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TURKS SUSPECT ISRAELI ROLE IN PKK ATTACK ON NAVAL BASE AT ISKENDERUN

Hours before the deadly Israeli raid on the *Mavi Marmara* and other ships carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza, an assault on Turkey’s Iskenderun Naval Base left seven servicemen killed and six injured (Firat, May 31; *Today’s Zaman*, June 6). Though earlier reports indicated the attack was on the naval installation, Hatay Governor Mehmet Celalettin Lekesiz said later that PKK members fired on a military vehicle carrying troops to sentry posts with RPG-7 grenade launchers and “long-range weapons” (TurkishPress.com, May 31). Iskenderun Naval Base is located in the Hatay province of southern Turkey on the northeast coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The base hosts the largest of Turkey’s three naval training centers. Iskenderun is well outside the usual range of PKK military attacks, though the group has carried out terrorist bombings throughout Turkey.

The deadly attack at Iskenderun came shortly after midnight, on the morning of May 31. A few hours later, Israeli commandos boarded six ships carrying humanitarian aid for Gaza in international waters, killing nine and injuring dozens more. All of the casualties were Turks, and the news of the event sparked large protests throughout the nation. Inevitably, news of the fatal attack on Iskenderun looked to many Turks like two sides of the same coin. The feeling was reflected at top levels across the political board; AKP Deputy Chairman Huseyin Celik remarked, “We do not think that it is a coincidence that these

two attacks took place at the same time” (*Today’s Zaman*, June 2). After expressing regret over the losses at Iskenderun, CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu stated, “At a time when the Israeli army continues military operations, it is meaningful that such an incident took place in Turkey” (*Today’s Zaman*, June 2). Turkish intelligence agencies are reported to be investigating any links between the raid on the flotilla and the attack on the naval base (*Today’s Zaman*, June 6). Funerals of the dead servicemen across Turkey were attended by prominent government officials and large numbers of mourners carrying flags and shouting slogans (*Hurriyet*, June 1).

Turkey’s top military, intelligence and counterterrorism officials met with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on June 2 to discuss the two incidents. Following the meeting, Interior Minister Besir Atalay was cautious in his remarks, remarking, “I don’t want to say [these incidents] are related. Such investigations require close attention and we want to refrain from careless statements lacking tangibility... These subjects are delicate, especially when they have international dimensions” (*Hurriyet*, June 2; *Today’s Zaman*, June 3).

Many in Turkey’s government and military recall revelations of former Israeli commandos training Kurdish airport security and members of the Kurdish peshmerga militia prior to 2005, when political questions over their apparently illegal status in northern Iraq forced them to withdraw (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, December 1, 2005; *Ynet*, December 1, 2005). The men were employed by Kudo, a private security company run by Shlomi Michaels, a business associate of former Mossad chief and previous Kudo partner Danny Yatom. In recent months there have been reports that the Israeli military trainers have returned and resumed training of elite Kurdish military forces (*Arutz Sheva*, February 5; *Today’s Zaman*, June 9).

Sedat Laciner, head of the Ankara-based International Strategic Research Organization and a prominent commentator on Turkish security issues, noted that the Iskenderun attack was not typical of PKK operations. He suggested the PKK was acting as a “subcontractor” to Israel and was supported by ex-members of Mossad or the Israeli military. “It is normal that the PKK is trying to ally with Turkey’s enemies at this level... Israel also wants to show the ruling party of Turkey as something equal to Hamas. Israel wants to create such a bias in minds” (*Journal of the Turkish Weekly*, May 31). Other analysts pointed out that the apparent vulnerability

of the Iskenderun region was of concern, given the concentration of new coal-fired and natural gas power plants in the area (*Journal of the Turkish Weekly*, June 5).

In Jerusalem, Mossad Chief Meir Dagan told the Knesset that Turkey was forming a new anti-Israel coalition with Syria and Iran as part of the AKP’s aim of restoring Turkish power in the Middle East. Dagan said President Erdogan has “a dream of returning Turkey’s dominance through going down the Islamic hall. He believes that through Hamas and Palestinians, additional doors will be opened for him in the Arab street” (*Jerusalem Post*, June 2).

