

Iran let off too easy

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On Sunday, Aug. 15, a 16-year-old girl in the town of Neka, Iran, was executed by hanging.

During her trial for charges of "engaging in acts incompatible with chastity," the teenage victim did not have a lawyer. She defended herself. She told the religious judge that he should punish the main perpetrators of moral corruption, not the victims. After her execution, the judge said he had her executed for her "sharp tongue."

In summer 1988, the Iranian regime massacred about 30,000 political prisoners in the course of a few months. According to a report by Amnesty International at the time, a mass grave was discovered when the rain washed away the soil in one of the shallower graves. People started digging up the graves in the middle of the night to recover the bodies of their loved ones.

The Iranian regime is now more than a local tyranny. It is a global threat that has to be dealt with urgently. Yet, it seems that policy-makers cannot come to a solid conclusion regarding Iran, perhaps because the stakes are too high. However, without an objective and firm policy, the next global disaster could be a nuclear Iran.

The wave of global terrorism started in 1979, with the assault on the U.S. embassy in Tehran. Iran then started sponsoring satellite terrorist groups around the world. Hostage taking in Lebanon marked the 1980s. In 1987, Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini issued a "fatwa" (decree) to murder the British author Salman Rushdie. During 1980s and 1990s, 450 terrorist operations were carried out by Iran's terror squads in Europe and the Middle East.

Amazingly, despite the mounting evidence, Iran was never held accountable. Several European countries, including France, Germany and Britain, promoted engagement in return for lucrative trade deals. France has emerged as Iran's leading trading partner. In return, last year, the French launched a raid on the headquarters of the principal Iranian opposition group, the National Council of Resistance of Iran. In an attempt to curry favor with Tehran, the Clinton administration blacklisted a council member organization, the People's Mojahedin, in 1997.

The United States went a step further, bombing the Mojahedin camps in Iraq in return for Tehran not meddling in Iraq during and after the 2003 invasion. Not surprisingly, the clerics did not keep their side of the bargain and sent thousands of troops and millions of dollars to Iraq to fuel the insurgency.

Appeasing the mullahs might have had short-term economic benefits, but it caused great perils for the rest of the world in the long run because it emboldened the mullahs to persist in their terrorist ambitions. Tehran's traditional apologists in Washington, including former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and the Council of Foreign Affairs, recommended dialogue with Iran.

Without question, another round of dialogue with Iran would give the clerics more time in their efforts to procure nuclear weapons.

The option before the world community is not one of appeasement vs. military action. Both options completely ignore the crucial role Iranians have to play in their country's future. There is a resilient pro-democracy movement in Iran that has been demanding regime change. Last February, Iranians overwhelmingly boycotted the parliamentary elections. In addition, Iran has a very strong and well-organized opposition movement.

Supporting the Iranian people's demands for regime change and reaching out to the Iranian opposition movement is a wise and prudent approach. This has to be augmented by firm and clear action, including the removal of the terror tag against the opposition movement and sending Tehran's nuclear file to the

United Nations Security Council.

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