SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE	: UNITED STATE
	-
JENNY RUBIN, ET AL.,)
Petitioners,)
v.) No. 16-534
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, ET AL.,)
Respondents.)

Pages: 1 through 49

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4	Petitioners,)
5	v.) No. 16-534
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7	Respondents.)
8		-
9		
10	Washington, D.C.	
11	Monday, December 4, 2	2017
12		
13	The above-entitled mat	ter came on for oral
14	argument before the Supreme Court	of the United States
15	at 11:11 a.m.	
16		
17	APPEARANCES:	
18	ASHER PERLIN, Hollywood, Florida;	on behalf
19	of the Petitioners	
20	DAVID A. STRAUSS, Chicago, Illinoi	s; on behalf of
21	the Respondents	
22	ZACHARY D. TRIPP, Assistant to the	e Solicitor
23	General, Department of Justice	e, Washington, D.C.;
24	on behalf of the United States	s as amicus curiae,
25	supporting the Respondents	

1	CONTENTS	
2	ORAL ARGUMENT OF:	PAGE:
3	ASHER PERLIN	
4	On behalf of the Petitioners	3
5	ORAL ARGUMENT OF:	
6	DAVID A. STRAUSS	
7	On behalf of the Respondents	29
8	ORAL ARGUMENT OF:	
9	ZACHARY D. TRIPP	
10	On behalf of the United States	
11	as amicus curiae, supporting the	
12	Respondents	39
13	REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF:	
14	ASHER PERLIN	
15	On behalf of the Petitioner	44
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		
21		
22		
23		
24		
25		

1	PROCEEDINGS
2	(11:11 a.m.)
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: We'll hear
4	argument next in Case 16-534, Rubin versus the
5	Islamic Republic of Iran.
6	Mr. Perlin.
7	ORAL ARGUMENT OF ASHER PERLIN
8	ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONERS
9	MR. PERLIN: Mr. Chief Justice, and
10	may it please the Court:
11	In 2008, Congress comprehensively
12	overhauled the terrorism exception to foreign
13	sovereign immunity to close gaps that had for
14	years allowed foreign terror states to thumb
15	their noses at U.S. judgments finding them
16	liable for acts of terrorism while their
17	victims were drawn into a long, bitter, and
18	often futile search for scarce assets that
19	would be subject to execution under the
20	exceedingly narrow commercial exception to
21	foreign sovereign immunity.
22	The centerpiece of that legislation is
23	Section 1610(g). That provision provides that
24	American terrorism victims can execute their
25	judgments upon the property of a foreign state

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1 that is subject -- against which a -- a
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- judgment has been entered under 1605A, and it
- 3 makes available the property of the state's
- 4 agencies and instrumentalities.
- 5 JUSTICE GINSBURG: If -- if --
- 6 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well --
- 7 JUSTICE KENNEDY: As provided in the
- 8 section.
- 9 MR. PERLIN: As provided in this
- 10 section. The question is what that -- what
- 11 that provision means. The Respondents would
- 12 have the Court delete the three words between
- the word "execution" and the words "as provided
- in this section." What it actually says is
- that the property is subject to execution upon
- 16 that judgment as provided in this section.
- 17 JUSTICE GINSBURG: We know what --
- 18 that -- that Congress wanted to do away with
- 19 what they call the Bancec factors, and this
- statute was written perfectly to do just that.
- 21 You say it does something more.
- 22 MR. PERLIN: It has to do more, Your
- Honor.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: And why does it
- 25 have to? What the statute did is it made more

- 1 assets available because you didn't have to
- 2 worry whether it was the state itself, an
- 3 instrumentality of the state, an agency. The
- 4 -- the property of any of those entities was
- 5 available.
- 6 So it swelled the assets that would be
- 7 available. But it didn't say anything, not a
- 8 word, about immunity.
- 9 MR. PERLIN: Well, there -- there's
- 10 two questions there. It doesn't say anything
- 11 about immunity, but those are magic words. It
- does say that the property is subject to
- 13 execution.
- 14 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Magic words under
- 15 (a) and (b).
- MR. PERLIN: I'm sorry?
- 17 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: In 1610 in (a) and
- 18 (b), Congress knew how directly to say property
- is not or is subject, immune from attachment.
- 20 But it used something very different here.
- 21 Rather, it says that property is, quote,
- 22 "subject to attachment as provided in this
- 23 section." Those are two very distinct
- 24 formulations.
- MR. PERLIN: They are different.

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1 Subsections (a) and (b) were part of the
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- 2 original Foreign Sovereign Immunity Act from
- 3 1976. There were other amendments since then.
- 4 If you look at subsection (f)(1), which the
- 5 President has waived, it says "shall be subject
- 6 to execution."
- 7 The -- the Terrorism Risk Insurance
- 8 Act, which is codified as a note to subsection
- 9 -- to Section 1610, also says shall be subject
- 10 to execution to -- to execution. So the
- 11 language -- when Congress sat down to write
- 12 subsection (g), it was looking at the other
- 13 terrorism exceptions to execution immunity that
- it had already passed, and those were (f) in
- 15 TRIA, and it modeled (g) after -- after those
- 16 sections.
- 17 JUSTICE BREYER: Can they execute,
- 18 your clients, on the embassy?
- MR. PERLIN: So --
- 20 JUSTICE BREYER: On the uniform -- on
- 21 the uniforms that the people in the embassy
- 22 wear, on -- on the papers that the ambassador
- 23 keeps in his desk if, in fact, you read "as
- 24 provided in this section," the answer is no.
- 25 If you read it to include because it has to be

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1 commercial, all right? Under your reading,
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- where those words must mean something else,
- 3 can't they do it?
- 4 MR. PERLIN: They cannot.
- 5 JUSTICE BREYER: Why not?
- 6 MR. PERLIN: Subsection -- Section
- 7 1609 says that Section 1610 -- execution under
- 8 1610 is subject to international agreements
- 9 like the Vienna Convention which would protect
- 10 diplomatic property, and Section 1611 protects
- 11 military assets, certain central bank assets.
- 12 JUSTICE BREYER: Okay.
- MR. PERLIN: Congress, when they
- enacted 1610(g), they did not completely
- abrogate foreign sovereign immunity for terror
- 16 states. They wanted to provide a remedy for
- 17 the victims, they wanted to punish and deter
- 18 the terror states, but at the same time,
- 19 Congress recognized that Iran and North Korea,
- 20 Syria, Sudan, these are sovereign states, and
- they're entitled to a bare minimum of sovereign
- 22 immunity, and Congress retained that bare
- 23 minimum by protecting quintessentially
- 24 sovereign assets while making everything else
- 25 subject to execution.

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1
               JUSTICE ALITO: What does "as provided
      in this section" mean? Am I right you think it
 2
      incorporates only procedural requirements?
 3
               MR. PERLIN: No, Your Honor there are
 4
      a number of -- a number -- no, Your Honor. A
 5
      number of --
 6
 7
               JUSTICE ALITO: What does it -- what
      does it mean?
 8
               MR. PERLIN: It means, as provided --
 9
      the way to read it is it refers to the judgment
10
      that's entered under 1605A. As provided in
11
12
      this section, it says, execution -- you can
13
      have execution upon the property -- upon that
14
      judgment as provided in this section.
15
               "As provided in this section" modifies
      the judgment, "upon that judgment," and it --
16
17
      and it refers to the section -- Section 1605A,
      which is the only section mentioned in this
18
      sentence. It's referring back to the section,
19
      1605A, that was a couple lines above in the
20
21
      same sentence.
2.2
               And what it says is that a judgment
23
      entered -- that Section 1610(g), which provides
24
      sweeping remedies for terrorism victims, is
      only applicable to those who hold judgments
25
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1 entered under the statutory cause of action of
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- 2 1605A. It is not available to other plaintiffs
- 3 holding terrorism judgments.
- It also extends -- it also extends,
- 5 "as provided in the -- this section," extends
- 6 the remedies. The remedies -- remember, the
- 7 remedies of 1605A, capital A, are very novel,
- 8 to say the least. You -- you -- you don't have
- 9 a private right of action anywhere else in the
- 10 Sovereign -- Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act.
- 11 You don't have any other provision that allows
- 12 punitive damages against a sovereign state,
- which is a sure sign that Congress was not
- 14 concerned about affronting the dignity of
- 15 terror states.
- 16 They allowed punitive damages. They
- 17 -- they expected those to be enforced. They
- 18 allowed a pre-judgment lien of lis pendens to
- 19 attach to all sovereign -- all of the state's
- 20 property that is subject to execution under
- 21 1610, that -- including property of any party
- that the plaintiff identifies as being
- 23 controlled by -- by that terror state.
- 24 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: If -- if --
- JUSTICE ALITO: So "as provided in

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this section" is really superfluous, isn't
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- 2 it --
- 3 MR. PERLIN: It's --
- 4 JUSTICE ALITO: -- under your
- 5 interpretation?
- 6 MR. PERLIN: It's not. It refers --
- 7 well, it's -- it emphasizes the centrality of
- 8 the 1605 judgment to this provision. And it
- 9 also -- there's -- there's no other way to read
- 10 it. If you read it as -- as the Respondents
- 11 would, there's no -- there's no provision
- within 1610 that can pair with 1610. They say
- 13 that it must pair with another substantive
- 14 provision of 1610.
- But nothing works. Try to -- try to
- 16 go through. It says that -- 1610(g) says that
- 17 the property of a foreign state is subject to
- 18 execution and the property of an agency or
- 19 instrumentality.
- Now, if this were only a veil-piercing
- 21 mechanism, as the Respondents claim, there's no
- reason to mention the property of the foreign
- 23 state.
- You don't need to pierce the veil to
- reach the property of the -- of the judgment

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1 debtor terror state. You just go straight for
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- 2 that property. And if you have a judgment
- 3 against the agency or instrumentality --
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I'm sorry. I
- 5 thought that the University of Chicago had
- 6 raised an interesting argument, that the
- 7 definition of foreign state in the statute
- 8 includes, by definition, an agency or
- 9 instrumentality of a foreign state, so that the
- 10 reference to foreign state that you're relying
- 11 upon does include the concept of piercing the
- 12 corporate veil in its very definition.
- MR. PERLIN: Well, that would -- that
- 14 would -- that itself would abrogate Bancec, the
- 15 rationale that University --
- 16 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, that -- not
- 17 quite, because what -- I mean, this provision
- deals directly in aid of the plaintiffs in the
- 19 Bancec case and in the others that had found
- 20 against plaintiffs.
- 21 There are at least three cases where a
- 22 class of plaintiffs were found not to be in a
- 23 sufficiently tied relationship to the foreign
- 24 state and the plaintiffs there couldn't
- 25 recover, so there was a real issue this was

- 1 addressing, the fact that there were
- 2 subsidiaries and agencies of foreign state who
- 3 had commercial property, and it wasn't being
- 4 made available to plaintiffs.
- 5 MR. PERLIN: So the question would be
- 6 to ask the Respondents why they don't mention
- 7 those cases in their briefs. We have
- 8 maintained, consistently, that the property of
- 9 the foreign state, those words, are completely
- 10 not just superfluous but misleading if there --
- if this is just a veil-piercing mechanism. If
- it's veil-piercing mechanism --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Why? It gave them
- 14 what those three cases denied them. It gives
- other plaintiffs with similar claims a lot --
- 16 access to a lot of -- of property that they
- 17 wouldn't have had under Bancec.
- 18 MR. PERLIN: The provisions that allow
- 19 execution upon the property of an agency or
- 20 instrumentality gives access to -- to the
- 21 agency or instrumentality's property.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Well, give an
- 23 example. I mean, there's a famous example
- 24 which you probably know about, the -- the
- 25 letter of Cyrus, saying to everybody throughout

