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HELD FOR RANSOM: THE FAMILIES OF IRAN'S HOSTAGES SPEAK OUT

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

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HELD FOR RANSOM: THE FAMILIES OF IRAN'S HOSTAGES SPEAK OUT

TUESDAY, JULY 25, 2017

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:00 p.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. The committee will come to order.

After recognizing myself and Ranking Member Deutch for 5 minutes each for our opening statements, I will then recognize any other members wishing recognition for 1 minute. We will then hear from our witnesses. We thank them for appearing before us today. Without objection, the witnesses prepared statements will be made a part of the record and members may have 5 days to insert statements and questions for the record subject to the length limitation in the rules.

The Chair now recognizes herself for 5 minutes.

On behalf of the ranking member and me, we wish that it was not necessary to conduct this hearing today. However, we believe that it is important to continue to elevate this matter as much as we can to ensure that we continue to advocate on behalf of U.S. citizens being unjustly held in Iran and ask questions about what our Government is doing to get your family members back home.

Our witnesses today represent the families of four American hostages in Iran. Bob Levinson, a former U.S. Government employee and public servant for 33 years—we have his photo in a poster—including at both the FBI and the DEA, and a constituent of our ranking member, Mr. Levinson was last seen on March 9, 2007; Siamak Namazi, a businessman who graduated from Tufts and Rutgers Universities, who founded a consulting firm focused on the risk of doing business in Iran and who was detained on October 15, 2015; his father, Baquer Namazi, a former representative of the U.N. Children's Fund, who was detained on February 22nd, 2016 while trying to look into his son's case; and Nizar Zakka, an information, communications, and technology development expert who was detained on September 18, 2015.

In addition to these four men, we are aware of at least four other Americans being held in Iran, including three who were arrested last year and one who was detained just earlier this month.

It is no easy task to testify before Congress, even more so when it is about a family member who is suffering and has been taken from you. And I know I speak on behalf of all members when I say that we are deeply appreciative of the witnesses appearing before us today. My heart broke as I read each one of your testimonies. The love and the pride that you have for your family members was so clearly evident, and I want you to know that all of us here are committed to doing everything in our power to get your loved ones home safely.

This is unfortunately the second time in the last 3 years that our committee has held a hearing on Iran's hostages, as we welcomed the Levinson family last time as well as three witnesses whose family members were eventually released as part of the nuclear deal with Iran, known as the JCPOA. Iran's taking of hostages in exchange for political or financial concessions is by any definition morally and ethically abhorrent and completely outside the scope of international legal norms.

I know that both the current and past administration have wanted to bring these Americans home and they have tried hard to find a solution when dealing with a regime that does not respect human rights or decency or the rule of law. But it is not enough. Without additional pressure on the Iranian regime and without a significant step up in the efforts of both the White House and the State Department, Iran will undoubtedly not only continue detaining those held today, but will take even more hostages in the future.

The State Department and other relevant agencies must also intensify their efforts to keep in contact with the families of those being held every step of the way. Despite revisions to U.S. hostage policy in 2015, including the creation of a Family Engagement Coordinator, we continue to hear too many stories about the U.S. Government not keeping the families in the loop. The Hostage Response Group and the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell were also good steps forward and have had some successes, but we continue to see too many Americans being held for too long.

Later this week, a resolution that I am proud to be leading with Ranking Member Deutch will be on the House floor. It calls for Iran's unconditional release of Bob, of Siamak, of Baquer, and Nizar as well as any other U.S. citizen, legal permanent resident, or foreign national and urges the President to make their release the highest of priorities. And I have no doubt that it will pass overwhelmingly.

But we need to see additional pressure and additional sanctions specifically against the Iranian individuals and entities responsible for detaining those family members, for taking hostages as a matter of policy, and for committing increasingly gross human rights abuses, so that Iran is finally forced to change its behavior and these Americans are released and brought home. We need to see an intense, concerted effort from both Congresses and this administration because this is a problem that is not going away.

And with that I am pleased to yield to my good friend, the ranking member, Mr. Deutch of Florida.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I want to thank you for holding this hearing today. You have been a champion for these families and the families of so many others who have been wrong-

fully held or imprisoned by rogue regimes. You have been a steadfast partner in advocating for the release of my constituent Bob Levinson and I am most grateful for your unwavering support.

To Doug, Babak, and Omar, thank you for being here today to share the stories of your fathers and brother. None of us can imagine what your families go through every single day. Your testimony today will give this Congress and the American people a small window into the unimaginable reality that you face each day.

Just last week we learned that Iran has taken another American citizen, convicted him in some undisclosed sham trial, and sentenced him to 10 years in prison. Hostage taking is not a game that responsible nations play. Iran's outrageous disregard for international law should give every country, every company, especially every American company, pause as to whether this is a country they should welcome back into the community of nations.

Siamak Namazi has been detained since November 2015. His father, Baquer, has been detained since February 2016. Baquer was detained at 80 years old, a mere 6 weeks after the deal that saw five Americans previously being held by Iran released in January of last year. His health unfortunately is poor. Neither were afforded due process, and this family has still not been made aware of the exact charges against them. This is not rule of law. This is hostage taking.

Nizar Zakka is an internet freedom activist. He was invited to Iran to participate in a conference and was subsequently detained. Can you imagine, invited to a country and then arrested with no cause. Iran first acknowledged holding Nizar in November 3rd, 2015. Like Siamak and the recently sentenced Xiyue Wang, Nizar has been sentenced to 10 years in prison.

Bob Levinson has been missing for 10 years. Bob went missing from Kish Island, Iran, March 9, 2007. Bob and his wife Christine live in my district in Coral Springs, Florida. Bob is a patriot in every sense of the word. He devoted 28 years of his life to government service, first at the DEA and then 22 years at the FBI. I have come to know the Levinson family well over the past 7 years.

Bob's wife of over 40 years, Christine, is here today as well as Bob's eldest son, Dan. Not here today are Bob's five other children, Susan, Stephanie, Sarah, Samantha, and David. Sarah recently gave birth to Bob's newest grandchild. He was born on July 4th, a date that certainly makes Bob proud. Last year, Bob's namesake, 3-year-old Bobby, underwent treatment for cancer, and just a few months ago Bob's son, David, had his first child and the baptism is next week.

Bob has missed all of these milestones. Imagine 10 years without your husband, your father, your grandfather. We will hear what that has been like from Doug, who was only 13 at the time Bob disappeared. No family should have to endure 10 years of unanswered questions, 10 years of watching others come home, and 10 years of being left behind.

I have sat in this room countless times over the years and talked about Bob, I have talked about him on the House floor, and I won't stop talking about Bob. I won't stop calling out Iran to once and for all send Bob home. Iran may claim they don't know where Bob is, but they know how to find him and they know how to get him

home. We need action. Bob can no longer be left behind, and today I would like you to hear directly from Bob.

In 2010, the Levinsons received the video you are about to see. In it you will see Bob under duress, pleading for his country to help him, if we could play it.

[Video shown.]

Mr. DEUTCH. It is hard to watch, but it is important that the world see Bob, that they see more than a name in a newspaper article, that they see the husband, father, the grandfather, the American public servant. I implore this administration to make bringing Bob home a priority. And despite our policy disagreements with Iran, bringing home Bob, Siamak, Baquer and Nizar, and the other Americans detained in Iran must always be at the top of the agenda.

Doug, Babak, Omar, I can only hope that by providing each of you a chance to tell your family's story today we can send a message that the release of these Americans is a priority for this Congress, it is a priority for the American people, and we will not stop until they are home. And I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Deutch. And the Levinson family feels very blessed to have you as their representative, for always being a voice for Bob. I know that we didn't catch the beginning part of that video. Is it possible to go back and—it seemed like it started in the middle.

[Video shown.]

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. And I think we got at the very beginning. Thank you so very much. Thank you. And now I would like to have members make their opening statements. We will start with Mr. Chabot of Ohio.

Mr. CHABOT. Thank you, Madam Chair and Ranking Member Deutch for your continued dedication to this important issue. I know that you have both been, I kind of think, an inspiration to the rest of us on the committee for how doggedly you have taken this on and thank you for doing that. And I also want to express our sincere admiration for our witnesses here today, all three. Your willingness to testify on these abhorrent cases is a testament not only of your love for your family members but to your courage and tenacity in standing up for what is just and what is right.

Mr. Levinson as we know is the longest-held U.S. civilian in American history and Iranian officials have done little to live up to their commitments to work through the cases to assist the United States to investigate Mr. Levinson's disappearance. And Iran—I am almost out of time. Iran has continued to take people hostage. They took people before the agreement with Iran and they have taken people since then.

So it seems nothing has worked to change the way they value human life. It is a terrible situation and to have a loved one outside your family under the circumstances you have is just something that no human being should have to be under those circumstances, and this is on Iran. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chabot.

Mr. Schneider of Illinois.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, and I too want to join in commending the chairman and the ranking member for holding this

hearing. And to each of you, thank you for being here for sharing your story. I first had the privilege of sitting in this chair 4½ years ago, and it was then that I first heard my colleague from Florida, Mr. Deutch, so eloquently speak on behalf Robert Levinson. I have heard him speak many, many times.

I was not here when the deal with Iran was consummated and some of the hostages were brought home but Mr. Levinson was left behind. I am greatly honored and fortunate to be back in this seat and quite honestly stunned that we are still having to speak out and call for the return of Robert Levinson. But here we are. And I want to thank my colleague, Ted, for your continued passion and eloquent words. We will continue to fight for this. Thanks to Doug, to Babak, and Omar. Your presence here is a reflection of our commitment and we will be here until your fathers, your brother, come home. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. DeSantis, I mean Mr. Schneider. Mr. DeSantis of Florida.