Though the rhetoric on both sides is heated, there are signs that pragmatism will win the day. Turkey canceled three joint military exercises with Israel after the flotilla attack, but Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul said Turkey still expects delivery of four Israeli-made Heron unmanned aerial vehicles, part of a \$190 million purchase of ten Heron UAVs. Other ongoing defense programs worth hundreds of millions of dollars are expected to continue (*Hurriyet*, June 3; *World Tribune*, June 2). Meanwhile, Turkish troops are reported to have taken losses in firefights with PKK fighters in southeastern Turkey’s Hakkari and Siirt provinces as the Kurdish rebel movement ends its ceasefire (*Anatolia*, June 1).

COURTROOM THEATER ENDS AS MAURITANIA CONDEMNS AL-QAEDA CELL TO DEATH

Following a short but dramatic trial, three self-proclaimed al-Qaeda members have been sentenced to death in Mauritania for their role in the murder of four French tourists in December 2007. The attack became known in Mauritania as “the Aleg case,” named after the small town near the murder site, about 250 km southwest of the capital of Nouakchott (see *Terrorism Focus*, January 9, 2008).

A total of twelve men were tried for the murders; four in absentia, with the other eight kept within a wooden cage in the Nouakchott courtroom. Only three were accused of the actual murders; the others were charged with complicity. Spectators attending the trial had to pick their way through a phalanx of riot police deployed on the court steps, submit to three separate body searches and give up any bags or cell phones before entry. Women wearing veils were prevented from entering. Foreign reporters, however, were encouraged to attend

and report the proceedings. The charges faced by the main accused, Maarouf Ould Haiba, Sida Ould Sidna and Mohamed Ould Chabarnou, included terrorism, premeditated murder and rebellion against the state. After the murders, Sidna and Chabarnou fled to Guinea-Bissau, where they were tracked and arrested by local police with the assistance of French intelligence services. Haiba was arrested soon afterwards in Nouakchott (*Ennahar* [Algiers], May 23).

Though the three principal suspects (aged 22 to 29) insisted they were not responsible for the murders, they loudly proclaimed their membership in al-Qaeda, admitted their participation in al-Qaeda training camps and insisted their confessions had been extracted through torture. By demanding the death sentence, the prosecution put its own case in jeopardy. Important ballistics evidence obtained by French experts could not be used when Paris invoked its policy of refusing to allow experts to give evidence in capital cases. Other than that, there were no witnesses and few substantial exhibits in the three-day trial (al-Arabiya, May 25; *Jeune Afrique*, June 5; AFP, May 26).

In court, the three accused taunted the judges with accusations of apostasy and proclaimed that it would have been a great honor to have killed the victims – if they had done it. Charbarnou even sang the Muezzin’s call to prayer during the proceedings (AFP, May 24; *Walf Fadjiiri* [Dakar], May 26; *Jeune Afrique*, June 5). The accused said they were “Soldiers of Allah,” and were determined to continue their war against France, the United States and their acolytes (Casafree.com [Morocco], June 5). Sidi Ould Sidna said he was unconcerned about his fate. “The court is only applying criminal law, not Islamic law. That’s why we’re not concerned by these decisions” (AP, May 25).

The sentences came down on May 25. The three principals in the case received the death sentences sought by the prosecutor, while the others received acquittals or short sentences ranging from six months to three years. After the death sentences had been issued, the condemned men continued their political theater, beginning with Maarouf Ould Haiba, who shouted at the judge, “God is Great! You’ll see, dog, we’ll go to paradise!” Haiba then held up a black cloth inscribed with the Muslim profession of faith in white letters – “There is no God but God and Muhammad is his Messenger.” Sidi Ould Sidna turned to the five French citizens in attendance and drew his fingers across his throat in the universal slaughtering gesture while Mohamed Ould Chabarnou

shouted, “Between us and the France of Sarkozy is the sword!” (*Dawn* [Karachi], May 26; *Jeune Afrique*, June 5).

The death sentence was last applied in Mauritania in 1987, when three Black African officers were executed for planning a coup against the Moor-dominated government. While Mauritania has been considering abolition of the death penalty, death by both hanging and firing squad remain legal methods of execution (*Le Quotidien de Nouakchott*, May 26). All death sentences since 1987 have been commuted to life imprisonment, but there are indications the government may press for capital penalties in this case. The murders resulted in significant economic damage to Mauritania when the Paris-Dakar rally was canceled as a result of the attack. The country’s important tourism sector collapsed soon after. France, the former colonial power, also remains an important economic and political partner of Mauritania. Lawyers for the defendants filed an appeal the day after sentencing, citing the prosecution’s description of the ballistics evidence during the trial without having this evidence formally entered into the record (APA, May 26; AFP, May 26).

