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SOMALI SUFIS ENTER GOVERNMENT AS AL-SHABAAB CONTINUES ITS WAR ON THE DEAD

Following an earlier campaign of grave desecrations and exhumations in southern Somalia, al-Shabaab militants have now turned their attention to the graves of respected Islamic scholars and Sufi leaders in Mogadishu. Heavily armed detachments of Shabaab fighters have been arriving at various cemeteries in Mogadishu to destroy shrines and graves with hammers and hoes while chanting “Allahu Akbar (*God is great*),” often in full sight of the local religious communities. The Shabaab official in charge of the destruction, Shaykh Sa’id Karatay, said the operations would continue “until we eradicate the culture of worshipping graves” (AFP, March 26). Salafists such as those found in the ranks of al-Shabaab oppose the practice of visiting the tombs of the revered leaders and founders of Somalia’s Sufi orders.

Al-Shabaab’s pursuit of a self-destructive policy like grave desecration is yet another example of the movement’s short-sightedness and adherence to a rigid Salafist interpretation of religion that seems to continually distract the movement from its stated intention of establishing a Shari’a state in Somalia. It was al-Shabaab’s attacks on Sufi shrines and graves in southern Somalia in 2008 that led to the mobilization of a large Sufi militia devoted to the destruction of al-Shabaab. Known as Ahl al-Sunna wa’l-Jama’a (ASJ), this militia has drawn on the nation’s large Sufi community to build a formidable fighting force that the beleaguered Transitional Federal Government has come to rely on for its own

survival. The ASJ has leveraged this reliance into a formal entry into the TFG, negotiating a deal that calls for five ministries in the TFG, a number of diplomatic posts and deputy commanders in the army, police and intelligence departments (al-Sharq al-Aswat, February 24). The negotiations were hosted by the Ethiopian government in Addis Ababa.

Al-Shabaab began its campaign with the destruction of the tomb of Shaykh Muhyidin Eli on the northern outskirts of Mogadishu. Shabaab commander Shaykh Ali Muhammad Husayn (a.k.a. Abu Jamal, the Shabaab “governor” of Banaadir region) told reporters, “We have carried out a holy operation to destroy tombs used as worshipping symbols. We aim to get rid of the barbaric and non-Islamic culture in the country (AFP, March 23). Eyewitnesses said Shaykh Muhyidin’s remains were removed from the grave and stuffed into sacks (Raxanreeb.com, March 24). Shaykh Sa’id’s forces then excavated a series of graves close to Mogadishu’s Bakara market, including the tombs of Ma’allin (“Teacher”) Biyamalow, his wife and his small child (Andalusnews, March 25). According to Shaykh Ali Muhammad Husayn, “Allah forgives sins but He does not forgive polytheism. Therefore, the mujahidin always stand to fight anything that goes against the Shari’a... If a man does good deeds, he will reap rewards. However, it is polytheism to worship him besides Allah just because he is a good man” (Andalusnews.com, March 24).

Reaction to the exhumations was swift. Elders of the Mudulood clan in Banaadir region have announced they will lead a rising against al-Shabaab to expel them from north Mogadishu (Jowhar, March 23). Shaykh Bashir Ahmad Salad, chairman of the Organization for Somali Religious Scholars, described the exhumations as un-Islamic and a “violation of the rights of a deceased person” (Dayniile, March 27). The ASJ has reported that its scholars in Nairobi are raising their supporters to travel to Mogadishu to fight al-Shabaab and are also recruiting forces in Mogadishu to take revenge on al-Shabaab (Shabelle Media Network, March 26).

Shaykh Sa’id Karatay has expanded al-Shabaab’s war on the dead, ordering his men to search out and destroy all graves from the colonial period, graves with crosses and graves with foreign names. Special targets are graves bearing Ugandan, Tanzanian and Kenyan names; the

Shaykh describes these as the graves of the forefathers of the Ugandan dominated African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which is involved in heavy fighting against al-Shabaab. “These people had previously come to attack the country and the dates they died here are also marked on the graves. Clearly, this is not the first time that Africans have come to attack us. The forefathers of these African forces raining down mortars on us are buried here, right here” (Universal TV [Somali], March 23).

