

The Murder of Saleh Mohammadi

By Bruce Bawer

For decades, the Soviet Union was a fearful, nuclear-armed dictatorship. The Kremlin ruled over its people by terror. Dissenters were executed or sent to the Gulag. Ronald Reagan was right when he called it an evil empire. Over the decades, it fought proxy wars with America in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Angola, Nicaragua, and the Middle East. In the U.S. it funded activist groups such as the Black Panthers in order to cultivate dissent. On the few occasions when its satellite states dared to tiptoe away from total control, the tanks rolled in – into Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. Those who tried to escape into West Berlin by climbing over the Wall were shot to death.



Yet when the Soviet Union finally fell on December 26, 1991, the transformation was virtually bloodless. Why? Because Communism had lost its mojo. Gorbachev wasn't prepared to kill Russians in order to preserve it. Even if he had ordered the military to act, it might have refused. Few of the leaders around Gorbachev were willing to fight for Communism, let alone die for it. And the masses had long since seen through it. Nor was the economy able to keep the machine going. Hardliners tried to keep the ship afloat, but they were too few and too weak. And so it died, not with a bang but with a whimper.

Not so in Iran. The current regime in Tehran is on its way out. One mullah after another has been vaporized. The roll of honor is impressive: Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader; Ali

Shamkhani, Secretary of the Iranian Defence Council; Mohammad Pakpour, Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps; Abdolrahim Mousavi, Chief of the General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces; Aziz Nasirzadeh, Minister of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics; Mohammad Shirazi, Head of the Military Office of the Supreme Leader; and Esmaeil Khatib, Minister of Intelligence. Add to this a long list of top-ranking generals.

You'd think this would be enough to bring down any ordinary government. But the Islamic Republic is no ordinary government. If Gorbachev's Soviet Union had lost its faith in Marxism-Leninism, the men in Tehran are as fanatical as ever in their devotion to Islam. If Gorbachev and his supporters refused to kill their own people, the mullahs have no such qualms. Human life is nothing to them. If the survival of the Islamic state requires it, they will kill anybody and everybody. So it is that even as these tyrants live in fear of being hit by an American missile, they have no intention of ceasing to fight the enemy within. That's the power of their faith – although of course it's appalling to see the word "faith" used to describe someone's dedication to a cruel, primitive, bloodthirsty ideology that can make the word "totalitarian" seem insufficient.

But it's because of that enduring, undying faith that, on March 19, these monsters executed 19-year-old Saleh Mohammadi, a leading member of the Iranian national wrestling team. Mohammadi was hanged along with two other men, Mehdi Ghasemi and Saeed Davoudi. All three had been arrested in Qom, Mohammadi's hometown, where they had been participating in an anti-government protest. (Mohammadi's [arrest](#) took place on January 15.) After their arrest, the three men were accused of killing police officers, a charge against which they were not given the opportunity to defend themselves in court. Instead of facing trial, Mohammadi was tortured until he confessed to the crime of "waging war against God." His death sentence was handed down in Qom in early February, with Mohammadi telling

the judge that his confession had been coerced “under torture and other ill-treatment.”

Nima Mar, a human-rights activist and fellow athlete, has [described](#) Mohammadi’s execution as “a blatant political murder, part of the Islamic Republic’s pattern of targeting athletes to crush dissent and terrorize society.” Amnesty International [stated](#) that the “fast-tracked proceedings” to which Mohammadi was subjected “bore no resemblance to a meaningful trial.” And LBC [reported](#) that according to Mashi Alinejad, an Iranian American activist, “the executions are a signal from Tehran that its crackdown on protests would continue despite the ongoing bombing.”

As the Wall Street Journal [editorialized](#) on Friday, the Iranian state’s execution of its own citizens as punishment for protesting is a pretty clear indication of the character of the government that not a few Americans – eager to take the side of anyone whom Trump opposes – have chosen to side with. The Journal noted that Mohammadi and his fellow victims were far from alone: “By some counts, regime enforcers killed as many as 32,000 Iranians who took to the streets. Photographs leaked from the country show body bags lined up en masse. Many of the wounded were pursued and then killed in hospitals.” And the New York Times, citing the Washington-based Human Rights Activists News Agency, [noted](#) that Iranian forces have killed “over 200 children” during the recent protests.

While the official butchering of protesters in Iran has been underreported in the U.S., some attention, at least, has been paid to the recent plight of the Iranian women’s soccer team, whose members incurred the mullahs’ wrath by refusing to sing their national anthem after a match in Australia. When some of the women requested asylum in that country, they were denied – a decision that was reversed after President Trump personally urged the Australian prime minister to intervene (and promised that if he didn’t take them in, Trump would). In the end, however, the women withdrew their asylum request and returned

to Iran, obviously having been told – in good, old-fashioned Communist style – that if they didn't come home, their families would pay the price for their treachery.

There is nothing distinctly Iranian about the illegitimate arrest, trial, and execution of Saleh Mohammadi, or about the mass killing of citizens whose only crime was participating in peaceful public protest. This brutality on the part of the Iranian government is rooted entirely in Islam, a religion that originated on the Arabian peninsula and that is alien to the Persian people, who have a long, rich history that predates Islam by many centuries. But that history doesn't matter a whit so long as these fanatical Muslims are allowed to remain in power. When a country, any country, is run by such people, this is the kind of conduct that you have to expect.

It's conduct that was typical of the USSR during the days of Lenin and Stalin, of China under Mao, of Cambodia under Pol Pot. It's conduct that can only take place when the people who govern are in the grip of an absolute devotion to an ideology that commands utter obedience and demands the ultimate punishment for anyone who dares to deviate in the slightest. Islam has been precisely such an ideology ever since its founding, and in times and places where its unconditional devotees wield unlimited power, the dark and dangerous truth about this so-called religion has been unmistakable. If the fact that Iranians in Iran and around the world are cheering America's dropping of bombs on their own country isn't enough to make you recognize the sheer evil of Islam, the execution of Saleh Mohammadi, a teenage athlete and a national hero, damn well better do the job.

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