

# A Year Later, Iranian Regime Still Attacking Women, U.S. Still Ineffectual

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*A year later, and nothing has changed. Last week, the Islamic Republic of Iran’s so-called “morality police” reportedly attacked 16-year-old Armita Geravand on a metro in Tehran for allegedly not wearing the hijab. She is now in a coma with head trauma. This incident serves as a reminder of the Iranian regime’s continued repression of its people one year and one month following the death of Mahsa Amini, an Iranian-Kurdish woman whose murder ignited widespread protests throughout the country.*

*That Iran keeps brutalizing its women underscores that—despite largely symbolic actions like imposing sanctions and awarding an Iranian activist the Nobel Peace Prize—the United States and its partners have failed to hold the Iranian regime accountable for its transgressions. This latest attack on Geravand should spur the administration to take action to assist the Iranian people by dealing increasing costs on the Iranian regime for its violent oppression through reputational damage, greater sanctions enforcement, and new penalties for its systemic abuse of women. The United States should begin by demanding the Nobel Foundation bars Iranian regime officials from attending the Nobel Peace Prize award ceremony.*

## What Happened?

- One year and one month after the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, in whose name Iranians continue to protest demanding an overthrow of the Iranian regime, the Iranian regime’s so-called “morality police” [attacked](#) another Iranian woman, 16-year-old Armita Geravand. She is now in a coma.
  - » Images surfaced on [social media](#) and online of Geravand after she was attacked on Tehran’s metro.
  - » Although the circumstances surrounding the incident remain unconfirmed, a plausible and increasingly likely explanation is that she was attacked for not covering her head with a hijab.
  - » Iran’s Shargh newspaper said that Iranian security forces [arrested](#) one of its journalists, Maryam Lotfi, after she had visited the hospital where Geravand was being treated and reported on her case.
  - » Iranian-Kurdish rights group Hengaw reported that Iranian security forces had detained Geravand’s mother on Thursday near the hospital where she is being treated.

- On October 6, 2023 Narges Mohammadi, an Iranian human rights activist currently still imprisoned by Iran, was [announced](#) as a recipient of the 2023 Nobel Peace Prize for her role in fighting for the Iranian people and their freedom.
  - » Earlier this year, as it did last year, the Nobel Foundation [disinvited](#) Iran, Russia, and Belarus from its award ceremonies in Stockholm for their role in the invasion of Ukraine. According to a September 2, 2023 press [statement](#) from the Foundation, Iran’s ambassador is still invited to the Nobel Peace Prize award ceremony in Oslo, though it remains to be seen whether it will be disinvited in light of this year’s laureate.

## Why Is It Important?

- Fueled by the murder of Mahsa Amini, Iranian protesters have sought not merely political reforms but a new regime, a transformation that would provide immense strategic benefits to the United States. The attack on Geravand serves as a reminder of the protests continuing to take place in Iran for over a year—the largest in scale in decades—and the absence of a robust response from the United States, which continues to take an accommodationist approach to the Iranian regime regarding its nuclear ambitions.
  - » Abram Paley, the administration’s acting envoy to Iran, [posted on X](#) that the United States was “shocked and concerned about reports that Iran’s so-called morality police have assaulted [Geravand.] We are following news of her condition. We continue to stand with the brave people of Iran and work with the world to hold the regime accountable for its abuses.”
  - » Germany’s Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock [posted on X](#) “A young woman in Iran is fighting for her life again. Just because she showed her hair on the subway. It’s intolerable.”
  - » The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani [responded](#) on X, “Instead of interventionist and biased remarks and expressing insincere concern over Iranian women and girls, you’d better be concerned about U.S., German and UK healthcare personnel, patients and tackle their situation.”
- The United Nations Human Rights Council [announced](#) a fact-finding mission to Iran to investigate Iran’s human rights abuses, its [first](#) such mission to Iran, and [reported](#) on the one-year anniversary of Amini’s death that “Iran has refined and reinforced its capacity and actions to quell dissent, including with the use of surveillance technology. Anyone who participates in the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ movement, including through protesting or sharing their support publicly for instance on social media, is at risk of arrest, detention, torture and ill-treatment and prosecution for serious crimes that may lead to the imposition of the death penalty.” A report from the fact-finding mission is due in March 2024.
- The Biden administration promised in its U.S. National Security Strategy to “stand with the Iranian people.” However, as detailed in this [JINSA NatSec Brief](#) about the protests in the leadup to the anniversary of Mahsa Amini’s murder, neither Biden nor Secretary of State Blinken has delivered a speech or held a press conference over the past year dedicated to supporting the protestors, despite the Biden administration’s frequent support for democracy and human rights.