The latest round of desecrations is being used as a rallying point for the Sufi militia; according to ASJ spokesman Abdikadir Muhammad Somow, “Every believer, every Somali, anyone interested in the dignity of our country and that of Islam should now stand up to [al-Shabaab] and let this be the last of their transgressions. It should give us the will and determination to once and for all oust them out of our country” (Universal TV, March 23). General Muhammad Nur Galal has joined the ASJ as a military advisor in central Somalia as the movement prepares to drive al-Shabaab out of Galgadud and Hiraaan provinces (Warsheekh.com, March 23). The Soviet-trained General Galal, a member of the influential Hawiye/Habr Gadir/Ayr clan, was one of the planners of Somalia’s 1977 invasion of Ethiopia’s Ogaden region. ASJ leader Shaykh Umar Muhammad Farah believes al-Shabaab’s campaign is in retaliation for ASJ joining the TFG:

The excavation of the remains of prominent religious scholars that took part in spreading of Islam in the last centuries is quite disappointing. For them to treat fellow Muslims the way they did is abhorrent. We see this as a reaction to the recent agreement between Ahlu Sunna wa’l-Jama’a and the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia in Addis Ababa.

Many Somalis have observed the TFG’s silence on the tomb demolitions and its failure to send security forces to intervene (Dayniile, March 25). It is known that President Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad dislikes the Sufi community and has not hesitated to insult it in the past even though his government would probably collapse without its support. The President and many of his supporters were once allied with the leaders of al-Shabaab and they share many views on the application of Islam in Somalia.

IRAQI BA'ATHIST LEADER CALLS ON ARAB LEAGUE TO OPPOSE THE "AMERICAN AND IRANIAN PROJECT IN IRAQ"

Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, leader of the Iraqi Ba'ath party and commander of the Jihad and Liberation Front (a coalition of Iraqi resistance groups formed in 2007), has issued a statement urging the Arab League to act promptly to foil what he described as American and Iranian plans for the permanent occupation of Iraq.

Al-Duri's exact whereabouts are unknown, but he is believed to operate from Syria. Despite ill health, he has continued to exert the same influence within the Ba'athist party and its allies as he did when he served Saddam Hussein as Vice President of Iraq and Deputy Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council. The Ba'athist leader opposes al-Qaeda, blaming its "strategic errors" for preventing the collapse of the occupation in its first year (al-Moharer.net, July 20, 2008).

Al-Duri, perhaps aware that repeated calls for support against American occupation in Iraq have gone unheeded for seven years, ties his appeal to the Arab nations' newfound fear of Iranian intentions in the region, suggesting that Washington and Tehran are cooperating to eliminate the Sunnis of Iraq before moving on to the rest of the Arab Middle East. He reminds the Arab leaders of the immense sacrifice made by Iraqis to repel Iranian forces in the 1980-1988 war between the two neighbors. Al-Duri describes this conflict as a "Persian attack on the ummah (the global Muslim community)," rather than an attack on Iraq.

The Ba'athist leader goes on to express the disappointment of the resistance in the Arab League nations in failing to support the Iraqi people. Al-Duri notes the Iraqi people are besieged:

Unfortunately, the strangest thing is that they are besieged by those who are supposed to be their initial and strategic depth in all national, patriotic, human, religious, and moral standards. The Iraqi people have been, and still are, besieged by the official Arab regimes, except for a very few. To date, there are some Arab rulers, who have not only imposed a siege and blockade, but also put all their weight, as well as their country's weight and capabilities at the service of the occupier and its collaborators.

The statement also implicates Iran in the American occupation from the beginning:

Iran, the neighbor of vice, rancor, and hatred for the ummah, its history, and message, unfortunately helped and facilitated the invasion and occupation of Iraq and powerfully cooperated with this superpower to destroy Iraq's growth and civilization... You have to know too that the United States handed Iraq over to Iran on a silver platter...

Al-Duri interprets the withdrawal of occupation troops from Iraq's urban areas as a victory for the resistance, but ultimate victory and independence is being foiled by Iraq's "Quislings," its Shi'a politicians. According to al-Duri, the time is right for the Arab nation to assert itself in the interest of "freedom and independence," as is being done by nations "lesser in numbers and potential," such as Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, Vietnam, Korea, Turkey, Russia and even Iran.

