September 19, 2023

The Honorable Virginia Foxx
2462 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3305

Re: Iran Regime Interference in American Institutions of Higher Learning

Chairwoman Virginia Foxx:

We write to call for a House Committee on Education and the Workforce investigation into the Islamic Republic of Iran's subversive influence over American institutions of higher learning. Specifically, we ask that the committee exercise its oversight authority to determine the extent of the Iran regime's infiltration of Princeton University and Oberlin College through the employment of suspected foreign agents, and to take appropriate action based on its findings.

The Alliance Against Islamic Republic of Iran Apologists, or AAIRIA, is a non-partisan group of former political prisoners, families of executed political prisoners, and human rights activists who seek justice and accountability for those who have suffered at the hands of the Iran regime.[1] We work tirelessly to counter the regime's influence on college campuses, among government institutions, and through media propaganda.

Professor Seyed Hossein Mousavian of Princeton and Mohammad Jafar Mahallati of Oberlin College are accused of serving the Iran regime's interests and acting as unregistered foreign agents of Iran, the world's most prolific state sponsor of terrorism. Furthermore, Mousavian and Mahallati each played a part in covering up or facilitating the Islamic Republic's crimes against humanity.

Mousavian is the Middle East Security and Nuclear Policy Specialist for the Program on Science and Global Security at Princeton University. The professor uses the prestige afforded to him as an academic to boost the Iran regime's image in the West and support its foreign policy objectives. Most recently, U.S. Strategic Command invited Mousavian to speak at a Deterrence Symposium, where he railed against perceived American injustices towards Iran and urged military leaders to "rewrite their policy in the Middle East."[2] His appearance at a senior U.S. command center invited sharp criticism from the House

[1] "About Us-Story." 2023. AAIRIA. https://aairia.org/story/
[2] U.S. STRATCOM Public Affairs Office. 2023. "2023 USSTRATCOM Deterrence Symposium - Dr. Seyed Hossein Mousavian." YouTube. https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=QTz9TqmlcQQ

and Senate Armed Services Committees, which demanded a full accounting of why "a propagandist of the regime" was invited to headline the symposium.[3]

While employed at Princeton, Mousavian has maintained close ties to the Islamic Republic. He attended the 2020 funeral of Major-General Qassem Soleimani,[4] the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force (IRGC-QF), a U.S.-designated terrorist entity responsible for the deaths of at least 600 U.S. service members.[5] He subsequently appeared in an Iran state propaganda film lionizing Soleimani in his final days. With a smile, Mousavian recounted how former U.S. envoy to Iran Brian Hook's wife "can't sleep," and how "she cries and trembles," telling her husband, "'They'll kill you,'" over the U.S. drone strike that eliminated Soleimani.[6]

Mousavian is a former Iran regime official who served the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in various roles, including as Iran's ambassador to Germany (1990-1997). During this period, the regime carried out assassinations of Iranian dissidents residing in Germany. Iran's diplomatic service was accused of planning and coordinating the targeted killings with Hezbollah,[7] an Iranian-backed terrorist organization, and four diplomatic staff were expelled from Germany after a court verdict pointing to "the participation of Iranian state agencies."[8] Mousavian, who blamed the murders on "the work of the Americans," also faced calls for his deportation.[9]

During his time at Princeton, Mousavian has continued to support the Iran regime's hostile foreign interests. During a 2016 interview, Iran's then-foreign minister Javad Zarif told state television that he "worked closely with [Mousavian] for many years," adding that the professor "is some[one] who is completely tied to the regime" and is "currently working hard" for it.[10]

As with Mousavian, Professor Mahallati – the Nancy Schrom Dye Chair in Middle East and North African Studies at Oberlin College – is a former Iran regime diplomat. While serving as Iran's ambassador to the United Nations (1987-1989), Mahallati was complicit in covering up the regime's 1988 massacre of an estimated 4,500 political prisoners. Amnesty International documented Mahallati's repeated attempts to mislead international investigators and dismiss evidence of the 1988 massacre.[11]

Members of the House Education and Workforce Committee are familiar with Mahallati and his ties to Iran's regime. In September 2022, you co-authored a letter to Oberlin College with Rep. Jim Banks requesting answers about the faculty "vetting process" and the conditions surrounding Mahallati's

---

[3] Rogers, Mike and Wicker, Roger. 2023. Congressional Letter to STRATCOM. U.S. Congress. https://armedservices.house.gov/sites/republicans.armedservices.house.gov/files/Letter%20to%20Gen.%20Cotton%20re%20Mousavian%2008.30.23%20FINAL%5b47%5d.pdf

[4] Kredo, Adam. 2022. "Princeton Faculty Member Brags About Death Threats Against Trump Admin Envoy." *Washington Free Beacon.* https://freebeacon.com/campus/princeton-official-brags-about-death-threats-against-trump-admin-envoy/

[5] Office of the Assistant Attorney General. 2020. "Memorandum for John A. Eisenberg Legal Advisor to the National Security Council. U.S. Department of Justice. https://www.justice.gov/d9/2023-04/2020-03-10_soleimani_airstrike_redacted_2021.pdf

[6] Kredo, "Princeton Faculty Member Brags."

[7] Levitt, Matthew. 2018. "Iran's Deadly Diplomats." Combating Terrorism Center. https://ctc.usma.edu/irans-deadly-diplomats/

[8] Hakakian, Roya. 2011. *Assassins of the Turquoise Palace.* https://books.google.com/books?id=I5zmbMR2FTAC&printsec=copyright#v=onepage&q&f=false

[9] Ibid.

