

secret Iranian nuclear facilities at Qom are further evidence that the Iranian government is insincere regarding the purpose of its nuclear program.

A third point Hauptman makes is that the Iranian Jewish community of some 30 000 is not at risk from anti-Semitic government discrimination. Anyone with friends or relatives who lived in Iran through the Islamic Revolution can speak to the murder of adherents to minority religions by those forces that became the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. By definition, sharia law, to which the nation currently adheres, makes non-Muslims second-class citizens. In a totalitarian state where people are stoned to death for merely being *accused* of adultery, how can statements of fair treatment from members of minority communities trapped there truly be taken at face value?

Hauptman claims that the recent murders of Iranian nuclear physicists featured on the Iran Watch website suggest some clandestine plot to kill scientists who might support the Iranian nuclear program. Here's another possible scenario: Scientists such as Masoud Alimohammadi, who Hauptman says had friends and collaborators around the world, might have been murdered by the Iranian government, simply for having such contacts. Anyone with family in Iran can state with confidence the fear that people there face for even being perceived as disagreeing with the government. Iranians' postal, telephone, and email communications with the outside world are in no way free of monitoring by the state. Should we believe that the Iranian government collects all that information and doesn't act on it?

The motivations for Hauptman's bizarre statements become clear at the end of his letter, when he attacks American foreign policy in the Middle East. Unfortunately, disliking American policy is not a valid reason to portray the Iranian government as something it is not. My Iranian relatives were very unhappy with the Bush policy and the invasion of Iraq in 2003—not because of American aggression, but because America stopped there and did not liberate them as well! They cannot understand how citizens blessed to live in free societies cannot recognize hostile governments in places like Iran and call them what they are. US government silence during the demonstrations following the stolen Iranian elections of 2009 is as clear an example as Haupt-

man's letter is of the US government's lack of clarity and objective assessment of the situation in the Middle East.

Science exists in the world that is, not the world of ideological fantasy. As scientists, we have an obligation to speak out when members of our community cross the line between promoting truth and engaging in propaganda. Hauptman's statements undermine the efforts of people in Iran and elsewhere who are fighting for the day when Iranian citizens can exercise freedom of conscience and can freely and peacefully engage in the broadest spectra of inquiry and research.

Reference

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John Hauptman's rambling and emotive response to my brief comments (PHYSICS TODAY, December 2010, page 8) about Iran-Israel relations in light of Toni Feder's news item (August 2010, page 22) underscores my original point: PHYSICS TODAY should steer clear of politics, since such discussions can easily lead to unsubstantiated opinions on topics far beyond its purview.

In his letter, Hauptman makes several serious and even bizarre claims that need to be addressed.

► Hauptman claims that Iran has not stated as a goal the annihilation of Israel, nor has it clamored for war. As "proof," he translates a sentence from the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's 2005 anti-Israel speech. However, his one worn example is superseded almost daily by combative, linguistically unambiguous threats. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has stated that Israel is a "stinking corpse" that must be "annihilated,"¹ and his regime hosts conferences on Holocaust denial. Banners saying "Death to Israel" in Farsi are hung in public places,² and Iran has stated its aim to build a nuclear arsenal and missile delivery system.

► Hauptman is "not aware of 'thousands of American deaths for which Iran is directly responsible.' " He must not be trying very hard. The US State Department lists Iran as the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism.³ Iran provides weapons, training, and intelligence for Hezbollah. The regime also partners with Sunni terror organizations, including Al Qaeda in the Sudan.

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Over the past 35 years, Iran has planned and directed many major terrorist attacks on American targets. Also, the most lethal improvised explosive devices in Iraq and Afghanistan are recognized as coming from Iran.⁴ For more detail on this and other concerns in my letter, an unabridged version accompanies this letter online (doi:10.1063/PT.3.1233).

An exact total of Americans killed by Middle East-based terrorists is hard to compute because news reports are incomplete. However, taken together, the existing data easily suggest thousands of American deaths as the result of Iran's actions.

► Jews, says Hauptman, are safe and happy in Iran. He fails to mention that the 30 000 Jews living there now are the remainder of the 100 000–150 000 who were there before 1948. Most of the community has fled, chiefly to Israel. Remaining Iranian Jews are often harassed, rounded up and charged with espionage, shot, or thrown in prison. As for not accepting “bribes” to move to Israel, sadly, the tiny Jewish minority community, like the Christian Copts in Egypt, must be extremely careful not to draw attention to itself, lest govern-

ment-sanctioned retribution ensue.

► Hauptman suggests that the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control and its website Iran Watch may have been involved in the murder of Masoud Alimohammadi and another physicist. That Alimohammadi was an outspoken critic of the Mullah regime leads his friends and colleagues to suspect he was murdered by agents of the Iranian government.⁵ The Wisconsin Project is a nonpartisan organization and has never published any type of “hitlist,” though the Iran Watch website does publish a list of suspect entities thought to be contributing to Iran's weapons programs (<http://www.iranwatch.org/suspect/enduser-list.asp>). However, to call that a hitlist and to then segue into the supposed evils of Israel is odd and irresponsible of Hauptman. There is no evidence of Israeli complicity in or even motivation for the murder. It was irresponsible of PHYSICS TODAY to allow such claims into print without adequate fact checking.

The report on the plight of Iranian scientists would have been more evenhanded had Feder also covered the rationale for the sanctions against Iran. Instead, the ensuing exchange, espe-

cially Hauptman's exceedingly odd letter, has led to much spilled ink. I strongly recommend that in the future PHYSICS TODAY stick more closely to science.

References

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2. See, for example, J. Teitelbaum, *What Iranian Leaders Really Say About Doing Away with Israel: A Refutation of the Campaign to Excuse Ahmadinejad's Incitement to Genocide*, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Jerusalem (2008), <http://www.jcpa.org/text/ahmadinejad2-words.pdf>.
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