

USADI Dispatch

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USADI Commentary

Twin Pillars of Iran's Ruling Theocracy

When the Khomeini-led clerics stole freedom from the Iranian people in 1979, they lacked the capacity to lead a nation of 35 million toward democracy, prosperity and progress. Khomeini knew full well that the popularity of his theocratic rule, however vast, was only skin deep, meaning that in an open political environment the genuine democratic forces would flourish and push the clerics into oblivion.

Repression at home and export of fundamentalism abroad formed the clerics' twin pillars of power. Khomeini's dictatorial *velayat-e-faqih* doctrine (the absolute supremacy of clerical rule) provided the religious and ideological basis for implementing a uniquely ruthless regime under the cloak of religion.

The suppression of the democratic opposition was not, in and of itself, a sufficient safeguard. The enormous changes in the post-revolutionary Iran had raised the overall expectations of people, especially the young generation, who were anxious for real solutions to their vast social and economic problems.

Before the Iran-Iraq War, an increasing number of disillusioned young people had joined the ranks of the democratic opposition. By exporting revolution and creating "foreign" boogiemens the mullahs tried to stem the mass flocking of their followers to the opposing camp.

The occupation of the U.S. embassy in Tehran was the first attempt at focusing public attention on foreign targets. Shouting "anti-imperialist" slogans, the clerics purged their more liberal internal rivals. At the same time, they encroached on neighboring Muslim countries. Under such pretexts as "defending the Islamic nation" or "liberating Jerusalem via Karbala," the mullahs made maximum use of the war with Iraq to justify the domestic repression.

Soon after the Shah's ouster, the mullahs established their suppressive apparatus. Within a few years, they formed such organizations as the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Islamic Revolutionary Courts, Islamic Revolutionary *Komitehs*, the paramilitary Bassij force, and other agencies in government offices, schools, universities, the armed forces, and the bazaar.

The twin pillars of the *velayat-e-faqih* - repression at home and export of revolution - have kept this theocracy in power for twenty five years. There is absolutely no tolerance for any dissent; even the harmless and feeble pro-Khatami faction was not tolerated. Protests by students, women, workers, teachers and the public at large are suppressed brutally. Nevertheless, the democracy movement in Iran remains utterly defiant.

But it is not enough just to applaud Iranians' courage. Our Iran policy must be one of support for democratic opposition groups and their campaign to replace Iran's theocratic despots with a secular and representative government. Anything less would only allow the mullahs to shield their tyrannical house of cards behind tall, thick and ubiquitous walls of suppression.

Iran Tries Diplomatic Blackmail Again

BERLIN -- A Berlin mayor refused Monday to cancel plans to erect a plaque to four Iranian Kurds shot dead in an attack blamed officially on Iran, despite a warning from Tehran's mayor of a tit-for-tat response.

"We don't see any reason to renounce the plan, which was decided on by the local council," Monika Thieman, the mayor of Berlin's upmarket Charlottenburg district, said.

"These opposition activists gathered in the Mykonos restaurant to promote human rights in Iran, and were murdered because of it."

The plaque would say the men died fighting for "freedom and human rights."

A German court concluded in 1997 that the killers were acting on Tehran's orders.

Now the spat has erupted again, after Tehran's mayor threatened to erect a plaque denouncing Germany for supplying chemical weapons to Saddam Hussein's Iraq if Berlin unveils one on April 20 accusing Iran over the Mykonos attack.

AFP, March 29, 2004

Diplomat Summoned after Rights Criticism

TEHRAN - Iran's foreign ministry has summoned an Irish diplomat here to complain over what it said were "irresponsible and interventionist" European Union criticism of the Islamic republic's human rights record.

State media and the Irish embassy said Aidan Cronin, the embassy's first secretary, was called in for a dressing down on Sunday from the foreign ministry's legal affairs director Mohammad Mehdi Akhondzadeh.

At the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva on Thursday, the EU warned that it had seen little progress in Iran's human rights dossier, which Brussels has effectively made a precondition to improved trade ties.

The EU also openly admitted that its policy of constructive engagement with Tehran on human rights was flagging.