Attacks on the Ahmadiya in Lahore Reveal Growth of the Punjabi Taliban

By Arif Jamal

The multiple suicide attacks by the Punjabi Taliban on two mosques in Lahore where members of the Jamaat-i-Ahmadiya had gathered to pray on May 28 hardly came as a surprise. As hundreds of Ahmadis gathered to offer prayers in the early Friday afternoon, several suicide bombers entered the two mosques almost simultaneously and took the worshippers hostage. They started slowly throwing hand grenades among their hostages. Some of them climbed the minarets of the mosques and fired from above. When the terrorists started running out of ammunition they began detonating their suicide vests. However, for the first time in Pakistan’s history, the worshippers reacted and overpowered two terrorists before they could detonate their suicide vests (*The News* [Islamabad], May 29). Nevertheless, the terrorists succeeded in killing 95 and

injuring more than a hundred. Police reached the site only when the terrorists were already half way through their killing spree, even though TV crews were already at the scene.

Jamaat-i-Ahmadiya is a small sect of Islam, founded nearly 125 years ago in Punjab by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who claimed to be the prophet (nabi) and messenger (rasool) of Islam. As such he claimed to be the successor of the Prophet Muhammad and the earlier Nabi Isa (Jesus Christ). Other Muslim sects rejected Mirza Ghulam as a false prophet since they consider Muhammad to be the last of the prophets, a basic tenet of Islam. As the new sect grew in numbers, the hatred of traditional Muslim sects towards the new sect also grew. Resistance to the Ahmadis became organized with the 1931 founding in Punjab of the Majlis-i-Ahrar-i-Islam political party (MAI, or Ahrars for short), the same year as the revolt by Muslims in Kashmir against their oppressive Hindu rulers. [1] The Ahrars thrived on anti-Hindu agitation in Kashmir and anti-Ahmadiyya agitation in Punjab. [2] Like the Jamaat-i-Islami of India, the Ahrars also opposed the founding of Pakistan by the secular All India Muslim League, but quickly became active in Islamist politics in the new state. The roots of the Taliban, particularly the Punjabi variety, can be traced back to the Ahrars.

Led by the Ahrars, a coalition of Islamist parties, including the Jamaat-i-Islami and Deobandi groups, launched an anti-Ahmadi movement called Tehrik-i-Khatme Nabuwat (Movement to Protect the Finality of Prophethood) in Punjab in 1953. The agitation remained restricted to Lahore and some other Punjabi cities. The new movement demanded the designation of the Ahmadis as non-Muslims and the expulsion of the Ahmadis from all important official positions, particularly the then Foreign Minister, Sir Zafarullah Khan. The government had to impose martial law and crush the agitation with an iron hand. The Ahrars slowly disappeared from the scene and were replaced by the more hardline and permanent Deobandi-based Tehrik-i-Khatme Nabuwat, which has played a key role in radicalizing the Deobandi sect since the 1953 agitation. As the Tehrik-i-Khatme Nabuwat has no political structure, all Deobandi ulema and jihadists from all Deobandi political and religious parties follow the movement. [3]

The Tehrik-i-Khatme Nabuwat and the Jamaat-i-Islami of Pakistan once again launched anti-Ahmadi agitation in 1974 and forced Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to

have Parliament declare Ahmadis non-Muslims. Under a constitutional amendment, Ahmadis were barred from calling themselves Muslims and using Islamic terms. Ahmadis had been victim of violence by other Muslim sects from the early days but their persecution became semi-official after 1974, with scores of Ahmadis killed and hundreds others injured in Pakistan. Within three days of the latest Lahore terrorist attacks, an ordinary Muslim stabbed an Ahmadi to death in the Punjab town of Narowal with a knife (*Dawn*, June 1). Typical of anti-Ahmadi violence, the incident attracted little attention.

