



## Woman, Life, Freedom

April 2, 2025

Featuring Masih Alinejad

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

**ALINEJAD:** *Women, Life, Freedom* was not just about women. Men shoulder to shoulder with their sisters. They knew about the rest, they knew that they might not be able to go back home, but they were there to sacrifice their lives to free Iran.

**DUBOWITZ:** Welcome to *The Iran Breakdown*, where we expose the truth about the world's most dangerous dictatorship. I'm your host, Mark Dubowitz.

Today we're spotlighting one of the Iranian regime's most fearless enemies, Masih Alinejad. Born in Iran, exiled for speaking truth to power, and now living under constant threat, Masih is not just a journalist or an activist, she is a one-woman revolution. Masih has become the voice of the voiceless, especially Iranian women, fighting back against the regime's brutality. Her campaigns, "My Stealthy Freedom," "White Wednesdays" and "United For Navid," went viral, showing women shedding their compulsory hijabs in defiance of a regime that uses "Modesty Laws" as a weapon of control, and have united Iranian athletes against the brutality of the regime.

Her social media platforms have become lifelines for Iranians risking everything to protest. The regime sees her as a threat, and they try to silence her the only way they know how: through violence. In the past few years, the Islamic Republic has made three attempts to kidnap or assassinate her on U.S. soil. Just recently, a New York court convicted two men for their roles in a murder-for-hire plot orchestrated by Iranian operatives to assassinate Masih right in Brooklyn. Today, we break down her story, the verdict, and what it tells us about Iran's global terror machine. This is *The Iran Breakdown*, so let's break it down.

Masih Alinejad, welcome to *The Iran Breakdown*.

**ALINEJAD:** Thank you so much for having me. I thought you said, "Welcome to Iran."

**DUBOWITZ:** We are going to be in a free Iran and sometime soon, because I think with your efforts and the efforts of others, the Islamic Republic is going down. But we're going to talk about that. I want to start, Masih, with your personal life, and maybe we can go right back to the beginning: your life in Iran, your move to America. Talk to us a little bit about your upbringing in Iran. What kind of environment did you grow up in and what was your first experience with the regime's repression?

**ALINEJAD:** I grew up in a very, very tiny village, Northern Iran, Qomi Kola, close to Caspian Sea. So I grew up in a very traditional family. Two of my brothers, and my father, they were injured during the war between Iran and Iraq. And I have to say that I started my own revolution from my family's kitchen because all I – I didn't have any educational system to teach me how to understand about discrimination or learn about oppression, as you ask how I felt it. I just had a brother, just two years older than me, watching him enjoying his freedom as a boy, like going to stadium, dancing, singing, riding a bicycle, all the activities that I was banned from doing because of being a girl. So envying that freedom made me a rebel.

So that's how I grew up. In a very tiny village and finding that it's not fair to be behind the curtain, and to be told what to wear, to be told not to show my crazy, massive hair, and then going to school, feeling this unfairness every single day that the school principal seeing us like second-class citizen. Forget about that, brainwashing us to say, "Death to America. Death to Israel." That was not fair as a child. Like, wow. I was like...yeah. So that's my childhood. I grew up in this beautiful childhood in the village, and then the hate and nasty government telling us to hate ourselves, our body, and then the rest of the world.

**DUBOWITZ:** So Masih, at some point you leave the village and you move to where? To Tehran?

**ALINEJAD:** No, that was a dream for me to go to Tehran. As a child, when I was living in a village, my dream was to go to Babol. It's a close city to my village. So I went to Babol to go to high school because we didn't have high school in the

village. And then I went to Tehran later, when I got married, when I started my job. But I went to high school in Babol. That's how I became an activist, because that was the moment when I was into poetry, reading history, and reading a lot of fictions, but I was not allowed. There were some specific books we were forbidden to read, and I remember that every single morning that we were there to cite Quran. We were there to chant, as I said, "Death to America, Death to Israel." I was like, "That's not me."

So I actually took the mic and started to read Forugh Farrokhzad, one of the well-known poet in Iran. I started to read Ahmad Shamlou's poem, and I was loud. I was like, "*ay ana yeki na basande bood*". And then suddenly they attacked me, physically. They got my mic away from me, and they were like – and I was like, "That was just a poem." So, then I started to join my brother and my friends, a lot of people like me, so to write pamphlets, to read book, make a summary and spread it, school, everywhere, to bring people together, to study, to educate ourself, basically to reprogram ourself from what the government actually put in our mind. So that's how I started my activism at school.

I remember that we decided one night to go out and write slogan in our school walls, everywhere in the city. So girls were actually not allowed to go out. So we were like, "Oh my God." We were living with fear that my brother and my friends, all of them, they went out, write a slogan. So we were inside our house, waiting for them to come back, almost like nightmare. So they came back safe. The day after, when we were walking in the streets, seeing the slogan, I get goose bump. "Death to Khamenei," all the slogans. And we were so proud of ourself, walking in the city of Babol saying, "Yes, we made it." That's how we started our activism which landed us to go to prison.

**DUBOWITZ:** So this was, I guess, the '90s, right? But I want to ask you, Masih, so you're in high school, you're feeling this sense, this urge for activism, but at some point you have to leave Iran. Tell us a little bit about the circumstances that led you to have to leave your country and come to the United States.

**ALINEJAD:** For me, growing up there, 33 years living under sharia laws, living under oppression, living under a society that the government brainwashed, even the men in my own family, to own my body, to tell me what kind of lifestyle that I can follow, was not easy. But at the same time, I learned from my pain to be powerful, not to be a victim, to push the boundaries, to fight back, from my tiny village to my city, Babol, which I went to prison, to Tehran, which I got myself into trouble again, become a journalist, parliamentary journalist. So, I published articles about a Basiji beating up students, then I was summoned...

**DUBOWITZ:** The Basij being the regime's security thugs, right?

**ALINEJAD:** Yes.

**DUBOWITZ:** Who go into the streets and beat up Iranians.

**ALINEJAD:** Yeah.

**DUBOWITZ:** Yeah.

**ALINEJAD:** I've experienced that brutality myself, being beaten up by morality police, by Basiji. I've seen my brother being beaten up by Basiji. So I wrote an article as a journalist to expose them. That time I was part of a reformist group, a reformist media, because I wanted to have more freedom to criticize the establishment. So I believed in reform. And I had a column, and I criticized the Basiji, then I was summoned by the most notorious prosecutor, Saeed Mortazavi, who killed Iranian-Canadian journalist, Zahra Kazemi. So it was not easy to face him.

He was actually looking me the way that I felt, like I'm naked, the way that humiliating me, bullying me, attacking me. So I had this experience. I lost my column, but again, I was a parliamentary journalist and I was a rebel criticizing the MPs in

their eyes. And I remember that when I published their payslips, how much salary they received; if you do that here in America, Mark, you will receive an award. My award was just being kicked out from Iranian Parliament, and still I was like, "I didn't do anything wrong. Why they kicked me out from Iranian Parliament?"

**DUBOWITZ:** And what year was this, Masih?

**ALINEJAD:** 2005, when I got kicked out from Iranian Parliament. That was the moment I was like, "I don't have anything to do." I was summoned by Saeed Mortazavi, kicked out from Iranian Parliament. I had a dream to give voice to Iranian people. And I remember that when I was criticizing the mullahs in parliament, face-to-face, mostly when I was criticizing them on different issue that were red line, they didn't want answer. They were like, "First cover your hair. *Moohsto bepooshoon aval*. This is the expression, every single woman in Iran heard that. If you challenge the government, if you challenge the school principal, if you challenge the society, they want to attack you. They want to harass you. They say that, cover yourself first and then speak, and then open your mouth. It's manipulating you.

It's like telling you that you're nobody if you don't cover yourself. So I've seen the mullahs telling me, "Cover yourself first." And I was like, "I'm not going to cover myself." And then he took all his abaya, his holy dress, and he ran after me to punch me. He said, "You're either going to cover your hair or I punch you on your face," which a lot of journalists saved my life that time. You can see his face. There are a lot of photos of him angry and trying to punch me. So I tried everything to reform this government, to criticize them in their face, to fight back the barbaric laws there. I couldn't do anything. So that's how I was forced to leave Iran. It was during election, 2009.

