**Iranian Demonstrators Killed in Violent Clashes in Kazerun**

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On May 17, 2018, violent clashes broke out in the historical Iranian city of Kazerun, in the Fars Province, between demonstrators (some of whom were armed) and the Iranian security forces (some of whom were in civilian dress) in the city’s main square.1 Iranian security forces fired teargas at the rioters, and the local police station was set on fire. According to the Fars news agency, the riots were organized through the social media application Telegram. Social networks throughout Iran have been flooded with the hashtags #Kazerun\_in\_blood.2 [Also spelled as Kazeroun and Kazeroon.] At least five citizens have been killed in the clashes, while scores were injured and dozens have been arrested.

Riots began in Kazerun a month ago, following a law proposed by Hossein Reza Zadeh, the Majlis (Iranian parliament) member for the Fars Province, to divide Kazerun into two (for the distribution of funds, water, and so forth). According to residents, the plan was intended to increase the power of the Majlis member, but it would harm the historical identity of the city. The protest was pushed off due to involvement in the nuclear issue, foreign currency rates, and the economic situation, but it has now burst forth very strongly.

Many users of social media are criticizing state-run media outlets in Iran for preferring to cover events in Gaza instead of reporting the violent clashes in Kazerun. They are rioting to censure Iran for focusing on investment and involvement abroad instead of on what is going on inside the country. Against the backdrop of the clashes in Kazerun, social media users have called upon the government to stop their interference and large investment in Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Syria and to concentrate on Iranian domestic affairs instead.

Several social media users (including opposition activists from outside Iran) wrote, “Death to clerical rule in Iran!” and circulated graphic pictures and videos7 of injured people during the rioting.8 One of the main slogans in the online campaign is “(The government) is supporting Gaza and committing crimes in Kazerun.” Additional slogans used by social media protesters include, “All the time, they said America was the enemy. [But] the enemy [the Islamic regime] is right here.”

Travelers at the Chitgar metro station in Tehran called out, “Death to the dictator [Khamenei]!” when passengers were removed from a carriage for no apparent reason.

At the same time, the current communications minister is being criticized for the government’s continued attempts to harm companies providing VPN services, claiming “damage to security and usage for the purposes of Ransomware.” Iranian public demand for these companies’ services has increased as it tries to circumvent the Iranian regime’s continual blockage of leading social media networks, such as Telegram. Iranian demonstrators use social media networks to organize demonstrations against the regime and warn protesters of the presence of security forces in certain areas.

Iran blocked the network at the end of April, claiming it was used for organizing demonstrations against the government.