

EXPULSION OF IRANIAN DIPLOMATS

Hon. David Kilgour

(co-chair, Canadian Friends of a Democratic Iran)

Notes for address to members of the Iranian-Canadian community

Pearson Building, 128 Sussex Drive

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On Sept. 7, Canadian Friends of a Democratic Iran welcomed Foreign Minister Baird's announcement that his government is closing the Iranian embassy in Ottawa after removing earlier our remaining diplomats and their families from Canada's embassy in Tehran.

Canada is no longer willing to put up with the conduct of one of the most inhuman regimes on earth, including the ongoing intimidation of many Canadians of origin in Iran by its embassy. Canadians and the world's peoples have a responsibility to stand in solidarity with the struggle for dignity in Iran. I stress here too my high regard for Iranians living within and outside Iran, who believe in peace, dignity, the rule of law, and freedom of speech and religion as much as Canadians do. We all hope that the Canadians currently in Iran's prisons will not be affected negatively and note that at least one other prisoner there facing death, Gholam Reza, fortunately appears to have recently been released.

Minister Baird indicated that the decision to suspend diplomatic relations with Iran's regime was rooted in its proclaimed hatred towards other nations, pursuit of nuclear weapons, and gross and systematic human rights violations against its own citizens. The victims include many Iranian-Canadian families whose loved ones have been tortured or executed. This includes the mass execution of political prisoners in the summer of 1988 that has been described by some experts as the largest execution of dissidents since World War II. All of us here for the record oppose a military confrontation with Iran.

Ahmedinejad Record

Since Ahmadinejad became president in 2005, he has imprisoned protesters, tortured prisoners and escalated the execution rate. He is doing his utmost to develop nuclear weapons, while insisting that it is only for peaceful purposes that he wants to enrich uranium.

Having concealed its enrichment program for 18 years, Iran still insists that its nuclear program is entirely peaceful. It does not require nuclear energy for industrial purposes when it has vast reserves of oil and natural gas. The UN Security Council has already imposed four rounds of sanctions for its refusal to freeze its enrichment program. Nuclear proliferation is uniquely troubling because the regime threatens Israel with nuclear

destruction. Consumed with hatred of Israel, Ahmadinejad could use nuclear weapons.

Camps Ashraf and Liberty

A related issue involves approximately 3400 Iranian refugees in Camps Ashraf and Liberty. Ashraf was created in the desert about an hour's drive from Baghdad by Iranians, who in 1980 fled from the wave of terror unleashed in Iran by Ayatollah Khomeini. They were supporters of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), which was founded in the 1960s by university students, who had actively opposed the regimes of both the shah and the clerics. Tens of thousands of them were executed by the Khomeini regime when he seized power in 1979.

In 1986, the French government expelled the PMOI members, who had managed to escape Iran and to seek asylum in France in order to obtain the release of French soldiers captured by Tehran proxies in Lebanon. Unfortunately only Saddam Hussein's regime would accept them, so they reluctantly relocated to Iraq. The PMOI kept Saddam at arm's length and was neutral during the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Following the coalition forces' attack on Saddam, all Ashraf residents voluntarily disarmed and were declared "protected persons" under the Fourth Geneva Convention. They were subsequently guarded by U.S. soldiers. This ended, however, when the U.S. in 2009 handed off their protection under the Convention to the Tehran-influenced government of Nouri al-Maliki. Ignoring successor obligations under international law, his forces have since attacked the camp twice, killing 47 and wounding more than 1,000 unarmed men and women.

In late January this year, a committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) called on the Iraqi government not to turn the former American base, Camp Liberty into a prison, and called on the UNHCR to end the long delay in determining the refugee status of all residents. PACE noted that the living conditions in the new location are far less bearable than initially promised.

The United Nations organization as a whole has been weak to date in dealing with safety and dignity issues involving Ashraf residents. More 'responsibility to protect' and respect for the UN founding documents and purposes are clearly required by the U.N., its Security Council and the international community if the present government in Baghdad's worst instincts are to be contained successfully. The continuing fear of many of us is that Camp Liberty is morphing into a concentration camp to hold members of most probably the largest Iranian opposition movement before they are slaughtered or returned to the inhuman Tehran regime in chains.

In short, all of us here today and many others in the Iranian diaspora across Canada are delighted.

Thank you.