

Press Releases: Supporting Iranian Voices

Remarks

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SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you all. Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you very much. Well, thank you, Fred, for that kind introduction. It reminded me when I was going through my confirmation process they were chasing down all the people I'd known my whole life, and they found one of the young men who played basketball with me at Los Amigos, and his quote was – they asked how good I was. And he said, “Well, he made the most of what he had.” (Laughter.)

Thanks for the kind introduction and thanks for hosting me here at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library. It's a very special place and an honor for me to be here.

I also want to thank my friend Tom for joining me here tonight. He and I have been on multiple missions together, and I am confident we will continue to do so in the days and weeks and years ahead.

And it's great to see Governor Wilson here. I voted for you a couple times a long time ago. (Laughter.)

And I know we have many members of the Iranian American community with us this evening. This is just a fraction of the quarter million Iranian Americans in Southern California alone. We have many Iranian American guests from all across the United States here as well. Thank you. I look forward to hearing from you this evening, learning more about the situation in Iran as you see it, and understanding what your loved ones and friends are going through living in that place.

And I recognize the Iranian diaspora is diverse. There are many faith backgrounds and many different walks of life, and that's a good thing, and not all Iranian Americans see things the same way. But I think everyone can agree that the regime in Iran has been a nightmare for the Iranian people, and it is important that your unity on that point is not diminished by differences elsewhere.

To our Iranian American and – to our Iranian American friends, tonight I want to tell you that the Trump administration dreams the same dreams for the people of Iran as you do, and through our labors and God's providence that day will come true. (Applause.)

Next year will mark the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. As I'll spell out more in a moment, the 40 years of fruit from the revolution has been bitter. Forty years of kleptocracy. Forty years of the people's wealth squandered on supporting terrorism. Forty years of ordinary Iranians thrown in jail for peaceful expression of their rights. Why has the regime conducted itself in such an abhorrent way over the past 40 years and subjected its people to these conditions? It's an important question.

The answer is at root in the revolutionary nature of the regime itself. (Applause.)

The ideologues who forcibly came to power in 1979 and remain in power today are driven by a desire to conform all of Iranian society to the tenets of the Islamic Revolution. The regime is also committed to spreading the revolution to other countries, by force if necessary. The total fulfillment of the revolution at home and abroad is the regime's ultimate goal. It drives their behavior. Thus, the regime has spent four decades mobilizing all elements of the Iranian economy, foreign policy, and political life in service of that objective. To the regime, prosperity, security, and freedom for the Iranian people are acceptable casualties in the march to fulfill the revolution.

Economically, we see how the regime's decision to prioritize an ideological agenda over the welfare of the Iranian people has put Iran into a long-term economic tailspin. During the time of the nuclear deal, Iran's increased oil revenues could have gone to improving the lives of the Iranian people.

Instead they went to terrorists, dictators, and proxy militias. Today, thanks to regime subsidies, the average Hizballah combatant makes two to three times what an Iranian firefighter makes on the streets of Iran. Regime mismanagement has led to the rial plummeting in value. A third of Iranian youth are unemployed, and a third of Iranians now live below the poverty line.

The bitter irony of the economic situation in Iran is that the regime uses this same time to line its own pockets while its people cry out for jobs and reform and for opportunity. The Iranian economy is going great – but only if you're a politically-connected member of the elite. Two years ago, Iranians rightfully erupted in anger when leaked paystubs showed massive amounts of money inexplicably flowing into the bank accounts of senior government officials.

And there are many more examples of the widespread corruption.

Take Sadeq Larijani, the head of Iran's judiciary. He is worth at least \$300 million dollars. He got this money from embezzling public funds into his own bank account. The Trump administration sanctioned Larijani in January for human rights abuses, because we aren't afraid to tackle the regime at its highest level. (Applause.) Call me crazy – you won't be the first – but I'm a little skeptical that a thieving thug under international sanctions is the right man to be Iran's highest-ranking judicial official. (Laughter and applause.)

