

# USADI Dispatch

A publication of the U.S. Alliance for Democratic Iran

Volume 1, No. 21

Thursday, March 25, 2004

## USADI Commentary

### Tehran's double talk and double strategy in Iraq

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami sent a message of "condolence and solidarity" to Spain's King Juan Carlos after the Madrid bombings, pronouncing that "terrorist acts are contrary to religious values." The same day, Reuters reported that Tehran was delivering more money to Middle Eastern terrorist groups.

Iran's ruling mullahs are notorious for their double talk, but nowhere is this more evident than in Iraq, where Tehran has two main objectives: to create a client regime and to rid itself from its Iraq-based main opposition, the Iranian Mujahedeen-e Khalq.

Since the onset of the war, Tehran has been flooding Iraq's holy Shia cities with its agents disguised as "pilgrims." The mullahs are laying their groundwork quite methodically because they believe time is on their side. Since last May, the population of holy city of Karabla has swelled to almost twice than what it was before the war, with new residents coming mostly from Iran. Local Iraqis have complained that many Iranians are paying huge sums to buy houses for Tehran's agents who are skillfully embedding themselves in these cities.

Since coming to power in 1979, the mullahs have considered Iraq the ideal springboard to export "Islamic Revolution" throughout the region. They view a pro-Tehran Iraq as a counterweight to the advancement of democracy in the Middle East. Clearly, a secular democratic Iraq would be a strategic blow to Tehran.

Iran is also hell-bent on eliminating its archenemy, the Mujahedeen-e Khalq. Last December, the Iraqi Interim Governing Council (IGC) issued a resolution, a brainchild of Tehran, which called for the expulsion of the Mujahedeen from Iraq. Two days later, an IGC spokesman said the expulsion order was a prelude to hand over the Mujahedeen to Iran. Raymond Tanter and Patrick Clawson, both with the Washington Institute, argued against such a deal which in their words would treat these dissidents "as if they were trading cards." "Trading the human rights of innocent people for political expediency would be a tragic move, to say the least," they warned.

For one thing, Mujahedeen proponents and detractors, alike, share the view that the group "is singularly dedicated to one goal: overthrowing its 'archenemy,' the Islamic Republic of Iran." The mullahs also believe the group - currently disarmed and under protection of the US military - is still in a position to influence the political landscape in Iran as anti-government protests mount in the country. The Washington Post described the IGC's expulsion order "a surprise move that could alter the regional balance of power" and a "significant political and security gain for Iran" since there are no other "major opposition groups operating on any of Iran's borders" which would provide it with direct access.

In the long run, Tehran's strategic threat to a democratic Iraq would be neutralized when a secular, peaceful democracy replaces the ruling theocracy. Washington should, therefore, develop a solid policy of support for Iran's democracy movement. In the meantime, it should block mullahs' drive to derail the legitimate desire of Iraqis for pluralism and democratic institutions. In addition, it should not entertain the idea of handing over Mujahedeen members, partially or as a whole, to the mullahs. This would be inhumane, strategically counter-productive, and against our stated policy of no deals with terrorist regimes.

### EU Warns Iran Over Human Rights

GENEVA -- The European Union warned Tehran on Thursday 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 at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva that its policy of constructive engagement with Tehran on human rights was flagging.

"Unfortunately, the fourth round of our human rights dialogue with Iran has not taken place due to Iran's failure to confirm the dates agreed," Ireland's envoy Mary Whelan told the Commission on behalf of the EU presidency.

"We regret that overall we see little improvement in the human rights situation in the country," she added.

Whelan underlined that violations of human rights "continue to be widespread" in Iran, including torture, disappearances after arrests, arbitrary detention and political and religious repression.

The EU also noted that a de facto moratorium on amputations in Iran, a criminal penalty under Islamic law, had not been respected, while public executions continued.

*AFP, March 25, 2004*

### Weekly shut down

TEHRAN -- The Iranian judiciary has closed down *Tabarestan*, a weekly magazine, for drawing similarities between goats and Iran's ruling Islamic clerics, press reports said.

In its last issue before being ordered shut down by the judiciary, the weekly published an article denouncing the misdeeds of the goat, branding it a destructive animal "whose distinctive sign is to have a long beard".

According to the newspaper, the goat is an animal which does not respect "the democratic rights in a herd of sheep" and even stops the sheep from "freely bleating".

*Tabarestan* also added that the goat "destroys everything in its way, eats the roots of plants and the leaves of trees."

