

US-born anchor for Iranian TV jailed without charges

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Marzieh Hashemi, an anchor and reporter for Press TV, the English-language station of Iran's state-run broadcasting system, was arrested Sunday at St. Louis Lambert International Airport, transported to a Washington detention facility in manacles and chains and has been held ever since without charges or any public explanation from either the US Justice Department or the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

Hashemi was in the United States to visit her family, including a brother suffering from cancer, and was working on a documentary film on Black Lives Matter.

The arrest of Hashemi, a 59-year-old US citizen married to an Iranian, who has worked as a journalist in Iran for 25 years, has all the characteristics of the kind of forced "disappearances" executed by fascist-military dictatorships. It has been carried out in flagrant violation of constitutional rights to freedom of the press and freedom from arbitrary arrest, as well as the basic right of habeas corpus.

Hashemi was allowed to call her family to inform them she was imprisoned only two days after she was seized at the airport. US authorities have provided no information to her children as to the reason for her detention, saying only that she is a material witness in an undisclosed investigation.

Her son, Hossein Hashemi, a research fellow at the University of Colorado, said that he and his siblings have also been subpoenaed to appear before a grand jury in Washington.

Hashemi's children have reported that their mother has been subjected to cruel and degrading treatment by the US authorities. She is locked in a cell in manacles at an undisclosed detention facility. A Muslim, she has been denied food she can eat and offered pork by her jailers in a blatant attempt to ridicule her religion. She

told her son she had only pretzels to eat since her arrest. She was stripped of her hijab and given only a T-shirt to wear.

Born Melanie Franklin in New Orleans, Hashemi studied journalism at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, where she came into contact with Iranian students who supported the 1979 revolution against the US-backed dictatorship of the Shah. Marrying an Iranian, she moved to Tehran and pursued her journalistic career, working for the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, or IRIB.

She is a prominent figure on Press TV, anchoring the English language news for the Iranian broadcaster, conducting interviews and producing documentary films.

Her son, Hossein, noted that in her on-air commentary his mother had been "critical of a lot of the domestic policies of the United States government," as well as "the wars abroad and the regime change policies that the United States enforces all the time and puts major budgets behind."

Hashemi's arrest has been largely ignored by the corporate media, as well as by the pseudo-left outfits that orbit the Democratic Party.

All the pundits and editorial boards that postured as defenders of freedom of the press in the face of the Saudi monarchy's assassination of former regime insider and journalist Jamal Khashoggi have maintained a stony silence in the face of this grossly unjust imprisonment of the American-born Iranian journalist.

One can only imagine their furor had Iranian authorities dragged Christiane Amanpour, the Iranian-raised and US state-connected ABC News anchor, away in chains and imprisoned her without charges.

Their silence in the face of the Hashemi affair is no

accident. Her jailing is in line with the attempt by the US ruling class—with the full support of the corporate media—to intimidate, censor and silence all critical and independent journalists and media organizations around the world.

The treatment meted out to her is precisely what the US authorities hope to inflict upon WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange if they are able to pry him out of the Ecuadorian embassy in London where he has rather tenuous sanctuary.

The brutal abduction and detention of Hashemi are also bound up with the increasingly bellicose and provocative American imperialist offensive against Iran, which has escalated steadily since the Trump administration abrogated Washington's commitment to the 2015 Iran nuclear accord and began the imposition of increasingly punishing sanctions aimed at starving the Iranian people into submission.

The US ruling establishment has been conducting a bitter internecine struggle over President Donald Trump's announced decision to withdraw troops from Syria, with leading administration officials, including National Security Adviser John "Bomb Iran" Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, walking back Trump's promise of a swift pullout and redoubling US threats against Iran.

Whether Hashemi is being held as part of a wider pseudo-legal plot to discredit Iran and stoke the war drive remains to be seen. Such an attempt was made under the Obama administration with the fabrication of a case based upon ludicrous allegations that supposed Iranian agents (one of them a DEA informant) had attempted to hire a Mexican drug cartel to blow up the Saudi ambassador to the US in a Washington restaurant.

Whatever the case, the imprisonment of Hashemi and the brazen violation of her basic democratic rights constitute a deadly serious warning. As they lurch toward war and are driven by mounting fear of the developing opposition and mass struggles of the working class from below, the US government and the capitalist oligarchs who rule America are turning ever more openly toward dictatorial forms of rule.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on all working people, students and youth in the US and internationally to demand the immediate and unconditional release of Marzieh Hashemi.



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