Mr. DESANTIS. Well, I thank the chairman and thank the ranking member for keeping the American people apprised of this issue. We had a deal with Iran. We sent billions of dollars, even a billion seven in cash. I know we got some people back. We did not get everybody back and we need to do that. This is a maniacal regime. They are fomenting all kinds of problems all across the Middle East. They are a stalwart enemy of this country and I would just urge the President, lean in on this issue. Put some pressure on them. Do what we can do. We are the strongest country in the world, we have got to be able to get our people back.

And I know there is a lot of stuff that goes on behind the scenes, but boy, I would love to see something public, strong, and swift and I would love to see these people back. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. DeSantis.

Mr. Zeldin of New York.

Mr. ZELDIN. Well, thank you Madam Chair and to the ranking member as well for your leadership on this issue, this hearing, which is called the Families of Iran's Hostages Speak Out, hopefully will be part of a better way forward of America speaking out because these families need this administration, need the American people to be fully behind them in this effort.

We gave $1.7 billion ransom payment in cash to Iranians at the same exact time of securing a release of some unjustly imprisoned Americans. The administration said it wasn't a ransom. Some suggested it was a coincidence. Some said we owed them the money. Everything in this story is highly and easily disputable based off of facts. One of those facts also is that not everyone has come home and Iran has continued its bad activities.

So thank you again to the chair for hosting this hearing and hopefully it will inspire our country to do more to speak out to bring your families home and to ensure this doesn't happen again with better policies going forward. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Amen. Thank you, Mr. Zeldin.

And now we would like to introduce our witnesses. Honored to welcome Doug Levinson, Doug as you know is the youngest son of Robert Levinson. He was only 13 when his father, Bob, went missing in Iran. I have had the pleasure, we all have, of having met

with him many, many times about his father's case. He works here on the Hill for the office of our good friend, Senator Bob Menendez of New Jersey.

Thank you, Doug, for your persistent efforts. Thank you for being with us today. We look forward to your testimony.

And next we would like to welcome Babak Namazi. Mr. Namazi's father Bakar Namazi and brother Siamak Namazi were sentenced to prison in 2016 by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps under trumped up charges. Babak has been working relentlessly to free his father and his brother.

Thank you, Babak, for joining us in this important hearing today. I have had the pleasure of meeting you at various times along with your attorney. We look forward to hearing your testimony.

Finally, we would like to welcome Omar Zakka. Omar is the son of Nizar Zakka who was arrested, as you had heard, while attending a women's conference in Tehran in 2015. Nizar was sentenced in closed-door trial to 10 years in an Iranian prison. Nizar has engaged in multiple hunger strikes during his imprisonment which has put his health in an unstable condition. His son Omar has been working also tirelessly to secure the release of his father.

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today, Omar, and we very much look forward to your testimony.

As I had said, your written testimony has been made a part of the record. Please feel free to summarize your statements and then we will begin our question and answer period. We will begin with you, Mr. Levinson.

STATEMENT OF MR. DOUGLAS LEVINSON (SON OF ROBERT LEVINSON)

Mr. LEVINSON. Thank you. Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of this committee, thank you for inviting me to testify before you today. My name is Doug Levinson. I am the youngest child of Robert and Christine Levinson. What you just saw was the last known video of my father who disappeared from Iran's Kish Island on March 9, 2007. That was 3,791 days ago. Bob Levinson, or Dad as my six siblings and I call him, is the longest-held hostage in American history.

The Iranian Government has never officially recognized arresting my father, but just 3 weeks after he went missing an Iranian state-sanctioned media outlet called PressTV reported that he was "in the hands of Iranian security forces and could be freed in a matter of days." Our family also received documents indicating that he was arrested by local authorities on Kish Island. I would like to submit these articles——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Without objection.

Mr. LEVINSON [continuing]. Into the record. Thank you.

Iran has repeatedly changed their story from asking what he was doing there to denying he was ever there at all. The hostage video you saw was made to look as if he was being held by some radical extremist group. Don't be fooled. The U.S. Government officials believe that is a ruse. Iran is responsible and they know exactly where he is.

Over the past 10 years, Dad has missed three of his children's weddings, two high school graduations, and three college graduations, including myself, and too many birthdays and major milestones to count. He has five grandchildren he has never met. They know their Grandpa Bob through the stories we tell them and they pray each night to one day meet him. Bobby, who was named after his Grandpa Bob, is currently in remission from stage II lymphoma. He is only 3 years old. But with all that Dad has missed over the past 10 years, the most devastating part is that Bob Levinson has been left behind by the U.S. Government time after time after time and we cannot let that happen again.

With me today is my mother Christine who has fought every single day of these past 10 years to rescue the love of her life. My parents should be enjoying their empty nest, visiting their grandchildren, and traveling the world like they had promised. Instead, my mom's first trip outside of the United States was to Iran to retrace my father's footsteps. Words cannot describe what an honor it is to be the child of Bob and Christine Levinson. [Applause.]

Mr. LEVINSON. Also here with me today is my older brother Dan who testified before this committee 2 years ago alongside the families of Jason Rezaian, Saeed Abedini, and Amir Hekmati. Just 6 months after that testimony all three were released as part of the JCPOA, but our father was left behind and we had to find out from watching the news just like everyone else. Let me repeat that. My mother found out because my sister called her after seeing it on television. No one from the United States Government had the decency to give us an advanced warning that this was happening.

Devastated does not even come close to what we felt that day. My family received the hostage video that you saw, earlier in 2010, years after many in the government wrote him off for dead. We received this photo and others like it in 2011.

Bob Levinson has devoted his life to two things, providing unwavering love to his wife and family and protecting America by putting away the bad guys. Dad worked for the FBI for 22 years and 6 years in the DEA before that. He was working for the U.S. Government when he was taken and therefore the United States Government has a moral obligation to bring him home.

Just last year, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled that Iran is responsible for my father's arrest and declared that they must acknowledge and return him home immediately. The U.N. has been more forceful on securing my father's return than the government that sent him there.

I was only 13 years old when my father was kidnapped. He is my best friend. He is everything I wish I could be. Four days before he was kidnapped my father wrote me an email. This is what it said: Monday, March 5, 2007. Dear Dud, I hope you miss me as much as I miss you.

I didn't see his message until March 11th, the day after we learned something was wrong. As a scared and terrified 13-year-old boy who had just been told his father was missing, I sent him a message back. Sunday, March 11, 2007. Hi Daddy, it is March 11th and I just got your email. Everyone is looking for you. Dad, I want to let you know that I love you so much and please come back

home safe and sound. I love you, Dad, so much. Please respond back. I am so scared. Please come home.

The last time I saw him I was about 5 foot 4 inches. Today I stand 6 feet 4 inches tall, the same height as Dad when he left. I have always wanted to follow in his footsteps, but I never thought that I would be wearing a pair of his shoes while testifying in front of Congress. I will be honest, they are still a little bit big, but the blisters that I get on my heel remind me of the service and the sacrifice that the man they belong to gave to this country.

His service inspired me to move to DC last year and to take a job working on foreign policy for a senior member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I know the weight that this committee holds and while I am honored to be here, this is the second time we have had to do this. This is the second time we have had to testify on my father's behalf. We pray there will not need to be a third.

Finally, I am here today with three goals. First, to make sure that my father is not forgotten. We are desperate. We have endured the turnover of three administrations. We have met with anybody and everybody that will listen. We don't know what else we can possibly do.

Second, we are here to get on the record that the United States Government has repeatedly failed my father and my family. Year after year we have witnessed the United States administration officials fail to make my father the priority he needs to be. We are hopeful with this new administration, but we have heard these same promises before. We need action. We have watched at least ten Americans who have been captured and released by Iran since my father was taken 10 years ago. Ten. That is ten families who have been reunited with their loved ones. That is ten times that my father has been left behind, one for each year he has been gone.

And third, we are here to ask for your help. Please, hold the United States and the Iranian Governments accountable for bringing Bob Levinson home. Please, be relentless in pursuing all options and pushing this administration to resolve this case as quickly as possible. And please, do not let Iran off the hook. They have been allowed to do whatever they want because there have been no consequences. They have avoided my father's case for years. They know what happened to Bob Levinson and they can send him home, but they choose not to.

In our experience, the Iranians only respond to pressure. Hold their feet to the fire. Threaten them with sanctions. Do anything. Do something. The excruciating pain of not knowing, the fear that we haven't done enough, and the thought that the United States Government has failed to rescue my father thus far is demoralizing. My father Bob Levinson is an American hero. He is a patriot. Please help us finally bring him home. As he said in that hostage video in 2010, 33 years of service deserves something. Please help us. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Levinson follows:]

Douglas Levinson
Written Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
July 25th, 2017

Madame Chairwoman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of this committee,

Thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Doug Levinson. I am the youngest child of Robert and Christine Levinson. What you just saw was the last known video of my father, who disappeared from Iran's Kish Island on March 9th, 2007. That was 3,791 days ago.

Bob Levinson, or "Dad" as my six siblings and I call him, is the longest held hostage in American history.

The Iranian government has never officially acknowledged arresting my father. But just three weeks after he went missing, an Iranian state-sanctioned media outlet called Press TV reported that he was "in the hands of Iranian security forces" and could be "freed in a matter of days." Our family also received documents indicating that he was arrested by local authorities on Kish Island. I'd like to submit the Press TV article and these documents for the record.

