

Debate Pack

CDP-0189 (2021)

Claire Mills
Tim Robinson

12 November 2021

The case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

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Background

A Westminster Hall debate on Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe has been scheduled for Tuesday 16 November from 2.30pm to 4.00pm. The debate has been initiated by Tulip Siddiq MP.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is a British-Iranian dual national who is currently being detained in Iran. She is one of several Western dual nationals who have been detained in the country in the last few years on what are regarded as arbitrary charges by the UK Government.

She was originally jailed by the Iranian authorities in 2016 on charges of plotting to overthrow the government, allegations which she has denied. Originally sentenced to five years in prison, four of those were spent at Evin prison and one under house arrest following her release from prison in 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A few months before the end of her five-year sentence, further charges were brought against her by the Iranian authorities. Charged with spreading propaganda against the government following her participation in a demonstration outside the Iranian embassy in London in 2009 and by giving an interview to the BBC Persian Service, [she was sentenced](#) to a further one-year jail term and a one-year travel ban in April 2021. The UK Government called the charges “[indefensible and unacceptable](#)” and accused the Iranian Government of deliberately putting her through “[a cruel and inhumane ordeal](#)”. In October 2021 [she lost an appeal](#) against a second jail term. Although threatened with a return to jail at any time, she currently remains under house arrest.

The Government has been criticised by human rights groups such as [Redress](#) and MPs including the former Foreign Secretary, [Jeremy Hunt](#), for not acting decisively in Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe’s case, and those of other British/Iranian dual nationals being held in Iran.

Her family have claimed that she is being [held as a bargaining chip](#) to pressurise the Government to pay back a £400 million debt it owes to Iran for the sale of chieftain tanks in the late 1970s. [The Government acknowledges the debt that it owes](#) but says that it has been unable to make payment due to the sanctions regime in place against certain designated entities and individuals, including the Iranian Ministry of Defence. The Government has said it [regards it as “unhelpful”](#) to connect the cases of British dual nationals with the military debt.

The question of debt repayment has been brought before the UK courts several times over the last few years. A further High Court hearing had been scheduled for April 2021 but was adjourned at the request of the Iranian

Ministry of Defence. [A final decision on a new hearing date has not yet been made.](#)

At the end of October 2021 Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's husband, Richard, began a hunger strike outside the Foreign Office in an attempt to put pressure on the Government, who he has called "[too timid](#)" in its efforts to secure her release.

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Press articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

[We must bite the bullet and pay £400m to free Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, writes former Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt](#)

Daily Mail
Jeremy Hunt MP
11 November 2021

[After 17 days of hunger strike, I'm still trying to save Nazanin](#)

The Guardian
Richard Ratcliffe
9 November 2021

[It's Liz Truss's moment to do the right thing](#)

The Observer
David Mitchell
7 November 2021

[Anoosheh Ashoori's family to meet Liz Truss as they seek diplomatic protection](#)

The Guardian
Patrick Wintour
2 November 2021

[Amir Abdollahian: UK must repay its 40-year-old debt](#)

Tehran Times
24 September 2021

[Campaign for Detained British-Iranian Urges Sanctions on 10 Iranians](#)

Iran International
Maryam Sinaiee
19 September 2021

[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe husband talks to Truss about detained wife](#)

BBC News
Malu Cursino
19 September 2021

[Britain shouldn't pay out to secure Zaghari-Ratcliffe's release](#)

The Spectator

Charlie Peters

27 April 2021

[British defence secretary says Britain must honor Iran debt](#)

MEHR News Agency

22 March 2021

[How Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe was hung out to dry by the British](#)

The Times (Subscription required)

Catherine Philp

28 December 2020

[Britain's debt to Iran growing day by day, Iran says](#)

Tehran Times

12 October 2020

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Press releases

Iran statement: 11 November 2021

**Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
12 November 2021**

An FCDO spokesperson said:

The Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister, Bagheri Kani visited the FCDO today (11 November) to meet senior government officials and Minister Cleverly.