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1 the Middle East that the Jews are free and they
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- 2 can go back to Israel, Palestine, the temple,
- 3 and that letter exists and Persia -- the
- 4 Persian letter, and Iran has sent it around the
- 5 world.
- 6 Now, in your view, they have -- and
- 7 people have looked at it. And if it comes to
- 8 the United States, you can seize it. Is that
- 9 -- that's your view of it? Because if it is,
- of course, if Congress knew about it, then they
- 11 -- they might have had a general idea, given
- 12 the nature of the stuff in Chicago.
- MR. PERLIN: Well --
- JUSTICE BREYER: I -- I would be
- 15 surprised that they'd want to do that.
- MR. PERLIN: We -- you might be
- 17 surprised, but Congress has addressed --
- 18 JUSTICE BREYER: Your view is, yes,
- 19 you could seize it?
- 20 MR. PERLIN: It would depend on --
- 21 yes, you could. It -- Congress has addressed
- this very question, twice, in 22 U.S.C. 2459,
- 23 Congress provided a very specific and limited
- 24 immunity for culturally significant objects
- 25 being brought to the United -- culturally

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1 significant objects being brought to the United
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- 2 States for display or exhibition.
- 3 There was a very specific immunity
- 4 there that -- that the -- that somebody who
- 5 wants to bring in that -- that property, those
- 6 exhibits can apply to the State Department in
- 7 advance and receive a letter immunizing those
- 8 -- those assets from -- from judicial process.
- 9 And -- and last year --
- 10 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Did that -- did
- 11 that exist in, what was it, 1939 --
- 12 MR. PERLIN: It did not. It did not.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: -- when Chicago got
- 14 this?
- MR. PERLIN: But Congress could have
- made that provision retroactive, and it didn't.
- 17 And Congress --
- 18 JUSTICE GINSBURG: But what about the
- 19 provision that Congress did enact in -- and
- 20 we've been talking about (g) and so -- so this
- is subsection (3), refers to "nothing ... shall
- 22 be construed to supersede the authority of a
- 23 court to prevent ... the impairment of an
- 24 interest held by a person who is not liable in
- 25 the action."

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1 Why isn't the University of Chicago
```

- 2 such a person? They're certainly not liable in
- 3 the action. And they got this property when
- 4 Iran was not listed as a terrorist state.
- 5 MR. PERLIN: Uh-huh.
- 6 JUSTICE GINSBURG: The Shah was in
- 7 control, not the Ayatollah.
- 8 MR. PERLIN: The University hasn't
- 9 raised that as a defense. And because Section
- 10 1610(g)(3) refers to a -- a party with an
- 11 ownership interest, not just a -- some other
- intangible interest -- and -- and even to the
- extent that they do, that doesn't mean that the
- 14 Court should not be able to transfer title to a
- 15 -- to whatever party would be ready to -- to
- 16 pay the price.
- 17 And we think it would be Iran, by the
- 18 way. If -- if the Court would construe this
- 19 statute as Congress, we think, as we read it,
- 20 Congress would finally -- I mean Iran would
- 21 finally pay attention to a judgment, and they
- 22 would say, we're -- we're about to lose our --
- 23 our -- our artifacts --
- 24 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Well, what are the
- 25 terms of that? The University of Chicago has

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1 had this since 1939. Iran has never tried to
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- 2 take it back. What are the terms of the lease?
- 3 MR. PERLIN: They have -- it's not a
- 4 lease. It was a long-term loan for the -- for
- 5 the study and cataloguing, publishing,
- 6 photographing, cleaning, of these -- of these
- 7 artifacts.
- 8 And University of Chicago does not
- 9 assert an ownership interest. They -- they say
- 10 that they're -- in the briefs, they say they're
- 11 trustees, or they were entrusted -- they don't
- even call themselves trustees even; they say
- they were entrusted with this. Every -- they
- 14 use language, but they never say we have a
- 15 concrete right in these -- in these assets.
- 16 And if they do, the court can -- the
- 17 district court, when it orders the sale, it can
- 18 make accommodation for that. It can say that
- 19 whoever buys it -- and we would be -- we're --
- 20 my clients would be perfectly happy if --
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: The University of
- 22 Chicago --
- MR. PERLIN: -- these artifacts
- 24 remained in the University of Chicago.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: -- is not

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1 interested in this property for the money --
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- 2 for money. It's interested in having these
- 3 antiquities --
- 4 MR. PERLIN: I know.
- 5 JUSTICE GINSBURG: -- on display, to
- 6 be researched, to be seen.
- 7 MR. PERLIN: But it doesn't belong to
- 8 them. It's not theirs. And whoever it belongs
- 9 to can decide whether they're the best
- 10 university to study it.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: You're answering my
- 12 question that, well, don't worry about
- 13 University of Chicago, the district court can
- 14 give them some money.
- MR. PERLIN: No, not money. Not
- 16 money. The district court, if they have a -- a
- 17 right, to the extent that they have a right to
- 18 retain the -- the artifacts and continue their
- 19 work with them, the district court can say that
- 20 the sale should be conducted subject to the
- 21 rights of the University of Chicago. It
- 22 doesn't -- it doesn't mean that it's all --
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: But what would
- 24 those rights --
- MR. PERLIN: -- it's not all or

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1 nothing. The property can be divided up.
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- JUSTICE GINSBURG: -- be? Their
- 3 rights have been from 1939 on they have this
- 4 property.
- 5 MR. PERLIN: Well, since 1980, they've
- 6 had the property because Iran couldn't get it
- 7 back, for a big part of that time. And for a
- 8 big part of the time before that, every now and
- 9 then, Iran was asking, when are you going to
- 10 finish -- when are you going to finish studying
- 11 these things. And -- and they were not very
- 12 forthcoming.
- When this lawsuit was filed, they
- 14 moved into -- they expedited their study of the
- assets because they realized that they might
- lose them. And, now, again, University of
- 17 Chicago is really an amicus here. They don't
- 18 -- they have no interest in these assets.
- 19 They -- and to the extent that they
- 20 do, the Court can protect that. It -- it can
- 21 protect that interest in a -- in a sale.
- 22 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, assuming
- you're right, does that mean, if you lose here,
- you think Iran will be able to repatriate the
- 25 assets?

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1 MR. PERLIN: Absolutely. There's
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- 2 nothing in their way. They did. They did. We
- 3 lost -- we lost in the district court, and
- 4 there was another collection of Iran --
- 5 Iran-owned assets, and on the eve of the -- the
- 6 argument in the court of appeals, they were
- 7 shipped back to Iran after the court had denied
- 8 our -- our motion to stay, but -- but they were
- 9 shipped back to Iran. And they --
- 10 JUSTICE BREYER: They have other
- 11 things in the United States. I mean, it seems
- 12 to me so far, that the main difference between
- 13 your interpretation and the other side as a
- 14 practical matter is that if you're right, that
- private people will be able to take cultural
- 16 assets from Persia and sell them and ship them
- 17 back to Iran, and if they're right, you will
- 18 have to limit your recovery to commercial
- 19 objects because that's what the other parts of
- 20 the statute provide.
- MR. PERLIN: Well --
- JUSTICE BREYER: Now -- now, that's
- 23 not perhaps going to turn out to be relevant to
- 24 the decision. I grant you that. But I -- I --
- 25 I -- it's something I'm -- I'm -- like to have

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1 in my mind.
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- 2 MR. PERLIN: Okay. The -- the
- 3 distinction under the foreign sovereign
- 4 immunity -- let's put it this way. They want
- 5 to cabin us into Section 1610(a)(7), which is
- 6 the commercial use exception for property owned
- 7 by the state.
- 8 That provision, as the Seventh Circuit
- 9 held, requires not just use for a commercial
- 10 activity, but it has to be used by the foreign
- 11 state. And a number of courts of appeal have
- 12 held, as did the Seventh Circuit and this Court
- 13 did not accept review of this issue, that --
- 14 that it has to be -- that the use must be by
- the foreign state itself, even though that's
- 16 not in the -- those words are not in the
- 17 statute.
- But a number of courts of appeal have
- 19 looked at financial assets -- let's take the,
- 20 you know, proceeds of a -- of a commercial
- 21 transaction between a state and private parties
- that are proceeds that are held in an account,
- that are intended for the foreign state, and
- the courts have said that's not commercial use
- 25 property. Why? Not because it's the proceeds

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of a commercial transaction, but because those
```

- 2 proceeds belong -- have not yet been used by
- 3 the foreign state for commercial activity.
- 4 They're just sitting in the account
- 5 passively waiting to be used, but they haven't
- 6 been used yet, and the state can say, we're
- 7 going to put it in our general account --
- 8 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That just seems
- 9 like --
- 10 MR. PERLIN: -- in the Treasury.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: -- an issue
- 12 Congress has to address.
- MR. PERLIN: Well, Congress --
- 14 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: And those courts
- may well be wrong. I don't know.
- MR. PERLIN: What I'm saying is that
- 17 the practical difference between our
- 18 construction and the Respondents' construction
- is not antiquities. It's all of these cases
- 20 dealing with -- with passive bank accounts.
- 21 There's another case in California where there
- 22 was a judgment obtained by the Ministry of
- 23 Defense of Iran against a defense contractor,
- 24 and the court said the money paid by the -- by
- 25 the Ministry of Defense, that's not commercial

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1 use property because it hasn't been used by
```

- 2 Iran.
- 3 There -- there's -- there are
- 4 countless cases like this, and this is the body
- 5 -- these are the -- these are the -- the cases
- 6 that this provision is -- is -- or one group of
- 7 cases this provision is intended to cover.
- 8 It's not intended to cover antiquities, and I
- 9 don't think there's going to be a -- a mad rush
- 10 to grab antiquities.
- JUSTICE BREYER: That's what you're
- doing yourself in this case; that's what it is,
- 13 isn't it?
- MR. PERLIN: That's all that they've
- 15 left. That's all -- this -- this proceeding
- 16 below began in 2003. The -- the terror attack
- in this case was in 1997. My clients have been
- 18 waiting 20 years to enforce their judgment
- 19 against Iran. Iran does not pay judgments.
- 20 You know -- you know, it's not
- 21 Argentina, they can't afford to pay the
- 22 judgment. They just don't. And they don't --
- they don't care what the American courts say.
- 24 And Congress finally said enough is enough, and
- 25 -- and they said there's punitive damages and

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1 we're going to waive res judicata, we're going
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- 2 to waive collateral estoppel, we're going to
- 3 waive statutes of limitations; you can go back
- 4 and convert your old judgments into a new 1605A
- 5 judgment and use -- and use that tool under
- 6 1610(g), under our provision to enforce it.
- 7 Congress said enough is enough. We
- 8 want these judgments enforced. And it's not
- 9 about antiquities. That's -- that's
- 10 what the Respondents are writing about, but
- 11 they will not tell you what the -- what the
- 12 property of a foreign state applies to.
- 13 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Is there anything
- 14 --
- 15 MR. PERLIN: The United States doesn't
- 16 --
- 17 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Is -- is there
- anything in the legislative record that shows
- 19 that Congress was intending to do anything
- other than dispense with the Bancec?
- MR. PERLIN: Absolutely.
- JUSTICE GINSBURG: Yes?
- MR. PERLIN: Yes, it says that it
- 24 applies -- that the provision will apply to any
- 25 property in which the foreign state has a