Iran has repeatedly changed their story, from asking what he was doing there to denying he was ever there at all. The hostage video you saw was made to look as if he's being held by some radical extremist group. Don't be fooled, US officials believe that's a façade. Iran is responsible, and they know exactly where he is.

Over the past ten years, Dad has missed three of his children's weddings, two high school graduations, three college graduations, and too many birthdays and major milestones to count.

He has five grandchildren he's never met. They know their Grandpa Bob through the stories we tell them, and they pray each night to one day meet him. Bobby, who was named after his Grandpa Bob, is currently in remission from Stage 2 Lymphoma. He's only three years old.

But with all that Dad has missed over the past ten years, the most devastating part is that Bob Levinson has been left behind by the U.S. Government time after time after time. And we cannot let it happen again.

With me today is my mother, Christine, who has fought every single day of these ten years to rescue the love of her life. My parents should be enjoying their empty nest, visiting their grandchildren, and traveling the world like they had planned. Instead, my mom's first trip outside of the United States was to Iran to retrace my father's footsteps. Words cannot describe what an honor it is to be their son.

Also here is my older brother Dan, who testified before this committee two years ago alongside the families of Jason Rezaian, Saeed Abedini, and Amir Hekmati. Just six months after that testimony, all three were released as part of the JCPOA. But our father was left behind, and we found out from watching the news just like everyone else. Let me say that again, my mother found out because my sister called her after seeing it on TV. No one from the United States

Government had the decency to give us advanced warning. Devastating does not even come close to describe the pain that we felt that day.

My family received the hostage video that you saw a few minutes ago in 2010, years after many in the government wrote him off for dead. We received this photo and others like it in 2011.

Bob Levinson has devoted his life to two things: providing unwavering love to his wife and family, and protecting America by putting the "bad guys" away. Dad worked for the FBI for 22 years, and for the DEA 6 years before that. He was working for the U.S. Government when he was taken and the U.S. therefore has a moral obligation to bring him home.

Just last year, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions ruled that Iran is responsible for my father's arrest, and declared that they must acknowledge and return him immediately. The UN has been more forceful on securing his return than his own government that sent him there.

I was only thirteen years old when my father was kidnapped. He was my best friend. He is everything I wished I could be. Four days before he was kidnapped, my father wrote me an email. This is what it said:

"***Monday, March 5th 2007.***

Hello, Duddy Dud!

I hope you miss me as much as I miss you.

Love,

Father of

Duddy J. Dudminster"

I didn't see his message until March 11th, the day after we learned something was wrong. As a scared 13-year old boy who had just been told his father was missing, I sent him a message back:

"***Sunday, March 11th, 2007.***

Hi Daddy…It is March 11th and I just got your email. Everyone is looking for you, even the FBI! Daddy I want to let you know that I love you so much and please come back home safe and sound. I love you Daddy so much. Please respond back. Please Dad I'm so scared. Please come home.

Love,

Your Son,

The Roasted Baby"

The last time I saw him, I was about 5-foot-4. Today, I stand 6 feet 4 inches tall, the same height as Dad when he left.

I've always wanted to follow in his footsteps, but I never thought that I would be wearing a pair of his shoes while testifying in front of Congress. I'll be honest: they are still little bit big. But the blisters I get on my heels remind me of the service and sacrifice that the man they belong to gave to his country.

His service inspired me to move to DC last year and take a job working on foreign policy for a senior member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I know the weight that this committee holds, and while I'm honored to be here, this is the second time we have to testify on our father's behalf. We pray there will not need to be a third.

Finally, I'm here today with three goals. First: To make sure my father is not forgotten. We are desperate. We have endured the turnover of three administrations. We have met with anybody and everybody that will listen. We don't know what else we can possibly do.

Second: We're here to get on the record that the United States government has repeatedly failed my father and my family. Year after year, we've witnessed U.S. administration officials fail to make my father the priority that he needs to be. We are hopeful with this new administration, but we've heard these promises before. We need action.

We have watched at least 10 Americans who have been captured and released by Iran since my father was taken ten years ago. That's 10 families who have been reunited with their loved ones. That's 10 times that my father has been left behind – one for each year he's been gone.

And third, we're here to ask for your help. Please, hold both the U.S. and Iranian governments accountable for bringing Bob Levinson home. Please be relentless in pursuing this administration to resolve this case as quickly as possible.

And please do not let Iran off of the hook. They've been allowed to do what they want and have avoided our father's case for years because there are no consequences. They know what has happened to Bob Levinson and they can send him home – but they choose not to. In our experience, the Iranians only respond to pressure. Hold their feet to the fire, threaten them with sanctions, do anything – do something.

The excruciating pain of not knowing, the fear that we haven't done enough, and the thought that the U.S. Government has failed to rescue my father all of these years is demoralizing.

My father, Bob Levinson, is an American hero. He is a patriot. Please help us finally bring him home. As he said when he pleaded for help in 2010: 33 years of service deserves something. Please help us.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, excellent testimony, heartfelt and insightful. Thank you so much, Mr. Levinson.

Mr. Nimazi?

STATEMENT OF MR. BABAK NAMAZI (SON OF BAQUER NAMAZI, BROTHER OF SIAMAK NAMAZI)

Mr. NAMAZI. Madam Chair.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. You could put the microphone a little bit closer to you.

Mr. NAMAZI. Madam Chair, is that better?

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Just a little bit. Why don't you hold it a little bit closer to you.

Mr. NAMAZI. Madam Chair and distinguished members of the subcommittee, 651 days ago on October 13, 2015, my brother Siamak Namazi was arrested and detained in Iran by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and has been held at a notorious Evin Prison.

In January 2016, five American hostages were released from prison in Iran. To my family's shock and horror, my brother was not released. We were given different explanations of the inexplicable, but felt reassured to learn that Secretary of State John Kerry had been promised by Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif that Siamak would be released within weeks of the other hostages' release. When he was not, my family was devastated.

But things only got worse from there. Instead of releasing my brother, on February 22nd, 2016, my father Baquer Namazi was lured back to Iran from a brief trip abroad by the promise of seeing Siamak, but instead he was also detained. On October 17, 2016, without any evidence or respect for the their rights of due process, my father and brother were each summarily tried, convicted, and sentenced to 10 years in prison for collusion with a hostile government. They remain in Evin Prison today.

It is important to emphasize this latter point because Foreign Minister Zarif claimed last week in an interview with CBS News that my father was not behind bars, implying he had been transferred to house arrest. This is just not true. My father and brother have been and continue to be subjected to unimaginable suffering including spending part of their confinement in solitary cells.

My father is 81 years old and has a severe heart condition that requires medication and may shortly require a pacemaker. He has lost more than 30 pounds and suffers dizziness, shortness of breath, and headaches. In the last few months, he has been twice hospitalized for a week at a time which only makes us more concerned about his well-being, especially as the IRGC never told our father or our family what was wrong with him after such hospitalization and no records were given to the family. It is obvious that his condition, both physical and mental, is rapidly deteriorating. My father's prison sentence is a death sentence.

My brother is a strong man, but I fear he has given up hope. His detention conditions are truly horrific. He has been kept in isolation for long periods of time. For the majority of his detention he was forced to sleep on a concrete floor because they gave him no bed and held him in solitary confinement for most of the time. Though Siamak will not talk about it, he has been tortured by the

IRGC with beatings and tasing and psychological torment as prison guards having told him my father is in dire health and only telling him the truth days later.

The IRGC has ripped my family in half, and for those of us left behind we worry all the time about whether my father and Siamak will survive. We don't yet see a way through this suffering to their liberation. I don't understand why Foreign Minister Zarif would claim my father is now under house arrest when he clearly isn't. For the Iranian Government to present this false claim to the international community makes a mockery of my family's pain by having given us a moment of hope that at least a little of our suffering might be ameliorated, only to see it dashed when the truth becomes clear that it hadn't happened.

I cannot digest the inhumanity and cruelty that my family is exposed to on a daily basis. My family is very grateful that the United Nations where my father worked for many years is highly engaged. It has been very heartening to see Secretary-General Guterres engage at the highest levels with the Iranian Government following up on Secretary-General Ban's engagement. And Tony Lake, the head of UNICEF, has been incredibly focused on pressing Iran to release my father as well as hundreds of my father's UNICEF colleagues.

We are also very grateful for ongoing assistance provided by President Trump and his administration on our behalf. It is clear by both the public statements and private actions that the President is very focused on securing the release of my family and other American citizen hostages in Iran. We desperately need that help and support to secure my father and brother's release. While I am not qualified to say what specifically would be most effective to secure the release of my family, I urge the President and Congress to spare no efforts and to do whatever is necessary to save my father and brother and to save them quickly.

I would also be remiss if I did not thank Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen for having originally sponsored House Resolution 317 with Representatives Lowey, Poe, and Deutch, and all other cosponsors. It is heartening to see such strong bipartisan support and my family is so grateful that this subcommittee unanimously adopted the resolution. I hope the full House of Representatives will take up the resolution as soon as possible.

Finally, I turn my attention to speaking publicly to the Government of Iran. In short, my father and brother have done nothing wrong and are innocent. Foreign Minister Zarif said last week at the Council on Foreign Relations that he is willing to address this humanitarian problem from a humanitarian perspective. I pray that he finds a way and that these are not just empty words. They must be released urgently and on humanitarian grounds before it is too late.