Al-Duri asks the Arab leaders to take six decisions:

1. To acknowledge that the armed and unarmed Iraqi resistance is pursuing its legitimate right to resist occupation under international and religious law.
2. To expel all representatives of the Baghdad government and invite representatives of the resistance to represent Iraq in the Arab League.
3. To sever diplomatic relations with the Baghdad government and cancel all existing commitments to that government.
4. To implement the Arab League's Joint Defense Agreement. Article 2 of the agreement calls on all member states to "go without delay to the aid of the State or States against which an act of [armed] aggression is made."
5. To provide humanitarian support for the Iraqi people, who are "threatened by the disaster of annihilation."
6. To exert pressure "by all means possible" on the United States to abandon Iran and withdraw immediately.

After mentioning the work of a number of resistance groups fighting in south Iraq, al-Duri says the next phase of the conflict will see the resistance fighting the enemy

“on every inch of Iraqi soil.” If the United States insists on its support for the “Iranian Safavid expansionist project, we will fight and pursue it... We will not be deceived by the enemy’s withdrawal of its forces or part of them.”

Pakistani Military Launching Counter-Insurgency Operation in Orakzai Agency

By Arif Jamal

A new military offensive against the Pakistani Taliban in Orakzai Agency and Tirah Valley of the Khyber Agency appears to be in the works. It is not clear how big the forthcoming military operation will be, though it may not be of the scale witnessed recently in the Swat Valley and the South Waziristan Agency. It is more likely to be a more low profile military operation like the one carried out in the Bajaur Agency, where the security forces captured Damadola in February 2010. Damadola was the home base of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) commander Maulvi Faqir Mohammad and was considered the nerve center of the TTP. Frontier Corps Major-General Tariq Khan told reporters on March 3, “We are facing problems in Orakzai and Tirah and will launch operations there in the near future (*Dawn*, March 4).”

Orakzai Agency was the base of Taliban leader Hakimullah Mahsud, who is believed to have died in a drone attack earlier this year. The TTP insists he is alive, but doubts still linger about his death. He was reported to have died in Multan in southern Punjab while on his way to Karachi for medical treatment, but nobody has seen his corpse. Orakzai is the birthplace of the Pakistani Taliban, which formed in early 2000, when Pakistani Deobandi militants from Orakzai Agency used the term “Tehrik-i-Taliban” for the first time. The Pakistani Taliban announced themselves when the local Shi’a Muslim community started building a mosque near a Shi’a shrine in the village of Alikhel in Orakzai. The Pakistani and Afghan Taliban descended upon the villages of Alikhel, Tallyaya and Baropalay, demolished the mosque and banished the Shi’a community from the area. [1] According to one account, the newly founded

Pakistani Taliban wanted to take over the lands owned by the local Shi’a to cultivate poppy to fund jihad in Pakistan. [2]

Military activity has increased in Orakzai recently, with scores of militants reported dead in the fighting and bombing by Pakistan Air Force jets. Several Orakzai commanders and militants of the group headed by Mullah Nur Jamal (a.k.a. Mullah Tufan) were also killed in neighboring Kurram Agency during a clash with a pro-military Taliban group led by Commander Rafique (*Dawn*, March 21). In the second week of March, local tribesmen reported that troops were taking positions in Lower Orakzai and had sealed off all main routes to and from Orakzai Agency. Pakistani Air Force (PAF) jets bombed six hideouts of the Taliban in Orakzai on March 14, killing 13 Taliban (*Dawn*, March 15). This was followed by further air raids on March 19-20, reportedly killing another 20 Taliban (*Daily Times*, March 20; *Dawn*, March 21). At the same time, troops captured the area of Kasha in Orakzai and directed sporadic artillery fire from the central Kurram and Ferozkhel area on militant positions in neighboring Khyber Agency to stop the movement of militants (*Dawn*, March 21). A pro-government *lashkar* (ad-hoc militia) killed several militants in Orakzai as the PAF pursued the fleeing militants, killing 25 Taliban (*The News*, March 21). On March 21, hotly pursuing the fleeing militants, PAF planes bombed them in Kurram Agency and killed 25 of them. Bombing killed nine militants in Orakzai on the same day (*The News*, March 22).

