

5 Things Most People Don't Know About Iran

The world watched on Monday as Iranians shouted "Death to America!" in the streets of Tehran. A crowd of at least 1 million people gathered for the funeral of Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Suleimani, who was killed on Jan. 3 by American forces. The angry protesters burned American flags and called for the assassination of President Trump while Suleimani's daughter, Zeinab, called for revenge.

"The families of the American soldiers ... will spend their days waiting for the death of their children," she vowed at the funeral.

Here at home, Americans are divided on the killing of the Iranian general. Democrats have criticized Trump's decision to target Suleimani, denouncing the military action as reckless. Republicans say Suleimani was a vicious war criminal who engineered the killings of thousands since he began his career in 1997 as a terrorist mastermind. Pentagon leaders say Suleimani was plotting imminent attacks before he was killed last week in a U.S. airstrike on Baghdad.

So whom do we believe? I turned to Masih Alinejad, an Iranian journalist and women's rights advocate, who offered a levelheaded opinion in her article in the *Washington Post* on Jan. 6. "I have one piece of advice," Alinejad wrote. "Don't take what you're seeing at face value."

The truth is that we aren't getting the whole picture from the mainstream media. Here are five things you need to know about the Iranian situation:

1. **There is massive disapproval of the Muslim leadership inside Iran.** We all saw the crowds at Monday's funeral in Tehran. But Iran doesn't want you to know that a huge

protest movement has been rocking the country for years. Last November thousands marched in the streets to demand the removal of Iran's clerical rule. Reuters said Iranian security forces killed more than 1,500 people during that incident.

The regime of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, works hard to keep people from thinking for themselves. After last November's protests, the government shut down the internet for five days. Many journalists and bloggers have been jailed or killed for the crime of "insulting" Khamenei. Yet in spite of threats, brave Iranians still take to the streets to call for an end to tyranny.

2. **Iranians living in America are celebrating the demise of Gen. Suleimani.** Los Angeles is home to 300,000 Iranian-Americans—many of whom came to this country when the Shah of Iran was deposed in 1979. But you will not hear many of these new Americans defending Gen. Suleimani. Many of them rejoiced at the news of his death because they were familiar with his bloody record.

Nasser Sharif, president of the California Society for Democracy in Iran, calls Suleimani a "murderer of Iranians, Syrians and American soldiers in Iraq." He also told *The Los Angeles Times* this week that his contacts in Iran are thrilled that Suleimani was killed. "The Iranian regime is very weak and vulnerable and desperate," he said. "The regime is very unpopular among the public and the young generation."

3. **Mosques are empty all across Iran.** For several years journalists have been reporting that mosque attendance in Iran has dwindled. This is because the typical Iranian has rejected the tyranny of the ayatollahs. Young people are sick of the harsh state control, the public floggings for criminals and the strict dress requirements. Even as far back as 2015, a reporter from *The Telegraph* said hardly anyone attended Friday prayers

at the largest mosque near the University of Tehran.

Inflation is high and jobs are scarce in Iran. Younger Iranians see the government as the problem. Mania Filum, who is 27, said educated Iranians are seeking opportunities to leave the country. “Everybody plans to win funds for PhDs and leave Iran,” she said. Farshid Andikjou, a 27-year-old former engineer, told *The Los Angeles Times* that he is studying English so he can get a job overseas. “Give me a good reason to stay in my country,” he added.

4. **There is a vast spiritual awakening taking place in Iran today.** Christians inside Iran say there is an unprecedented level of interest in the gospel. People are listening to Christian broadcasting and discreetly asking for prayer through secure apps. Mission groups working with Iranian churches say they often can’t provide enough Bibles or resources for new believers, because the number is growing.

Operation World continues to list Iran as having the fastest-growing evangelical church in the world. Underground churches are flourishing, even though the government arrests pastors and harasses believers. And in a new documentary about the Iranian church, *Sheep Among Wolves II*, an unidentified Iranian pastor says: “What if I told you no one follows Islam inside of Iran? Would you believe me? This is exactly what is happening inside of Iran. God is moving powerfully inside of Iran.”

5. **Iran plays a huge prophetic role in the Bible.** It would be tragic if we looked at Iran simply as an enemy nation—especially when considering the role it has played in the history of our faith. It is the land where Daniel lived and prophesied. It is the place where Esther and Mordecai worked and prayed to save the Jews from genocide. It is where God’s people were preserved during 70 years of judgment—and where King Cyrus decreed

that they could go back to their homeland. In fact, Cyrus' tomb is in the Iranian city of Pasargadae.

All these facts should be considered as we pray for Iran in this tense moment. First Timothy 2:2 calls us to pray "for kings and for all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty." Pray for the uprooting of terrorism. Pray for protection for Iran's persecuted church. Pray that spiritual revival will spread. Pray for peace and freedom in this ancient land. {eoa}