BRITISH EMBASSY IN TEHRAN STORMED BY PROTESTING STUDENTS



The gates at the old US embassy site in Tehran. (David Holt photo on Flickr with Creative Commons license)

While gathering materials for yesterday's post on the reports of an explosion near the uranium processing facility near Isfahan in Iran, I almost mentioned this story on the Mehr News website, where we got confirmation that Iran was reducing its diplomatic relations with the UK, expelling the Ambassador:

> The Guardian Council has endorsed the parliamentary ratification on reducing ties with Britain, the council spokesman Abbas Ali Kadkhodaii announced on Monday.
>
> Lawmakers approved on Sunday a proposal calling for a reduction in the level of diplomatic and trade ties with Britain to a minimum level.
>
> Now the Foreign Ministry is obligated to reduce its relationship with London to the level of charge d'affaires within two weeks.

This action by Iran has now escalated, with

multiple reports surfacing that student protesters have entered the grounds of the British embassy in Tehran. From CNN:

> Iranian students stormed the UK Embassy in Tehran Tuesday, breaking down the door, throwing papers and replacing the British flag with an Iranian one, a CNN crew witnessed.
>
> The protesting students also threw stones at the embassy's windows.

There is more from Reuters:

> Iranian protesters stormed the British Embassy compound in Tehran on Tuesday, smashing windows and burning the British flag during a rally to protest against sanctions imposed by Britain, live Iranian television showed.
>
> /snip/
>
> The incident followed Britain's imposition of new sanctions on the Islamic state last week over its nuclear program.
>
> London banned all British financial institutions from doing business with their Iranian counterparts, including the Central Bank of Iran, as part of a new wave of sanctions by Western countries.

And the Reuters article shows that the protesters had "encouragement" from the government:

> In parliament in Tehran on Sunday, a lawmaker warned that Iranians angered by the sanctions could storm the British embassy as they did to the U.S. mission in 1979.

Looking at Iran's Fars News Agency, we see documentation of the start of the protest:

> Hundreds of Iranian university students started a rally in front of the British embassy in Tehran Tuesday afternoon to shout protest against London's hostile policies against Iran.
>
> "Down with Britain", "Down with America", "Down with Israel" and "Students are Awake and Hate Britain" are among the slogans chanted by the protestors.
>
> Protesters who carried photographs of Iran's assassinated nuclear scientist Majid Shahriari and IRGC Quds Force Commander Major General Qassem Soleimani, set fire on Britain's flag.
>
> The rally comes as Iran is commemorating the first martyrdom anniversary of its nuclear scientist Majid Shahriari who was assassinated by the Israeli Mossad agency supported by the British MI6.

The article then also repeated the information on downgrading Iranian-British relations from the ambassador level to the level of charge d'affaires in response to the economic sanctions put in place after the IAEA report on Iran's nuclear technology.

So far, there are no reports that I have seen of hostage-taking, but it looks like Iran is doing their best to recapture some of the anti-western hatred of 1979. It seems likely to me that if hostages are taken, the war mongers in Washington, DC (yes, I mean you, John McCain, Lindsey Graham and Joe Lieberman, among others) will go into paroxysms of joy over a new reason to attack Iran. However, if they do take hostages, Iran should be prepared for a deluge of contact from Republican presidential candidates looking to bargain for the release of the hostages as they each try to resurrect the Reagan zombie.

Update: The Washington Post is reporting that the housing compound for British diplomats also

was stormed, but there still are no reports of hostages. Also, Iranian authorities appear to have ordered the students out of the embassy compound after an hour:

> When the students arrived at the embassy complex late Tuesday afternoon, there was no scaffolding or barriers of the type erected by Iranian security during previous demonstrations as a way of keeping the protesters out of the compound.
>
> Riot police, who normally would have been deployed to keep order at the protest, were absent as well. In their place were standard Iranian police forces, equipped with shields.
>
> For about an hour, the police did not move to stop the students as they rushed into the embassy compound, lowering the flag, destroying the satellite dishes and setting fires.
>
> But eventually, police told the students to leave the compound and disperse.