

# THE STATUS OF AMERICAN HOSTAGES IN IRAN

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## HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

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## **THE STATUS OF AMERICAN HOSTAGES IN IRAN**

**MARCH 7, 2019**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA,  
AND INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 1:33 p.m., in Room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Theodore E. Deutch (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. DEUTCH. This hearing will come to order. I start by asking unanimous consent that the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Waltz, be allowed to sit on the dais and participate in today's hearing. Without objection, so ordered.

Welcome, nice to have you with us.

This hearing, entitled "The Status of American Hostages in Iran," will allow members of the Levinson, Namazi, and Zakka families to share information about their loved ones who remain imprisoned or missing in Iran. The hearing will also help subcommittee members examine how Congress can both hold Iran accountable for its actions and advance efforts to bring detained American citizens and legal residents home.

Without objection, all members may have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous materials for the record subject to the length limitations in the rules. I will offer an opening statement and then turn it over to the ranking member, Mr. Wilson, for his opening statement.

I want to welcome our witnesses. I am heartbroken to see you back at this table. I thank each of you for your courage and for your advocacy. It is my goal to have this be the last hearing like this that we do together. I want to acknowledge all the families, the family members that are here today in the audience and if you would, I would ask you to stand.

Please know that we see you and we support you and we thank you for being here. You may be seated, thanks.

I thank the ranking member for his partnership. In conjunction with today's hearing, Ranking Member Wilson and I are introducing a number of related legislative efforts. We would welcome the support of all members of the subcommittee.

Saturday will mark the 12th anniversary of the disappearance of Robert Levinson from Iran's Kish Island. Bob was last seen at his hotel on March 9th, 2007. Bob is a patriot. Bob devoted 30 years to serving his country, first with the DEA and then a quarter cen-

tury with the FBI. Bob is a husband of 40 years. He is a father of seven. He is a grandfather of six, five of whom he has never met.

Bob is my constituent and a part of our community back in Coral Springs, Florida. Bob is not at home enjoying his retirement and his family because of Iran. In the days after Bob disappeared, Iranian State TV reported he was in government custody, yet the story soon changed. To this day, Iran's leaders refuse to acknowledge it is responsible for Bob's disappearance.

The regime has never fulfilled its repeated promises of assistance on locating and returning Bob. To echo my former Florida colleague, Senator Bill Nelson, who fought on behalf of the Levinson family for a decade, "If Iran does not have Bob, they know who does and where to find him." Bob Levinson is the longest-held American hostage. Today, Mr. Wilson and I introduce the Bob Levinson Hostage-Taking Accountability Act that strengthens U.S. Government policy on hostage taking and authorizes sanctions on those who engage in hostage taking.

Today, we are joined by Bob's wife, Christine, and three of his seven children, Sarah, Dan, and Doug. We thank them and their four siblings, Susan, Stephanie, Samantha, and David for their strength and for their advocacy. I have gotten to know the Levinsons over the past 9 years I have been in Congress. They are remarkable. I am grateful to know them and I wish that I did not have to know them under these circumstances.

Doug and Dan have each sat at this witness table where their mother sits today. We cannot and we must not convene another hearing where we sit across from a member of this family. Iran's despicable practice of holding Americans and other foreign nationals hostage should not be tolerated by any responsible nation.

Today we will hear from Babak Namazi about the horrific conditions his brother and father have faced since they were imprisoned in 2015 and 1916, respectively. Siamak detained first followed by his father Baquer, a former United Nations official, is in his 80's. Baquer's health has dramatically deteriorated since his detention. Siamak and Baquer were sentenced to 10 years in prison at a sham trial, their appeals repeatedly denied. Baquer should not spend the rest of his life in prison. He and Siamak must be released immediately and returned to their family.

The subcommittee first heard from Omar Zakka when he was still in high school. Omar's father, Nizar, is a U.S. legal permanent resident and a Lebanese citizen. Nizar is an IT professional who was invited to Iran to participate in an IT conference. Let me say that again. He was invited to the country and then detained. Nizar has been in prison since 2015 and his physical state has weakened. Like the Namazis, he was sentenced to 10 years in a sham trial in 2016.

And these families are not the only families suffering. There are other Americans in Iran. Xiyue Wang is a doctoral student at Princeton who went to Iran to do research for his dissertation. He was arrested on bogus charges and sentenced to 10 years in Iran's notorious Evin Prison.

I would note that just months ago, Iran also arrested Michael White, a U.S. Navy veteran, in July. White was beaten, has no money to hire a lawyer, and still does not know if any charges are

filed against him. White is a former cancer patient and his health is worsening. Furthermore, there are Canadians and Brits and French detained in Iran. It is disgusting the way that this regime disregards the human rights of its own people and of foreign nationals.

Hostage taking is a violation of international law. For the Levinsons, they have now worked with three U.S. administrations; the rest of the families are on their second. They encounter the same problems time after time, well-meaning officials who run into bureaucratic hurdles, geopolitical shifts in our relations with Iran and, worst of all, being left behind when others come home.

This administration has taken pride in its ability to bring Americans home, but I am concerned that the withdrawal from the JCPOA, the heightened rhetoric, and lack of contact with any Iranian officials may slow down efforts to return these Americans to their families. But I urge the administration and I urge President Trump to sit down with each of these families, hear their stories, understand their suffering, and then take bold action to return their loved ones.

And I will turn it over to the ranking member, Mr. Wilson, for his opening statement.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Chairman Ted Deutch. I want to thank you for holding this important hearing today. I am grateful to work with you on this subcommittee on such critical issues. You have long fought for the release of Americans unjustly held in Iran and I have been particularly inspired by your hard work highlighting the case of your constituent, Robert Levinson, who disappeared in Iran in 2007.

Sadly, today is the 12th anniversary of his disappearance. I hope that together we can continue the bipartisan tradition of the committee of elevating these tragic cases as you and the former chairman of the subcommittee, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, have been so successful in raising this issue in the past.

Ms. Levinson, Mr. Namazi, Mr. Zakka, thank you for being here today to share your stories of your loved ones. None of us can imagine what your families go through every single day. Your testimony today will give Congress and the American people a small window into the imaginable reality that you face each day.

Iran is currently holding at least eight Americans and dual U.S.-Iranian nationals on trumped up charges that amount to clear and definitive hostage taking. At least nine other individuals with British, French, Australian, and Canadian nationality are also being held by the regime. This is unfortunately not the first time this subcommittee has held a hearing on Iran's hostages.

Iran's taking of hostage in exchange for political or financial concessions is morally reprehensible. It is symbolic of Iran's outrageous disregard for international law and basic human decency. It goes hand in hand with the regime's designation as the foremost State sponsor of terrorism in the world. We need to see additional pressure and sanctions specifically against Iranian individuals and entities responsible for detaining the family members of our witnesses here today. Iran has been taking hostages as a matter of policy and we must force Iran to change its behavior. We need to see an intense, concerted effort from Congress and the administra-

tion to seek the release of our Americans who are being held in Iran.

I am grateful to join Chairman Deutch as the lead Republican on two important pieces of legislation introduced today, including a resolution that will be calling for the immediate release of Mr. Levinson, Siamak and Baquer Namazi, and Nizar Zakka. With all three are U.S.—and all other U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, and foreign nationals which are being held in Iran. The other crucial measure that will be introduced would impose sanctions on any foreign person responsible for or complicit in the unlawful detention abroad of a U.S. national.

It is time for Iran and other rogue regimes to pay the price for taking American hostages. I urge this committee to take up the bills as soon as possible. And, hey, I know they will with Chairman Deutch. Thank you again for the extraordinary and brave and courageous witnesses who are here today. We look forward to your testimony. I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Wilson.

I will now introduce the witnesses. Mrs. Christine Levinson is the wife of Robert Levinson; Mr. Babak Namazi is the brother of Siamak Namazi and the son of Baquer Namazi; and Mr. Omar Zakka is the son of Nizar Zakka.

Mrs. Levinson, you are recognized. Witnesses please limit your testimony to 5 minutes and, without objection, your written statements will be made a part of the record. Thanks again for being here.

Christine, Mrs. Levinson.

#### **STATEMENT OF CHRISTINE LEVINSON, WIFE OF ROBERT LEVINSON**

Mrs. LEVINSON. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of this committee, my name is Christine Levinson. I am the wife of Robert “Bob” Levinson, an American held by the Iranian Government. My husband is the longest-held hostage in American history. If I had my choice I would not be sitting here before you to give the testimony I am about to give. I would sitting at home with my husband by my side. I am only here out of necessity.

My husband, Bob, has been a hostage for 12 years. Despite trying to get him home by every means possible, I am absolutely no closer than I was when he first went missing on March 9th, 2007. I hold the Iranian Government responsible, but I believe the U.S. Government is at fault as well. Bob was taken nearly 12 years ago to this day on Kish Island, Iran.

Since that time, my family and I have had no direct contact with him. A few years ago we received a video of him as a hostage pleading for help of the U.S. Government, then we received photos of him wearing an orange jumpsuit. We have been unable to obtain any information on what needs to be done to return Bob home. All the facts of this case tell us that the Iranian authorities kidnapped my husband.

I have been to Kish Island. I believe it would be impossible for the Iranian Government not to know what happened to Bob. We have confirmed that he made it to his hotel on Kish on March 8th,



2007, and left the hotel the next day. But his name was nowhere to be found on the passenger manifest for the flight returning to Dubai.

Additionally, the FBI assessment of the video and photos we received years later concluded that the Iranian Government had to have developed them and sent them to us. The FBI also has a \$5 million reward that remains unclaimed. The evidence is so conclusive that the United Nations released an opinion in 2016 holding Iran responsible for Bob's continued deprivation of liberty, yet Iran has been allowed to feign ignorance over and over again with absolutely no consequences from the U.S.

My family's dreams of reuniting with Bob continue to remain just dreams. We believe he is alive and we continue to receive reports that he is alive. At this time, there is mounting urgency for his health and well-being. Every moment is of the essence for Bob, who turns 71 this Saturday. After three very different Presidential administrations, we are no closer to bringing Bob home than we were when we started. We have nothing. There have been some dedicated people from various government agencies on the front lines of Bob's case working hard to get him home. We are deeply grateful to them.

At the same time, we have experienced shocking dysfunction from our other officials. It became clear to me early on that major government bodies were not even talking to each other about the case. In the past, statements and misstatements to the media by U.S. officials about Bob's status questioning if he is alive or in Iran have severely undercut the efforts to hold Iran accountable. We know this because Iranian authorities have thrown these wrong statements back in our faces.

The Iranians still regularly point to a statement made in error by the White House several years ago that Bob was not in Iran. That was wrong. But the U.S. Government gave Iran an excuse not to send Bob home. And in January 2016, when other American hostages were released and Bob was left behind, the U.S. Government let Iran get away with it. My husband served this country tirelessly for decades. He deserves better from us and from our government.

