



Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

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Iran tightens its security collaboration with Persian Gulf countries in an attempt to secure regional hegemony. It also strives to moderate the tension with its neighbors and to prevent them from being used as a launching pad for attacks against Iran.



The red carpet rolled out for the Qatari chief of staff and the Iranian defense minister during a visit to Tehran (Islamic Republic News Agency, Iran, July 7, 2009).

Overview

1. While working to contain internal protests, the Iranian regime's foreign policy remains defiant towards the West in general and the United States in particular. That has recently been manifested by Iran's activities to **promote security collaboration** with three

important Persian Gulf countries, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman. It is part of Iran's efforts to achieve hegemony and the status of a regional power and at the same time to moderate the great tension with its neighbors. Moreover, in our assessment its attempts to tighten security collaboration with **Qatar and Bahrain**, which host large American bases, are also aimed at preventing their territory from being used as a launching pad for a possible attack on Iran's nuclear installations.

2. Therefore, at the beginning of July the Chief of Staff of **Qatar's** army visited Tehran and discussed "collective collaboration" in securing the Persian Gulf, with the heads of its military and security apparatuses. They also discussed **practical issues**, including the intention to have their border guards hold a joint exercise, an exchange of information and joint military training. **Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the ruler of Oman**, is planning a visit to Iran in the near future, and one of the items on the agenda will be the signing of a mutual security agreement. In addition, on July 10 the Majlis (the Iranian parliament) was asked to ratify a bill for security collaboration with Bahrain, despite the tense relations between the two countries.¹

3. Iran's efforts to promote security collaboration with the Persian Gulf countries are also intended **to increase its political influence in the Persian Gulf, complementing its growing military activities in the Gulf waters (in June Iran held an air force exercise over the Gulf)**. Iran again tried to convince the pro-Arab Gulf States, which regard the West, especially the United States, as the major supporting power, that their security would be better ensured by regional treaties relying on Iran than by the West, motivated by its own interests. Iran also severely criticized the UAE for having allowed the French to open a naval base in May 2009, claiming that France wanted to destabilize the region and lead the local arms race.

¹ For further information see our March 2, 2009 bulletin "Iran and the Persian Gulf: The claim by Iranian advisor Nateq Nouri that Bahrain was formerly a province of Iran incensed Bahrain and led to shows of solidarity with Bahrain throughout the Arab world. Bahrain, with its Shi'ite majority, is a traditional target for subversion by Iran, which seeks hegemony in the Persian Gulf" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/iran_e005.pdf.

Iranian activities for tightening security collaboration with the Gulf States

4. Iran has recently tried to convince a number of Persian Gulf countries to sign mutual security agreements with it. It has stressed the notion that the Gulf's security should be in the hands of the Gulf States with no foreign intervention, that is, **they had to replace their reliance on the West with reliance on Iran** to ensure long-term regional security and stability.

The Persian Gulf



The Persian Gulf (<http://aljozor.blogspot.com>).

5. As part of their efforts, the Iranians have instituted the following:

i) **Security collaboration with Qatar:** The Qatari army's Chief of Staff **Hamid Ali Atiya** visited Tehran and on July 7 met with **Muhammad Mustafa Nizar**, the Iranian minister of defense, and **Muhammad Ali Ja'afari**, commander of the Revolutionary Guards. Atiya and the heads of the Iranian military and security apparatuses discussed "collective collaboration" for the defense of the Persian Gulf. Ja'afari said that Iran was willing to collaborate with Qatar's army to defend the Gulf's security. **General Qassem Rezai**, commander of the Iranian border patrol, said that Iran's border patrol and Qatar's coast guard would hold a joint exercise in Persian Gulf waters. The two countries also agreed to increase security collaboration, exchange information about border smuggling and hold joint training.²

ii) **A security agreement with Oman:** Iranian foreign minister Manuchehr Mottaki met in Tehran with Omani foreign minister Yussuf bin Alawi bin Abdallah on July 11.

² Alef News Agency, Iran, and Fars News Agency, Iran, July 10, 2009.

