pressure the regime to

abide by its international obligations, what kind of tools and

support will this person have, and how will that authority be

exercised?

I want to move to sanctions. But, I’m a little bit

over time. I know that Senator Udall has joined us.

Senator Udall, do you want to use this time for your questions?

Senator Udall, thank you very much.

We are joined by Senator Risch, the ranking member of the

subcommittee.

And next we’ll go to Senator Shaheen.

Thanks very much.

Before I get to the issue of sanctions, I want to ask you a threepart

question.

The first one would be to give us a report, in a sense—and I

know it would be just by way of a summary—but a report on how

you think the sanctions are impacting the regime’s behavior, if you

could provide some sense of that.

And then, second, I wanted to ask you a followup question about

areas that we can pursue, statutory change or otherwise, that

would enhance and strengthen already existing or underway sanctions.

And I have a third question, as well.

But first, from either or from both of our witnesses, it would be

helpful to have a sense of how you think the sanctions are impacting

the regime.

Mr. Posner, anything you want to add to that?

I just want to highlight one letter. And I know

that our government has already designated 10 individuals, and

the Europeans have a list of some 32. But, I wanted to just highlight,

for the record, a letter dated April 20, that Senator Menendez

and Senator Cardin and I sent to the State Department; in particular,

with a list of 12 individuals in Iran, in both the military

and law enforcement area of their government. And I just want to

provide a friendly reminder, that that letter is still in need of a

response. I’m not quibbling about the timing. But, I think that we

have to have a response to that, because a concern that I have is

that there are things we can do, in addition to what’s already been

done. And I want to see those move forward.

Our ranking member, Senator Risch, has some questions.

Thank you, Senator Risch.

Senator Shaheen.

I just have one final question. I know we’re going

to be moving to our second panel. The question is on Camp Ashraf.

According to the U.N., 34 residents at Camp Ashraf in Iraq, near

the Iranian border, were killed in early April. I’ll ask one or both

of you to speak to that issue. What is the U.S.’s position on that

issue?

Well, I thank you both for your presence here

today, and for your testimony.

We’ll have questions for the record, as well. And that record will

be open for members of the committee.

I think we’ll move to our second panel.

Thank you.

Well, thank you very much. We have our second

panel. And we’re grateful for our witnesses.

Each of you, as you might have heard me say before, will have

your full statements be made part of the record. If you can summarize,

as best you can, your statement, that would be helpful.

Ms. Bakhtiar, if we can start with you. And I

appreciate your being here with us, and for your testimony.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Apostolou.

Thanks very much.

Mr. Hosseini.

Thank you very much.

We’re so grateful to each of you for your appearance today and

for your testimony. We are reminded that, when we confront a

challenge this difficult, in terms both what the Iranian people are

up against and the international response, government alone, and

governments alone, cannot solve this problem or provide the kind

of help that we need. So, those who are outside of government and

are providing the kind of testimony and advocacy that you’ve

already demonstrated, whether your expertise is in communications

or in public policy or in the arts or other ways to communicate,

it’s critically important.

And, for each of you, whoever would want to respond to this—

I don’t necessarily direct it at any one person—but, how would you

assess, right now, the strength, or the status, maybe is a better

word, of the Green Movement today? And just give us kind of your

sense of where things are. Because, of course, for many Americans,

the coverage, in June 2009, was significant. There are some other

events that played out in that same time period that, at least in

my judgment, watching it and remembering it, started to push the

story off the television, I think, unfortunately, at the time. But, I

wanted to get your sense of where things are today.

Thank you, Ms. Bakhtiar.

Would either of our two other witnesses like to comment on this?

By way of followup, before I move to Senator

Risch, that last point you made, I think is very important. I said,

at the time, and I think I’ve said it a number of times since then,

that even though we didn’t see people on the streets, month after

month, and we didn’t have a lot of coverage of it, that I’ve always

believed that, once something stirs in someone’s heart and they

want to take action, just because they’re not on the streets every

day, doesn’t mean that there isn’t a movement. It might be quieter,

it might be more repressed, but it’s still there. And I think there’s

plenty of evidence to show that.

And I think we also, here in the United States, tend to underestimate

how difficult it is to start and to take action and to sustain

what we’ve seen both in Iran, as well as in Tunisia and Egypt and

Syria, among other places that we could mention.

I have a few other questions, but we’ll move to Senator Risch.

Thanks very much.

I wanted to ask a question in reference to testimony provided to

us this morning by Mr. Hosseini. On page 2 of your testimony—

and you highlighted part of this in your summary of the testimony—

you say, and I’m quoting, ‘‘We have over 428,000 fans, just

on Facebook where they leave comments proactively and communicate

with us in a manner that sometimes makes us think that

they are producing the show and we are their audience. Our broadcasts

reach Persian-speaking audiences in Iran, in the entire Persian-

speaking world, including the large Iranian diaspora outside

of Iran.’’ That’s from your statement.

And I’d ask you, based upon all of that interaction that you have,

what advice do you have for us to be able to keep making the case,

not just against the regime, but about the moral gravity of this

challenge that we face? Because sometimes bills and legislation

and action here doesn’t translate very well, and we often don’t communicate

very well. And I just want to get your sense of how you

see this challenge, from your vantage point.

And you purposefully named the show ‘‘Parazit’’,

which means ‘‘static.’’ Tell me about that, in terms of the thematic

underpinning of that name, why you chose it, and how it’s so

relevant.

You’re obviously reaching a lot of people in a

very direct way, and especially young people. What do you see as

the main impediment that you confront to making your audience

even bigger? Is there a mechanical impediment, or is it more complicated

than that?

And you obviously think some of them are persuadable,

to use a word in our lexicon. Yes?

And even some—a good number who may have

been supporters of Ahmadinejad in the past?

I’d ask the same question to the other two witnesses.

Is there anything you can tell us about this communications

challenge, and what is the best strategy?

OK.

Well, thank you all for your testimony.

Is there anything else that you’d like to say before we conclude?

We’re just about ready to wrap up, and I want to give you that

opportunity—I know that there are a number of things we did not

cover. But, is there anything you wanted to say before we go?

Thank you very much.

And I know that the Congress has more work to do, and the

administration has more work to do, even though you could point

to progress in both branches of government. But, we have more to

do. And this hearing today, and your testimonies, will give us, not

just inspiration, but also the information that we need to move forward.

And we look forward to working with you as we move into

a new chapter.

And we have to do everything we can to meet the moral obligation

we have, and also to recognize that, what happened in June

2009, and leading up to June 2009, has changed that country forever,

even though we may not see daily manifestations of it on our

television sets. But, I think what’s stirred in the hearts of people

in that country have changed it forever. And we’ve got to make

sure that we’re providing even more tools and more strategies to

allow what is in the hearts of the people to be able to be fully realized.

And I look forward to working with you on that.

Thank you very much, and we’re adjourned.