Former IRGC officer and Minister of Interior Sadeq Mahsouli is nicknamed "the Billionaire General." He went from being a poor IRGC officer at the end of the Iran-Iraq war to being worth billions of dollars. How'd that happen? He somehow had a knack for winning lucrative construction and oil trading contracts from businesses associated with the IRGC. Being an old college buddy of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad just might have had something to do with it as well. (Laughter.)

The ayatollahs are in on the act, too. Judging by their vast wealth, they seem more concerned with riches than religion. These hypocritical holy men have devised all kinds of crooked schemes to become some of the wealthiest men on Earth while their people suffer.

Grand Ayatollah Makaram Shirazi is known as the "Sultan of Sugar" for his illicit trading of sugar, which has generated over \$100 million for him. He has pressured the Iranian Government to lower subsidies to domestic sugar producers while he floods the market with his own more expensive imported sugar. This type of activity puts ordinary Iranians out of work.

Another ayatollah, one of Tehran's Friday prayer leaders for the last 30 years, had the government transfer several lucrative mines to his foundation. He too is now worth millions of dollars.

And not many people know this, but the Ayatollah Khamenei has his own personal, off-the-books hedge fund called the Setad, worth \$95 billion, with a B. That wealth is untaxed, it is ill-gotten, and it is used as a slush fund

for the IRGC. The ayatollah fills his coffers by devouring whatever he wants. In 2013 the Setad's agents banished an 82-year-old Baha'i woman from her apartment and confiscated the property after a long campaign of harassment. Seizing land from religious minorities and political rivals is just another day at the office for this juggernaut that has interests in everything from real estate to telecoms to ostrich farming. All of it is done with the blessing of Ayatollah Khamenei.

This list goes on, but we've got places to go tonight. The level of corruption and wealth among Iranian leaders shows that Iran is run by something that resembles the mafia more than a government.

On foreign policy, the regime's mission of exporting the revolution has produced a decades-long campaign of ideologically-motivated violence and destabilization abroad. Assad, Lebanese Hizballah, Hamas, Shia militant groups in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen feed on billions of regime cash while the Iranian people shout slogans like "Leave Syria, think about us."

Our partners in the Middle East are plagued by Iranian cyberattacks and threatening behavior in the waters of the Persian Gulf. The regime and its allies in terror have left a trail of dissident blood across Europe and the Middle East.

Indeed, our European allies are not immune to the threat of regime-backed terrorism.

Just earlier this month, an Iranian "diplomat" based in Vienna was arrested and charged with supplying explosives for a terrorist bomb scheduled to bomb a political rally in France. This tells you everything you need to know about the regime: At the same time they're trying to convince Europe to stay in the nuclear deal, they're covertly plotting terrorist attacks in the heart of Europe.

And because fighting the United States and destroying Israel is at the core of the regime's ideology, it has committed and supported many acts of violence and terrorism against both countries and our citizens. As just one example, well over a thousand American service members have been killed and wounded in Iraq from Iranian-made IEDs.

Today, multiple Americans are detained and missing inside of Iran. Baquer Namazi, Siamak Namazi, Xiyue Wang are unjustly held by the regime to this day, and Bob Levinson has been missing in Iran for over 11 years. There are others, too. And we in the Trump administration are working diligently to bring each of those Americans home from having been wrongfully detained for far too long. (Applause.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Shouting.) President Trump imprisons children. The Trump-Pence regime is kidnapping children. Trump and Pence –

AUDIENCE: (Booing.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: Despite – despite the regime's –

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Shouting off-mike.)

AUDIENCE: (Booing.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Shouting off-mike.)

AUDIENCE: USA, USA, USA, USA, USA, USA, USA, USA, USA, USA.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Shouting off-mike.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: If there were – if there were only so much freedom of expression in Iran. (Cheers and applause.)

