

COVERT TERROR: IRAN'S PARALLEL INTELLIGENCE APPARATUS

INTRODUCTION

On the afternoon of September 7, 2004, plainclothes agents kidnapped Shahram Rafizadeh from his office in Tehran. First he was hustled into a waiting car, then to another with curtains covering the windows. Then he was beaten, blindfolded and thrown into a dark metal cell.

Rafizadeh, a journalist, blogger and poet, spent the next 73 days in solitary confinement. The first time Rafizadeh was interrogated, he was blindfolded and handcuffed, then punched and kicked until he fell unconscious. During subsequent interrogations, he had his head repeatedly bashed against the wall and his entire body whipped by cable wires. Within weeks, his body weight had dropped from more than 200 pounds to less than 100.

Rafizadeh was a broken man by the time he was dragged into the office of Tehran's public prosecutor, Saeed Mortazavi. Mortazavi demanded that Rafizadeh confess to trumped-up charges, warning that if he did not, Rafizadeh's three children might find themselves in mortal danger. Rafizadeh confessed, then escaped into exile as soon as he was released from illegal detention.

The plainclothes agents who kidnapped Shahram Rafizadeh were hardly rogue operatives. They, like Tehran's public prosecutor, were part of a vast parallel intelligence apparatus that operated in Iran during the presidency of reformist Mohammed Khatami. This summary documents that parallel intelligence apparatus. A more detailed and more comprehensive version of this report, *Covert Terror: Iran's Parallel Intelligence Apparatus*, is available from the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center.

From 1997 to 2004, the parallel intelligence apparatus' clandestine activities aided conservatives in Iran in their efforts to retain control over the levers of state. Known in Farsi as *nahadhayih ittila'tiyih muvazi*, the parallel intelligence apparatus (PIA) operated under the effective authority of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. Members of the PIA were responsible for the brutal intimidation and silencing of reformists, political dissidents and critics. Their primary targets were journalists, bloggers and student activists, many of whom came to prominence as a result of Khatami's relatively tolerant approach toward public criticism of the conservative establishment's policies. PIA agents relentlessly and systematically engaged in measures to silence pro-reform voices and stifle freedom of expression, in violation of both Iranian and international law.

Although little, if any, official documentation exists regarding the PIA's establishment, decision-making process or inner workings, available evidence indicates that PIA units were not only aided in their efforts by official organs of the state, but were organizationally and operationally part of executive and judicial agencies. These agencies included police and law enforcement and their affiliated intelligence offices, including the *Niruyih Intizamiyih Jumhuriyih Islamiyih Iran* (NAJA), or Law Enforcement Forces; military forces including the *Sipah-i Pasdaran*, or Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and the Iranian Army; executive agencies including the Ministry of Intelligence, the Ministry of Defense and, perhaps most troublingly, the Judiciary. The PIA's

activities were also supported by paramilitary and vigilante groups including the *Basij* and *Ansari Hezbollah*, both of which operate under the auspices of the Office of the Supreme Leader.

Interviews and independent research conducted by IHRDC reveal a striking pattern of brutality by PIA agents. The PIA's goal was to break its targets through the use of various tactics designed to coerce them into confessing to contrived criminal charges. These tactics included unlawful investigations, surveillance, arrests, searches and seizures of property, prolonged interrogations, torture and detention in illegal and often hidden facilities. Many of the coerced confessions were often obtained under the supervision of judges or other influential members of the Judiciary, and were videotaped and broadcast by state-owned media outlets such as the Kayhan newspaper and Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting.

The scope of the crimes committed by PIA agents is breathtaking. An analysis by IHRDC has uncovered widespread violations of numerous articles of the Iranian Constitution, as well as of Iran's Citizen Rights Law and State Prisons Organizations Law. The breach of international norms is equally shocking: IHRDC's research has revealed violations of the Convention Against Torture, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, not to mention the United Nations' Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners and Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary.

The lack of accountability for the PIA's crimes, however, is perhaps best revealed in the fate suffered by Ali Akbar Musavi-Khu'ini. A reformist, Musavi-Khu'ini was appointed in 2001 as head of the Article 90 Commission, a parliamentary body established to investigate the PIA's alleged use of illegal detention facilities to detain and interrogate political prisoners. His investigation so piqued the conservative establishment that he was imprisoned in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison, where he remained until after Khatami had retired from office.