In addition to being a patriot, Bob is an incredible husband and father. We have raised seven children together. When our youngest daughter gets married in just 2 months, it will be the last daughter he has the opportunity to walk down the aisle, and everyone knows how important that is to a dad. Not a day or week goes by that I do not get a phone call from one of my children saying how much they miss Bob and struggle without him.

We are all suffering a living nightmare. We wonder endlessly what kind of conditions my husband is living through. We know how deeply he must ache physically and spiritually from being away from us for so long, by being away from anyone he knows and loves with absolutely no human rights. What kind of hell must he be living in that both our government and Iranian authorities have allowed him to live in for so long?

I want to close my testimony by asking each of you to imagine how devastated you would feel being ripped away from your family with no contact with your loved ones and no contact with the out-

side world. My husband has been held captive for 4,381 days. That is 12 years this Saturday, without his family. Imagine how alone he must feel. We need your help.

Today, Congressman Deutch and Senators Menendez and Rubio introduced the Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery Hostage-Taking Accountability Act. I cannot thank them enough for their continued support for Bob and our family. I truly hope this will be something that brings Bob home. But when Saturday's anniversary passes and the media attention immediately shifts, a different issue will take the priority and we will again feel like we have this immense burden alone. Without you we cannot succeed. Please help my family to get Bob home. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mrs. Levinson follows:]

**Christine Levinson: Written Testimony for House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa and International Terrorism Hearing "The Status of American Hostages in Iran"**

**March 7th, 2019**

Mister Chairman, Ranking Members, and distinguished members of this committee,

My name is Christine Levinson. I am the wife of Robert "Bob" Levinson, an American held by the Iranian government. My husband is the longest held hostage in American history.

If I had my choice, I would not be sitting before you to give the testimony I am about to give. I would be sitting at home, with my husband by my side. I am only here out of necessity. My husband Bob has been a hostage for twelve years, and, despite trying to get him home by every means possible, I am absolutely no closer than I was when he first went missing on March 9, 2007. I hold the Iranian government responsible, but I believe the US government is at fault as well.

Bob was taken nearly 12 years to this day, on Kish Island, Iran. Since that time, my family and I have had no direct contact with him. In the past twelve years, we have received a video of him as a hostage pleading for the help of the United States government, and photos of him wearing an orange jumpsuit. We have been unable to obtain any information on what needs to be done to return Bob home.

My family and I believe that the government of Iran is responsible for my husband's disappearance and continued detention. All the facts of the case indicate they kidnapped my husband. I have been to Kish Island. I believe that it would be impossible for the Iranian government not to know what happened to Bob. The hotel and flight manifests show that he made it to his hotel on Kish on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007. By seeing his distinct signature on the hotel registry, I know he left the hotel on March 9<sup>th</sup>, but flight manifests back to Dubai do not have his name on them. Additionally, the FBI assessment of the video and photos that we received years later concluded that the Iranian government had to have developed them and sent them to our family. The FBI also has a five million dollar reward that remains unclaimed.

The evidence has been so conclusive that the United Nations released an opinion in 2016 holding Iran responsible for Bob's "continued deprivation of liberty."

It is clear to me from multiple conversations with Iranian officials that this is a government to government case. Over the past twelve years, we have received no meaningful assistance from the Iranian government other than allowing us to go to Iran to retrace Bob's steps on Kish Island. Iran has been allowed to feign ignorance over and over again – with absolutely no repercussions from the US.

My family's dreams of re-uniting with Bob continue to remain just dreams. We believe he is alive, and we continue to receive reports that he is alive. At the same time, there is mounting urgency for his health and well-being. Every moment is of the essence for Bob, who turns 71 this Sunday.

After three very different US presidential administrations, we are no closer to bringing Bob home than we were when we started. We have nothing.

Time and time again, Bob has been left behind, deprioritized, or seemingly forgotten. This has not been the fault of a single person or administration in our government, but instead has become a systemic failure of this government's ability to uphold our nation's values.

There have been some dedicated people from various government agencies on the front lines of Bob's case, working hard to get him home. We are deeply grateful to them. At the same time, we have experienced shocking dysfunction from our officials at multiple points over the past twelve years, from the very first days Bob was taken. In the first years of his disappearance, it became clear to me that major government bodies were not even talking to each other regarding his case. Some past statements and misstatements to the media by US officials about Bob's case, questioning if he is alive or in Iran, have severely undercut the efforts to hold Iran accountable. We know this because Iranian authorities have thrown these wrong statements back in our faces. The Iranians still regularly point to a statement made in error by the White House three years ago that Bob is not in Iran. That was wrong, but the US government gave Iran an excuse to not send Bob home.

In Jason Rezaian's new book about his own experience as an Iranian hostage, he cites a source in the Iranian Supreme Leader's office. That source states that, in discussions with members of the Obama administration regarding the release of then-hostages, "the issue of Bob Levinson had initially been a point of contention throughout the negotiations (between Iran and the United States)...and that, initially, Levinson—or a complete accounting of what happened to him—was to be a part of the deal, but the Rouhani administration decided there was no political value at that time in acknowledging, after eight years, that, yes, Iran had been responsible for his disappearance."

And, in January 2016 when these other American hostages were released and Bob was left behind, the United States government let Iran get away with it.

My husband served this country tirelessly for decades; he deserves better from all of us and from our government. He deserves our endless pursuit to bring him home, to fight day and night and leave no stone unturned. He deserves to be the priority, not just among our top priorities.

In addition to being a patriot, Bob is an incredible husband and father. We have raised seven children together. These were the years that Bob and I expected to especially enjoy. Our youngest daughter will be getting married in just two months. This will be the last daughter he has the opportunity to walk down the aisle. And everyone here knows how important that is to a dad.

Not a day or week goes by that I don't get a phone call from one of my children saying how much they miss Bob and struggle without him. We are all suffering a living nightmare. My children and I have trouble sleeping. We wonder endlessly what kind of conditions my husband is living through. We know how deeply he must ache, physically and spiritually, by being away from us for so long. By being away from anyone he knows or loves, with absolutely no human rights. Does he have any human touch? Any access to sunlight? What kind of hell must he be living in, that both our government and the Iranian authorities have allowed him to live in for so long?

Even today after twelve years, people just don't know about Bob. They do not recognize the name Bob Levinson or have any idea of his struggle.

I want to close my testimony by asking each of you to imagine how devastated you would feel to be ripped away from your family, with no way to contact your loved ones, no human rights and no contact

with the outside world. My husband has been held captive for 4,381 days. That's 12 years this Saturday without his family. Imagine how alone he must feel.

It is clear that no matter how hard we try as a family, we can't get there alone. We need your help. Today, Congressman Deutch and Senators Menendez and Rubio introduced the Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage-Taking Accountability Act. I hope this will do something to bring Bob home. But when Saturday's anniversary passes, and the media attention inevitably shifts, a different issue will take priority, and we will again feel like we have to take on this immense burden virtually alone. Without you we won't succeed. Please help my family to get Bob home.

Thank you.

###

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mrs. Levinson.  
Mr. Namazi, you are recognized.

**STATEMENT OF BABAK NAMAZI, BROTHER OF SIAMAK  
NAMAZI AND SON OF BAQUER NAMAZI**

Mr. NAMAZI. Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today. I sit before you in utter desperation and disbelief that over three and a half years into my family's indescribable anguish both my 82-year-old ailing father Baquer Namazi and 47-year-old brother Siamak Namazi continue to unjustly and cruelly languish in Iran, each with 10-year prison sentences.

For reasons I still do not understand, my innocent family was targeted by Iran's Revolutionary Guards and being used as pawns and hostages. Since this nightmare began, my family has faced the evil might and power of the IRGC which has imposed on us a relentless and sustained campaign of cruelty, pain, suffering, lies, and horrors which continue until today.

I am here today, however, because it must be emphasized that the situation for my family, and especially my seriously ill father, is critical and swiftly heading toward an irreversible tragedy unless something is done and done urgently. I am here today to implore the Trump administration, the U.S. Congress, the United Nations and, really, anyone at all to help me save the lives of my father and brother.

Since my father's unjust imprisonment in February 2016, he has been hospitalized eight times, two of which required emergency heart-related surgeries including the installation of a pacemaker. My father would only be rushed to the hospital by the IRGC when his health reached critical deterioration and often his requests for medical attention were ignored, causing severe harm.

My father lost over 20 pounds, was placed for extended periods in solitary confinement, and was subjected to severe psychological torment. While my father is currently on a restricted, temporary medical furlough, his health continues to decline. In fact, the rate of deterioration is accelerating daily. Aside from his already weakened heart and related ailments which continue to deteriorate, he has been recently diagnosed with epilepsy as well as a 70 percent blockage of main arteries leading to his brain, significantly increasing the risk of a stroke.

My father is getting weaker every day and cannot take a few steps without his knees buckling under him and loss of balance. It seems every day a new ailment unleashes itself on my frail father. We live in constant fear that at any moment my father will have his temporary medical furlough revoked and be dragged back to Evin Prison. It is due to this fear that I reluctantly have been keeping a lower profile and drawing less attention to our plight.

But as the only capable family member living in freedom I must do all I can to save my beloved father and brother. I can no longer keep quiet. The horrific and painful realities is that my father is dying. He needs proper medical attention outside of Iran and is living on borrowed time. Unless he is allowed to leave urgently, I feel already desperate circumstances will turn tragic.

I have begged repeatedly and do so again for the Iranian Government to allow my sick father to be allowed to leave Iran. We do not want my father to leave Iran in a coma, or worse, dead. The situation is also terrible for my innocent brother Siamak who has been languishing in Evin Prison since October 2015.

Mr. Chairman, going against all values that we stand for as Americans, the prior administration inexplicably and unforgivably left Siamak behind in January 2016 when it brought other American hostages home. At the time, a mere promise made by the Iranians to release my brother within weeks provided license to leave an American behind in the name of the greater good of a nuclear deal.

Well, we know how that horrific miscalculation turned out for my family. Not only was my brother not released, but the IRGC doubled down and also arrested my father who had been lured back to visit my brother, shattering our lives beyond what we could have ever imagined. I spend a lot of time still wondering how our lives would have been so different today had Siamak not been abandoned in January 2016.

Both my father and Siamak are innocent and are being used as pawns and hostages. My father has spent his entire life serving humanity, including decades spent working with UNICEF in the most dangerous parts of the world. Growing up, my brother and I missed having my dad around terribly, but we understood the importance of his humanitarian mission. It is because of his impeccable record with UNICEF that the U.N. Secretary General, UNICEF, and hundreds of U.N. staff and retirees have privately and publicly reached out to the highest levels of the Iranian Government to ask them to release my father on humanitarian grounds.

Siamak similarly followed in my father's footsteps in serving humanity. In his most recent efforts, Siamak published a detailed report in 2013 that identified the negative effects of U.S. sanctions on lifesaving medicine and medical equipment reaching the Iranian people. In part, due to his work, the U.S. Government relaxed its rules to allow more lifesaving medicine to reach the Iranian people.