FCDO representatives reiterated that Iran should take the opportunity to conclude the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) deal on the table now.

The Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister was also pressed on the need for Iran to urgently release all British nationals unfairly detained in Iran, including Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, Anoosheh Ashoori and Morad Tahbaz.

Minister Cleverly met Richard Ratcliffe again today to reaffirm our commitment to reuniting his wife, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, with her family in the UK. The Foreign Secretary, Minister Cleverly and the FCDO continue to work hard to secure the release of all those British nationals unfairly detained in Iran.

Foreign Secretary Statement on Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe: 16 October 2021

**Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
16 October 2021**

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

Iran's decision to proceed with these baseless charges against Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is an appalling continuation of the cruel ordeal she is going through.

Instead of threatening to return Nazanin to prison Iran must release her permanently so she can return home.

We are doing all we can to help Nazanin get home to her young daughter and family and I will continue to press Iran on this point.

2,000 days since Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe was detained: Foreign Secretary's statement

**Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
23 September 2021**

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

Today marks 2,000 days since Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's cruel separation from her family.

She is going through an appalling ordeal.

We are working tirelessly to secure her return home to her family.

I pressed the Iranian foreign minister on this yesterday and will continue to press until she returns home.

Iran: Foreign Secretary meets Iranian Foreign Minister, 22 September 2021

**Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
22 September 2021**

A Foreign, Commonwealth and Development spokesperson said:

The Foreign Secretary held her first meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian to discuss bilateral, nuclear and regional issues. She called for the release and return home of British dual national detainees. She urged Iran to return rapidly to the JCPOA negotiations in Vienna with a view to all sides coming back into compliance and reducing tensions over Iran's nuclear programme.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss to meet Iranian Foreign Minister to discuss detained British nationals and nuclear deal

**Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
20 September 2021**

- Foreign Secretary will press Iran on ongoing consular cases including the arbitrary detention of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe
- Liz Truss will also call on Iran to return to the nuclear deal negotiating table before it is too late

The Foreign Secretary Liz Truss will meet a number of her international counterparts for the first time at the United Nations General Assembly in New York today (20 September) – including Iranian Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian.

With the meeting coming within her first week in the role, Liz Truss will say that a reset of bilateral relations between our countries should be a shared interest, but Iran's continuing nuclear non-compliance and escalating nuclear programme is blocking important progress.

The Foreign Secretary will call for Iran to immediately release Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, Anoosheh Ashoori, Morad Tahbaz and all UK nationals unjustly trapped in Iran.

As the 2000th day of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's arbitrary detention approaches this week, she will ask the Iranian Foreign Minister to end her suffering, allowing her to return home to be reunited with her daughter and husband in the UK.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said:

I will be asking Iran to ensure the immediate and permanent release of all arbitrarily detained British nationals in Iran, and to begin working with us to mend our fractured relations.

The UK, US and our international partners are fully committed to a nuclear deal, but every day that Iran continues to delay talks whilst escalating its own nuclear programme means there is less space for diplomacy.

The Foreign Secretary will reiterate the US offer to lift sanctions in exchange for Iran returning to full compliance with its nuclear commitments. She will call on Iran to return to the Vienna talks over the nuclear deal (JCPoA), and once again return to compliance with its nuclear commitments, which is in the best interests of all parties.

Foreign Secretary Truss will also meet India's Foreign Minister Jaishankar at the UN General Assembly on Monday. The ministers will take the opportunity to evaluate the [2030 Roadmap published earlier this year](#), as a vision of UK-India relations over the next 10 years.

She will highlight our shared interests over Afghanistan, how the UK wants to work with India to prevent Afghanistan becoming a safe haven for terrorists, and limit terrorist groups' access to resources.

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PQs

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

05 Nov 2021 | 65504

Asked by: Ruth Jones

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many meetings she has had which have focused on securing the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe since her appointment.