"All our misfortunes come from the goats and their kids", the weekly said, adding that it "is astonishing that the number of the goats is on the increase."

*AFP, March 15, 2004*

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](mailto:dispatch@usadيران.org)

**Associated Press**

March 23, 2004

**Iraq's Basra Gives View of Tehran's Influence**

BASRA -- It was the clearest sign yet that what's developing in southern Iraq is not the open, free and democratic society promised by the U.S.-led coalition occupying Iraq. The police officer at a roadblock ordered a traveler to cover her hair if she expected to continue her journey. "This is an Islamic country and you must respect our feelings," said the officer in the pale blue uniform supplied by the occupying coalition.

Welcome to the Islamic state of southern Iraq where almost every public building is adorned with murals and posters of the three prominent Shiite Muslim clerics "martyred" in the chaos of today's Iraq or under the rule of Saddam Hussein.

It is the sons, brothers and followers of these three men who -with the backing of neighboring Iran -are shaping the Shiite politics in the south. Here, secular ideas are not tolerated, alcohol sellers and video shop owners risk their lives, clubs and restaurants are closed for playing music, and women fearing for their lives hide behind veils.

While the world's attention has been focused on the bickering over whether the country's interim constitution should make Islam "a source" or "the source" of legislation and over the form of federation best suited for Iraq, these hardline Islamic forces are quietly putting down roots and building their power base.

Many Basra residents say that the Shiite clerics who rule Iran are behind much of the religious-vigilante violence taking place in this city of 2 million and that the Islamic Republic is determined to have an influential role here. "Basra is the center of culture and science," said Mustafa, a 26-year-old businessman. "Most of the religious parties are mercenaries who lived in Iran .... They want to impose their ideas on us. They want their word to be the law. We are afraid of them."

Many in Basra fear that by the time elections are held next year and a constitution is in place, it will be too difficult to eliminate these forces, which will be fully entrenched.

Women have been especially affected by the changes in Basra. They are hardly seen in the streets -almost never at night -and when they do go out they wear the hijab, or veil. Even some Christians follow this practice, though the law doesn't mandate such Islamic dress, as it does in Iran. "The situation of women used to be bad under Saddam, but it's worse now," said Ahood al-Fadhly, a women's rights activist. "Now, they can't even come into the street the way they want to dress."...

SCIRI's (the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, or SCIRI) presence is obvious in Basra, from the Iranian-backed al-Nakheel TV station and -more importantly -the forcing of the police intelligence unit to recruit more than 150 men from the Badr Organization the SCIRI militant wing that is trained and financed by Iran

**National Review Online**

December 30, 2003

**Iranian Futures: Khatami's doublespeak and a hot potato**

... In a report from Tehran last week, the AFP news agency quoted Khatami as saying that "Iran was ready to pardon most members of the People's Mujahedeen," a prominent Iranian opposition group which "seeks a secular government to replace Iran's clerical regime." The Mujahedeen have been fighting against the Iranian mullahs for over 24 years — doing much more than writing articles and waving banners...

Last week, Iraq's Governing Council (IGC) issued a statement calling for the expulsion of these Iranian dissidents by the end of December. And a day later, in tandem with the Iranian regime, a member of the IGC told the AFP that it "is considering handing the People's Mujahedeen back to the Iranian authorities." On December 23, Mohammad Hasan Fadaie, a spokesperson for the Iranian foreign ministry, reiterated Khatami's call for "amnesty" by rejecting Ambassador Bremer's recent intent to release the 3,800 Iranian dissidents to a third country. Echoing that spirit, Iran's Prosecutor General Abdolnabi Namazi last Sunday warned that the transfer of the Mujahedeen members to any country but Iran "will cost Europe and the U.S. dearly." He went on to say that protection of the Mujahedeen members "by any system would entail political, economic and security consequences."

As the U.S. finds itself holding a hot Mujahedeen potato, it will be wise to carefully consider the question of the Iranian extradition. President Bush must send a clear message to Tehran, saying that he will not allow the clerical regime to silence Iranians who are brave enough to speak out or act against brutality at home and terrorism abroad. The Mujahedeen role and presence in Iraq should be examined in the context of many open questions that still remain while Iraq is being reconstructed. However, appeasing Khatami by allowing thousands of Iranian dissidents to be sent to the gallows in Iran will not likely follow the president's vision of "the regime in Tehran [who] must heed the democratic demands of the Iranian people, or lose its last claim to legitimacy."

*Excerpts from an article by Nir Boms, a senior fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies*