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How to enhance Swedish advocacy mechanisms for citizens arbitrarily detained or missing abroad



Executive Summary

This report addresses the longstanding challenges faced by Swedish families advocating for the release of loved ones who are arbitrarily detained or missing abroad. Drawing from historical cases and contemporary examples, the report identifies systemic issues in Sweden's approach to prisoner advocacy and proposes actionable solutions.

Aims

Short-term

- To create a set of guidelines, a manual, and/or departmental protocol outlining some of the available tools to help guide both families and officials through the crisis.
- To ease communication between family members and Swedish authorities and ensure the utilization of all available means of advocacy and support.

Long-term

- To establish a more effective advocacy system on behalf of Swedish citizens arbitrarily detained or missing abroad.

Key Findings

1. Historical and Systemic Challenges

- Families often encounter unresponsiveness and insensitivity from Swedish officials.
- The government's "duty to silence" creates a prolonged information vacuum, exacerbating family distress.
- Similar patterns persist in cases dating back to the Cold War, like that of Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg (Russia), and in recent high-profile detentions, including Dawit Isaak (Eritrea), Gui Minhai (China), and Ahmadreza Djalali (Iran).

2. Current Gaps:

- Lack of regular updates and meaningful engagement with families.
- Insufficient support systems for legal, psychological, and financial assistance.
- Over-reliance on restrictive secrecy rules hinder effective communication.
- Focus on bilateral vs. international advocacy mechanisms.

3. Comparative Insights:

- The U.S. has reformed its hostage policies since 2015, emphasizing family engagement and inter-agency coordination.

Recommendations

1. **Improving Communication**
 - Appoint qualified family liaison officers to maintain regular contact and provide meaningful updates.
 - Develop a departmental protocol for empathetic, transparent communication.
2. **Enhancing Family Support**
 - Provide referrals to legal, psychological, and social services.
 - Consider legislative reforms to adjust strict secrecy rules, enabling better information sharing.
3. **Strengthening Advocacy**
 - Engage NGOs, human rights organizations, and allied governments in a consistent dialogue to amplify advocacy efforts.
 - Explore international mechanisms, such as EU-wide frameworks for coordinated responses to arbitrary detentions.
4. **Promoting Accountability**
 - Implement targeted human rights sanctions against regimes involved in unlawful detentions.
 - Maximize the use of international legal remedies and multilateral partnerships to deter future incidents.
5. **Learning from Global Practices**
 - Adapt U.S. models, such as the Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage-Taking Accountability Act, to establish centralized coordination mechanisms and ensure timely declassification of intelligence for family briefings.

Conclusion

The Swedish government has an important opportunity to lead on the issue of advancing global human rights mechanisms, countering the scourge of international hostage taking and providing better support for its citizens. By adopting the proposed reforms, Sweden can enhance its own human rights advocacy, reduce family distress, and strengthen its position as a champion of international humanitarian law.



It's a strange thing to mourn someone who has disappeared. You talk about the person and catch yourself saying that he was, instead of he is. You find a book on sale that you know he would like, but you do not buy it because you don't know whether you will see each other again. You send email upon email just to say hi but never receive a response.

Angela Gui - daughter of Swedish publisher Gui Minhai, forcibly disappeared in China since 2015

For decades, the relatives of Swedish citizens forcibly disappeared or unlawfully imprisoned abroad have complained about the insensitive treatment they receive from Swedish officials. Adopting a few relatively simple measures could help fix this problem, bringing relief to both sides. These and other proposed policy changes can render Sweden's prisoner advocacy more effective.

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Introduction

Two years after Swedish diplomat Raoul G. Wallenberg disappeared from war-torn Budapest in early 1945, his mother, Maj von Dardel, lost patience: In March 1947 she walked into the Swedish Foreign Ministry to confront Swedish officials who had refused to share any information about their efforts to locate her son. During a contentious meeting, she decried the "lack of enthusiasm" displayed by Swedish diplomats who, as she charged, presumed without evidence that Raoul Wallenberg was dead. She also characterized the official handling of her son's case as "cold blooded". This pattern would repeat itself again and again until Maj von Dardel's death in 1979. Her family remembers how she would sit hours next to the phone hoping that Swedish officials would call with news about their search.



(Left) Raoul Wallenberg's parents, Maj and Fredrik von Dardel fought for decades for news about their son's fate. Wallenberg's siblings Nina Lagergren and Dr. Guy von Dardel continued the search. They are pictured holding their brother's diplomatic passport in 1989.

In April 2023, the Swedish Ambassador to Israel, Eric Ullenhag, took the extraordinary step to [formally apologize to Raoul Wallenberg's family](#) "for the Swedish government abandoning him and leaving his family far too alone and without the support they deserved ."

Unfortunately, the families of Swedish citizens currently arbitrarily detained or missing abroad find themselves locked into a similar struggle for information with Swedish authorities as Wallenberg's parents did eight decades ago.

I. Background

Nearly all the families of Swedish citizens imprisoned or lost abroad after WWII share more or less the same story – past and present. The relatives of the eight-men crew of a DC-3 reconnaissance aircraft that was shot down over the Baltic Sea in 1952 were never told about the plane’s secret reconnaissance mission or the fate of their loved ones.¹ Neither were the families of the more than a dozen ships and their crews that vanished during the Cold War.²

None of the families received financial assistance/compensation or emotional support (counseling) to deal with their trauma. The widows, parents and siblings of the lost men were left entirely alone with their grief and the responsibility of caring for their children, with virtually no outside support. Access to key information in these Cold War cases continues to be restricted.



Crew of the downed DC-3. Upper row, from left to right: Alvar Älmeberg, Gösta Blad, Einar Jonsson, Bengt Book. Lower row: Ivar Svensson, Erik Carlsson, Börge Nilsson, Herbert Mattson. Four of the men remain unaccounted for.

¹ The aircraft was a TP 79, a variation of the Douglas DC-3.

² Approximately 270 Swedish ships sank during World War II. Approximately twenty Swedish ships, carrying more than 120 crew members, disappeared after the end of hostilities in 1945. Inger-Siw Eruths Lindell ed., *Rapporterad Saknad: Sjöfolk i krig*, (Stockholm: Carlssons, 2002). Another example is the case of Dagmar Hagelin who disappeared in Argentina in 1977. She is believed to have been murdered by military forces. The individuals responsible for her murder have never been brought to justice. More recently, the families of the victims of the ferry MS Estonia that sank in the Baltic Sea in September 1994 have expressed serious concerns about the failure of Swedish authorities to provide a full account of the tragedy and to recuperate the individuals who perished.