Answering member: James Cleverly | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Iran's decision to proceed with these baseless charges against Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is an appalling continuation of the cruel ordeal she is going through. Instead of threatening to return Nazanin to prison Iran must release her permanently so she can return home. The Foreign Secretary discussed Nazanin's case with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on 22 September at the UN. The Foreign Secretary has also taken every opportunity to discuss the situation with other key players in the region and more widely and will continue to do so. The Foreign Secretary has spoken to Nazanin twice since taking up her role and met Nazanin's family most recently on 28 October to reiterate our commitment to securing her release. In addition, ministers hold regular meetings with officials to direct activity across the FCDO to secure her release. Our Ambassador in Tehran has regularly raised the cases of our detainees with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We will not stop working until those dual British nationals being arbitrarily detained by Iran are released.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

04 Nov 2021 | HL3302

Asked by: The Marquess of Lothian

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking, if any, to secure the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe following the loss of her appeal against a second jail sentence.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Iran's decision to proceed with these baseless charges against Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is an appalling continuation of the cruel ordeal she is going through. We are doing all we can to help Nazanin get home to her young daughter and family and the Foreign Secretary will continue to press Iran on this point, most recently discussing it with Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian on

22 September. Our Ambassador in Tehran continues to regularly raise our detainees with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Topical Questions

26 Oct 2021 | 702 c136

Asked by: Jeremy Hunt

I warmly welcome my successor's successor to her place, although saying that makes me feel rather old. She will know that Richard Ratcliffe, Nazanin's husband, has restarted his hunger strike this week. She will also know that Nazanin is not going to come home until we pay the debt that we owe Iran for the Challenger tanks, which the Defence Secretary has accepted that we owe Iran. When are we going to repay that debt, and what will the Minister do to ensure that hostage taking never pays?

Answered by: Elizabeth Truss | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

I have huge sympathy for Nazanin and Richard Ratcliffe. I have spoken to both of them about the terrible situation that Nazanin faces. It is imperative that she is not put back into jail in Iran, and I am working as hard as I can, both directly with the Iranian authorities—I have had a meeting with Iranian Ministers—and with our international allies to bring Nazanin and the other UK detainees home.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

10 Sep 2021 | 41090

Asked by: Tulip Siddiq

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will formally acknowledge Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe to be a hostage under the terms of the 1982 Taking of Hostages Act in response to recent public statements to that effect by Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister.

Answering member: James Cleverly | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We do not accept our nationals being used as diplomatic leverage and have repeatedly made this clear to Iran. We remain committed to securing the immediate and permanent release of arbitrarily detained dual British nationals in Iran, including Nazanin. We will continue take any action we judge will help secure her permanent release, keeping under review what we judge to be in her best interests. They must be able to return to their families in the UK. We call on President Raisi's administration to start to set a new course for Iran by releasing them.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

10 Sep 2021 | 41088

Asked by: Tulip Siddiq

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, if he will publish any response he has had from the Iranian Government following the request that it investigate credible allegations of torture in the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe; and whether the Iranian authorities have agreed to conduct an independent investigation of torture claims.

Answering member: James Cleverly | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We take all allegations of torture and mistreatment very seriously. The Iranian government has deliberately put Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe through a terrible ordeal. Iran's treatment of her is intolerable and she must be allowed to return permanently to her family in the UK. The Foreign Secretary continues to raise Iran's practice of detaining foreign and dual nationals with his Iranian counterpart. Our Ambassadors in Tehran have regularly raised our detainees with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

02 Sep 2021 | HL2369

Asked by: The Marquess of Lothian

To ask Her Majesty's Government when the Foreign Secretary last spoke to the Foreign Minister of Iran to secure the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe to allow her to return to her family in the UK.

Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We remain committed to doing all we can to secure Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe's return home. Iran has put her through a cruel and intolerable ordeal and we have called on them, in the strongest possible terms, to end her suffering and allow her to be reunited with her family. The Foreign Secretary continues to raise the UK's serious concerns about Iran's practice of detaining foreign and dual nationals with his Iranian counterpart. Our Ambassadors in Tehran have regularly raised our detainees with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Iran: Detainees

27 May 2021 | 6275

Asked by: Lisa Nandy

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the commitments to address arbitrary detention made in the G7 Foreign and Development Ministers' Meeting Communiqué of 5

May 2021, what steps he plans to take with his G7 counterparts to secure the release of British dual-nationals arbitrarily detained in Iran, including (a) Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, (b) Anoosheh Ashoori and (c) Mehran Raouf.