I have engaged countless Trump administration officials to advocate for my family. With the recent appointment of the Special Presidential Envoy on Hostage Affairs Robert O'Brien, I am glad there is finally a person responsible for coordinating and leading the efforts to bring home hostages like my family. I am grateful to Robert and his team for working incredibly hard at this. However, the reality is that more than 2 years after President Trump's inauguration, at least to me, it seems that we are not any closer to bringing my family and other hostages home.

While I do not understand the politics involved between our country and Iran, what I do know is that whatever has been tried so far has not worked. I strongly believe that only through direct engagement focused on the humanitarian imperative of bringing home American hostages will there be a likelihood of success. While a direct dialog will not guarantee success, in my view, the absence of dialog will guarantee failure, a failure which would result in my father's death and my brother serving at least 10 years in prison. We cannot afford to spare any efforts.

I am counting on President Trump to stay good to his word that Americans will not languish in Iran when he is President. The President has had great success in freeing other American hostages from other countries like North Korea, Venezuela, Turkey, Yemen, and Egypt, and I implore the President to spare no effort to bring my family and other American hostages home from Iran.

Finally, I would like to share with you a part of a personal message from my dad to his UNICEF colleagues urging them to continue humanitarian efforts on behalf of the needy. My father sent this message to me as he was being forced back to prison after one of his emergency heart-related surgeries:

“While the pain of those dearest to me continues to hurt deeply, I am also sorry that with the help of all of you and other great humanitarians that I could not continue to serve our common cause of peace for children, especially in the sorely troubled Middle East region, elimination of poverty through people empowerment, combating child trafficking, and opening space to hear the voices of the poor. Sustaining these great causes will be the best reward that can, God willing, be granted to this humble man.”

My father and brother have dedicated their lives to the most important causes of humanity. Now, we desperately and urgently need humanity to be a voice for them before it is too late. Please be that voice. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Namazi follows:]



Testimony for House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee  
on Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism

“The Status of American Hostages in Iran”

By Babak Namazi

March 7, 2019

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today.

I sit before you in utter desperation and disbelief that over 3.5 years into my family’s indescribable anguish, both my 82-year-old ailing father, Baquer Namazi, and 47-year-old brother, Siamak Namazi, continue to unjustly and cruelly languish in Iran, each with 10 year prison sentences.

For reasons I still do not understand, my innocent family was targeted by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and being used as pawns and hostages. Since this nightmare began, my family has faced the evil might and power of the IRGC. It has imposed on us a relentless and sustained campaign of cruelty, pain, suffering, lies and horrors, which continues until today.

The fictional charges my family has been convicted of is “collaboration with hostile government” referring to the United States. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has found my father and brother were both held illegally and in violation of international law, demanding their immediate release. Yet even while convicting my family of collaborating with the U.S. as a “hostile” government, Iran has claimed to the International Court of Justice that the United States is breaching a 1955 Friendship Treaty.

To my shock, Iran has accused my family of most of the problems it faces, including U.S. sanctions, UN sanctions, shortages of oil and petroleum, shortages of medical supply, reduction of the size of the country’s population, and unleashing the Stuxnet virus, among others. Unbelievably, the IRGC has spent enormous resources to propagate these wild conspiracy theories, even producing a multi-part “documentary” broadcast on national Iranian television.

I am here today, however, because it must be emphasized that the situation for my family, and especially my seriously ill father, is critical and swiftly heading towards an irreversible tragedy unless something is done and done urgently. I am here today to implore the Trump Administration, the U.S. Congress, the United Nations, and really anyone at all to help me save the lives of my father and brother.

Since my father’s unjust imprisonment in February 2016, he has been hospitalized eight times, two of which required emergency heart related surgeries including installation of a pacemaker. My father would only be rushed to the hospital by the IRGC when his health reached critical deterioration and often his requests for medical attention were ignored, causing severe harm. My father lost over 20 pounds, was placed for extended periods in solitary confinement, and was subjected to severe psychological torment.

While my father is currently on a restricted temporary medical furlough, his health continues to decline – in fact the rate of deterioration is accelerating daily. Aside from his already weakened heart and related ailments – which continue to deteriorate – he has been recently diagnosed with epilepsy as well as a 70% blockage of main arteries leading to his brain significantly increasing risk of stroke. My father is getting weaker every day and cannot take a few steps without his knees buckling under him and loss of balance. It seems every day a new ailment unleashes itself on my frail father.

We all live in constant fear that at any moment my father will have his temporary medical furlough revoked and be dragged back to Evin Prison. It is due to this fear that I reluctantly have been keeping a lower profile and drawing less attention to our plight.

But as the only capable family member living in freedom, I must do all I can to save my beloved father and brother. I can no longer keep quiet.

The horrific and painful reality is that my father is dying. He needs proper medical attention outside of Iran and is living on borrowed time. Unless he is allowed to leave urgently I fear our already desperate circumstances will turn tragic. I have begged repeatedly, and do so again, for the Iranian government to allow my sick father to be allowed to leave Iran. We don't want my father to leave Iran in a coma, or worse, dead.

The situation is also terrible for my innocent brother Siamak, who has been languishing in Evin Prison since October 2015.

Mr. Chairman, going against all values that we stand for as Americans, the prior administration inexplicably and unforgivably left Siamak behind in January 2016 when it brought other American hostages home. At the time, a mere promise made by the Iranians to release my brother within weeks provided license to leave an American behind in the name of the greater good of the nuclear deal.

Well, we know how that horrific miscalculation turned out for my family. Not only was my brother not released, but the IRGC doubled down and also arrested my father who had been lured back to visit my brother -- shattering our lives beyond what we ever could have imagined. I spend a lot of time still wondering how our lives would have been so different today had Siamak not been abandoned in January 2016.

Since his arrest, Siamak has been subjected to severe mistreatment, including physical abuse and the use of tasers. He has been threatened with electric shock, with authorities going so far as to attach wiring to his body. He spent about a year in solitary confinement/isolation without a bed or mattress to sleep on, in addition to many other horrors. It seems that the IRGC is doing all it can to break Siamak's will, and I have spent countless sleepless nights concerned they are succeeding.

Both my father and Siamak are innocent and are being used as pawns and hostages. My father has spent his entire life serving humanity including decades spent working with UNICEF in the most dangerous parts of the world. Growing up, my brother and I missed having my Dad around terribly, but we understood the importance of his humanitarian mission.

It is because of his impeccable record with UNICEF that the UN Secretary General, UNICEF, and hundreds of UN staff and retirees have privately and publicly reached out to the highest levels of the Iranian government to ask them to release my father on humanitarian grounds. I wish to take a moment to thank the Secretary General, UNICEF Executive Directors (Tony Lake and Henrietta Fore) and the entire UNICEF family for standing firmly beside us from day one and I urge them to continue their efforts.

Siamak similarly followed in my father's footsteps in serving humanity. In his most recent efforts, Siamak published a detailed report in 2013 that identified the negative effects of U.S. sanctions on life saving medicine and medical equipment reaching the Iranian people.

In part, due to his work, the U.S. government relaxed its rules to allow more lifesaving medicine to reach the Iranian people. Cruelly, such humanitarian advocacy by Siamak were criminalized by the IRGC and the Iranian government.

I have engaged countless Trump Administration officials to advocate for my family. With the recent appointment of the Special Presidential Envoy on Hostage Affairs Robert O'Brien, I am glad there is finally a person responsible for coordinating and leading the efforts to bring home hostages like my family. I am grateful to Robert and his team for working incredibly hard at this.

However, the reality is that more than two years after President Trump's inauguration, at least to me, it seems that we are not any closer in bringing my family and other hostages home. While I do not understand the politics involved between our country and Iran, what I do know is that whatever has been tried so far has not worked.

I strongly believe that only through direct engagement focused on the humanitarian imperative of bringing home American hostages, will there be a likelihood of success. While a direct dialogue will not guarantee success, in my view, the absence of dialogue will guarantee failure – a failure which would result in my father's death and my brother's serving at least 10 years in prison. We cannot afford to spare any efforts.

I am counting on President Trump to stay good to his word that Americans will not languish in Iran when he is president. The President has had great success in freeing other American hostages from other countries like North Korea, Venezuela, Turkey, Yemen and Egypt, and I implore the President to spare no effort to bring my family and the other American hostages home from Iran.

Finally, I would like to share with you a part of a personal message from my dad to his UNICEF colleagues urging them to continue humanitarian efforts on behalf of the needy. My father sent this message to me as he was being forced back to prison after one of his emergency heart related surgeries:

*While the pain of those dearest to me continues to hurt deeply, I am also sorry that with the help of all of you and other great humanitarians that I could not continue to serve our common cause of peace for children, especially in the sorely troubled Middle East region, elimination of poverty through people empowerment, combatting child trafficking and opening space to hear the voices of the poor . . . Sustaining these great causes will be the best reward that can, God willing, be granted to this humble man.*

My father and brother have dedicated their lives to the most important causes of humanity. Now, we desperately and urgently need humanity to be a voice for them before it is too late.

Please be that voice.

Thank you.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Namazi, and thank you for sharing that message with us.

Mr. Zakka.

**STATEMENT OF OMAR ZAKKA, SON OF NIZAR ZAKKA**

Mr. ZAKKA. Good afternoon. My name is Omar Zakka. I am the youngest of Nizar Zakka's three sons and I am speaking on behalf of all us today. Thank you all, ladies and gentlemen of the Congress and representatives of the American people, for the opportunity to speak to you today and for the attention you give to my father's kidnapping. This is my second time here. I was first here in July 25, 2017.

Mr. ZAKKA. It is now nearly 4 years since I have seen my father. My father was last seen leaving his hotel on 18th of September 2015 on the way to the airport. He was kidnapped and taken hostage by the IRGC. My father was in Iran on the official invitation of the Iranian Vice President, Ms. Molaverdi, who had invited my father to speak on the second conference on Women and Sustainable Development.

I repeat, he was officially invited to Iran by the Vice President of Iran.

My father is an internet freedom advocate. He is the president of IJMA3, an international NGO that specializes in information technology for development, based in Washington, DC. He has spent most of his career working on bridging the digital divide between different communities around the world. In September 2018, 3 years after my father had been taken, his host, Mrs. Molaverdi, admitted to the Associated Press that Iran had failed my father, and yet my father remains a hostage of the Revolutionary Guard.

The last 4 years and especially in the 2-years since the last hearing, life has been very difficult for us. Time and again, our hopes that our father will be released have been shattered. My father has been subjected to physical and mental torture and ill treatment by his captors who continue to exert pressure on him to make false confessions to support his crimes. Sometimes my father has been promised that if he confesses he will be released. My father is a man of honor and integrity. He will not confess to crime he has not committed.

Somehow, my father sustains his mental strength. He has just stopped a 3-week hunger strike a few days ago, the only means available to him to protest against his treatment. He stopped because we, his family and friends, pleaded to him. His body cannot handle such a long hunger strike anymore. My father has been denied his human rights. When the Foreign Minister of Iran, Mr. Zarif, was once asked by the media about my father's case, his reply was that my father's case "is a problem between the U.S. and Iran." What problem between the U.S. and Iran could justify kidnapping my father?