The concerns of the relatives of the disappeared have been well documented. Swedish authorities, in particular the National Defence Radio Establishment (Försvarets radioanstalt, FRA) knowingly withheld information and in many instances lied outright about certain facts. For example, Swedish officials claimed for decades that the lost DC-3 had simply been out on a “training flight”.

Family members were made to feel that their continued requests for answers were somehow unreasonable or even inappropriate. As late as December 1998, FRA informed the relatives of the missing crew that they were not eligible to receive compensation for their loss because the plane’s disappearance had not been “FRA’s fault”³.

Roger Älmeberg, the son of DC-3 pilot Alvar Älmeberg, summarized his concerns with official efforts in 2008:

*"After nearly sixty years we still do not know ... how the Soviet decisions ... behind the attack [on the plane] were conceived. ... The unsolved questions are deeply connected to why ... the wives, parents, siblings and children of the crew members were left to ponder the fate of the eight men in unnecessary uncertainty."*⁴



Gösta Rudnert, captain of the *Sten Sture*, in his office at the Swedish Navy Command, Malmö, 1943. He left behind a wife and three daughters. Rudnert and 18 other crew members disappeared without a trace in 1947. More than 20 Swedish ships with a crew totaling over 120 sailors disappeared during the Cold War.

³ "Försvaret tog inget ansvar". *Dagens Nyheter*, October 17, 1999.

⁴ Roger Älmeberg. "The Swedish DC-3 and The Destiny of its Crew". 1 April 2008, www.raoul-wallenberg.eu

Kerstin von Seth, daughter of Gösta Rudnert, captain of the ship *Sten Sture* that disappeared in 1947, shares Älmeberg's frustration. In their view, the Swedish government's approach in particular has lacked crucial resolve to obtain the hoped for answers.

"Swedish officials were mostly concerned with the country's international prestige and have shown an incredible nonchalance towards the relatives", von Seth wrote in a personal account of her father's disappearance.⁵

Unfortunately, many of these very same problems persist today.

Communications between Swedish authorities and family members at times feel more like a war of attrition than a constructive exchange designed to advance the overall aim of rescuing the imprisoned individuals. Presently, there are no clear mechanisms in place for families to receive regular case updates or even for the most basic tasks, like scheduling meetings with Swedish officials.

⁵ See von Seth's account in See Kerstin von Seth. *När du ser Karlavagn*. Lund: Domarringen, 2008.

II. The cases of Dawit Isaak, Gui Minhai and Ahmadreza Djalali

On the need to improve interactions between Swedish authorities and the families of Swedish citizens arbitrarily detained or missing abroad.

Dawit Isaak Swedish Eritrean journalist and author imprisoned in Eritrea since 2001



Photo credit: www.freedawit.com

Journalist, poet and playwright Dawit Isaak, who holds both Eritrean and Swedish citizenship, was apprehended by Eritrean police forces on September 23, 2001. At least nine other journalists were detained as well. Numerous others went underground or fled the country. The crackdown on press freedoms and freedom of expression occurred in the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in New York. A few days later, on September 18th, the Eritrean regime ordered the closure of eight newspapers, including Meqaleh, Setit, Tsigenay, Zemen, Wintana, and Admas.

Dawit Isaak was born on October 27, 1964 in Eritrea which at the time was part of Ethiopia. He and his five siblings grew up in the capital city in Asmara, where his parents managed an Italian deli. From a very young age, Isaak showed an affinity for writing. His younger brother Esayas

recalls that Dawit literally wrote everywhere – at the breakfast table, before school; in his spare time, when other kids were playing; at night, in his bed. While still in elementary school, he began to author and stage theatre plays. As a young adult he published two novels in his native language of Tigrinya. He also won several prizes for theatre plays, bringing him to national attention. At the time, Eritrea found itself embroiled in a brutal war for independence (1961-1991). In 1985, Dawit Isaak fled the violence, finding refuge in Sweden. He soon managed to find employment as a janitor at the Gothenburg Cathedral and in 1992 he obtained Swedish citizenship.

After Eritrea gained independence in 1993, Isaak returned to Eritrea and started working as a journalist. He later married and he and his wife are the parents of three children. Dawit Isaak became a co-owner and contributing writer of Setit (ሰቲት), Eritrea’s first independent newspaper, named after a major river in Eritrea. On June 5, 2001, Setit published an open letter from the “G-15”, a group of Eritrean politicians and government officials who sharply criticized the growing erosion of civil liberties in Eritrea under President Isaias Afwerki.

Except for two short days of conditional release in 2005, Dawit Isaak has been imprisoned for 23 years without charge or trial, and with no contact to the outside world. Neither his family nor his legal counsel know of his present location or his physical condition. Isaak and his colleagues are currently the longest imprisoned journalists in the world.

Immediately after Dawit Isaak’s arrest in 2001, his brother Esayas Isaak turned to Swedish authorities for help but received little interest and virtually no assistance.⁶ It took several months before the Swedish Ambassador to Eritrea in 2001 became aware of Isaak’s detention. Dawit Isaak’s family has been left for months at a time without any news or contact from the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁷ They also have not been permitted to review any of the documentation contained in the Foreign Ministry’s official case file.

In March 2017, Dawit Isaak was awarded the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize. In its unanimous decision, the jury cited its wish to recognize Isaak “for his courage, resistance and commitment to freedom of expression.” He was also shortlisted for the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought (European Union). He is the 2024 honoree of the [Edelstam Prize](#) for “for his outstanding contributions and exceptional courage in standing up for freedom of expression, one’s beliefs, and in the defence of Human Rights.”

The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights’ (ACHPR) issued a [final and binding ruling in 2016](#), calling on Eritrea to release Dawit Isaak and his colleagues without delay and “to

⁶ [Prisoner of Conscience Since 2001 – Why has Sweden not managed to bring Dawit Isaak home? | RSF](#). For a full chronology of the official handling of Dawit Isaak’s case see Granskning av arbetet med att försöka uppnå frigivning av Dawit Isaak och Gui Minhai SOU 2022:55, October 28, 2022.

⁷ Also [Betlehem Isaak: Nu har Dawit Isaak varit fängslad i 23 år | Göteborgs-Posten \(gp.se\)](#)

grant detainees immediate access to their families and legal representatives.” (ACHPR ruling 428/12, *Dawit Isaak v Republic of Eritrea*, 19th Extraordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, February 2016).⁸

In July 2023, in a [sharply worded opinion](#), the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNGWAD) expressed its “utmost concern regarding the [...] un rebutted allegation that Mr. Isaak has been in pretrial detention for more than twenty-one years [sic] without being charged and without any perspective of trial.” [Opinions adopted by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention at its ninety-sixth session, 27 March–5 April 2023]. The Working Group called for Isaak’s immediate, “unconditional release” and it took the notable step of referring his case to the Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances and the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, among others.