Answering member: James Cleverly | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

We are in contact with a range of international partners including the G7 who share our deep concerns about the ongoing detention of arbitrarily detained foreign nationals, including dual British nationals, in Iran. We continue to raise the named individuals' cases at the most senior levels, and discuss them at every opportunity with our Iranian counterparts. Our Ambassador in Tehran regularly raises our dual national cases with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, most recently on 24 May.

5 Other Parliamentary material

5.1 Debates

Iran

19 Oct 2021 | 815 cc106-127

Lords question for short debate on what is their policy towards Iran; and what engagement they have had with the government of that country on (1) the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, and (2) the detention of dual nationals.

5.2 Urgent Questions

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

25 Oct 2021 | 702 cc57-62

Urgent question to ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs to make a statement on Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

Asked by: Tulip Siddiq

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs to make a statement on my constituent Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

Answered by: James Cleverly

It is indefensible and unacceptable that Iran has rejected Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe's appeal against the new charges made against her. We continue to call on Iran to let her return home to the UK immediately. On 22 September, the Foreign Secretary spoke to the Iranian Foreign Minister to make clear our deep concern about the ongoing situation of Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe, alongside the continued detention of Anoosheh Ashoori and Morad Tahbaz. Iran must release British dual nationals who have been arbitrarily detained so that they can return home.

The Foreign Secretary spoke to Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Richard Ratcliffe on 16 and 17 October respectively. Earlier this month, I spoke to the families of arbitrarily detained dual British nationals and reiterated that the UK Government, from the Prime Minister down, remain fully committed to doing everything we can to help them to return home. We also called for humanitarian treatment of detained British dual nationals. Their welfare remains a top priority for us. We lobby on health concerns and mistreatment allegations whenever we have specific concerns or a family member brings issues to our attention. We call on the Iranian Government immediately to

allow health professionals into Evin prison to assess the situation of dual British nationals incarcerated there. We continue to raise their cases at the most senior levels and discuss them at every opportunity with our Iranian counterparts. Our ambassador in Tehran regularly raises our dual national detainees with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office provides consular assistance to the families of British dual nationals detained in Iran wherever they seek our support.

The UK Government continue to engage with international partners and directly with the Government of Iran on a full range of issues of interest to the UK. Our priorities remain to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons capability, to promote stability and security in the region, and to secure the full release of our dual national detainees. I can assure this House that the safety and welfare of all British dual nationals detained in Iran remains a top priority for the UK Government. We will continue to raise our concerns with our Iranian interlocutors at every level, and we will not stop until those who have been detained unjustly are at home with their loved ones.

Asked by: Tulip Siddiq

I thank Mr Speaker's office and you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for granting this urgent question. It is my eighth urgent question on Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe since she was detained five harrowing years ago in Iran on false charges.

You may remember, Madam Deputy Speaker, that only two years ago Nazanin's husband, Richard Ratcliffe, was on hunger strike outside the Iranian embassy in solidarity with his wife, who was doing the same in Evin prison in Iran. Today, Richard is on hunger strike on the Foreign Secretary's doorstep in Whitehall, pleading with her and the Prime Minister to do more to challenge Iran's hostage-taking and to bring Nazanin home to be reunited with him and their daughter Gabriella. I think all Members across this House will realise that going on hunger strike is the absolute last resort for anyone. Richard has told me that he feels that there is no other option left because our Government's response to his wife's case has been pitiful. Earlier this month, Nazanin was told that the Iranian judiciary had upheld a new one-year prison sentence and a further one-year travel ban that she had been given. This was just the latest escalation from Iran in this five-year ordeal, and yet again we do not feel that it has triggered any robust action from the UK. I know there was hope for a diplomatic solution just before summer, but these false dawns have actually made the situation worse for Nazanin and her husband.