```
1 beneficial ownership. That any property in
```

- which the foreign state has a beneficial
- 3 ownership is subject to execution of that
- 4 judgment. It says the -- the -- the sponsors
- 5 -- the Senate sponsors said that it is intended
- 6 to remove many of the barriers to execution of
- 7 a judgment. And according to Respondents, it
- 8 only addresses one of those barriers.
- 9 It says that the -- the right to the
- 10 -- to the property is subject to a simple
- 11 ownership test. A simple ownership test. When
- 12 you start piercing veils and layers of veils,
- 13 that is not a simple ownership test. That
- 14 might have been intended to be included in --
- in the -- but that's not what was being
- 16 addressed.
- 17 And, finally, what the -- what the
- 18 statute does say, the legislative history --
- 19 the House Report says that "although it
- 20 subjects to execution any property in which the
- 21 state has a beneficial -- beneficial interest,
- it does not extend to diplomatic property."
- So once Congress is excluding
- 24 specifically that narrow class of
- 25 quintessentially sovereign property, diplomatic

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1 property, you know that it's extending to -- it
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- 2 covers everything else. There's no reason --
- 3 if it didn't cover commercial use property or
- 4 non- -- sorry, non-commercial use property,
- 5 there's no reason to specifically mention
- 6 diplomatic property because, obviously, that's
- 7 going to be included in non-commercial.
- 8 This applies to everything.
- 9 Everything except diplomatic, military, and
- 10 certain central bank assets. The idea that --
- 11 that Congress would be concerned with
- 12 affronting the dignity of a state sponsor of
- 13 terrorism and would extend protection to their
- 14 non-commercial assets for that reason, to avoid
- 15 an affront to their dignity, is just
- 16 preposterous.
- 17 JUSTICE GINSBURG: Do you have any
- other section that dispenses with the sovereign
- immunity then that doesn't mention -- doesn't
- 20 say anything that refers to immunity?
- 21 MR. PERLIN: Well, I mentioned Section
- 1610(f)(1). It says that the property shall be
- 23 subject to execution. And the TRIA, Terrorism
- 24 Risk Insurance Act, which is a note. I don't
- 25 think I included it -- it was an oversight --

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1 in the -- in the statutory appendix, but it's
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- 2 -- it's codified as a note to Section 1610, and
- 3 that -- that provision -- these are the three
- 4 terrorism provisions -- execution immunity
- 5 provisions of the Foreign Sovereign Immunity
- 6 Act, and not one of them uses the word immunity
- 7 -- it says that we're abrogating immunity here
- 8 or limiting immunity. So, again, it's not
- 9 abrogating it wholesale; it's maintaining a --
- 10 a -- a skeletal remain of sovereign immunity
- 11 because -- in recognition of the fact that
- 12 these states are sovereign.
- 13 JUSTICE ALITO: All right. In your
- 14 brief, you offered several other
- interpretations of the phrase "as provided in
- 16 this section, "interpretations that are
- 17 different from the one --
- MR. PERLIN: Yes.
- 19 JUSTICE ALITO: -- you provided this
- 20 morning. Are you disavowing those now?
- MR. PERLIN: I think that the best
- 22 construction is that it refers to the judgment
- 23 entered under 1605A. I think that those are
- 24 alternative constructions that are viable and
- 25 certainly more viable than the Seventh

- 1 Circuit's.
- 2 Again, if you sit down and try to
- 3 think of cases where -- where the property of a
- 4 foreign state will have applicability --
- 5 applicability under 1610(g) where it wouldn't
- 6 -- where this property wouldn't be subject to
- 7 execution under 1610(a)(7), right, according to
- 8 the Respondents' construction, you won't find
- 9 it. You will not come up with a case or you're
- 10 going to have to work very, very hard and
- 11 there's no reason Congress would have included
- 12 -- if this were only meant to pierce a veil,
- 13 Congress would have said subject to subsection
- (3), or paragraph (3), the property of an
- agency or instrumentality of a foreign state
- 16 against which a judgment has been entered under
- 17 1605A is subject to execution -- to attachment
- 18 and execution.
- 19 It did not need to mention the
- 20 property of the foreign state. Iran and the
- 21 government both talk about how it had to
- 22 mention the foreign state. Well, it's true, it
- 23 had to mention the foreign state because a
- 24 judgment was entered against the foreign state,
- 25 but it does not need to single out the property

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of the foreign state, if all this were -- was a
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- veil-piercing mechanism.
- 4 cannot pierce the veil of a company or a
- 5 country to reach the property the country owns
- 6 directly.
- 7 Now, let me just point out that none
- 8 of the other provisions of 1610 work with (q)
- 9 either. (b), which the Seventh Circuit relied
- 10 on -- it said this section refers to subsection
- -- really refers to subsections (a) and (b).
- 12 Subsection (b) applies only where there's a
- 13 judgment entered against the agency or
- 14 instrumentality.
- 15 If you have -- again, if you have a
- 16 judgment against the agency or instrumentality,
- 17 you don't need a veil-piercing mechanism to
- 18 reach it because you go after -- you go after
- 19 its property directly.
- 20 (c) is -- is -- specifically mentions
- 21 (a) and (b) only, that an execution referenced
- under (a) and (b), and it doesn't mention (g).
- 23 And Congress could have amended it to include
- 24 executions under (q).
- 25 (d) is for prejudgment attachment

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where there's an express waiver of immunity.
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- None of these provisions work. I'm
- 3 going to -- I'd like to reserve the rest of my
- 4 time for rebuttal, but if you -- if you sit
- 5 down and try to -- they don't work. It just
- 6 doesn't -- there's no way to read it according
- 7 to the Seventh Circuit and -- and apply it.
- 8 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 9 counsel.
- 10 Mr. Strauss.
- ORAL ARGUMENT OF DAVID A. STRAUSS
- 12 ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENTS
- MR. STRAUSS: Thank you, Mr. Chief
- 14 Justice, and may it please the Court:
- 15 Let me first pick up on a piece of the
- legislative history that my friend quoted to
- 17 the Court. Senator Specter, who introduced the
- precursor of what became 1610(g), did say that,
- 19 as -- as Mr. Perlin said, that the provision
- was designed to eliminate many of the barriers
- 21 which are preventing U.S. citizens from
- 22 collecting on court-ordered damages. He then
- 23 said it does this by changing the legal
- 24 standard of the Bancec doctrine. So that was
- 25 the way in which this exposed more assets --

- 1 more property to execution by terrorism
- 2 plaintiffs.
- In fact, the Petitioners' position
- 4 about the construction of 1610(g) is wrong for
- 5 four independently sufficient reasons. One is
- 6 the language the Court has focused on, "as
- 7 provided in this section." This section, is
- 8 Section 1610, that is the section of which (g)
- 9 is a subsection. So the phrase "as provided in
- 10 this section" means the Petitioners have to
- 11 satisfy the provisions of 1610, which means
- that only property used for commercial activity
- in the United States can be seized. And
- 14 Petitioners, I think, have just not come up
- 15 with a plausible alternative account of what
- 16 "as provided in this section" means.
- 17 But there's a second reason. And it
- 18 has to do with the difference between
- 19 subsection (g) and the provisions of subsection
- 20 1610 that really do abrogate sovereign
- 21 immunity. The Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act
- 22 says, in Section 1609, that the property of
- foreign states in the U.S. shall be immune from
- 24 attachment, except as provided in 1610.
- Then the subsections of 1610 say in

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1 terms one after another that certain property
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- 2 shall not be immune. Subsection (a) says that,
- as does (b), as does (d), as does (e).
- 4 Subsection (g) contains no such language. The
- 5 relevant part of subsection (g) does not refer
- 6 to immunity at all.
- 7 And there's a reason for that. The
- 8 reason is that (g) is about Bancec, and the
- 9 Bancec doctrine is not an immunity doctrine.
- 10 The Court was very explicit about that in the
- 11 decision, the Bancec decision itself.
- 12 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, you do
- 13 think -- agree with him, don't you, that the
- 14 property of a foreign state in -- in (g) (1)
- is a -- is a strong indication at least that it
- is not limited to overturning the Bancec
- 17 decision?
- 18 MR. STRAUSS: No, I -- I don't agree
- 19 with that, Mr. Chief Justice. I think what's
- 20 going on there is Congress wanted to make it
- 21 very clear that Bancec was no longer -- no
- longer going to be a barrier in these cases.
- 23 And so it said property of the state,
- 24 property of agencies, property of
- instrumentalities, property of separate

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1 juridical entities, interests in separate
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- 2 juridical entities, all of these things are in
- 3 the same basket, and all of them are subject to
- 4 attachment and execution.
- I think that's why you have that --
- 6 that language in -- in (g)(1). It's not a --
