

September 18, 2024

The Honorable Antony Blinken
U.S. Secretary of State
U.S. State Department
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520
Via email at secretary@state.gov

Re: Visas for the Iranian Delegation to the United Nations

Dear Secretary Blinken:

United Against Nuclear Iran (“UANI”) understands that the Islamic Republic of Iran’s President Masoud Pezeshkian will lead a delegation to the opening of the U.N. General Assembly during the week of September 23. This delegation will potentially include Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Vice President for Strategic Affairs Javad Zarif.

President Masoud Pezeshkian has called himself a longtime member of the IRGC’s Basij.¹ The Basij is subject to counterterrorism and human rights abuse sanctions in the United States. Despite being labeled as a “reformist,” Pezeshkian has bragged about being the first individual to vigorously enforce the hijab on women across hospitals and universities in Iran even prior to the regime’s mandatory hijab laws.² He has been a loyal adherent to the rule of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, despite Western media’s attempts to portray him as a “moderate.” Even after Pezeshkian took office as president, the Iranian police tortured to death Mohammad Mir Mousavi.³ Likewise, Tehran still made the decision to send ballistic missiles to Russia for use against EU candidate country Ukraine, imperiling innocent Ukrainians with these lethal arms and endangering our European allies.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi is a member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which is a U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization.⁴ A former commander of the IRGC has revealed that Araghchi has also served in its Quds Force, which would be consistent with the Iranian regime embedding Quds Force operatives within the Foreign Ministry and in its embassies abroad.⁵ The Quds Force itself is under multiple U.S. sanctions designations.

¹ Comments by Masoud Pezeshkian, September 7, 2024, available at https://x.com/IranIntl_En/status/1832431427754791255.

² “Pezeshkian: I Made the Hijab Mandatory in Hospitals and Universities Prior to the Hijab Law” (in Persian), Hamshari Online, July 1, 2024, available at <http://hamshahrionline.ir/x9mL6>; Jason Brodsky and Jack Roush, “Iran’s New President is No Reformer,” National Review, July 21, 2024, available at <https://www.nationalreview.com/2024/07/irans-new-president-is-no-reformer/>.

³ “Iran’s president orders investigation after activists alleged police tortured man to death,” Associated Press, August 29, 2024, available at <https://apnews.com/article/iran-suspect-torture-pezeskhian-mohammed-mir-mousavi-362b941e24d9afa408a03defa9f931af>.

⁴ Jason Brodsky, “New Iranian president appoints crisis cabinet,” The Middle East Institute, August 13, 2024, available at <https://www.mei.edu/publications/new-iranian-president-appoints-crisis-cabinet>.

⁵ Ibid. See also Kasra Aarabi, Saeid Golkar, “Iran’s Militia Doctrine,” Tony Blair Institute, February 11, 2021, available at <https://institute.global/insights/geopolitics-and-security/view-tehran-irans-militia-doctrine>.

Vice President for Strategic Affairs Javad Zarif, the Islamic Republic's former foreign minister, is also under U.S. sanctions. Public reporting suggests Zarif ran a significant Iranian influence operation on U.S. soil for years. One such initiative he engaged in is the "Iran Experts Initiative," which cultivated individuals and entities in the United States and Europe to echo the Islamic Republic's narrative and penetrate U.S. policy debates to serve the interests of Tehran.⁶ There was no public disclosure of any of these interactions with a hostile foreign power, and Zarif and his Foreign Ministry deputies recruited researchers and analysts to ghostwrite op-eds and take other steps to promote the positions of the Islamic Republic on the nuclear file in Western countries.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has the blood of Americans and their allies on its hands, including the most recent execution by its partner Hamas of American citizen Hersh Goldberg-Polin. From the October 7 massacre by Hamas in Israel, which was underwritten by Iran, to its supply of arms to Russia, the Iranian government is a pariah. It is also plotting to assassinate current and former U.S. officials, including the Republican nominee for president of the United States, on American soil.⁷ Many Americans would consider this an act of war against the United States. That is not to mention the Iranian regime's aggressive efforts to influence U.S. politics and policy⁸—including paying individuals to engage in behavior promoting antisemitism and brazen efforts to hack the 2024 presidential campaigns of both Vice President Kamala Harris and former U.S. President Donald J. Trump.

