

Where Is The Outrage?

By **Abbas Milani**

For 42 years, the world did business with Muammar Qaddafi, even as it knew about the brutality he was inflicting on his own people. Too often, there was no outrage in the West about Qaddafi's crimes. Now, if the same pattern is not to be repeated in Iran, one must ask: Where is the outrage about that country's endemic brutality and its kleptocratic theocracy? Specifically, where is the outrage about the fact that the four leading figures of the Green Movement—Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi, as well as their equally defiant wives, Zahra Rahnavard and Fateme Karubi—have been under arrest now for six weeks? While military intervention in Iran is not an option as it was in Libya, it would still be helpful and morally justified if the world didn't forget about the serious crimes that are taking place there on a daily basis—and if American leaders showed more consistent outrage about the plight of the Iranian people.



Over the course of three decades, the Islamic Republic has unleashed a reign of terror on Iran, arresting tens of thousands, executing several thousand, and forcing some three million Iranians—including hundreds of journalists, writers, dissidents, scientists, physicians, scholars, and entrepreneurs—into forced exile. In 1988 alone, according to numerous credible reports, on direct order of Ayatollah Khomeini, close to 4,000 prisoners, serving time on earlier charges, were summarily executed in what was clearly a crime against humanity. If one adds up all the bloodshed and violence in Iran since 1979, there is hardly a regime in the Middle East, including Syria's and Libya's, that has shed as much blood and caused as much heartbreak to keep its despotic hold on power. The ruling regime in Iran—effectively at this point a partnership between Ayatollah Khamenei and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps—is literally and metaphorically getting away with murder.

Yet, in recent weeks, even as Tehran has put Green Movement leaders under house arrest and cracked down on protesters, developments around the world have helped it to escape scrutiny. There have been occasional exceptions to this pattern—such as a strong March 21 Persian New Year message from President Obama, in which he made clear that he stands with the democratic

aspirations of the Iranian people—but, for the most part, the revolt in Egypt, the war in Libya, and the devastating earthquake in Japan have pushed Iran off the front pages. Moreover, the ill-advised Saudi incursion into Bahrain has provided the Iranian regime with an occasion to grandstand about siding with the democratic aspirations of the people there.

Despite these “fortunate” turns of events, the regime continues to suffer from internal rifts. The fact that Rafsanjani—who has vacillated between the Green Movement and the regime—was recently displaced as chair of the Assembly of Experts can be taken as an indication of strife within the government. Moreover, articles in some of the most important papers and websites close to the IRGC and Khamenei have recently attacked Ahmadinejad in a remarkably bitter tone, predicting that he and his controversial guru, Mashai, are planning a new challenge to the clerical regime. Copies of a CD that was produced and distributed using government funds—and which quotes Shia texts to portray Ahmadinejad as a saintly figure anointed to be the key ally and advocate of the Mahdi, whose return, according to Shiism, will deliver apocalyptic salvation to humanity—have sparked the ire of IRGC commanders, as well as top ayatollahs. Speaking in Iranian publications, these critics have questioned the validity of the quotes and condemned the effort to attach a precise timeline to the Mahdi’s return.

The 32-year history of this regime shows it to be brutal but careful in its use of violence against the Iranian people. Its leaders will do what they think is needed to stay in power, yet they are constantly weighing the price and profit of each act. In spite of their verbal bravura and defiant tone, they do seem to take into account international and domestic opinion. The release of British sailors arrested by the IRGC several years ago on charges of entering Iranian waters was one example of the regime changing its behavior when it realized a formidable alliance of forces were against it. Now, however, the international community has allowed the regime to pay virtually no price for the arrest of the four leading figures of the democratic movement. That needs to change. Showing more outrage would help.

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