**DUBOWITZ:** 2009, right?

**ALINEJAD:** Yeah.

**DUBOWITZ:** So 2009 was a pivotal year in Iranian history, right? There were the fraudulent elections that brought Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president, back into power. And Iranians were furious that their vote had been taken away from them, and they took to the streets in what became known as the Green Revolution, when I think there were millions of Iranians on the streets in North Tehran, across the country, but primarily in North Tehran saying, "Death to the dictator. Where is my vote? And death to the dictator."

**ALINEJAD:** Yeah. It started from, "Where is my vote?"

**DUBOWITZ:** Right. Right.

**ALINEJAD:** But ended, "Where is my country? Where is my rights?" Because, yeah, that's why I started from my own story to tell you that I didn't become a revolutionary against the whole regime overnight. As a person who grew up in Iran, I tried everything. So I actually tried voting for reformists as well. So, there were 20 million people voted for Khatami, having the hope of...

**DUBOWITZ:** Former president of Iran.

**ALINEJAD:** Former president of Iran.

**DUBOWITZ:** Yeah.

**ALINEJAD:** And I actually, I had a meeting with him when he was the president, and I told him, on his face, that millions of us being fooled by you, because you said that you're going to open the doors of a stadium towards women. You said that we're going to get rid of morality police. Morality police are a bunch of police officers walking in the street and telling women to cover yourself. I see two beautiful women sitting here [in the podcast studio]. Your beautiful hair, you have to

cover it. If you don't, then you're master criminals. Sorry, I have to, because I know that women understand this very well. The first thing that they want to go out, they use mirror to make themselves beautiful the way that they are because it's your identity. No?

So in my country, we have to use the mirror to make ourselves the one that this backward mullahs want us to be. This is very heartbreaking. So I said to Khatami, on his face, that how come you said that you want to reform? What kind of reform that still we the women are not allowed to sing? We're not allowed to sing in 21st century. And he was giving me a lecture about the fatwa by Khomeini, saying that singing, if men hear the voice of women and they get provoked, so this is haram. I was shocked, Mark, that a reformist president, that we have been say that come back, we have to vote because this time we're going to see change, telling me that this is haram. And I said that, "Have you ever heard of a woman singing?" He said, "I heard women citing Quran." I said, "No, no, no. That's different. Have you ever heard of women singing?" He said, "No." And I started to sing on his face. *[Singing in Farsi]*.

It means that God, if you make me cry, I will make the whole world cry. That's the power of civil disobedience. So I ask him the question and I thought that enough of journalism, I have to be an activist, so let's just practice my – and then he started to clap like this. When you see the video, you think that he's praising me? No, he was trying to keep me quiet because the rest of the video, he says that, "Please, when you go out, don't sing. Don't continue this. This is not good." So, I found a way that I can do anything to reform this barbaric regime. And then during the election, I was in the street, made a lot of videos of people and asking them, "Do you have really hope?" Going and ask, "Why you want to vote for [Saeed] Mortazavi? Why you want to vote for [Mehdi] Karroubi?"

I didn't have the hope, but people again saying that, this is the last chance. This is the last chance. What happened? They vandalized my car just because of going in the street and challenging people. So they vandalized my car. I didn't have any other option. So I left Iran and I came to England, and then America.

**DUBOWITZ:** And just to clarify for some of our listeners, so Mortazavi and Karroubi were the two, quote, "reformist opposition leaders" who were...

**ALINEJAD:** Ah, no longer, I don't call them reformists, but you're right.

**DUBOWITZ:** Right. Who ostensibly were "reformists," quote, unquote, and were running against [Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad in the 2009 presidential election. They were put under house arrest, as I recall. They may still be under house arrest.

**ALINEJAD:** One of them.

**DUBOWITZ:** One of them.

**ALINEJAD:** Mortazavi is still under house arrest.

**DUBOWITZ:** And they've let Karroubi go?

**ALINEJAD:** Yes.

**DUBOWITZ:** But I think your disillusionment about this reformist movement is now shared by millions of Iranians, who at first believed that these were men who could reform the system and have realized, over years, that they were regime insiders. They had no interest...

**ALINEJAD:** They are the good PR of the Islamic Republic.

**DUBOWITZ:** Right. Right.



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**ALINEJAD:** When they are in crisis, internally, or even when they are in crisis, like losing their legitimacy outside Iran, then they need a good PR. Here we are.

**DUBOWITZ:** Right.

**ALINEJAD:** They introduce reformist and that's how...

**DUBOWITZ:** We're the smiling mullahs.

**ALINEJAD:** The smiling mullahs. Exactly, like [Mohammad] Javad Zarif, like [President Masoud] Pezeshkian right now, and that really breaks my heart when I see that. *New York Times*, a lot of reliable media outside, still buying their narrative and saying that this time there is a reformist president is in power. What kind of reform? I just mentioned about singing. Right now, women are in prison for the crime of singing. Right now, that I'm talking to you, in 21st century. But I see that women outside Iran writing articles for *New York Times*, for CNN, and saying that reformist president is in power. No, they're not reformists, they're not moderate. When it comes to women's right, when it comes to challenging sharia laws, they're all the same. They're just a good PR for the mullahs.

**DUBOWITZ:** Yeah, and Khamenei has been, I think, quite brilliant at trotting out, whether it was [Hassan] Rouhani, or Zarif, or the current president, is trotting out these men with their smiles, some of them coming to Washington or New York, giving speeches at the Council on Foreign Relations, talking to Western journalists and presenting this smiling face of a brutal, repressive regime.

I want to ask you now, so you leave Iran after...

**ALINEJAD:** 2009.

**DUBOWITZ:** ... 2009. You come to the United States and you use your social media following, which I guess is starting to build, to run three very consequential campaigns. I want to talk a little bit about those campaigns, each one of them, and ask you to describe them. The first was, I believe it was called "My Stealthy Freedom." And I want to know, what inspired you to get it started? What was at the core of that campaign, and what was the regime reaction to that specific campaign?

**ALINEJAD:** First of all, I have to say "My Stealthy Freedom" means that you are banned from having your basic freedom, but you know how to create it in a stealth, in secret. It's like guilty pleasure. So women are being told from the age of seven in Iran, "If you don't cover your hair, you won't be able to get an education. You won't be able to go to school for sure. You won't be able to get a job. You won't exist if you don't cover your hair." So for me, yes, when I left Iran, I actually started to first interview the family members of 2009 protest victims. More than a hundred people got killed, so I started to interview their family members, their mothers and fathers who were sharing the details of their beloved one being tortured to death, or got shot in the head or in heart, in the streets.

So one day I saw that my Facebook page was full of sorrow and full of misery. So I was like a lot of young teenagers following my page and I thought, "They're losing their hope." So I started to talk to them, and I said that anytime when I feel sad, when my heart is broken, because of all these brutality we are facing, so I go in the street and I run in a beautiful spring. I feel the wind in my hair. So I published that photo just to share my feeling with the youth in Iran, to help them to survive the sadness, all the bad news that we've been facing, 2009. And then immediately I got bombarded by a lot of comments from Iranians saying that they envy it. They were envying at my freedom. And I said, "Hey, wait a minute." Soon after, I published another picture of myself, which was taken inside Iran, unveiled, driving down towards my hometown, Babol.

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I published that and I said that as a woman, I knew how to create stealthy freedom. I knew how to bypass my morality police. So I'm sure that you have the same photos of yourself with your beautiful hair. Share it with me if you want to tell your own stories. This time I got bombarded by photos. Millions of women actually followed my page only in one week. And I was like, "What?" Even I, myself, was brainwashed in Iran that, hmm, hijab is not a big deal, let's just bring political change. But now these women are telling me that they want to talk about their body, they want to talk about their personal freedom. So that's why I created a different Facebook page called "My Stealthy Freedom." That's how anti-compulsory hijab campaign was born.

**DUBOWITZ:** And these were Iranian women sending you photos...

**ALINEJAD:** From Iran.

**DUBOWITZ:** ... from Iran, also out there in the streets, taking off the hijab and showing their beautiful hair.

**ALINEJAD:** It's punishable crime, Mark. It is a punishable crime.

**DUBOWITZ:** Explain to our listeners, I'm sure people out there who are Iranian know and understand this, but maybe non-Iranians just don't appreciate this. Why would showing your hair inside the Islamic Republic be a punishable crime? Why is this such a threat to the Islamic Republic, the Islamic Revolution, and the hard men that rule Iran?