The Iranian system has proven that it is only interested in using the platform of the U.N. General Assembly to propagandize on behalf of a system that has no legitimacy and is in violation of international law. That the Iranian delegation's visit to New York comes just days after Iranians around the world marked the second anniversary of the murder of Mahsa Amini by the regime's "Morality Police" adds further insult to injury.

As UANI has repeatedly communicated to the U.S. State Department, the U.S. government's overly generous granting of visas to Iranian officials visiting the U.N. General Assembly undermines American foreign policy objectives. Instead of isolating the regime diplomatically at a time when it is attacking multiple governments around the world, the U.S. State Department rewards this behavior by offering it entry to the United States.

Especially concerning is the granting of visas to Iranian officials who are under U.S. sanctions. The U.S. State Department did so when the Butcher of Tehran, the late President Ebrahim Raisi, visited to New York despite being under sanctions himself. Those individuals who have associations with designated terrorist entities by the United States also continue to be permitted to travel to New York.

At a time when the U.S. government is concerned about Iranian influence operations as the presidential election of 2024 in November nears and American citizens are under active threat of harm from Islamic Republic agents, it would be wholly inappropriate to once again welcome a large Iranian delegation to New York. It is worth noting that members of the Islamic Republic's delegation threatened

⁶ "Inside Tehran's Soft War," Iran International TV, September 2023, available at <https://content.iranintl.com/en/investigates/inside-tehran-softwar/index.html>.

⁷ "Exclusive: Secret Service ramped up security after intel of Iran plot to assassinate Trump; no known connection to the shooting," CNN, July 16, 2024, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2024/07/16/politics/iran-plot-assassinate-trump-secret-service/index.html>.

⁸ "Statement from Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines on Recent Iranian Influence Efforts," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, July 9, 2024, available at <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/press-releases/press-releases-2024/3842-statement-from-director-of-national-intelligence-avril-haines-on-recent-iranian-influence-efforts>.

and physically assaulted U.S.-based Iranian journalists in New York at last year's U.N. General Assembly.⁹ These acts of transnational repression on U.S. soil cannot be ignored.

The U.S. government retains the sovereign authority to deny visas irrespective of the U.N. Headquarters Agreement with the United States. Congress has acknowledged as such, granting the president the authority to deny a visa to anyone for "security, terrorism, and foreign policy" reasons.¹⁰ Both Democratic and Republican Members of Congress wrote to you this year as well demanding the U.S. State Department impose such visa restrictions.¹¹ There is also precedent in denying Iranian officials visas to visit the U.N. Headquarters in New York. The Trump administration denied then-Foreign Minister Javad Zarif a visa in January 2020.¹²

We are particularly troubled by the prospect that Vice President Javad Zarif will be granted a visa in September despite being under U.S. sanctions. He is not a sitting president or foreign minister and therefore has no urgent business being in Manhattan with the Iranian delegation. Given his well-documented history in participating in malign influence operations in the United States, his presence here would be wholly inappropriate.

We therefore urge you to deny the Pezeshkian delegation visas to the United States. If you still decide to move ahead of their visit, at the very least, their movements should be severely restricted, in keeping with the treatment the late Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian received when he traveled to New York in April 2024.¹³

We would therefore appreciate hearing from you at your earliest convenience to address these concerns. Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours,



Ambassador Mark D. Wallace

⁹ "Iran's President Entourage Attacks Iran International Reporters In NY," Iran International, September 21, 2023, available at <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202309217257>.

¹⁰ Joseph I. Lieberman and Mark D. Wallace, "No Visa for Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi," The Wall Street Journal, September 13, 2024, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/no-visa-for-irans-president-ebrahim-raisi-united-nations-general-assembly-new-york-terrorism-belgium-biden-bolton-alinejad-11660166051>.

¹¹ Jewish Insider, March 2024, "[Bipartisan Group of Lawmakers Calls on Administration to Block Iranian Leaders from U.N. Meetings in U.S.](#)"

¹² "U.S. denies Iran's Zarif a visa to attend U.N.: U.S. official," Reuters, January 7, 2020, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/us-denies-irans-zarif-a-visa-to-attend-un-us-official-idUSKBN1Z605T/>.

¹³ Alex Oliveira, "Iran's foreign minister to have movements restricted during NYC trip days after Israel attack: report," New York Post, available at <https://nypost.com/2024/04/16/world-news/irans-foreign-minster-to-have-movements-restricted-during-nyc-trip-report/>.