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USADI Commentary

Zahra Kazemi's Legacy: Standing up to the Mullahs

Alas, it had to be Zahra Kazemi's life to again bring the world's attention to the barbaric treatment Iranians, particularly women, get from Iran's ruling regime. Still, it is very quiet out there. There was no condemnation and no serious international response to hold Tehran to account for its murderous conduct in light of new appalling revelations about her murder.

The 54-year-old Iranian-Canadian photojournalist was murdered in prison in June 2003. She was arrested outside of Tehran's notorious Evin prison while taking photographs of the families of young Iranians arrested during student protests against the ruling theocracy.

According to a former Iranian army doctor who examined her before she died in a military hospital emergency room, Kazemi was beaten, tortured and raped. Dr. Shahram Azam, who recently received political asylum in Canada, has told Canadian media that Kazemi was brought from Evin prison unconscious with bruises all over her body. She had a skull fracture, two broken fingers, missing fingernails, a crushed big toe and a smashed nose, deep scratches on the neck and evidence of flogging on the legs and back.

Still Western capitals from Washington to London, were intentionally silent in condemnation of Tehran's barbaric murder of Kazemi. The EU's faltering nuclear negotiations with Tehran, it seems, has left them speechless in denouncing the mullahs' blatant murder of Kazemi. Washington, eager not to appear hindering the EU-Tehran meaningless nuclear talks, has kept a low profile on this and other rights violations in Iran. Canadian government's statements in light of new revelations amounted to nothing more than a rehash of its previous positions. Human rights organizations have not fared any better.

Kazemi's case opens a window into the role Iranian women are playing against the tyranny of mullahs. Make no mistake, as an Iranian woman who in her capacity as a journalist defied the mullahs, her gender was the main reason to arouse the barbaric wrath of the theocratic establishment. Her tragic murder made Kazemi the face of thousands of Iranian women who have died or have been tortured in the hands of mullahs for daring to make a stand for freedom and resisted their tyranny.

Kazemi's brave defiance of the mullahs by no means was an isolated case. From the 1906 Constitutional movement to the 1979 anti-monarchic revolution to the nationwide resistance to the ruling theocracy, women have always been a key component of anti-dictatorial movements in Iran.

Misogyny is the lynch pin of the fundamentalist ideology ruling Iran. Institutionalized violence is carried out in the name of God. No other government in the world has executed as many women as the Iranian regime has since the 1979 revolution. A common method of punishing women in public is by stoning them to death. At least 14 women have been sentenced to stoning or stoned to death since 1997 when Mohammad Khatami came to office. Iran has had the highest number of female prisoners in the world.

The women in Iran, of course, have persevered. When they rise against oppression, they shake the regime to its foundations. Just last month, an anti-government riot erupted in Tehran following a soccer match between Iran and Japan. Women who are banned from attending soccer matches actively took part in this riot calling for the overthrow of the mullahs.

It is outright unconscionable that as the new revelations about Kazemi's murder made it through international media, the mullahs' president Mohammad Khatami received a red-carpet welcome in Austria and France. Eager to strike new lucrative deals with Tehran, the EU has made of a mockery of its long-held claim to be the land of upholding human rights. When it comes to choosing between commerce and Zahra Kazemis of Iran, the EU capitals made their choice a long time ago: Euro over human rights.

The most meaningful comment about Kazemi's case was probably made last week by her son, Stephan Hashemi. "I'm continuing what my mother has started by standing up to the Iranian regime," he said. And that is exactly what men and women of Iran will do to bring the ruling tyrants down. **(USADI)**

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

The Wall Street Journal

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Iranian Opposition Group Cites Reactor Concerns

An Iranian opposition group claims Iran has accelerated construction of a heavy-water nuclear reactor in the western part of the country that, when completed, could be used to make fuel for atomic weapons.

If true, yesterday's charge by the National Council of Resistance of Iran could further complicate talks between Iran and the so-called EU-3 -- France, Britain and Germany -- to secure "objective guarantees" Iran isn't pursuing nuclear weapons.

The Council's claims couldn't be independently verified, and the group's largest member, the People's Mujaheddin of Iran, is listed as a terrorist entity by the U.S. and Britain. U.S. and International Atomic Energy Agency officials have expressed skepticism about a number of the Council's more recent claims. However, in August 2002 it exposed the existence of the Arak site and an extensive covert Iranian program to enrich uranium. Those claims were confirmed by the IAEA, the United Nations' Vienna-based nuclear watchdog.

According to the Council, Iran aims to complete a heavy-water production facility at the Qatran Complex in Arak by August, after gas leaks and other technical problems delayed an earlier target date of November 2004. Heavy water is used to control the nuclear reactions in a reactor.

In addition, the group claims Iranian officials have ordered work speeded up at another part of the complex -- a planned 40-megawatt heavy-water research reactor -- and that workers are operating in double shifts. Iran says it is building that research reactor for civilian purposes, but the plutonium waste from heavy-water reactors can be used to make weapons fuel.

Work on the Arak facility is legal and wouldn't breach the letter of Iran's deal with the Europeans, under which Iran suspended all activities related to its uranium-enrichment program, another potential route to weapons-grade fuel. Arak has been of less concern because the foundations for it only recently were laid and Iran is still some distance from producing plutonium waste, a Western diplomat in Vienna said.

However, according to a British official familiar with the nuclear talks, confirmation that Iran is accelerating work at Arak would breach the spirit of the negotiations. The problem, this official said, is that while the Europeans are trying to secure permanent "objective guarantees" that Iran isn't pursuing nuclear weapons, completing the Arak facility "would be a jigsaw piece in an overall puzzle -- the Iranians having at some stage in the future a capability to produce material for weapons use."...

The Sunday Times

April 3, 2005

Iran offers cash for bombs to break Palestinian truce

PALESTINIAN fighters have revealed that Hezbollah, the militant Lebanese group backed by Iran, is offering to pay for attacks aimed at shattering the fragile truce with Israel.

Ariel Sharon, the Israeli prime minister, has made it clear that one suicide bomber in Tel Aviv could prompt him to abandon negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, and may even delay Israel's disengagement from Gaza, which is planned for July.

In the first concrete evidence of Iranian interference in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the men, all on Israel's most wanted list, said they had received payments of up to \$9,000 sent by Hezbollah to the West Bank for attacks against Israel during the past four years.

They said that most of the money from Hezbollah had been sent to Islamic Jihad, the militant fundamentalist group that has sent suicide bombers into Israeli cities. The men, members of the al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades -- the military wing of Fatah, the secular group founded by Yasser Arafat -- knew of the payments because they liaised with Islamic Jihad in their area, near the West Bank city of Nablus.

"They would send Islamic Jihad money in amounts of something like \$4,000," said Ala'a Sanakreh, the 27-year-old leader of the group. "It's easy -- they just use Western Union."...

Sanakreh said that although he was not privy to politics on any senior level, he believed from his discussions with local Islamic Jihad members that the money offered for fresh attacks came from Iranian intelligence and the Revolutionary Guard.

The money from Hezbollah, which takes its orders from Tehran, appears to be evidence of Iran's desire to stop a negotiated peace between Israel and the Palestinians...