

(Video) Iran's Presidential Election Incentivizes Activity by Foreign Influence Networks

Iran-friendly journalists and academics have dedicated their professional lives to whitewash the regime's crimes.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Many Iranians

have joined the leading opposition movement, [The National Council of Resistance of Iran \(NCRI\)](#), and [the People's Mujahedin of Iran \(PMOI/MEK\)](#), to endorse the boycott of

the polls on the understanding that the faux democratic process is little more than a pretense for the regime to appoint the candidate favored by the

supreme leader. That preference has a long history and seemingly reflects a trend whereby some of Iran's worst human rights abuses have been systematically rewarded for their willingness to use political violence in defense of the theocratic system.



Meet some Iranian lobbies in West: (from left) Seyed Hossein Mousavian, Trita Parsi, Mohammad Javad Zarif with Kaveh Afrasiabi.

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NCRI

[Ebrahim Raisi](#) has demonstrated this willingness in various ways, with regard to the use of political violence both at home and abroad. Prior to assuming control of the judiciary, he served for years as the head of the Astan-e Quds Razavi foundation and thus contributed to its financing of foreign terrorist entities. As judiciary chief, Raisi oversaw the torture of thousands of political prisoners following a nationwide anti-government uprising in November 2019, during which 1,500 people were shot dead in a matter of days.

But Raisi is especially infamous for his role in the massacre

of political prisoners in the summer of 1988. Raisi was serving as Tehran's deputy public prosecutor when the regime's founder, Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a fatwa calling for the deaths of all the members and supporters of the MEK in prison. Raisi was soon appointed to serve as

one of five figures in the Tehran “death commission” which oversaw the interrogation and execution of political prisoners in the nation’s capital.

Across various cities, the massacre is estimated to have claimed over 30,000 lives, but with its main focus being on Tehran, Raisi potentially bears responsibility for a majority of the killings. This fact has naturally received renewed attention in some circles as a result of Raisi’s status as an apparent shoo-in to serve as Iran’s next president. The National Council of Resistance of Iran recently published a document describing Raisi as a “mass murderer,” and then held an online panel discussion that implicated each of the current election’s candidates in human rights abuses and crimes against humanity.

But the global reach of this education campaign has been impeded by contrary campaigns from the Iranian regime, which are always running but have presumably stepped up their efforts in the run-up to Raisi’s pre-arranged election. More than three decades after it took place, not one person has been held accountable for Iran’s massacre of political prisoners. This fact underscores a pattern of spotty international attention to the incident, which was actually brought to the attention of Western policymakers by Iranian expatriate activists while it was still going on.

To their credit, some such policymakers pushed for a response to the killings at the time, and many others have joined the campaign for accountability in more recent years. But they are still competing against paid lobbyists for the Iranian regime, as well as Iran-friendly journalists and academics who have dedicated a portion of their professional lives to downplaying the regime’s crimes and promoting conciliatory policies that steer well clear of demands for accountability among its officials.

Efforts to expose Raisi’s role in the massacre are inextricably linked to activism targeting Iran’s influence networks and disinformation campaigns that are forever pushing back against increasing public awareness about the massacre itself. One such case is the activities of Mohammad Jafar Mahallati, a former Iranian ambassador to the United Nations and current Professor of Religions at Oberlin College who reportedly played a leading role in covering up the 1988 massacre in its immediate aftermath.

Mahallati has been employed by Oberlin since 2007, but he has used his position as a platform to continue defending a viciously repressive regime and downplaying the criminal records of its leading officials, including Ebrahim Raisi. Many Iranians have called for Mahallati to be stripped of tenure and fired from the college. The effort was praised by Princeton researcher Xiyue Wang, who was held hostage in Iran from 2016 to 2019. He told reporters that he was “glad” to see such scrutiny being applied to Mahallati and that he hoped it would be extended to “other regime promoters on American campuses, such as Hossein Mousavian.”

Mousavian arrived in the United States in 2009, ostensibly after a falling-out with the government of then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. But his public statements over the past

dozen years have made it clear that he retained his loyalty to the regime's ultimate authority, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. While it may seem surprising at first that repeated defense of the theocratic dictator would be tolerated by Mousavian's employer, the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, the situation is perhaps partially explained by the financial links between American institutions of higher education and Khamenei himself.

According to Al Arabiya, a number of those institutions have received financial contributions from the Alavi Foundation, which operates as a conduit for Iranian influence as an arm of the Mostazafan Foundation of the Islamic Revolution. That overarching institution is directly controlled by Iran's supreme leader and has been subject to prosecution by the US Department of Justice, yet it still appears to wield influence over American discourse on foreign policy. Regime-linked academic appointments are only one element of this influence, and the Alavi Foundation is only one of the entities that have skirted US law enforcement in order to exert that influence.

In January, the US Department of Justice indicted Massachusetts political scientist Kaveh Lotfolah Afrasiabi for multiple violations of the Foreign Assets Registration Act. His arrest marked the end of a 13-year career as an operative for the Iranian regime, during which he was paid more than a quarter of a million dollars to promote its talking point via legitimate Western media outlets. But this case also raised vital questions about how many other individuals are still operating in a similar capacity. Furthermore, it highlighted the prior inaction of Western governments in the face of warnings from their own lawmakers.

Last year, three US Senators wrote to the DOJ urging an investigation into the National Iranian-American Council and its founder Trita Parsi, who was later revealed to have collaborated with Afrasiabi on certain publications. The latter's arrest prompted nine members of the US House of Representatives to write another letter calling for a broader investigation into the phenomenon of Americans being paid to lobby for the Iranian regime.

Similar investigations are equally warranted in Europe and throughout the world, and they are arguably more urgent than ever at a time when the regime is working to elevate one of its most notorious human rights abusers to the position of president. Raisi's pending election gives Tehran even stronger incentives to counter the activism which seeks to expose his crimes and promote Western policies that lead to accountability for the regime as a whole.

As long as Iran's influence networks remain intact throughout the West, that project of suppression will be far too easy. But if the US and Europe are committed to rooting them out, they already know where to begin.

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