You know, despite the regime's clear record of aggression, America and other countries have spent years straining to identify a political moderate. It's like an Iranian unicorn. (Laughter.) The regime's revolutionary goals and willingness to commit violent acts haven't produced anyone to lead Iran that can be remotely called a moderate or a statesman.

Some believe that President Rouhani and Foreign Minister Zarif fit that bill. The truth is they are merely polished front men for the ayatollahs' international con artistry. Their nuclear deal didn't make them moderates; it made them wolves in sheep's clothing. Governments around the world worry that confronting the Islamic Republic harms the cause of moderates, but these so-called moderates within the regime are still violent Islamic revolutionaries with an anti-America, anti-West agenda. You only have to take their own words for it. And for that matter, the evidence reveals that their agenda is a anti-Iran agenda as well.

The regime's absolute adherence to the Islamic Revolution mean it cannot endure any ideas in the Iranian society that would contradict or undermine it – unlike we just did here this evening. It's why the regime has for decades heartlessly repressed its own people's human rights, dignity, and fundamental freedoms.

It's why the Iranian police detained a teenage Iranian gymnast for posting an Instagram video of herself dancing.

It's why the regime arrests hundreds of Ahwazis, members of Iran's minority Arab community, when they speak out to demand respect for their language and for their basic beliefs. The government's morality police beat women in the streets and arrest those who do not wish to wear the hijab.

On "White Wednesday" activist recently – one activist was recently sentenced to 20 years in prison for protesting compulsory hijab wearing.

The desire to uphold the Islamic Revolution has especially resulted in gross suppression of the freedom of religion in Iran, often to barbaric ends.

Last month, a simple man, a bus driver, a father of two children, and a member of the Iranian Gonabadi Sufi Dervish Community, was convicted and

sentenced to death. His sentence came on questionable grounds following violent clashes between security forces and the Dervishes. He was reportedly denied access to a lawyer before, during – before and during his grossly unfair trial. This man, Mr. Salas – and his supporters – maintains his innocence throughout, reportedly stating he had been tortured into a forced confession. Sadly, on June 18th, the regime hanged Mr. Salas in prison.

His death was part of a larger crackdown that began in February, when at least 300 Sufis demanding the release of their fellow faith members were unjustly arrested. Right now, hundreds of Sufi Muslims in Iran remain imprisoned on account of their religious beliefs, with reports of several having died at the hands of the regime's brutal security forces.

Among those imprisoned is the 91-year-old leader, Dr. Noor Ali Tabandeh, who has been under house arrest for at least the last part of four months – the greatest part of four months. He is in need of immediate medical care.

The religious intolerance of the regime in Iran does not only extend to Sufi Muslims. The same goes for Christians and Jews and Sunnis and Baha'is and Zoroastrians and members of many other groups inside Iran who live with the fear that their next prayer may be indeed their last.

What grieves us so badly about the treatment of religious minorities in Iran is that their presence far pre-dates the regime. They are a historic part of the rich fabric of an ancient and vibrant Iranian civilization. That fabric has been torn by intolerant, black-robed enforcers. When other faiths are suppressed, the image of Iran becomes a self-portrait of the ayatollahs and of the IRGC.

In response to myriad government failures, corruption, and disrespect of rights, since December Iranians have been taking to the streets in the most enduring and forceful protests since 1979. Some shout the slogan, "The people are paupers while the mullahs live like gods." Others choose to shut down the Grand Bazaar in Tehran. The specific grievances do differ, but all those voicing dissatisfaction share one thing: They have been ill-treated by a revolutionary regime. Iranians want to be governed with dignity, accountability, and respect. (Applause.)

The regime – this is important. The regime's brutal response to these peaceful protests reflects the intolerance that its revolutionary worldview has produced. Last January, the regime welcomed in the new year with the arrests of up to 5,000 of its own people. They were peacefully calling for a better life. Hundreds reportedly remain behind bars, and several are dead at the hands of their own government. The leaders cynically call it suicide.

