



Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

Spotlight on Iran

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Assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist employed for internal power struggles

On the backdrop of Iran's ongoing political crisis, the assassination of the Iranian scientist Mas'ud Ali Mohammadi was employed last week by government supporters and by the opposition for political aims. The government supporters stressed that the professor of physics from Tehran University supported the regime, accusing the opposition of creating an atmosphere which encouraged his assassination by "Zionist and American" elements and their proxies. On the other hand, supporters of the reformist opposition claimed that Prof. Ali

Mohammadi was one of the supporters of Mir Hossein Mousavi, and even hinted at the possibility that the regime itself had been involved in the assassination.



Shortly after the scientist was assassinated, the conservative Fars news agency cited one of Ali Mohammadi's students, who had said that the physics professor was a religious person, that he was loyal to the regime and to the rule of the religious jurist, and that in a recent talk with his students he had stressed that the only way to solve the current political crisis in Iran was through the constitution and the Islamic regime (Fars, January 12). Borna News, a news agency affiliated with government supporters, also reported that during a convention he had recently held with students in the wake of the latest violence in Iran, Prof. Ali Mohammadi stressed his commitment to the regime and to the revolution, saying that action must be taken to resolve the internal differences of opinion in the country (Borna News, January 12).

Mohammad Javad Larijani, the director of the Institute for Studies in Theoretical Physics and Mathematics and the brother of Majles speaker Ali Larijani and judiciary chief Sadegh Larijani, also stated that the assassinated scientist was "committed to the Islamic revolution". In an interview to the Tabnak website, Larijani said that Prof. Ali Mohammadi was a very religious person who supported the revolution and the rule of the religious jurist, and that he was willing to do everything for the dignity of Iran (Tabnak, January 12).

In a condemnation issued by the chairman of the Islamic Students Association following the assassination of Prof. Ali Mohammadi, Ali Reza Araninejad blamed the opposition for the atmosphere that emerged following the election, which allowed anti-revolutionaries to carry out the assassination of the top scientist. There is no doubt, said Araninejad, that the assassination was carried out by the enemies of the regime, the US and Israel, through their proxies in Iran, but the question is, who is responsible for the atmosphere that facilitated the assassination. According to Araninejad, prior to the last presidential elections anti-revolutionary groups did not dare perpetrate such terrorist attacks; however, the increasing

pressure exerted in recent months by Iran's enemies, supported by the opposition, on the regime encouraged those groups to carry out their plans (Fars, January 12).

On the other hand, media affiliated with the reformist opposition raised doubts about the death of the Iranian scientist. Rah-e Sabz, a website affiliated with the supporters of Mir Hossein Mousavi, reported that, contrary to the attempts of pro-government media to portray Prof. Ali Mohammadi as a supporter of the regime and the government, the top scientist was in fact a supporter of the reformist opposition. According to the website, the name of the physics professor appears on a list of 420 lecturers from Tehran University who on the eve of the last elections signed a letter supporting Mir Hossein Mousavi in the presidential race.

The website also denied a report which appeared on the conservative Fars news agency, according to which a royalist group took responsibility for the scientist's assassination. The website reported that the Royalist Association of Iran denied involvement in the assassination, pinning the blame on Iran's intelligence services instead (Rah-e Sabz, January 12). Several Iranian opposition websites even reported that the assassinated lecturer had recently been looking into the possibility of moving to Sweden to pursue his research in the University of Stockholm. According to that report, the scientist had recently terminated his cooperation with the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization, and it is possible that the regime was involved in the assassination in order to keep him from leaving Iran (Iran Press News, January 12).

Fact-finding committee on Kahrizak detention center releases its report, criticizing treatment of political prisoners and pinning responsibility on opposition leaders

The special fact-finding committee appointed by the Majles to investigate the events which took place in Iran following the last presidential elections submitted its conclusions to the Majles early last week. The committee's work focused on the Kahrizak prisoners scandal, which sent the country reeling several months ago. The affair broke out in July 2009, after the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, ordered to close down the detention center in southern Tehran, claiming that it had no "proper facilities" to hold inmates. The order was given on the backdrop of reports according to which at least three inmates had found their deaths in the detention center as a result of torture and abuse by wardens and criminals with whom they were held in custody. The prisoners who died in the facility include Abdol Hossein Ruholamini, the son of one of the senior advisors of Mohsen Reza'i, the secretary of the Expediency Discernment Council and the former Revolutionary Guards chief.