Ahmadis are an extremely peaceful community and follow Mirza Ghulam's prohibition against violent jihad. This may be one reason why they have previously managed to avoid suicide attacks since they were introduced into Pakistan by al-Qaeda and the Taliban a few years ago. With the Lahore suicide attacks, the Punjabi Taliban have brought this peaceful community to the center stage of the war on terror. The Punjabi Taliban are likely to target Ahmadis increasingly in the months and years to come. A Taliban representative who has previously acted as spokesman for the Asian Tigers (responsible for the abduction and murder of former Inter-Services Intelligence official Khalid Khwaja) and identifying himself as Mohammad Omar (possibly an alias for militant Osman Punjabi) told an Islamabad daily that although the Ahmadis were an obvious target, previous attempts to target Ahmadis had failed one way or another (*The News*, May 31, May 1). The bombers were either arrested or could not fully organize attacks on Ahmadi facilities. The Taliban spokesman explained:

Small factions of militants that have broken away from the mainstream groups fighting in Kashmir, Pakistan and Afghanistan could be involved in the Lahore attacks on Qadianis [a pejorative term for the Ahmadis based on Mirza Ghulam's birthplace of Qadian]. The suicide bombers for such missions are normally made available by the central Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) while the attackers and facilitators providing logistical support are often Punjabi Taliban or militants (*The News*, May 31).

As the Pakistani Taliban are trying to spread their war on the Pakistani state, they are likely to continue to target minorities like the Ahmadis in their efforts to create instability.

The suicide attacks jolted the entire Pakistani state and local public opinion like no recent attack has

done before. Consequently, at least part of the federal government and the media tried to emerge from a state of denial that has badly infected all arms of the state till now. For the first time, Pakistan's interior minister Rehman Malik admitted the existence of the Punjabi Taliban and their presence in South Punjab. He said 726 members of banned groups such as the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Jaysh-e-Muhammad (JeM) came from South Punjab, where 44% of a total of 20,000 Pakistani madrassahs are located. He admitted that the SSP, LeJ and JeM were part of al-Qaeda. Unlike in the past, Malik refused to blame India for the terrorist attacks. He also hinted at carrying out an army operation in South Punjab on the pattern of those conducted in the tribal areas (*Dawn* [Karachi], May 31). However, it looks like it will be difficult for the Interior Minister to implement his desires in the face of a reluctant Punjab government and the Pakistani military, which is uninterested in opening another front at this time.

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Notes:

1. Report of the Court of Inquiry – Punjab Disturbances of 1953, Government Printing Punjab, p.10. Available at http://www.thepersecution.org/dl/report_1953.pdf
2. Arif Jamal, *Shadow War – The Untold Story of Jihad in Kashmir*, Melville House, New York, 2009.
3. Author's interviews with several Deobandi Islamists and jihadists in Pakistan during 1999-2007.

Al-Qaeda after al-Yazid: Coping with the American Drone Offensive

By Bruce Riedel

The death of al-Qaeda's operational leader in Afghanistan last month is a significant but not fatal setback for the radical Islamist movement. Mustafa Ahmad Muhammad Uthman Abu al-Yazid (a.k.a. Shaykh Sa'id al-Masri) was apparently killed in

a May 21 drone attack in Pakistan's North Waziristan Tribal Agency. Al-Qaeda's as-Sahab media announced his death in a message released on May 31 (*As-Sahab Media Production*, May 31; *Dawn* [Karachi], June 1). This development is indicative of how the Obama administration's increased pressure on al-Qaeda is having a real impact and ultimately disrupting the group's activities. Al-Qaeda is far from being on the ropes, so to speak, but it is hurting, and al-Yazid's death will affect the group's actions in several ways.

Al-Yazid—who was actively involved in the 9/11 plot—was a member of al-Qaeda's core leadership and old guard (*Asharq al-Awsat*, February 6). He was an Egyptian with very close ties to Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's number two. Both al-Yazid and al-Zawahiri were involved in the plot to assassinate Anwar Sadat in 1981, and the two created the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) movement after being released from prison in the mid-1980s (see *Terrorism Monitor*, July 3, 2007). In 1998, The EIJ formally merged with al-Qaeda.

According to some reports, al-Yazid was also al-Qaeda's number three in command (*The News* [Islamabad], June 3; *Dawn*, June 1). If that is true, then he is, by various accounts in the media, the tenth individual to be identified by American intelligence as al-Qaeda's "number three" who has been killed or captured since 2001; it is clearly a dangerous job. However Al-Qaeda itself has never identified anyone as number three in its chain of command, and there is most likely more than one individual at any one time who reports to al-Zawahiri and Bin Laden directly. Over time, Al-Qaeda has demonstrated remarkable organizational agility and a deep bench. It can be assumed, based on this pattern, that al-Yazid will be replaced.