I know that the Minister means well, that he is well versed on this case, and that he has been supportive of my constituent, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, and her husband Richard, who has come to the Gallery today to listen to this urgent question. I want to ask the Minister specifically about four asks from Nazanin's family. Will he acknowledge that Nazanin is a hostage of the

Iranian state? Will the Government bring forward Magnitsky sanctions against those involved in this hostage taking and challenge Iran on it in the courts? Will the Government finally fulfil the promise of resolving the £400 million debt that we as a country owe Iran? Will he work to secure a commitment to end hostage taking in negotiations around the Iran nuclear deal?

I urge the Minister, for Nazanin's sake, for Richard's sake, for Gabriella's sake and for the sake of all British citizens imprisoned in Iran or at risk of being taken hostage, to commit to a robust response to Iran and a proper rescue plan for Nazanin.

Answered by: James Cleverly

I commend the hon. Lady for the passion with which she promotes the interest of her constituents. I know other Members in the House also have an interest. I cannot begin to imagine what it must be like for the families of those incarcerated in Iran, and I understand the universal desire to get these British dual nationals home. I assure her that the UK continues to have this as one of our top priorities. It is the focus of all the conversations we have with Iran. She will understand that a range of sanctions is already imposed against individuals and entities in Iran from the UK and international bodies. Of course the Iranian regime would love to connect the cases of these British dual nationals with the international military services debt. We regard it as unhelpful to reinforce that link. We make the point very clearly that British dual nationals must not be used as a means of diplomatic leverage. Therefore, we continue to call on Iran to do the right thing, to release all the British dual nationals in incarceration and to allow them to come home to their families and loved ones.

Asked by: Dr Julian Lewis

Can the Minister tell the House roughly how many British dual nationals are being held captive in Iran, and how many of them chose to go there after the ordeal of this poor lady began so many years ago? What advice would he give to any British dual nationals thinking of going to Iran in the future?

Answered by: James Cleverly

The UK travel advice on Iran has remained consistent for some time. We strongly advise against all travel to Iran. Our ability to offer consular support, for the very reasons that we have discussed here, is severely limited. My right hon. Friend will forgive me if I choose not to disclose how many people we believe are in incarceration. Our view is that, while that might be frustrating to many, it is sometimes better that we exert the pressure that we exert quietly, rather than publicly.

Asked by: Wayne David

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) on securing this urgent question and on the sterling work she is doing on behalf of her constituent, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. Six months ago, my

hon. Friend secured a similar debate on the second sentence Nazanin was given by the Iranian authorities. Now, Nazanin has lost her appeal to overturn that spurious conviction and faces the prospect of returning to prison, where we know conditions are very poor. This means she may not see her husband and young daughter until 2023. Yesterday, her husband Richard Ratcliffe began, as we have heard, a hunger strike outside the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. When I met Richard earlier today, he showed his courage and determination, and he made clear to me that he was taking this action because he has lost faith in the overnment's broken strategy.

After over 2,000 long days, it is surely time for the Government to fundamentally rethink their whole approach to Nazanin's predicament and the predicament of the other dual nationals who are in a similar position. Last week, in reply to questions from my hon. Friend and me in a Westminster Hall debate, the Minister said that the Government remain absolutely committed to securing the full release of Nazanin and the other imprisoned dual nationals. The new Foreign Secretary has said that she will continue to "press Iran" on the issue.

My question today is straightforward: what precisely is the Government's strategy for bringing Nazanin and the others home? Words are not enough. It is surely time for the Government to take real and robust action.

Answered by: James Cleverly

I understand the frustration that is clearly in the hon. Gentleman's voice and I assure him that that is echoed by everyone involved in the situation. The incarceration of British dual nationals is down to Iran. The most recent charges brought against Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe are as spurious as the original charges and we demand that the Iranian regime releases her. I assure him that we are exploring every option. I assure him that, if he were able to come up with specific ideas that we had not already explored, they would be listened to and taken seriously. I also assure him, however, that we have explored and continue to explore every option to secure the release of all the British dual nationals currently held in incarceration in Iran.