In August 2009, the Iranian authorities were forced to admit that some of the people detained in the riots which had broken out in Iran following the presidential elections died in

the detention center as a result of the harsh conditions in which they were held. The internal security forces chief Esmail Ahmadi-Moqaddam admitted that some detainees had been beaten by wardens, and that some of those in charge of the facility had been found to neglect their duties.

Last week, Kazem Jalali, a Majles member and spokesman of the parliamentary fact-finding committee appointed to investigate the events, had summarized the main findings of the committee for the Majles members. The committee strongly criticized the decision to relocate nearly 150 people detained in the riots to the Kahrizak detention center, where dangerous criminals and drug addicts are held, blaming Tehran's former prosecutor general Sa'id Mortazavi for the decision. The committee also ruled that the Kahrizak detainees were held in cruel, inhuman conditions, and that the happenings at the detention center constituted an offense against the detainees and the dignity of the Islamic regime. The committee suggested that the judiciary commence legal proceedings against those responsible for the events at the detention center and investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of three young men who died during their detention.

However, the committee ruled out claims voiced in recent months by opposition leader Mehdi Karubi that the political prisoners had been sexually abused. According to the committee speaker, during its work it did not find any testimonies or documents to indicate that sexual abuse had taken place.



نمایی از سالن بازداشتگاه و سرویسهای انتهای بازداشتگاه

Kahrizak detention center (Tabnak, October 5, 2009)

According to the summary of the fact-finding committee's report, the investigation of the events which took place in Iran following the presidential elections cannot ignore the "lies" spread about alleged forgery which took place during the elections, and the unlawful conduct of those who disrupted public order in those events. The committee even saw fit to blame the two opposition leaders (Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi) for breaking the law,

disrupting public order, and fanning the emotions of the public, saying that they offended the sanctity of the Islamic regime (various news agencies, January 10).

Daryush Qanbari, the spokesman of the reformist minority faction of the Majles, defined the committee's report as a "positive step", adding, however, that the report was incomplete and unsatisfactory since it did not address some of the events which took place following the elections, such as the violent incident in the Tehran University dormitories and the suspicious death of a physician working at the Kahrizak detention center (Parleman News, January 10).

Senior reformist opposition figure: use of violence should not be encouraged; Iran's current situation should not be compared to situation just before Islamic revolution

In the wake of the Ashura riots and on the backdrop of calls issued by Iranian opposition elements in the West to the reformist protest movement in Iran to escalate its struggle against the regime, a senior reformist opposition figure has recently published a letter warning against the use of violence by the "green movement". The letter was written by Ezatollah Sahabi, one of the leaders of Iran Freedom Movement, an opposition organization whose activity has been banned by the Iranian authorities in the past decade. Sahabi called on the Iranian exiles abroad not to encourage the opposition in Iran to use violence. The opposition leader also noted that there could be no comparing the revolutionary mood which prevailed in Iran in 1978 to the mood prevailing nowadays.



Ezatollah Sahabi (left) with Iran's former president, Mohammad Khatami

In his letter, Sahabi notes that in light of the great significance of Iranian nationals residing abroad in shaping world public opinion on the situation in Iran, he would like them to keep in mind two major points about the current situation:

First, the Iranian regime is interested in seeing the reformist protest movement turn to extremism and violence in order to justify its oppression. According to Sahabi, the use of violence by the Green Movement would hurt Iran, the Iranian people, and itself, as it would

benefit the oppressive regime which would use it as an excuse to oppress the opposition and enlist the support of clerics, religious civilians, and government-criticizing conservatives. Iranian and world history shows that the use of violence never leads to positive outcomes, and that those who win through violence continue to use oppression and violence after coming to power.

Second, the current events in Iran must not be compared to the time of the Islamic revolution. The situation right now, according to Sahabi, is not similar to the situation in 1963 [Khomeini's failed uprising against the Shah], when the authorities were able to suppress and eliminate the popular protest movement, or in 1978, when the people and society on one hand and the government and regime on the other faced revolutionary conditions.