**ALINEJAD:** First of all, I have to say that there are three pillars that keep the Islamic Republic survive, as I said, from the beginning: "Death to America," "Death to Israel," and hijab, compulsory veiling. These are the pillars of this ISIS in power, as I call them. So for them, the first thing when they took over Iran was to write their own ideology on our body. Let's just ask a simple question to your audience, to anyone who listen to this podcast. When you go to Iran, the first thing that you understand, this is a country ruled by religious dictatorship, by Islamic ideology. As what? Through us, women, because we are the one forced to carry the most visible symbol of Islamic Republic with us everywhere we go. So, for that...

**DUBOWITZ:** I mean, the men don't dress really differently there, do they?

**ALINEJAD:** No.

**DUBOWITZ:** I mean, if we saw pictures of Iranian men in Tehran or any of the other – in Shiraz, or any of these other places, they would look...

**ALINEJAD:** Exactly.

**DUBOWITZ:** ... "normal."

**ALINEJAD:** So, we are forced...

**DUBOWITZ:** So, you're forced to actually carry this burden of the Islamic Republic, as you say, on your bodies and on your hair?

**ALINEJAD:** Exactly. So through women, those who carry the most visible symbol of a religious dictatorship, they can control the whole society. They can brainwash men that you own your women. So now everything has changed, which we are going to explain, and talk about the civil disobedience campaign. But I want to tell you that the hijab is the core value of the Islamic Republic, and that's why the Supreme Leader, the clerics, they get very angry when they see women practicing their civil disobedience.

So why I did that? Because look, from the beginning, my goal was just bringing political change. My journalism, my activism, were always about challenging the politicians saying no to Islamic Republic. But I thought that not everyone want



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to get involved in a political movement because people want to have a normal life. People want to enjoy their freedom. So I changed the messaging. So, I created different initiative like “White Wednesdays.” My...

**DUBOWITZ:** Let's talk about “White Wednesdays” because “White Wednesday” is a fascinating campaign. It grew out of “My Stealthy Freedom.” Talk about what that was. Why wearing white on Wednesdays? What does that actually mean? And how did Iranians participate? What risks did they face? And we talked a lot about the women of Iran, but I'd be interested also in your insights, and how did the men of Iran engage in “White Wednesday”?

**ALINEJAD:** I had a campaign about them as well, #MenInHijab.

**DUBOWITZ:** Amazing.

**ALINEJAD:** I'm going to tell you why, but I started to actually create different initiative as I said to you when I was meeting President Khatami. So, if I was acting as a journalist and kept asking question, I didn't – I mean, I couldn't change anything. But as soon as I practice my own civil disobedience on his face, singing, the change, I felt empowered. I was like, “I can do it.” So that's all about civil disobedience campaign. When you ask women to say no to compulsory hijab, immediately when they walk unveiled, when they wave a white headscarf in public every Wednesday, they identify each other.

They find that, “Wow, we are not alone. Wow, there are big number of us. Wow, I say no.” Men see them and they say, “Wow, it's beautiful. We want to be part of it.” So instead of just creating a political movement, you can say to every single person, you can be part of this fight against this barbaric regime. That's why I pick a day, Wednesday, and I picked a color, white, and I said, this is the time we have to shift the online movement to offline. Mark, you won't believe me, I received 96 videos the first night when I launched “White Wednesdays.” It was beautiful.

**DUBOWITZ:** So these are videos of Iranian women?

**ALINEJAD:** Wearing white symbols.

**DUBOWITZ:** Wearing white symbols.

**ALINEJAD:** Taking off in public and calling other people to join them.

**DUBOWITZ:** And filming themselves and sending you the video.

**ALINEJAD:** Yes. You have to see the videos. First, they were all like one army – like one woman, as you said, one revolution, every single woman. Then they became 10 women walking in the street. Then men were walking shoulder to shoulder with them, men wearing white as a sign of solidarity. And then I saw that the Iranian regime got angry. They arrested hundreds of women. Actually, the police announced that right after the campaign. They said that 3.6 million women were arrested in the street by police. They were either warned or sent to court.

They confiscated 49,000 cars because women were unveiled. Please, when I talk, show their videos because I want everyone to see the beautiful face of brave women in Iran and brave men joining them. Men and women were walking unveiled, police were announcing that, “Next Wednesday, if anyone comes in the street, we will arrest them.”

They did. One day, they arrested 29 women only in one day. But what happened, the mothers of those who got arrested, they removed their hijab. They had a white head scarf in the street, and they said that now we will join our daughters. So when they arrest their daughters, then they create anger. So this time the mothers were saying that, now we say no to forced hijab, no to forced regime, no to Islamic Republic.



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So that's how the campaign, the civil disobedient movement growing. Then I was just watching and enjoying that this was the true face of women of suffrages. It was like the Rosa Parks of Iran. Not one, not two, millions of people. And then the backlash started, not only arresting women. They did everything to oppress this civil disobedience movement in our – everything. They created a law under my name.

**DUBOWITZ:** I was going to ask you that, because the regime is starting to take notice of you now. So they create a law under your name. Tell us about the law. Tell us how it's been applied against those inside Iran.

**ALINEJAD:** They did.

**DUBOWITZ:** And really, I mean, let's not spare details here. Tell us about what the regime is doing to these women and men.

**ALINEJAD:** The woman who got arrested, they told me that how they have been tortured, how they have been forced to do false confession. One of them Mojgan Keshavarz she actually – you can see her video, it went viral when actually she took to the street and call every single woman to join them by just filming herself and calling them to join them, handing out flowers, white flowers, and telling them, "join our movement." They arrested her and they tortured her. She just publicly announced that she was tortured. They told her, "We're going to execute you if you don't do a false confession against Masih Alinejad." And she didn't. Some did, like my hero, Sepideh Rashno, just last week when the trial started, she actually made a video and she said that. She's a well-known activist inside Iran. We all saw her face in Iranian state television, denouncing herself, denouncing my campaign and myself.

But now she came public and she said that, "I was forced by the Iranian authority to say bad things about Masih Alinejad," which I don't mind, but see how they are scared of women? They have guns and bullets. They have nuclear weapons. They have everything that they say to the world that we are the most powerful regime, but they're scared of women's hair. They're scared of women's body. They are scared of women walking unveiled and saying that, "We want to have freedom." So for that, I'm telling you, they use every kind of violence to silence them. But the most loudest voice still are the women in Iran. They put camera everywhere, like Chinese camera. You can see everywhere to identify...

**DUBOWITZ:** Right, these are surveillance cameras.

**ALINEJAD:** Surveillance cameras.

**DUBOWITZ:** That they buy from the Chinese Communist Party.

**ALINEJAD:** Exactly.

**DUBOWITZ:** In order to surveil women and in order to enforce hijab laws.

**ALINEJAD:** Yeah, to identify women in public. Subway, everywhere you go, the cameras are there. And women are showing – I'm very sorry, but I have to say women showing their middle fingers to cameras, to Ali Khamenei directly. They challenge him. They killed 1,500 innocent protesters in Bloody November if you remember. When they kill them, they shut down the internet to hide their brutality. It was a massacre in Balochistan. What happened immediately when women and men, they had access to internet, fathers and mothers. They used their camera and they said that, "This is the regime. They killed our children, but we're not going to give up." So what the regime is using against women and men in Iran is not working. It's just creating more anger and determination to end this regime.

**DUBOWITZ:** So, with "White Wednesdays" and the campaign, you become one of the main targets of the Islamic Republic, right? I mean, there's a law that is named after you, a law that is used then to brutally repress Iranian women and Iranian men. Because we're going to get to that later in the conversation, because this becomes highly relevant. But I

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just want listeners to understand, you are gaining the attention of Ali Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij. You're becoming quite notorious inside the regime.

**ALINEJAD:** It's not because of me. They are scared of anyone who could mobilize people around the cause. If I was fighting individually, if you go on my Instagram page and you just see me publishing a video of myself, my speech, my book, they won't scare. They don't pay attention to this. But when they go to my Facebook page, to my Instagram page, with almost 10 million followers altogether, they see that this is the voice of Iranian women. This is the voice of the mothers whose children got killed. But you can see their face, their videos saying "no" to Ali Khamenei. They're scared of that.