- 7 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: But Bancec
- 8 wasn't about property of a foreign state. It
- 9 was about the agencies, instrumentalities, et
- 10 cetera.
- MR. STRAUSS: It's -- it is -- that is
- 12 -- it's right that Bancec was not about the
- property of a state itself, but the way the
- 14 section is written, property of a state
- including property that is in a separate
- 16 juridical entity or is an interest held
- 17 directly or indirectly in a separate juridical
- 18 entity, what you see in the legislative history
- is a lot of concern that state judgment debtors
- 20 would be arranging their assets in ways that
- 21 would distance themselves from ownership.
- JUSTICE BREYER: Is it the case there
- 23 on that particular point -- I was trying to
- 24 work out that does Bancec ever apply -- could
- it apply to funds or -- yeah, funds of the

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1 foreign state itself? Is there anything that
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- 2 suggests it applies where the -- where the
- 3 foreign state deposits some money in a bank?
- 4 And then they argue, we -- that isn't
- our money, that's the bank's money, and we're
- 6 just the beneficial owner of that money. And
- 7 Bancec might have said, yes, that's right, it's
- 8 not their money, it's an agency -- it's an
- 9 agent's money.
- 10 MR. STRAUSS: I'll -- I'll say two
- 11 things to that, Justice --
- 12 JUSTICE BREYER: What about that
- 13 argument?
- MR. STRAUSS: -- Justice Breyer. I
- think the Bancec criteria are not very clear.
- 16 The Court deliberately left the criteria vague.
- 17 And I think Congress was concerned about that
- 18 situation.
- 19 And I think that's why you see this
- language in (g)(1) that really tries to be
- 21 comprehensive and cover every base. But what I
- 22 think you don't get out of (g)(1) is anything
- about immunity because it even applies to
- separate juridical entities who would have no
- 25 claim to --

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1
               CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Well, it
 2
      doesn't want them to cover everything in every
             It's titled property in certain actions.
 3
      And I think the other argument on the other
 4
      side is that the certain actions are, you know,
 5
      the ones in -- in -- don't include the ones
 6
 7
      governing the property of the foreign state.
               MR. STRAUSS: Well, I think the
 8
      certain actions, Mr. Chief Justice, are actions
 9
      to execute judgments under 1605A. This is a
10
      special provision to make it easier for
11
12
      terrorism plaintiffs to get assets. It doesn't
      apply to ordinary judgment plaintiffs.
13
               And I think that's the -- that's the
14
      property it's referring to. This is -- really
15
      was intended to make it much easier for
16
17
      plaintiffs who have terrorism-based judgments
      to get their hands on assets, but only those
18
      plaintiffs. And I think those are the actions,
19
      and that's why a judgment entered under 1605A
20
      -- but that doesn't mean that the rest of the
21
2.2
      section does not apply.
23
               In fact, it says the rest of the
24
      section does apply upon -- as -- as provided in
      this -- in this section.
2.5
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               JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Mr. Strauss, I
 2
      think you were cut off on three independent
      reasons. You went -- you went through one and
 3
      two. What were three and four?
 4
               MR. STRAUSS: Two was the -- the
 5
 6
      repetition --
 7
               JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: The one you were
      just talking about.
 8
 9
               MR. STRAUSS: Not the repetition of --
      shall not be immune. The third is this:
10
      Petitioners' position really would nullify a
11
12
      decision Congress made at the very same time it
      enacted 1610(q) in 2008. This is -- we go
13
14
      through this on page 25 and 26 of our brief.
15
               The -- the statute that added
      subsection (q) also created 1605, the cause of
16
      action that -- the remedy the Petitioners
17
               That statute then amended the FSIA to
18
      invoke.
      say to parties like Petitioners, who are
19
20
      seeking to execute a 1605A judgment, must show
      that the property they want to seize is used
21
2.2
      for commercial activity of the United States.
23
      That same statute said that. It said that by
      inserting 1605A into subsection (a), which is a
24
      subsection that requires commercial activity.
25
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1 So Congress did that. It created 1605 --
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- 2 1605A.
- It said if you have a judge -- if you
- 4 are trying to execute a 1605A judgment, here is
- 5 how you do it. Section -- you go to section --
- 6 subsection (a), subsection (a)(7) says you can
- 7 execute a 1605A judgment, provided you can show
- 8 that the property is used for commercial
- 9 activity in the United States. That's what
- 10 that statute does.
- 11 Then the next provision -- or a few
- lines later in the statute, really, it's not
- even the next provision, sets up, enacts
- 14 subsection (g). So, as Petitioners would --
- 15 would have it, Congress created this remedy,
- 16 provided that if you want to execute a judgment
- based on this remedy, you go to subsection (a)
- and you show that the property you're seizing
- is used for commercial purpose -- commercial
- 20 activity in the United States.
- 21 And then immediately Congress said,
- oh, never mind, you don't have to show
- 23 commercial activity. That's Petitioners'
- 24 story.
- 25 That's Petitioners' account of the

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1 significance of 1610(q). And I think that's
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- 2 just no way to read Congress's actions. That
- just does not -- is not a plausible account of
- 4 what Congress might have been doing.
- 5 And there's really a fourth reason as
- 6 well, and it has to do with how central the
- 7 commercial activity limit is to the FSIA and to
- 8 foreign sovereign immunity generally. The
- 9 principle at stake here is the principle that
- 10 commercial property may sometimes be subject to
- 11 seizure, but non-commercial property is not.
- 12 And that principle is -- has the
- deepest roots in U.S. law and international
- 14 law. It's actually anticipated by Chief
- Justice Marshall's opinion in the Schooner
- 16 Exchange. It was the foundation of the Tate
- 17 Letter, which led to the reorganization of
- 18 foreign sovereign immunity doctrines.
- 19 That distinction between commercial
- and non-commercial property is stated
- 21 explicitly in the FSIA itself in Section 1602.
- 22 It's central to the U.N. Convention on
- 23 Immunities of States. It was the holding of a
- 24 recent decision of the International Court of
- Justice which barred the seizure of, as it

1	happens, a cultural center. The ICJ barred the
2	seizure of a cultural center because the
3	cultural center is non-commercial, and that
4	case actually involved the victims of Nazi
5	crimes. So this is an extremely deeply rooted
6	principle. Now, that's not to say Congress
7	could not abrogate it. Of course, Congress
8	could.
9	But the Court said, just last term, in
10	Helmerich, the case involving the Venezuelan
11	seizure of oil rigs, that the Court is not
12	going to assume that Congress has made a quote,
13	in the Court's words, "radical departure" from
14	central principles like that one, unless
15	Congress has made its determination very clear,
16	and here what's really very clear is the
17	opposite, that Congress did not intend to

19 If the Court has no further questions?

override sovereign immunity in Section 1610(g).

20 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,

21 counsel.

MR. STRAUSS: Thank you very much.

23 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Mr. Tripp.

24

18

1	ORAL ARGUMENT OF ZACHARY D. TRIPP ON BEHALF OF THE
2	UNITED STATES, AS AMICUS CURIAE, SUPPORTING THE
3	RESPONDENTS
4	MR. TRIPP: Mr. Chief Justice, and may
5	it please the Court:
6	These ancient Persian artifacts are
7	immune from execution under 1609, and nothing
8	in 1610(g) lifts that immunity. And if I could
9	just make three quick points about why that's
LO	right.
L1	The first, as most of the questioning
L2	has already been focused on today, is it just
L3	can't be squared with the statutory text. The
L4	statute says that the property of these
L5	different entities is subject to execution "as
L6	provided in this section."
L7	But the way Petitioners read it, it
L8	would work exactly the same way if it said the
L9	exact opposite. If it said that the property
20	was subject to execution, regardless of what is
21	provided in the section, and that just can't be
22	right.
23	And then so, second, I think another
24	thing that really drives home that they are
2.5	misreading this law is that the way they read

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1 it, it gives with one hand what it takes away
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- 2 with another.
- 3 So, as my brother was explaining,
- 4 Congress added (g) at the same time it added
- 5 (a)(7), and what (a)(7) says is that these very
- 6 same people, victims of terrorism with
- 7 judgments under 1605A, it says that they can
- 8 execute against the property of a foreign
- 9 state, but only if it's used in commercial
- 10 activity.
- But the way they read (g), those
- 12 people can defeat that limitation just by
- invoking a different subsection of the same