Sahabi warns against incitement to violence on the basis of extreme, exaggerated assessments, and against an attempt to radicalize the demands and slogans of the reformist opposition on the basis of an incorrect comparison between the current situation and the time of the Islamic revolution. According to Sahabi, a revolution in Iran is currently both impossible and unwelcome. Historical experience in Iran since the time of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq (Iran's prime minister in the years 1951-1953, who headed a popular movement for the nationalization of oil) proves that evolutionary movement and behavior based on reasonable, moderate demands may produce better, sustainable results.

Sahabi further states in his letter that Iran has a pluralistic society made up of very religious, traditional, and secular people, of right wingers and conservatives as well as left wingers and oppositionists. The slogans used by the opposition must not be radicalized in a way that would prompt some senior clerics, government-criticizing conservatives, and those who belong to the traditional sections of Iranian society to shift their support to the ruling political faction. The Green Movement itself is also pluralistic, and the radicalization of its demands and slogans may strengthen its rival faction and create schism and division in its ranks.

Sahabi warns against the understandable tendency of Iranian exiles, who are interested in returning to their homeland, for rashness and recklessness. Some of them are filled with strong hatred against the revolution and the Islamic republic, causing them to embrace a radical, emotional, and unreasonable line. According to Sahabi, Iranians, particularly young ones, have the right to express their dissatisfaction and nervousness with the suppression of their demands and popular movement by the authorities. However, political strategy must be based on an evaluation of the strength, interests, and balance of power between the various social factions, rather than be based solely on the "truth" and the rights. Even if the revolution was good for Iran and the Iranian people, the conditions now are not

revolutionary. Sahabi claims that the opposition's demands must be based on national solidarity and on the limits of the Iranians' capabilities. Not just the use of weapons, but also a political, rational, and non-violent several-year-long struggle against oppression and arrests is a kind of sacrifice; sometimes it is even harder. The form of the struggle and emotions must be controlled for the sake of future generations and for the future of the Iranian people and their country; the historical lesson must be learned from Iran's struggle for freedom and justice (Rah-e Sabz, January 2).

Iran's media emphasizes statements made by Israeli Brigadier General (Ret.) Uzi Eilam on Iranian nuclear program

The recent statements of Brigadier General (Ret.) Uzi Eilam, the former director of Israel's Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC), on Iran's nuclear program were widely covered on the Iranian media last week. In interviews he granted recently to Israeli and Western media following the publication of his memoirs, "Eilam's Arc", Eilam said that Iran was very far from achieving nuclear capabilities. He also claimed that Israeli defense officials overestimated the Iranian threat, ruling out the possibility of an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities.

Many Iranian media last week gave extensive reports on Brigadier General Eilam's statements, stressing that the assessments of the "Israeli general" contradicted the assessments recently voiced by the head of the Israeli Intelligence Directorate, Major General Amos Yadlin, concerning Iran's ability to build at least one nuclear facility by the end of 2010. Iranian media also stressed that Eilam's declarations on the limitations facing an Israeli attack in Iran contradicted the public statements made by some Israeli leaders and the claims published in recent months by Israeli and Western media regarding the possibility of a military attack on Iran's nuclear sites in case the international sanctions imposed on Iran fail (Iranian news agencies, January 10-11).

According to a report on Brigadier General Eilam's statements published in the ultra-conservative daily Keyhan, "political commentators" believe that the "Zionists' lies" and exaggerations about the Iranian nuclear threat were meant to allow Israel to receive assistance funds from the US and from Western countries to solve "the internal problems of the Zionist regime" (Keyhan, January 11).

Fars, a conservative news agency, did more than report on Brigadier General Eilam's statements, saying last week that other Israeli military commentators warned against an Israeli military attack on Iran due to its possible consequences. The news agency cited Amos Harel, the military reporter of the Haaretz daily newspaper, and Major General (Ret.) Yitzhak Ben-Israel, who according to the report severely questioned Israel's ability to carry out a

military attack on Iran. The agency noted that those experts and commentators had recently warned that Israel did not have the operative capability to carry out such an attack, and that in case of a military action against Iran's nuclear facilities Israel would have to suffer a severe, unprecedented reaction by Iran and by Hezbollah and Hamas, and to face serious political consequences on the international and regional-Arab scenes (Fars, January 11).

Picture of the week: opposition leader Mehdi Karoubi's car attacked by government supporters during his visit to the city of Qazvin



Raja News, January 8