Not a single day of those 4 years has passed that my family and I do not fear for my family's safety. The feeling of dread we experience if we miss my father's call or if we do not hear from him for 3 days is unbearable. We are tormented by the fear that something terrible has happened to him or will happen to him. In December last year, he was taken into incommunicado solitary confinement

for approximately 40 days. We did not know where he was, if he was alive or dead.

After 4 years of not seeing my father, I see him on film released by the Iranian TV, while being arrested. The film was shamelessly broadcast by the Iranian State news. The film, part of a smear campaign, it was broadcasted four times on prime time television. There is no truth whatsoever in these allegations. My father is innocent.

We thank Secretary of State Mr. Pompeo for the following statement he made about my father in mid-September 2016 when he was in Congress, in which he said: "This week marks 1 year the Iranian Government has been holding hostage Nizar Zakka, a U.S. legal permanent resident and international internet development expert. Mr. Zakka this week was sentenced to 10 years in prison, millions of dollars in fines; his only crime was to bring greater internet access to the women of Iran."

Currently, my father is being held underground sharing four crowded cells between 50 of them, about 17 men to each cell. The air in my father's cell is rank with the smell of sewage. It is infested with rats and bedbugs. There is no designated place for him to eat. My father spends 16 hours of each day and every day in a coffin-size space, where he sleeps and keeps all of his clothes and a few of his possessions. They cannot see the sunlight or breathe fresh air at any time except for 2 hours a day during lunchtime. They have to choose to have lunch and miss the sun, or to see the sun and miss lunch.

My father's kidnapping is an act of State terrorism. Iran has conducted this practice of hostage taking for over 40 years. We believe it will continue if you, the representatives of the American people, do not help to put an end to it. We have done everything possible in our capacity to put an end to this misery. We have reached out to the U.N. and other international human rights organizations, have launched petitions, we have campaigned for my father's cause in the media, and we have issued countless press releases done by my brothers and I about my father's case. But we feel like we are facing obstacles we do not understand.

We are looking forward for President Trump to name my father and other hostages, while condemning their arbitrary detention by IRGC. Such a statement will help us sustain the pain and suffering they are experiencing knowing they are not forgotten. We ask America to take all available legal and diplomatic measures to reunite us with our father. We ask this government to do the same for all the families of the other hostages.

Thank you again to the representatives of the American people for this opportunity and for your continuous support. Thank you.  
[The prepared statement of Mr. Zakka follows:]

**Testimony of Mr. Omar Zakka before the House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Subcommittee: Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism**

**The Status of American Hostages in Iran  
*Thursday, March 7, 2019***

Good Afternoon,

My name is Omar Zakka. I am youngest of Nizar Zakka's three sons and I am speaking on behalf of us all today.

Foremost, I want to thank you all, ladies and gentlemen of the Congress and the representatives of the American people, for the opportunity to speak to you today, and for the attention you give to my father's Kidnapping.

This is my second time here. I was first here in July 25, 2017. At that time my father had been detained in Iran for nearly 2 years. It is now nearly 4 years since I have seen my father.

My father was last seen leaving his hotel on 18 September 2015. On the way to the airport he was kidnapped and taken hostage by the Revolutionary Guard.

My father was in Iran on the official invitation of the Iranian Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, Mrs Molaverdi, who had invited my father to speak at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference and Exhibition on Women and Sustainable Development.

I repeat: He was officially invited to Iran by the Vice President of Iran.

My father is an internet freedom advocate. He is the president of IJMA3, an international NGO that specializes in information technology for development, based in Washington DC.

He has spent most of his career working on bridging the digital divide between different communities around the world.

In September 2018, three years after my father had been taken, his host, Mrs Molaverdi admitted to the Associated Press that Iran had 'failed' my father. And yet my father remains a hostage of the Revolutionary Guard.

Since I last appeared before Congress in July 2017, our life became much, much harder. The last four years, and especially in the two years since the last hearing, life has been

very difficult for us. Time and again, our hopes that our father will be released have been shattered.

My father has been subjected to physical and mental torture and ill treatment by his captors who continue to exert pressure on him to make false confessions to his supposed 'crimes'. Sometimes my father has been promised that if he confesses, he will be released. But my father continues to bravely refuse to do so despite the insufferable pressure put on him.

My father is a man of honor and integrity. He will not confess to a crime he has not committed.

Somehow, my father sustains his mental strength. He has just stopped a hunger strike a few days ago – the only means available to him to protest against his treatment. That hunger strike lasted 23 days. He stopped because we – his family and his friends - pleaded him to. His body cannot handle such a long hunger strike.

My father has been denied his human rights. He has been denied the most basic and fundamental guarantees to a fair trial, he has been denied the right to be treated humanely and with dignity, he has been denied medical treatment, he has been arbitrarily denied his freedom.

When the Foreign Minister of Iran, Mr Zarif was once asked by the media about my father's case, his reply was that my father's case "is a problem between the US and Iran".

What problem between the US and Iran could justify kidnapping my father?

There is no justification for his treatment, for this flagrant disregard of his rights.

Knowing what my father is suffering, my family and I try not to mention our own hardship.

I was 17 years old when he was kidnapped. A few days ago, I turned 21.

Not a single day of those 4 years has past that my family and I do not fear for my father's safety.

The feeling of dread we experience if we miss my father's call or if we do not hear from him for three days is unbearable. We are tormented by the fear that something terrible has happened to him, will happen to him.

In December last year he was taken into incommunicado solitary confinement for approximately 40 days. We did not know where he was, if he was alive or dead.

After four years of not seeing my father, I saw him on film released by the Iranian TV, while being arrested. The film was shamelessly broadcast by the Iranian state news network IRIB. The film – part of a smear-campaign against my father and other dual national and foreign detainees - was broadcast four times on primetime television. It shows my father in his high school uniform, and claims he was a CIA officer. My father went to Riverside Military Academy in Gainesville, Georgia, the same high school I and my brothers attended. The film claims, amongst other things, that my father was trying to over-throw the Iranian government.

There is no truth whatsoever in these allegations. My father is innocent.

The only thing that has kept us strong in the face of this terror is the support of the American people and the people of my father's native country, Lebanon, for which we are very grateful. We thank Secretary of State, Mr. Pompeo for the following statement he made about my father in mid-September 2016 when he was in Congress, and hope he will try to help us:

Open Quote: "This week marks one year the Iranian government has been holding hostage Nizar Zakka: a US legal permanent resident and international internet development expert. Mr. Zakka this week was sentenced to 10 years in prison and millions of dollars in fines. His only crime was to bring greater internet access to the women of Iran." Close Quote.

Our family has suffered too much. It is becoming intolerable.

My father is currently held underground, sharing four crowded cells between 50 of them. About 17 men to each cell.

The air in my father's cell is rank with the smell of sewage. It is infested with rats and bed bugs. There is no designated place for him to eat. My father spends 16 hours of each and every day in a coffin-size space, where he sleeps and keeps all his clothes and his few possessions.



They cannot see the sunlight or breath fresh air at any time except for two hours a day during lunch time. They have to choose: to have lunch and miss the sun, or to see the sun and miss lunch.

We ask you, we implore you, to help our family and save our father.

My father's kidnapping is an act of state terrorism. We know of no other occasion in history when a government has extended an official invitation to a person, only to kidnap them and hold them hostage.

Iran has conducted this practice of hostage-taking for 40 years. We believe it will continue if you, the representatives of American people, do not help to put an end to it.

We have done everything possible in our capacity to put an end to this misery.

We have reached out to the UN and other international human rights organizations, we have launched petitions, we have campaigned for my father's cause in the media, and we have issued countless press releases done by my brothers and I, about my father's case.

The international community has taken notice.

In December 2018, the UN General Assembly urged Iran to cease the 'widespread and systematic use of arbitrary detention, including the use of this practice to target dual and foreign nationals'.

In his latest report the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran the Special Rapporteur, mentioning my father's case, concluded there is a pattern involving the arbitrary detention of dual and foreign nationals in Iran.

These statements and acknowledgements of my father's and others' plight are welcome. But we feel like we are facing obstacles we do not understand.

For our family and the families of other hostages, it is important to know and to see that the US government acknowledges the gravity and supports us.

We are looking forward to seeing senior officials of the US government, and we hope President Trump, condemning the arbitrary detention of my father namely, and to condemn the violation of fundamental human rights by Iran.

For my father and the other hostages, such a statement will help him to sustain the pain and suffering he is experiencing, knowing he is not forgotten, and that he is on the minds of senior and top officials of this government.

We ask this government to take all available legal and diplomatic measures to reunite us with our father.

We ask this government to do the same for all the families of the other hostages.

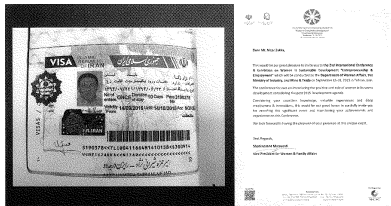
Help us reunite with our father.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you, again, the representatives of American people, for this opportunity, and for your continuous support. Your support has helped, and continues to help, us to sustain our strength until our beloved ones come back.

Thank you.



Nizar Zakka, Tehran.



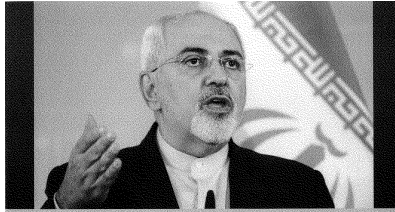
Nizar Zakka's Visa and Government Invitation.



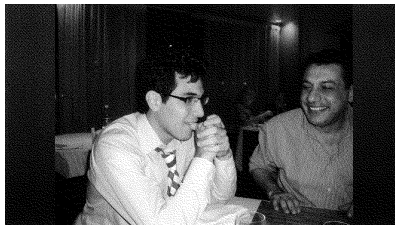
Nizar Zakka with Moulaverdi During the Conference

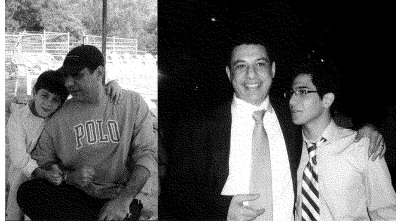


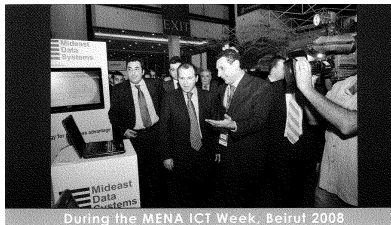
Moulaverdi to AP: Nizar is innocent. We failed him.

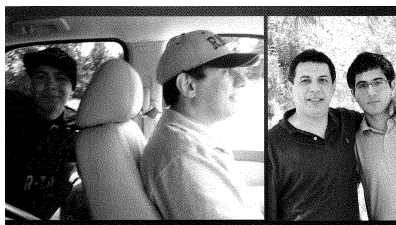


Zarif: Nizari Zakka's problem is a problem between Iran and the U.S.