Chronology

- **2001:** Isaak is illegally arrested and imprisoned without trial. He has been held incommunicado since. It is speculated that he is [held](#) at the Eiraeiro Detention Center in conditions tantamount to torture.
- **November 19, 2005:** Isaak is briefly [released](#) to receive medical treatment, and then taken back to prison two days later. This is the last time his sister spoke to him and he was also able to contact his children in Sweden by phone.
- **May 26, 2009:** Eritrean President Afwerki [stated](#) in an interview that “We know how to handle [Isaak’s] kind,” and that Isaak would not be released or stand trial.
- **December 2011:** Eritrea ignores a formal *Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus* (Eritrea Supreme Court, Dec. 21, 2011) submitted by Dawit Isaak’s legal team Jesús Alcalá, Percy Bratt and Prisca Orsonneau
- **May 10, 2013:** A former prison officer [confirms](#) that Isaak is alive.
- **2014:** Reporters without Borders (RSF) [files](#) a criminal complaint with the office of the Swedish prosecutor against the lead authorities in Eritrea responsible for Dawit Isaak unlawful imprisonment, including Eritrea’s President. The Swedish Prosecution Authority decides not to open an investigation. A subsequent appeal of this decision is also rejected.
- **March 25, 2015:** In an official review of these past decisions, the Swedish Prosecutor General finds that crimes against humanity have almost certainly been committed against Dawit Isaak. The ruling also states that responsibility for Mr. Isaak’s unlawful

⁸ The ruling was not communicated to Dawit Isaak’s legal team until November 2016.

imprisonment rests entirely with the Eritrean leadership. Nevertheless, the Swedish Prosecution Authority declines to initiate a criminal investigation.⁹

- **February 2016:** The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) issues a [final and binding ruling](#) calling on Eritrea to release Dawit Isaak and to grant contact with his family and legal representatives.
- **July 6, 2020:** Speaking on a public radio program, Bethlehem Isaak, Dawit Isaak's eldest daughter, [says](#) that her father is alive.
- **September 15, 2020:** A library named after Isaak is [inaugurated](#) in Sweden.
- **October 8, 2020:** The EU Parliament releases [statement](#), demanding Dawit Isaak's release.
- **October 21, 2020:** Reporters without Borders (RSF) [files](#) another complaint with the Swedish prosecutor's office. This time the complaint is signed also by international lawyers like Canada's former Minister for Justice, a former judge of the ICC, the former president of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate.
- **January 12, 2021:** The Swedish Public Prosecutor's National Unit for International and Organized Crimes states that it has reason to believe Isaak is the victim of a [crime against humanity](#), which would fall under Sweden's universal jurisdiction. However, it refuses to open an investigation citing difficulties of carrying it out without cooperation from Eritrean authorities. Three months later, in April 2021, RSF formally asks the Swedish general prosecutor's office to [reverse its decision](#) not to open investigations into Isaak's case.
- **August 18, 2021:** The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) releases a [statement demanding the release of Dawit Isaak](#), citing information from a "credible source" that Isaak was alive in prison as of September 2020.
- **July 2023** The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD) issues a formal opinion that Dawit Isaak has been arbitrarily detained and calls for his immediate, unconditional release.
- **November 2024:** The Swedish prosecution authority again refuses to initiate a criminal investigation of members of the Eritrean leadership for crimes against humanity in the case of Dawit Isaak.

⁹ Among other factors, the Prosecutor General's office cited concerns expressed by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs that a criminal prosecution could impede its efforts to win Mr. Isaak's release.

Honors

- **2003:** Press Freedom Award, Reporters without Borders,
- **2006:** Anna Politkovskaya Prize
- **2009:** Tucholsky Prize, Swedish PEN
- **2010:** Freedom of Expression Prize, Nordic Authors' Association,
- **2010:** Golden Pen, WAN
- **2017:** Press Freedom Award, Guillermo Cano Prize, UNESCO
- **2017:** Finalist, Sakharov Prize
- **2024:** Edelstam Prize

Sources

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[Dawit Isaak - PEN America](#)

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Gui Minhai**Swedish publisher detained in China since 2015**

Photo credit: www.freeguiminhai.com

Born in 1964 in China's Zhejiang province, Gui Minhai 桂民海 moved to Beijing at the age of 17 to study history. During his student years, he developed a passion for poetry and spent much of his time writing. After working as an editor for the People's Education Press, he moved to Sweden in 1988 for postgraduate studies. Following the Tiananmen massacre in 1989, Gui was granted permanent residency and received Swedish citizenship three years later.

In 2004, after working in China for five years, Gui moved to Germany where he authored books on Chinese politics. In Germany, he also began his advocacy for press freedom in China, joining the Independent Chinese PEN Centre – the Chinese exile chapter of PEN International – and later serving on its board. When Gui subsequently travelled to China in 2008 to visit family, he was denied entry and deported. Four years later, Gui co-founded Mighty Current Media, a publishing house and distributor of books based in Hong Kong, specialized in Chinese politics that could not be published on the mainland. In 2014, Mighty Current acquired Causeway Bay Books, a Hong Kong independent bookstore specializing in titles that were restricted on the Chinese mainland. In 2015, Gui disappeared from his vacation home in Thailand and was

imprisoned in China.¹⁰ In 2017 he was briefly released but placed under strict home detention. In 2018 he was rearrested while traveling on a train, accompanied by two Swedish diplomats. In 2020, he was sentenced to ten years in prison in a secret trial. Today, it is unclear where he is, how he is, or if he's even still alive.

In late 2018, the Swedish ambassador to Beijing contacted Gui's daughter to organise a meeting between her and two businessmen with ties to the Chinese government in Stockholm to discuss new directions in the work to secure Gui's release. At the meeting, which took place in January 2019, the men tried to pressure Gui's daughter to stop her public advocacy on behalf of her father, with one of them threatening her.¹¹

In February 2020, the Ningbo People's Intermediate Court announced that Gui Minhai had been sentenced to ten years in prison for "illegally providing intelligence overseas".