Asked by: Alyn Smith

I warmly commend the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for securing the urgent question and for her indefatigability in keeping the issue to the fore. We were in a Westminster Hall debate last week where she was notably passionate in her prosecution. For the record, I do not doubt the diligence of the Minister on the subject; I think it has been raised a number of times with the Iranians. Despite all the good intentions and cross-party unity, however, Column 60 is located here we have not seen progress; arguably, we have seen reversals. What sort of toothless tiger cannot get its nationals back from an overseas regime that has taken them hostage? We need to call a spade a spade.

We have an opportunity for progress with President Raisi coming to COP in Glasgow in a matter of days. Will the UK Government take the opportunity of having him in Scotland to hold talks about the issue? If not, why on earth are we contemplating having the head of a regime that is holding UK nationals hostage on our soil?

Answered by: James Cleverly

I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that the release of British dual nationals is part of every conversation that we have with the Iranian regime at every level. I remind the House that, ultimately, that is the responsibility not of those people in incarceration or of this Government, but wholly, solely and exclusively of the Iranian regime. The detention of those people is completely illegitimate and unfounded, and they need to be released immediately.

Asked by: Layla Moran

I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for granting the urgent question and I thank the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for doggedly pursuing the issue, both of which say that the House will not give up on Nazanin. I find it disappointing that those of us who have taken an interest in the case could have written what the Minister said, because we hear the same thing over and over again.

I want to push one of the questions that has already been asked. As part of the joint comprehensive plan of action negotiations, is the end to hostage taking one of the things that the Government are going to press? We have to keep pushing at every available avenue and that is clearly on the table and needs to be explored. Can the Minister give us an update on that?

Answered by: James Cleverly

As I have said, we do not accept the notion that arbitrarily incarcerating British dual nationals should be used as a point of leverage in negotiations. The suspended negotiations taking place in Vienna are about ensuring that we do not ever see a nuclear-armed Iran. Our position on that is consistent and unwavering, and we will not allow Tehran to distract us from that course of action. Our position is straightforward and simple: the people in incarceration should be released without condition, not as part of some negotiation, but because they are not in any way responsible for the charges that have been brought against them.

Asked by: Kevin Brennan

The concern behind the UQ of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) today and behind Mr Ratcliffe's recent hunger strike is that the issue of British prisoners abroad is not really the top priority for the Foreign Office. I ask the Minister to review the correspondence that we have had recently in relation to the case of Luke Symons—it is related in some ways through the Iranian connection—who is incarcerated in Sana'a by the Houthis, and also the correspondence my constituent Bob Cummings has had

with his Department regarding that case to see whether he really feels, when he looks at it, that it indicates that the quality of attention that is required in these cases of British prisoners improperly and illegally incarcerated overseas is really being given by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. I hope he would agree to do that and review that correspondence.

Answered by: James Cleverly

I thank the hon. Gentleman for the point that he has raised. I can assure him that, on my recent visit to Oman, I raised this case with the Omani Foreign Minister, with whom I have a very good relationship, in an attempt to get a message across to the Houthis, who have in recent times stepped back from direct engagement with the UK Government. When I spoke directly with the Houthis, I raised the case of Luke, and we regularly raise the case of British dual nationals when we have conversations with those countries that are either directly involved or able to act as intermediaries for our message. But I can assure him that this is a topic of conversation that I have consistently with the Foreign Secretary and we consistently have with the Iranians and other countries that might be able, as I say, to act as intermediaries for that message. It remains a top priority of this Government.

Asked by: Dame Diana Johnson

I have just had the honour of speaking to Richard Ratcliffe, as I did two years ago when he was on hunger strike outside the Iranian embassy. I also want to commend my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for her eighth urgent question on this matter. Can the Minister just set out how, or if, we are using our international partnerships to try to bring an end to this dreadful situation?