Overall, it is clear the regime's ideology has led many Iranians to be angry they cannot call their homeland a "normal" country.

They know that a constitution that enshrines the export of Islamic revolution and the destruction of its neighbors and the restriction of citizenship is not normal.

Ordinary Iranians know that their government's torture of its own people is not normal.

Earning multiple rounds of sanctions by the UN Security Council is not normal.

Inciting chants of "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" is not normal.

Being the number one state sponsor of terror is similarly abnormal.

Sometimes it seems the world has become desensitized to the regime's authoritarianism at home and its campaigns of violence abroad, but the proud Iranian people are not staying silent about their government's many abuses.

And the United States under President Trump will not stay silent either. (Applause.)

In light of these protests and 40 years of regime tyranny, I have a message for the people of Iran: The United States hears you; the United States supports you; the United States is with you.

When the United States sees the shoots of liberty pushing up through rocky soil we pledge our solidarity, because we too took a hard first step towards becoming a free country a few years back.

Right now, the United States is undertaking a diplomatic and financial pressure campaign to cut off the funds that the regime uses to enrich itself and support death and destruction. (Applause.) We have an obligation to put maximum pressure on the regime's ability to generate and move money, and we will do so.

At the center of this campaign is the re-imposition of sanctions on Iran's banking and energy sectors.

As we have explained over the last few weeks, our focus is to work with countries importing Iranian crude oil to get imports as close to zero as possible by November 4th. Zero.

Recently – (applause). Recently, as part of this campaign, we designated the Bahraini Shia militia terrorist organization Saraya al-Ashtar, and with the UAE we have jointly disrupted a currency exchange network that was transferring millions of dollars to the IRGC.

And there's more to come. Regime leaders – especially those at the top of the IRGC and the Quds Force like Qasem Soleimani – must be made to feel painful consequences of their bad decision making. (Applause.) We are asking every nation, every nation who is sick and tired of the Islamic Republic's destructive behavior, to join our pressure campaign. This especially goes for our allies in the Middle East and Europe, people who have themselves been terrorized by violent regime's activity for decades.

And you should know that the United States is not afraid to spread our message on the airwaves and online inside of Iran either. (Applause.) For 40

years the Iranian people have heard from their leaders that America is the "Great Satan." We do not believe they are interested in hearing the fake news any longer. (Laughter and applause.)

Today, one in four Iranians – 14 million people – watches or listens to U.S. Government broadcasts each week. And it's more important than ever now to refute the regime's lies and repeat our deep desire for friendship with the Iranian people. Right now, our U.S. Board – Broadcasting Board of Governors is taking new steps to help Iranians get around internet censorship as well. The BBG is also launching a new 24/7 Farsi-language TV channel. It will span not only television, but radio, digital, and social media format, so that the ordinary Iranians inside of Iran and around the globe can know that America stands with them. (Applause.)

And finally – and finally, America is unafraid to expose human rights violations and support those who are being silenced.

We continue to raise our concerns over the Islamic Republic's dire record of human rights abuses each time we speak at the UN and with our partners who maintain diplomatic relations with that country. We make it clear that the world is watching, and as the regime continues to make its own people the longest-suffering victims, we will not stand silent. (Applause.)

And now we call on everyone here in the audience and our international partners to help us shine a spotlight on the regime's abuses and to support the Iranian people.

The goal of our efforts is to one day see Iranians in Iran enjoying the same quality of life that Iranians in America enjoy. (Cheers and applause.)

Iranians in America enjoy all the freedoms secured by their government, not trampled by it. They are free to pursue economic opportunities they believe are best for them and their families, and they can be proud of their country and practice their faiths in the way they desire.

There are a few individuals with us I want to highlight tonight who embody what we hope for the Iranian people.

Goli Ameri came to the United States as a freshman at Stanford and has founded successful companies and has served at the State Department and at the UN.