Chronology

- **1964:** On 5 May, born in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, China.
- **1983:** Moves to Beijing to study history at Peking University.
- **1988:** Settles in Sweden for postgraduate study, and later works at the University of Gothenburg.
- **1992:** Obtains [Swedish citizenship](#).
- **2004:** Moves to Germany and starts working as a publisher of books on Chinese politics.
- **2006:** Joins the Chinese chapter of [PEN International](#).
- **2008:** [Denied entry](#) to China while trying to visit his family.
- **2012:** Established [Mighty Current Media](#), a Hong Kong-based publishing house specializing in books on Chinese politics.
- **2015:** On 17 October, [abducted in Thailand](#) while on holiday.
- **2016:** On 17 January, reappears in an undisclosed location in China during [forced confessions broadcast](#) by the state-controlled television channel CCTV.
- **2016:** On 28 February, appears in a second forced confession broadcasted on Chinese channel Phoenix TV.
- **2017:** On 17 October, allegedly "released" from detention, but in reality [placed under residential surveillance](#) by the regime.
- **2018:** On 19 January, Angela Gui, Gui Minhai's daughter, spoke on the phone with her father for the last time.

¹⁰ Around the same time, four of Gui's colleagues, Lui Bo, Cheung Chi-ping, Lam Wing-kee, and Lee Bo also disappeared and resurfaced in detention on the Chinese mainland.

¹¹ ["Damned if you do, damned if you don't"? I won't. | by Angela Gui | Medium](#)

- **2018:** On 20 January, [apprehended](#) again by suspected state security agents while on a train with two Swedish diplomats.
- **2018:** On 9 February, resurfaces in a third forced confession published in several Chinese newspapers.
- **2020:** On 25 February, [sentenced to 10 years](#) for "illegally providing intelligence overseas."
- **2020 - onwards:** No news on Gui Minhai's whereabouts or location of detention
- **December 10, 2024:** The EU calls for the immediate release of Gui Minhai and other political prisoners in China

Honors

- **2017:** Publicistklubben Väst (Swedish Publicists' Association West) Dawit Isaak Prize
- **2017:** Association of American Publishers International Freedom to Publish Committee Jeri Laber Award
- **2017:** Publicistklubben (Swedish Publicists' Association) Anna Politkovskaya Memorial Prize
- **2018:** IPA Prix Voltaire
- **2019:** Tucholsky Prize
- **2020:** Johann-Philipp Palm Award
- **2021:** Nominated for Sakharov Prize (by MEP David Lega)

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[Gui Minh ai, the Swedish publisher deprived of his freedom for 3,000 days | RS](#)

[Jag ritar en dörr på väggen med fingret – Kaunitz-Olsson](#)

Ahmadreza Djalali

Swedish Iranian physician and scholar of disaster medicine arrested in Iran in 2016



Photo credit: Vida Mehrannia

Born in 1971 in Iran, Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali is a physician and expert on disaster medicine. He is Sweden's longest held prisoner in Iran. He was arrested by Iranian intelligence officers in 2016, after attending a medical conference. Dr. Djalali was sentenced to death in 2017, in a rigged trial, on charges of espionage. Dr. Djalali acquired Swedish citizenship in 2018.

According to his wife Vida Mehrannia, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has rarely initiated contact during the eight and a half years since her husband's arrest and never provided any in-depth assessment of his situation. In June 2024, Mehrannia received no prior warning and received no explanation from Swedish officials when former Swedish prisoners in Iran, Johan Floderus and Saeed Azizi, were released in a prisoner swap that failed to include Ahmadreza Djalali. His family learned of the news from media reports, just like the rest of the Swedish public.

Since his imprisonment in 2016, Dr. Djalali's health has steadily declined. He suffers from gastric ulcers, low blood pressure, low pulse, over 20 kg weight loss, cholecystitis and gallstones, and a variety of other serious ailments. He has been held in solitary confinement for extended periods of time. During repeated interrogations, he has been told that the life of his family would be endangered if he failed to cooperate.

Iran has refused to recognize Dr. Djalali's Swedish citizenship. He has been consistently refused consular access, despite repeated requests from the Swedish Embassy in Iran.

Chronology

- **1971:** Born in Tabriz, Iran.
- **1990-1997:** Doctorate of Medicine, Tabriz University, Iran.
- **1999-2002:** Researcher and Instructor, National Emergency Medical Services, Ministry of Health, Iran.
- **2000-2008:** Researcher and lecturer in HAZMAT emergencies, Medical Research Institute, Tehran, Iran.
- **2005-2006:** Head of Disaster Management Section, Ministry of Welfare & Social Insurance, Iran.
- **2004-2008:** Faculty member, Department of Emergency Management, Natural Disaster Research Institute, Iran.
- **2008-2012:** PhD in Disaster Medicine, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden.
- **2009-2010:** European Master in Disaster Medicine, Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale, Italy & Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium.
- **2012-2014:** Postdoctoral research fellowship, CRIMEDIM - Center for Research and Education in Emergency and Disaster Medicine, Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale, Novara, Italy.
- **2012-2014:** Postdoctoral researcher fellowship in Disaster Medicine, Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale, Italy.
- **2014-2015:** Research associate and instructor in Disaster Medicine, CRIMEDIM, Università del Piemonte Orientale, Italy.

Arrest and Detention

- **April 25, 2016:** During a trip to Iran to participate in scientific workshops, Dr. Djalali was detained by the security forces of the Ministry of Information and taken to Evin prison.
- Following his arrest, Dr. Djalali was kept in solitary confinement for three months. Investigators threatened him and pressured him to confess and cooperate with them.
- After three months of solitary confinement, Dr. Djalali was transferred to a small room (8m² in size) that he shared with three other people, where he was kept for four months.
- During the first seven months after his arrest, Dr. Djalali had no access to any lawyer or attorney.
- During the initial four months after his arrest, Dr. Djalali was not allowed to meet his family in Iran.
- Seven months after his arrest, Dr. Djalali faced the first interrogatory trial. He was assigned a lawyer who was not allowed to talk or assist Ahmadreza Djalali in any way.