Answered by: James Cleverly

The right hon. Lady raises an important point. I can assure her that we speak about this issue, as I say, directly with the Iranian regime, but also with other countries, both in the region and those friends and allies that we have in Europe and in the United States of America. We will not rest in our efforts to bring British dual nationals home not because questions are raised in the House or exchanged in correspondence, but because it is the right thing for us to do. We do not need to be pressured into doing this. This is what we choose to do because it is the right thing to do, and I can assure her and the House that it will remain a priority until they are all able to come home.

Asked by: Margaret Ferrier

I am sure all of us send our solidarity to Richard, who is having to go on a second sit-out outside the FCDO this evening and for the coming days. I send my solidarity to him and his daughter, and to Nazanin. Further to calls for the Government to set out a comprehensive strategy to secure the release and return to the UK of dual nationals such as Nazanin and Anoosheh Ashoori, Morad Tahbaz and Mehran Raouf, can the Minister tell us what discussions

the Prime Minister has had to secure the release of state-taken UK dual nationals as a matter of urgency with his Iranian counterpart?

Answered by: James Cleverly

Obviously, the majority of the interactions with Iran take place within the FCDO at ministerial level, and I can assure the hon. Member that the Prime Minister takes a very keen interest in this, as does the Foreign Secretary and as do I. I can only repeat what I have said previously: the Government will not rest until we have secured the release and repatriation of these incarcerated British dual nationals.

Asked by: Janet Daby

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for securing this urgent question, and thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for granting it. The Minister knows of my constituent only too well—Anoosheh Ashoori—because he continues to be held alongside Nazanin. He was recently denied conditional release without a hearing. I am not sure if the Minister is aware of that. His daughter Elika said:

“The fate of our family is at the mercy of the UK government. They...will decide whether we see our dad in the near future or when he is an old man in his 70s having wasted a decade of his life in...jail.”

Can the Minister say to me whether my constituent Anoosheh Ashoori will be granted diplomatic protection?

Answered by: James Cleverly

I understand the frustration felt by the families of those who have been incarcerated in Iran, but the fault is with the Iranian Government. We will continue to work to secure their release, and to do everything that we believe is in the best interests of getting their release. Ultimately, however, the blame lies with the Iranian regime, and we should never lose sight of that. They are the ones who brought about these illegitimate charges, who are incarcerating British dual nationals, and who have the exclusive power to release them, and they should.

Asked by: Jim Shannon

I commend and thank the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for her press appearance—she is much admired by many in this Chamber. Recent news from Nazanin’s husband has confirmed the impact that imprisonment is having on her mental health and stability, and that is little wonder when we see a glimpse of the way that this British citizen is living, ever aware that Members of the House had thought to secure her freedom, only for that to be thwarted. What steps is the Minister prepared to take to secure her freedom once and for all, and to send a message that this nation, this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, will protect her own?

Answered by: James Cleverly

It is not always possible, particularly in fast-moving and sensitive negotiations such as those we are engaged with in Iran, to go into every detail in the House, and I beg the indulgence of the House to understand that. I assure the hon. Gentleman, as I have said to others, that this issue remains an absolute priority for the Government, and the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and I will take every opportunity to raise it directly with the Iranians and seek the proper, permanent release of all British dual nationals currently held in arbitrary detention in Iran.

[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)

27 Apr 2021 | 693 cc237-247

Urgent question on Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)

03 Nov 2020 | 683 cc185-196

Urgent question on Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

[British Citizens Imprisoned Overseas and Coronavirus](#)

02 Mar 2020 | 672 cc635-643

Urgent question on British citizens who are imprisoned abroad in countries where coronavirus is spreading rapidly.

[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)

07 Oct 2019 | 664 cc1563-1574

Urgent question on the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, following the release of one Australian-British national who was also imprisoned at Evin prison.

[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)

17 Jul 2019 | 663 cc845-857

Urgent question on the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)

07 Jan 2019 | 652 cc49-61

Urgent question on the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe following punitive actions taken against her in Iran.