Major-General Tariq Khan’s announcement of coming military operations in Orakzai comes as a surprise to many Pakistan-watchers, as the Pakistani military had snubbed both the Americans and Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gillani when they requested the start of such operations. Prime Minister Gillani appears to have been softly prodding the Pakistan Army for some time to take the military offensives that started in Swat and South Waziristan to their logical end by carrying out full-scale operations in Orakzai and North Waziristan. Prime Minister Gillani had announced as early as December 12, 2009 that the government had decided to launch a similar operation in Orakzai after the success of the South Waziristan operation (*Dawn*, December 4, 2009). However, the Pakistani military remained non-committal and reluctant to extend themselves further. In what was a clear snub to U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates during his visit to Islamabad in January, Pakistan army spokesman Major-General Athar Abbas

ruled out the possibility of launching any new operations beyond South Waziristan in the next 19 months (*Dawn*, 22 January).

According to a senior Pakistani official, the reasoning behind the decision to launch the operation in Orakzai was two-fold. First, the operation is being launched at a time just as the United States and Pakistan are set to start the next round of their strategic dialogue. The offensive is aimed at countering U.S. pressure on Pakistan to do more to fight terrorism on the frontier. Second, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, who is to retire in November, is seeking an extension to his tenure as the Chief of the Army Staff. In anticipation of an extension to his service, he has even granted an extension of service to several of his favorite generals without the consent of the prime minister. However, the Pakistani government is reluctant to oblige him. The government would find it hard to say “no” if the Americans intervene in General Kayani’s favor, something it might do if the Americans observe an acceleration of the war on terrorism. [3]

The Pakistani military has not announced the details of the new military offensive as it has done in the past. Whether the military operation expands or runs out of steam in the coming weeks depends on the outcome of the strategic dialogue, or possibly how forcefully the United States advocates in favor of extending General Kayani’s service before his civilian bosses.

Arif Jamal is a visiting fellow at the New York University and author of “Shadow War – The Untold Story of Jihad in Kashmir.”

Notes:

1. Based on the author’s research in Orakzai agency from March to July 2000.
2. Author’s interview with local Shi’a leader Syed Jamil Hussain, July 2000.
2. Author’s telephone interview with a senior Pakistani official, March 2010.

The Gorran Movement – A Change in the Iraqi Kurdish Political Landscape

By David Romano

The emergence of a new Kurdish opposition movement in Iraqi Kurdistan—Gorran (meaning “Change”)—has complicated the political landscape of northern Iraq. A break-away movement of many top PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) members founded in February 2009, Gorran won 25 of 111 seats in the Kurdish provincial elections of July 2009. The two previously dominant parties, the PUK and the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) won most of the remaining seats in that election. Gorran campaigned on a platform of reducing the dominant parties’ corruption, nepotism and “1930s Chicago-style big party politics” in the region. [1]

In the March 7 nation-wide Iraqi elections, Gorran ran on a separate slate from the KDP-PUK Kurdistan Alliance List. According to final results released by the Iraqi High Electoral Commission on March 26, Gorran won 8 parliamentary seats to the Kurdistan List’s 43, winning almost half the vote in the PUK stronghold of Sulaymaniya and two seats in Erbil, but faring poorly in Kirkuk, Duhok, Ninawa (Mosul) and Diyala. [2]

Kurdish media complained that Gorran and two smaller Kurdish Islamist lists split the vote in this election, leading to the Kurds’ loss of up to six seats in the new Iraqi Parliament (Rudaw.net; March 15). If a list’s vote tally in this latest election failed to meet the threshold for a parliamentary seat in a certain province (as opposed to nationwide in the 2005 election), those votes were lost. In the case of disputed territories like Kirkuk, this led to the loss of some 98,000 Kurdish votes, according to Ja’afar Iminki, the head of the KDP’s election office. [3] As a result, Iyad Allawi’s Iraqiya list appears to have emerged with the most votes in Kirkuk, despite a majority of that province’s electorate voting for the different Kurdish lists. When Jamestown asked Gorran deputy leader Mohamad Tofiq about the issue, he responded “What is 6 seats in a parliament of 325? The Kurds will have a total of maybe 60 seats in the new parliament.” [4]