THE PERPETRATORS

Various theories exist regarding the establishment of PIA units, but there is general consensus among political analysts that they came about as a result of the ideological schism between reformist elements encouraged by Khatami's landslide victory in 1997 and old-guard conservatives fighting to retain control. The conservative establishment found itself on the defensive for the first time since the founding of the Islamic Republic in 1979, as a wave of electoral victories by pro-reform candidates ushered in a period of relaxed social and political restrictions and a gradual strengthening of a vibrant civil society.

Although the election signaled the strength of popular demands for reform, it did not change the basic framework of the Islamic revolutionary system, and did not ultimately translate into deeper social reforms. Khamenei remained the most powerful political figure in the country, and the conservative bloc within the clerical establishment retained control over many state institutions.

The old guard did, however, lose authority and influence over certain key executive posts, in particular at the Ministry of Intelligence, and it was in response that the Khamenei-led conservative establishment created, nurtured and directed parallel intelligence units dedicated to crushing the reformist movement.

In 1998, a number of Iranian dissident intellectuals were brutally murdered in an apparently coordinated campaign that became known as the "Chain Murders." After the attacks Khatami and his allies launched executive and parliamentary investigations, which eventually revealed an

extensive network of alleged rogue intelligence elements linked to the Ministry of Intelligence and several other intelligence units. The minister of intelligence at the time, conservative cleric Dorri Najafabadi, was considered to be close to the supreme leader.

Two years later, Khatami took advantage of the popular outcry provoked by the Chain Murders to replace Najafabadi with Ali Younesi. Once appointed minister of intelligence, Younesi purportedly purged his ministry of those involved in the Chain Murders.

To counter their loss of influence within the Ministry of Intelligence, conservatives found other state intelligence organs through which to maintain control. They turned to their most trusted and reliable allies: the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, the NAJA law enforcement forces and the Army, each of which has its own intelligence and counterintelligence units. The conservatives used these intelligence units to unlawfully collect and manufacture material incriminating individuals linked to the reformist movement.

The conservative establishment exerted substantial influence over Iran's Judiciary, and used it as an instrument to counter Khatami and his allies. Within several years of the Ministry of Intelligence purges, Ayatollah Seyyed Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, the head of the Judiciary, established three independent intelligence-gathering units. In October 2001, the Judiciary established a special committee to oversee the implementation of the supreme leader's policies in foreign relations and to prosecute individuals who criticize the Supreme National Security Council's decisions. In September 2002, the Judiciary established the Intelligence Protection Organization of the Judiciary, a notorious intelligence organization implicated in some of the abuses documented in this report. And in 2004, Shahroudi ordered the establishment of the Social Intelligence Organization, which was charged with gathering information related to public vices.

Operating beyond the purview of the Ministry of Intelligence, these units were ultimately accountable to the supreme leader, who appoints the head of the Judiciary. The head of the Judiciary, in turn, has the authority to appoint the head of the Supreme Court and the chief public prosecutor, who each have the managerial authority to appoint and dismiss their subordinates. The head of the Judiciary also appoints the top judges in the Revolutionary, Military, Clergy, Administrative and General Courts, as well as the justice minister. With the Judiciary almost entirely at the disposal of Khamenei, the conservative establishment exploited the powers granted to judicial authorities to legitimize their political objectives.

The result was a bifurcated system of intelligence operations, one controlled by reformist factions led by Khatami and his minister of intelligence, Younesi, and the other led by Khamenei and the various heads of the newly created subsidiary intelligence units. There is evidence that despite the complex and overlapping structure of Iran's intelligence agencies, ultimate oversight came from officials at the top of these organizations, including those close to the Office of the Supreme Leader.

This decentralized intelligence structure was susceptible to abuse, and it enabled conservatives and their allies to simply bypass, with virtual impunity, legal constraints protecting fundamental rights enshrined in Iranian and international law. Decentralization in the Iranian political system did not, in fact, lead to separation of powers or a system of checks and balances. To the contrary, the new structure further concentrated power in the hands of the supreme leader and his appointees in the armed forces and Judiciary, all of whom identified with the conservatives' political agenda.

