Well, I thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for

scheduling this very important hearing, and I join you in welcoming

our distinguished witnesses.

I hope that their insights will give us a better understanding of

the impact of United States policy and the efforts of the international

community in confronting the Iranian threat.

As a personal aside, as I see Ambassador Pickering, I am reminded

of his rescue of Senator Sam Nunn and me from problems

at the Moscow airport, but that is a long story. I appreciate it,

nonetheless.

And likewise, Karim Sadjadpour has been so helpful at our congressional

Aspen Institute conferences in which we have discussed

Iran. He has brought his insights, together with 20 members of

both houses, and we appreciate that.

I said at our last hearing in December on Iran that Iran was a

direct threat to United States national security, the security of our

close ally Israel, and other United States interests in the region.

That situation persists today. Iranian intransigence toward fulfilling

its international obligations with respect to its nuclear program

continues.

Iran’s parliamentary elections on March 2 were boycotted by opposition

candidates and reformers, and the election results appear

to embolden Iran’s hard-liners. Even as its isolation grows, little

has changed in Iran.

Democratic movements across the Middle East and North Africa

gave voice to the demands for democratic pluralism and respect for

the rule of law and human rights, but the Iranian regime continues

its brutal repression of journalists, political activists, students, and

trade unionists.

Moreover, it continues its persecution of Christian pastor, Yousef

Nadarkhani, who faces execution because of his religious beliefs.

Iran’s support for the regime in Syria, where the death toll has

surpassed 8,000 people, has enabled President Assad to pursue his

deadly campaign of attacks against the Syrian people.

Outside Iran, the political posture of many of Iran’s neighbors

has changed and with it, perhaps, their inclination to respond

to Iran’s acquisition of nuclear capability by seeking their own

weapons.

Four years ago, I commissioned a staff report entitled ‘‘Chain

Reaction: Avoiding a Nuclear Arms Race in the Middle East,’’ to

assess the risks of nuclear proliferation in this volatile region

should Iran get a nuclear weapon. It reviewed the history of nuclear

proliferation and focused on three countries—Saudi Arabia,

Egypt, and Turkey.

That report expressed grave concerns about a Middle East arms

race, and I will be interested to learn our witnesses’ views on this

proliferation dynamic.

In order to confront the threat posed by Iran to our national

security, our interests in the region, and the security of Israel, I

continue to believe that our challenge lies in the achievement of an

international consensus that presents the Iranian regime with the

plain choice between pursuing its nuclear weapons program or preserving

the economic viability of the country.

In December, the Senate unanimously passed an amendment to

the Defense Authorization Act sanctioning those institutions doing

business with the Central Bank of Iran, which lies at the center

of Iran’s efforts to circumvent multilateral sanctions. I am hopeful

about reports suggesting that these and other sanctions are beginning

to bite. I am also encouraged by the news that certain European

Union countries and Japan have significantly reduced their

crude oil imports from Iran, and that the United States and its

international partners are working with other importing countries

to further cut off the Iranian regime’s lifeblood derived from its oil

revenues.

I have repeatedly urged the Obama administration to lessen our

own need for foreign oil imports by permitting such things as the

construction of the Keystone XL pipeline from Canada. Although

the United States imports no oil directly from Iran, the more non-

Iranian oil on the global oil market, the more there is for others

seeking alternatives to Iran’s crude.

The Energy Department says Keystone would help lower gas

prices for Americans, and it would give the United States more

flexibility in a crisis. All options in the Iranian crisis remain on the

table.

The fundamental question for United States policymakers is

whether a sanctions regime can be imposed that will verifiably stop

Iran’s nuclear weapons program. Can we say that sanctions are

having the intended effect of inducing change in Iran’s behavior?

I’ll be interested to hear our witnesses address this question

because it is, I believe, the fundamental issue. If a cornerstone of

our current policy is sanctions, it seems to me incumbent to ask:

Are they working and are they being used to good effect?

I thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for this hearing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just following up this thought of existential angst, you have

mentioned one specific idea that could be used to reach out to the

Iranian people, and that is the Voice of America Persian language

service. Now if that was to be beefed up, and I gather from your

testimony that you feel not much is happening there, and it is

worth our committee taking a look into, what would the messages

of our broadcasts be?

In other words, if we were to try to improve our image among

the Iranian people, the 20 million listeners or what have you, what

would we say?

Well, let us say they do begin to communicate.

Are we hopeful then that the Iranian public or elements of it,

young people or whoever, come out into the streets, that they

decide simply that they have had enough and this becomes irrepressible?

What is the scenario for making any difference to

Khamenei with regard to his situation?

Ambassador Pickering, if, in fact, Voice of America

Persian was revived and these messages were getting to the

public, granted that, as Karim has pointed out, the people might

not come out into the streets. Perhaps not quite ready for that.

But how does that affect your point four of this diplomacy situation

if all of this is going on as we have revived something very

different and are obviously going after Iranian public opinion with

the thought of potential regime change?

Yes?

Thank you.

Thank you very much.

I have just one final question. I mentioned in my opening

remarks that sometimes the thought is expressed that the Iranian

program could trigger other countries in the Middle East to feel

that in terms of their own defense or prestige or for a variety of

other reasons, including maybe the continuity of their own regimes,

they ought to develop nuclear weapons programs.

Is that a realistic assumption, or is it simply a debating tool? Or

do you have any judgment as to technically or financially or foreign

policywise whether it is likely—and I don’t want to name countries

for fear of being accused of at least impugning their situations.

There are some candidates at least often mentioned. But as a general

principle, is the proliferation idea a valid one?

General Cartwright.

Well, I thank you each for those responses because

this is, I suspect, another avenue of diplomacy that is related

to Iran, which we are discussing today, but also clearly pertains to

longer term objectives of security for our country, as well as for our

friends in the Middle East.

Do you have any further questions, Senator Shaheen?

Well, we just thank you all very, very much. This has been a tremendous

hearing, tremendously informative for us and we hope for

citizens of the country who have been listening to you and to the

responses to our questions.

And the hearing is now adjourned.