I have been reassured so many times by well-meaning individuals to be patient and that my family just needs to hold on, but patience isn't a virtue that I can have when I see my father and brother's physical and mental health deteriorate so much and at an increasing rate of speed. Please help me bring my father and brother home. I am losing my entire family. We are simply running out of time. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Namazi follows:]

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Middle East and North Africa

"Held for Ransom: The Families of Iran's Hostages Speak Out"

Testimony of Babak Namazi

July 25, 2016

Madam Chair and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, six hundred and fifty-one days ago, on October 13, 2015, my brother, Siamak Namazi, was arrested and detained in Iran by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (the IRGC) at the notorious Evin Prison.

In January 2016, five American hostages were released from prison in Iran. To my family's shock and horror, my brother was not released. We were given different explanations of the inexplicable, but felt reassured to learn that Secretary of State John Kerry had been promised by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif that Siamak would be released within weeks of the other hostages. When he was not, my family was devastated.

But things only got worse from there. Instead of releasing my brother, on February 22, 2016, my father, Baquer Namazi, was lured back to Iran from a brief trip abroad by the promise of seeing Siamak, but was instead was also detained.

On October 17, 2016, without any evidence or respect for their rights of due process, my father and brother were each summarily tried, convicted, and sentenced to ten years in prison for "collusion with an enemy state." They remain in Evin Prison today. It is important to emphasize this latter point because Foreign Minister Zarif claimed last week in an interview with CBS News that my father Baquer was "not behind bars," implying he had been transferred to house arrest. This is just not true.

My father and brother have been and continue to be subjected to unimaginable suffering including spending part of his confinement in solitary cell. My father is 81-years-old, and has a severe heart condition that requires medication and may shortly require a pacemaker. He has lost more than 30 pounds and suffers dizziness, shortness of breath, and headaches. In the last few months, he has twice been hospitalized for a week at a time, which only makes us more concerned about his well-being, especially as the IRGC never told father or our family what is wrong with him after such hospitalization and no records were given to the family. It obvious that his condition, both physical and mental, is rapidly deteriorating. My father's prison sentence is a death sentence.

My brother is a strong man, but I fear he has given up hope. His detention conditions are truly horrific. He has been kept in isolation for long periods of time. For the majority of

his detention, he was forced to sleep on a concrete floor because they gave him no bed and held in solitary confinement. Though Siamak will not talk about it, he has been regularly tortured by the IRGC with beatings and tazing, and psychological torment such as the prison guards having told him my father is in dire health and only telling him the truth days later.

The IRGC has ripped my family in half, and for those of us left behind, we worry all the time about whether my father and Siamak will survive. We don't yet see a way through this suffering to their liberation. I don't understand why Foreign Minister Zarif would claim my father is now under house arrest, when he clearly isn't. For the Iranian government to present this false claim to the international community makes a mockery of my family's pain by having given us a moment of hope that at least a little of our suffering might be ameliorated, only to see it dashed when the truth became clear that it hadn't happened. I cannot digest the inhumanity and cruelty that my family is exposed to on a daily basis.

My family is very grateful that the United Nations, where my father worked for many years, is highly engaged. It has been very heartening to see Secretary-General Guterres engage at the highest levels with the Iranian government, following up on Secretary-General Ban's engagement. And Tony Lake, the head of UNICEF, has been incredibly focused on pressing Iran to release my father as well.

We are also very grateful for ongoing assistance provided by President Trump and his administration on our behalf. It is clear by both the public statements and private actions that the President is very focused on securing the release of my family and other American citizen hostages in Iran. We desperately need that help and support to secure my father and brother's release. While I am not qualified to say what specifically would be most effective to secure the release of my family, I urge the President and Congress to spare no effort and to do whatever is necessary to save my father and brother and to save them quickly.

I also would be remiss if I did not thank Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen for having originally sponsored House Resolution 317 with Reps. Lowey, Poe, and Deutch, and all the other co-sponsors. It is heartening to see such strong bipartisan support and my family is so grateful that this Subcommittee unanimously adopted the resolution. I hope the full House of Representatives will take up the resolution as soon as possible.

Finally, I turn my attention to speaking publicly to the Government of Iran. In short, my father and brother have done nothing wrong and are innocent. Foreign Minister Zarif said last week at the Council on Foreign Relations that he is willing "to address this humanitarian problem from a humanitarian perspective." I pray that he finds a way and not these are not just empty words. They must be released urgently and on humanitarian grounds before it is too late.

I have been reassured so many times by well-meaning individuals to be patient and that my family just needs to hold on. But patience isn't a virtue that I can have when I see my

father and brother's physical and mental health deteriorate so much and at an increasing rate of speed.

Please help me bring my father and brother home. I am losing my entire family. We are simply running out of time.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much and thank you for referencing our bill which we hope will be on the House floor for passage tomorrow afternoon, late afternoon.

Mr. NAMAZI. Thank you, Madam.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And of course it calls for the release of all of your family members. Thank you.

Mr. NAMAZI. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Zakka, thank you so much.

STATEMENT OF MR. 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. My brothers are Nadim and Kareem, and I am speaking on the family's behalf. We are residents in Washington, DC, also have family in Texas.

My father wanted me to be sure that I thanked all of you ladies and gentlemen of the Congress, the representatives of the American people. Thank you for defending human rights as well as calling attention to my father's plight and, as my father reminded us many times before, the plight of other innocent people, Americans and those from many other countries being held in hostage in Iran. I know that my dad appreciates how you have stressed the particular obligation that the United States has in securing his release as well as the release of other U.S. persons held in Iran.

When the Iranians abducted my father, I had not even graduated high school. At the time, I was following in my father's footsteps. I was a cadet second lieutenant at my father's alma mater, the Riverside Military Academy in Gainesville, Georgia. Like other cadets, I was trying to learn accountability by working and leading my peers during a challenging time in my life. I had hopes and dreams and still do. I thought I would be in some state college right now doing what any 19-year-old would be doing. Sitting here in Congress was the farthest thing from my mind. However, my dad's close to 2-year ordeal has taught so much about the importance of life, family, and friends.

Today is the 30th day of my dad's latest hunger strike. His will, as I said, as strong as ever. My dad is innocent and as he says will not be forced to do things against his will including signing forced confessions.

Even though I was hardly aware or even appreciated the scope of my father's work at the time, I knew enough to be a very proud son. All of my brothers are very proud of him. Our dad is truly a great man, maybe a better man than I will ever be. My dad has devoted his life for humanitarian and development work, in other words helping others. My dad used his computer science and mathematics degree from Texas University, and his talents, to help others in the ICT field.

My father believes in the power of information as well as technology, and how it can help other communities that the world has neglected and left behind. I have never known him to even have a political standpoint as all along he proclaimed to be a law-abiding citizen of the world and does not advocate for any party, group, or government. To help advance his mission, he founded and managed a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, IJMA3 USA, with offices right here in Washington, DC.

My father, Nizar Zakka, was invited by Iranian Vice President, Mrs. Molaverdi, to attend in September 2015 in Tehran a conference on Women in Sustainable Development Entrepreneurship & Employment. I will repeat this because it is so important. My dad had an official invitation from a senior Iranian official and an Iranian visa. In her invitation letter to my dad, Mrs. Molaverdi said that she wanted my dad to speak in Iran because of his countless knowledge, valuable experience, and deep creativeness. Yet despite these nice-sounding words, after the conference my dad was kidnapped on his way to the airport. Since then, he has been detained and held against his will at the notorious Evin Prison. This is why my dad has said throughout this ordeal that he was invited and kidnapped.

I was not alive, of course, the first time Iranians took Americans hostages in 1979, so this is the first time in my short years that I have heard anything like this. So I decided to research about it, found nothing. This is baffling. It seems as if this is the first time anyone, much less an ICT expert, is invited by a government as a guest then gets kidnapped by that same government. Taking innocent people hostage is not what civilized governments do. This is why we have repeatedly urged the unconditional release of my dad. To his captors in Iran: Please let my dad go. My dad was in Iran as your guest, why do you treat him this way?

It has been 2 years since my father was stolen away from our family. It has been a rough time. In addition to the bad things that have been done to him in Evin, his mother, our grandmother, died last year and my dad was not able to say goodbye to her. We talked about these things since I have had the privilege to speak to him on the phone. His voice and tone alone have made me feel the suffering he has had to endure to this point.

These 2 years have done so much damage to him physically that I would never wish this upon anyone in the world. All of this pain and suffering has led my dad to his fifth hunger strike. Why, because he tells me and my brothers that we do not put our heads down for anyone. My dad said that he would rather die for his cause than live with injustice. He told me it is about liberty or death. He did not say whether he was quoting the famous American Patrick Henry, but he has been inspired throughout his whole life about the American experience of liberty and freedom.

My father has been called a prisoner of conscience. This is very difficult for me to say, but as my dad has said, again, he would rather die than succumb to his captors. Even in Evin Prison, in his own way, my dad thinks of other prisoners and what they are going through including some who have family here today. To these families, I know my dad, and if he can I know that he will do all he can in his power to help your loved ones get out as well.

This is his 30th day on hunger strike. I fear for his life and safety. My dad spoke to me briefly this morning. He said he knows that Americans stand for liberty and freedom and that they won't let him down. You may not be aware that my dad is a horseman. He said today he is no longer feeling hunger, but rather severe, excruciating colic pain tearing him from inside, exactly similar to what a horse feels when he is severely sick.