High-level officials of the armed forces and the Judiciary continue to disavow any knowledge of the existence of parallel intelligence structures within their agencies, and little official documentation exists regarding the actual composition and identity of these organizations. As a result, it is difficult to establish a precise chain of command implicating high-level government officials in connection with the detention and torture of political dissidents. It appears, however, that those staffing PIA units were not rogue elements operating completely outside the purview of high-level officials.

Indeed, it can be stated with confidence that senior members of the Judiciary were deeply involved in the systematic human rights abuses perpetrated by PIA agents. The Judiciary was not only unwilling to check those abuses, but also played an active role in denying victims fair hearings pursuant to Iranian and international law. Detainees interviewed by IHRDC singled out three high-ranking Judiciary officials as being heavily involved in the PIA's extrajudicial activities: Ja'far Saberi Zafarqandi, presiding judge of Branch 1610 of the Special Court of Mehrabad; Saeed Mortazavi, the public prosecutor of Tehran; and Judge Hassan Zare Dehnavi, also known as Hassan Haddad, head of Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court.

In 2004 the head of the Judiciary, Shahroudi, issued a directive in what is believed to be a response to a sharp increase in complaints regarding arbitrary arrests and detentions perpetrated by plainclothes agents allegedly linked to PIA units. The directive reemphasized civil rights and protections already codified in Iran's Constitution and Criminal Code of Procedure, including explicit prohibitions against the use of arbitrary surveillance, arrests, detentions, interrogations and torture by government agents.

The directive also enumerated a host of due process safeguards, including access to legal representation and respect for the rule of law. In May of that year the directive was formally approved by the *Majlis* and confirmed by the Guardian Council. The new law, passed during the final year of Khatami's presidency, is known as the "Law Respecting Legitimate Freedoms and Protecting Citizen Rights," or Citizen Rights Law. Enactment of this law was widely seen as the first public acknowledgment of the practice of torture in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Despite the passage of the 2004 law, however, conservative factions loyal to the supreme leader continued to consolidate power within the armed forces and the Judiciary. A later report to Shahroudi by Hojjatoleslam Abbas-Ali Alizadeh, head of the Judiciary of Tehran Province and at the time interim director of its Civil Rights Inspectorate, indicated that allegations continued to be made of PIA activities well after the law was passed.

THE VICTIMS

There is little, if any, documentation on the criteria used by PIA agents to select their targets. According to some analysts and witnesses interviewed by IHRDC, there were decision-making boards charged with setting the network's agenda. A review of the individuals targeted and eventually detained suggests that they were chosen due to the nature of their political activities, their occupations and their location of activity, among other details of their personal lives.

Interviews conducted by IHRDC indicate that while PIA operatives targeted activists dedicated to the peaceful promotion of democratic ideals, they generally refrained from targeting high-profile political activists. This pattern suggests that PIA agents selected missions that were logistically feasible, and targets that would allow them to maximize their objectives without risking too much pushback from the reformist camp and the public at large. The targeting and mistreatment of students, journalists and bloggers was particularly harsh, as these individuals had access to

decentralized media sources, in particular the blogosphere, and could more effectively be used by PIA operatives to threaten and intimidate reformists and their allies.

Before arresting their targets, PIA agents conducted comprehensive and thorough investigations into individuals' private lives, day-to-day activities and social contacts. These investigations often covered the target's financial accounts, as well as telephone calls both made and received up to several months prior to the subject's arrest. Evidence suggests that the investigations were not initiated with the purpose of bringing formal charges against the individual. Rather, they were essentially fishing expeditions intended to provide PIA units with compromising or embarrassing information which could later be used to coerce subjects into curbing their political activities.

PIA operatives not only conducted illegal investigations into the private lives of their targets, but also systematically and routinely arrested individuals without providing a legal basis for their actions or affording the arrestees adequate due process. The arbitrary arrests were frequently conducted by plainclothes agents who failed to present their victims with valid arrest warrants. Many of the individuals interviewed by IHRDC said that they were picked up by plainclothes agents from law enforcement and security units of the Ministry of Intelligence and NAJA's Amaken branch, officially known as the General Directorate of Supervising Public Premises. In several instances, witnesses told IHRDC that family members were either arrested or threatened if PIA operatives could not find their targets.