- 14 statute. They can get commercial,
- non-commercial property, whatever, and that's
- 16 just not a sensible way --
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Don't they --
- 18 MR. TRIPP: -- to draft a statute.
- 19 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Don't they explain
- 20 (a) (7) as being present to permit state law
- 21 claims based on the same actions as the federal
- 22 action?
- MR. TRIPP: So --
- 24 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: That would render
- 25 (a)(7) --

- 1 MR. TRIPP: So we -- we don't think
- that's right, and we also just don't think it
- 3 really helps them.
- 4 JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: I know you're
- 5 saying it, but explain to me why.
- 6 MR. TRIPP: Yes. So the reason it's
- 7 not right, we explain this on pages 24 and 25
- 8 of our brief. It has to do with the language
- 9 of 1605A itself. This is on 12A of our gray
- 10 brief if you want to see it.
- 11 And what 1605A says is "The Court
- 12 shall hear a claim under this section if " and
- 13 then the prerequisites to jurisdiction are
- 14 satisfied. So we think anytime a court gets
- 15 jurisdiction and enters a judgment, it's a
- judgment under 1605A, regardless of what cause
- of action they happen to invoke.
- I also think this doesn't really move
- 19 the dial for them much because, in practice, in
- the mine-run application of 1605A, when
- 21 somebody gets jurisdiction, they're also going
- 22 to use the cause of action.
- 23 As Petitioners were -- were
- 24 describing, it's very powerful, it's directly
- on point, punitive damages, vicarious

- 1 liability, and so it would still be true that,
- in the mine-run application of (g), they would
- 3 be reading the law to give with one hand what
- 4 it takes away with the other.
- 5 And then the last thing I'd just like
- 6 to mention here is about the United States'
- 7 competing interests in this case. I mean,
- 8 obviously, we have a very strong interest in
- 9 combatting state-sponsored terrorism. We also
- 10 have concerns in these cases about the
- 11 reciprocal -- reciprocal treatment of our own
- 12 property abroad. And I think, particularly in
- 13 light of those concerns which are quite
- 14 weighty, if Congress was really going to take
- the step of allowing execution against property
- of a cultural and historic significance to
- another country and its people, that would be a
- 18 big deal and it would not be the kind of thing
- 19 that you expect to see buried in a conforming
- 20 amendment without remark.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: Well, how about
- the cases, the other cases he was talking
- about, the ones with proceeds in the bank from
- 24 a commercial activity, et cetera?
- 25 His reading would take care of those

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1 rulings, wouldn't they?
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- 2 MR. TRIPP: I -- so I think one thing
- 3 about -- the way we read the statute too, I
- 4 think it does help to some extent with -- with
- 5 the breadth of the using commercial activity,
- is that the way we read (g), once you -- if you
- 7 have a judgment against the foreign state, you
- 8 can pierce the veil down through to the agency
- 9 or instrumentality, and then you can go after
- 10 the agency or instrumentality's property under
- (b)(3). And (b)(3) does not require that the
- 12 -- the property be used in commercial activity.
- 13 It's enough that the instrumentality is engaged
- in commercial activity.
- JUSTICE SOTOMAYOR: So you think those
- other courts were wrong?
- 17 MR. TRIPP: Those other -- I believe
- 18 the other decisions that he was talking about
- were interpreted in (a)(7), not (b)(3). And so
- 20 -- but as we understand it, the statute works
- 21 together with -- with all of it. It works --
- 22 1610, you can pierce the veil and use (a), (b),
- the procedures in (c) would apply, (d) could
- apply, (f) could apply if it weren't waived.
- 25 And so I think a natural way for Congress to

- 1 pick up all of those -- all of those procedures
- 2 was to say that the property is subject to
- 3 execution as provided in this section.
- 4 And so what Congress did was to tether
- 5 the extent of execution under this
- 6 veil-piercing provision to all the protections
- 7 that are already baked in elsewhere in 1610,
- 8 and those protections ensure that you can't
- 9 execute against the ancient Persian artifacts
- 10 like these.
- So, if there's no further questions,
- we're asking the Court to affirm.
- 13 CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
- 14 counsel.
- Mr. Perlin, you have five minutes
- 16 remaining.
- 17 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF ASHER PERLIN
- 18 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONERS
- MR. PERLIN: The first point I want to
- 20 make is that the -- the government and the
- 21 University claim that our reading would render
- 22 this -- would render subsections (a) (7) and
- 23 (b)(3) superfluous. That's -- that's not the
- 24 case.
- 25 The private right of action under --

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1 under Section 1605A(c) applies only where the
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- 2 plaintiffs are U.S. nationals, members of the
- 3 military, or government contractors or
- 4 employees.
- 5 The immunity waiver that's also in
- 6 1605A, but subsection (a), so 1605A(a), applies
- 7 where the claimant or the victim is a U.S.
- 8 national, a member of the military, or a
- 9 government employee or contractor.
- 10 It's a -- it applies to a broad -- it
- 11 -- the immunity waiver reaches a broader class
- of plaintiffs. The remedy provided under
- 13 1610(g) is limited to those who hold judgments
- 14 under 1605A, and this judgment that's available
- under 1605A is a -- is the statutory judgment.
- The provisions of 1610(a)(7) and
- (b) (3) apply where the judgment relates to a
- 18 claim for which the foreign state is not immune
- 19 under 1605A, which is explicitly referring to
- the immunity exception and it's explicitly
- 21 referring to the broader class of plaintiffs.
- 22 So we don't think that -- that there's -- there
- is some overlap, but it does -- that does not
- render (a) and (b) superfluous.
- 25 Second of all, (b), as Iran argues and

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1 they argued below in -- in the Bennett case,
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- which is Case 16-334, I believe, there, there
- 3 was a case where VISA had collected money for
- 4 Bank Melli, a bank -- an Iranian bank, and was
- 5 holding it because -- because of the sanctions.
- 6 It could not return that -- it could not pay
- 7 that money out. Terrorism victims came and
- 8 said we want to -- we want to enforce a
- 9 judgment against that money that VISA collected
- 10 on behalf of Bank Melli. And VISA filed an
- 11 interpleader action.
- 12 Iran defended, and they said you can't
- 13 -- you cannot enforce your judgment under
- 14 1610(b)(3) because that applies only where the
- 15 judgment is entered against the instrument --
- the agency or instrumentality, and Bank
- 17 Melli -- there's no judgment here. That's what
- 18 Iran -- that's what Iran's argument was. The
- 19 -- and, right -- Iran continues to maintain
- that -- that it won't apply to (b)(3).
- 21 And I think that that's -- I mean,
- 22 that's -- you would have to say that -- you
- 23 would have to read out of (b)(3) the limitation
- that you need a judgment against the agency or
- instrumentality for it to apply to (b)(3).

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1 Again, there's -- there's no way to read this
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- 2 through according to their construction, to
- 3 read it through and apply it.
- 4 Now, again, just to make clear the
- 5 point about the "as provided" -- "upon a
- 6 judgment as provided in this section, " if you
- 7 look at the other substantive provisions of
- 8 1610, they allow -- let's start with -- let's
- 9 look at 1610(a). The opening paragraph says
- 10 that the property of a foreign state "used for
- 11 ... commercial activity in the United States,
- 12 shall not be immune from attachment ... or from
- 13 execution, upon a judgment entered by a court
- of the United States." Right?
- There's "execution, upon a judgment"
- and then words that modify the judgment. Same
- 17 thing in subsection (b). It's the exact same
- 18 structure.
- 19 Subsection (f), it's not the exact
- same words, but it's the same structure again
- 21 that -- that the property is subject to
- 22 execution of any judgment relating to a claim
- for which the state is not immune. Again, the
- 24 words following "judgment" are modifying the
- word "judgment," which makes sense under the

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1 last antecedent rule, and it also makes sense
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- 2 here because we're -- we're talking about a
- 3 particular judgment. Section 1610(g) applies
- 4 to -- to a particular judgment.
- 5 The -- the word "execution" is
- 6 separated from that phrase by a comma. The
- 7 words "upon that judgment as provided in this
- 8 section" do not contain a comma. Those words
- 9 are meant to be read together, and the "as
- 10 provided in this section" is modifying the word
- 11 "judgment."
- 12 The U.S. concerns about foreign --
- 13 about foreign -- foreign relations are
- 14 misplaced. The explicit purpose -- one of the
- 15 explicit purposes of the Foreign Sovereign
- 16 Immunities Act was to remove foreign sovereign
- immunity decisions from the executive branch
- 18 and -- and place them with the courts.
- 19 And that was for two reasons. One
- 20 that -- that plaintiffs, American plaintiffs,