The new divisions within the Kurdish front, as well as a smattering of violent confrontations between Gorran

and PUK supporters during the last year, has sparked speculation regarding stability in Iraqi Kurdistan and the Kurds' ability to pursue their goals vis-à-vis Baghdad (*Kurdish Aspect*, December 31, 2009). [5] Gorran has also complained of intimidation and harassment from the PUK. The possibility of Nuri al-Maliki or other non-Kurdish political blocs bringing Gorran and the smaller Kurdish Islamist parties into a coalition government that leaves out the KDP-PUK Kurdistan Alliance List thus exists.

The chance of this happening, as well as the threat to Iraqi Kurdistan's stability, does not appear to be great, however. Both high Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) officials and Gorran leaders told Jamestown that on issues of core interest to the Kurds, a united front will continue to exist. Falah Mustafa Bakir, the head of the KRG's Foreign Relations Office, observed that Gorran's focus is on administration of the KRG, budget issues, and other questions of governance. "In any dispute between Baghdad and the KRG, we have one voice – it's a national identity issue." [6] Gorran Deputy Leader Mohamad Tofiq likewise told Jamestown that "We can agree on a unified front for issues important to the region." [7] He added, however, that "On other issues of importance to any Iraqi, we can pursue a different policy from that of the KDP and PUK. Not everything is a Kurdish issue. It is important for Iraqis to see that you have concerns on issues of importance to the whole country." Tofiq does not, however, rule out the possibility of joining an Iraqi government without the Kurdistan Alliance. According to Tofiq, joining a coalition government depends on the nature of that government, on the solutions they propose for Kurdish concerns, and not on whether or not the KDP and PUK are present. "We competed against them. This wasn't so we could follow their orders in a coalition."

If Gorran were to join a new government in Baghdad that does not include the KDP and PUK it would open itself up to accusations of selling out Kurdish national interests, especially if it failed to quickly secure significant progress on Kurdish claims over Kirkuk and other disputed territories, an oil law and revenue sharing between the KRG and Baghdad. Immediately after the March 7 elections, leaders of al-Maliki's State of Law slate and Allawi's Iraqiyya bloc raced up to Kurdistan to sound out Kurdish leaders about the next coalition government, but they did not meet with the Gorran Movement. Gorran has not articulated preferences on core interests of Kurdistan (disputed territory, oil, peshmerga forces vis-à-vis Baghdad, and federalism)

that differ from those of the KDP and PUK. In the latest election, its discussion of these questions focused on the KDP and PUK's failure to secure progress on these issues rather than the goals themselves.

The possibility of significant instability in Iraqi Kurdistan also appears remote. Unlike most Kurdish political parties of the past, Gorran does not have an armed militia, and leaders insist, "We will never have a militia – the Kurdish people are tired of militias and conflict" [8] Iraqi Kurdistan's institutions, which have had to develop since 1991, should prove able to handle a new opposition party. Gorran's emergence is healthy for the democratic system, at least in the traditionally PUK-dominated part of Kurdistan. Gorran's splintering from the PUK leaves the KDP relatively dominant in its part of the region, however, and perhaps eventually in need of some healthy opposition as well.

David Romano is an assistant professor of International Studies at Rhodes College.

Notes:

1. Jamestown interview with Gorran Deputy Leader Mohamad Tofiq, Suleimaniya, March 20, 2010.
2. <http://www.themajlis.org/projects/iraq-results>; http://al-shorfa.com/cocoon/meii/xhtml/en_GB/features/meii/features/main/2010/03/27/feature-01.
3. *Ibid.* According to preliminary election results, however, the author estimates the number of "lost" Kurdish votes in Kirkuk to actually be closer to 45,000, with another 50,000 votes dissipated between the three smaller Kurdish lists in Niniwa, Diyala, Salaheddin and Baghdad.
4. Author's interview with Mohamad Tofiq, March 20, 2010.
5. Wladimir van Wilgenburg interview with Lahur Talabani, Rudaw.net, March 5, 2010. See also *Terrorism Monitor*, March 11, 2010.
6. Author's Interview with Falah Mustafa Bakir, Erbil, March 16, 2010.
7. Author's interview with Mohamad Tofiq, March 20, 2010.
8. *Ibid*