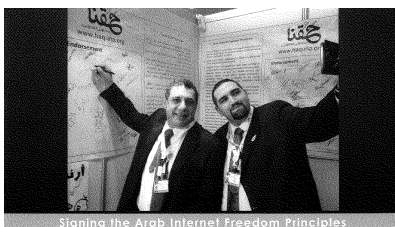




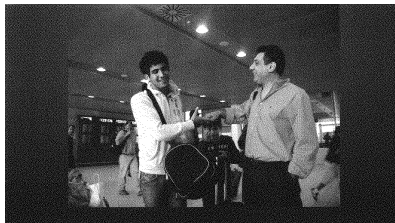
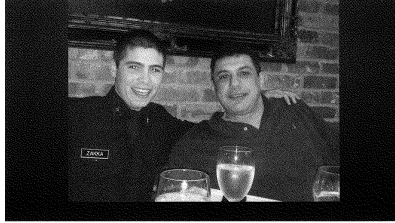
Arab Internet Freedom Alliance Meeting, Beirut 2013



During the Global Internet Governance Forum, Baku 2012



Signing the Arab Internet Freedom Principles





Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Zakka. Thank you to all of our witnesses.

Let me begin by asking, on the July 2018 appointment of Robert O'Brien to serve as Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs, the National Security Advisor, John Bolton, pledged that O'Brien would maintain a collaborative dialog with the families of current hostages regarding diplomatic recovery efforts for their loved ones.

I just would ask each of you, in your view, are Special Envoy O'Brien and his staff fulfilling that pledge and in what areas could there be improvements from your very important perspectives?

Mrs. Levinson.

Mrs. LEVINSON. Robert O'Brien and his team are extremely helpful in our case. They are available whenever we need them to be. Their team coordinates any meetings that we need to have and Mr. O'Brien, himself, is in contact with us whenever he feels he needs to give us an update on my husband's case. So I think the hostage fusion cell as it is called is doing a good job and is necessary to maintain the status of one place where you can get all the information about a hostage.

Mr. DEUTCH. Good. Thank you, Mrs. Levinson.

Mr. Namazi.

Mr. NAMAZI. Insofar as that office is concerned—

Mr. DEUTCH. Can you turn the microphone on, sorry.

Mr. NAMAZI. As far as that office is concerned—

Mr. DEUTCH. Wait, actually, sorry. Is it on?

Mr. NAMAZI. Is that on?

Mr. DEUTCH. OK, thank you very much.

Mr. NAMAZI. The office has been very helpful. I have had no problem having communications. Obviously it is important to have a single point who is leading and managing this, but obviously from at least my point of view, while that office is very valuable and it has been very helpful to have the communications, we are all sitting here today because our loved ones are not with us yet.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Zakka?

Mr. ZAKKA. We do appreciate all the support we are getting and we hope to see more of this support in the future.

Mr. DEUTCH. OK, thanks.

Ms. Levinson, last May you told Time Magazine that your family had been left behind after the Trump administration prioritized securing the release of American hostages in North Korea. Have you seen increased focus from the Trump administration on your husband's case since the release of those Americans in North Korea?

Mrs. LEVINSON. Unfortunately, I have not. I feel that more could be done. Bob is still not home and so it is necessary for the Trump administration to make it a priority. Bob is the longest-held hostage, as I said before, and the U.S. Government needs to get him home and that is all we are asking for. It is not something that every American would not want for their family.

Mr. DEUTCH. It is a little unorthodox and probably not quite the right thing to do, but I would just ask each of you, since I know the White House watches what happens here, shares it with the President, do you have a message for the President?

Mrs. LEVINSON. I would ask that he would meet with us. He does not know us. He does not understand how difficult it has been for

our family because he has not talked to us. We need to make sure that everyone in the U.S. Government at the highest levels knows how difficult it is for any family to be away from their loved one and unable to resolve it themselves.

Mr. DEUTCH. I appreciate that.

Mr. Namazi.

Mr. DEUTCH. I am not sure that it is——

Mr. NAMAZI. Yes. I mean obviously I would welcome very much the President's direct engagement. I mean again in the case of my family, he set a very, very high standard for me personally, my family personally, when he tweeted about my family. And I have a feeling with the incredible success he has had with releasing other hostages from other countries, if he does meet with us and hear our stories he will be even further motivated to spare no efforts especially given the urgency of my father's health. And I am sure he would be very keen to do more himself.

Mr. DEUTCH. I appreciate that.

Ms. Zakka.

Mr. ZAKKA. I hope President Trump sees our case and puts a little bit more focus to it and accomplishes the same accomplishments he has done with other hostages throughout the world. And I hope our families are next, all of our families, because we do miss them and we cannot wait for them to come home.

Mr. DEUTCH. I appreciate that and I appreciate those messages.

Mr. Wilson, I will turn it over to you.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And this is one of the most meaningful hearings I have ever been to and it is so meaningful because of your participation, your heartfelt presentation.

And for Mr. Zakka and Mr. Namazi, if you are able, can you tell us the conditions that you know about your loved one, how being held, and the importance for the world to understand that the Iranian regime is not only holding your loved ones, but also abusing them. And if each of you could explain, begin with Mr. Namazi and Mr. Zakka. And the only reason I did not ask Mrs. Levinson, because they still are concealing what occurred March the 9th, so we—that is why I am asking you.

Mr. NAMAZI. Thank you. I mean since the arrest there has been just absolutely horrific mistreatment. I mean in the case of Siamak there has been also physical abuse. This has included the use of tasers. He has been placed in solitary confinement and isolation for close to a year. And in certain circumstances there was a threat of electric shock with the authorities going as far as actually putting wiring on him. He has had no mattress to sleep on for a very extended period of time. He was in a dark, cold cell.

And in the case of my father, as I mentioned, he is on medical furlough right now, but you know while he was there he has been as an 82-year-old man someone woke up one morning and decided that let's put this old man in the solitary confinement for a few weeks. Well, who does this? Who wakes up and make a decision like this?

We appreciate the attention. It has been a painful decision for me to come out and speak publicly as it has been for other family members, but I fear if I do not speak about this I—it is important

for the world to know that the suffering we are going and our loved ones are going through and that is why the urgency.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you.

And, Mr. Zakka?

Mr. ZAKKA. The treatment of everyone in Evin especially the ones taken from American citizens and other people they do not care about their physical condition. They do not care about their mental condition. They subject them to being in solitary confinement for extended periods of time with disregard of any human rights.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much.

And, Mrs. Levinson, it really is so impressive to be here with your family, and I look forward to having your input in trying to identify the most effective way forward. From your experience, from your study, from your family's study, and what talented family you have, what do you believe can be most effective to try to change the course of the Iranian conduct of the illegal concealing and holding of your husband?

Mrs. LEVINSON. I am not sure what is going to resolve my husband's case. What I would hope is that both sides of the U.S. Government and Iran would work to get the cases of both my husband and all the other people being held hostage resolved. There is no reason for a government to hold an individual. I hope that the United States administration just continues to make it a priority to get all the hostages everywhere in the world home. These are the people who make up the United States. The United States is a country of freedom and these people have no freedom. And that is what we need to make sure the other governments do, especially Iran.

Mr. WILSON. And we go back to the Tripoli pirates. I mean this has always been the standard of our country to recover hostages and not be subject to hostages and, sadly, and, Mrs. Levinson, in your situation there has been no contact at all.

But, Mr. Namazi and Mr. Zakka, have you been in contact at all with the Iranian regime in terms of what may be required for their release, for your family's release?

Mr. NAMAZI. I personally have had no contact with the Iranian Government. No.

Mr. ZAKKA. Neither do I.

Mr. WILSON. And, additionally, has there been any intimidation by any, all three of you, by the Iranian regime that could be directed from the Iranian regime? Has there been any intimidation effort on your family?

Mrs. LEVINSON. No, we have not received any kind of intimidation. They have not acknowledged that they have Bob, officially, so they have not done anything as far as intimidating us.

Mr. NAMAZI. Half of my family was ripped away from me, so I do not think they needed to call and threaten anymore. The action spoke very, very loudly. I know for a fact that my brother was constantly threatened with the arrest of my mom, for example, but from my perspective I would have rather had threatening calls, I mean between the decisions. I mean this is horrible to have to sit here and say this, but I would rather be threatened, beaten than have my father and none of my family members. But I wish they

had taken me instead of my father because he would not be dying right now today, perhaps.

Mr. WILSON. And, Mr. Zakka?

Mr. ZAKKA. To be honest, I could not have said it better than my peer, Mr. Namazi. We did not have any intimidation, though they have—I have nothing to say, sir.

Mr. WILSON. Again, as I conclude I want to thank each of you and what wonderful families you have. God bless you.

Mr. ZAKKA. Thank you.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Vargas, you are recognized.

Mr. VARGAS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you for holding this hearing and the ranking member also, and especially I want to thank the witnesses here today.

Mrs. Levinson, obviously I listened very carefully to your testimony and I mean what was very moving was the sad situation that your daughter may be walking down the aisle, again without your husband. I have two daughters and I think that was very moving. And then when you were asked, you know, if you could say anything to the President, you would like to talk to him. And I hope you do get a chance because you communicated that so well how sad it is and how tormenting it is not to have your husband home.

And how that also, Mr. Namazi, your dad and your brother, Mr. Zakka, your dad, I hope you get that opportunity because I think there is more that we can do as a government to bring them home. I did want to ask specifically about that. I mean, my family has never been taken hostage, I hope they never do obviously, and I want to know what kind of contact do you have from the American government?

Now obviously we talked about the Special Envoy O'Brien, but what kind of day-to-day contact or week-to-week or month-to-month or year-to-year, what kind of contact do you have officially with the government as we tell you what we are doing or what we cannot do to help you?

Mrs. LEVINSON. In Bob's case the U.S. Government, as I said before Bob was a retired FBI agent so we have always maintained contact with the FBI. We do have contact with—we did have contact with the State Department as well over the years and we have met with the high-level officials that we need to over the years.

As far as the Hostage Envoy goes, I feel that it is much easier now because there is one person who you get in touch with and then you are able to get all the meetings you need through that one person. And the Hostage Envoy Mr. O'Brien does get in touch with us whenever he has new information to share. If we ask for a phone call they are always willing to talk to us. I have never seen any problem with getting in touch with them about the case.

Mr. VARGAS. That is good to hear. My question was going to be then, he does communicate with you then. You do not only call him, he sometimes calls you if he has information?

Mrs. LEVINSON. Right. He will ask for a call with us and we will make an arrangement for actually the whole family to get on a conference line and talk about the case, and he has done that several times. And as I said, he has invited us to DC for meetings and so on, so he has done a very good job at this.

Mr. VARGAS. Thank you.



Mr. Namazi, how about yourself?