- **December 26, 2016:** Ahmadreza Djalali was seriously threatened with the death penalty by judge Abolqasem Salavati and decided to start a hunger strike.
- Dr. Djalali went on hunger strikes on several occasions in protest against his arrest and detention. The first three protests lasted a week each, while the fourth started on December 26, 2016, and lasted until February 12, 2017, for 49 days. Djalali began his fifth hunger strike on February 15, 2017, lasting over 40 days.
- **July 5, 2017:** Ambassadors from EU countries visited Evin Prison. During their visit, Dr. Djalali was taken to solitary confinement to prevent any possible meeting or contact.
- **August 2017:** Dr. Djalali's trial begins.
- **October 21, 2017:** Judge Salavati informed Ahmadreza Djalali's lawyer that he has officially been sentenced to death. Dr. Djalali has lived under the threat of execution ever since.
- **November, 2017:** the [UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention called on Iran to immediately release Ahmadreza Djalali](#) and offer him the right to compensation and other reparations.
- **July 29, 2019:** Dr. Djalali was reportedly blindfolded and transferred from his cell in Evin Prison to an isolated cell in an undisclosed location. There, Dr. Djalali was allegedly subjected to torture and threatened with the execution of the death sentence issued against him in order to force confessions from him. He was isolated until August 8, 2019.
- **November 24, 2020:** Dr. Djalali was transferred to solitary confinement and told that his death sentence would be carried out. The transfer took place just days before the trial of Asadollah Asadi was due to start in Belgium on November 27, 2020.
- **December 1, 2020:** Dr. Djalali was to be transferred to Rajai Shahr prison, preliminary to an execution. He was later granted a temporary reprieve, however continued to be held in solitary confinement until April 14, 2021, for a total of 141 days.
- **March 18, 2021:** [UN human rights experts demanded the immediate release of Djalali](#) due to his critical condition after over 100 days in solitary confinement.
- **May 4, 2022:** just days after prosecuting authorities in Sweden sought a life sentence for Hamid Nouri, Iranian state media that Dr. Djalali was to be executed by May 21. The execution was later postponed due to international pressure.
- **May 19, 2022:** [Amnesty International declared Ahmadreza Djalali as a hostage](#) held by Iranian Authorities.
- **June 2023:** Dr. Djalali was excluded from a prisoner exchange that freed the Iranian diplomat and convicted terrorist Assadollah Assadi in exchange for Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele and three other EU citizens, although Dr. Djalali was heavily used as a bargaining chip in the case.
- **December 2023:** After a Swedish appeals court upheld the conviction and life sentence against convicted Iranian mass murderer Hamid Nouri, Iranian state media disseminated a propaganda video against Dr. Djalali. Just days later, on December 22, 2023, an official from the judiciary visited Ahmadreza Djalali in prison warning that his conviction and death sentence are "confirmed" and "will soon be implemented". [Amnesty](#)

[International published an update stating that Ahmadreza Djalali is at grave risk of retaliatory execution.](#)

- **June 2024:** Dr. Djalali was excluded from a prisoner exchange that freed Hamid Nouri in exchange for the Swedish diplomat Johan Floderus and Swedish Iranian businessman Saeed Azizi.

Honors

- **2019:** Received [honorary citizenship](#) of the city of Novara, Italy
- **2020:** Harvard University, Scholars-at-risk fellowship scholarship
- **2020:** 153 Nobel prize laureates [issued a public letter](#) in support of Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali
- **2021:** Courage-to-Think Award, Scholars-at-Risk
- **2021:** Awarded Academic Honoris Causa by Carta Academica in Belgium

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Amnesty International, Belgium [Amnesty Public Statement](#)

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[KI president: "Ahmadreza Djalali is a victim of a cynical game played by the Iranian government" | Karolinska Institutet](#)

Strict secrecy rules prevent meaningful communications

“Our experience with the government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ... is deeply disappointing,” Vida Mehrannia noted in an interview earlier this year, echoing the views of many other Swedish families with loved ones unlawfully detained abroad. Mehrannia stressed that she fully appreciates the fact that Swedish officials must shield certain aspects of their work from public scrutiny. “However,” she added, “for the Foreign Ministry, quiet diplomacy seems to imply an almost absolute duty to [maintain] secrecy.”¹²

¹² “Vår erfarenhet av regeringen och UD är däremot djupt nedslående. Jag förstår att tyst diplomati omfattar moment som inte får komma ut ens till mig och mina barn. ... Men för UD [Utrikesdepartementet] tycks tyst diplomati innebära en nära nog absolut tystnadsplikt.”

Swedish diplomats argue that they are bound by the strict rules of the Swedish government's privacy policy, the "duty to silence" (tystnadsplikt). As a result, repeated requests by families for information are routinely met with the same curt and essentially meaningless responses – "Sweden's efforts on behalf of [...] ... continue with undiminished strength" or "We continue to raise your husband/father/uncle's case with the respective authorities."

This information vacuum adds stress and anxiety to an already extremely difficult situation for family members that can last for many years. It also puts Swedish officials in a difficult position, causing serious tensions and resentments on both sides.

There has to be a better way

The families of Swedish hostages and political prisoners understand and respect the need for confidentiality and discretion. They appreciate living in a country where the authorities are concerned about the welfare of their citizens.

All parties should be interested in maximizing efforts and potential positive outcomes. In fact family members are a valuable and often crucial resource that should be fully utilized. As Angela Gui points out, "We often have access to cultural knowledge and contact networks that diplomats lack."

Freezing families out and treating them in a cold and aloof manner is counterproductive and could be easily avoided.

Given the dramatic increase of incidents of international hostage taking by both state and non-state actors in recent years, more Swedish families, as well as other EU citizens, are bound to face similar challenges.

Victims of repression and their families have a right to the truth, as is explicitly stated in the [International Convention on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#).

The steps adopted by the U.S. government over the past decade to reform its official hostage policy, especially as it concerns family engagement, can serve as a useful guide towards implementing key changes in Sweden [see addendum].

The Swedish government today has an important opportunity to lead on this issue as it explores a more coordinated, international approach, starting with its partners in the European Union.

III. How to enhance Swedish advocacy mechanisms: Proposed policy changes

The proposals focus on two key issues -

- How to improve communication between family members and Swedish authorities
- How to create a more effective advocacy on behalf of Swedish citizens arbitrarily detained or missing abroad

Adoption of the concrete policy steps outlined below can help remedy the current impasse.

Some of these proposals will be easier to implement than others but all are relevant. The individual points can serve as a blueprint for developing a set of guidelines and/or a manual or formal departmental protocol.

a. Appoint a family liaison official in charge of maintaining contact with family members to provide regular basic updates.

The Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs should appoint a qualified liaison official in charge of maintaining regular contact with family members and who could provide meaningful updates. These contacts could be supplemented by more in-depth briefings with higher-level officials, at agreed upon intervals or as the need arises.

b. Improve and expand family support

While the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not a social agency, Swedish officials should provide basic information about services or organizations that offer support to affected families. This should include basic information about how and where to obtain proper legal counsel, access to Swedish social services, psychological counseling, as well as possible financial and other types of assistance.

Such referrals are especially important for families with a foreign background who may need help with identifying the different options available to them in an unfamiliar system.

c. Improve communication with family members

Perhaps the most important step to pursue would be for Swedish officials to develop a departmental protocol for meaningful communication with family members. This should include the adoption of a less restrictive, more personal form of interaction when communicating with families. It does not take much to offer a kind word or to extend a simple gesture of empathy. Such an adjustment by itself would go a very long way to improving

relations. Family members are also an invaluable resource and can provide valuable insights and information that can help to maximize rescue efforts

d. Consider the adoption of new legislation to adjust strict secrecy rules

This is undoubtedly one of the most important and also complex issues to address.