PIA abductions often involved physical duress, beatings and violence. The arrest of women's rights activist Fariba Davoodi-Mohajer in early 2001 is a case in point. She described to IHRDC how on a January afternoon, she was bringing her daughter home from school when she noticed some Nissan SUVs parked near her house. As she entered her home, seven or eight plainclothes men forced their way in without asking her permission or producing an arrest warrant. When she asked for their identities and questioned why they were there, they began beating her and attempted to drag her over to their vehicles. She resisted. When she put her leg inside the door frame, someone pushed the door into her leg, forcing her to give in. Her daughter screamed for help, and her husband and son attempted to prevent her abduction. Neighbors also arrived. The fight dragged on until more agents arrived in seven or eight cars to help her abductors and prevent her neighbors from leaving their homes.

In other cases, uniformed law enforcement agents openly participated in the unlawful arrests of dissidents. These law enforcement agents conducted their operations using the same illegal methods employed by the plainclothes agents. The similarities in the agents' modus operandi strongly suggest the existence of an operational link between PIA agents and regular law enforcement units, especially those affiliated with the intelligence functions of NAJA's Amaken branch.

According to witnesses interviewed by IHRDC, PIA units often searched the homes of victims either contemporaneously with unlawful arrests, or several hours or days after the victims had been transferred to an illegal detention facility. These searches were almost invariably conducted by plainclothes agents linked to law enforcement units, such as NAJA's Amaken branch or the Ministry of Intelligence, and often without a warrant or explanation as to why the searches were taking place.

Many of the witnesses described the aggressive and violent manner in which PIA agents searched their homes and seized personal articles. Like the investigations conducted prior to arresting targets, the searches were conducted in a manner that suggested the agents were on fishing expeditions for items that could be used against the suspect.

The search of Mohsen Sazegara's house is a telling case in point. One of the founders of the Revolutionary Guard, Sazegara served in several senior government positions before adopting reformist positions and, in 2003, spearheading a campaign to hold a referendum on Iran's Constitution. He was arrested several times that year, and he recounted to IHRDC how his house was searched during one of the agents' raids:

"Just like last time, they inspected the whole house. They looked through my computer files, personal desk, family photo albums, in the refrigerator, behind the refrigerator, our bedroom, and everywhere else. When one of the searching officers looked at my family photos, my wife protested and said that the women in the pictures were not wearing veils. The security officer responded with, 'there is nothing wrong with an innocent glance.' Then they inspected my CDs and DVDs to see what movies I watched.... They took one of my most valued writings about the history of science. This writing was in fact the result of many years of work. I pleaded with the head agent to leave the writing, but he refused and assured me that it would not get lost. Unfortunately, the writing was lost."

THE PRISONS

Many of the PIA's illegal detention facilities were located in and around Tehran, and were managed and operated by elements linked to intelligence units of the Ministry of Intelligence, Revolutionary Guard, NAJA and the Army. The Revolutionary Guard ran Prison 59, Section 325 of Evin Prison and Vali Asr. The Intelligence Office of the Army operated Hishmatiyih and Detention Center 36 of Jamshidiyyih. Prison Jay was administered by the Intelligence Protection Organization of the Ministry of Defense. NAJA managed the Mullahadra, Vuzara, Tupkhanih, and Khatam-ul-Anbiya prisons, as well as a secret facility at the headquarters of the notorious Amaken branch. The Ministry of Intelligence, for its part, administered Tawhid Detention Center, and Sections 209 and Alef of Evin Prison.

Prison 59 is located on the vast Vali-e Asr military base in Eshratatabad. Vali-e Asr is run by military and law enforcement agencies, but Prison 59 itself is administered by the Revolutionary Guard's Intelligence Protection Office. The Iranian government announced that the prison was closed in 2001, but the Revolutionary Guard reportedly denied the attorney general of Greater Tehran permission to inspect the facility in 2006 and it appears to still be active.

Prison 59 was originally designed to hold the Revolutionary Guard's military prisoners, but between 1997 and 2004 it was used to detain and interrogate political dissidents. It appears that the Revolutionary Guard began using the facility to launch investigations into students, journalists and political rights activists in 1999, after Khamenei commanded the paramilitary force to suppress the student movement. Detainees describe Prison 59 as a terrible place, completely cut off from the outside world and lacking light, proper food and fresh air. Visits by family members were strictly prohibited, and detainees were denied access to legal counsel.