Mr. NAMAZI. I am of course in regular contact with senior administration officials and I live in Dubai so, and I come to, you know, Washington quite regularly, and on this trip also I did meet with them. I have had again not a difficulty in meeting with senior officials, although before the Hostage Envoy Mr. O'Brien was appointed, there were changes. It was not continuity and that was a challenge, you know, that it was almost a restart. And I know they are working hard for the release of my family as well as the other family members that we have here, but at the same time I feel there is not enough is being done fast enough, I mean especially in the sense of the urgency is very clear in the case of my father and it has been clear for the past year or two and the deterioration has been very rapid.

And so while I do—I am very grateful for the engagement, I do hope that we can step up and deploy whatever tools we have as American government because obviously there is a lot we can do.

Mr. VARGAS. Yes. Well, I know even in your testimony you were reticent to come up and speak because of the—you were hesitant because of potential danger. But thank you for your bravery. Thank you for coming forward. And I know that you are very concerned because of your father's age and his illness, so I hope that this does encourage our government and obviously the regime in Iran to do more to release him.

How about you, Mr. Zakka?

Mr. ZAKKA. They do communicate with my lawyer, but personally they do not, and as needed.

Mr. VARGAS. So the Special Envoy has never communicated with you personally?

Mr. ZAKKA. No, sir.

Mr. VARGAS. OK. Do you feel like you get the information that you need?

Mr. ZAKKA. No, sir.

Mr. VARGAS. You do not, OK. So in your case then it does seem like we have to do a better job to communicate with you to let you know what is going on; is that correct?

Mr. ZAKKA. Yes, sir. I sure hope so.

Mr. VARGAS. OK. My time has expired. Again thank you very much for showing the courage to come forward and I hope we can help. And again I want to thank the chair for the bills that they have proposed and I certainly will support them. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Vargas.

Mr. Chabot, you are recognized.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Deutch for his commitment, I know, to the Levinson family. He has been involved in this for a long—it is obviously much harder on the family, but I know it is something he has been committed to and done everything that he could for his constituents in this particular instance, so we appreciate that.

I know how frustrating it has been for obviously the family, principally, and a lot of the questions I think, you know, it mostly comes down to what can we do when we are considering legislation? Are there—have you all had a chance to review or was that

done in cooperation with you? Are there things that you would like us to do additionally other than supporting that legislation?

Mrs. Levinson, in particular was there something that you would like to, for example, you know, boy, I wish this would have gotten in the bill, or did not get in there. Are there any other thoughts that you have or—

Mrs. LEVINSON. I personally have not seen the wording on the bill so I do not know exactly what it states. I would ask, a Special Envoy is I think something that is necessary, but I would hope that the administration would not use this as an excuse to pass the buck, so to speak, and not meet with the families themselves. I would like everybody to be able to see the families and see what they are going through and be able to help in any way possible.

And sometimes I think because there is one person to go to who handles everything, it is hard. People just do not take the interest as much in the case. I do not think the overall government does that and we need to do that.

Mr. CHABOT. OK, thank you very much.

Let me ask this. I know one of the things that being in your circumstances and, you know, obviously none of us can relate to this unless we are actually under those circumstances and we are not, but let me just ask you this. It must be very, very frustrating to have to kind of hold your tongue with respect to Iran and the government knowing that they have your loved one over there and if you express your outrage that they can take it out on your loved one, so you have to be somewhat careful about that. Is that the case or what? I would be interested in hearing from each of you.

Mrs. Levinson.

Mrs. LEVINSON. Honestly, that is always in the back of my mind. We have over the 12 years been silent and we have also tried to push them hard, and I do wonder every time we open our mouths whether it is going to have an effect on Bob and what happens to him, especially since we have no information—

Mr. CHABOT. Yes.

Mrs. LEVINSON [continuing]. About what they are doing to him right now.

Mr. CHABOT. Yes. Just as Member of Congress, I am sure you are all familiar with Otto Warmbier who was taken by the North Koreans. Well, I used to represent the little part of the greater Cincinnati area that he was in—now it is Brad Wenstrup—and I think Brad felt the same way. We were very—as much as I hate Kim Jong-un and think he is a brutal, thuggish dictator who has done the most outrageous things to his own people, you sort of wanted to bite your tongue because you always thought if you are saying that they might take it out on this person knowing that they have anything to do with you. So I was always very careful until he got back here, obviously in a terrible state, but that has got to be even tougher for the family.

Mr. Namazi and Mr. Zakka, how about, about holding your tongue?

Mr. NAMAZI. It is an extremely difficult decision. Being here today for me was a very difficult decision because the Iranian Government will always take the easy way out and blame the victims for what it is doing to them. So every time I speak to the press,

every time I come to hearings, which I wish it would end soon that I be here to celebrate as opposed to sharing the pain, but the fact is that it is important, I think, to—if there is not attention given to my family and others there could be even—I feel there could be even more mistreatment.

So yes, I do fear but I have to wrestle that versus the absolute silence of what that would mean for them. I do not have that luxury of knowing what is right and wrong all the time. I have to go with my gut feeling and of course the advice I get. The Iranians have always insisted on keeping it quiet because who wants this kind of publicity? Who wants this kind of attention?

So I learned the difficult way, because for the first years since this nightmare started for my family we did keep quiet. I broke my silence only when there was a conviction. And I have to say that was also encouraged by the previous administration to keep quiet especially when my brother was left behind. No one wanted to get that kind of attention on that side as well.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, my time has expired, but could Mr. Zakka answer as well?

Mr. DEUTCH. Of course, of course.

Mr. Zakka, you are recognized.

Mr. ZAKKA. I am actually very fearful about what I say and what I do in front of the public in regards to IRGC or Iran just because they are very unpredictable. They will take anything and just maybe put it out on him and it does affect me. I do not know what I can say or what I cannot and how they will perceive it. It is a constant fear whenever I do present myself in public toward this cause.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you.

Mr. Trone.

Mr. TRONE. First of all, I want to thank Chairman Deutch for holding this hearing. This is an unmitigated tragedy for the families. I mean I cannot—it is hard to comprehend a brother, a father, or a husband not going down the aisle with the daughters, it is mind boggling. America has had a tradition of no person left behind and we owe it to you folks to continue that.

And I guess my first question would be, how would you characterize the differences between how the Obama Administration was working on this versus the Trump administration?

Mrs. Levinson.

Mrs. LEVINSON. The Trump administration—the Hostage Envoy was not in place during President Obama's first administration. He was only created in, the position was only created at the end of his second term.

Mr. TRONE. Who was the Hostage Envoy?

Mrs. LEVINSON. James O'Brien. And now with the Trump administration that position has been in place since the beginning. And so it is a whole different situation and it is difficult because I cannot really judge the two administrations differently because of the two different situations. In the beginning we had no contact with President Obama or his administration the way we do since the

Hostage Envoy was created, so I would say that the Hostage Envoy is helpful.

The differences also, the Obama Administration was willing to talk to the Iranians and the Trump administration has said they will not talk to the Iranians. So it is a——

Mr. TRONE. It is going to be hard getting a resolution if we do not talk to the Iranians.

Mrs. LEVINSON. Right, right.

Mr. TRONE. Mr. Namazi?

Mr. NAMAZI. I mean again, you open with a very correct statement. As Americans we do not leave anyone behind and with, you know as I have mentioned a few times, but I cannot help myself because this is just so—I am living every day as a consequence of that—that is what I thought. That is what my family thought. That is what we all believe in. This is what America stands for.

We realize on national television that my brother was left behind. So yes, it was Iranians. It was Revolutionary Guards who took my family and kept them. It was Obama Administration who chose to leave Siamak behind for reasons I will not understand until today. My family will not understand.

So my engagement again was very unique because for the first few months obviously that was still my family's only hope was the engagement. And I met with Jim O'Brien, an amazing person and he cared. And people who take this position is not for the money, obviously. It is not for the glory. It is a thankless job and I appreciate people who are dedicated to this. What policy is going to be implemented by these individuals and what powers do they have?

And I share Mrs. Levinson's concern that yes, it is amazing and it is incredible to have this Special Presidential Envoy because there is one person in charge. At the same time, I used to go to the White House quite often, not that I want to go to the White House, you know, do not misunderstand me. But I felt I was being more engaged with decisionmakers.

And I think, one, you had asked what can be done with the Presidential Envoy. I think perhaps empower him even more and for him to be a principal. And we had spoken about a position as Ambassador because obviously whatever decisions are made are made at the White House and especially with this administration that has a whole different approach with Iran that becomes even more important.

Mr. TRONE. Mr. Zakka?

Mr. ZAKKA. I am not very aware of how like government works and the policies that go around, at least most of them. What I could see is that the new administration is more upfront with their, well, activities and everything they do a little bit more than the Obama Administration.

Mr. TRONE. Well, I tell you, I think it is certainly important to Mr. Wilson's point that we have an opportunity, you have an opportunity to sit down with the President at some point in time, sooner not later. Every day, it is a bad day—and tell him your story and if he has that as an imperative he can get that job done. And we owe it to you to get that job done. Thank you.

Mr. ZAKKA. Thank you.

Mr. DEUTCH. I thank you, Mr. Trone.

Mr. Watkins, you are recognized.

Mr. WATKINS. I yield my time.

Mr. DEUTCH. OK, thank you.

Mr. Keating.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank you and the ranking member for having this important hearing. I also would like to say, Mr. Chairman, I think as Mrs. Levinson knows in particular that each and every opportunity over the years, you have been making sure at every possible committee hearing that we have had publicly that people know that this is a priority for us, that these Americans are being detained without legal justification.

And I would like to really thank the witnesses for coming forward here today because it is not easy. It takes a lot of courage and I know how difficult that must be. But I also know how important it is that we hear your voices and that the rest of America hears your voices through these hearings. And I hope, too, the Iranians hear your voices.

In fact, I will tell you with your presence here—I want to say this and I think I do not speak for myself in many ways, but this Congress there is legislation to impose sanctions on those Iranians that are responsible for and complicit with politically motivated and extended detention or trial of U.S. citizens or legal permanent citizens. And your presence here and hearing these stories and seeing the actions of the Iranian Government in doing this will shape greatly the way I view that legislation.

And that legislation would not only pertain to sanctions individually on those people, but on their families as well.

So thank you for being here in that regard. We have heard most of what you have had to say. I have, like so many members, I have family members who are being detained, Paul Whelan in Russia, right now without legal justification.

And I would just like to ask one question other than the statement I made. Is there anything outside the official areas of action that is taken by the State Department or by the Envoy that we could ever be helpful with, you know, the effects on your family, maybe some help for your family and they are coping with this that there might be areas where we can provide some assistance?

Before I did this I was a district attorney and I know that people suffering the kind of trauma you are having, although it is hard to compare some of that I know that what they are going through as a family and what they are going through themselves. Could you suggest perhaps, maybe some other resources that might help you or your family members to get through this?

Mrs. LEVINSON. Actually, I think the Victims Services Administration, the people in that group do help sometimes. I have been in contact with them and they have helped my family. I do not know what else they can do right now.

Mr. KEATING. I know. There is only one thing that will remedy the situation.

Mrs. LEVINSON. Right, right.

Mr. KEATING. And that is getting them back.