Please, I plead with you, the American people, the people from our ancestral homeland, Lebanon, please do not let my father die in Iran. We ask anyone in a position to do so to please help my brothers and I be reunited with our father. Thank you very much for this special opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Zakka follows:]

Prepared Remarks of Mr. Omar Zakka Before the United States Congress
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Middle East & North Africa
2172 Rayburn House Office Building

25 July 2017

Prepared Remarks – Check Against Delivery

Good afternoon. My name is Omar Zakka. I am youngest of Nizar Zakka's three sons. We have a home in Washington, DC. I also have an uncle who lives in Texas.

My father wanted me to be sure to, first and foremost, to thank all of you, ladies and gentlemen of the Congress. You are the representatives of the American people. Thank you for defending human rights and calling attention to my father's plight and, as my father has reminded me and our family many times before, the plight of other fellow innocent people, Americans and from many other countries, being held hostage in Iran.

Our family appreciates all the efforts of Chairwoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Ted Deutch, indeed, all members of this Committee including Chairman Ed Royce and Ranking Member Eliot Engel, as well as Senators who have supported my dad such as Senator Ted Cruz, for standing for the defense of fundamental liberties around the world. I know that my dad appreciates how you have stressed the ***"particular obligation"*** that the United States has in securing his release, as well as the release of other U.S. persons held hostage in Iran.

When the Iranians abducted my father, I had not even graduated high school. At the time, I was following in my father's footsteps. I was a cadet second lieutenant, at my father's alma mater, the Riverside Military Academy in Gainesville, Georgia. Like other cadets, I was trying to learn accountability, by working and leading my peers during a challenging time in my life.

I had hopes and dreams, and still do. I thought I'd be in some state college right now doing what any 19 year old would be doing. Sitting here in the Congress was the farthest thing from my mind. However, my dad's close to two-year ordeal has taught me so much about the importance of life, family, and friends. My dad's ordeal, is a reminder that we must prepare for life challenges, because from one day to the next, things can and, will, change.

I have thought a lot lately about Riverside's motto, ***Sound Mind in a Sound Body***. It did not really mean all that much to me back then. It does now. For while my dad is of a strong and sound mind, he is fighting for his liberty, indeed, his life. This week marks five weeks of hunger strike. His body may be weak, but his will, as I said, as strong as ever. My dad is innocent and, as he says, will not be forced to do things against his will, including signing forced confessions.

Even though I was hardly aware, or really appreciated the scope of my father's work at the time, I knew enough to be a very proud son. All of my brothers are very proud of him. Our dad is truly a great man, maybe a better man than I'll ever be. My dad has devoted his life for humanitarian and development work. In other words, helping others. My dad used his Computer Science and Mathematics degree from the University of Texas, and his talents, to do that, help others in the ICT field.

My father believes in the power of information as well as technology, and how it can help communities that the world has neglected and left behind. I have never known him to even have a political standpoint as he proclaimed to be a law-abiding citizen of the world, and does not become a part of any party, group, or government. To help advance his mission, he founded and managed a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, IJMA3 USA, with offices right here in Washington, DC.

My father, Nizar Zakka, was invited by Iranian Vice President Mrs. Shahindokht Molaverdi to attend the 2nd International Conference & Exhibition on Women in Sustainable Development "Entrepreneurship & Employment" in Tehran from the 14th to the 18th September of 2015. I have submitted a copy of the invitation letter for legislative record.

I'll repeat it because it is so important: My dad had an official invitation from a senior Iranian official. In her invitation letter to my dad, Mrs. Molaverdi said that she wanted my dad to speak in Iran because of his "***countless knowledge, valuable experiences and deep creativeness & innovations...for enriching this significant event and transferring***" as well as my dad's "***achievements and experiences to this Conference.***" Yet despite these seemingly nice-sounding words, after the Conference, my father was kidnapped on his way to the airport and has been detained and held against his will at the notorious Evin prison. This is why my dad has insisted throughout this ordeal that he was "***invited and kidnapped***."

I was not alive, of course, the first time Iranians took Americans hostage in 1979. So this is the first time in my short years that I have heard anything like this. So I decided to research about it, I found nothing. This is baffling. It seems as if this is the first time, that an ICT expert, someone is invited by a government, as a guest, then gets kidnapped by that same government. To my knowledge, this has not even been done, by any party, or organization let alone a government.

Governments may have disagreements, but treating people as hostages, a centuries old but uncivilized practice, is not acceptable among civilized nations. Which is why we have repeatedly urged the unconditional release of my dad. And I do so again today: please let my dad go! My dad went to Iran, as he has to other countries in the Middle East, to help the Iranian people learn more about the Internet.

It has been 2 years since my father was stolen away from our family. It has been a tough time. In addition to the bad things that have been done to him in Evin, his mother, our grandmother died last year and my dad was not able to say goodbye to her. We talked about these things since I've had the privilege to speak to him on the phone for

the past few months. His voice and tone alone have made me feel the suffering he has had to endure to this point. These two years have done so much damage to him physically, that I would never wish this upon anyone in the world. To the government of Iran: is this how you treat a guest?

All of this pain and suffering has led my dad to this ongoing hunger strike; he told me the other day that ***we do not put our heads down for anyone***. My dad said that he would rather die for his cause than live with injustice and what they are doing to him. In fact, he said this phrase to us, in Arabic, that translates to ***"liberty or death."***

My dad did not say whether he was quoting the famous American Patrick Henry, but he has been inspired throughout his whole life about the American experience of liberty and freedom. A liberty and freedom that he believes will help the people all over the world make better lives for themselves and their families. He believes so much in this that, despite the things that are being done to him, for his steadfast position about the importance of information and the Internet, as well as his refusal to give in to Iranian pressures, my father has been called a prisoner of conscience.

I believe these ideas help sustain my dad as his body weakens. This is very difficult for me to say but as my dad has said, again, he would rather die, than succumb to his captors. Even in Evin prison, in his own way, my dad thinks of other prisoners and what they are going through, including some who have family here today. To these families, I know my dad, and if he can, I know that he will do all he can in his power to help your loved ones get out as well.

This is his 30th day on hunger strike, I fear for his life and safety. Please, I plead with you, the American people, the people from our ancestral homeland, Lebanon, please not to let my father die in Iran. We ask anyone in a position to do so, to please help my brothers and I be reunited with our dad.

Thank you very much for this special opportunity.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Zakka. Thank you, very mature and professional presentation as well as heartfelt and emotional and I am sorry that you had to grow up so fast, along with Mr. Levinson, before your time you became adults.

Mr. Levinson, your father as we have discussed is the longest-held American citizen in our nation's history, and his disappearance in 2007 means that your family has interacted with three U.S. administrations in the White House. Can you tell us about the level of engagement the U.S. Government has had with your father's case over the last decade, and do you feel that the current administration is giving your father's case the appropriate amount of resources? Can you describe how, if at all, the current administration's approach may differ from the previous two administrations? Thank you, sir.

Mr. LEVINSON. Absolutely. Thank you for the question.

Just this past week, my mother as well as several of my siblings came to DC and we met with various U.S. Government officials at the White House, at the State Department, as well as the FBI. The FBI has been absolutely incredible over the past 10 years. They truly make us feel as if we are family because my father was an FBI agent for 22 years.

I think that over the past 10 years we have been told the same things over and over again, "Stay silent" or "Now it is time to be more public." It has been fluctuating for 10 years of doing press and not doing press. And it is incredibly disappointing to my family that it has been 10 years of this over and over and over again and three administrations.

We are optimistic about the White House statement that was released on Friday saying that there will be severe consequences if the Iranian Government does not release my father and the other Americans being held, and we are optimistic by that because that is some of the strongest language that we have heard in the past 10 years, but it is a great first start. It is a great first step and we are looking for more.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much.

Mr. Namazi, you testified that your father has lost more than 30 pounds and he has been hospitalized twice in the last few months. And your brother, well, his detention conditions are horrific. He has been subjected to psychological torment. Can you tell us what kind of access they are getting for their health needs, any attention whatsoever? And how can the U.S. Government, have we been advocating for their health needs while they are in prison?

Mr. NAMAZI. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I think what has been lacking, well, for my family ever since this nightmare started is really understanding what has been happening to my father and Siamak. When my dad was hospitalized this was not information that was shared with us in advance. This is something we found out after the fact from my father. When we asked him why he was hospitalized there was not much he could tell us. He had no access to medical records from this hospitalization, and we were never formally advised of what conditions and what records they were.

There has been a lot of pressure because of this from the U.S. Government, from my family, from everyone who cares, really, and I believe that he has been getting more medical attention because

he has already been hospitalized twice. But I fear that this is not enough and I fear that at any moment my father may die. And I hate saying this, I also didn't think I would ever have to sit in this room and testify and describe these horrible conditions. So I think what is really urgently needed are ways to get my family out before it is too late.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. And the clock is ticking and you fear for their survival.

Mr. NAMAZI. Yes. I mean the days, the weeks, the months, they are going by and this situation continues to deteriorate very rapidly. We are not talking about a condition that has just come about. My father has had heart surgery in the past. He has had heart condition in the past. Siamak has been pushed over the edge. He is under relentless pressure and interrogations. All signs indicate that they are succeeding in, you know, taking away his will and really breaking him.

So we are desperate. We are desperate and we are completely, until today, at a loss of why this is happening to our family.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. We hear your pleas and we will act on those.