When they see on my social media that I created different initiative to keep this movement alive, for instance, when morality police were attacking women, I asked them to use their mobile as their weapon under the hashtag called "#mycameraismyweapon." So they started to film the morality police. For years and years, I've been bullied by a lot of journalists, so-called activists and dissidents in actually the West, mostly telling me that you're putting the lives of Iranians at risk by telling them make a video.

But guess what? Now, all those women, all the media – like, I was going to international media telling me that, "There is a law under your name. If anyone send videos to you, will be charged up to 10 years prison according to the head of the Revolutionary Court. Why do you still ask women to send videos to you?" I get bombarded by women filming morality police because they know that freedom is not free, because they want to expose the regime, because they want to expose the morality police.

For years, we've been watching women screaming when they were being beaten up by morality police. But believe me, I've seen many videos under the #mycameraMyweapon, that the morality police, the extremists that were hiding their face from Iranian brave women because they didn't want to be filmed. They didn't want to be exposed. So I believe that the regime is scared of the women that is still willing to film them, to expose them, to speak up. So they scared of my platform, the social media, because I just dedicated this to millions of people.

**DUBOWITZ:** So, Masih, let's go to the third campaign, and it's "United For Navid." And this is also going at a – I call this sort of central pillar of the identity in Iran. It's not death to America, death to Israel, and it's not hijab, but it's football. It's Iranian football, "soccer" for Americans. Tell us a little bit about the "United For Navid" campaign. How did it come together? What were you trying to achieve? And tell us a little bit about Navid Afkari and his story.

**ALINEJAD:** Navid Afkari was an Iranian athlete. He was executed by the regime and the whole society were there to save his life. Even President Trump tweeted about him, asked the regime to stop killing him. None of us could save his life. That created a huge frustration and anger among Iranians.

**DUBOWITZ:** And what were the accusations? These false accusations against him?

**ALINEJAD:** False accusation. They always say when they want to execute people, they said, these athletes or these protesters, they used violence against Basij, against military. That's false accusation against a lot of protesters. Innocent protesters got executed. So in that time, I was frustrated as well, but I didn't want to just cry. I didn't want to just mourn and sit and do nothing. So, I learned from my campaign – previous campaign from Iranian women that this is a time we should do something. We should mobilize this time the athletes. So I started to send emails, call every individual well-known athletes that I knew them.

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They were the heroes of millions of Iranian people. So I told them that, "This is the time. Women are not allowed to go to a stadium, men are getting executed. And why we're not getting together and united to call international community, to ban Islamic Republic, to kick Islamic Republic from all international sports leagues?"

**DUBOWITZ:** And these are Iranian athletes both inside Iran, outside Iran, football players, wrestlers?

**ALINEJAD:** All different...

**DUBOWITZ:** Others, right?

**ALINEJAD:** Exactly. Yeah. And they were well-known athletes, women and men. They won a lot of medals for Iranian people. But this time many of them joined the campaign making videos, like Iranian women making videos. This time were the athletes, well-known celebrities making videos and calling the international community to ban Islamic Republic. And I'm telling you why. You actually said something, which is funny now for me because I like to say the same thing. I always want to say three pillars. Sport was not. But sport became a tool to implement the three pillars, to actually use it as a propaganda tool to show the rest of the world that our athletes, Iranian athletes are not playing with Israeli athletes.

But that was not a choice. The athletes were forced to – you know, when they see Israeli athletes everywhere across the globe, they were forced not to shake the hand, and they were not allowed to play with Israeli athletes. So you know that. And Iranian women were forced to wear hijab. And Ali Khamenei was using this thing that to the rest of the world, this is the woman of Iran. So basically sport became a place, sport washing, a tool in the hand of the regime, the Revolutionary Guard, to whitewash this murderous regime. So I decided to actually show the rest of the world that this is not a real sport. You remember President Biden, a lot of politicians back there during apartheid in South Africa, they were all about banning South Africa.

**DUBOWITZ:** I mean, South Africa was banned from all international competitions, and South Africa like Iran, is a sports crazy country. And they were not allowed to participate in international rugby matches or soccer, or cricket. I mean, this was very successful at convincing the apartheid government in South Africa, the Afrikaner controlled government, that they had no place in the international community.

**ALINEJAD:** Exactly.

**DUBOWITZ:** I think it was actually quite successful in chipping away at their control and undermining their power and forcing the decision. I mean, at the end of the day, it was white Afrikaner South Africans who voluntarily gave up apartheid and gave it to the Black majority.

**ALINEJAD:** I get goosebumps. I get goosebumps.

**DUBOWITZ:** So, it was very successful in those days, but you wanted to have the Islamic Republic...

**ALINEJAD:** But still, Mark. No, it's not. It still is a red line. Let's just admit the reality. Still, even now, some of the opposition believe that this is the only happiness, the only joy that the people of Iran can have. So then let's not talk about boycotting Islamic Republic. So I saw some of the opposition figure cheering for the football team, but I saw the people of Iran, ordinary people, women, right after the brutal murder of Mahsa Jina Amini in the hand of the morality police. I saw that when the American soccer team won against the Islamic Republic, Iranian people, ordinary people in the street, they were celebrating that. Why? Because the people inside Iran, they believed that this is not a real sport.

I mean, I'm just asking women everywhere. If it was not women of my country, if it was women in America, in France, in Germany, they were being kicked out from a stadium. What would've been the reaction of the rest of the world? Outrage.

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What would've been the demand of feminist global movement asking FIFA to kick out their country until the day that women are allowed to go to stadium?

**DUBOWITZ:** No doubt. No doubt.

**ALINEJAD:** No doubt. We can't say that Islamic Republic is like ISIS, Islamic Republic is apartheid. But at the same time, saying that, "Oh, then it's okay if we see the flag of Islamic Republic in International Football Federation." No, this is a real apartheid. And I believe...

**DUBOWITZ:** Well, it's a gender apartheid.

**ALINEJAD:** It is apartheid against women, of course. So for that, I believe that still we need to bring unity among opposition because when I meet with leaders of democratic countries, they say that to me that still among Iranian opposition, people saying that we should not kick out Islamic Republic from FIFA. We should not kick out Islamic Republic from sport federations. We should allow them to engage with international community.

I don't think this is the right thing to do. So still this is a taboo, but I believe that these well-known athletes can bring the global athletes together to put more pressure on the Islamic Republic.

**DUBOWITZ:** So, Masih, I want to turn now to – before we get to talking about regime threats to you personally and the recent trial, I want to talk about “Women Life Freedom,” because in some respects, the campaigns that you ran, particularly targeting hijab and in support of Iranian women, really culminated in a remarkable series of events in 2022, 2023, where really, Iranian women took to the streets. And tell us a little bit about “Women, Life, Freedom,” how it began, what triggered it, what it really meant to you on a personal level, and why did the slogan become the real heartbeat of the Iranian protest movement?

And again, also I'm really interested in your thoughts on the aftermath of “Woman, Life, Freedom.” What did it accomplish? Why did it, in the end, not bring down the regime? And the one thing I would like you to touch on, because it's something that just shocked me as a longtime observer of the Islamic Republic of Iran, is reports coming out of Iran that got very little attention. That what really broke the back of the “Woman, Life, Freedom” protest movement was that the regime launched chemical weapons attacks against Iranian schoolgirls. I mean, that got very little attention in the West, but it just gives you a sense of just how brutal this regime that you've described. So “Woman, Life, Freedom,” tell our listeners a little bit about it.

**ALINEJAD:** I get very emotional. I mean, even the slogan, “Woman, Life, Freedom,” makes me very, very emotional because I've been waiting for years to see that finally, men and women shoulder to shoulder chanting one of the most beautiful slogan and supporting their sisters, because I know that what helps the Islamic Republic to survive is the vision. For years, when we were saying that we want to get rid of compulsory veiling, a lot of time we're being ignored by a lot of people, saying that, “there are so many bigger problems. Why you make a big deal out of it?”

I was very clear and millions of women in Iran were very clear that this is not about a small piece of cloth. When we talk about hijab, we basically talk about our dignity. We talk about our identity. We talk about just having our basic freedom. So Mahsa Jina Amini, 22 years old woman when she got killed...

