

USADI Dispatch

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USADI Commentary

The Summer of Discontent Looming in Iran

With summer fast approaching, Iran's security forces are gearing up to crackdown on anti-government demonstrations which usually escalate in the months of June and July.

There have been many protests in Iran's major cities already. In March, violent anti-government protests erupted in Fereydoun Kenar, Marivan, Boukan, and Isfahan.

And earlier this month, teachers in Tehran and elsewhere staged demonstrations that led to the closure of many schools across the country. Moreover, more than 20,000 people took part in a protest by tea growers in northern Iran last week. The state-run media reported the arrest of 18 tea growers.

To stem the rising momentum of popular protests, Iran's theocratic rulers are undertaking pre-emptive measures by deploying the security forces in Tehran and other major cities. Special units of the Revolutionary Guards Corps regularly take position in many of the capital's major intersections and streets. Roaming around in groups of four or five, they harass particularly the students and young people, making their presence felt.

In an editorial entitled, "The Guards must keep their guard up," the state-controlled daily, *Ressalat*, expressed concern over the spread of popular uprisings. "Certainly, the psychological atmosphere of June and July requires the vigilance of the Hezbollah as never before," it wrote last week.

The mullahs' security forces have also executed searches at many internet service centers. Another state-controlled daily *Sharq* wrote over the weekend that 20 such centers had been searched and that at least 12 shut down.

The number of executions including public hangings has been on the rise in recent weeks. Agence France Presse reported today that three people were hanged in Tehran and in the northeastern city of Mashhad. The clerical regime hanged four prisoners in city of Khorramabad (western Iran), and city of Ahwaz (southwest), Tehran and Karaj last week. Two women and six men in Arak and Karaj have also received death sentences.

Clearly, the mullahs, anticipating a long and hot summer of discontent, are banking on the international community's ambivalence as they implement their pre-emptive measures to keep the democracy movement at bay. Without doubt, the United Nations Human Rights Commission's indifference toward the deteriorating state of human rights in Iran, reflected in the European Union's failure to table a censure resolution against Iran in the Commission's April session in Geneva, emboldened Iran's ruling tyrants.

Iran's democracy movement offers the only chance for real change in Iran through peaceful means. The United States' security concerns could only be alleviated if and when the rule of law and democracy prevail in Iran. We should, therefore, give priority to efforts aimed at ensuring respect for the human rights of Iran's citizens and Iranian dissidents striving to establish secular and representative governance in that country.

Voice of America (Editorial)

May 7, 2004

Iran Actively Supports Terrorism

Iran is the world's "most active state sponsor of terrorism." In its latest "Patterns of Global Terrorism" report, the U.S. State Department says that in 2003, Iran's "Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Ministry of Intelligence and Security were involved in the planning of and support for terrorist acts." The report says Iran backs terrorist groups that target Israel and harbors senior members of al-Qaida.

Cofer Black, the U.S. Coordinator for Counterterrorism, says that the Iranian government's many security agencies do much more than collect information:

"They have and develop relationships with terrorists and terrorist groups to be in a position to command and control terrorist actions in response to national command authority."

Ambassador Black says that Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, as well as Hezbollah, are among the terrorist groups that have received financial and logistical support from the Iranian government:

"They are the ones that provide the weapons and armament that are funneled to Hezbollah to kill innocent people, sent through Syria. They provide safe haven to leadership elements of the al-Qaida organization who, very likely, are in contact with their operatives overseas that are planning and attempting to execute attacks against innocent men, women, and children."

Ambassador Black says the U.S. takes Iranian support for terrorism seriously:

"These guys are very dangerous. They operate globally. They have killed people. They take actions that directly impact innocent men, women, and children."

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@usadIran.org

Washington Times (Editorial)

May 10, 2004

A U.N. whitewash for Iran

Last month... when it came to the Iranian government's brutal treatment of its own citizens, the UNHCHR (the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights) stood mute. At this year's session, which concluded in Geneva late last month, the organization declined to rebuke the Iranian government for violating human rights, despite a large body of evidence that it has engaged in summary executions, torture, and arbitrary arrests and detention.

In January, U.N. special investigator Ambeyi Ligabo, a Kenyan diplomat, issued a report documenting the cases of journalists and intellectuals who have received severe punishment for criticizing the Islamist government and clerical leadership that controls the country. Mr. Ligabo noted the case of Hashem Aghajari, a history professor in Tehran, who was arrested in August 2002 for a speech given two months earlier titled "Islamic Protestantism." Last November, Mr. Aghajari was sentenced to 74 lashes and death on charges of insulting Islam, apostasy and heresy. A journalist named Abbas Abdi was sentenced to eight years in jail after his November 2002 arrest following publication of a poll indicating that Iranians overwhelmingly support a resumption of relations with the United States. Journalist and film historian Siamak Pourzand, 75, has been chained to his bed at Modares Hospital in Tehran...

But even though Mr. Ligabo documented these and other cases in his report, the UNHCHR has ignored his findings and refused to condemn the Iranian government...

The Economist

May 6, 2004

Mocking Mullahs

Disenchanted by their theocratic government, many Iranians enjoy the not uncommon sight of a gowned cleric standing helplessly at the side of the road, hailing taxis that refuse to stop. They make fun of akhunds, an impolite word for mullahs, and crack jokes about seminarians whose ambition is to parrot their teachers' every banality. Iranians have always chuckled in private.

Until April 21st, that is, when "Marmulak" (Lizard), a film that contains these and other impious jibes, came out in several Iranian cities. Kamal Tabrizi's comedy, about Reza, a fugitive criminal disguised as a mullah, is very funny. But it is also a taboo-breaker, which is one reason it has enjoyed the most successful opening in Iranian film history.

"Marmulak" punctures clerical self-esteem more comprehensively than any Iranian film since the ayatollahs took power in 1980. The film shows Reza, resplendent in gown and turban, flirting with a comely widow, picking the pocket of a Tehran swell and fluffing his lines after inadvertently becoming prayer leader of a small-town mosque.

Jumhuri-ye Eslami, a conservative newspaper, says that such scenes insult Iran's "religion, government and people". Others, however, point to the success of Reza's idiosyncratic sermons in drawing worshippers to his mosque, and to his bent for pious deeds. "Marmulak", they argue, may even draw some of the sting of popular discontent.

Although censorship is in theory controlled by Iran's reformist government, headed by President Muhammad Khatami, it is unlikely that "Marmulak" could have been made without support from some in the conservative establishment. Though the film is not being shown in two cities known for their piety, Iran's most senior ayatollahs have so far expressed their unhappiness in private; it is still possible that the film will be taken off the screens. ...

Agence France Presse

May 12, 2004

US commission slams Iran for abuses of religious freedom

WASHINGTON - A semi-official US religious freedom watchdog heavily criticized Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt for discrimination... The US Commission on International Religious Freedom identified the three Middle Eastern countries as the region's prime violators of the right to worship and called for Washington to increase pressure on them, particularly Saudi Arabia, to change...

Iran has been designated a "country of particular concern" for abuses of religious freedom since 1999, and the panel once again recommended that it be identified as such.

"The government of Iran engages in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, including prolonged detention, torture, and executions based primarily or entirely upon the religion of the accused," the commission said.

In particular, it noted continued persecution by the Islamic republic's conservative Shiite religious leadership of the members of the Baha'i faith as well as discrimination against Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians in addition to minority Sunni and Sufi Muslims.