And Mr. Zakka, thank you so much for your emotional testimony. Now in November of last year, Iran's Javad Zarif talked about your dad and he said that the matter of your dad is a U.S.-Iranian problem. And one of the leading networks also asked Rouhani about your father. What message do you have for Zarif, for Rouhani, for any other Iranian regime leader who can help your father?

Mr. ZAKKA. You wouldn't expect anyone to be invited into their home and you hurt them. When you invite someone to your home you must respect them, respect the people that walk into your home and do not harm them. Thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, excellent witnesses and just a horrific set of circumstances.

And it is my pleasure to recognize Mr. Deutch for his question and answer.

Mr. DEUTCH. And I thank my friend the chairman.

Doug and Babak and Omar, it is difficult to testify before Congress. It is particularly difficult to have to appear to share something as painful as what each of you is going through. I would just suggest that and let you know that the service that you are providing the country, not just Bob and Siamak and Bakar and Nizar, but the service you are providing the country by giving us the opportunity to pause for a moment and remember that with all of the challenges that Washington faces and all of the things that are so dividing our country, at a moment when Americans are being held abroad wrongly as hostages and it is a moment that the country has to come together and you are providing that opportunity for all of us and for that we are grateful.

Doug, I know that your mom and your brother Dan traveled to Iran shortly after your dad went missing. Have you had any further engagement with Iran since that first trip? Are there plans to go back?

Mr. LEVINSON. Yes, so actually my brother Dan traveled to Iran, Kish Island, himself, just almost 2 years ago after the previous hearing. If that is any sign of how desperate we are, my brother

traveled there by himself to Kish Island to retrace my father's footsteps again and talk to anybody there that could help us.

We would love to go back. Hopefully we won't need to. Hopefully they can send him home. But if we need to, we are looking into putting in our request to go back over there.

Mr. DEUTCH. The hearing today is obviously being broadcast. Is there anything that you would like to say to the people who are holding your father, Doug?

Mr. LEVINSON. I would say we need Bob Levinson. We need my father back now. It has been 10 years. He has missed so much, if that picture of me is any physical evidence or can tell you how long it has been, how much of our lives he has missed. He is a good man. He is a decent, good and decent man. Please send him back home.

Mr. DEUTCH. Is there a particular message we can send to the new administration, Members of Congress?

Mr. LEVINSON. Yes. Like I said in my testimony, do not let Iran off the hook. They know exactly where he is. Put as much pressure as possible on them and this administration. If there is a way to sanction an organization or an individual over there and hold that as a terms of release of my father saying that we will not ease those sanctions unless you return Bob Levinson, that is one suggestion. I think that it is absolutely devastating to my family that it has been 10 years and the U.S. public, not everybody knows about Bob Levinson and not everybody knows about the longest-held hostage in American history who is still being held.

Mr. DEUTCH. And finally, if you would like on behalf of your mom and your siblings, you have not had the opportunity to speak with your dad, what message would you send to him?

Mr. LEVINSON. I would tell him, I would say Dad, we are never going to stop. We will never stop fighting to get you home. We are doing everything we possibly can every single day. We miss you. We love you. Please stay strong. We are going to get you home.

Mr. DEUTCH. Doug, I can only promise you and Christine and Dan and your family and the Namazi family and the Zakka family that the chair and I and the members of this committee and the members of the United States Congress will continue to work and press and do everything we can until all of your loved ones return where they belong here at home. And I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Deutch, for your leadership on this issue.

Mr. Zeldin of New York?

Mr. ZELDIN. Thank you, Madam Chair. And first off, to the Levinson family I can personally attest from being in many settings with your congressman that when you are not around, no cameras, no media, when it is just your congressman with anyone who can possibly do anything to help you, it is the very first thing and he advocates very passionately on your behalf. I can't even, I have lost count of just how many times I have been in the settings with him where he was advocating on behalf of you and your family. It is important for you to know that because none of that does get covered. And I also know that he is not doing it to get covered, he is doing it to bring your dad home, to bring your spouse home.

As far as when we look at the debate over Iran and the Iran nuclear deal, there is discussion over the letter of the deal and there is the discussion over the spirit of the deal. And the spirit of the deal you can look at all of Iran's bad activities in total to see whether or not Iran is abiding by the spirit of the deal. I think today's hearing is showing the faces of Iran violating the spirit of the deal.

Every time Iran is chanting death to America in their streets, on their holidays, calling us the Great Satan, calling Israel the Little Satan, test firing intercontinental ballistic missiles in violation of U.N. resolutions, working to overthrow foreign governments or financing terror, actively doing it right now with the money that was provided to them in the sanctions relief, they are violating the spirit of the deal.

And part of the process of recertifying every 3 months the Iran nuclear deal is not just whether or not Iran is in compliance with the letter of the JCPOA, but also whether or not the deal is in America's national interest, it is in the best interest of America's national security. And unfortunately what we gave up was our leverage that brought the Iranians to the table. As we were negotiating the JCPOA, the Iranians needed the deal more than we did. Not only were we propping up a bad regime, we certainly were propping up the wrong regime when you look at the other options. And if someone was to say they only spent $1 billion or $3 billion on terror that is $1 billion or $3 billion more than we should have been providing to them through the sanctions relief.

So now we have these Americans being unjustly imprisoned and the Iranians are not at the table. And that is why I believe that when we were negotiating the deal in the first place all of these other bad activities should have been part of the agreement because I don't know what leverage right now we have to have the Iranians come to the table begging to release your family members.

And I think it is important for Congress and the administration and for the American public, but also for the international community, because this isn't just the United States, to all be working together to increase sanctions on Iran's bad activities to get back to that point where the Iranians are begging for the sanctions relief. And at that point as they are begging for the sanctions relief we should be putting down a red line that says we will absolutely not agree to this deal unless you release our American prisoners being unjustly held. It is a red line that should have gotten thrown down last time and it is a red line that should be taken into consideration for next time.

And in order for that red line to be effective, I believe that Congress needs to be increasing the sanctions on the Iranians and that the Americans need to work on putting the teeth back into these sanctions working with our allies in other countries, because I think that too is part of the purpose of us being here. One is to hear your incredibly moving testimony, to see your faces as the face of Iran's bad activities and your family members as the face of Iran's bad activities, but to do something about it because you want your family members home.

And you know what, with Iranians, asking nicely isn't going to make it happen because these aren't good people. They don't re-

spect weakness, they only respect strength. And to get them back to the table and to get your family members home, the pressure needs to get ramped back up and we need to stop playing nice with the wrong regime, a regime that appeases hardliners and certainly doesn't have your family members' best interest in mind. I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Zeldin.

Mr. Schneider?

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you. And again I just want to emphasize my gratitude to the chairman and ranking member for calling this hearing, for each of you for sharing your stories. I am the father of two sons same age as you, Mr. Levinson, 9 months on either side of you. I am a very proud dad. I can't speak on behalf of your fathers, but I can speak with certainty that they are very proud of you here today, so thank you for sharing your story.

Mr. Levinson, you have had the unfortunate circumstance, you and your family, of working with now three administrations. To the extent that you are willing to share, could you help us understand the differences in approach, if any, that this administration is taking, or steps and actions you would like to see this administration take?

Mr. LEVINSON. Absolutely. Thank you for your comments. Like I said, the statement put out last week by the White House was some of the most strong and powerful language directed at the Iranians. I believe it is quoted as saying there will be severe consequences if they do not return Bob Levinson and the other American hostages and all other American hostages.

I think throughout the past 10 years we have seen—we have constantly been told the same thing that we are doing everything we can. But on January 16th, it was apparent that not everything that they could have done was done.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. January 16th last year.

Mr. LEVINSON. Correct, 2016.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Right.

Mr. LEVINSON. My father was not part of the JCPOA. After the other Americans were released, I believe in the deal it is stated that Iran will continue to cooperate on working to find my father, and they have not. I have to make that clear. They have not. We have not heard anything from them cooperating with the United States Government.

I think for this administration again the statement was a good first start, first step. Truly it is encouraging to us. However, statements need to be backed with action, and if they do not release my father there needs to be consequences.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Agreed.

Mr. Namazi, as I understand it, you and your family had the chance to meet with Ambassador Haley at the U.N. From your perspective, to the extent you can share again and outcomes, effects that that meeting had, the effect of having the U.N. and UNICEF engaged in your father's case, could you expand on that if you would?

Mr. NAMAZI. Thank you. As you mentioned, my father worked for over 20 years for UNICEF so it obviously makes a lot of sense for the U.N. to be highly engaged and they have been engaged. Meet-

ing with Ambassador Haley was extremely helpful to bring the attention that it is not just a concern in Washington, obviously, which is a very high concern as it should be, but also the U.N. community and the U.N. family is extremely concerned for the well-being of my father. So I found a lot of support from Ambassador Haley and it has publicly been reported afterward of course. Secretary-General Guterres has also as a result been engaged following by the former Secretary-General.

All these engagements of course are very helpful, but at the end of the day what matters to me, to my mom, what matters the most to my dad and Siamak is the results. It has been almost this past week marked 2 years that Siamak was prevented from leaving. It is about 20 months that this nightmare has been going on for my father who is not doing well. And all the engagements are great. They are increasing. We are getting a lot of access and meeting with the officials. And I do look forward to all these to bear the result of seeing my father and Siamak.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you. And I will close with this. There is but one measure of success here and it is Siamak and Bakar, it is Robert Levinson, it is Nizar Zakka coming home.