The Mullahadra, Vuzara, Tupkhanih, and Khatam-ul-Anbiya prisons were run by the NAJA's Amaken branch, whose PIA arm was particularly active in suppressing dissidents. Other PIA-affiliated units, such as the Intelligence Protection of the Judiciary, also used Amaken's facilities to carry out interrogations and detain political dissidents, journalists and students.

It is believed that a substantial number of journalists and political activists were interrogated in Amaken facilities after 2001. While some Iranian analysts argue that the covert interrogations were conducted by NAJA agents alone, these operations were in all likelihood overseen by senior intelligence figures purged from the Ministry of Intelligence after the investigation into the Chain Murders.

Political detainees at Amaken were often held in cells with ordinary criminals. Few detainees agreed to discuss their experiences at Amaken with IHRDC, but those who did described an environment designed to shock them into confessing to crimes they had not committed. Among those held at Amaken was prominent attorney and journalist Mohammad Ali Safari, who died from a heart attack suffered immediately after his release.

Khatam-ul-Anbiya, or Khatam, was another prison run by NAJA. Reportedly located inside a residential complex belonging to the police department on Seoul Street in northern Tehran, Khatam held political prisoners alongside those charged with moral crimes, smuggling and various other offenses. Detainees were kept in solitary cells, and were denied fresh air, access to health services, legal counsel and visits by family members. Even their use of the facility's restrooms was subject to strict control by the interrogators.

In northwestern Tehran, Sections 209 and 325 of the notorious Evin complex are essentially run as separate prisons, operating outside of the control of both Evin's authorities and the State Prisons Organization. Section 209 is administered by agents linked to the Ministry of Intelligence, while Section 325 is connected to the Revolutionary Guard. Access to both facilities is strictly restricted to employees and senior officers of the Ministry of Intelligence and Revolutionary Guard.

Detainees held in Sections 209 and 325 were blindfolded when they left their solitary cells, and unlike the solitary cells in Evin's main section, the cells in Sections 209 and 325 did not have their own restrooms. Both sections had their own health services, despite the fact that Section 209 was located directly behind Evin's health clinic.

Prison Jay, located on a military base near the terminal at Mehrabad Airport in western Tehran, is an example of the close and collaborative efforts between PIA units and the Islamic Republic's military. According to former detainees interviewed by IHRDC, Prison Jay is administered by the Intelligence Office of the Ministry of Defense, and as in other facilities, detainees at Prison Jay were kept blindfolded and denied both the right to see family and access to legal counsel.

Many of the most notorious facilities were located in or close to Tehran, but PIA units also operated illegal detention facilities in other areas of the country. It is worth noting that the issue of secret prisons outside of Tehran was not extensively addressed by either reformists or the media during Khatami's presidency. Ensafali Hedayat, a prominent journalist and writer who was detained and mistreated in an illegal prison in East Azerbaijan province, attributed the omission to the fact that victims held in those facilities were mostly non-reformists.

Regardless of location, detainees in all secret detention facilities were denied access to their families, guaranteeing that the PIA's activities would be shielded from public and legal scrutiny. Cut off from the outside world, detainees were unable to reveal their location, post bail or secure legal representation. Detainees were also denied access to needed medical care, which PIA agents knew would reveal that detainees had been abused. On the rare occasions that detainees were allowed to be examined by physicians, the doctors were blindfolded.

Detainees at PIA-run facilities were regularly denied access to other basic accommodations, including food, adequate lighting, clothing and toiletries. The unhygienic environment contributed to the hopelessness, psychological distress and emotional breakdowns experienced by many detainees. For women the mistreatment was further exacerbated by the absence of female PIA personnel, as well as limited access to feminine hygiene products, separate showers and private restrooms.

THE INTERROGATIONS

The goal of PIA interrogations was to break detainees so they would confess to crimes they had not committed. To achieve this goal, PIA agents employed a variety of interrogation tactics. These tactics included both “soft” tactics -- subtle interrogation methods designed to trick, confuse or lull detainees into submission -- and “hard” tactics, including intimidation, threats, assaults and torture.