After the meeting he said that in the near future the two countries would sign a security agreement which would symbolize strategic collaboration in preserving regional stability and security.³ The Omani foreign minister also met with Iranian President Ahmadinejad and in the near future the Omani ruler, Sultan Qaboos bin Said, is supposed to visit Iran. The Iranian news agency ISNA reported that Majlis chairman Ali Larijani met with the Omani foreign minister and afterwards said that the only possible way to ensure the rights of the Palestinians was the “resistance” [i.e., continued terrorist attacks]. The Omani foreign minister, according to the report, stated that Oman was determined to extend its economic and political ties with Iran, and criticized the United States’ “hostile policy” toward Iran. He expressed hope that the Obama administration would keep its promise for a dialogue with Iran.⁴



Left: Ahmadinejad and the Omani foreign minister (Islamic Republic News Agency, Iran, July 11, 2009). Right: The Iranian and Qatari foreign ministers at a joint press conference (Fars News Agency, Iran, July 11, 2009).

iii) **An agreement for security collaboration with Bahrain:** On July 10 the Iranian government sent a bill for security collaboration with Bahrain to the Majlis for ratification. According to the Fars News Agency, the bill was sponsored by Iranian President Ahmadinejad and the Iranian Foreign Ministry. According to the bill’s preamble, it had been proposed in view of the “friendly relations between Iran and Bahrain, their influence on strengthening security in the Persian Gulf and their vulnerability to organized crime” while in actual fact there has been continued hostility between the two countries. The proposed bill contains a number of articles dealing with the war on drug smuggling and on the prevention of drug addiction, the smuggling of commercial goods and humans, and illegal economic activity. Implementing the agreement will require the formation of a joint committee.⁵ **Note:** relations between Iran and Bahrain are strained because of statements occasionally

³ Mehr News Agency, Iran, and Fars News Agency, Iran, July 11, 2009; Al-Bayan Center website, the Gulf States, July 12, 2009.

⁴ ISNA News Agency, Iran, July 12, 2009.

⁵ Fars News Agency, Iran, July 11, 2009.

made by Iran to the effect that Bahrain is an Iranian province, Iran's subversion of the country and its attempt to win the support of the Bahraini Shi'ite majority, ruled by a Sunni royal family and leadership.

Iranian sensitivity to the Western presence in the Persian Gulf region

6. For a long time Iran has exhibited signs of sensitivity to the Western presence in the Persian Gulf region and to the large American military bases located there. There are **important American bases** in two of the countries with which Iran is trying to promote security agreements and both countries maintain military collaboration with the West:

i) **Qatar** hosts America's largest Middle East airfield at **Al-Udeid** (built in 1996), and giant warehouses, considered the largest outside the United States (with enough equipment for an armored brigade). The base served as the forward headquarters of the American Central Command (CENTCOM) during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. In February 2008 Qatar held large-scale war games with called "Gulf Shield 01" with France and the UAE.

ii) **Bahrain** hosts the headquarters of the American 5th Fleet which also serves as the launching base for the Combined Task Force in the region of the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea (the northwestern part of the Indian Ocean) and the East African Coast. This past May a conference of senior security personnel was held in Bahrain to discuss the defense of the Persian Gulf. It was attended by CENTCOM Commander David Petraeus, American commander in Iraq General Ray Odierno, and 5th Fleet Commander Vice-Admiral William Gortney.

7. Iranian sensitivity was expressed by its responses to the UAE decision to allow France to erect a naval base on its territory (Peace Camp). The Iranian media accused France and its president of "adventurism" likely to destabilize the Persian Gulf. The unbridled reactions of the Iranian media indicate a high level of sensitivity to what Iran regards as an increased Western presence in the Persian Gulf **which it considers its own sphere of influence**. To reinforce its position on the ground, Iran has recently increased its presence and naval patrols, and even sent boats to the Gulf of Aden in an attempt to prevent pirates from taking over its cargo ships.

8. Two examples of Iranian harsh criticism of the construction of French naval bases in the UAE were the following:

i) **Iranian foreign minister spokesman Qashqavi** said that the French decision would not contribute to regional security and that the UAE should avoid involvement in the Gulf area policies of foreign powers “interested in regional destabilization” which might lead to an arms race. He added that in order to sell arms and in view of the global economic crisis, certain countries might have the impression that regional security had been undermined. He warned the Gulf States against buying arms from “bankrupt” companies in the West.⁶

ii) The conservative *Jumhuri Islami* was more blatant. It claimed that France, like the United States, was interfering in regional issues and looking for markets for its military equipment, especially its Rafael fighter jet, which was supposed to replace the Mirage. “The truth is that a number of colonial countries like France, England and America have been eyeing the Arab economies with the intention of spreading fear among them, and in that way trying to help them to preserve security and stability.” *Jumhuri Islami* sneered at France’s military capabilities, claiming that “its soldiers are not made for battles and wars, because if they were they would have saved France from Hitler and defended their country.” The paper warned against Sarkozy’s foolhardy policies and his attempt to buy prestige by erecting military bases in the UAE, calling him “an arrogant megalomaniac.”⁷

⁶ Mehr News Agency, Iran, May 26, 2009.

⁷ *Jumhuri Islami*, July 2, 2009).