Susan Azizzadeh was forced to leave everything behind and come here in 1979. Today she is the leader of the Iranian American Jewish Federation. (Cheers and applause.)

Makan Delrahim – I think I saw him – came to America with his family when he was just 10 years old. (Applause.) He is now the Assistant Attorney General at the Department of Justice – quite amazing. (Applause.)

We hope that the successes of Goli and Susan and Makan and the many others American – Iranian Americans among the diaspora in the United States remind all Iranians of what is possible under a government that respects its people

and governs with accountability. Iranians should not have to flee their homeland to find a better life. (Applause.)

While it is ultimately up to the Iranian people to determine the direction of their country, the United States, in the spirit of our own freedoms, will support the long-ignored voice of the Iranian people. Our hope is that ultimately the regime will make meaningful changes in its behavior both inside of Iran and globally. As President Trump has said, we're willing to talk with the regime in Iran, but relief from American pressure will come only when we see tangible, demonstrated, and sustained shifts in Tehran's policies.

I thought I'd close tonight in a perfectly appropriate way by invoking the words of a man who routinely made the case for freedom and respect far more eloquently than I ever could, President Ronald Reagan. In 1982 – (applause).

In 1982, President Reagan gave a speech to the British Parliament that became known as the Westminster address. He urged other Western governments to support those around the world trying to break free of tyranny and injustice. His reason why was simple and powerful. He said, "Freedom is not the sole prerogative of a lucky few, but the inalienable right and universal right of every human being."

This is why we also call on all governments to end their flirtations with a revolutionary regime and come quickly to the aid of the Iranian people. (Applause.) On that same day in those same remarks, President Reagan said, "Let us ask ourselves: 'What kind of people do we think we are?' And let us answer, 'Free people, worthy of freedom, and determined not only to remain so, but to help others gain their freedom as well.'"

Today, the United States condemns oppression levied on the Iranian people by those who rule unjustly, and we proudly amplify the voices of those in Iran longing to have those inalienable and universal human rights cease to be ignored and instead to be honored. We do so knowing that many in the streets and marketplaces speak for those who the regime has permanently silenced over the years – who may even have been loved ones who are in the audience tonight.

It's America's hope that the next 40 years of Iran's history will not be marked by repression and fear – but with freedom and fulfillment – for the Iranian people.

Thank you. (Applause.)

GOVERNOR WILSON: Well, you've answered all the questions.

SECRETARY POMPEO: We'll take another swing. Thank you.

GOVERNOR WILSON: Well, Mr. Secretary, I had some questions for you, but you actually answered almost all of them quite eloquently.

SECRETARY POMPEO: We'll see if I can give the same answer when I'm not – got remarks in front of me. (Laughter.)

GOVERNOR WILSON: Well, let me just start with this one. Is it realistic to think that the Iranian people will ever regain control of their country in what we would term the foreseeable future?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Of course. (Applause.) Well, of course. Of course. I always remind those who think it's not possible or think the time horizon will be measured in centuries not hours, I always remind them that things change. There are disjunctive moments. There are times when things happen that are unexpected, unanticipated. Our revolution would be one of them. I could go on. You all could name them, too.

We don't know the right moment. We don't know the day that the behavior of the Iranian regime will change. But we do know the things that the world is obligated to do so that when the right time comes, when the right moment comes, that opportunity is even more likely to find its fulfillment.

GOVERNOR WILSON: Would you synthesize your excellent speech and really in a few words say what you think the best way to effect that change within the Iranian Government is and how the Trump administration is helping the Iranian people in their struggle to become freed from this current tyrannical administration there?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So President Trump has been absolutely unequivocal on this not only in the message but in the fact that this is a real priority for the administration as well. I think that's important. One could have a objective, but if one doesn't rank it sufficiently high attention spans are short and resources limited. The President has put this as something he considers to be incredibly important.