The interrogations were aimed at producing evidence that would incriminate political dissidents and student activists under national security laws, or which would damage detainees’ moral credibility and reputation. Many of the detainees were accused by their interrogators of involvement in espionage, connections to foreign institutions or receiving funding from foreign intelligence agencies or known Iranian dissidents, offenses which carry severe sentences, including the death penalty.

Without fail, interrogation sessions were conducted in the absence of legal counsel or representation. All former detainees interviewed for this report were kept blindfolded during their interrogation sessions, as well as during periods of detention and even during visits to the restroom.

Interrogation sessions often lasted for hours, and were conducted by rotating interrogators at random hours throughout the night. In some cases, sessions lasted for four consecutive nights. Detainees were often not allowed to use the restrooms while undergoing interrogation. The only break detainees were permitted was during prayer time. Some detainees reported that they were not allowed to return to their cells for days until they agreed to participate in the interrogators’ plot to uncover alleged reformist conspiracies. Between interrogation sessions, detainees were usually subjected to sleep deprivation and held in solitary confinement.

The PIA’s heavy reliance on solitary confinement, perhaps more than any of the other cruel methods employed in the secret detention facilities, was often what led detainees to the breaking point. Solitary confinement was used not as punishment for undisciplined detainees, but rather to force confessions out of those who refused to cooperate. Long periods of silence and inactivity during solitary confinement were often immediately followed by intense, violent and long interrogation sessions conducted by several PIA agents. This repeating pattern of sensory deprivation followed by sensory overload eventually took its psychological toll.

In 2004, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention condemned the widespread and long-term use of solitary confinement in Iran:

“[F]or the first time since its establishment, [the Working Group] has been confronted with a strategy of widespread use of solitary confinement for its own sake and not for traditional purposes.... This is not a matter of a few punishment cells, as exist in all prisons, but what is a ‘prison within a prison’ fitted out for the systematic, large-scale abuse of solitary confinement, frequently for long periods.... It appears to be an established fact that the use of this kind of detention has allowed the extraction of ‘confessions’ followed by ‘public repentance’ (on television); besides their degrading nature, such statements are manifestly inadmissible as evidence.”

Detainees subjected to solitary confinement were often kept incommunicado in small cells measuring just 5 feet by 6.5 feet. Most of these cells were located underground, and lit with artificial light 24 hours a day. In many cases, detainees were kept in solitary confinement for months at a time. One detainee interviewed by IHRDC stated that he spent 128 continuous days

in solitary confinement, and many others have told similar stories to IHRDC and other human rights organizations.

Intimidation and threats were another central component of the PIA's multi-pronged strategy of creating an environment devoid of any hope, one which would eventually lead to the submission of detainees. Detainees indicated that the interrogations went hand-in-hand with verbal threats and intimidation, all of which amounted to psychological torture intended to break down the detainees' sense of dignity and self.

All of the former detainees interviewed by IHRDC recalled that verbal assaults and threats began as soon as they arrived at the illegal detention facilities. The persistent and deliberate stream of verbal assaults usually commenced with the announcement of serious but arbitrary charges against the detainees. The threats were often accompanied by "mercy offerings," such as assistance in exchange for cooperation -- a classic carrot-and-stick approach used to simultaneously intimidate and coax victims into self-incrimination.

When more subtle tactics failed to work, detainees were often faced with more overt forms of intimidation, including threats of physical and sexual violence. These threats were often employed when the detainees were exhausted and in shock due to sleep deprivation, long interrogations and persistent beatings. Former detainees also told IHRDC that they were often left in an interrogation room and made to listen to a detainee in the next room begging, shrieking and asking for mercy.

"After some time in Khatam, I was made to watch how the investigators beat other prisoners," recalled Hassan Zarezadeh Ardeshir, a human rights activist and journalist who was arrested 12 times by plainclothes PIA agents. "The prisoners were miserably asking for mercy, but they were still beating them. It was a very horrible scene. It was killing me. Then they would threaten me, and tell me that if I did not cooperate, I would be similarly tortured."

