**On Iran, UN Human Rights Council Needs American Resolve**

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The United States should support and urge other states to support a resolution in the United Nations Human Rights Council on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, a resolution that would strengthen the UN's machinery to monitor and report on Iran, and encourage constructive engagement with Iran to alter its brutal and repressive policies.

As of now, some senior administration officials are evidently not convinced. But without firm US backing, which offers cover to others, such a resolution won't survive the widespread indifference to human rights abuses in the shark-infested waters of the UN.

When the United States agreed to join the Human Rights Council, the administration's strategy was to "engage" the Council to help it fulfill its mandate and its potential, and to keep faith with people around the world who look to the United Nations to protect their human rights. Susan Rice, the new US Ambassador to the United Nations, said: "The U.S. is seeking election to the council because we believe that working from within, we can make the council a more effective forum to promote and protect human rights." The Obama administration even appointed an ambassador to focus solely on the Human Rights Council, while another deals with other multilateral institutions in Geneva.

Where is the beef, though? To date, the Council has not passed a single resolution dealing with the situation in Iran, which has become one of the worst in the world. In the past months, Human Rights Council members balked at energetic proposals including to hold a special session on the topic. In the March session, human rights campaigners failed to arouse interest even in a mild proposal for an extra report on Iran to be presented to the Council. Members trotted out a range of excuses for taking no action. US officials say the EU was divided and not on board; EU officials say they were waiting for the US to lead. Those kinds of maneuvers are familiar in the politics of international organizations. This time around, in the run-up to the June session, the ball seems more squarely in the US court, as there is growing support for a resolution and a clear expectation for American resolve.

The Iranian government has tried to rally its increasingly restless population to its side by generating conflict with the international community, and in particular with the US, while distracting the world's attention from the central social reality of contemporary Iran, its egregious human rights violations. Iran executes its citizens at the highest rate per capita in the world, most after trials lacking due process, including those who have allegedly committed crimes as minors. Torture is endemic and systematic. Iran's lethal repression of political dissent is taking the form of show trials at which peaceful critics are sentenced to death. And Iran boasts an archaic legal discrimination against women (which, however, did not prevent its election to the UN's Commission on the Status of Women).

But the Obama administration, apparently because it is hoping to engage Iran in a dialogue to reduce tensions and solve the nuclear standoff, has not spoken or acted forcefully concerning these horrendous human rights violations. The result has been a growing alienation with the massive but diffuse movement for change in Iran; in other words, it is the result aimed for by President Ahmadinejad and his hard-line clique. On the other hand, the administration's quietude has hardly yielded geo-political results.

American support for a Human Rights Council resolution on the situation of human rights in Iran will help the administration break out of this syndrome. It will show that the administration is serious about helping the Human Rights Council become a serious body. American support will enable a strong step forward in holding Iran accountable for its violations of UN treaties.

The Human Rights Council is the most appropriate body to address the unfolding human rights crisis in Iran. A Human Rights Council Resolution, coming from a multilateral body, cannot be dismissed by Iran as political posturing. Perhaps most importantly, because substantive change always comes from within, such a resolution will demonstrate solidarity with Iranian people struggling for their human rights.

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