The mission set for our team is clear. It's to deny the Iranian leadership the resources, the wealth, the funds, the capacity to continue to foment terrorism around the world and to deny the people inside of Iran the freedoms that they so richly deserve. How's that in 30 seconds? (Laughter.)

GOVERNOR WILSON: That's pretty good. (Applause.) There is a perception among some that Iranians, including students and including legitimate visitors, can't obtain U.S. visas because of a travel ban. Would you clarify what U.S. policy is regarding what we will call Iranian civil society visitors?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Sure, I'd be happy to do that. So President Trump has made clear with respect to a number of countries that weren't providing us with sufficient information that we had risks of American security that we were going to do our best to work with those countries to develop the information that we needed. Iran continues to deny us the basic data-sharing systems that hundreds of countries – or, excuse me, dozens and dozens of countries have already provided us. We would like Iran to do that.

We still allow students to come in. There are many students. I'm sure there are students here tonight who are Iranians who are here studying. We welcome that. But this administration does have as one of its primary policies to make sure that we appropriately vet all those who come to the nation so that we can keep our country safe. That's the plan. That's the policy. (Applause.)

GOVERNOR WILSON: Well, on perhaps an unduly optimistic note, what could be a basis for reconciliation between the United States and Iran?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So it's always possible. (Laughter.) And the President has made clear the fact that – I shouldn't have joked. The President has made clear he would love that, he would welcome that. I've now made three trips to Pyongyang, a regime that has treated its citizens in way that also denies them their freedoms.

The President has said if we can get this change, if we can get the leadership to make a strategic decision about how to ensure its well-being and the well-being of its peoples, that we're prepared to have a conversation and to discuss how that might proceed. The President has stated at least once, perhaps more than once, that he is prepared to do that with the leadership in Iran, but not until such time as there are demonstrable, tangible, irreversible changes in the Iranian regime that I don't see happening today. But I live in hope. (Applause.)

GOVERNOR WILSON: And what would be your advice for students – hopefully many in the audience today – who will be interested in being part of that effort and seek a career at the State Department? How can they best prepare and what challenges should they anticipate?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So we welcome all hardworking, talented patriotic folks to come be part of a great diplomatic team in the United States. It's an incredible honor. I'm now 12 weeks, almost to the day, as the Secretary of State. The team is fantastic. My wisdom for them is no different than the same wisdom I gave my son. If he was here he'd be rolling his eyes about now. (Laughter.)

Work hard, study, tell the truth every place you go. We have lots of folks who speak different languages who have spent time in other countries who have been able to learn about other cultures. It's critically important that we get that skill set at the State Department. Those are the kinds of things that young people who want a wonderful, exciting, rewarding, important career working as an American diplomat ought to think about doing as they move their way through college and beyond and we welcome. Go to state.gov. It's easy to find. We've got lots of great places for talented young Americans to come be part of our great team. (Applause.)

GOVERNOR WILSON: Well, Mr. Secretary, you have been quite clear, and it's, I think, clear to all of us who are privileged to be in this audience and in this house dedicated to the preservation and the enhancement of the Ronald Reagan legacy that you understand it better than perhaps anybody I've come across in a long time. (Applause.)

We, I think, both remember that at a critical time in the history of this country he said, with a smile, "Trust, but verify." (Laughter.) And it seems to me that's your message very clearly, and we thank you for the distinguished service that you have given from the moment that you left the Point, number one in your class. I find that quite impressive. (Applause.) And whoever that opponent was against whom you were playing basketball at Los

Amigos, I think he would have to say when he said, "Well, he made the most of what he could," you made the most of a very generous helping from the good Lord of brains and courage and directness. We are lucky to have you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you, Pete. That's very kind. (Applause.) Thank you, thank you. That's very kind.

GOVERNOR WILSON: Well, it's sincere.

SECRETARY POMPEO: That's very, very kind. Thank you, sir. (Applause.)

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