- » On the one-year anniversary of Amini’s death, the [Treasury Department levied](#) sanctions on nearly thirty entities, including the head of Iran’s prisons and three pro-regime Iranian media outlets, and the [State Department](#) instituted visa restrictions on thirteen individuals involved in either suppressing the protests or censoring information about them—steps that Iran’s foreign minister said “are more like a joke.”
  - These measures restrict these individuals from access to any property or assets they may have in the United States and any individuals that engage in certain transactions with these individuals may themselves be designated.
  - As these individuals are unlikely to have assets in the United States, these actions are likely to be symbolic and without meaningful consequences.
- » European capitals, which have also been experiencing Iran’s destructive behavior on their continent in Iran’s support to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, have repeatedly issued statements and actions, [individually](#) and as part of the [European Union](#) (EU), in response to the protests.
- As JINSA President and CEO Michael Makovsky [testified](#) before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform recently, the administration’s lack of serious repercussions on the Iranian regime for its systematic abuse of Iranians’ human rights is paired with an accommodationist approach that allows Iran to reap billions of dollars—funds that can be used to strengthen its oppressive security apparatus and keep the regime in power—in the hopes of convincing Iran’s leaders to acquiesce to a nuclear deal.
  - » Just days before the anniversary of Amini’s death, the Biden administration agreed to a hostage deal that gave the Iranian regime access to \$6 billion in frozen assets in addition to releasing five Iranians who were lawfully imprisoned in the United States. Although under the agreement, Iran is only to use those unfrozen funds for humanitarian purposes, this frees up money the regime can now use for malign activities.
  - » As U.S. sanctions against Iranian oil shipments have not been enforced, Iran’s oil exports have risen by 35 percent from 2021 to 2022.

## What Should the United States Do Next?

- Given the Iranian regime’s persistent attacks on women and protestors, the Biden administration should focus on the plight of the Iranian people and support their efforts.
  - » This should include a speech or statement from President Biden dedicated to the protests in Iran and actions in coordination with European allies to hold the Iranian regime accountable for its human rights abuses and destructive behaviors, including halting talks on its nuclear ambitions.
  - » President Biden and his European partners should begin by calling on the Nobel Prize committee to exclude Iranian regime officials from attending the Peace Prize award ceremony.
- Legislators should hold open hearings with Biden administration officials examining what actions it is taking to hold the Iranian regime accountable and how Congress can support its efforts.

- The United States should impose economic, reputational, and diplomatic costs on the regime and individual officials for human rights abuses.
- To minimize the funds the Iranian regime can use for internal repression, the United States should take steps that prevent billions of dollars from flowing back to Iran under last month's prisoner swap and ongoing oil sales.
  - » The United States should adopt strict accountability and transparency measures for all purchases that Iran makes using the \$6 billion from the hostage deal and block any use of those funds if it resells goods it purchases on the black market or directs those funds to the Iranian military or terror network.
  - » To limit Iran's accumulation of foreign currency reserves and funds, the Treasury Department should more proactively enforce sanctions against Iranian entities that transport oil, namely to China. The United States should also strictly enforce sanctions on all shipping and insurance companies and ports facilitating Iranian oil exports.
  - » The United States should sanction and push nations to de-flag all 338 vessels in Iran's 'Ghost Fleet' as well as designate their ship captains and crews, while offering them the opportunity to exchange Iranian oil for clemency and compensation under the U.S. Rewards for Justice program, through which the U.S. government has seized nearly \$228 million in Iranian crude oil since 2019.
  - » The Treasury Department should enforce and expand sanctions on Iran's petrochemical, metals, mining, automotive, shipping, manufacturing, and textiles industries.
  - » The United States should pressure all European nations that continue to allow U.S.-sanctioned Iranian state airlines to use their airspace and runways to cut off access to Iran Air, Mahan Air, and Qeshm Air, especially as those airlines provide drones and other military support to Russia that it is using to attack Ukraine.
- Adding obstacles in the way of Iranian officials conducting business as usual, such as travel restrictions and visa bans, will impose diplomatic and reputational costs on the regime's leadership.
  - » The United States should renew the travel restrictions imposed in 2019, which were considerably scaled back in 2021, on Iranian officials attending UN General Assembly sessions and other meetings in New York.
  - » The U.S. government should also close the Iranian Interests Section consulate in Washington, which facilitates travel to Iran so long as the regime continues to engage in wrongful detentions of Americans to hold them as hostages and assassination plots against U.S. citizens.
- As JINSA has [recommended](#), to minimize the risks of Americans being taken as political hostages by Iran, the State Department should raise its Level 4 Travel Warning on Iran to a full travel ban.
- The State Department should organize a multilateral coalition to punish the Iranian regime's human rights violators, including the "morality police," which are an entity of Iran's Law Enforcement Forces (LEF).

- » The United States should encourage Australia and the United Kingdom to join the EU in sanctioning the LEF as an entity. The United Kingdom has sanctioned individual LEF officials, a welcome but insufficient measure to reduce the LEF's funding or interrupt its operations.
- With sanctions and restrictions under UN Security Council Resolution 2231 and the JCPOA sunseting on October 18, the United States should launch an urgent campaign to encourage its European allies to prevent those elements from expiring.
  - » U.S. officials should strongly and publicly oppose the EU's announcement on September 14, 2023, that they will not stop these sanctions and restrictions from sunseting and stress that it is unacceptable and contrary to their shared interests for the EU not to snapback sanctions before UNSCR's 2231's permanent expiration in October 2025.