Mrs. LEVINSON. Right.

Mr. KEATING. And these are years of your life and of their lives that are taken away. And all our lives are measured in years and hours and minutes and it is a terrible deprivation. Any other suggestions that you might have other than—you really do not have to suggest much or tell us. Your presence here says it all, so thank you for doing this.

And I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Keating.

Mr. Waltz, please, you are recognized.

Mr. WALTZ. And thank you, Chairman and Ranking Member Wilson, for allowing me to support the families today and your important legislative efforts. And I just want to echo my colleagues, the Iranian—I do not even want to say habit, I want to say practice—deliberate State practice of hostage taking that has been a part of their foreign policy since the taking of our embassy in 1979. We may remember former Army officer and CIA Officer Buckley who was tortured and hung through the Iranian proxies Hezbollah, in the 1980's, and they are still operating through proxies. I also want to call attention in addition to your tragic cases to the longest-held journalist, Austin Tice, through the Syrian regime backed by Iran.

My question for you—well, before I get to my question, I certainly agree with my colleagues and I would be interested in your families' take on this as well. I certainly agree we need to turn up the pressure through sanctions that will be in this legislation. I think that is how the Iranian regime responds.

I also understand your desire for dialog and talk and would certainly support a humanitarian track that is limited but specifically talks about these cases and opens that up. My guardrail on that and I would be interested in your take, is that no other substance though. And as a way to keep up the pressure to keep them to the table and no other substance in terms of improving our relationship, in terms of easing the sanctions, in terms of any other thing the regime wants, without resolution on these issues whether it is the—and it is the full release.

My question is, one, your opinion there, do you agree with that if the administration were to take that approach?

And then, second, specifically for you, Mr. Namazi, can you elaborate on how your brother was left behind, your understanding of how that happened? I think we need to get that out in the public consciousness in a very real way so that it never happens again with any other type of negotiation. So just first a humanitarian track, but no other substance and then second, if you can elaborate on that, Mr. Namazi.

Mr. NAMAZI. Thank you. I believe it is very much consistent with American values of cherishing life and cherishing bringing Americans home. And we can only do that in my view—and I do not think there are many people who would disagree with that, really—is through dialog and a very narrow dialog just as you have described it on a humanitarian track.

We have managed to get other hostages home from countries that we thought we were going to go to war with imminently, you know, I am referring to North Korea. If you recall, there were discussions and fear of a nuclear engagement and within months through dialog, I would imagine, and then other countries. So, yes,

I would very much support that. I believe not doing it would result in failure.

Mr. WALTZ. So not to interrupt you, Mr. Namazi, but you would agree then as a resolution in all of these cases with Iran as a precondition for any other talks?

Mr. NAMAZI. From my point of view—

Mr. WALTZ. From your perspective.

Mr. NAMAZI. From my point of view, this is the most important thing in the world for me, yes. I do not know why my brother was left behind. I have heard different stories. I have heard different versions and I have also been accused, my family has also been accused unofficially and off the record by unnamed sources that we never requested help. This is a puzzle that I will take to grave with me, I would imagine.

But the fact is that Siamak was left behind. He was left behind when there was an opportunity not to leave him behind. And I think it was because it was so important to have a deal on a specific date and that date could not be—

Mr. WALTZ. You are referring to the Iran deal?

Mr. NAMAZI. Yes.

Mr. WALTZ. Yes.

Mr. NAMAZI. I cannot imagine anything else. But I do not understand what happened in the back doors. I have heard different stories. I have never heard—I hope 1 day someone writes a book who knows what really happened and I can find out what happened to my family.

But the painful truth is he was not on a plane when other hostages were on there. We found out about it, did not even get the heads up. Not that that would have made it any easier, but if someone had called and said, oh, we cannot tell you why, but, you know, be prepared for bad news.

Mr. WALTZ. Mr. Namazi, I am sorry to interrupt you.

Just in the interest of the little bit of time I have remaining, would—I think there is a notion within media that we deal with that and well-meaning that they do not want to highlight these cases because they do not want to, you know, increase the value of these hostages that are clearly being held as part of hostage diplomacy.

And as you have gone through this process do you see now this horrible process you are going through that there is actually value, more value—I know there is risks and you have all described there are risks, to my colleagues. But just as a way for us to help in highlighting these cases and keeping the spotlight on them that there is more to be gained there than risk? Is that, I mean is there kind of a consensus there amongst the families?

And apologies, Chairman, for going over my time.

Mrs. LEVINSON. Bob was actually also left behind in that 2016 deal. And they were supposed to continue talking about his case and they were supposed to have meetings between the U.S. Government and the Iranian officials on Bob's case. After the deal was made they had one meeting and nothing happened and it took from January to May before they had that one meeting. They had that one meeting and said they could not resolve the case and so therefore nothing else was done.

When asked about the differences between the two administrations, I would say that although the Trump administration has the Hostage Envoy in place, the Obama Administration had an opportunity to get Bob home and failed to get him home and they had 8 years to do it. I hope that President Trump does not follow that lead and leave Bob behind again.

I think we need dialog. I think we need to figure out how to make that dialog happen because the Iranians do not need to come to the table if they do not want to. Something has to change to make them want to come to the table.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Waltz.

Ms. Levinson, Mr. Namazi, Mr. Zakka, to your families we are immensely grateful for your participation at our hearing today. Thank you for reminding us how extremely personal this is for you. Thank you for reminding us that we have a critical role to play in bringing your family members home.

And I would echo what Mr. Wilson said, the power of your testimony today will help compel that we continue to act on behalf of your loved ones and do everything that we possibly can to ensure that this is the last time that we ever have to have this hearing. Thank you and this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:42 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]



APPENDIX

**SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism**

**Ted Deutch (D-FL), Chairman**

March 7, 2019

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>):

**DATE:** Thursday, March 7, 2019

**TIME:** 1:30 pm

**SUBJECT:** The Status of American Hostages in Iran

**WITNESS:** Mrs. Christine Levinson  
Wife of Robert Levinson

Mr. Babak Namazi  
Brother of Siamak Namazi and son of Baquer Namazi

Mr. Omar Zakka  
Son of Nizar Zakka

**By Direction of the Chairman**

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

## COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism HEARINGDay Thursday Date March 7, 2019 Room 2172Starting Time 1:32 PM Ending Time 2:42 PMRecesses 0 ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to ) ( to )

Presiding Member(s)

*Chairman Theodore E. Deutch*

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒Executive (closed) Session ☐Televised ☒Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒Stenographic Record ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

*The Status of American Hostages in Iran*

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

*See Attached*

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an \* if they are not members of full committee.)

*\* Michael Waltz, FL*HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

*IFR - Rep. Ted Deutch (Levinson Fact Sheet)**IFR - Rep. Ted Deutch (Rep. Jayapal Letter)**IFR - Rep. Ted Deutch (Gov. Inslee Letter)**QFR - Rep. Steve Watkins*

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE \_\_\_\_\_

or

TIME ADJOURNED 2:42 PM
  
 Subcommittee Staff Associate

# HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

## SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

### SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
X	Theodore E. Deutch, FL
	Gerald E. Connolly, VA
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	Ted Lieu, CA
	Colin Allred, TX
	Tom Malinowski, NJ
X	David Trone, MA
	Brad Sherman, CA
X	William Keating, MA
X	Juan Vargas, CA

<i>PRESENT</i>	<i>MEMBER</i>
X	Joe Wilson, SC
X	Steve Chabot, OH
	Adam Kinzinger, IL
X	Lee Zeldin, NY
	Brian J. Mast, FL
	Brian K. Fitzpatrick, PA
	Guy Reschenthaler, PA
X	Steve Watkins, KS

# HELP BOB LEVINSON, DETAINED BY IRANIAN AUTHORITIES SINCE 2007

## The Facts

### Detention

Bob Levinson is the longest held hostage in US history. He was detained on Kish Island, Iran, after leaving the Hotel Maryam for the airport on March 9, 2007. The last man known to have seen him, Dawud Salahuiddin, said Levinson was delivered by plainclothes Iranian security agents in the hotel lobby after an overnight stay.<sup>1</sup>

### Proof of Life

The family received four emails, including a proof of life video and photographs in 2010 and 2011 that, according to media reports, US intelligence officials concluded were sent by a professional (such as a government) intelligence service.<sup>2</sup>

### FBI Reward

In 2015, the FBI announced a \$5 million reward for information leading to Levinson's safe return. This increased the \$1 million reward first announced in 2012. To date, no one with information of any value has come forward.<sup>3</sup>

### Omission from Hostage Deal

In January 2016, the US and Iran agreed to a prisoner exchange that left Levinson behind in Iran. Iran has failed to meet its obligations as part of that deal to resolve the Levinson case.<sup>4</sup>

## Frequently Asked Questions

### How can we be sure Levinson is still alive?

- There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that Levinson is not alive.<sup>5</sup> Proof of Life was received in 2010 and 2011, after several years of captivity. There continues to be an influx of reports stating that he is alive to this day.

### How can we be sure he is still in Iran?

- Levinson disappeared on Iranian soil in 2007 and has had no contact with the outside world since then. He has not been sighted in any other country. Levinson was last seen in Iran and the Iranians have a responsibility to resolve his case and bring him justice, which they still have yet to do.<sup>6</sup>

### Why won't Iran officials admit they have him?

- Some have speculated that Iranian authorities were not initially involved in Levinson's detention by local Kish officials. Twelve years later, any suggestion of government ignorance is implausible. Iranian officials have said that "wherever it may occur in Iran, any suspicious move will be swiftly detected".<sup>7</sup> There are ways for the Iranians to cooperate with the US to rescue Levinson, but they still have yet to do so.

