



Iran Human Rights Monitor (<https://iran-hrm.com/index.php/2018/10/28/iran-evin-prison-irans-most-notorious-jail/>)

Foreigners detention in Iran : a tool of negotiation with the West ?

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On 12th September 2019, Australian authorities revealed a new case of foreigner's arrest in Iran, confirming the incarceration of two of its citizens in Evin Prison. The 17th of September, the judiciary spokesman Gholamhossein Esma'ili confirmed the arrest of the two Australians, charged of espionage. The couple is accused of having taken pictures of a military site near Tehran. According to the same source, they used a drone equipped with a camera.

It is not the first time that such unfortunate event happens in Iran. This most recent episode echoes with the detention of the British Australian scholar Moore-Gilbert in 2018 who was sentenced to ten-years in jail, after being accused of espionage. Moreover, in June 2019 the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) carried out the arrest of the Iranian French anthropologist Fariba Adelkhah.

Recently, Amnesty International expressed its deep concerns regarding the numerous affairs of foreigners being arrested in Iran. Such an increase raises many questions. Among them, lies the issue of the condition of detention in Iranian jails. Indeed, physical violence as well as psychological mistreatment remain a very concerning matter, as highlighted in the case of the Iranian Canadian activist Kavus Seyyed Emami, who died in custody in February 2018. The recent transfer of the British Iranian Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe from prison to a psychiatric institution also sheds some light on this alarming issue.

If Australia's foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, claims that there is *"no reason to think that these arrests are connected to international concern over Iran's nuclear programme, United Nations sanction enforcement or maritime security concerning the safety of civilian shipping"*, others believe that such arrests might hide political considerations. As Bayart, the research director from the CNRS explained, his colleague Adelkhah has become a diplomatic hostage within the hands of the Islamic Republic, while in the affair Zaghari-Ratcliffe, an activist from Amnesty International stated: *"(...) the real motive may be more to do with exerting pressure on Britain"*. The same source reaffirmed the common practice of using prisoners as leverage in political confrontations. As one might recall, on the first day of implementation of the JCPOA, a prisoner exchange was organized between Iran and the US. In April 2019, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif reiterated the possibility of reconducting such an arrangement, evoking the arbitrary detention of several of his fellow citizens.

Nevertheless, the silence of the Iranian judiciary renders difficult to assert whether the more recent cases correspond to an attempt of political coercion or a retaliation for the detention of Iranian citizens in the West. If one is to accept the arbitrary nature of these arrests, we need to determine whether it is the consequence of a deliberated and concerted effort from the Iranian authorities or, on the contrary, the result of a competition between different factions from within the regime. As a matter of fact, some sources have suggested the existence of an internal political game in Iran, emphasizing the efforts made by the hardliners in order to undermine the diplomatic endeavours of the reformists to end the negotiation with the West.

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