

USADI Dispatch

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

Volume 1, No. 58

Thursday, December 23, 2004

USADI Commentary

Tehran Ends 2004 with a New Record in Rights Abuse

Earlier this week, the United Nations General Assembly denounced Iran for public executions, torture, arbitrary sentencing, flogging, stoning and systematic discrimination against women in law and practice. The resolution expressed concern at the "worsening situation" regarding freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of the media, "especially the increased persecution for the peaceful expression of political views, including arbitrary arrest and detention without charge or trial."

The document, the 51st UN censure of Iran, deplored the execution of children under the age of 18 in violation of international standards.

Human rights organization have issued scathing reports about Tehran's appalling rights record, such as issuing decrees to stone to death of 13-year old schoolgirls and mentally-disabled women, as well as public hanging of teenagers.

The Human Right Watch reported this week, "The Iranian judiciary is using threats of lengthy prison sentences and coerced televised statements in an attempt to cover up its arbitrary detention and torture of internet journalists and civil society activists." Since September, more than 20 internet journalists and civil society activists have been arrested and held in a secret detention center in Tehran, the report said.

Amnesty International also issued an Urgent Action this week to save an Iranian woman from being stoned to death for adultery. Hajieh Esmailvand's sentence was upheld by the Supreme Court and her unnamed co-defendant is at risk of imminent execution by hanging, according to the press release.

AI reported, "The Iranian Penal Code is very specific about the manner of execution and types of stones which should be used. Article 102 states that men will be buried up to their waists and women up to their breasts for the purpose of execution by stoning." Article 104 states, with reference to the penalty for adultery, that the stones used should "not be large enough to kill the person by one or two strikes, nor should they be so small that they could not be defined as stones."

In short, although the mullahs' regime continued rights violations brought more international censures in 2004, Tehran continued its barbarity with impunity.

The systematic and brutal suppression of dissent is the mullahs' main instrument to preserve their reign of terror in Iran. Without it, the mullahs stand little change in the face of an increasingly restive population.

Nevertheless, by claiming that there is no "visible opposition," Tehran's apologists argue that the only option is to preserve the status quo. In truth, however, this is only a cover for justifying the appeasement of a terror-sponsoring tyranny with which the Europeans have struck lucrative business deals.

The other lie Tehran, its apologist in the EU and its few friends in Washington policy circles perpetuate is that with the political death of Khatami's "reformist" faction, the democracy movement has also died, degenerating from a dynamic political movement into apathy and passive opposition.

The fact, however, is that the democracy movement was not the brainchild of Khatami or his faction, but a by-product of a century-long struggle against despotism in Iran. The mass graves in Iran and the walls of hundreds of dungeons in Iran's notorious prisons are a testament to the national courage and spirit of resistance among Iranians.

The world community must stop turning a blind eye to the mullahs' continued rights violations and crackdown on dissidents; it should initiate a diplomatic offensive instead.

The outside world must condemn unequivocally every arrest, public execution, stoning, and any other case of rights abuse. Tehran must be made to pay for its atrocities.

Western embassies in Iran must raise their voice and take action in response to the suppression of dissidents and other kinds of right abuses. Their presence in Tehran, rather than facilitating commerce at the expense of Iranians' national welfare, must be a source of diplomatic support for the democracy movement there.

As Washington works to formulate a new Iran policy, it must make support for Iranian dissidents working to unseat this regime the centerpiece of its policy. To this end, limiting Tehran's capacity to muzzle the opposition will go a long way to enhance the Iranian people's chance of toppling this murderous regime.

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.

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The Boston Globe (Editorial)

December 22, 2004

Iranian meddling

IT MAY be a positive sign that when campaigning began for elections scheduled for Jan. 30 in Iraq, the first hot-button issue raised by Iraqi politicians was the specter of Iranian influence.

US officials as well as Arab leaders are breaking no new ground when they warn in public about Iranian meddling in Iraq. They are fearful of Tehran for geopolitical reasons. They don't want Iranian-style theocracy to spread beyond Iran's borders.

But it is an exhilarating novelty for Iraqis to be open about such a politically sensitive subject without fear of being tortured or killed.

Campaigning for the new National Assembly alongside Prime Minister Iyad Allawi last Wednesday, Iraq's interim defense minister, Hazem Shaalan, suggested that parties represented on the electoral list of the United Iraqi Alliance -- a list compiled primarily by religious Shi'ites loyal to Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani -- might be soft on national security because they are in thrall to Tehran.

"When we arrested the commander of Jaish Mohammed" -- one of the terrorist gangs operating in Iraq -- "we discovered that the key to terrorism is in Iran, which is the number one enemy for Iraq," Shaalan said. The connection between this particular terrorist group and Tehran may or may not be authentic. But the political spin of the minister's accusation shows that many people in Iraq harbor profound fears of Iranian influence.

That fear has less to do with ethnic or sectarian animosity than with Tehran's political system. According to Shaalan, the Iranians "are fighting us because we want to build freedom and democracy and they want to build an Islamic dictatorship and have turbaned clerics to rule in Iraq."

Even if Shaalan was exaggerating when he called the United Iraqi Alliance's list of candidates "an Iranian list," parties on that list do have links with Tehran, and some of the candidates -- opponents of Saddam Hussein -- had fled into exile in Iran. So the threat of Iranian meddling in the politics of a post-Ba'athist Iraq is real. Iranian agents and influence-buying funds from Tehran have been circulating in Shi'ite areas of southern Iraq.

However, the best antidote to imposition of the Iranian system in Iraq is the cleansing effect of democratic debate...

The Sunday Times

December 19, 2004

Iranian links undermine mullah's drive for power

An alliance of religious parties that want to turn Iraq into an Islamic state is facing a growing challenge in the country's election and is accused of having secret links with Iran. As campaigning was launched last week, a coalition of leading Shi'ite parties called the United Iraqi Alliance began as firm favourites for the poll on January 30.

At least 60% of Iraqis are Shi'ites. With much of the Sunni population threatening to boycott the election, the coalition that was pulled together on the orders of the revered Shi'ite cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has looked unbeatable.

Last week there was evidence that even in the Shi'ite heartlands -- including the second city of Basra -- the coalition is far from unshakable. It is being undermined by fears of Iranian influence and tribal loyalties to local candidates.

The coalition is spearheaded by the formerly Tehran-based Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) whose leader, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, spent years in Iran. It also includes the Iraqi branch of Hezbollah, which is close to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, and the Iraqi National Congress whose leader, Ahmed Chalabi, was accused by American officials of helping Iranian intelligence, a claim he vigorously denied.

Most Shi'ites are determined that the vote should go ahead regardless of Iraq's insurgency. After centuries of domination by more educated Sunnis, they believe their time has come. While they remain loyal to Sistani, it is unclear how far that allegiance will translate into support for Iranian-backed religious parties demanding much stricter Islamic laws.

As registration closed for candidates, it emerged that at least eight coalitions will oppose the United Iraqi Alliance, in addition to 73 other independent parties. Among the main challengers is the Iraqi List, led by Iyad Allawi, the interim prime minister....

Many citizens oppose such shows of force and are furious to see pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini, the late revolutionary Iranian leader, displayed in a police station. "How can they revere someone who put this city under siege and bombed us?" asked one unemployed engineer, referring to attacks on Basra in the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s.

As one senior British Army officer said last week: "In Basra, Iran is seen as shorthand for anything bad. Every crime or explosion is blamed on an Iranian outsider. Yet one way or another so many people have Iran in their background. It's going to be a big factor here..."