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Are 500,000 Keys to Paradise Enough?: Germany "Confronts" Ahmadinejad

by Matthias Küntzel

In pondering the behavior of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, I cannot help but think of the 500,000 plastic keys that Iran imported from Taiwan during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88. At the time, an Iranian law laid down that children as young as 12 could be used to clear mine fields. Before every mission, a plastic key would be hung around each of the children's necks. It was supposed to open for them the gates to paradise.

The "child-martyrs" belonged to the so-called "Basij" movement created by the Ayatollah Khomeini. The Basij Mostazafan – the "mobilization of the oppressed" – were volunteers of all ages that embraced death with religious enthusiasm. They provided the model for the first Hezbollah suicide bombers in Lebanon. To this day, they remain a kind of SA of the Islamic revolution. Sometimes they serve as a "vice squad", monitoring public morals; sometimes they rage against the opposition – as in 1999, when they were used to break the student movement. At all times, they celebrate the cult of self sacrifice.

Ahmadinejad forms part of the first generation of Basiji militants and still today he is often to be seen wearing a Basiji uniform. He would like to bring about a renaissance of the Basiji culture of the 1980s – in order, among other things, to combat the burgeoning Western-oriented youth movement that has, for instance, given rise to some 700,000 weblogs in the last years. Thus Ahmadinejad made a personal appeal this year for Iranians to participate in the annual "Basiji Week" that took place in late November. According to a report in the newspaper Kayan, some 9 million Basiji heeded the call, "forming a human chain some 8,700 kilometers long in which President Ahmadinejad also took part. In Tehran alone, some 1,250,000 people were mobilized." (Cited in Wahied Wahdat-Hagh, „[Bassiji: die revolutionäre Miliz des Iran](#)“, on MEMRI Deutschland.) Ahmadinejad used the occasion to praise the "Basij culture and the Basij power" with which "Iran today makes its presence felt on the international and diplomatic level". Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, Chair of the Guardian Council, went so far as to describe the very existence of Iran's nuclear program as "a triumph of the young people who serve the Basij movement and possess the Basiji-psyche and Basiji-culture." He added: "We need an army of 20 million Basiji. Such an army must be ready to live for God, to die along the way of God, and to conduct Jihad, in order to please God."

Is the Iranian population being thus prepared for the announced nuclear war against Israel? Three years ago, the then Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani explained that a single atom bomb used against Israel "would leave nothing on the ground", whereas the damage done by a possible retaliatory strike would be limited ([source](#): MEMRI Special Dispatch, 3 January 2002). Even with a million dead, the Islamic world would survive, whereas Israel would be destroyed. Thus the logic of Rafsanjani's argument. It is this murderous calculation – the sort of calculation that lies at the base of every suicide attack – that distinguishes the atomic ambitions of Iran from the interests of all existing nuclear powers.

If there is a western nation today that has the means to confront such madness with effective sanctions, it is Germany. For the last 25 years, the German government has offered its good offices to the anti-Semitic Mullahs in Tehran with a shamelessness unrivalled by any other western government. In 1984, Hans-Dietrich Genscher was the first western Foreign Minister to pay his respects to the Mullah regime. Ten years later, Germany's federal intelligence service, the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), trained Iranian intelligence agents in Munich. (See Arthur Heinrich, "Zur Kritik des 'kritischen Dialogs'", *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, May 1996.) And whereas since 1995 American firms are prohibited from trading with Iran, Germany will, in the words of Werner Schoeltzke of the German Near and Middle East Association, , "remain the preferred technology partner of Iran also in the years to come" (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 5 December 2003).

Germany is today by far the most important supplier of goods to Iran and its exports are increasing at a steady 20% per year. In 2004, German exports to Iran were worth some €3.6 billion. At the same time, Germany is the most important purchaser of Iranian goods apart from oil and Iran's most important creditor.

Since, however, Ahmadinejad provided the world with such a stark reminder of the ideological foundations of the Mullah-dictatorship – Holocaust denial, anti-Semitism, and the destruction of Israel – Berlin is in a tight spot. On the one hand, Berlin would not like to put in danger Germany's special relationship with Tehran. On the other hand, it does not look particularly good when the country from which came the Holocaust practitioners now collaborates with the regime of the Holocaust deniers. On 11 December, Germany's new deputy Chancellor, Franz Müntefering of the SPD, indicated the way out of this dilemma: "Berlin Demands a 'Reaction' to Ahmadinejad" ran the headline in the following day's edition of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (12 December 2005). This sounded surprisingly forceful. But whoever read the small type quickly understood the actual meaning of the headline: "Berlin demands a 'reaction' to Ahmadinejad from everyone else". The deputy Chancellor was cited as follows: "We cannot do it alone. Rather this has to be frankly discussed in the framework of the European Community and it must in the clearest possible terms be discussed in the framework of the United Nations".

Excuse me? Germany can do nothing on its own? Only the German government can abrogate the 2002 investment agreement between German and Iran. Only Berlin can terminate the "Hermes" export credit guarantees that offer Iran advantages beyond almost any other country. As a consequence of the "Hermes" guarantees, the German state takes over all the specific risks connected with exports to Iran. Already in 1992, exports to Iran enjoyed the second highest level of Hermes guarantees after only Russia, and since then their scope has been continually increased. To bring an end to the privileges that the Mullah-dictatorship thus enjoys is entirely possible, though evidently politically unwanted. Müntefering's uncompromising rhetoric is just the musical accompaniment to "business as usual". Thus whereas the German government speaks impressively at the EU summit of sending "a clear signal of the sharpest possible disapproval", in the Bundestag it speaks sheepishly "of avoiding the isolation [of Iran]".

And what of Germany's "Left" opposition? Should we not assume that privileging the most elementary human rights over the interests of the big corporations would be a special concern of the "Greens" or the "the Left" alliance? Far from it. Apart from some

few exceptions, the “Left” has not been prepared to allow the Holocaust denier from Tehran to deprive it of its conspiracy theories and rage against “BuSharon”. “If the Iranian President Ahmadinejad did not exist,” writes, for example, the Berlin-based “Green” daily Die Tageszeitung (taz), “the USA and Israel would have had to invent him” (15 December 2005). Ahmadinejad’s words are only to be taken seriously inasmuch as they “provide a welcome pretext for the USA and Israel.”

Thus, on 16 December 2005, all the parties represented in the German Bundestag united to pass a resolution – including not a single word about the German-Iranian special relationship – applauding the Müntefering line: “The German Bundestag welcomes that the German government has stood up to the remarks of the Iranian President.” Yes indeed: Bravo and many more such successes! Given the obvious solicitude for the requirements of German industry, it would not surprise me if Ahmadinejad ordered his next batch of plastic keys for his Basiji from Germany. But will 500,000 keys to paradise be enough for the war against Israel?

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