Family members respect and acknowledge the important role of silent diplomacy and the need for discretion and confidentiality. However, families currently face an almost complete information vacuum, often spanning years and even decades.

If strict secrecy and privacy rules stand in the way of a more meaningful interaction between Swedish authorities and family members of Swedish citizens imprisoned abroad, then Swedish lawmakers should consider the adoption of new legislation to adjust or relax some of these rules. Specifically, this would require the adjustment of current Swedish secrecy laws.¹³ Important precedents exist for making such adjustments.¹⁴ This suggests that changes concerning the release or sharing of certain types of information can be proposed and adopted relatively quickly.

The changes implemented in the U.S. can serve as a useful model. They include the creation of an office of **Intelligence Community Issue Manager for Hostage Affairs** in 2020 (as part of the [Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage Taking Accountability Act](#)). The primary task of this office is the timely declassification of certain intelligence information which allows the proper briefing of family members.

The reforms introduced in the U.S. over the past decades have created a more centralized, inter-agency approach to counteracting hostage taking. It allows for the pooling of expertise and, consequently, a more rapid and flexible response to the varied aspects of each hostage crisis. [See IV. Addendum]

¹³ This would mainly involve the law on openness and secrecy from 2009, [Offentlighets- och sekretesslagen](#) (2009:4). The Swedish Espionage Act [[lagen om utlandsspioneri](#)] that went into effect in January 2023 may pose additional obstacles to releasing certain types of details. The law criminalizes the disclosure of any information that could affect Sweden's relations with its allies or other foreign partners.

¹⁴ In 2021, the Swedish government introduced an amendment of the offentlighets – och sekretesslagen (2009:400) regarding the type of information an official parliamentary commission in 2021/22 was allowed to share with the public in the cases of Dawit Isaak and Gui Minhai. In this particular example, the Swedish government moved to further tighten secrecy provisions. However, the move illustrates that important changes governing the access to information can be proposed and adopted with relative ease and speed. See [Granskning av arbetet med att försöka uppnå frigivning av Dawit Isaak och Gui Minhai SOU 2022:55](#); also [Mönstret upprepas från Wallenberg till Isaak – delar av sanningen döljs - Kvartal](#) [[The same pattern from Raoul Wallenberg to Dawit Isaak — Part of the truth remains obscure \(substack.com\)](#)]

Just as importantly, the reforms created a mechanism that allows families to receive regular and meaningful updates about official efforts to free their loved ones.

e. Intensify communications with non-state actors

Swedish officials should try to expand communications with non-state actors, foreign and domestic, like NGOs and human rights organizations, journalists and experts that are working to draw attention to the plight of Swedish prisoners held abroad. Human rights activists have repeatedly tried to coordinate public advocacy measures in more effective ways with Swedish authorities. Here, too, the appointment of a liaison official could help to create a more consistent exchange and bridge the communication gap. A natural candidate would be the office of Sweden's Ambassador for Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law [Ambassadör för *mänskliga rättigheter*, demokrati och rättsstatens principer] who advocates for compliance with international human rights standards and who already maintains close contacts with many Swedish civil society actors.

f. Improve interaction and outreach to allied and non-allied governments to create a rapid, multilateral international response

Swedish authorities should avail themselves of all currently available mechanisms to secure assistance from global partners and allied governments. One example is the [Declaration against Arbitrary Detention in State-to-State relations](#) (endorsed by more than 70 countries). Sweden so far has not invoked the Declaration.

The Declaration is currently non-binding. It would be important to strengthen this tool by working to transform at least certain aspects of its provisions into a binding agreement.

The Swedish government should also continue to seek, when and where appropriate, the input and advice of non-allied governments and other actors to enhance communication and enhance negotiation options.

g. Maximize and exhaust all available domestic and international legal remedies

Additionally, Swedish authorities should ensure the systematic application and exhaustion of all available domestic and international legal remedies, including the submission of formal filings with international bodies (i.e., the African Union, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the UN Human Rights Council), submitting applications of habeas corpus, pursue universal jurisdiction (seek extradition, open criminal investigations), pursue the imposition of a

variety of sanctions, including visa, travel (transit) and residency restrictions, and consider the freezing or seizure of individual or country assets.

h. Seek close cooperation with European partners

The Swedish government has a chance to take a leading role on this issue. Sweden should support the creation of an EU wide/international mechanism that will allow for a joint, coordinated approach to international hostage taking and work for the release of political prisoners.

It could promote the creation of a joint working group on hostage affairs at the EU level. This working group could create concrete proposals regarding punitive measures to be adopted with regards to state or private actors who engage in hostage taking or the unlawful imprisonment of EU citizens. This working group could also create proposals for a coordinated approach/mechanism to negotiate on behalf of EU citizens unlawfully imprisoned abroad. Such negotiations urgently require a more integrated and streamlined process for information sharing between various international law enforcement and intelligence agencies, specializing in fighting international crime, hostage negotiations and counterterrorism. Domestically, Swedish authorities could pursue the creation of a position of a Swedish Envoy for Hostage Affairs and promote the creation of a similar post in the EU.

i. Hold human rights violators accountable and fight impunity

It is notable that so far, neither China, Eritrea or Iran have incurred a serious cost for the unlawful, long term imprisonment of three Swedish citizens. Sweden should explore the imposition of closely coordinated targeted human rights sanctions with its global partners. There exists an important precedent for such a step. In response to the sudden death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny in February 2024, the EU, on a Swedish initiative, adopted a [new Russia specific sanctions framework](#) - with the stated aim of protecting the Russian opposition and political dissidents. The new measures target 20 Russian individuals for sanctioning, including judges who have presided over the trials of Russian citizens jailed for speaking out against the war in Ukraine. According to Swedish and EU officials, there are currently no plans to apply a similar sanctions framework to other autocratic regimes like Eritrea, China or Iran even though the civil societies in these countries also urgently require protections.