**DUBOWITZ:** So, tell us about her. She shows up in Tehran.

**ALINEJAD:** She's a Kurdish woman. She came to Tehran...

**DUBOWITZ:** Kurdish-Iranian, right?



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**ALINEJAD:** Yes, with her brother. She came, I mean...

**DUBOWITZ:** She's coming to the big city.

**ALINEJAD:** Vacation, exactly. I'm coming from a small city. I know how it feels to come to Tehran knowing no one. And then she got arrested in front of her brother. From the beginning, I said that I got arrested in front of my brother. So, these brothers and sisters were in the city of Tehran...

**DUBOWITZ:** Arrested? Explain why. Why did she get arrested?

**ALINEJAD:** A little bit of her hair was visible.

**DUBOWITZ:** Visible from under her hijab?

**ALINEJAD:** Head scarf.

**DUBOWITZ:** Right.

**ALINEJAD:** It was not unveiled, and she was beaten up by morality police, and brutally she got killed. That created a huge anger, but let's not forget that it was Mahsa's father who exposed the brutality of morality police. So, this is another Iranian man, Kurdish man. So, he started to talk to the media, telling everyone that no, because you know that the regime started to say that...

**DUBOWITZ:** She died of natural causes.

**ALINEJAD:** Exactly, "heart attack," to make us believe that she passed away from heart attack. But as soon as her father spoke up, all the media went there. Two journalists, brave journalists, went there to cover – interview the father. So, everyone paid attention. And that that was the moment for years and years. Millions of Iranians were waiting to see solidarity from men to women, and that's why people took to the street across Iran.

**DUBOWITZ:** Masih, it's interesting because I remember when this happened. And I remember that somebody hacked into the database, I think it might've been of the Ministry of Health of Iran, and managed to get hold of the health record of Mahsa Amini and hand that to two Iranian journalists who then wrote about this to expose the lies of the regime that she had died of a heart attack, but instead had been bludgeoned to death by the Basij, by these thugs, by the regime's morality police. And then the story just – it went viral, it went global. Tell us about that. Tell us about that story. Tell us what happened during those protests.

**ALINEJAD:** It went viral, but the empty – I mean, I don't want to criticize the solidarity when we saw from the beginning, but from the beginning it was beautiful when I saw that the athletes, actress started to show their solidarity by cutting their hair and saying that, "We stand with the women of Iran."

**DUBOWITZ:** Not just Iranian athletes and celebrities but...

**ALINEJAD:** Across the globe.

**DUBOWITZ:** ...Western.

**ALINEJAD:** Western. And I remember the day after when I saw that the female politicians from European Parliament started to cut their hair, I went to a French television and I said that it is beautiful to see ordinary women or athletes or actress to cut their hair and show their solidarity. But we don't want the female politicians, especially the Europeans who have the power to go after the Iranian regime cutting their hair. We want you to cut your ties with our killers.



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**DUBOWITZ:** Don't cut your hair, cut your ties. In fact, I mean, I remember also seeing many images of European politicians, by the way, Western journalists as well from the United States, when meeting with regime officials, they wouldn't show their hair, they wouldn't cut their hair. They would put on hijabs.

**ALINEJAD:** That breaks my heart.

**DUBOWITZ:** Right?

**ALINEJAD:** That breaks my heart. I'm telling you, the Iranian women inside Iran risking everything to say no to Islamic Republic, no to sharia laws. Let's be very clear, we're not fighting against a small piece of cloth. We want to get rid of sharia laws, we want to get rid of Islamic ideology. We want to have a secular democracy, the one that you all have it here and you enjoy it in America. What is different between us and you in America, in Western countries, in Europe? Nothing. This is 21st century and we deserve to have secular democracy. What breaks my heart, those who educate me, and millions of Iranian women that, "This is your culture." In the name of cultural relativism, in the name of different argument, white savior complex, Orientalism, we don't want to save the women of Iran. They actually educate us that we don't want to interfere.

But actually those who were for years and years educating us, the Western feminists who put a hijab, and saying that, "We want to respect your culture," they empowered the Islamic Republic to kill people like Mahsa Amini. They empowered those killers inside Iran to put more pressure on us. How? I'm telling you, I remember that I was actually interviewing the high ranking members of Revolutionary Guards in Iran. When I left Iran, and I started to interview the clerics on the phone and challenging them about compulsory veiling, and they named Catherine Ashton, they named her, they named the female politicians outside Iran, and they said that even those female politicians from West...

**DUBOWITZ:** Right. So Catherine Ashton, who was the lead diplomat for the European Union, for the EU based in Brussels. She was the one who was going out negotiating with the Islamic Republic, in particular, over the nuclear deal of 2015.

**ALINEJAD:** Exactly. Catherine Ashton, then Federica Mogherini, hired representative from the European Union. So, the clerics in Iran mentioning them, saying that, "Look at them. Even they know how to respect our culture. Then who are you? How dare you to say no to [this]." They don't say "compulsory hijab," they say, "an order from God." So, you see, that's how the appeasement, empowering and emboldening the oppressive regime to put more pressure on their own women. So still, I don't hear anything from them.

**DUBOWITZ:** Okay, so "Woman, Life, Freedom" erupts, Mahsa Amini is brutally killed. This sparks massive protests inside Iran, Iranian woman, but also their fathers, their brothers, their sons, their mothers, people taking to the streets. Tell us a little about your recollections of those months and then of course, what happened.

**ALINEJAD:** In my opinion, the flame of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" revolution is still burning. Revolution have different phases in different – look at the history, different countries. Some took years, but I have to say that "Woman, Life, Freedom" was not just about women. Men shoulder to shoulder with their sisters taking to the street, they knew about the risk. They knew that they might not be able to go back home, but they were there to sacrifice their life to free Iran, to have a secular democracy. And I remember those moments, that seeing all the social media men were saying goodbye to the family members. I saw a picture of a young man published a photo on his Instagram and saying that, "My sister, you stay back. I sacrifice my life for you." And then the same person was shot by the Iranian regime and killed. I saw that a lot of time men were actually walking with open arms towards security forces with guns and bullets and saying that, "Come and kill me, but we're not going back home."



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So, teenagers like Nika Shakarami, like Sarina [Esmailzadeh], teenagers, 16-year-old, they got killed. They were burning their headscarf. When I talk about them, I get furious that teenagers risk their life, they burn the headscarf in public to lead the revolution inside the country. Still now feminists outside Iran bowing to clerics wearing hijab and calling it as our culture. This is an insult to a nation when you call a barbaric law part of our culture. So that's why I say yes, the flame of the revolution still burning. See Narges Mohammadi, Mahboobe Rezai, Fateme Sepehri, Nahid Shirpisheh, Sepdideh Gholian, these women are from different political views, left, right, monarchist, republican, absolutely different political views, but when it comes to end Islamic Republic, to say no to execution, to say no to compulsory veiling, they're all united, but I don't know how the West, especially the feminist global movement, are still quiet.

Look, I'm going to say that here. I joined Women's March in America. That was first year I was so excited. I was in the streets here in New York, very excited, chanting, "My body, my choice." I even called my friends in Iran and I said, "Wow, I don't get an acid attack. I don't get arrested. Nobody want to kill me here." This is the first time in my life protesting in the street, and I thought that this is about my body, my choice. So I reached out to the same women, the same women behind the Women's March, and I asked them, "Now, support my cause." I asked Ilhan Omar, I asked Linda Sarsour, all these women, because I came from Iran. I was like, "This is America, people protesting. This is be beautiful, so they're going to support us now." And guess what? Not only they blocked me, all of them, they called me a mouthpiece of Trump, agent of CIA, agent of Mossad, they called me Islamophobic, they kept quiet. They launched a smear campaign against me.

At the same time, my women, women of Iran, were facing imprisonment but not denouncing the campaign. Their mothers joined them. These people outside were celebrating World Hijab Day, and I could barely mobilize the Western feminists to celebrate No Hijab Day. There are a lot of ex-Muslim people who experienced sharia laws, who have lived under Taliban, under their ISIS, under Islamic Republic. Let us talk. That is breaking my heart. When I see people in the West say, "I am Hamas." They are praising Hamas, Houthis. That breaks my heart that they don't take to the street right now to support the women of Iran who are imprisoned for the crime of singing. They don't take to the university campus for the women of Afghanistan who are being kicked out from a school. That is sad. I remember from the beginning, even when you support me, I was under a massive online harassment, [accused] that, "now Israeli supporting you, now, you became an agent of FDD and Mossad."