Political Theater or Counterterrorism? Assessing Iran's Capture of Jundallah Leader Abdelmalek Rigi

By *Chris Zambelis*

Iranian security forces pulled off a major coup on February 23 by capturing the enigmatic militant leader Abdelmalek Rigi (Press TV [Tehran], February 23; IRNA [Tehran], February 23). The 31-year-old founder and leader of Jundallah (Soldiers of God), an ethnic Baloch nationalist group, is responsible for leading a campaign of violence, criminality, and terrorism in Iran's southeastern province of Sistan-Balochistan since 2003. Rigi and his followers have been a thorn in the side of Iran's security services and, when considered in the context of the myriad domestic and international challenges facing Tehran, a threat to the overall stability of the Islamic Republic. In its self-anointed mission to act as an advocate on behalf of Iran's predominantly Sunni ethnic Baloch minority, Jundallah has targeted Iranian security forces and official symbols of the state. [1] Jundallah's use of beheadings and suicide bombings targeting both the Iranian security services and civilians are reminiscent of attacks executed by radical Sunni Islamists elsewhere in the region and have stoked fears of the spread of violent Sunni extremism in predominately Shi'a Iran (Fars News Agency [Tehran], May 29, 2009).

The precise circumstances behind Rigi's capture remain a mystery. The drama surrounding the event, however, continues to draw attention across Iran as Rigi's downfall plays itself out as political theater. After tracking Rigi's movements in the region for months, infiltrating the organization and even recruiting ranking members such as Rigi's younger brother Abdulhamid as informants, Iranian intelligence officers moved in on the militant leader by forcing his Kyrgyzstan Airways flight to Dubai to land while it was in Iranian airspace (Asia Times [Hong Kong], March 13; Press TV, February 23). [2]

Iranian authorities claim that Rigi's busy travel schedule included trips to the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Europe over the last few years, trips that allowed him to cement contacts with U.S. and other foreign intelligence officials. Iranian Intelligence Minister Heydar Moslehi claimed that Rigi

was present at a U.S. military base in Afghanistan a day before his capture, where he was issued a forged Afghan passport by U.S. authorities. At the time of his capture, Rigi was also reported to be in possession of a forged Pakistani identification card (Press TV, February 23).

Iran believes that the manner in which Rigi was captured vindicates its longstanding claim of Jundallah ties to foreign intelligence services hostile to Iran, particularly the U.S. CIA and other Western and Arab intelligence services which Iran believes are behind a campaign to undermine the Islamic Republic by fomenting internal ethno-sectarian discord (Al-Alam TV [Tehran], February 23).

Rebellion and Control in Iranian Balochistan

Based on the group's early rhetoric and discourse, Jundallah emerged as a defender of the rights of Iran's ethnic Baloch minority that inhabits the impoverished and desolate province of Sistan-Balochistan. With accurate population figures difficult to come by, ethnic Baloch in Iran are estimated to number anywhere between two and four million and are among Iran's poorest and most underserved communities. In addition to their status as an ethnic and linguistic minority amid Iran's intricate mosaic of distinct cultures and identities, the Baloch, as a predominantly Sunni Muslim community, also feel stigmatized in Iranian society in light of their faith. Ethnic Baloch tend to see themselves as the targets of a calculated campaign of repression by the Persian-dominated Shi'a Islamist regime in Tehran, sentiments often apparent in Jundallah's discourse. Rigi has, however, always refuted allegations that he was a separatist and that Jundallah was a nationalist movement, instead acknowledging his Iranian identity and stating his intent to help his people live better lives as Iranians (Roost Online, May 14, 2006).

The Iranian Baloch inhabit a busy corridor used by locally-based organized criminal organizations—many of them heavily armed and battle-hardened due to their regular engagements with Iranian and Pakistan security services—to smuggle narcotics, arms, people and other contraband to Pakistan and Afghanistan and back to Iran (see *Terrorism Monitor*, November 6, 2009). The existence of Iranian Baloch-led organized crime organizations with links to similar groups led by their kin over the border in Pakistani Balochistan has made the region a priority for Iran's security services, whose heavy-handed measures and widespread presence in the province are likely to have exacerbated many of the

legitimate and deep-seated grievances already felt by the ethnic Baloch towards the central government.