In his role as chief of operations in Afghanistan, al-Yazid would have been directly involved in the planning of the December 30, 2009 suicide bomb attack on the CIA's forward operating base in Khost, an operation that killed seven CIA officers and a senior Jordanian intelligence officer (*Habst-e-Sobh* [Kabul], January 3; *Aljazeera.net*, January 10). The suicide bombing marked the second worst day in CIA history. Al-Yazid would also have been involved in al-Qaeda's plot last year to attack the New York City subway system with three suicide bombers during rush hour, just days after the anniversary of 9/11. Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan-American, pled guilty to that plot and stated that he was directed by al-Qaeda leadership in Pakistan (*Asia Times*, May 26; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, May 7).

Finally, al-Yazid played an important role in fund raising for al Qaeda, based on his ties to donors in the Arabian Peninsula. The Saudis have been taking additional measures recently to cut off private funds for al-Qaeda and make it harder for money to get to the movement from its traditional sources.

Drones are only one part of the Obama administration's strategy to "disrupt, dismantle and defeat" al-Qaeda. While it remains far from achieving that goal, the pressure is beginning to have an impact on the terrorists' operational tempo. One example is al-Zawahiri himself; since December he has appeared only once in al-Qaeda's propaganda output, consisting of a brief message last month eulogizing the death of two senior al-Qaeda commanders in Iraq (As-Sahab Media Production, May 20; Islamnet.net, May 20). Before this year, al-Zawahiri was a frequent commentator on al-Qaeda audio and video messages, often appearing every other week. His conspicuous absence is probably related to the Khost attack; al-Zawahiri was the bait that al-Qaeda was dangling in order to get their bomber into the CIA base. Al-Zawahiri's absence from the airwaves has been noted in the jihadist underworld. If he fails to speak about Yazid's martyrdom it will not go unnoticed.

One implication of the pressure American forces have put on al-Qaeda is that the movement is more dependent on its Pakistani allies and hosts. The network of al-Qaeda-associated terrorist groups inside Pakistan – especially the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Afghan Taliban, and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) – are more important to al-Qaeda's survival than at any time since 2002. Al-Qaeda relies on them for financial help and for developing hideouts beyond the range of the drones.

Fortunately for al-Qaeda, its Pakistani allies seem receptive to its needs. The Taliban and LeT are working closer than ever with al-Qaeda. Indeed, the Times Square car bomb attack (backed by the TTP), the Khost attack on the CIA (backed by both the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban), the LeT-backed plot involving Pakistani-American David Headley to attack Copenhagen last year, and Najibullah Zazi's New York City plot have all underscored just how close the connections are at the operational level. This means the United States is facing a larger pool of terrorists in Pakistan committed to attacking al-Qaeda's target set than ever before. Given its global reach in the Pakistani diaspora, LeT is a particularly important ally and force multiplier for al-Qaeda.

Another implication is that al Qaeda's franchises from North Africa to South-East Asia are more independent. The al-Qaeda core can afford to give them less help financially. Always decentralized, al-Qaeda is now, more than ever, likely to encourage the franchises to launch their own operations against the U.S. homeland. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) was the first to do so last Christmas with the attempted airline bombing by Nigerian national Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, allegedly trained in Yemen by AQAP (*Kuwait Times*, December 30, 2009). Others may follow. This means that the United States needs to keep a close watch on al-Qaeda cells in Algeria, Somalia, Yemen and Indonesia, among others. In essence, the battlefield is stretched.

Finally, more pressure on al Qaeda means the movement will look for more opportunities to strike back. The number of attempted terrorist strikes in the American homeland from all sources in the last year has been unprecedented. [1] Al-Qaeda no longer seems obsessed with outdoing 9/11 when it attacks America. It will still try to outdo 9/11, but it will also settle for smaller attacks that damage American confidence.

The drones will not defeat al-Qaeda by themselves; nor are they intended to. President Obama's strategy is to use them as one part of a broader diplomatic and military offensive. There are signs of progress in the effort to destroy al-Qaeda, but there is a long way to go yet.