[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)

22 May 2018 | 641 cc728-732

Urgent question on the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe following the new charges brought against her in Iran.

[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)

13 Nov 2017 | 631 cc22-35

Urgent question on the case of British-Iranian national Ms Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

5.3 Private Notice Question

[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)

28 Apr 2021 | 811 cc2243-7

Lords private notice question on the sentencing of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe in Iran.

5.4 Statements

[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)

27 Oct 2021 | 815 cc796-800

Lords statement on Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)

04 Nov 2020 | 807 cc710-5

Lords statement on Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

[Coronavirus: British Citizens Imprisoned Abroad](#)

02 Mar 2020 | 802 cc438-440

Lords statement on British citizens who are imprisoned abroad in countries where coronavirus is spreading rapidly.

5.5 Early Day Motions

[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe](#)

EDM 592 (session 2021-22)

27 October 2021

Mr Barry Sheerman

That this House believes that there should be an urgent national all-faith delegation to Tehran to petition for the immediate release of British citizen Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliffe and other political detainees currently being held in Iran; condemns the continued unjust detention of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and other dual citizens and political prisoners within the Islamic Republic and stands in solidarity with them and their loved ones; and urges the

Government to renew its vigour in negotiating the release of Nazanin Zaghari Ratcliffe and to appraise all options available to ensure that she returns home as soon as possible.

The situation in Iran

EDM 1182 (session 2019-21)

24 November 2020

Layla Moran

That this House recognises the people of Iran are suffering terribly as a result of covid-19; acknowledges that it is vital that medical aid and other humanitarian assistance reaches them; notes that the coronavirus crisis does not stop at any border; and therefore calls on the Government to work with its partners and allies to ensure that there is a coordinated international response to the pandemic; further calls on the Government to work with international and EU partners to revive the Iran nuclear deal as a step toward greater stability in the region; urges the Government to secure the indefinite release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and other UK-Iran dual nationals held in Iran; and further notes that the violation of individuals' human rights is never acceptable, and that the UK, Iran and others must work together to ensure this does not occur.

Immediate return of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori to the UK

EDM 1084 (session 2019-21)

2 November 2020

Layla Moran

That this House condemns the unjust imprisonment of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori; notes the unfair sentencing of Anoosheh to 12 years imprisonment and summoning of Nazanin to court yet again; recognises the difficult and dangerous conditions that Nazanin is facing by being confined to remaining within 300 metres of her parents' house and Anoosheh in prison due to his vulnerability to covid-19; acknowledges the UK's historic role in standing up for British citizens wrongfully detained abroad; and therefore calls on the Government to make representations to the Iranian authorities for the immediate return of both Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori to the UK.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

EDM 142 (session 2019-21)

6 February 2020

Barry Sheerman

That this House expresses its concern at the continued imprisonment of British national Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe; urges the Government to act purposefully to negotiate her release; supports a review into the steps taken so far by this and previous Governments to secure her release; stands in solidarity with Nazanin's family and loved ones; and considers the role of an all-faith delegation in petitioning for Nazanin's release.

6

Further reading

[Deposited Paper DEP2021-0842](#)

Letter dated 03/11/2021 from Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon to Lord Trefgarne regarding a question concerning Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Iran
03 Nov 2021 | Deposited papers | House of Lords
Depositing department: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

[Iran's compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#), CDP 157, 14 October 2021

[Status of the Iran nuclear deal](#), CBP 9338, 14 October 2021

[Iran: 2021 presidential election](#), CBP 9269, 5 July 2021

[Iran's next President: Ebrahim Raisi and the Iran nuclear deal](#), Commons Library Insight, 22 June 2021

[Government policy on Iran](#), CDP 135, 3 December 2020

[Iranian-British dual nationals held in Iran](#), CBP 8147, 17 November 2017

[Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe: What's Happening?](#) Amnesty International, 27 October 2021

[Iran](#), Human Rights Watch country page

[Iran: Targeting of Dual Citizens, Foreigners](#), Human Rights Watch, 26 September 2018

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