### What is the US government position on the case?

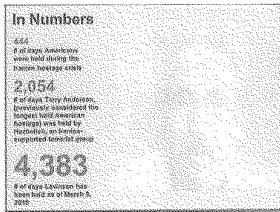
- The US government, including Secretary of State Pompeo, strongly advocates for Bob Levinson's release: "We are engaged... literally every day, in working to return every U.S. citizen who is either wrongfully detained or a hostage somewhere around the world. That certainly includes Bob Levinson and all those that are being held by the Iranian regime. We are determined to get them back."<sup>8</sup>

### Family Trip to Iran

In Dec 2007, Levinson's family members traveled to Iran. They saw his name on Kish Airline flight manifests entering the country and his signature as checking out of his hotel, but his name was not on any departing flight manifests. They witnessed firsthand that Iran has some of the strictest security in the world and that guests on Kish must turn over their passports when they check into hotels.<sup>9</sup>

### Arrest Documents

In 2010, the family received documents from a former Iranian government official indicating that Levinson's 2007 arrest was ordered by Iranian intelligence, as well as showing information on his detention and health.<sup>10</sup>



## Iran's Party Line Keeps Changing

### 2007

One month after Levinson is taken, state-run Press TV Iran reports on his arrest by Iranian intelligence forces, says he should be "free in a matter of days", but for the rest of the year, Iran refuses to provide information on Levinson's whereabouts.<sup>11</sup>

### 2008

In an interview during the UN General Assembly, Iran's President Ahmadinejad says, "There was a claim made some time ago... They talked and met with our officials... I see no reason for a person who... arrived in Iran through official channels, to have problems here... are we ready to help, to assist with that matter?"<sup>12</sup>

### 2009

Iran's UN Ambassador Khazaei tells the family to private that the issue is "government to government". Other countries that inquire about the case are told to stay out of it.<sup>13</sup>

### 2011

In a meeting with members of an American non-profit organization, the Iranian Ambassador to France confesses that Levinson was in the Iranian government's custody.<sup>14</sup>

### 2012

President Ahmadinejad does not deny Levinson is in custody: "I remember last year [Iranian and American intelligence groups had a meeting, but] haven't followed up on it. I thought they came to some kind of an agreement."<sup>15</sup>

### 2014

Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif tells CNN: "I have not seen anything that could prove that he [Levinson] was ever in Iran... We need the United States to explain... if he was ever in Iranian territory."<sup>16</sup>

### 2016

Iranian officials, in conversations with private citizens and publicly, point to an anonymous January White House statement that Levinson is no longer in Iran.<sup>17</sup>

### 2018

Iran fails to respond to continued requests by two UN groups, the HNGO and USGAI, or to an international joint letter by families of hostages held by Iran. The only response is silence.<sup>18</sup>

### 2019

Iran maintains its silence with regard to Bob Levinson and other hostage cases.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Levinson Family

<sup>2</sup> CNN, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

<sup>3</sup> AP, "FBI Offers \$5 Million Reward for Missing American," 10/10/2015

<sup>4</sup> AP, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

<sup>5</sup> AP, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

<sup>6</sup> AP, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

<sup>7</sup> AP, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

<sup>8</sup> AP, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

<sup>9</sup> AP, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

<sup>10</sup> AP, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

<sup>11</sup> AP, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

<sup>12</sup> AP, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

<sup>13</sup> AP, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

<sup>14</sup> AP, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

<sup>15</sup> AP, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

<sup>16</sup> AP, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

<sup>17</sup> AP, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

<sup>18</sup> AP, "Iran says it has proof of life video of missing American," 10/10/2010

PRAMILA JAYAPAL  
7TH DISTRICT, WASHINGTON

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET  
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
IMMIGRATION AND BORDER SECURITY  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON REGULATORY REFORM,  
COMMERCIAL, AND ANTITRUST LAW

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-4707**

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March 12, 2019

The Honorable Mike Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St., NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Secretary Pompeo:

I write to request your assistance in securing the release of Mr. Xiyue Wang, a U.S. citizen who has been detained by the Islamic Republic of Iran since August 2016.

Mr. Wang is a proud American and graduate of the University of Washington with deep ties to Washington State and the Seventh Congressional District.

Mr. Wang was in Iran for the purpose of conducting research for his Ph.D. dissertation on late 19th and early 20th-century Eurasian history at Princeton University. His research plans were fully communicated to the Iranian Interest Section at the Pakistani embassy in Washington, D.C. which issued his visa, as well as to libraries in Iran. As he conducted his research, he was wrongfully arrested, denied due process, and sentenced to a ten-year prison sentence under espionage charges.

Mr. Wang's wife and five-year-old son have not seen him since his detainment in August of 2016. My office has recently learned from Mr. Wang's mother, Kexu Lan, that Mr. Wang has been confined to a cell in the basement of an Iranian prison. His mental and physical health are rapidly deteriorating and he is considering going on a hunger strike.

Restricting academic freedom by imprisoning scholars, researchers, and journalists is deeply anti-democratic. I urge you to work for the immediate release of this American citizen and hold Iran accountable for their strategy of detention and hostage-taking for political gain.

Given your successful track record of securing the release of U.S. citizens detained in Egypt, Turkey, and North Korea, I am confident you will work to safely return Mr. Wang to his family in the United States.

Sincerely,



PRAMILA JAYAPAL  
Member of Congress

CC: Donald Trump, President of the United States

JAY INSLEE  
Governor



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
Office of the Governor

March 6, 2019

The Honorable Theodore Deutch  
Chair  
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North  
Africa, and International Terrorism  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
2170 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Joe Wilson  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North  
Africa, and International Terrorism  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
2066 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Deutch and Ranking Member Wilson:

I am writing to convey my very serious concerns about the status and treatment of Xiyue Wang, who is currently detained by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Xiyue and his family have strong ties to Washington, as his mother, wife, and son currently reside in our state. He is also a graduate of the University of Washington.

Xiyue, a Ph.D. student at Princeton University, was in Iran solely for the purpose of studying Farsi and conducting scholarly research in connection with his dissertation on late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Eurasian history. He was studying historical records pertaining to the cultural history of the Qajar dynasty, with financial support from Princeton that was entirely under its control and with no involvement of any kind by the U.S. government or any outside parties.

Before traveling to Iran, Xiyue sent letters explaining his research plan to the Iranian Interest Section at the Embassy of Pakistan in Washington, D.C., which issued him a valid visa. He also communicated with libraries in Iran about his scholarly pursuits, and was, at every step, totally transparent about what he wanted to study and his reasons for this area of study. Xiyue was not involved in any political activities or social activism related to Iran.

In August 2016, Xiyue was arrested and charged by the Iranian government with espionage under its criminal code. Princeton University and others consider these charges to be completely false, and I am not aware of any available evidence that supports them. Xiyue's wife and mother filed a petition calling for his immediate release with the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. The petition asserts that his trial suffered from substantive and procedural defects and that his detention violates Iranian and international law. Xiyue was sentenced to 10 years in prison in July 2017.

The Honorable Theodore Deutch and The Honorable Joe Wilson  
March 6, 2019  
Page 2

I am very concerned about the treatment Xiyue has received while detained in Iran, and I encourage the Committee to take every action possible to obtain his release. In addition to undermining basic human rights, Xiyue's detention also infringes on the freedom of academic researchers to study, learn, and discover. When politics encroaches on academic freedoms, it should be a serious concern to us all.

I have previously communicated with former Ambassador Nikki Haley and the United States Mission to the United Nations regarding Xiyue's detention. I appreciate the support they have provided and their attention to this matter. However, despite their considerable efforts, the situation remains unresolved. I ask that the Committee fully engage in efforts to obtain the release of Xiyue Wang from Iranian custody, and I thank you for your attention to this issue.

Very truly yours,



Jeff Inslee  
Governor

Cc: The Honorable Eliot Engel, Chairman, House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
The Honorable Michael McCaul, Ranking Member, House Committee on Foreign Affairs

**MENAIT Hearing**  
The Status of American Hostages in Iran

March 7, 2019

**Question for the Record from Representative Steve Watkins**

My question is for all witnesses; Is the U.S government working with any other nations whose nationals are also being held captive to coordinate on communication and to work toward the collective freedom of your loved ones? Throughout this ordeal have any of you or your families been contacted by the Iranian Authorities with an update on the condition of your loved ones and their captivity?

**Response from Babak Namazi:**

*Is the U.S government working with any other nations whose nationals are also being held captive to coordinate on communication and to work toward the collective freedom of your loved ones?*

As far as I am aware the USG has been in contact with some other nations in this respect but I do not have the full details. It is worth noting that a number of the family members (including us) have joined the family members of nationals of other nations in making joint appeals and efforts for their loved ones.

*Throughout this ordeal have any of you or your families been contacted by the Iranian Authorities with an update on the condition of your loved ones and their captivity?*

During the detention in the revolutionary guard ward of Evin prison we had no real idea on the condition of my family members. The calls were very scarce and when done for a few minutes under the supervision of IRGC minders whom controlled what they could say. For example, only afterwards did we learn of mistreatments including my father being refused medical attention when he asked for it, on some other occasions being rushed to hospital without our knowledge due to severe health issue or my brother being physically abused and the extended length of time held in solitary confinement.

**Response from Jason Poblete, on behalf of Omar Zakka:**

*Attached*





poblete | tamargo

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**Jason I. Poblete**  
Attorney at Law  
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April 1, 2019

Rep. Ted Deutch (D-Fla.), Chairman  
Middle East, North Africa & International Terrorism Subcommittee  
House Foreign Affairs Committee  
2170 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

SUBJECT: *Response; Question for the Record from Representative Steve Watkins (R-Kan.)*

Dear Chairman Deutch,

On behalf of Mr. Nizar Zakka and his family, thank you for including Mr. Nizar Zakka's son, Mr. Omar Zakka, in the March 7 hearing: "*The Status of American Hostages in Iran*." Rep. Steve Watkins (R-Kan.) had a question for the record (QFR). I am providing the following answer in my capacity as counsel for Mr. Nizar Zakka.

**QFR from Rep. Steve Watkins (R-Kan.):**

*My question is for all witnesses; Is the U.S government working with any other nations whose nationals are also being held captive to coordinate on communication and to work toward the collective freedom of your loved ones? Throughout this ordeal have any of you or your families been contacted by the Iranian Authorities with an update on the condition of your loved ones and their captivity?*

Mr. Zakka was in Iran at the invitation of the Iranian government, a guest of the former Vice President Shahindokht Molaverdi. Upon information and belief, Mr. Zakka was unlawfully detained and kidnapped on September 18, 2015, by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC); and it is probable Mr. Zakka's abduction was orchestrated to coincide on or about September 17, the last day of the U.S. Congressional review period of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

poblete | tamargo

State Department officials with the Obama administration, as has been the case during the Trump administration, have advised that the United States is working with other nations whose nationals are held hostage; however, it is not clear if these efforts have been, or are being done in a coordinated multinational approach. It is my understanding that U.S.-European allies, and other potential stakeholders, may be unwilling or unable to speak publicly or otherwise coordinate to secure the release of Americans, U.S. LPRs, and others held hostage. It is my understanding there may be twelve nations whose foreign nationals are held hostage in Iran. This list of nationals should be published. The Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs at the Department of State may have more information.

While I cannot elaborate extensively on communications with Iranian authorities, since 2015, communications with Iranian officials have been, at best, spotty and cryptic. The Iranians have shown little regard for the well-being of Mr. Zakka or his family. As is typical in these cases, the communications related to Mr. Zakka's well-being have also been done via various interlocutors. Iranian officials have also made cryptic comments to the media.

For example, on November 7, 2016, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said "[w]hat happened to Mr. Zakka is not a problem between Iran and Lebanon ... the problem is actually between the United States and Iran." On September 14, 2018, almost three years to the day of Mr. Zakka's kidnapping, Vice President Molaverdi told the Associated Press Iran has "failed" to help a U.S. permanent resident imprisoned over spying allegations that she personally invited to the country for a conference." Molaverdi added, "[w]e did all we could to stop this from happening, but we are seeing that we have failed to make a significant impact."

Thank you, once again, for helping bring attention to Mr. Zakka's case. If you require additional information, please let me know.

Sincerely,

For Poblete Tamargo LLP



Jason I. Poblete

Attorney & Counselor at Law