On December 10, 2024, the office of the [U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken announced](#) that U.S. Department of State is implementing “two new visa restriction policies to promote accountability for wrongful, abusive, and unjust detention practices around the world.” [See Enclosure 1]

The new U.S. policy steps are especially interesting since they do not appear to be limited to crimes committed against U.S. citizens but also foreign individuals. One of the new visa restriction policies responds to the "wrongful detention" of U.S. nationals; the other addresses the "unjust or abusive" detention of foreign nationals.¹⁵

As Blinken noted in his official press statement:

“

Human beings should never be used as bargaining chips or subjected to abusive or unjust detention practices. Such acts are an affront to the human rights of those detained and to their basic humanity. The United States stands in solidarity with the victims of wrongful, abusive, or unjust detentions and their families. Since President Biden took office, we have secured the release of more than 50 unjustly detained Americans, *and we remain committed to working alongside our international partners to advocate for the release of all those who have been subjected to wrongful, abusive, or unjust detentions. [emphasis added].*

It should be explored how to coordinate these efforts with other countries and to seek the possible adoption of similar policies by the EU.

j. Increase the focus on effective deterrence of international hostage taking and unlawful detention

On December 3, 2024, the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation [outlined key measures that should be adopted](#) by U.S. legislators (U.S. Congress) to strengthen the Robert Levinson Act, with an emphasis on the prevention and deterrence of future hostage taking. The proposed

¹⁵ Under the Immigration and Nationality Act Section 212(a)(3)(C), the State Department has the authority to create visa ban policies that they can only use to deny entry to foreign nationals whose admittance could have adverse foreign policy consequences. There are no financial or economic consequences in conjunction with these visa restrictions. Unlike other sanctions, the State Department cannot publicly identify the individuals whose visas are blocked under it. <https://humanrightsfirst.org/resources-targeted-human-rights-and-anti-corruption-sanctions/>

steps include the creation of a “State Sponsor of Unlawful Detention” designation, akin to the existing “State Sponsor of Terrorism” designation. Other recommendations include improvement in public education about the specific risks international travelers face as well as increasing support for the victims and survivors of hostage taking, during their ordeal and after their safe return. Swedish authorities should consider adopting similar measures.

k. Counter the risk of retaliatory actions and transnational repression against family members

Transnational repression by foreign state actors or their agents is a growing problem and takes various forms. Family members of dual nationals imprisoned abroad have experienced different forms of harassment and also threats from members or supporters of the respective regimes responsible for incarcerating their loved ones. These attempts include verbal insults at public events, trolling on social media, negative media coverage as well as in some cases threats of physical harm. China is known to have established various [illegal overseas police stations](#) in European cities whose members monitor dissident activities. Agents working for the Chinese government tried to directly influence the official Swedish handling of the case of Gui Minhai by approaching the Swedish Ambassador to China and Gui’s daughter in Stockholm (in 2019).

The Swedish authorities are monitoring these threats, but families are essentially left on their own to protect themselves. There are growing concerns that foreign officials and persons involved in serious human rights violations nevertheless are successful in acquiring residency permits in Western countries, including Sweden, Canada and the U.S. There is an urgent need to close these loopholes, including through the imposition of targeted human rights sanctions.¹⁶

¹⁶ See the panel discussion on November 26, 2024, sponsored by the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights (RWCHR) [Justice without Borders: Leveraging Magnitsky Sanctions to combat Transnational Repression](#); and [Press Release | Justice Without Borders: RWCHR Hosts Critical Dialogue on Combatting Transnational Repression - Raoul Wallenberg Centre](#)

IV. Addendum

“There cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach”

The U.S. government’s reforms of its official hostage policy since 2015

The U.S. government currently has one of the most effective foreign hostage recovery teams in the world.

This was not always the case. The development is in large part due to the [James W. Foley Legacy Foundation](#) which provides assistance to U.S. hostages and other unlawfully imprisoned U.S. nationals abroad and their families. It also supports a variety of educational projects.

Founded in 2015, the foundation is named in honor of [James W. Foley](#), a U.S. journalist who in late 2012 was taken hostage by ISIS in Syria. He and two fellow Americans were brutally executed almost two years later.

Over the past decade, it has played a crucial role in reshaping the U.S. government’s hostage policy. Its central message is that a country’s wealth lies in its individual citizens, and in particular its journalists who risk their lives so we, the public, can make informed decisions – a cornerstone of any democracy.

James Foley’s family would learn of his death like the rest of the world – from the internet. When during a personal meeting President Obama told Diane Foley that saving her son had been “one of his administration’s top priorities”, she told him point blank that this was clearly not the case. In fact, the Foley family felt very strongly that the U.S. government had not only failed to do all it could do to save James but had essentially abandoned their son. The Foleys were determined that James’ death should not have been in vain. Almost immediately, they set out to ensure that other families would not have to face a similar tragedy without meaningful support.



Jim believed in America. He believed that our government valued him as a journalist and as a citizen. But he and our family were truly abandoned by our government. How would you feel if your son or daughter had been in Jim's predicament and treated similarly? Is an American citizen no longer valuable? Why were Jim and the other Americans in Syria treated as collateral damage?

Diane Foley, testifying before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, November 17, 2015

At the time of James Foley's kidnapping, the U.S. had a strict policy of 'no concessions, no negotiations' with terrorists. "We were really pretty much on our own. I don't think our government knew what to do with me. I was an annoyance, there was no structure to deal with us," Diane Foley recently recalled [in an interview](#) with CNN's Christiane Amanpour.

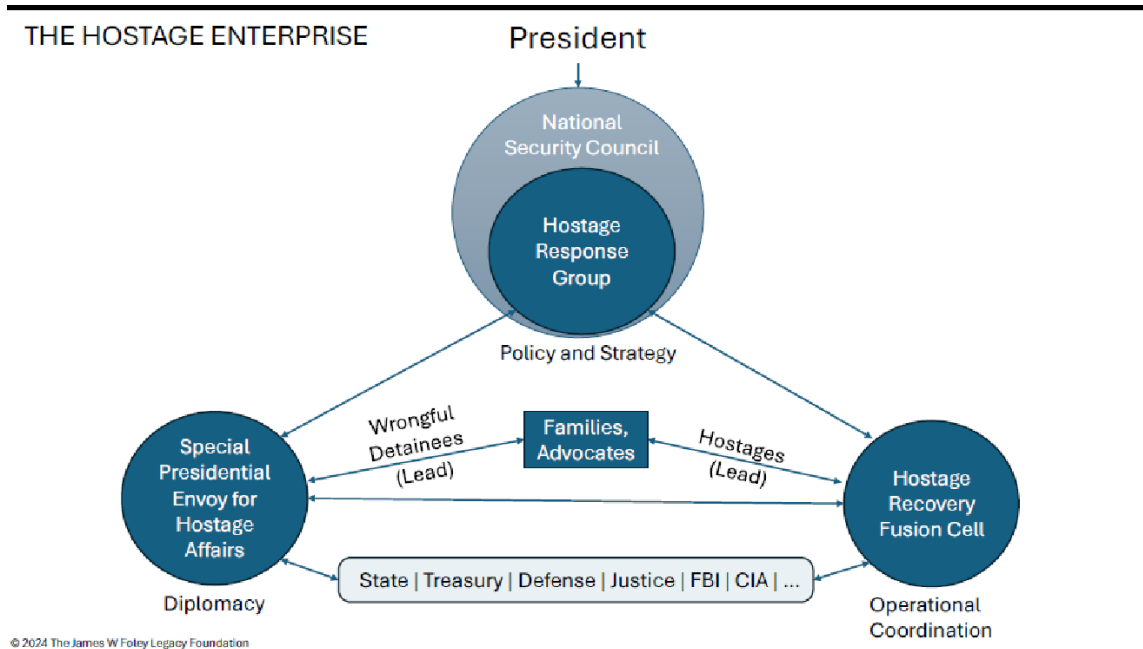
As one of her first actions after her son's death, Foley challenged the Obama Administration to conduct a review of its official hostage policy. "To President Obama's credit, he did", Foley says. But this could not erase the painful memories of her family's struggles. "During the first nine months after James disappeared, we received no information, nothing, zero." The official policy of 'no negotiation' also meant no discussion and no engagement. The family was strictly advised not to speak publicly about James' disappearance. Even worse, government officials were not allowed to share any information they had about who might be holding James or his location. "Everything was absolutely classified," Foley remembers. A few months after James' kidnapping, it slowly dawned on his family that – despite repeated official assurances – they found themselves entirely on their own, with the American hostages, including their son, being treated essentially like collateral damage.