I have not sat in the chairs you sit in today as a witness, it is difficult to testify before Congress I have no doubt. Again I just want to emphasize to all three of you, you have spoken on behalf of your families, your brother and fathers, in a way that makes all of us proud. Please know that we will do all we can all the time to make sure that that measure of success, bringing them home, is achieved sooner rather than later. Thank you very much and I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Well said. Thank you so much, Mr. Schneider.

Ambassador Wagner of Missouri?

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you, Madam Chair, for shining a spotlight on Iran's hostages. My heart breaks for those who have been arbitrarily detained in Iran and I am hopeful that this hearing will help the U.S. Government better respond to these tragedies. The abuse you and your family members have suffered at the hands of the Iranian regime is appalling and I am in awe of your bravery and your perseverance.

In 2015, the Obama administration issued a presidential policy directive on U.S. hostage policy stating that the U.S. Government would share more information with families and take into consideration each family's particular needs. To each of you, do you believe the Obama administration took steps to better communicate with families, and what would you recommend changing or not changing about the U.S. hostage policy?

Mr. Levinson, we will start with you.

Mr. LEVINSON. On the topic of communication, like I said we found out that the others were released as part of the JCPOA by watching the news. My mother got a phone call that morning. My phone—I was sleeping. I believe it was a Saturday—Sunday, Sunday. I was sleeping in because I was still in college. And when I woke up I saw 50 text messages and missed calls and I thought to myself, oh, my gosh. This could be it. And it was not. It was the complete opposite.

The FBI has continued to be a great friend and partner and investigator in trying to get my father home. They have always been in constant contact with us. For recommendations I would say just get all these Americans home and there won't need to be a communication issue the next time that happens.

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you, Mr. Levinson.

Mr. Namazi?

Mr. NAMAZI. We had a horrible experience, actually. I mean during the Obama administration we found out on television like the Levinson family that initially my brother Siamak was released and part of the swap. There were obviously, I can't describe the feeling of joy and the feeling of happiness that my brother has been released. That feeling was crushed within an hour that in fact Siamak was not part of the swap and for reasons which were not really clear to me until today, he was left behind.

And all this is unraveling on television, no one was communicating with us at that time. And when I was trying to find out information afterwards within the first 24 hours was very difficult to get clarity, and then finally we were told that there was a promise made by Foreign Minister Zarif to Secretary Kerry that Siamak would be released within weeks. The communication obviously got better because it couldn't get any worse, I would imagine, after everything that unraveled as it did that day.

I think the Office of the Special Envoy is an important office. I mean obviously taking that horrible night which was a huge, huge nightmare for my family not to have any communication, even getting a warning in advance that be prepared that this will happen and then that Siamak for whatever reason is not part of it, but thereafter that office had been helpful to at least keeping us informed on a regular basis. That office, the particular position has not been filled under the Trump administration, but we have had regular communications which started slowly but it has picked up pace on that aspect of it.

So, but obviously again I doubt everything can be shared with us, but you know, you don't want empty hope but you want to feel that we are heading toward a situation where your family and your loved ones will come home.

Mrs. WAGNER. Thank you, Mr. Namazi.

Mr. Zakka?

Mr. ZAKKA. I am not really sure how everything works here and how people should have received news, but how I receive my news is I go online like anyone else and read the news. But recently my dad has been able to talk to me and throughout those communications I am able to receive the news that I need.

Mrs. WAGNER. I have a couple more questions, Madam Chair, but I will—I have run out of my time. I will just say that like I said my heart breaks for you. I will proudly join my colleagues on the House floor tomorrow when we vote for this sanctions package. I will speak out on the floor tomorrow morning during the 10:00 a.m. hour on behalf of your loved ones. I thank you.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Ambassador Wagner. That voice is needed and we appreciate the bipartisan support that our bill has received. Thank you to the witnesses today. Sometimes as you have pointed out, it is hard for you to know whether to be-

come public, whether to speak out on behalf of your loved ones who are imprisoned in this country, the largest state-sponsored terrorism, still, in the world, but I think that you have made the right choice. I think that you have been leading advocates and no one knows about their suffering better than the people whom they love. So thank you for being such strong champions and strong advocates for your loved ones.

And with that, the hearing is adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 4:16 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Material Submitted for the Record

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

Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman

July 21, 2017

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 and North Africa in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov):

DATE: Tuesday, July 25, 2017

TIME: 3:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: Held for Ransom: The Families of Iran's Hostages Speak Out

WITNESSES: Mr. Douglas Levinson
(Son of Robert Levinson)

Mr. Babak Namazi
(Son of Baquer Namazi, brother of Siamak 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 *the Middle East and North Africa* HEARING

Day *Tuesday* **Date** *07/25/2017* **Room** *2172*

Starting Time *3:03 p.m.* **Ending Time** *4:16 p.m.*

Recesses [ ] (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____) (____to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Ros-Lehtinen

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session [✓]
Executive (closed) Session [ ]
Televised [✓]

Electronically Recorded (taped) [✓]
Stenographic Record [✓]

TITLE OF HEARING:

Held for Ransom: The Families of Iran's Hostages Speak Out

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

GOP- Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Reps. Chabot, DeSantis, Zeldin, Donovan, Wagner, Fitzpatrick
Dem- Ranking Member Deutch, Reps. Schneider

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

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.)*

Documents presented by Mr. Levinson

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *4:16 p.m.*

Subcommittee Staff Associate

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD BY MR. DOUGLAS LEVINSON
(SON OF ROBERT LEVINSON)

PRESSTV

Ex-FBI man in Iran not "missing" at all

Wed Apr 4, 2007 1:25AM
Share | Email | Print

Informed sources have told PRESS TV that the story of an American businessman and retired FBI agent gone missing from Iran's Kish Island is somewhat misleading.

The truth of the matter is he has been in the hands of Iranian security forces since the early hours of March 9, and his inability to communicate with his family or his company, has raised the alarm about his health, safety and whereabouts. Speaking to PRESS TV on condition of anonymity the sources made clear that aside from the obvious inconvenience, the person is being well looked after.

The sources also said that the matter, though routine, has been complicated by the mounting tensions stemming from repeated American threats against Iran, actual ongoing covert actions within Iran run by the Americans and the particulars of the man's background with the FBI. Not a happy configuration under the circumstances. Nevertheless the authorities are well on the way to finishing the procedural arrangements that could see him freed in a matter of days.

It has been established that his retirement from federal law enforcement took place nearly a decade ago, his area of expertise was organized crime not intelligence and his trip to Kish was purely that of a private businessman looking to make contact with persons who could help him make representations to official Iranian bodies responsible for suppressing trade in pirated products which is a major concern of his company. The outstanding reason for making such a connection is the man has no prior experience in this part of the world.

The enterprise he works for deals in low technology high visibility brand name products sold worldwide and the Persian Gulf has been proving to be a major problem area for illegal production and marketing of these products. Iran is not the origin of this activity but is the largest market by far on the waterway and thus a primary target area for the pirated goods.

His visit to Kish was supposed to be a one day affair but drew the attention of the security forces because his Iranian national host registered in the same hotel room as he did and local police thought they had discovered some discrepancy in the Iranians identification papers routinely handed into the hotel. Turns out, there was nothing irregular in the Iranian national's papers but this drew the attention of the local police onto the American and he was detained some 12-15 hours after arriving on the island.

It is a case of ordinary business running into extraordinarily bad circumstances. It is expected the matter will be over in a few days time. The Swiss Embassy in Tehran is in the process of or has already delivered a note from the U.S. State Department concerning his welfare and whereabouts to the Iranian Foreign Ministry. One of the ironies of the retired FBI man's ordeal is that he had been instrumental in persuading his former colleagues not to put former president Mohammad Khatami and his retinue through the ordeal of fingerprinting when he traveled to that country in September 2006.

Document #1 - [TN: In this letter, Anderson is probably Levinson.]

URGENT

Our Nation is Proud to Be the Student of the School of Prophet Mohammad
(Blessing of God be upon him and his descendants)

The Honorable Head of the Judiciary Office of the Armed Forces

H.E. Hojatollah-Aesalm Bahrami

Greetings, I hereby inform you that according to the report and the security services of this Ministry in Kish, a member of the US Federal Investigation or may be CIA, Robert Anderson, has recently entered the country with a regular passport and a tourist visa. He is here as an undercover tourist while conducting various meetings, taking pictures and gathering information.

Since his spying activities and efforts to set up a network have been established, please, make an arrangement to arrest him immediately by the end of the day, with the assistance of this ministry's personnel at the headquarter of the intelligence at Kish and transfer him to a detention center with a maximum security.

God Bless you with success.

3619172
274
03/08/2007

Signature of the Deputy of Counter Intelligence

CC:
1-Deputy of the operations
2-In the Name of God, the military prosecutor in Bandar Lange should be notified and the subject must be arrested

Deputy for the operations: Expeditiously and with the help of the brothers [IL] should be arrested.
Signature
[IL]

Document #2

URGENT

AIR FORCE
Kish Air Base

No: 2619-42
Date: May 2, 2007

124

In the Name of God

From: Command Center of Sahafaja [PH], Kish Air Base
To: The Honorable head of the military prosecutor office of Bandar Langeh

Subject: Accused File No. 85/3598

Greetings, I hereby inform Your Excellency that according to your order, the above subject is under the arrest of this military unit at a detention center at this base.

The subject has expressed that he is sick and his blood pressure is low for the last three days. He fell into a coma. His doctor examined him and he was diagnosed to have diabetes and noted that he is not in a good condition and ordered to transfer him to a hospital.