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Notes:

1. Based on an internal Department of Homeland Security Intelligence Note, ABC May 26; CNN May 26.

Iran Integrates the Concept of the “Soft War” Into its Strategic Planning

By Nima Adelkhab

An Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said this week that “certain countries” are waging a “Soft War” against Iran that should be countered through the establishment of closer relationships with other nations (*Tehran Times*, June 8). The concept of a “Soft War” is quickly becoming an integral part of Iran’s strategic defense planning, making it worthwhile to examine how Iran has conceived this model and how it plans to answer the perceived “soft threat.”

In a major media statement responding to the unrest that followed the June 2009 presidential elections, Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), provided a military strategic plan in August 2009 to counter what he described as “the enemy’s” efforts to topple the Islamic Republic (IRNA, August 29, 2009). In a ten-point list, Jafari highlighted measures intended to tackle the enemy’s “soft threat,” which he defines as the ultimate objective of the IRGC as protectors of the revolution (IRNA, August 29, 2009). A few days later, on September 1, 2009, Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi, the former head of the Quds Force (an elite unit within the IRGC) and the current Defense Minister of the Ahmadinejad administration, expanded on Jafari’s statement by asserting, “with the use of soft power we can protect the Islamic Republic by preventing and resisting outside threats” (IRNA, September 1, 2009).

Defining the Soft War

The IGRC reports to Iran’s Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL), which has substantially stepped up its Soft War rhetoric in a series of official statements issued since August 2009. The statements reveal that Tehran sees this alternative form of warfare as a series of hostile measures with the aim of changing the cultural and Islamic identity of Iranian society in such a way that it will erode the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic (IRNA, September 1, 2009). Though usually backed with the threat of military measures, soft warfare can impact all social aspects of a political system and can include such phenomena as “cultural invasions” and “psychological operations”

in order to bring “discord” to the country (Press TV, October 2009; ISNA, March 31; see *Terrorism Monitor*, April 22).

Though the terminology may be new, this is not the first time Iran has viewed this type of warfare as a major threat to the regime. Since its inception in 1979, the Islamic Republic has described internal dissenters as proxies of the United States and its allies, working to weaken the political system. The presidential election of 1997, won by the reformist candidate Mohammad Khatami, provided a new reason for the hardliners, with the help of the intelligence-military complex, to step up measures to counter-attack soft threats. These included efforts to defend IRGC political activities from reformist critiques. When the 1999 student uprising challenged the regime’s tight grip over the press and the imprisonment of a number of reformists, the discourse of coup became an everyday staple of the hardliners’ media.

The 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq increased Tehran’s own fear of military invasion, while the State Department’s \$75 million Democracy Promotion fund for Iran only solidified Iranian fears of foreign support for a regime change. Likewise, the 2006 and 2007 arrests of a number of Western-based scholars like Ramin Jahanbaglou and Haleh Esfandiari on suspicion of assisting the United States through their association with a number of D.C.-based think tanks and human rights groups revealed the regime’s new conception of a U.S. offensive against Iran, a campaign broadly described by Iran as being in the style of Czechoslovakia’s 1989 “Velvet Revolution” (Iran Press Service, July 5, 2006; Press TV, August 2009).

Bringing the Soft War to Operational Levels

What makes the latest rhetoric different is that the Soft War concept has become increasingly operational at an institutional level. According to Brigadier General Said Masoud, MODAFL has set up a special military force, the “Unit of the Soft War” (Setad-e Jang-e Narm), which will become fully operational in 2011 (IRNA, March 3, 2010). This unit, largely made up of members of the Basij-e Mostaz’afin (or Basij – the state militia, subordinate to the IRGC), is responsible for soft operations such as propagation, cultural activities and “psychological operations” (Press TV, August 16, 2009; IRNA, January 2). The apparent objective is to confuse and subsequently disrupt foreign-organized soft attacks. In May the Iranian Majlis (parliament)

ratified a bill designating the use of \$100 million for “soft” programs, some of which has been set aside for the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council to produce pro-government art and film (Press TV, September 6, 2009; *Alef*, May 5). Accordingly, provincial councils around the country were allocated a “cultural budget” for setting up “soft war camps” scheduled to become operational in early May 2010 (*Alef*, May 5). The precise operation and structure of these provincial “soft war camps” remains unclear. Meanwhile, since late 2010 a number of conferences and instructional programs have been set up to produce analysis and intelligence on how the regime can effectively advance its software activities in the cultural and educational domains (IRNA, March 6).