- 21 were being treated unequally based on whatever
- 22 policy consideration was relevant at the time.
- 23 And, two, the government was subject to foreign
- 24 pressure. So to -- to remove this pressure
- 25 from the government, Congress placed this

1	authority in the hands of the courts rather
2	than the government.
3	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: Thank you,
4	counsel.
5	MR. PERLIN: Your Honor.
6	CHIEF JUSTICE ROBERTS: The case is
7	submitted.
8	(Whereupon, at 11:56 a.m., the case in
9	the above-entitled matter was submitted.)
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Official accept [1] 20:13 appendix [1] 26:1 believe [2] 43:17 46:2 1 access [2] 12:16,20 applicability [2] 27:4,5 belong [2] 17:7 21:2 **11:11** [2] **1:**15 **3:**2 accommodation [1] 16:18 applicable [1] 8:25 belongs [1] 17:8 11:56 [1] 49:8 according [4] 24:7 27:7 29:6 47:2 application [2] 41:20 42:2 below [2] 22:16 46:1 12A [1] 41:9 account [6] 20:22 21:4,7 30:15 36: applies [11] 23:12,24 25:8 28:12 beneficial [5] 24:1,2,21,21 33:6 16-334 [1] 46:2 25 37:3 **33**:2,23 **45**:1,6,10 **46**:14 **48**:3 Bennett [1] 46:1 16-534 [1] 3:4 accounts [1] 21:20 apply [15] 14:6 23:24 29:7 32:24, best [2] 17:9 26:21 1602 [1] 37:21 Act [7] 6:2.8 9:10 25:24 26:6 30:21 25 34:13,22,24 43:23,24,24 45:17 between [6] 4:12 19:12 20:21 21: **1605** [3] **10**:8 **35**:16 **36**:1 46:20 25 47:3 17 30:18 37:19 1605A [25] 4:2 8:11,17,20 9:2,7 23: action [10] 9:1 9 14:25 15:3 35:17 Argentina [1] 22:21 bia [3] 18:7.8 42:18 4 **26:**23 **27:**17 **34:**10,20 **35:**20,24 40:22 41:17.22 44:25 46:11 arque [1] 33:4 bitter [1] 3:17 36:2.4.7 40:7 41:9.11.16.20 45:6. actions [7] 34:3,5,9,9,19 37:2 40: argued [1] 46:1 body [1] 22:4 14.15.19 both [1] 27:21 argues [1] 45:25 1605A(a [1] 45:6 activity [15] 20:10 21:3 30:12 35: argument [15] 1:14 2:2,5,8,13 3:4, branch [1] 48:17 1605A(c [1] 45:1 22,25 36:9,20,23 37:7 40:10 42: 7 11:6 19:6 29:11 33:13 34:4 39:1 breadth [1] 43:5 1609 [3] 7:7 30:22 39:7 24 43:5.12.14 47:11 44:17 46:18 BREYER [13] 6:17,20 7:5,12 12:22 1610 [18] 5:17 6:9 7:7.8 9:21 10:12 acts [1] 3:16 around [1] 13:4 **13**:14,18 **19**:10,22 **22**:11 **32**:22 **33**: 12,14 26:2 28:8 30:8,11,20,24,25 actually [3] 4:14 37:14 38:4 arranging [1] 32:20 12.14 43:22 44:7 47:8 added [3] 35:15 40:4,4 artifacts [6] 15:23 16:7,23 17:18 brief [4] 26:14 35:14 41:8,10 1610(a [1] 47:9 address [1] 21:12 39:6 44:9 briefs [2] 12:7 16:10 1610(a)(7 [3] 20:5 27:7 45:16 addressed [3] 13:17.21 24:16 ASHER [5] 1:18 2:3.14 3:7 44:17 brina [1] 14:5 1610(b)(3 [1] 46:14 addresses [1] 24:8 assert [1] 16:9 broad [1] 45:10 1610(f)(1 [1] 25:22 addressing [1] 12:1 assets [20] 3:18 5:1.6 7:11.11.24 broader [2] 45:11.21 1610(g [14] 3:23 7:14 8:23 10:16 advance [1] 14:7 14:8 16:15 18:15.18.25 19:5.16 brother [1] 40:3 23:6 27:5 29:18 30:4 35:13 37:1 affirm [1] 44:12 20:19 25:10,14 29:25 32:20 34:12, brought [2] 13:25 14:1 38:18 39:8 45:13 48:3 afford [1] 22:21 18 buried [1] 42:19 1610(g)(3 [1] 15:10 affront [1] 25:15 Assistant [1] 1:22 buys [1] 16:19 **1611** [1] **7:**10 affronting [2] 9:14 25:12 assume [1] 38:12 C 1939 [3] 14:11 16:1 18:3 agencies [4] 4:4 12:2 31:24 32:9 assuming [1] 18:22 1976 [1] 6:3 cabin [1] 20:5 agency [14] 5:3 10:18 11:3,8 12: attach [1] 9:19 1980 [1] 18:5 California [1] 21:21 19,21 27:15 28:13,16 33:8 43:8, attachment [7] 5:19,22 27:17 28: 1997 [1] 22:17 call [2] 4:19 16:12 10 46:16.24 25 **30**:24 **32**:4 **47**:12 came [2] 1:13 46:7 agent's [1] 33:9 attack [1] 22:16 cannot [3] 7:4 28:4 46:13 agree [2] 31:13,18 attention [1] 15:21 20 [1] 22:18 capital [1] 9:7 agreements [1] 7:8 authority [2] 14:22 49:1 2003 [1] 22:16 care [2] 22:23 42:25 aid [1] 11:18 available [7] 4:3 5:1,5,7 9:2 12:4 2008 [2] 3:11 35:13 Case [17] 3:4 11:19 21:21 22:12.17 AL [2] 1:3.6 2017 [1] 1:11 **27**:9 **32**:22 **34**:3 **38**:4.10 **42**:7 **44**: ALITO [6] 8:1.7 9:25 10:4 26:13.19 avoid [1] 25:14 22 [1] 13:22 24 46:1.2.3 49:6.8 allow [2] 12:18 47:8 away [3] 4:18 40:1 42:4 24 [1] 41:7 cases [12] 11:21 12:7.14 21:19 22: allowed [3] 3:14 9:16,18 Ayatollah [1] 15:7 2459 [1] 13:22 4.5.7 **27**:3 **31**:22 **42**:10.22.22 allowing [1] 42:15 25 [2] 35:14 41:7 В cataloguing [1] 16:5 allows [1] 9:11 26 [1] 35:14 b)(3 [8] 43:11,11,19 44:23 45:17 cause [4] 9:1 35:16 41:16,22 already [3] 6:14 39:12 44:7 29 [1] 2:7 center [3] 38:1,2,3 46:20,23,25 alternative [2] 26:24 30:15 back [8] 8:19 13:2 16:2 18:7 19:7, centerpiece [1] 3:22 3 although [1] 24:19 9,17 23:3 central [5] 7:11 25:10 37:6,22 38: 3 [4] 2:4 14:21 27:14,14 ambassador [1] 6:22 baked [1] 44:7 amended [2] 28:23 35:18 39 [1] 2:12 Bancec [16] 4:19 11:14,19 12:17 centrality [1] 10:7 amendment [1] 42:20 4 certain [6] 7:11 25:10 31:1 34:3,5, 23:20 29:24 31:8,9,11,16,21 32:7, amendments [1] 6:3 4 [1] 1:11 12.24 33:7.15 American [3] 3:24 22:23 48:20 bank [10] 7:11 21:20 25:10 33:3 42: certainly [2] 15:2 26:25 44 [1] 2:15 amicus [4] 1:24 2:11 18:17 39:2 23 46:4.4.4.10.16 cetera [2] 32:10 42:24 ancient [2] 39:6 44:9 Α bank's [1] 33:5 changing [1] 29:23 another [7] 10:13 19:4 21:21 31:1 a)(7 [7] 36:6 40:5,5,20,25 43:19 44: bare [2] 7:21.22 Chicago [12] 1:20 11:5 13:12 14: 39:23 40:2 42:17 barred [2] 37:25 38:1 13 **15**:1,25 **16**:8,22,24 **17**:13,21 answer [1] 6:24 a.m [3] 1:15 3:2 49:8 barrier [1] 31:22 18:17 answering [1] 17:11 able [3] 15:14 18:24 19:15 barriers [3] 24:6,8 29:20 CHIEF [19] 3:3,9 4:6 9:24 18:22 29: antecedent [1] 48:1 above [1] 8:20 base [1] 33:21 8,13 **31**:12,19 **32**:7 **34**:1,9 **37**:14 anticipated [1] 37:14 above-entitled [2] 1:13 49:9 based [3] 36:17 40:21 48:21 38:20,23 39:4 44:13 49:3,6 antiquities [5] 17:3 21:19 22:8,10 abroad [1] 42:12

23:9

anvtime [1] 41:14

appeals [1] 19:6

appeal [2] 20:11.18

APPEARANCES [1] 1:17

basket [1] 32:3

began [1] 22:16

became [1] 29:18

behalf [12] 1:18.20.24 2:4.7.10.15

3:8 29:12 39:1 44:18 46:10

abrogate [4] 7:15 11:14 30:20 38:

abrogating [2] 26:7,9

Absolutely [2] 19:1 23:21

Circuit [4] 20:8,12 28:9 29:7

claim [6] 10:21 33:25 41:12 44:21

Circuit's [1] 27:1

citizens [1] 29:21

45:18 **47**:22

claimant [1] 45:7 claims [2] 12:15 40:21 class [4] 11:22 24:24 45:11,21 cleaning [1] 16:6 clear 5 31:21 33:15 38:15,16 47: clients [3] 6:18 16:20 22:17 close [1] 3:13 codified [2] 6:8 26:2 collateral [1] 23:2 collected [2] 46:3.9 collecting [1] 29:22 collection [1] 19:4 combatting [1] 42:9 come [2] 27:9 30:14 comes [1] 13:7 comma [2] 48:6.8 commercial [29] 3:20 7:1 12:3 19: 18 **20**:6,9,20,24 **21**:1,3,25 **25**:3 **30**: 12 35:22,25 36:8,19,19,23 37:7,10 19 **40**:9,14 **42**:24 **43**:5,12,14 **47**: 11 company [1] 28:4 competing [1] 42:7 completely [2] 7:14 12:9 comprehensive [1] 33:21 comprehensively [1] 3:11 concept [1] 11:11 concern [1] 32:19 concerned [3] 9:14 25:11 33:17 concerns [3] 42:10.13 48:12 concrete [1] 16:15 conducted [1] 17:20 conforming [1] 42:19 Congress [44] 3:11 4:18 5:18 6:11 **7**:13.19.22 **9**:13 **13**:10.17.21.23 **14**:15.17.19 **15**:19.20 **21**:12.13 **22**: 24 **23**:7.19 **24**:23 **25**:11 **27**:11.13 28:23 31:20 33:17 35:12 36:1.15. 21 37:4 38:6,7,12,15,17 40:4 42: 14 **43**:25 **44**:4 **48**:25 Congress's [1] 37:2 consideration [1] 48:22 consistently [1] 12:8 construction [6] 21:18,18 26:22 27:8 30:4 47:2 constructions [1] 26:24 construe [1] 15:18 construed [1] 14:22 contain [1] 48:8 contains [1] 31:4 continue [1] 17:18 continues [1] 46:19 contractor [2] 21:23 45:9 contractors [1] 45:3 control [1] 15:7 controlled [1] 9:23 Convention [2] 7:9 37:22 convert [1] 23:4 corporate [1] 11:12 couldn't [2] 11:24 18:6 counsel [4] 29:9 38:21 44:14 49:4 countless [1] 22:4 country [3] 28:5,5 42:17

couple [1] 8:20 course [2] 13:10 38:7 COURT [32] 1:1,14 3:10 4:12 14: 23 15:14,18 16:16,17 17:13,16,19 **18:**20 **19:**3,6,7 **20:**12 **21:**24 **29:**14, 17 **30**:6 **31**:10 **33**:16 **37**:24 **38**:9, 11,19 39:5 41:11,14 44:12 47:13 Court's [1] 38:13 court-ordered [1] 29:22 courts [8] 20:11.18.24 21:14 22:23 **43**:16 **48**:18 **49**:1 cover [5] 22:7.8 25:3 33:21 34:2 covers [1] 25:2 created [3] 35:16 36:1.15 crimes [1] 38:5 criteria [2] 33:15.16 cultural [5] 19:15 38:1,2,3 42:16 culturally [2] 13:24,25 curiae [3] 1:24 2:11 39:2 cut [1] 35:2 Cyrus [1] 12:25

D **D.C** [2] **1**:10,23 damages [5] 9:12,16 22:25 29:22 41:25 DAVID [3] 1:20 2:6 29:11 deal [1] 42:18 dealing [1] 21:20 deals [1] 11:18 debtor [1] 11:1 debtors [1] 32:19 **December** [1] 1:11 decide [1] 17:9 decision [6] 19:24 31:11,11,17 35: 12 37:24 decisions [2] 43:18 48:17 deepest [1] 37:13 deeply [1] 38:5 defeat [1] 40:12 defended [1] 46:12 defense [4] 15:9 21:23.23.25 definition [3] 11:7,8,12 delete [1] 4:12 deliberately [1] 33:16 denied [2] 12:14 19:7 **Department** [2] 1:23 14:6 departure [1] 38:13 depend [1] 13:20 deposits [1] 33:3 describing [1] 41:24 designed [1] 29:20 desk [1] 6:23 deter [1] 7:17 determination [1] 38:15 dial [1] 41:19 difference [3] 19:12 21:17 30:18 different [5] 5:20,25 26:17 39:15 dignity [3] 9:14 25:12,15 diplomatic [5] 7:10 24:22,25 25:6, directly [6] 5:18 11:18 28:6,19 32:

17 41:24

disavowing [1] 26:20 dispense [1] 23:20 dispenses [1] 25:18 display [2] 14:2 17:5 distance [1] 32:21 distinct [1] 5:23 distinction [2] 20:3 37:19 district [5] 16:17 17:13.16.19 19:3 divided [1] 18:1 doctrine [3] 29:24 31:9.9 doctrines [1] 37:18 doina [2] 22:12 37:4 down [4] 6:11 27:2 29:5 43:8 draft [1] 40:18 drawn [1] 3:17 drives [1] 39:24

Ε

easier [2] 34:11,16 East [1] 13:1 either [1] 28:9 eliminate [1] 29:20 elsewhere [1] 44:7 embassy [2] 6:18,21 emphasizes [1] 10:7 emplovee [1] 45:9 emplovees [1] 45:4 enact [1] 14:19 enacted [2] 7:14 35:13 enacts [1] 36:13 enforce [4] 22:18 23:6 46:8,13 enforced [2] 9:17 23:8 engaged [1] 43:13 enough [5] 22:24,24 23:7,7 43:13 ensure [1] 44:8 entered [11] 4:2 8:11,23 9:1 26:23 27:16.24 28:13 34:20 46:15 47:13 enters [1] 41:15 entities [5] 5:4 32:1.2 33:24 39:15 entitled [1] 7:21 entity [2] 32:16.18 entrusted [2] 16:11.13 estoppel [1] 23:2 ET [4] 1:3,6 32:9 42:24 eve [1] 19:5 even [6] 15:12 16:12,12 20:15 33: 23 36:13 everybody [1] 12:25 everything [5] 7:24 25:2,8,9 34:2 exact [3] 39:19 47:17.19 exactly [1] 39:18 example [2] 12:23.23 exceedingly [1] 3:20 except [2] 25:9 30:24 exception [4] 3:12,20 20:6 45:20 exceptions [1] 6:13 Exchange [1] 37:16 excluding [1] 24:23 execute [9] 3:24 6:17 34:10 35:20 **36:**4,7,16 **40:**8 **44:**9 execution [36] 3:19 4:13,15 5:13 6:6.10.10.13 7:7.25 8:12.13 9:20 10:18 12:19 24:3.6.20 25:23 26:4