In His Own Words

Iranian authorities broadcast footage of Abdelmalek Rigi confessing to receiving material, financial, and logistical support from the CIA in return for waging an insurgent campaign against Tehran. According to excerpts from the transcript of Rigi's statement broadcast on Iranian television, Rigi claimed to have met with his alleged American handlers at the U.S. embassy in Islamabad in March 2010 to discuss the prospects for cooperation: "They [the CIA] said they would cooperate with us and would give me military equipment, arms and machines guns. They also promised to give us a base along the border with Afghanistan next to Iran (*Press TV*, March 25). Rigi also explained his apparent trips to Dubai and Bishkek: "They asked to meet me and we said 'where should we meet you?' and he said in Dubai... They told me that in Kyrgyzstan they have a base called Manas near Bishkek, and that a high-ranking person was coming to meet me and that if such high-ranking people come to the United Arab Emirates, they may be observed by intelligence people..." (*Press TV*, March 25). Rigi also commented on broader U.S. intentions towards Iran and the region: "The Americans said Iran was going its own way and they said our problem at the present is Iran not al-Qaeda and not the Taliban...". Rigi claims he was then told, "Only I could take care of the operations for them" (*Press TV*, March 25). Rigi also relayed alleged statements by his CIA handlers about Washington's strategy in dealing with domestic opposition groups in Iran, saying, "One of the CIA officers said that it was too difficult for us [i.e. the U.S.] to attack Iran militarily, but we plan to give aid and support to all anti-Iran groups that have the capability to wage war and create difficulty for the Iranian (Islamic) system" (*Press TV*, March 25).

Observers following Rigi's capture have noted that there were no obvious signs that Rigi had been coerced or pressured during his videotaped confession, though the possibility exists (*Asia Times*, March 13). In addition to the evidence provided by Rigi regarding Jundallah's ties to U.S. intelligence, Iranian authorities also allege that Rigi received support from other intelligence services hostile to Iran. According to Intelligence Minister Moslehi, Rigi traveled to Europe to meet with officials from several intelligence services. Moslehi also described alleged meetings with NATO officials in Afghanistan, where an unnamed NATO commander reportedly

expressed a "great deal of interest" in supporting a "Greater Balochistan," a Baloch homeland long coveted by Baloch nationalists that would encompass large swaths of Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. In addition to directly implicating the CIA in supporting Jundallah, Moslehi also mentions that the group received support from British and Israeli intelligence (Islamic Republic of Iran News Network [Tehran]; February 23).

Due to Jundallah's Sunni pedigree and occasional use of a virulently anti-Shi'a discourse, Iran often links the group to the intelligence services of Sunni-led Arab regimes who are accused of spreading radical Sunni Islamist ideology in Iran to counter Iranian influence in the region. Following Rigi's capture, Iranian authorities accused him of having joined "the Salafi-Takfiri schools with backing from Arab and Western intelligence services and with official funding from an Arab country" (*Al-Alam TV*, February 23). While no Arab country is mentioned outright, Iran's regional rival and staunch U.S. ally Saudi Arabia, along with the other pro-U.S. Gulf monarchies, are the most likely candidates, as they are suspected of allowing their territory to be used in meetings between Rigi, the CIA and other intelligence agencies. The curious circumstances behind Rigi's trip to Dubai are a case in point (*Al-Ahram Weekly* [Cairo], 11-17 March)

Without providing any evidence, Iranian lawmakers have also linked Jundallah to pro-monarchist diaspora opposition groups agitating for the overthrow of the Iranian regime (*Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Network 2* [Tehran], February 23). Iran has previously linked Jundallah to an array of radical opposition groups operating in Iran, including groups such as the bizarre, cult-like Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MeK) (see *Terrorism Monitor*, January 11, 2008).

