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REVIEW & OUTLOOK | OCTOBER 12, 2009, 3:23 P.M. ET

An Alternative Nobel

Three Iranian dissidents are sentenced to death.

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Suppose this year's Nobel Peace Prize had gone to the scores of Iranians now on trial for having protested the fraudulent re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad last June. For the three defendants who were sentenced to death over the weekend, a Nobel might have made all the difference in the nick of time. At a minimum, it could have validated their struggle.

Our friends in Oslo had a different idea, which means that the fate of the three defendants—known officially by their initials M.Z., A.P. and N.A.—are at the mercy of Iran's appellate and supreme courts. It's a slender hope in a country that is the leading executioner of juveniles, and whose leaders have only become more truculent toward dissenters since the election.

Hope is also slender because the Obama Administration has downplayed human rights in Iran as it pursues a negotiated nuclear settlement with the Ahmadinejad government. Without explanation, the State Department this month pulled funding for the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, a New Haven, Connecticut outfit that has been investigating the plight of those Iranians now in the dock, including Iranian-American scholar Kian Tajbakhsh and Newsweek reporter Maziar Bahari.

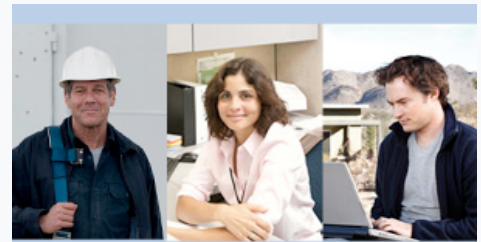
In his Rose Garden remarks about the Nobel, President Obama spoke about "the young woman who marches silently in the streets on behalf of her right to be heard even in the face of beatings and bullets." The elliptical reference is almost certainly to 27-year old Neda Agha-Sultan, whose murder last June by one of Ahmadinejad's goon squads was captured on a video seen around the world. We hope the President keeps in mind that the same people whose good faith he now seeks in negotiations were her killers.

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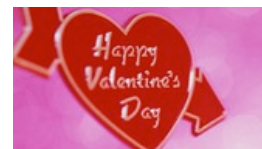
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