27:7.17.18 28:21 30:1 32:4 39:7.

15,20 42:15 44:3,5 47:13,15,22 **48**:5 executions [1] 28:24 executive [1] 48:17 exhibition [1] 14:2 exhibits [1] 14:6 exist [1] 14:11 exists [1] 13:3 expect [1] 42:19 expected [1] 9:17 expedited [1] 18:14 explain [3] 40:19 41:5.7 explaining [1] 40:3 explicit [3] 31:10 48:14,15 explicitly [3] 37:21 45:19,20 exposed [1] 29:25 express [1] 29:1 extend [2] 24:22 25:13 extending [1] 25:1 extends [3] 9:4,4,5 extent [5] 15:13 17:17 18:19 43:4 44:5 extremely [1] 38:5

f)(1 [1] 6:4 fact [5] 6:23 12:1 26:11 30:3 34:23 factors [1] 4:19 famous [1] 12:23 far [1] 19:12 federal [1] 40:21 few [1] 36:11 filed [2] 18:13 46:10 finally [4] 15:20,21 22:24 24:17 financial [1] 20:19 find [1] 27:8 finding [1] 3:15 finish [2] 18:10.10 first [3] 29:15 39:11 44:19 five [1] 44:15 Florida [1] 1:18 focused [2] 30:6 39:12 following [1] 47:24 foreign [50] 3:12,14,21,25 6:2 7:15 9:10 10:17,22 11:7,9,10,23 12:2,9 **20**:3,10,15,23 **21**:3 **23**:12,25 **24**:2 26:5 27:4,15,20,22,23,24 28:1 30: 21,23 31:14 32:8 33:1,3 34:7 37:8, 18 **40**:8 **43**:7 **45**:18 **47**:10 **48**:12, 13.13.15.16.23 formulations [1] 5:24 forthcoming [1] 18:12 found [2] 11:19.22 foundation [1] 37:16 four [2] 30:5 35:4 fourth [1] 37:5 free [1] 13:1 friend [1] 29:16 FSIA [3] 35:18 37:7,21 funds [2] 32:25,25 further [2] 38:19 44:11

futile [1] 3:18

g)(1 [4] 31:14 32:6 33:20,22 gaps [1] 3:13 gave [1] 12:13 General 3 1:23 13:11 21:7 generally [1] 37:8 gets [2] 41:14,21 GINSBURG [18] 4:5,17,24 14:10, 13.18 **15**:6.24 **16**:21.25 **17**:5.11.23 18:2 23:13.17.22 25:17 give [3] 12:22 17:14 42:3 given [1] 13:11 gives [3] 12:14,20 40:1 got [2] 14:13 15:3 governing [1] 34:7 government [7] 27:21 44:20 45:3, 9 48:23,25 49:2 grab [1] 22:10 grant [1] 19:24 gray [1] 41:9 group [1] 22:6

Н

hand [2] 40:1 42:3 hands [2] 34:18 49:1 happen [1] 41:17 happens [1] 38:1 happy [1] 16:20 hard [1] 27:10 hear [2] 3:3 41:12 held [5] 14:24 20:9.12.22 32:16 Helmerich [1] 38:10 help [1] 43:4 helps [1] 41:3 historic [1] 42:16 history [3] 24:18 29:16 32:18 hold [2] 8:25 45:13 holding [3] 9:3 37:23 46:5 Hollywood [1] 1:18 home [1] 39:24 Honor [4] 4:23 8:4.5 49:5 House [1] 24:19

ICJ [1] 38:1 idea [2] 13:11 25:10 identifies [1] 9:22 Illinois [1] 1:20 immediately [1] 36:21 immune [8] 5:19 30:23 31:2 35:10 39:7 45:18 47:12,23 Immunities [4] 9:10 30:21 37:23 **48:**16 immunity [32] 3:13,21 5:8,11 6:2, 13 7:15,22 13:24 14:3 20:4 25:19, 20 26:4,5,6,7,8,10 29:1 30:21 31: 6,9 **33**:23 **37**:8,18 **38**:18 **39**:8 **45**:5, 11.20 48:17 immunizing [1] 14:7 **impairment** [1] **14:23** include [4] 6:25 11:11 28:23 34:6 included [4] 24:14 25:7,25 27:11 includes [1] 11:8 including [2] 9:21 32:15 incorporates [1] 8:3

independent [1] 35:2 independently [1] 30:5 indication [1] 31:15 indirectly [1] 32:17 inserting [1] 35:24 instrument [1] 46:15 instrumentalities 3 4:4 31:25 instrumentality [12] 5:3 10:19 11: 3.9 **12:**20 **27:**15 **28:**14.16 **43:**9.13 46:16.25 instrumentality's [2] 12:21 43:10 Insurance [2] 6:7 25:24 intangible [1] 15:12 intend [1] 38:17 intended [6] 20:23 22:7,8 24:5,14 **34**:16 intending [1] 23:19 interest [9] 14:24 15:11,12 16:9 18:18.21 24:21 32:16 42:8 interested [2] 17:1.2 interesting [1] 11:6 interests [2] 32:1 42:7 international [3] 7:8 37:13.24 interpleader [1] 46:11 interpretation [2] 10:5 19:13 interpretations [2] 26:15,16 interpreted [1] 43:19 introduced [1] 29:17 invoke [2] 35:18 41:17 invoking [1] 40:13 involved [1] 38:4 involvina [1] 38:10 IRAN [24] 1:6 3:5 7:19 13:4 15:4. 17.20 16:1 18:6.9.24 19:4.7.9.17 **21:**23 **22:**2.19.19 **27:**20 **45:**25 **46:** 12.18.19 Iran's [1] 46:18 Iran-owned [1] 19:5 Iranian [1] 46:4 ISLAMIC [2] 1:6 3:5 isn't [4] 10:1 15:1 22:13 33:4 Israel [1] 13:2 issue [3] 11:25 20:13 21:11 itself [8] 5:2 11:14 20:15 31:11 32: 13 33:1 37:21 41:9

JENNY [1] 1:3 Jews [1] 13:1 judge [1] 36:3 judgment [51] 4:2,16 8:10,14,16, 16,22 10:8,25 11:2 15:21 21:22 22:18,22 23:5 24:4,7 26:22 27:16, 24 28:13,16 32:19 34:13,20 35:20 36:4,7,16 41:15,16 43:7 45:14,15, 17 46:9,13,15,17,24 47:6,13,15,16, 22,24,25 48:3,4,7,11

judgments [11] 3:15,25 8:25 9:3 22:19 23:4,8 34:10,17 40:7 45:13 judicata [1] 23:1 judicial [1] 14:8

judicial [1] 14:8 juridical [5] 32:1,2,16,17 33:24 jurisdiction [3] 41:13,15,21 Justice [76] 1:23 3:3,9 4:5,6,7,17, 24 5:14,17 6:17,20 7:5,12 8:1,7 9: 24,25 10:4 11:4,16 12:13,22 13: 14,18 14:10,13,18 15:6,24 16:21, 25 17:5,11,23 18:2,22 19:10,22 21:8,11,14 22:11 23:13,17,22 25: 17 26:13,19 29:8,14 31:12,19 32: 7,22 33:11,12,14 34:1,9 35:1,7 37: 15,25 38:20,23 39:4 40:17,19,24 41:4 42:21 43:15 44:13 49:3,6

K

keeps [1] 6:23 KENNEDY [1] 4:7 kind [1] 42:18 Korea [1] 7:19

language [7] 6:11 16:14 30:6 31:4 32:6 33:20 41:8 last [4] 14:9 38:9 42:5 48:1 later [1] 36:12 law [5] 37:13,14 39:25 40:20 42:3 lawsuit [1] 18:13 layers [1] 24:12 lease [2] 16:2,4 least [3] 9:8 11:21 31:15 led [1] 37:17 left [2] 22:15 33:16 legal [1] 29:23 legislation [1] 3:22 legislative [4] 23:18 24:18 29:16 32:18 letter [5] 12:25 13:3,4 14:7 37:17 liability [1] 42:1 liable [3] 3:16 14:24 15:2 lien [1] 9:18 lifts [1] 39:8 light [1] 42:13 limit [2] 19:18 37:7 limitation [2] 40:12 46:23 limitations [1] 23:3 limited [3] 13:23 31:16 45:13 limiting [1] 26:8 lines [2] 8:20 36:12 lis [1] 9:18 listed [1] 15:4

longer [2] 31:21,22 look [3] 6:4 47:7,9 looked [2] 13:7 20:19 looking [1] 6:12 lose [3] 15:22 18:16,23 lost [2] 19:3,3 lot [3] 12:15,16 32:19

loan [1] 16:4

long [1] 3:17

long-term [1] 16:4

M

mad [1] 22:9 made [6] 4:25 12:4 14:16 35:12 38: 12,15 magic [2] 5:11,14 main [1] 19:12 maintain [1] 46:19

maintained [1] 12:8 maintaining [1] 26:9 many [2] 24:6 29:20 Marshall's [1] 37:15 matter [3] 1:13 19:14 49:9 mean [13] 7:2 8:2,8 11:17 12:23 **15**:13,20 **17**:22 **18**:23 **19**:11 **34**:21 42:7 46:21 means [5] 4:11 8:9 30:10.11.16 meant [2] 27:12 48:9 mechanism [5] 10:21 12:11.12 28: 2.17 Melli [3] 46:4.10.17 member [1] 45:8 members [1] 45:2 mention [9] 10:22 12:6 25:5,19 27: 19,22,23 28:22 42:6 mentioned [2] 8:18 25:21 mentions [1] 28:20 Middle [1] 13:1 might [6] 13:11,16 18:15 24:14 33: 7 37:4 military [4] 7:11 25:9 45:3.8 mind [2] 20:1 36:22 mine-run [2] 41:20 42:2 minimum [2] 7:21,23 Ministry [2] 21:22,25 minutes [1] 44:15 misleading [1] 12:10 misplaced [1] 48:14 misreading [1] 39:25 modeled [1] 6:15 modifies [1] 8:15 modify [1] 47:16 modifying [2] 47:24 48:10 Monday [1] 1:11 money [15] 17:1,2,14,15,16 21:24 33:3,5,5,6,8,9 46:3,7,9 morning [1] 26:20 most [1] 39:11 motion [1] 19:8 move [1] 41:18 moved [1] 18:14 much [3] 34:16 38:22 41:19 must [4] 7:2 10:13 20:14 35:20

Ν

narrow [2] 3:20 24:24 national [1] 45:8 nationals [1] 45:2 natural [1] 43:25 nature [1] 13:12 Nazi [1] 38:4 need [5] 10:24 27:19.25 28:17 46: never [3] 16:1,14 36:22 new [1] 23:4 next [3] 3:4 36:11,13 non [1] 25:4 non-commercial [7] 25:4,7,14 37: 11,20 38:3 40:15 none [2] 28:7 29:2 North [1] 7:19 noses [1] 3:15

note [3] 6:8 25:24 26:2 nothing 5 10:15 14:21 18:1 19:2 39.7 novel [1] 9:7 nullify [1] 35:11 number [5] 8:5,5,6 20:11,18

0

objects [3] 13:24 14:1 19:19 obtained [1] 21:22 obviously [2] 25:6 42:8 offered [1] 26:14 often [1] 3:18 oil [1] 38:11 Okav [2] 7:12 20:2 old [1] 23:4 once [2] 24:23 43:6 one [14] 22:6 24:8 26:6,17 30:5 31: 1 **35**:3,7 **38**:14 **40**:1 **42**:3 **43**:2 **48**: ones [3] 34:6,6 42:23 only [13] 8:3,18,25 10:20 24:8 27: 12 28:12,21 30:12 34:18 40:9 45: 1 46:14 opening [1] 47:9 opinion [1] 37:15 opposite [2] 38:17 39:19 oral [7] 1:13 2:2.5.8 3:7 29:11 39:1 orders [1] 16:17 ordinary [1] 34:13 original [1] 6:2 other [22] 6:3,12 9:2,11 10:9 12:15 15:11 19:10,13,19 23:20 25:18 26: 14 **28**:8 **34**:4,4 **42**:4,22 **43**:16,17, 18 **47**:7 others [1] 11:19 out [7] 19:23 27:25 28:7 32:24 33: 22 46:7.23 overhauled [1] 3:12 overlap [1] 45:23 override [1] 38:18 oversight [1] 25:25 overturning [1] 31:16 own [1] 42:11 owned [1] 20:6

P

ownership [8] 15:11 16:9 24:1,3,

owner [1] 33:6

11,11,13 32:21

owns [1] 28:5

PAGE [2] 2:2 35:14 pages [1] 41:7 paid [1] 21:24 pair [2] 10:12,13 Palestine [1] 13:2 papers [1] 6:22 paragraph [2] 27:14 47:9 part [4] 6:1 18:7,8 31:5 particular [3] 32:23 48:3,4 particularly [1] 42:12 parties [2] 20:21 35:19 parts [1] 19:19 party [3] 9:21 15:10,15

passed [1] 6:14 passive [1] 21:20 passively [1] 21:5 pay [5] 15:16,21 22:19,21 46:6 pendens [1] 9:18 people [6] 6:21 13:7 19:15 40:6,12 42:17 perfectly [2] 4:20 16:20 perhaps [1] 19:23 PERLIN [54] 1:18 2:3 14 3:6 7 9 4: 9.22 **5**:9.16.25 **6**:19 **7**:4.6.13 **8**:4.9 **10**:3.6 **11**:13 **12**:5.18 **13**:13.16.20 14:12,15 15:5,8 16:3,23 17:4,7,15, 25 **18**:5 **19**:1,21 **20**:2 **21**:10,13,16 22:14 23:15,21,23 25:21 26:18,21 29:19 44:15,17,19 49:5 permit [1] 40:20 Persia [2] 13:3 19:16 Persian [3] 13:4 39:6 44:9 person [2] 14:24 15:2 Petitioner [1] 2:15 Petitioners [12] 1:4.19 2:4 3:8 30: 10.14 35:17.19 36:14 39:17 41:23 44:18 Petitioners' [4] 30:3 35:11 36:23, photographing [1] 16:6 phrase [3] 26:15 30:9 48:6 pick [2] 29:15 44:1 piece [1] 29:15 pierce [5] 10:24 27:12 28:4 43:8, piercing [2] 11:11 24:12 place [1] 48:18 placed [1] 48:25 plaintiff [1] 9:22 plaintiffs [17] 9:2 11:18.20.22.24 **12**:4,15 **30**:2 **34**:12,13,17,19 **45**:2, 12.21 48:20.20 plausible [2] 30:15 37:3 please [3] 3:10 29:14 39:5 point [5] 28:7 32:23 41:25 44:19 **47**:5 points [1] 39:9

policy [1] 48:22 position [2] 30:3 35:11 powerful [1] 41:24 practical [2] 19:14 21:17 practice [1] 41:19 pre-judgment [1] 9:18

