

WHY IS A PERSON WHO WORKED AGAINST MULLAHS' REGIME LABELED A TERRORIST?

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Byline: Kasra Nejat

Body

IMMIGRATION

I have received a lot of calls from Iranian-Americans in Missouri since April 3. "What about us?" they ask. "We are also political refugees. We also want freedom for Iran and had to flee to America. Are we out of the mullahs' reach?"

I have no answer for them.

On April 3, the Immigration and Naturalization Service arrested a young Iranian woman, Mahnaz Samadi. A human rights activist, Samadi is well known in Missouri. A keynote speaker at several community events, her wrenching personal testimony about the treatment of women in prison in Iran left a lasting impression. The INS is threatening to deport her.

As Iranians, we know that in her case that is a death sentence. Samadi sought to free Iran from the theocratic dictatorship installed by Ruhollah Khomeini, a goal shared by nine out of 10 Iranians. But she dared to speak out about her beliefs. While still in high school in Iran, she campaigned for human rights. She was arrested and spent four years under horrific torture in dreaded Evin political prison. The clerical regime killed her brothers, jailed her sister and tortured the entire family. She fled Iran to avoid being returned to the torture chambers, was granted political asylum in the United States in 1995 and dedicated her life to helping other Iranians victimized by the Tehran regime.

On April 3, she was arrested by INS agents on her return from Canada. She was not allowed to speak to her lawyer, who was at the border. She was secreted away to an unknown location, and then transferred from one jail to another. She was subjected to all kinds of humiliation, strip-searched following a visit from her attorney, shackled during the transfers between jails, taunted by guards as a "terrorist" and then locked up in a crowded cell in prison in rural Alabama.

Members of Congress, Amnesty International, the U.N. High Commission for Refugees, and Iranian-American communities across the U.S. have protested her arrest in letters to Attorney General Janet Reno and the INS director.

SO what is Samadi's crime? The INS's first notice to appear charges that she failed to tell them that, after fleeing Iran, she spent seven months with National Liberation Army's forces, who conduct "coordination attacks designed to liberate Iran." The NLA is the military wing of the resistance movement against the mullahs' tyranny. Sen. Christopher Bond led a group 28 senators who recognized the movement as legitimate. A majority in the House of

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Representatives, parliamentary majorities in Britain, Italy, Belgium and 143 members of the French National Assembly signed on the same initiative.

So what is really going on here? The State Department is still on the wrong track with the ruling regime in Iran. Let's flip through the history books. In January 1978, President Jimmy Carter referred to the shah's Iran as "as island of stability." Just months later, the monarchy was overthrown.

In 1985, the Reagan administration sent Iran's new president, Hashemi Rafsanjani, a gift of a cake, a colt and a Bible. That good will is better known now as the Irangate scandal.

In 1997, the State Department included Iran's largest and most effective opposition group in its list of foreign terrorist organizations. A senior Clinton administration official told The Los Angeles Times the inclusion of the People's Mujahedeen was a "goodwill gesture" to Iran's newly elected president, Mohammad Khatami.

It was quite obvious to Iranians here and in Tehran that Mahnaz Samadi's arrest was simply another in this series of concessions to Iran's unpopular rulers. The mullahs' state-controlled newspaper, Jomhuri-Islami, welcomed her arrest, adding that she might be deported.

That sure looks like a political agenda to Iranians in Missouri.

Mahnaz Samadi is the victim of a political game. So does that mean striving for freedom has become a crime? It is a question Iranian-Americans in Missouri are taking very seriously. The stakes are very high. In the words of Sen. Robert Torricelli, D-N.J., "Sending messages to foreign governments should not involve the taking of people's lives. She faces certain death. This is outrageous. It cannot be permitted to happen."

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