

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.