**DUBOWITZ:** Well, yeah, we're also being accused of being an agent of Mossad and CIA and MI6. So, we should all unite because clearly the regime is paranoid.

**ALINEJAD:** But that's you. Men are being labeled of MI6, Mossad, but we get another label as well. Like me, they call me a prostitute in Iran, they call me a whore. They labeled us a lot on social media. They use the tactic to discredit you. They use the tactic to isolate you and then to kill you or target you by assassination plot. These are the tactics of the Islamic Republic labeling us agent of Mossad, CIA, as I said, but we, the women who grew up under their sharia laws, we have agency.

They call it Islamophobic, but we know that phobia is an irrational fear. But our fear of Islamic ideology, my fear and the fear of millions of women in Iran of sharia laws, being beaten up, lashes, of course it's rational. Of course, I mean, you should be scared of Islamic Republic. You women should be scared of Islamic Republic. If you say that you don't have fear of a government that lashes you, that beaten you up for not covering your hair, that there should be something wrong with your logic. If you Western women do not understand the fear of us millions of women being the target of our government for the crime of just wanting to be our true self, then there is something wrong with your feminism. Then, you don't care about women's rights. You just care about your political agenda.

**DUBOWITZ:** Masih, I'm sure some of our listeners who are listening to this podcast are thinking, "Well, Masih, this is very familiar since October 7th," because many of those same self-proclaimed feminist groups and feminist leaders and female



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members of Congress were defending Hamas when it committed brutal sexual crimes against Israeli women, torture, murder, rape, mutilation against Israeli women, by the way of all different faiths and ethnicities, and either the deafening silence from these groups that you've talked about in the Iran context, or the defense of Hamas, the justification for that kind of brutality, and it did strike me after October 7th when I saw some of these rallies against Hamas that it was pro-Israel Jews who were there, pro-Israel Christians who were there, but also Iranians who were there.

**ALINEJAD:** Yes.

**DUBOWITZ:** Who were there because they understood exactly...

**ALINEJAD:** The pain.

**DUBOWITZ:** They understood the pain, and they understood that it was the same regime that for decades had been murdering, torturing, and raping Iranian women was now murdering, torturing, and raping Israeli woman. Same regime.

**ALINEJAD:** Because we know the nature of this regime, we know that killing, raping, torturing is in the DNA of the Islamic Republic. We know that the money of our people goes to the proxies, to Hamas, Houthis, Hezbollah. I remember when I woke up and I saw the naked body of the women being grabbed by Hamas after October 7th. When I saw the pictures, I was like, "This is the pictures of my women." And listen, I felt that when it comes to raping women, we are all united. I was shocked. I lost a lot of friends. I lost a lot of friends just because of issuing a statement against Hamas after October 7th.

Right after when I saw the pictures, the videos, it was familiar because under the hashtag, #MyCameraIsMyWeapon, in Iran you can see the same videos. They grab women's body proudly, they attack them, they rape them in prison, because they want to create fear, because they want to say that, "Yes, this is what we can do to you." And I saw the pictures and I was like, "Now it's my turn to support." And I just issued a statement, I was unfollowed by a lot of friends, a lot of allies, and some...

**DUBOWITZ:** The women that you marched with.

**ALINEJAD:** The women that I marched with...

**DUBOWITZ:** In women's rights protests inside the United States, shoulder to shoulder. Interesting, because...

**ALINEJAD:** You could see my videos.

**DUBOWITZ:** I mean, I would say your experience is familiar to a lot of American Jewish women who were at the same marches with you, probably in Washington, DC or in New York City marching for women's rights, and after October 7th were shut out and shot down by people they felt were their allies and their friends. I think they went through a very similar experience.

**ALINEJAD:** But we should not lose hope. You know why? Because for years and years we have been ignored by the Western feminists. Let's be very clear. We have been ignored. All the female politicians went to my country, they bowed to the mullahs the same. Let me just give you an example. There's a photo of a Swedish feminist ministers mocking President Trump, putting a picture of all women and President Trump with all men and mocking President Trump and saying, "Yes, this is a feminist ministry, feminist cabinet." And I was like, "Wow." The same feminist ministers, all of them, they went to my beloved country, Iran, but they were not as brave as Iranian women. They bowed to the mullahs wearing hijab. They really bowed down to the mullahs.

And I was like, "Well, when it comes to President Trump, you try to say you are powerful, men and women are equal." But when it comes to mullahs, "Well, men are more equal than women." I mean, what is your message? This is not feminism.



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This is hypocrisy. This is absolutely hypocrisy. So, we should not lose hope. Those ministers, they ignored us, but Mahsa created a huge revolution, and no one can now dare to ignore Iranian women, because from prison, they're sending a message to the rest of the world. And they say that, "Whether you support us or not, we will get rid of the Islamic Republic, but the history will judge those of you who could manage to stand with us and shake the regime, but you managed to shake the hand of the Islamic Republic."

**DUBOWITZ:** So Masih, you and millions of Iranian women have paid a real price for your desire for freedom, and I want to talk about that next. I want to talk about the recent trial that occurred, that just concluded.

I want to talk a little bit about the trial. Tell us about that trial. There've been three plots on American soil to kidnap you or kill you. I want to talk about that, and I also want to talk about how you manage this constant danger, how physically and mentally and emotionally, you and your husband and family, it's very difficult to go through this. And so, tell our listeners what's been going on in terms of the threats to you, a little bit more detail about that. Let's talk about the trial that just concluded. I know that was a very difficult and emotional experience for you, and also how you as a young woman deal with these threats and how your family deals with it.

**ALINEJAD:** Let me first thank you, because you invited me to come to your show from the beginning of the trial, and I said I can't, but you came to the trial. This is the true support that I want to see from the global feminist movement, to go to the public trial and listen to the killers, that how they expose all the details, like chilling details...

**DUBOWITZ:** Yeah, I didn't see many of them there, by the way.

**ALINEJAD:** Yeah, you didn't even hear the gigantic guy. The guy who was arrested with AK-47 in front of my house. He actually admitted that he was there to kill me. My husband was sitting there. I was a witness, so I was not allowed to be in the entire trial. So, my husband was sitting there and listening to all the details that he said. He actually tried different tactics to kill me. First, he wanted to get close to me. He said, "I was looking for an easy way to kill her," so that's why he sent me a text message asking me for help. So, the prosecutor actually asked him, "Why are you asking Masih for help?" And he said, "Because I heard that she's helping a lot of people, so I thought this is a good way to get close to her and kill her." So, he was actually explaining how he recruited people to stop innocent people, and the prosecutor asked whether it's easy to stop people, or it's difficult.

And he said, "Only for some people it's difficult." So absolutely cold-blooded. The face was very relaxed, very professional criminal saying that he recruited a woman to knock the door of my house, to take me out, and then do the job. So, these two tactics didn't work, and then he decided to burn the house down. So imagine, the house that he was planning to burn down was not just mine, my stepchildren lived there, my husband, and my beloved family. So, he said that none of these tactics worked, then he decided to buy AK-47, but let's not forget that he was not a random killer. He didn't have anything to do with me. The mastermind of this assassination plot are the Islamic Republic Revolutionary Guards, and Ali Khamenei.

**DUBOWITZ:** The Supreme Leader.

**ALINEJAD:** I don't call him – I mean, the funny thing is in the court, the prosecutor actually kept saying that, "Ms. Alinejad, I want to show you a video of the Supreme Leader." And I kept saying, "He is not the Supreme Leader. He is the dictator." And I kept saying, and at the end, Michael, the prosecutor, said that, "Yes, Ali Khamenei." So, I want to correct you as well. Let's just call him who he is.

**DUBOWITZ:** You're right.



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**ALINEJAD:** He's a dictator. We should not be politically correct. Let's name them who they are. They are terrorists. So yeah, the main terrorists are the Islamic Republic, especially when the video was presented, it was Ali Khamenei right after the brutal murder of Mahsa Amini, he actually gave a talk in front of the members of Revolutionary Guard.