When the captors finally made contact with the Foleys through an email, the first line of the message read "We have James, and we want to negotiate for him" – but with whom? The first FBI agent who was sent to assist the family spoke no Arabic and had no special expertise in the Middle East. As a government official, he was not permitted to engage in formal discussions. So, the family was left to conduct the negotiations entirely on their own. The captors demanded the release of several prisoners held in Guantanamo Bay and the sum of €100,000,000 (!). Meanwhile, the Foleys were informed that if they were to try to collect and pay a ransom for James, they could face legal prosecution.

The Foley family was dismayed to find that there was no clear and effective coordination between or even within the various U.S. agencies in charge of hostage issues and counter terrorism. While the official U.S. position of ‘no concession, no negotiation’ was supposedly enacted to discourage the future kidnappings of American citizens, nobody could produce any empirical data to back up this claim. In fact, Diane Foley directly challenged this core argument of her government’s hostage policy at a [hearing](#) before the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs in November 2015. “I respectfully demand to see the proof that our current hostage policy is protecting Americans... It would seem [instead] that Americans are becoming targets at an alarming rate!”

She argued that a policy of ‘no concession’ should not automatically have to mean ‘no negotiation’. In fact, she said, current U.S. hostage policy was “less a policy, but more of a slogan.” In particular, Foley sharply criticized the inconsistent implementation of U.S. hostage policy at the time, which in some cases allowed for negotiations, directly or indirectly, on behalf of U.S. military personnel. As Foley pointed out, those individuals for whom negotiations were conducted were freed, while in the cases where the U.S. ‘no-negotiation’ policy was strictly applied – like that of her son James and others – the hostages died. Foley directly called on both policy makers and the media to challenge their long-held assumptions and to realize that “we really need to show that we value our citizens, our journalists.”

As a direct result of the Foley Foundation’s efforts, President Obama in June 2015 issued an [Executive Order](#) introducing important new changes to the U.S. government’s official hostage policy. They included, among others, the creation of a special **Hostage Response Group**, a **Family Engagement Team**, to support and brief family members, as well as the appointment of a **U.S. Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs**. The changes were further formalized in 2020 when the U.S. Congress adopted the [Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage-Taking Accountability Act](#). It led to the creation of an interagency **Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell** and **Hostage Recovery Group** tasked “to assess and track all hostage cases of U.S. nationals and coordinate agency efforts to safely recover hostages.” It further includes an **Intelligence Community Issue Manager for Hostage Affairs** whose primary task is to ensure the timely declassification of certain intelligence information that allows for U.S. officials to brief families about the status of their loved ones. While the ‘no concession’ policy remains in effect, the new rules allow for at least some basic discussions and negotiations with hostage takers.



The results have been impressive. Over the past 10 years, over 100 hostages have been rescued. Diane Foley feels the changes have provided much needed flexibility for both families and government officials. “Every hostage situation is different. There cannot and should not be a ‘one -size-fits-all’ approach.”

Links

U.S. President Barack Obama’s Executive Order, 2015

<https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title22/chapter23/subchapter2&edition=prelim>

US Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs

<https://www.state.gov/about-us-special-presidential-envoy-for-hostage-affairs/>

2022 compliance strengthening, U.S. President Joe Biden

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/07/19/executive-order-on-bolstering-efforts-to-bring-hostages-and-wrongfully-detained-united-states-nationals-home/>

<https://www.steptointernationalcomplianceblog.com/2022/07/new-executive-order-targets-persons-responsible-for-hostage-taking-and-wrongful-detention>

The Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage-Taking Accountability Act

<https://jamesfoleyfoundation.org/bloghostage-family-perspectives/2021/3/9/how-bob-levinsons-legacy-will-help-bring-hostage>

<https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/dem/release/senators-menendez-rubio-leahy-coons-shaheen-celebrate-expected-passage-of-robert-levinson-hostage-recovery-and-hostage-taking-accountability-ac>

<https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/S.%20712%20Revised%20Substitute%20Amendment.pdf>

ENCLOSURE 1

DECEMBER 11, 2024

Global Accountability for Wrongful, Abusive and Unjust Detentions

Press Statement

Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State

December 10, 2024

The Department of State is establishing two new visa restriction policies to promote accountability for wrongful, abusive, and unjust detention practices around the world, a critical step to address the growing trend of foreign governments unjustly detaining individuals worldwide. With these policies, the State Department can impose visa restrictions on individuals who detain people as a pretext for an illegitimate purpose, provide disparate treatment based on a detainee's nationality, or violate a detainee's fundamental freedoms, among other concerns. The visa restrictions can also apply to the immediate family members of an individual engaged in these acts.

Human beings should never be used as bargaining chips or be subjected to abusive or unjust detention practices. Such acts are an affront to the human rights of those detained and to their basic humanity. The United States stands in solidarity with the victims of wrongful, abusive, or unjust detentions and their families. Since President Biden took office, we have secured the release of more than 50 unjustly detained Americans, and we remain committed to working alongside our international partners to advocate for the release of all those who have been subjected to wrongful, abusive, or unjust detentions.

These visa restriction policies are pursuant to Section 212(a)(3)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act