

IRAN ACCOUNTABILITY

Notes for Hon. David Kilgour, J.D.,
Co-chair, Canadian Friends of a Democratic Iran,
Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights Panel
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Shirin Ebadi, Iranian Nobel Laureate

The dire situation of human rights in Iran has been at the core of the struggle of Iranians for the past four decades. The brutal crimes committed in the 1980s were done by men who today enjoy full impunity and label themselves “reformers”, thereby illustrating that the reformer vs conservative split in Iran’s regime is a sham.

The uprising in Iran that began on December 28 th last year with the theme and a mainstream slogan of “Reformist, hardliner, the game is now over!” showed clearly to the world that the Iranian people would not settle for

anything less than a government that upholds their basic rights, freedom of speech and access to information, gender equality and a republic based on the separation of religion and state.

As you all know, thousands of people were arrested during the uprising. About a dozen were confirmed killed under torture, although the regime claimed they committed suicide.

On the other hand, Iran's mullahs have not stopped exporting their brand of fundamentalism and terror across the region, most notably Syria, Yemen and Iraq, even though its own population is seeking to tackle the regime however it can.

Many ask why Iran's despots choose to use people's assets and capital for foreign incursions while even according to regime officials much of the population lives below the poverty line. The best answer is indeed from the top mullahs and IRGC commanders: "If we don't fight in Syria, we have to confront and fight back on the streets of Tehran and our cities".

Thousands of strikes, protests, rallies, and demonstrations have been registered over the last year in Iran, showing the increasing frustration of the people with the regime.

Mrs. Shirin Ebadi, Iran's Nobel Laureate, in a recent interview showed her frustration with the so-called reformist faction of the regime and courageously admitted her mistakes in aligning herself with organizations lobbying for the regime such as NIAC (National Iranian American Council) and publicly demanded a regime change, obviously by the Iranian people and not foreign intervention.

As this point, when the Iranian people look to human rights defenders to support them in their call for freedom, justice, human rights, it would be a critical mistake to ignore their call and send any signal that would embolden the regime in its crackdown on peaceful dissent internally and export fundamentalism and terrorism externally.

The ten-point plan of Mrs. Rajavi calls for a nation based on separation of religion and state, complete gender equality, and a non-nuclear Iran. It provides the best option for a clear path towards democracy and ending Iran's hand in malign influence in the region.

The US Congress on April 27 passed “Iran Human Rights and Hostage-Taking Accountability Act (H.R. 474) (410 in Favour and 2 Opposed). This legislation highlights the Iranian regime's ominous record of hostage-taking and human rights abuses, including the 1988 massacre of thousands of political prisoners. The bill mandates the imposition of U.S. sanctions on Iranian regime officials and businesses for these crimes.

Irrespective of U.S. policy decisions on the Iran nuclear treaty (JCPOA), the Iranian regime remains "dangerous and threatening" to the U.S., its allies, and to the Iranian people."

The April 27 vote showed a much-needed non-partisan unanimity in dealing with threats coming from Iran. I hope that the Bill S-219 before the Senate that modestly incorporates non-nuclear sanctions to remain until we are satisfied that Iran upholds its commitments for two years, is passed with no partisan bias.

Iran is the exception that proves the rule: It's the textbook example of the country that meets every precondition for democratic transition but to date still refuses to change.

Iranian protests repeatedly boil down to one thing: the accountability of the regime to its people. However, Ayatollah Khamenei has chosen the other side. His power depends on the continued stranglehold of the security state, which he has also made the country's economic centre of gravity. As long as this is true, Khamenei can't or won't address the root cause of Iran's chronic unrest.

Thank you