precursor [1] 29:18 prejudgment [1] 28:25

preposterous [1] 25:16 prerequisites [1] 41:13

present [1] 40:20 President [1] 6:5 pressure [2] 48:24,24 prevent [1] 14:23

preventing [1] 29:21 price [1] 15:16 principle [4] 37:9,9,12 38:6

principles [1] 38:14

private [4] 9:9 19:15 20:21 44:25 probably [1] **12:**24

procedural [1] 8:3 procedures [2] 43:23 44:1 proceeding [1] 22:15 proceeds [5] 20:20,22,25 21:2 42:

process [1] 14:8 property [82] 3:25 4:3,15 5:4,12, 18,21 **7**:10 **8**:13 **9**:20,21 **10**:17,18, 22.25 11:2 12:3.8.16.19.21 14:5 15:3 17:1 18:1.4.6 20:6.25 22:1 23:12.25 24:1.10.20.22.25 25:1.3. 4.6.22 27:3.6.14.20.25 28:5.19 30: 1,12,22 31:1,14,23,24,24,25 32:8, 13,14,15 34:3,7,15 35:21 36:8,18 **37**:10,11,20 **39**:14,19 **40**:8,15 **42**:

12,15 43:10,12 44:2 47:10,21 protect [3] 7:9 18:20,21 protecting [1] 7:23 protection [1] 25:13

protections [2] 44:6,8 protects [1] 7:10 provide [2] 7:16 19:20

provided [31] 4:7.9.13.16 5:22 6: 24 8:1.9.11.14.15 9:5.25 13:23 26: 15,19 30:7,9,16,24 34:24 36:7,16 **39**:16,21 **44**:3 **45**:12 **47**:5,6 **48**:7,

provides [2] 3:23 8:23 provision [20] 3:23 4:11 9:11 10:8 11,14 11:17 14:16,19 20:8 22:6,7 23:6,24 26:3 29:19 34:11 36:11, 13 44:6

provisions [9] 12:18 26:4,5 28:8 29:2 30:11.19 45:16 47:7 publishing [1] 16:5 punish [1] 7:17 punitive [4] 9:12.16 22:25 41:25 purpose [2] 36:19 48:14

purposes [1] 48:15 put [2] 20:4 21:7

Q question [4] 4:10 12:5 13:22 17:

questioning [1] 39:11 questions [3] 5:10 38:19 44:11 quick [1] 39:9 quintessentially [2] 7:23 24:25 quite [2] 11:17 42:13

quote [2] 5:21 38:12 quoted [1] 29:16

R

radical [1] 38:13 raised [2] 11:6 15:9 Rather [2] 5:21 49:1 rationale [1] 11:15 reach [3] 10:25 28:5.18 reaches [1] 45:11 read [17] 6:23,25 8:10 10:9,10 15: 19 29:6 37:2 39:17,25 40:11 43:3, 6 **46**:23 **47**:1,3 **48**:9 reading [4] 7:1 42:3,25 44:21 ready [1] 15:15

real [1] 11:25 realized [1] 18:15 really [14] 10:1 18:17 28:11 30:20 **33**:20 **34**:15 **35**:11 **36**:12 **37**:5 **38**: 16 **39:**24 **41:**3,18 **42:**14 reason [10] 10:22 25:2,5,14 27:11 30:17 31:7,8 37:5 41:6 reasons [3] 30:5 35:3 48:19 REBUTTAL [3] 2:13 29:4 44:17 receive [1] 14:7 recent [1] 37:24 reciprocal [2] 42:11.11 recognition [1] 26:11 recognized [1] 7:19 record [1] 23:18 recover [1] 11:25 recovery [1] 19:18 refer [1] 31:5 reference [1] 11:10 referenced [1] 28:21 referring [4] 8:19 34:15 45:19,21 refers [9] 8:10.17 10:6 14:21 15:10 25:20 26:22 28:10 11 regardless [2] 39:20 41:16 relates [1] 45:17 relating [1] 47:22 relations [1] 48:13 relationship [1] 11:23 relevant [3] 19:23 31:5 48:22 relied [1] 28:9 relying [1] 11:10 remain [1] 26:10 remained [1] 16:24 remaining [1] 44:16

12 remember [1] 9:6 remove [3] 24:6 48:16,24 render [4] 40:24 44:21,22 45:24 reorganization [1] 37:17 repatriate [1] 18:24 repetition [2] 35:6,9 Report [1] 24:19 REPUBLIC [2] 1:6 3:5 require [1] 43:11 requirements [1] 8:3 requires [2] 20:9 35:25 res [1] 23:1 researched [1] 17:6

remark [1] 42:20

remedies [4] 8:24 9:6 6 7

remedy [5] 7:16 35:17 36:15,17 45:

reserve [1] 29:3 Respondents [13] 1:7,21,25 2:7, 12 **4**:11 **10**:10,21 **12**:6 **23**:10 **24**:7 29:12 39:3 Respondents' [2] 21:18 27:8 rest [3] 29:3 34:21.23 retain [1] 17:18 retained [1] 7:22

retroactive [1] 14:16 return [1] 46:6 review [1] 20:13 rights [3] 17:21,24 18:3 rigs [1] 38:11

Risk [2] 6:7 25:24 ROBERTS [13] 3:3 4:6 9:24 18:22 29:8 31:12 32:7 34:1 38:20,23 44: 13 49:36 rooted [1] 38:5 roots [1] 37:13 RUBIN [2] 1:3 3:4 rule [1] 48:1 rulinas [1] 43:1 rush [1] 22:9 S sale [3] 16:17 17:20 18:21 same [14] 7:18 8:21 32:3 35:12,23 39:18 40:4.6.13.21 47:16.17.20.20 sanctions [1] 46:5 sat [1] 6:11 satisfied [1] 41:14 satisfy [1] 30:11 saying [3] 12:25 21:16 41:5 says [24] 4:14 5:21 6:5,9 7:7 8:12, 22 **10**:16,16 **23**:23 **24**:4,9,19 **25**: 22 26:7 30:22 31:2 34:23 36:6 39: 14 40:5,7 41:11 47:9 scarce [1] 3:18 Schooner [1] 37:15 search [1] 3:18 second [3] 30:17 39:23 45:25 Section [53] 3:23 4:8.10.14.16 5: 23 6:9,24 7:6,7,10 8:2,12,14,15,17 17,18,19,23 9:5 10:1 15:9 20:5 25: 18,21 26:2,16 28:10 30:7,7,8,8,10, 16,22 32:14 34:22,24,25 36:5,5 37:21 38:18 39:16,21 41:12 44:3 **45:1 47:6 48:**3,8,10 sections [1] 6:16 see [4] 32:18 33:19 41:10 42:19 seeking [1] 35:20 seems [2] 19:11 21:8 seen [1] 17:6 seize [3] 13:8.19 35:21 seized [1] 30:13 seizing [1] 36:18 seizure [4] 37:11,25 38:2,11 sell [1] 19:16 Senate [1] 24:5 Senator [1] 29:17 sense [2] 47:25 48:1 sensible [1] 40:16 sent [1] 13:4 sentence [2] 8:19.21 separate [5] 31:25 32:1,15,17 33: separated [1] 48:6 sets [1] 36:13 Seventh [5] 20:8,12 26:25 28:9 29: several [1] 26:14 Shah [1] 15:6 shall [9] 6:5,9 14:21 25:22 30:23 31:2 35:10 41:12 47:12 ship [1] 19:16 shipped [2] 19:7.9 show [4] 35:20 36:7,18,22

shows [1] 23:18 side [2] 19:13 34:5 sign [1] 9:13 significance [2] 37:1 42:16 significant [2] 13:24 14:1 similar [1] 12:15 simple [3] 24:10,11,13 since [3] 6:3 16:1 18:5 single [1] 27:25 sit [2] 27:2 29:4 sitting [1] 21:4 situation [1] 33:18 skeletal [1] 26:10 **Solicitor** [1] 1:22 somebody [2] 14:4 41:21 sometimes [1] 37:10 sorry [3] 5:16 11:4 25:4 **SOTOMAYOR** [16] **5**:14,17 **11**:4, 16 **12**:13 **21**:8,11,14 **35**:1,7 **40**:17, 19,24 41:4 42:21 43:15 sovereign [24] 3:13,21 6:2 7:15, 20,21,24 9:10,10,12,19 20:3 24:25 25:18 26:5.10.12 30:20.21 37:8. 18 38:18 48:15.16 special [1] 34:11 specific [2] 13:23 14:3 specifically [3] 24:24 25:5 28:20 Specter [1] 29:17 sponsor [1] 25:12 sponsors [2] 24:4,5 squared [1] 39:13 stake [1] 37:9 standard [1] 29:24 start [2] 24:12 47:8 state [50] 3:25 5:2.3 9:12.23 10:17. 23 11:1.7.9.10.24 12:2.9 14:6 15: 4 20:7.11.15.21.23 21:3.6 23:12. 25 24:2.21 25:12 27:4.15.20.22.23 24 28:1 31:14,23 32:8,13,14,19 33:1,3 34:7 40:9,20 43:7 45:18 47: 10,23 state's [2] 4:3 9:19 state-sponsored [1] 42:9 stated [1] 37:20 **STATES** [23] **1**:1,14,24 **2**:10 **3**:14 7:16 18 20 9:15 13:8 14:2 19:11 23:15 26:12 30:13.23 35:22 36:9. 20 37:23 39:2 47:11.14 States' [1] 42:6 statute [17] 4:20.25 11:7 15:19 19: 20 20:17 24:18 35:15.18.23 36:10. 12 39:14 40:14,18 43:3,20 statutes [1] 23:3 statutory [4] 9:1 26:1 39:13 45:15 stay [1] 19:8 step [1] 42:15 still [1] 42:1 story [1] 36:24 straight [1] 11:1 STRAUSS [14] 1:20 2:6 29:10.11. 13 **31**:18 **32**:11 **33**:10.14 **34**:8 **35**: 1.5.9 38:22 strong [2] 31:15 42:8

structure [2] 47:18,20

study [3] 16:5 17:10 18:14 studying [1] 18:10 stuff [1] 13:12 subject [26] 3:19 4:1,15 5:12,19, 22 **6**:5,9 **7**:8,25 **9**:20 **10**:17 **17**:20 24:3,10 25:23 27:6,13,17 32:3 37: 10 39:15,20 44:2 47:21 48:23 subjects [1] 24:20 submitted [2] 49:7.9 subsection [25] 6:4.8.12 7:6 14: 21 27:13 28:10.12 30:9.19.19 31: 2.4.5 35:16.24.25 36:6.6.14.17 40: 13 **45**:6 **47**:17.19 Subsections [4] 6:1 28:11 30:25 44:22 subsidiaries [1] 12:2 substantive [2] 10:13 47:7 Sudan [1] 7:20 sufficient [1] 30:5 sufficiently [1] 11:23 suggests [1] 33:2 superfluous [4] 10:1 12:10 44:23 45:24 supersede [1] 14:22 supporting [3] 1:25 2:11 39:2 **SUPREME** [2] 1:1.14 surprised [2] 13:15,17 sweeping [1] 8:24 swelled [1] 5:6 Syria [1] 7:20

Т Tate [1] 37:16 temple [1] 13:2 term [1] 38:9 terms [3] 15:25 16:2 31:1 terror [7] 3:14 7:15.18 9:15.23 11: 1 22:16 terrorism [15] 3:12.16.24 6:7.13 8: 24 9:3 25:13.23 26:4 30:1 34:12 40:6 42:9 46:7 terrorism-based [1] 34:17 terrorist [1] 15:4 test [3] 24:11,11,13 tether [1] 44:4 text [1] 39:13 theirs [1] 17:8 themselves [2] 16:12 32:21 there's [27] 5:9 10:9,9,11,11,21 12: 23 19:1 21:21 22:3.9.25 25:2.5 27: 11 28:12 29:1.6 30:17 31:7 37:5 **44:**11 **45:**22 **46:**17 **47:**1.1.15 thev've [2] 18:5 22:14 third [1] 35:10 though [1] 20:15 three [7] 4:12 11:21 12:14 26:3 35: 2,4 39:9 throughout [1] 12:25 thumb [1] 3:14 tied [1] 11:23 title [1] 15:14 titled [1] 34:3 today [1] 39:12

tool [1] 23:5 transaction [2] 20:21 21:1 transfer [1] 15:14 Treasury [1] 21:10 treated [1] 48:21 treatment [1] 42:11 TRIA [2] 6:15 25:23 tried [1] 16:1 tries [1] 33:20 TRIPP [11] 1:22 2:9 38:23 39:1.4 40:18.23 41:1.6 43:2.17 true [2] 27:22 42:1 trustees [2] 16:11.12 Try [4] 10:15,15 27:2 29:5 trying [2] 32:23 36:4 turn [1] 19:23 twice [1] 13:22 two [7] 5:10,23 33:10 35:4,5 48:19, U

U.N [1] 37:22 U.S [7] 3:15 29:21 30:23 37:13 45: 2,7 48:12 U.S.C [1] 13:22 under [35] 3:19 4:2 5:14 7:1.7 8:11 9:1.20 10:4 12:17 20:3 23:5.6 26: 23 27:5.7.16 28:22.24 34:10.20 **39**:7 **40**:7 **41**:12.16 **43**:10 **44**:5.25 45:1,12,14,15,19 46:13 47:25 understand [1] 43:20 unequally [1] 48:21 uniform [1] 6:20 uniforms [1] 6:21 UNITED [17] 1:1,14,24 2:10 13:8, 25 14:1 19:11 23:15 30:13 35:22 36:9.20 39:2 42:6 47:11.14 University [13] 11:5,15 15:1,8,25 **16**:8.21.24 **17**:10.13.21 **18**:16 **44**: unless [1] 38:14 up [6] 18:1 27:9 29:15 30:14 36:13 44:1 uses [1] 26:6

V

using [1] 43:5

vague [1] 33:16
veil [6] 10:24 11:12 27:12 28:4 43: 8,22
veil-piercing [6] 10:20 12:11,12
28:2,17 44:6
veils [2] 24:12,12
Venezuelan [1] 38:10
versus [1] 3:4
viable [2] 26:24,25
vicarious [1] 41:25
victim [1] 45:7
victims [7] 3:17,24 7:17 8:24 38:4
40:6 46:7
Vienna [1] 7:9
view [3] 13:6,9,18
VISA [3] 46:3,9,10

together [2] 43:21 48:9

waiting [2] 21:5 22:18 waive [3] 23:1,2,3 waived [2] 6:5 43:24 waiver [3] 29:1 45:5,11 wanted [4] 4:18 7:16,17 31:20 wants [1] 14:5 Washington [2] 1:10,23 way [18] 8:10 10:9 15:18 19:2 20:4 **29**:6,25 **32**:13 **37**:2 **39**:17,18,25 **40**:11,16 **43**:3,6,25 **47**:1 ways [1] 32:20 wear [1] 6:22 weighty [1] 42:14 whatever [3] 15:15 40:15 48:21 Whereupon [1] 49:8 whether [2] 5:2 17:9 whoever [2] 16:19 17:8 wholesale [1] 26:9 will [7] 18:24 19:15,17 23:11,24 27: 4,9 within [1] 10:12 without [1] 42:20 word [6] 4:13 5:8 26:6 47:25 48:5, 10 words [13] 4:12,13 5:11,14 7:2 12: 9 **20**:16 **38**:13 **47**:16,20,24 **48**:7,8 work [8] 17:19 27:10 28:3,8 29:2,5 **32:**24 **39:**18 works [3] 10:15 43:20,21 world [1] 13:5 worry [2] 5:2 17:12 write [1] 6:11 writing [1] 23:10 written [2] 4:20 32:14 year [1] 14:9 years [2] 3:14 22:18 yourself [1] 22:12 Z ZACHARY [3] 1:22 2:9 39:1