Mock executions were another method of intimidation used by PIA agents. Ali Afshari, a political analyst who was held in solitary confinement for a total of 329 days, told IHRDC that he reached his breaking point when he was subjected to a mock execution:

"One of my interrogators who was playing the role of the bad cop said that I should get ready to be executed. He took me out of the cell and dragged me to the courtyard of Evin Prison so that he could carry out the execution. At the same time, I heard another interrogator (who played the role of the good cop) beg the judges on the phone to show mercy on me.... Then someone else said "no, that's not possible. The execution has to be carried out." [Again] the interrogator who played the role of good cop approached the bad cop and asked him to show mercy on me. And again the bad cop said 'no, this guy is a lost cause.' Then the good cop came to me begged me to think about my parents... and confess -- otherwise I would be executed by firing squad. The back and forth between the two interrogators lasted half an hour. I was completely broken.

Physical torture was also rampant in PIA-run detention facilities. The methods used included punching, kicking, whipping, electric shock, sleep deprivation, asphyxiation and hanging detainees upside down on a rope. Many of the detainees interviewed by IHRDC were subject to severe physical punishment. Some detainees were beaten during the first interrogation session; others were subjected to physical punishment after their interrogators were unable to break their resolve with psychological torture. IHRDC's interviews suggest that PIA interrogators were

prone to use violence against detainees who were highly educated and better equipped to withstand psychological torture.

Shahram Rafizadeh, a poet who wrote three books about the Chain Murders, was one such detainee:

“Once they smashed a wash bowl that was in the interrogation room on my head. On other occasions they whipped my back and feet with cable wires. When I resisted, they whipped me all over -- on my back, butt, and legs -- all the way down to my heels. I don’t know how many times they whipped me. It varied. Sometimes they hit me 10 times, sometimes 20 or 30, and other times more. There were short pauses between the torture sessions, during which the interrogators asked more questions. If they didn’t get the answer they wanted, the torture continued.”

The torture of another detainee, Amir Farshad Ebrahimi, makes clear that PIA operatives did not even have qualms about employing their brutal tactics against a former comrade in arms. An ex-member of *Ansar-i Hizbullah*, the *Basij* and the *Quds* special forces of the Revolutionary Guard, Ebrahimi was arrested for supporting students’ demands for greater political freedoms and held for eight months at several illegal detention facilities operated by PIA units.

“They tied my legs with ropes and made a strong knot,” Ebrahimi told IHRDC. “There were two people. I knew one of them, Colonel Akbar Sharafi of [NAJA]. Then they hung me upside down. I was really scared and thought that I would definitely die or suffocate. I begged them to stop. He pulled my legs up high to the point where my hands reached the ground. I was in that position for several hours and other than a few kicks and slaps, they left me alone. Around evening time they released me and laid me down. I asked for water, and they brought me water. After 15 minutes I vomited everything that was in my stomach.”

After breaking detainees’ resolve, the interrogators forced them to confess links to the reform movement, express remorse and beg for forgiveness during scripted videotaped confessions. Yet even after confessing to crimes they did not commit, the nightmare did not end for the PIA’s many victims.

Surveillance, harassment, and intimidation were all used by PIA agents in order to discourage former detainees from resuming their activities after their release from detention. PIA operatives continued to harass victims by making threatening phone calls, arbitrarily summoning them to appear in court, monitoring their activities and intruding in their personal lives. The post-release surveillance of the detainees by PIA agents created an environment of perpetual fear, one that prevented them from exercising their right to freedom of expression, and even from carrying out their daily activities.

CONCLUSION

The Iranian government’s persistent failure to address these gross deprivations of fundamental rights seriously impedes the establishment of civil society and the rule of law in Iran. The regime’s failure to provide redress to victims constitutes a continuing violation of Iranian and international law. Furthermore, the government’s reluctance to address crimes committed by PIA operatives during the reformist era indicates its unwillingness to tackle the fundamental institutional and structural flaws that enabled the creation and operation of the organizations.

The conservative factions in Iran used PIA units to clandestinely hold on to power with little to no political risk. Although PIA activities later dramatically decreased as a result of the closing ideological gap between the Office of the Supreme Leader and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, there is no reason to believe that the political balance between reformists and conservatives will remain static. If and when the balance of power shifts again, there is little reason to believe that conservatives will not once again unleash PIA agents.