**DUBOWITZ:** He mentioned your name.

**ALINEJAD:** Yeah. He said that these teenagers removing their hijab is not a big deal, so we can punish them. But [he said] the main issue, he actually talked to Hossein Salami, the head of Revolutionary Guards in Iran and the other members of Revolutionary Guards, the main issue is that American political agent who compares compulsory hijab to the Berlin Wall. If you understand this, you should take a stance against it. So it means, why the prosecutor of United States of America showed this video to the jury, because they know it very well. This is not a random assassination plot by random people. This is being planned. They mapped out different tactics first to discredit me, like online, as the prosecutor says, their first tactic was to launch smear campaign against me. And we've experienced that a lot when they assassinated Fereydoun Farrokhzad, when they executed Ruhollah Zam, another journalist who was actually tricked from France to Iraq and from Iraq to Iran. Then, they executed him. Before kidnapping him, they launched a smear campaign against him, against Fereydoun Farrokhzad, against many of the dissidents.

When they want to target them, first, they use different tactics, going after my family members, as I said, they put my brother in prison for two years. They brought my own sister on TV. I was watching my sister, 17 minute on TV show disowning me publicly. They interrogated my 70-year-old mother. So they try to break you inside. And now saying that, wow, thinking about they had the picture of my stepson, my own son. They had the picture of my beloved husband. So handling these things is not easy.

**DUBOWITZ:** So the smear campaign is the first tactic. The second is – I mean, it's a chilling video, and our listeners will see it. And that is Khamenei basically telling the IRGC, Masih Alinejad must go. You must target her and you must kill her. And so, they've tried different tactics. They tried to kidnap you.

**ALINEJAD:** Kidnap me, yeah. In my case, they were planning to take me to Venezuela.

**DUBOWITZ:** On a speedboat.

**ALINEJAD:** Yes.

**DUBOWITZ:** To Caracas and then fly you from Caracas to Tehran where you would be put on a public trial and then presumably executed. And you've been in more than 22 FBI safe houses?

**ALINEJAD:** I have moved more than 21 times between safe houses. I don't have a place to call it home, but I want to be very, very clear. Look, I don't carry any weapons. I'm only 45 kilos. I don't know why they scared of me. Whatever I did, it made them very angry that they want to get rid of me very bad. This has been third plots against my life. The next trial is coming, because after, when these three Azerbaijani guys were actually in a public trial, two men were convicted. I thought that I'm safe, but it seems that the word "safe" is too luxury for those of us who dare to challenge Islamic Republic. So the third plot, the Iranian regime actually hired two Americans. The same person who was assigned to assassinate President Trump hired two Americans to kill me. Where? This time, not in front of my house. I was scheduled to go to Fairfield University to give a talk. So they were there waiting for me to kill me there.

**DUBOWITZ:** Where is Fairfield University?

**ALINEJAD:** It's in Connecticut. I don't want to scare people in Connecticut because I love Connecticut and I want to go there. But that's the Islamic Republic.

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**DUBOWITZ:** And that was the third plot. So first plot was the kidnapping, taking [you] on a speedboat to Venezuela to Iran to execute. Second plot, and just to clarify the details here, a member the Iranian regime reached out to the Russian mafia who then recruited three, correct, three Azerbaijani men.

**ALINEJAD:** Yes.

**DUBOWITZ:** From Azerbaijan. And then, it was a murder for hire plot to kill you on American soil.

**ALINEJAD:** To your listeners, it sounds like a scary movie, like a Hollywood movie. But this is the reality of many dissidents in Iran. In four decades, according to one of the reliable human rights organization, Boroumand Institution, more than 500 innocent people were the target of either kidnapping plot or assassination plot by the Islamic Republic beyond their own borders. So we know that very well that this is not a Hollywood movie. This is the reality. They did that to Jamshid Sharmahd, another U.S. citizen. And guess what? When I was in a trial, Jamshid Sharmahd's daughter sent me an audio message and saying that I'm so happy you had the FBI. You are alive now.

**DUBOWITZ:** Well, he was transiting, I remember, through Dubai Airport.

**ALINEJAD:** Yes.

**DUBOWITZ:** And he was taken by regime agents and then taken back to Iran and executed.

**ALINEJAD:** Exactly. And now, they're dealing how to bury their father's body. That could have happened to me as well. I could have been dead.

**DUBOWITZ:** So Masih, these threats are coming in from Islamic Republic that's trying to kill you or kidnap you on American soil. Tell me, what was the response from the Biden administration?

**ALINEJAD:** I am very thankful to the law enforcement to protect my life. But at the same times, I was a little bit sad that the Biden administration didn't want to support me in a way that I wanted. To be loud American, practice my freedom of speech and give voice to voiceless people. Instead of protecting my freedom of speech, they said that they offered me to go under witness protection. And you know what witness protection means. I have to change my identity. I have to change my name, everything. I mean my hair, maybe my face. It's not in my DNA to go and hide myself. But I refused, for sure. But I strongly believe that this is what the Islamic Republic wanted to do.

**DUBOWITZ:** To silence you. Absolutely.

**ALINEJAD:** To silence me. So for me and millions of people, we know that fighting for freedom is not free. We have to pay the price and we are willing to pay the price. I'm ready to sacrifice my life for freedom of speech, for freedom, for democracy, for dignity. But at the same time, I don't want to keep silent. I don't want to go somewhere and change my identity and have a life just – you know, that's not me. The reason that the Iranian regime is angry with its own people, with people like me, the reason that terrorists are angry with us, because we are giving them hard time, and this is American values. American values is all about protecting freedom of speech, supporting the First Amendment, supporting people to speak up, to be loud. So I was quite shocked.

So now, I have to say I am relieved after three years moving between safe houses. There were nights I used to wake up wondering where I was, I couldn't recognize. There were days that I had to watch over my shoulder. There were like my New Year eve, no rules. I didn't have *Haft Sin*. I didn't have opportunity to find *Haft Sin*. You know what “Haft Sin” means?

**DUBOWITZ:** I do. Maybe explain that to our listeners.

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**ALINEJAD:** Yes, we have to find five items start with “S”. And I was in a small, tiny room one night. I was in a hotel room and I was not able to go out and find anything. I never forget the moment that the FBI agent knocked the door. Oh, my God. So he gave me seven apples. So, he thought that the *Haft Sin* means seven “S”, so seven apples. And I was like, it was beautiful. He was wrong, because I had to find different items, but it was beautiful to see that the government of my country who were trying to kill me, they don't care about no rules. They don't care about our New Year. They don't care about our history. But an American agent, which I used to be brainwashed saying, “Death to America,” was there caring about my Persian New Year celebration. It's emotional. This is the America that I love. This is the America that my people in Iran love. And they want to tell to President Trump, to Americans, that we are your allies, not these mullahs.

Let me tell you something. When I came to America, I asked my husband that, do you know any neighbors? Because I'm a village girl and I love to talk to neighbors. And my husband was working for *Bloomberg*. He's a *Bloomberg* guy. He was like, “Why should I know the neighbors?” And I started to get to know the neighbors. How? By growing vegetables in my garden, sunflowers, and knocking the doors of every single neighbors and offering them plants, basil, even making pickles. I used to grow cucumbers and offering them pickles to make my neighbors like family members. And I used to see the sign of Trump – supporting Trump, supporting Kamala and Biden, supporting Bernie Sanders. And I didn't even know who Bernie Sanders is from the beginning when I came here and my neighbors didn't know who I am.

So when they saw me on the news that the regime were trying to kill me this time, Mark, they were my neighbors knocking the door, offering me food, offering me red wine. One of the neighbors said that, if you want to hide somewhere, [come to] my house. It was beautiful. This is the America that I love. And I said to my husband, “You see all the people, Americans with different political views, they were all united when it comes to their fellow citizens, when it comes to the national security of America.” My husband was like, “No, this is because of your pickle diplomacy.”

