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With Iran Blaming West, Dual Citizens Are Targets

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Location of 2 Men Unknown, Families Say

By Tara Bahrapour
Washington Post Staff Writer
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Among the more than 100 people on trial after [Iran's](#) disputed presidential election are two dual citizens: Kian Tajbakhsh, 47, an American Iranian urban planner, and Maziar Bahari, 42, a Canadian Iranian filmmaker and Newsweek reporter.

Bahari was arrested June 21 at his mother's Tehran apartment, where he was staying while reporting on the post-election turmoil. Tajbakhsh, who lives in Tehran with his wife and daughter, was arrested July 9 while leaving his home to attend a party.

Friends and family members say they do not know where the men are being held. They have not been allowed visitors or access to lawyers, though both have been allowed a few phone calls and appeared in a Tehran courtroom last week.

Their arrests, along with those of opposition politicians and other journalists, came after Iranians poured into the streets protesting what they said was the rigged reelection of the incumbent president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Iranian officials have blamed the protests on foreign governments and news agencies, and friends of Tajbakhsh and Bahari worry that the two are being held because of their Western links.

"They are trying to make a case to their own constituents, and to international constituents, that what has taken place has a foreign element behind it, so dual nationals, people with ties to Western NGOs, are targets," said Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran analyst at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a friend of Tajbakhsh. "I don't believe for a second that they genuinely perceive Kian to be a threat to national security."

Last month, Iranian news reports quoted Bahari as stating that "as a journalist and a member of this great Western capitalism machine," he had "either blindly or on purpose participated in projecting doubts and promoting a color revolution" similar to those in Georgia and Ukraine.

Last week, Bahari, whose partner is pregnant in London, apologized before Iranian reporters. Friends and colleagues say they think the statements were made under duress.

Both men looked haggard and tense in photos released last week by Iran's semiofficial Fars News Agency.

Their arrests follow a pattern during Ahmadinejad's tenure of high-profile detentions of dual citizens. Since he took office in 2005, at least seven have been detained, including Woodrow Wilson Center scholar Haleh Esfandiari in 2007 and freelance journalist Roxana Saberi, who was convicted of espionage this year and later pardoned.

Tajbakhsh, who has lived in Iran since 1999 and has done some projects for its government, was held for four months in 2007, during which authorities accused him of trying to foment a "color" revolution. He stayed in

Iran afterward and had plans to teach at Columbia University this fall.

Friends said he had purposely avoided the election-related turmoil, even abstaining from voting. "He felt confident there was no rationale for him to be imprisoned," Sadjadpour said. Two days after the vote, Tajbakhsh wrote to him in an e-mail: "I'm keeping my head down. I have nothing journalistic to add to all the reports that are here."

Bahari had been filing reports for Newsweek and for television stations in [Britain](#); the Iranian government has accused him of sending reports to foreign news media in exchange for payment, said Nisid Hajari, Newsweek's foreign editor.

"That's exactly what he's been doing for more than 10 years," Hajari said, adding that the Iranian government had renewed Bahari's press accreditation each year and had not complained about his work. "What they've accused him of doing is a job that they themselves had licensed and approved him to do."

Bahari's writing had not been particularly critical of the Iranian government, according to analysts. "Newsweek coverage has been quite favorable in the past, so I'm surprised that they would target him," said Ervand Abrahamian, a history professor at the City University of New York's Baruch College.

Esfandiari, the scholar who, like Tajbakhsh, spent four months in an Iranian prison in 2007, said the government may simply have looked for convenient targets to blame for the post-election unrest.

"I can guess that they were digging into the velvet revolution file, and they needed a credible voice to talk about this velvet revolution, and the only person who was there was Kian," she said. "I've heard they have rooms full of charts about universities, think tanks, NGOs and are then drawing parallels from Georgia, Ukraine and so on. And then they go after truly, truly innocent people like Kian."

Shiva Balaghi, an Iran scholar at Brown University, said the arrests are part of a historical pattern in the Islamic republic. "Whenever they feel they're losing their grip on power is when they do these things," she said.

In past weeks, as cracks have appeared in the top echelons of the Iranian government, it has been unclear who is in charge of detainees. When Tajbakhsh checked in with his Intelligence Ministry minder after the election, Sadjadpour said, he was told, " 'It's not us that's behind the imprisonment now; it's the Sepah, the Revolutionary Guard.' "

The U.S. and Canadian governments have called for release of the men, and writers, filmmakers and artists have signed petitions. Iran is also holding a French academic, who apologized in court Saturday, and three U.S. citizens who hiked over the border from [Iraq](#) last week.

Jacki Lyden, a National Public Radio reporter who has worked with Bahari inside and outside Iran, said his arrest signals an end to the reassurances journalists there used to count on.

"Every little thing you tell yourself about why they would not come after you, those little half-truths over the last 20 years, are gone," she said. "Anybody who subscribes to the idea that there's a doormat-sized civil society in the Islamic republic has found that doormat yanked out from under them."

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