The US Alliance for Democratic Iran (USADI), is an independent, non-profit organization, which aims to advance a US policy on Iran that will benefit America's interests, through supporting Iranian people's aspirations for a democratic, secular, and peaceful government, free of tyranny, fundamentalism, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism. The USADI is not affiliated with any government agencies, political groups or parties.

1201 Pennsylvania Ave, NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20004

Tel: 202-661-4675, Fax: 202-318-0402, E-mail: dispatch@usadيران.org

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Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
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The Islamic Republic of Iran is a constitutional, theocratic republic in which Shi'a Muslim clergy dominate the key power structures... Several agencies share responsibility for law enforcement and maintenance of order, including the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, the Ministry of Interior, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp, a military force established after the revolution. Paramilitary volunteer forces known as Basijis, and various gangs of men known as the Ansar-e Hezbollah (Helpers of the Party of God), or more simply "plain clothes," acted as vigilantes aligned with extreme conservative members of the leadership... The regular and the paramilitary security forces both committed numerous, serious human rights abuses...

The Government's poor human rights record worsened, and it continued to commit numerous, serious abuses. The right of citizens to change their government was restricted significantly. Continuing serious abuses included: summary executions; disappearances; torture and other degrading treatment, reportedly including severe punishments such as beheading and flogging; poor prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; lack of habeas corpus or access to counsel and prolonged and incommunicado detention. Citizens often did not receive due process or fair trials. The Government infringed on citizens' privacy rights, and restricted freedom of speech, press, assembly, association and religion.

... The Government discriminated against minorities and severely restricted workers' rights, including freedom of association and the right to organize and bargain collectively. Child labor persisted. Vigilante groups, with strong ties to certain members of the Government, enforced their interpretation of appropriate social behavior through intimidation and violence. There were reports of trafficking in persons.

There were reports of political killings. The Government was responsible for numerous killings during the year, including executions following trials in which there was a lack of due process. Government affiliated vigilante groups also were responsible for extrajudicial killings.

The law criminalized dissent and applied the death penalty to offenses such as "attempts against the security of the State, outrage against high-ranking officials, and insults against the memory of Imam Khomeini and against the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic." Citizens continued to be tried and sentenced to death in the absence of sufficient procedural safeguards.

Exiles and human rights monitors alleged that many of those supposedly executed for criminal offenses, such as narcotics trafficking, actually were political dissidents...

Excerpts From the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2003

USA TODAY
March 30, 2004

Officials: U.S. 'Outed' Iran's Spies in 1997

WASHINGTON -- After a bombing killed 19 U.S. airmen at a barracks in Saudi Arabia in 1996, the Clinton administration struck back by unmasking Iranian intelligence officers around the world, significantly disrupting Iranian-backed terrorism, according to a high-level U.S. official and a former top official who was serving at the time of the operation.

Undisclosed until now, Operation Sapphire took place in 1997. Though the bombers who struck the Khobar Towers barracks were mostly Saudis, U.S. investigators quickly determined that Iranian intelligence officials had trained and organized the plotters. The former U.S. official said Iran was intimidated enough by the U.S. counterspy operation that it stopped targeting Americans after the bombing.

The first public hint of the U.S. operation came last week, when Richard Clarke, White House counterterrorism chief for three administrations, told a bipartisan commission investigating the 9/11 attacks that the Clinton administration responded "against Iranian terrorism . . . at Khobar Towers with a covert action."...

The former high-level U.S. official said Operation Sapphire led to the identification of scores of Iranian intelligence officers and the expulsion of some from foreign capitals. "We outed them," he said. "The CIA, working with others, identified every known Iranian intelligence operative and made it known that they were known. It resulted in no further manifestation of Iranian terrorism directed against the United States."

Operation Sapphire didn't end Iran's connection to terrorism. Iran has continued to support anti-Israeli militants and has refused to extradite members of the al-Qaeda terrorist network who fled to Iran after the U.S. ouster of the Taliban in Afghanistan...

The Khobar Towers case capped more than a decade of anti-U.S. terror by Iranians and Iran-backed groups. Iranian radicals seized the U.S. Embassy in 1979 and held Americans hostage for 444 days. Iran was believed to have backed the bombers who attacked the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983, killing 241 Americans...