(LAUGHTER)

**ALINEJAD:** So I think this is the America. Americans, when it comes to their fellow citizen, when it comes to protecting America, they're all united. And I want to see that in American policy, that when it comes to terrorists, when it comes to end this terrorist regime and its proxies, we have to be together. Why? Believe me, I grew up in Iran. I know them, that when they want to kill an American, they don't care whether you are left or right. They don't care whether you're Republican or Democrat. They hate America. They hate democracy. They hate our values here. That's why they want to kill us all. They want to just destroy this country. They want to expand their own ideology. That's why I say that when you don't join us, the people of Iran, to end the Islamic Republic and its proxies, believe me, they will end democracy one day.

**DUBOWITZ:** Masih, I want to end on a more positive note.

**ALINEJAD:** These are all positive. I mean, a clerical regime with all the nuclear weapons when they go after women inside Iran, the mothers, the teenagers, me outside Iran, what does it mean?

**DUBOWITZ:** It means they're terrified of you.

**ALINEJAD:** It means that our weapons are more powerful than their weapons. They're fighting for power, they're fighting for death. This is their culture. Our culture is life, freedom. This is our culture. So our weapons are more powerful than them. To be honest, every day when I wake up, I say to myself that they did everything to make my life miserable. So I have two options honestly, to feel miserable every day or to make my oppressors feel miserable.

**DUBOWITZ:** I know you. You're certainly not a miserable person.

**ALINEJAD:** Because my heroes are Iranian women.



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**DUBOWITZ:** No, I mean, you're an incredibly happy person and energetic and have a spine made out of titanium, and it's remarkable to me.

But I want to ask you, what's next for you personally? I mean, are there new campaigns you have in mind, new projects? And also, what does success for you look like in this life? What do you want for the people of Iran, and what should this administration be doing about Iran? Because you've mentioned a few times the regime having nuclear weapons. Well, thank God the regime doesn't yet have nuclear weapons. There's certainly a threshold nuclear power. I think 2025 is going to be a year where there's going to be a lot of discussion and perhaps quite a bit of action on this question of Iran's nuclear weapons program. But I must say, Masih, I fear that there's going to be some kind of nuclear deal and some kind of flawed nuclear deal.

**ALINEJAD:** That's not your fear. That's the fear of millions of people in my country as well.

**DUBOWITZ:** Because what happens if there's a nuclear deal with this regime? Then hundreds of billions of dollars are freed up to replenish the coffers of the regime. That money doesn't go to the Iranian people. It goes to regime insiders, and it gives the regime potentially a new lease on life. And you said that millions of Iranians fear the same thing. So, talk a little bit about not only what's next for you personally, but how you see the next year or two or four under the Trump administration. What would your message be to the Trump administration? And finally, I think it's really important, what can listeners of this podcast do to help you and the woman and men of Iran to advance the cause of freedom?

**ALINEJAD:** First of all, I have to say that the West have tried negotiation for decades. What have they achieved? Nothing. Nothing.

**DUBOWITZ:** Worse than nothing.

**ALINEJAD:** Biden administration hand out billions of dollars to Islamic Republic. The appeasement only emboldened the regime to empower Hamas, Hezbollah, and October 7th happened.

**DUBOWITZ:** And by the way, can I just add?

**ALINEJAD:** Sure.

**DUBOWITZ:** Most of Iran's nuclear weapons expansion occurred under President Biden after his election when he abandoned the pressure campaign of his predecessor. And you're right, I mean by giving them billions of dollars and not being willing to crack down on the regime, and in fact leading a campaign to try take the Islamic Revolutionary Guards off the foreign terrorist organization list, as you remember, all it did was embolden this regime and they grew their nuclear weapons program exponentially. And this is the problem now President Trump has had to inherit. So you're right, this policy of maximum deference or maximum appeasement only emboldens the regime.

**ALINEJAD:** Exactly. I remember that when Rob Malley was a special envoy of the Biden administration team, I said the same thing, that you are wasting the resources of America, the time, and it's just a waste negotiating with a regime that doesn't understand language of diplomacy. They understand only one language, language of pressure. That is something that the Trump administration should think about it because I keep hearing that, "maximum pressure." But at the same time, they want to negotiate with the Islamic Republic with a government that actually take dual national citizen hostage as their diplomacy to make money, to bring people on the table to negotiate.

So I strongly believe that right now, if we say that this regime do not understand the language of diplomacy, we have to actually support the people of Iran who want to bring this regime down. I never, never ask the Western leaders to come and save us. But what I want is very clear. I want them to stop saving the Islamic Republic. What can save the Islamic



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Republic? Nuclear deal, burying human rights under a nuclear deal, absolutely is going to help the Islamic Republic to survive. So, I want to just – to your listeners, because a lot of time Americans telling me that, “Why should I care about Iran miles away from America? We are not at war with the Islamic Republic.”

**DUBOWITZ:** Well, the Islamic Republic is at war with us.

**ALINEJAD:** That's what I think.

**DUBOWITZ:** They killed and maimed thousands of Americans.

**ALINEJAD:** Islamic Republic is at war not only with its own people, with America, with Israel. So Americans, especially now when they say, “For us, America is first, we don't care about the rest of the world.” I want to tell them that for the ayatollahs, America first as well, the first thing that they want to do, to destroy America, to destroy democracy. So that's why if we really believe America first, democracy first, we should think about how to eliminate those who kill innocent people. They're killing teenager girls in Iran. They're raping women. They're killing men, executing men for the – I mean, just simply take to the street with empty hand and say that we want freedom. They sent killers in front of my house in Brooklyn to kill me. What do you want me to do?

**DUBOWITZ:** Well, Masih, it's worth pointing out that since 2009, throughout these protest movements, as millions of Iranians have been on the streets, one of the chants that they utter is, “Death to the dictator.”

**ALINEJAD:** What does it mean?

**DUBOWITZ:** Death to the ayatollah. Death to the regime. Death to the Islamic Republic. And they also say this, and I think it's a really important point for us perhaps to end on, is they say, “Death to the dictator. President Obama, President Biden, President Trump, are you with us, or are you with a dictator?” President Obama, President Biden, unfortunately, both those presidents decided to engage with the dictator and not support the Iranian people.

**ALINEJAD:** I was invited by Obama's administration to do an interview with him. And Obama's administration got cold feet saying that if we do this interview with an Iranian journalist working for a foreign newspaper, we might send a signal to the Islamic Republic that the U.S. government supporting the Green Movement, the uprising, the protesters. They said that we decided not to support the people of Iran, in my opinion. And what happened, at the same time, President Obama was sending a letter to Ali Khamenei to get a nuclear deal. I strongly believe that the true allies of Americans, democratic countries, are the people of Iran.

So when you legitimize this government, when you negotiate with them, not only you betraying the people of Iran, you betraying your own people. Yes, when I came in America, I learned what happened in Vegas, stays in Vegas. But believe me, what happens in the Middle East is not going to stay in the Middle East. Islamic Republic and its proxies, Houthis, Hamas, Hezbollah, they are one of the most deadliest virus, and they will infect the rest of the world if you don't join the people of Iran to end them.

**DUBOWITZ:** Great note to end on. First of all, I want to thank you so much for joining the podcast. I want to thank you for your courage. I want to thank you for your commitment to the United States. You're another example of what I always say, which is the only place where Iranians can't succeed is inside the Islamic Republic. Because whenever Iranians come to the United States or Canada or go to Europe, we get these incredible immigrants who are unbelievably hardworking and resilient and committed. So we're very proud that you are an Iranian-American.

**ALINEJAD:** Thank you so much.

**DUBOWITZ:** And you've come here.



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**ALINEJAD:** I mean, these days when I jump on bicycle or when I walk in the street, I shout, "I love you America." Because think about it, how ironic the government from my birth country, Iran, the regime, the ayatollahs trying to kill me. The government of my new country trying to protect me. This is one of the most sad things and beautiful thing, which makes me to be very proud American Iranian.

**DUBOWITZ:** Well, you're a wonderful American, you're a great warrior, and we're very proud to have you on the show. So thanks, Masih.

**ALINEJAD:** I hope one day, I can invite you to my beautiful country, Iran. You're going to have fun there.

**DUBOWITZ:** Next year in a free Iran.

**ALINEJAD:** See you in Iran.

**DUBOWITZ:** The message is clear: the regime is exporting terror to American streets. But Masih Alinejad? She is not backing down. She is a living testament to the regime's fear and the Iranian people's courage. I'm Mark Dubowitz. This has been *The Iran Breakdown*. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time when we break it down again.