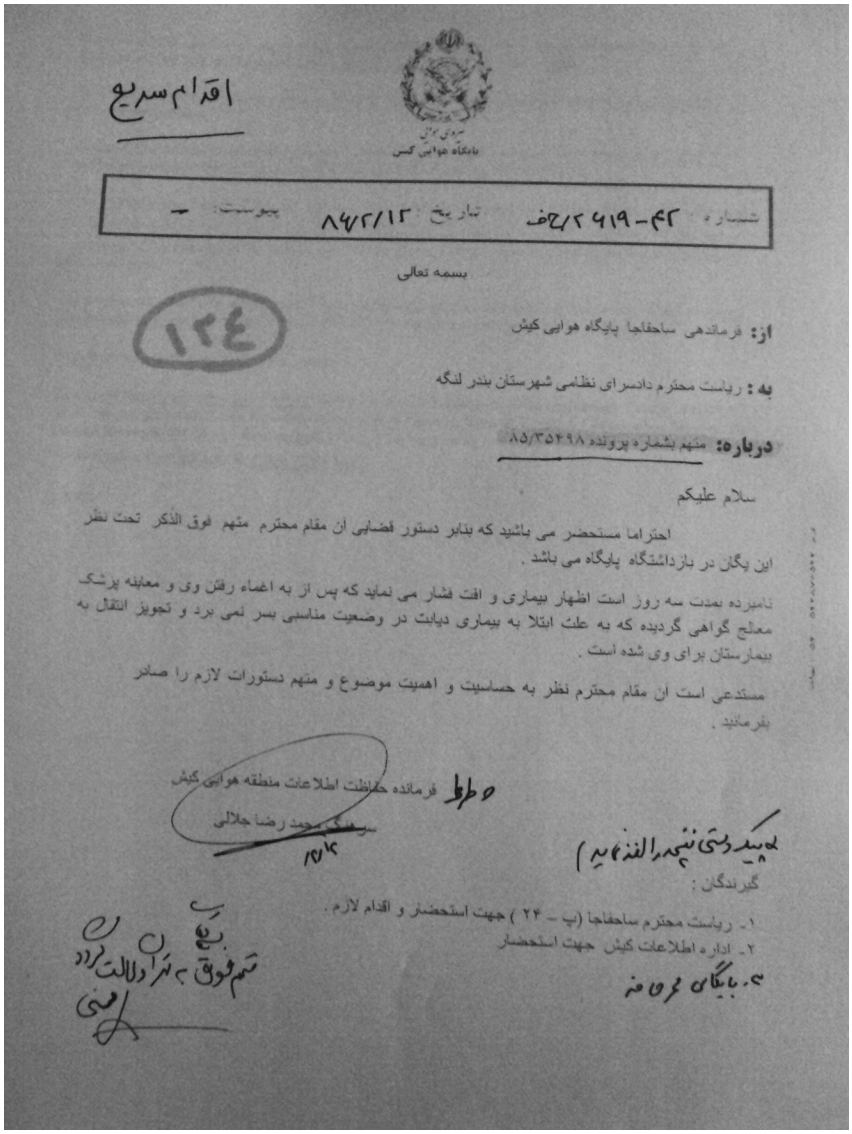
In regard to the importance of this matter and the subject, please inform us about the necessary actions that should be taken in this regard.

Signed on behalf of
The Commander of Intelligence Protection, Kish Air Base
Mohammad Reza Jalali

(A messenger should hand deliver the result)

Receivers:
1- The Head of the Sahahagh [B-24] for information and taking necessary action.
2- The Kish Intelligence Office for information purposes
3- Secret file

The above attachment should be sent to Tehran for guidance.



اقدام سریع

جمهوری اسلامی ایران
نیروی دریائی
پایگاه هوایی کیش

شماره: ۴۲-۶۱۹۰/۲/ف تاریخ: ۸۶/۲/۱۲ پیوست: -

بسمه تعالی

(۱۲۴)

از: فرماندهی ساحفاجا پایگاه هوایی کیش

به: ریاست محترم دادسرای نظامی شهرستان بندر لنگه

درباره: متهم بشماره پرونده ۸۵/۳۵۴۹۸

سلام علیکم

احتراما مستحضر می باشید که بنابر دستور قضایی آن مقام محترم متهم فوق الذکر تحت نظر این یگان در بازداشتگاه پایگاه می باشد .

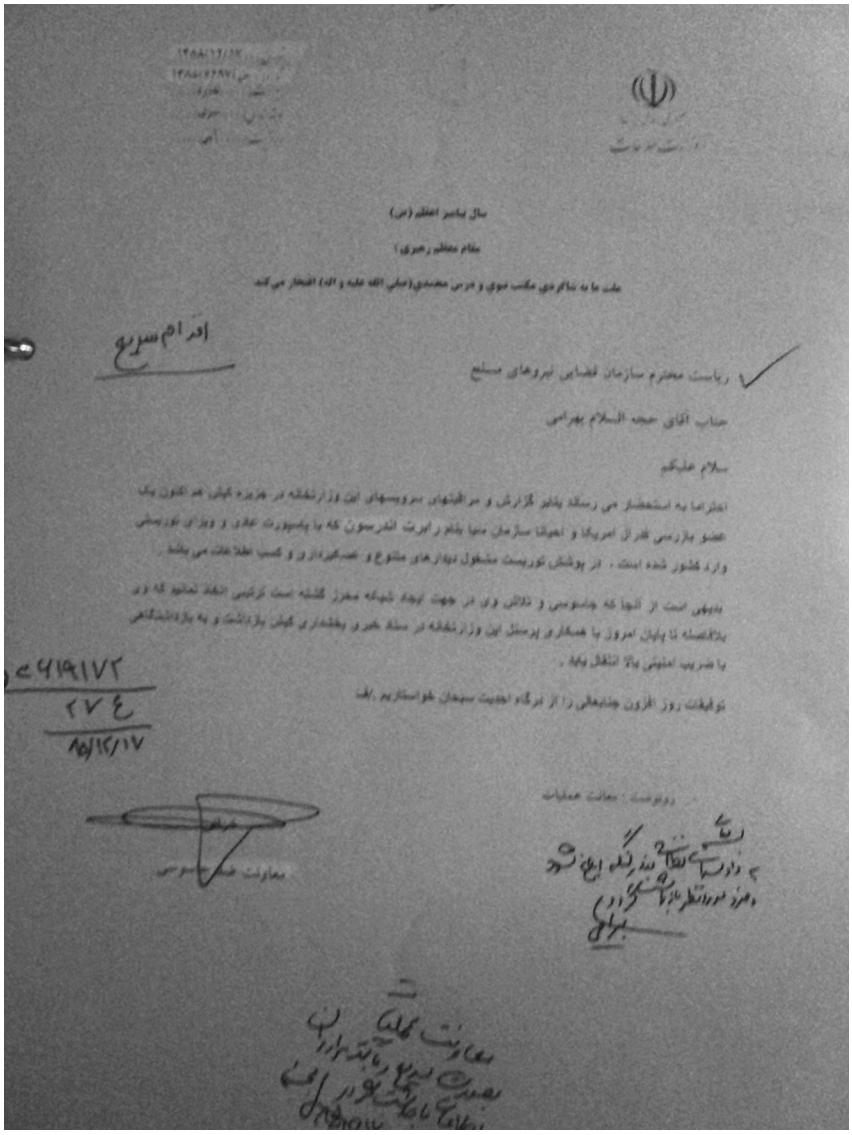
نامبرده بمدت سه روز است اظهار بیماری و افت فشار می نماید که پس از به اعضاء رفتن وی و معاینه پزشک معالج گواهی گردیده که به علت ابتلا به بیماری دیابت در وضعیت مناسبی بسر نمی برد و تجویز انتقال به بیمارستان برای وی شده است .

مستدعی است آن مقام محترم نظر به حساسیت و اهمیت موضوع و متهم دستورات لازم را صادر بفرمائید .

فرمانده حفاظت اطلاعات منطقه هوایی کیش
سرهنگ محمد رضا جلالی

گیرندگان :

۱- ریاست محترم ساحفاجا (پ - ۲۴) جهت استحضار و اقدام لازم .
۲- اداره اطلاعات کیش جهت استحضار
۳- بایگانی محرمانه



سلام بیامبر اعظم (ص)

مقام معظم رهبری (

حلت ما به شاگردی مکتب نبوی و درس محمدی(صلی الله علیه و آله) افتخار می کند

ریاست محترم سازمان قضایی نیروهای مسلح

جناب آقای حجه الاسلام بهرامی

سلام علیکم

اجازتا به استحضار می رسانند پیرو گزارش و مراقبتهای مرتبهای این وزارتخانه در جزیره کیش هم اکنون یک عضو بازرسی فدرال امریکا و احتمالا سازمان سیا بنام رابرت اندرسون که با پاسپورت عادی و ویزای توریستی وارد کشور شده است . در پوشش توریست مشغول دیدارهای متنوع و غیرمترقبه از و کسب اطلاعات می باشد .

بدیهی است از آنجا که جاسوسی و نفوذ وی در جهت ایجاد شبکه مخرب گذشته است تراکنیس انجام نماید که وی بلافاصله تا پایان امروز با همکاری پرسنل این وزارتخانه در منطقه خبری بخشهایی کیش بازداشت و به بازداشتگاهی با ضریب امنیتی بالا انتقال یابد .

بتوفیقات روز افزون جنابعالی را از درگاه احدیت مسئلت خواستاریم ./ف

رونوشت : معاونت عملیات

معاونت اطلاعاتی