VFW: Iranian Deal Must Include Marine's Release

Hekmati's plight seems to be a nonissue to the American government

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is demanding that the safe release of former U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Amir M. Hekmati be linked to any potential deal with Iran.

The U.S.-born Hekmati, a native of Flint, Mich., was in Iran visiting relatives in 2011 when he was arrested and accused of being a spy. He would be subsequently tried, convicted, and sentenced to death. He was later retried and sentenced to 10 years in prison — a sentence he now serves in Evin Prison in northwestern Tehran, where he is allegedly being tortured by his captors.

"Today I am demanding that the U.S. government make his release a nonnegotiable part of whatever deal is cut with Iran," said VFW National Commander John W. Stroud. "I have had grave concerns over his wrongful imprisonment, but am especially troubled over allegations that his Iranian captors are torturing a former Marine and a fellow VFW member."

The VFW had written U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power in September 2013 to urge her personal involvement to gain his release, but to date, Hekmati's plight seems to be a nonissue to the American government.

"If our government can swap five of the worst terrorists for one American soldier, we can certainly make the safe release of one former Marine an unconditional part of a deal that has yet been formalized," said Stroud. "It's what America does for her citizens — we bring them home."

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