Rigi's Capture in Context

In light of the many challenges facing Iran, the significance of Rigi's capture in terms of shoring up security in Sistan-Balochistan and overall domestic political stability cannot be understated. Indeed, Rigi's capture is a major triumph for Iran. The excitement behind Rigi's capture in Iran has even inspired Iranian filmmakers to consider producing a movie to document the event (*Asia Times*, February 26). Most importantly, Rigi's capture bolsters Tehran's hand during a period when the Islamic Republic continues to be subject to a U.S.-led campaign that threatens to impose harsh economic sanctions as punishment for its nuclear

program. Iran also faces periodic threats of outright attack by Israel or the United States.

Clearly, the most important issues underlying Rigi's capture revolve around Iran's allegations of U.S. and other foreign support for Jundallah and the testimony provided by Rigi. While many observers are right to raise questions regarding the veracity of the confession given by Rigi and other members of Jundallah currently in Iranian custody, Rigi's travels to Dubai and other locations raise serious questions about his background and the identity of his benefactors. U.S. support for Jundallah and potentially other domestic insurgent and terrorist groups operating in Iran would serve to counter Iranian influence in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as pressure Iran on issues related to its nuclear program and other activities deemed harmful to U.S. interests in the greater Middle East.

Yet some of Iran's claims regarding Jundallah's alleged supporters abroad are problematic. Given the highly politicized and sensitive nature of what support for Jundallah would mean, it is unlikely, for instance, that actors such as NATO would be involved, as claimed by Iranian authorities, in supporting U.S.-led efforts to support a violent insurgency and terrorism in Iranian Balochistan.

In a related point that raises questions about the veracity of at least some of Iran's claims of Jundallah's foreign connections, Iran has also implicated Pakistan in supporting Jundallah, despite Pakistan's own difficulty in contending with a far stronger and more violent Baloch nationalist insurgency in its own Balochistan province and the history of Iranian and Pakistani collaboration in crushing ethnic Baloch nationalism - a threat to the territorial integrity and stability of both countries. Significantly, Pakistan has arrested members of Jundallah in Quetta in Pakistani Balochistan and summarily extradited them to Iran for trial (*Iran Daily* [Tehran], June 15, 2008). Moreover, Iran and Pakistan just signed a landmark agreement to begin construction on a \$7.6 billion pipeline deal that will transport Iranian natural gas to Pakistan, a pipeline that will traverse both Iranian and Pakistani Balochistan and have strategic implications for regional economics and energy security (BBC, March 17). Yet in spite of the record of cooperation in suppressing Baloch nationalism and the overall state of friendly relations, Iran summoned Pakistan's ambassador to Tehran to protest what it saw as Islamabad's alleged indifference to Jundallah's presence along the Pakistani side of the

porous Iranian-Pakistan frontier following the massive suicide bombing executed by Jundallah on May 28, 2009 targeting worshippers at the Amir al-Momenin mosque in Zahedan, the provincial capital of Sistan-Balochistan (*Tehran Times* [Tehran], May 31, 2009). By doing so, Iran was trying to deflect attention from the circumstances within its own borders that gave rise to Jundallah, choosing instead to redirect attention outward. In short, Iran has shown that it will implicate its allies, in addition to its enemies, for purposes of political theater and regional advantage.

Conclusion

Many questions have surfaced following Rigi's capture and his subsequent testimony detailing Jundallah's alleged ties with foreign intelligence services, especially the CIA. Serious observers of U.S.-Iranian relations should distinguish between the political theater that ties obscure pro-monarchist groups and the upper echelons of NATO to Jundallah and the very real possibility that foreign intelligence services may in fact be supporting insurgents and terrorist organizations to weaken and destabilize Iran. Rigi's planned trip to Bishkek from Dubai alone should raise serious questions about the nature of his contacts and activities abroad. More details of Rigi's capture will surface in the coming months, but Jundallah's future remains uncertain. Rigi's capture, along with the successful infiltration of the group by Iranian intelligence in recent years, may very well mean its downfall although Iranian Balochistan will remain a center of simmering grievances and criminality.

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Notes:

1. In an apparent attempt to refute allegations that it promulgated a radical Sunni Islamist agenda under the guise of Baloch nationalism and to showcase its popular credentials, Jundallah at one point announced that it had changed its name to People's Resistance Movement of Iran (PRIM).
2. Due to the prominent role of members of the Rigi family in Jundallah, the group has often been referred to in Iran as the "Rigi Clan" or "Rigi Group."