



May 19, 2010

Update II- Was Kakavand's Acquittal Part of a *Quid Pro Quo* with Iran?

On May 7, a French appeals court [denied](#) a U.S. extradition request and acquitted of smuggling charges thirty-seven-year-old Iranian engineer Majid Kakavand. On May 17, the French Interior Ministry demanded the expulsion of an Iranian serving a life sentence on murder charges, and on May 18 a French court granted his [parole](#). One day earlier, Iran [released](#) a French academic held in that country for nearly a year on espionage charges. The close association of these events strongly implies that France engaged in an unwise *quid pro quo* with Iran.

Kakavand was accused by the United States of smuggling more than \$1 million in U.S. electronic dual-use military parts to Iranian entities associated with Iran's military and ballistic missile programs via his Malaysian trading company. (See earlier ISIS analysis of the Kakavand case [here](#), and updates about the French court case [here](#) and [here](#)). Iranian Ali Vakili Rad was serving a life sentence for the 1991 murder of the Iranian shah's last prime minister, Shapour Bakhtiar, in Paris. Clotilde Reiss, 24, a French national, was detained in Iran on espionage charges since July 2009. Iranian president Ahmadinejad had publicly [stated](#) over the last year that the fate of Reiss was linked with Iranian detainees in France, but French officials denied that such a deal would be made.

A prisoner exchange deal raises questions about both the autonomy of the French courts and France's commitment to preventing the illicit procurement of sensitive items for Iran's missile and nuclear programs. On the nonproliferation side, France should carefully consider how it can play a more proactive role in preventing military usable items from reaching Iran and ensuring that alleged Iranian smugglers stand trial in the country whose laws were violated. At the same time, France should consider the poor example it has set which Iran may well exploit in the future. While the unlawful detention of foreign nationals in Iran is cause for concern, this *quid pro quo* makes more likely the occurrence of further groundless detentions, particularly when Iranian smugglers are arrested abroad. Iran may hope that the other country will be cowed into making a similar prisoner exchange, and it now has a French precedent to follow.