

**Testimony of
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House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia
“Iran’s Escalating Threats: Assessing U.S. Policy Toward Iran’s Malign Activities”**

Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Phillips, Members of the Committee

I want to start by thanking you all for holding this hearing to examine the repression and brutality of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As we sit here, the Islamic Republic has doubled its efforts to crack down on protesters, especially on women and the families of 70 of the protesters killed during the Woman Life Freedom Revolution.

A year ago, Mahsa Jina Amini, a 22-year-old woman, from the Kurdish provinces, was arrested by the Morality Police in Tehran for the crime of having a few strands of hair exposed. She was beaten to death while in the custody. Thousands of Iranian women get arrested every year for having improper hijab, but Mahsa Amini’s death galvanized Iranians, especially women and teenage girls who took to the streets. Iranian women knew that any of them could have been Mahsa.

The Iranian people by their actions showed how much they detest the gender apartheid regime and its sharia laws. But their demands were not limited just to calling for an end to compulsory hijab. It was a call for an end to the Islamic Republic. I have often compared compulsory hijab to the Berlin Wall that symbolized communist oppression. When the Berlin Wall fell, it signaled the end of the communism. I’m sure that when compulsory hijab is removed that will be the end of the clerical regime.

The regime cracked down hard, sending in crack forces to put down the woman, life, freedom revolution. In the process, more than 600 protesters were killed, some shot in the head by snipers; the regime jailed more than 20,000. Tens of protesters were sentenced to death and at least a dozen have been executed after brief show trials. The regime even conducted terrorism against its own population by deliberately using chemical gases to poison some five thousand female students as punishment for taking part in the uprising

The Islamic Republic of Iran is not only one of the most brutal regimes in the world, but also one of the greatest threats to United States national security. Since its inception in 1979, the Islamic Republic has consistently targeted individuals who voice dissent against the government's policies, both domestically and abroad. More than 500 dissidents and opposition figures living outside Iran's borders have been killed or kidnaped.

After more than four decades in power without any meaningful reform, the character of the Islamic Republic is unlikely to change. The persecution of women, ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBTQ people, form the core ideology of the regime.

Recently, the regime has grown bolder, threatening Americans on US soil in operations that I believe are nothing short of a declaration of war. I would like to illustrate this by sharing just a bit about my personal experience.

In July last year, a man armed with AK-47 came to my house in Brooklyn to kill me on direct orders from the Islamic Republic. The assassin, Khalid Mehdiyev, a member of an East European criminal gang had been stalking me for days, waiting outside my home and monitoring my activities and those of my family, neighbors, and friends. Hiring criminals is nothing new for the Islamic Republic but before the assassin could carry out his mission, he was arrested by law enforcement officials.

The truth is that this was the second attempt on my life on US soil in just one year. The brazen assassination plot came exactly 12 months after another plot by the Islamic Republic agents to kidnap me, was stopped by the FBI.

Today, I am happy to report that four individuals in jail – the three men who had planned to kill me are behind bars and so is the woman who helped transfer funds to arrange the kidnapping.

I am grateful to members of Congress who passed the Masih Alinejad Hunt Law in response to the kidnapping plot.

But the Biden Administration's weak response is putting lives at risk, signaling that plotting to kidnap or kill Americans carries only minimum punishment. Imagine If the killer with AK47 had opened fire in front of my house in Brooklyn, how many of my neighbors would have been killed? I have no fear for my own life.... Don't get me wrong, I don't want to die, I want to be alive and see my beloved Iran freed from religious dictatorship. But I also care deeply about the national security of my beloved adopted country, the United States of America.

The administration has only taken token measures to punish the Islamic Republic, always careful not to antagonize the ayatollahs. Their condemnation of the kidnapping attempt was vaguely worded and showed weakness. That only emboldened the Iranian regime to initiate the assassination plot.

The threats go beyond dissidents. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards have threatened former government officials, including former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and former National Security Advisor John Bolton.

Before the regime came after me in my adopted country, they went after my family in Iran. In 2017, Iranian intelligence officials devised an elaborate plan to bring me to Turkey on the

pretext of a family reunion so that they could arrest and take me back to Iran. Their plans were foiled thanks to my brother, Alireza, who secretly warned me.

Alireza spend 2 years in jail for the crime of being my brother.

I am just as proud of my Iranian heritage as I am of the rights I enjoy as an American citizen. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan last year promised that “the United States of America will protect and defend its citizens.”

It seems not all Americans are equal. Some members of this administration have an easier time criticizing Saudi Arabia for its human rights violations than they do with Iran.

Here for the first time, I would like to share a secret: The White House warned me earlier this year that there have been more than 31 credible threats against me on US soil. And in an email, the administration strongly advised me to go into witness protection.

For those who don't know, witness protection means that I have to change my name, my social security number, my identity and disappear. This is exactly what the Islamic Republic of Iran wants me to do. To be silent and not give voice to voiceless people of Iran who say NO to Islamic Republic.

In response to the White House, I refused to be silent or intimidated. And I want my fellow Americans, including members of Congress, to help me to practice my freedom of speech in America and expose the danger of Islamic Republic terrorist regime to the whole world.

Iranian people are great admirers of the United States. The Islamic Republic on the other hand is a religious dictatorship that has only hatred for America and Americans. During the street protests across many cities in Iran, one of the chants most often heard was: “They lie to you that our enemy is America; our enemy is right here.”

The U.S. must take a more aggressive, comprehensive, and proactive approach to countering transnational repression. Americans should not be left alone to face dangerous state actors. Washington should criminalize transnational repression itself. Only one country systematically targets Americans: the Islamic Republic. Right now, there are a number of citizens from the West that are held hostage in Iran and are used as bargaining chips. Handing out billions of dollars to Islamic republic to free these prisoners is not the right solution. It only sends a signal that hostage taking diplomacy works.

The smart way to proceed is to keep our allies united behind a set of bipartisan initiatives that seek to counter Islamic Republic’s malign activities, stop its transnational repression and end its hostage taking. It means making it clear that the United States and the world will not tolerate and reward terrorism.

Thank you again for inviting me here today, and I look forward to answering your questions.