

# U.S. Move Prompts Iranian Witch Hunt

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**TEHRAN**—Last month's failed U.S. hostage rescue mission appears to be taking a domestic political toll in Iran amid a crossfire of hints and charges that the U.S. commandos had Iranian collaborators.

Intentionally or not, American statement seeking to explain and justify the mission in its tragic aftermath have had the effect of arousing Iranian suspicions of each other. Some Iranians now fear that the attempted rescue may result in a witch hunt against Western-oriented dissidents on charges of being linked to the United States.

In the flurry of domestic recriminations, controversies have sprung up over such subjects as the Iranian air force's straffing of the American aircraft abandoned at the desert landing site and the publication of a love letter in a Tehran newspaper.

Accusations have surfaced that elements of the Iranian armed forces may have cooperated with the rescue

mission. There have been signs that some Moslem clerical hardliners may try to use the raid to discredit moderate secular rivals.

If nothing else, leaks in Washington that people in Iran were involved in the rescue effort have contributed to intricate and imaginative conspiracy theories.

President Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr has charged that clashes between leftists and rightists on Iranian university campuses before the mission, a wave of terrorist bombings in Tehran afterward and the continuing warfare between government forces and Kurdish guerrillas in western Iran were all part of a U.S. plot against the Iranian revolution.

In an apparent attempt to make political capital of the U.S. attempt by rallying public support for his programs, Bani-Sadr has charged that the goal of the operation was not to rescue the American hostages but to topple his government.

Bani-Sadr's clerical rivals, meanwhile, seem to be drawing a bead on some leading secular figures by drop-

ping hints that they might have been involved in the alleged American plot.

No names have been officially mentioned, although the religious supervisor of Iran's Interior Ministry, Ayatollah Mohammed Reza Mahdavi Kani, has said that four Iranians and three foreigners have been arrested so far in connection with the Tehran bombings.

"Supposing some top names were involved," he told a Tehran newspaper, "Even then it is not advisable to make their names public because of the country's prevailing situation."

One immediate effect of the U.S. rescue attempt has been to make Iranians even more wary than they have lately become about contacts with foreigners, especially Americans.

"I'm afraid to associate with my American friends," said a U.S.-educated Iranian banker. "Just the fact that I studied in the States means to many people that I'm a potential American agent."

Also apparently suspect in the wave of internal paranoia generated by the U.S. rescue mission are Iranian military personnel trained in the United States or who worked with American technicians or military advisers here. Suspicions that Iranian servicemen may have collaborated with the raid stem from the U.S. team's evasion of Iranian radar on the flight to the de-

sert landing site and the Iranian attempt to destroy the U.S. aircraft soon after the rescue effort was announced by Washington.

Adding to the controversy was the death of an Iranian Revolutionary Guard commander who was among the first to arrive at the landing site after the Americans left.

Although Iranian officials initially said he was "martyred" while inspecting a booby-trapped helicopter, eyewitness reports indicated that he was killed when Iranian air force F4s strafed and rocketed the aircraft.

Critics of the straffing have charged that valuable documents and equipment were destroyed along with the aircraft and hinted that this may have been part of an effort to suppress information about the American plan.

Since then government and military officials have been at pains to justify the operation, but no one has directly accepted responsibility for ordering it.

In a local newspaper interview a day after the rescue mission was aborted, Bani-Sadr defended the bombardment on the grounds that American technicians had installed Iran's radar system and knew how to evade it if they wanted to reenter Iran.

"Since it was very likely that the United States would take some action to steal these helicopters, this order

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was issued," Bani-Sadr explained. "The purpose was to put the helicopters out of action so they couldn't be taken out of Iran."

Bani-Sadr's explanation was backed up by the chief of military joint staffs, Maj. Gen. Hadi Shadmehr, who claimed that the American commandos left a radio transmitter on in one of the helicopters to pinpoint the landing site for a later attempt to retrieve the aircraft.

Asked if sensitive U.S. documents had been destroyed along with the U.S. helicopters, Bani-Sadr said that if any existed they would not have been damaged "since this operation was only for putting the helicopters out of order."

However, the commander of the Iranian Air Force, Gen. Amir Bahman Bagheri, told the newspaper Kayhan that the attack on the abandoned helicopters had not gone precisely according to plan.

"Unfortunately, some sensitive

areas such as their gasoline tanks and engines caught fire when the helicopters came under Air Force fire and they were destroyed," he said. He said one was not damaged at all and could be flown.

Bagheri said he was appointing a team to investigate what Kayhan called the "suspicious death" of the Revolutionary Guard commander, who the paper said was rumored to have "gained access to the plans and documents on the U.S. military plan."

Suspicious also have been stirred by publication in the Tehran newspaper Bamdad of a love letter addressed to "Arya." Although it can be a man's name, Arya also recalls the deposed shah's title of Aryamehr, meaning "light of the Aryans."

"My Arya, my unique, my summit, my glory," said the letter, published in Bamdad's personal messages column April 30. It asked in conclusion, "how should I know when I will join you?" it was signed, "Sacrificed for you, the red flower."

A leaflet distributed by Moslem fundamentalist followers of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini charged that the message was a secret code connected with a plot against Iran.

"Simultaneous with the American government's military invasion and its unsuccessful coup plot, fifth columnists and agents of SAVAK, the shah's secret police are carrying out a wave of sabotage, disturbances and bombings in Iran against the Islamic republic," the leaflet said. "An espionage role is being played by embassies and new agencies and local devoted journalists. This information is exchanged through condolences, poems, announcements, etc. In codes to let their masters know what is going on here."

The broadsheet warned Iranians to beware of such imperialist tricks and to "play your revolutionary role accordingly."