Soft War Tactics: Defensive Measures

In terms of preventive measures, the government’s activities involve a series of soft defensive tactics. The main focus is on spreading the state ideology in various cultural and public institutions. Since one of the main Soft War battlefields is in the educational domain, an attempt is being made to reacquaint the young with the ideals of the revolution (*Payvand*, September 6, 2009). The institutionalization of various Basij centers in elementary schools is reminiscent of the early revolutionary years of the 1980s, when the newly established Islamic Republic sought to instill the new ideology among the younger population (*Keyhan*, October 5, 2009). In many ways, the thrust of the new ideological campaign can be described as a form of “cultural revolution” that includes the involvement of artists, intellectuals and poets as agents of “truth” who can “distribute” (or propagate) such ideals through cultural means (Press TV, September 6, 2009).

Another Soft War battleground is the broadcast media, especially the use of international TV news channels as a means of changing global public opinion in favor of the Islamic Republic. The objective here is not merely to advance the state ideology, but to expand various media outlets that can “rival” and “neutralize the effect of anti-Islamic Republic media” (Press TV, April 19, 2009). The 2007 launching of Press TV, an English-language 24-hour news channel, set the stage for the rise of a new type of state media competing on a global scale with Sunni-Arab channels like Al-Arabiyah, and Western channels like CNN and BBC. In November 2009, the IRGC announced its latest plan to begin a new press agency called Atlas, modeled on international

news agencies like Al-Jazeera (Fars News, November 16, 2009). Shortly afterwards, Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi announced the inauguration of a new Iranian-designed satellite called Toloo, which will expand Iran’s global media capacities along with its military defense capabilities (Press TV, December 29, 2009).

Former IGRC commander Yahya Rahim Safavi pointed out in March that Iran must increase its number of 24-hour satellite television networks to counter “the enemy’s soft warfare,” declaring; “We can block the enemy’s cultural onslaught by using our own culture” (Press TV, March 8).

Soft War Tactics: Offensive Measures

The second tactical feature of Iran’s Soft War deals with offensive measures. The most important of these is the Internet and how such new mediums of communication can be used in the form of cyber warfare to undermine the flow of information in favor of the United States. Tehran views social sites such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter as elements of a cyber warfare threat to the Islamic Republic, particularly in the way rumors are spread online to “stir up” discord within Iran (Press TV, January 25; IRNA, April 1). Along with reactive measures such as filtering and blocking access to various sites, Iran’s response is also one of proactive management of the flow of information. This includes establishing a “national data center,” limiting and supervising the activities of dissidents supported by the United States and perhaps to be used in spreading rumors in favor of the regime (Students News Network, March 31).

The prospect of expanding state influence over cyberspace and other media outlets in order to spread pro-government propaganda is significant. The objective seems based in a psychological warfare campaign to portray Iran’s abilities as greater than what they might be in reality. Iran’s cruise missile plant is a case in point. Inaugurated in early March, the plant was largely described by the Iranian press as an indigenous cruise missile factory (IRNA, March 10). In reality the plant was built by the Chinese and Nasr-1, the missile built there, is the Iranian name for China’s C-704 missile (*Tehran Times*, April 30). This propaganda strategy is also applied to how the Iranian media overstates the capabilities of the state armed forces, describing its military technology in overblown terms to give the impression of an overwhelming force (See *Terrorism Monitor*, April 22).

Conclusion

According to Hamid Mowlana, an advisor to President Ahmadinejad, the West, specifically the United States, has failed to recognize Iran's "soft power infrastructure" (Press TV, March 11). This critical point underlines how Tehran has strategically shifted its attention to soft measures to tackle potential non-military threats to the state. The post-election unrest has pushed the regime to legitimize its authority by a show of hyperbolic activities, such as exaggeration of its military capabilities. In many ways, Tehran no longer views arts, culture and education as a source of threat but rather as an opportunity to enhance its influence in the idiom of ideas, (mis) information and cultural processes on domestic and regional scales. Promotion of Iran's enhanced self-image could, if successful, be a potential problem for regional security, as many neighboring states, especially those in the Gulf, could seek to advance their military capabilities in response, paving the way towards a new age of arms competition. Iran's soft tactics could also cause confusion in American perceptions of Iran's actual military capabilities and its ability to accurately assess Iranian strength. New conflicts are born in the fog of words and ideas.

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