



Written by [James Murphy](#) on November 5, 2020

## Iran: Students Told to Burn American Flags at Home Due to COVID-19

For the first time in four decades, Iran's traditional Student Day march, which marks the anniversary of terrorists seizing the American embassy in Tehran in 1979, did not take place. Instead, an official for the student section of the Basij militia urged revelers to burn American flags at their homes.

Iranian officials canceled the event due to a recent surge in COVID-19 cases in the country, with the capital Tehran being especially hard-hit. Iran is experiencing a third wave of the virus, which is reportedly taking 400 lives a day in the country.



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On November 4, 1979, radical Islamic students captured the U.S. Embassy in Iran and held 52 American citizens hostage for 444 days. The hostages were held until January 20, 1981 and released just after Ronald Reagan was inaugurated as president. This terrorist act is seen as a great victory in Iran and has been celebrated as such for the 40 years since it happened.

On Iranian state-run television on Sunday, the acting head of the student Basij organization, Mojtaba Bastan, instead announced the "Everyone Together [Says] Down With the USA" campaign. Bastan urged members of the student group to burn U.S. flags at their dwellings.

"On Tuesday morning at 9:00am, parents and students should come together and 'trample and set fire' to flags of the U.S., Israel and France at home, where they can safely play with fire without worrying about catching a deadly virus," Bastan said.

Members of the Iranian citizenry were then encouraged to film their private celebrations and send them to a special website where others could enjoy their flag-burning antics.

"In addition, a special website has been created where students are encouraged to upload minute-long videos and add their names to the statement, 'US must exit [Middle East] region,'" reported the London-based *Iran International*. "The website also features competitions 'Why Down with the USA?' and 'Message to American Soldiers,' for which students can enter drawings, essays, voice recordings and video clips."

The Basij militia, which organizes the Student Day march each year, is one of the five branches of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which was established in 1980 by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in the wake of the Iranian Revolution that ousted the Shah of Iran. The student group's forefathers were the students who attacked and held the American Embassy in Tehran.

The student group is made up of volunteers who are willing to act as martyrs for Allah as evidenced by their human wave attacks in the Iran-Iraq War, where members of the group were sacrificed in waves as a method of clearing minefields.



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Members of the paramilitary Basij militia are exempted from other military services, given reserved spots in universities and receive a small stipend from the government for their service in the group. Members of the group are more likely to get government jobs and other societal perks. 2009 estimates listed the group's membership at over 11 million.

In February, the group threatened to destroy the tomb of Esther and Mordecai, which is located in Hamadan, Iran. The group's plan was to destroy the Jewish site and replace it with a Palestinian consulate. In May, an unsuccessful arson attack was launched against the mausoleum, which caused only some minor smoke damage.

Iran is currently in the midst of a massive economic downturn caused largely by U.S. sanctions intended to deter Iran from its alleged ambition of gaining nuclear weapons. President Trump withdrew from the Iran Nuclear Deal in 2018, which led to renewed hatred of America among Islamic extremists in the country.



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