[10] Aarabi, Kasra. 2022. Twitter (X). https://x.com/kasraaarabi/status/1480220659221508099?s=46&t=7nGZXz-ilqp2VbmayHWhrw

[11] Amnesty International. 2023. "Involvement of Iran's Former Diplomats in Covering Up the 1988 Prison Massacres." https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/MDE1364182023ENGLISH.pdf

employment.[12] This letter pointed to the professor's role on the board of a regime-based journal connected to the IRGC that is openly sympathetic to Hezbollah.[13] Moreover, you cited a 2018 letter from Mahallati to Iran's Parliament defending his utility to the Islamic Republic as an instructor exporting the regime's radical brand of Shi'a Islam.[14]

AAIRIA has obtained new evidence showing that Iran's Permanent Mission to the U.N. appointed Mahallati in December 1997 as "'Special Advisor in Political Affairs' with full diplomatic and political privileges."[15] He served in this capacity while simultaneously employed as an adjunct professor of international affairs at Columbia University.

Foreign influence on college campuses is a growing concern that threatens to erode academic integrity, compromise proprietary research, and manipulate the next generation of policymakers. In the absence of sufficient federal oversight, state legislatures are passing laws that regulate foreign gifts, foreign travel, and background checks on visiting professors and researchers.[16]

AAIRIA members have suffered atrocities at the hands of the Iran regime and know firsthand the brutal methods it employs in pursuit of its strategic goals. This is not about academic freedom but is about academic integrity and national security. It is an urgent problem that requires the committee's immediate attention.

As such, we request the following actions concerning Mousavian and Princeton University:

- Contact Princeton University administrators to examine the hiring practices and vetting procedures behind Mousavian's employment, as well as his current relationship with the Iran regime.
- Request an audit of Mousavian's course curricula, research projects, scholarly publishing, and speaking engagements to determine the quality and independence of lesson plans and source material.
- Request Princeton University records of Mousavian's employment-related foreign travel and employment-related foreign activities, including a report of any gifts of funds or promises to pay offered by a foreign country or entity representing the interests of a foreign country.
- Require Princeton University to report any contract, gift, grant, endowment, award, scholarship, or donation of money or property of any kind received from the Islamic Republic of Iran. For any gifts or in-kind donations, Princeton should provide a detailed description of the purpose for which the gift is to be used by the institution; the identities of the persons whom the gift is explicitly intended to benefit; and any applicable conditions attached to the gift.

---

[12] Foxx, Virginia and Banks, Jim. 2022. "Letter to Oberlin College." U.S. Congress. https://static.foxnews.com/foxnews.com/content/uploads/2022/09/Rep.-Foxx-Letter-to-Oberlin-College-.pdf
[13] Johnston, Susannah. 2022. "Exclusive: Oberlin's Iranian Prof Boasted of His Utility to Tehran." *Focus on Western Islamism*. https://islamism.news/news/exclusive-oberlins-iranian-prof-boasted-of-his-utility-to-tehran/
[14] Ibid.
[15] "Letter from Iran's Permanent Mission to the UN granting Mahallati diplomatic immunity." 1997. IMGUR. https://imgur.com/a/fObVlTl
[16] "Louisiana's Higher Education Foreign Security Act of 2022 Signals Continued Scrutiny of Foreign Influence in American Academia." 2022. *Ropes & Gray.* https://www.ropesgray.com/en/newsroom/alerts/2022/october/louisianas-higher-education-foreign-security-act-of-2022-signals-continued-scrutiny

Regarding Mahallati and Oberlin College, please share the results of your September 2022 letter to Oberlin College and inform us of any follow-on actions you plan to take.

You should also be aware that, responding to public pressure, Oberlin College conducted a secretive internal review of the allegations against Mahallati in 2021.[17] The inquiry, carried out by Oberlin's own attorneys, failed to consult with expert witnesses and surviving family members with firsthand knowledge of the executions. Human rights groups, historians of Iran, and even Oberlin's own student newspaper have rejected the exercise as a sham investigation.[18] Therefore, we ask that you disregard Oberlin's flawed conclusions and refer to Amnesty International's February 2023 report, which addresses Mahallati's claims of ignorance over the 1988 massacres.[19]

In both cases, we request that the Committee issue recommendations and take appropriate actions pending the results of its investigations, including the suspension of federal grants and contracts in the event of non-compliance with the committee's requests.

You have demonstrated in the past that you view the Islamic Republic of Iran's influence over collegiate institutions seriously. We are confident that you will continue your rigorous oversight of vulnerable institutions, and we know that you will not be dissuaded from taking appropriate measures to ensure compliance from university administrators.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lawdan Bazargan
Alliance Against Islamic Republic of Iran Apologists

---

[17] "Factsheet: Professor Mohammad Jafar Mahallati." 2021. Oberlin College. https://www.oberlin.edu/news/fact-sheet-professor-mohammad-jafar-mahallati

[18] Vietze, Anisa et al. 2021. "Evidence Against Mahallati Irrefutable." *Oberlin Review*. https://oberlinreview.org/25328/opinions/evidence-against-mahallati-irrefutable/

[19] Amnesty International. 2023. "Involvement of Iran's Former Diplomats."