



Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

Spotlight on Iran

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Editor: Raz Zimmt



Highlights of the week

- ✓ "IDF's action is a step towards the destruction of Israel": Iranian press reacts to Gaza flotilla raid
- ✓ Revolutionary Guards expand influence on energy market
- ✓ Has Tehran's mayor started campaigning for president?
- ✓ Pictures of the week: Western fashion on Tehran marketplace

"IDF's action is a step towards the destruction of Israel": Iranian press reacts to Gaza flotilla raid

This week, the Iranian media has extensively covered the IDF raid on the Gaza flotilla. Editorials published by major dailies reflected Iran's traditional stance towards Israel, the West, and Arab countries, with no significant differences between the two main political factions: the conservatives and the reformists.

The conservative daily Resalat said that the IDF action was "savagely and disgraceful", calling it a premeditated crime violating human rights. Even if international organizations ignore the Zionists' crimes once again, the article said, this time the world's nations and governments will not tolerate behind-the-scenes deals between the permanent members of the UN

Security Council and the Zionist regime. The daily claimed that the action was Binyamin Netanyahu's revenge on the international community for the statement about Israel made last week by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review conference. Israel also sought to spread fear among Hamas supporters and take a heavy toll on the international community for its support of the Palestinian resistance. The daily criticized the US for keeping silent over the IDF action, and the UN for doing no more than asking Israel to explain its action. It was the daily's assessment, however, that the reaction of the international community this time will be stronger than ever before. By attacking the flotilla, Tel-Aviv started a dangerous game against the international community, but it will not be the one to decide how it is going to end (Resalat, June 1).

Jomhuri-ye Eslami, a daily affiliated with Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council, claimed that the crime committed by the "Zionist regime" proved to the entire world that the Palestinians are facing a barbaric and diabolical enemy. With the IDF taking such action against an international group of peace activists, it is perfectly clear what it does to the defenseless Palestinians.

The daily criticized the US support of Israel, claiming that it was a major cause for the continuation of its criminal policy. Going against international law, Israel's action is a warning sign to the international community that by remaining silent over Israel's policy, the latter will step up hostilities. Israel's crime is also humiliating for European countries, whose nationals took place in the flotilla, and the citizens of Europe expect their governments to react.

The criticism voiced by Jomhuri-ye Eslami focused on the leaders of Arab countries, claiming that they have no further justification to remain silent and continue their relations with Israel. The Muslim nations of the region expect Arab governments to at least cut off ties with and boycott Israel. The daily lashed out particularly against the government of Qatar, which hosted Binyamin Ben Eliezer, Israel's minister of industry and commerce, as the raid was taking place. The disgraceful behavior of reactionary Arab leaders is one of the main reasons for the continuing crimes of the "Zionist regime", the daily said. Public opinion in Muslim countries must exert particularly heavy pressure on the government of Egypt, the strategic partner of the Zionists, to change its treacherous conduct and open the Rafah crossing, at the very least.

The daily called on international organizations, the Arab League, the Security Council, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to respond strongly to Israel's aggression and, by doing so, to make up in part for their earlier disgraceful behavior. It was the daily's conclusion that Israel's crime proves to the international community that the Palestinians

have no choice but to resist and fight against the savage and criminal State of Israel. That crime supports the Palestinian cause and brings the “Zionist regime” one step closer to its destruction (Jomhuri-ye Eslami, June 1).



Students protest the Israeli raid in front of the UN office in Tehran, May 31

Hossein Shariatmadari, the editor-in-chief of the conservative daily Keyhan, said in an editorial that the IDF attack on the Gaza flotilla is an indication of the fear and insecurity prevailing in Israel. Shariatmadari asked whether now, in light of the “disaster”, Muslims will support political relations with the “Zionist regime” by Arab governments and the government of Turkey, or avenge the blood of their brothers by spilling the blood of Zionists wherever they are. The editor-in-chief of Keyhan also wondered whether Arab leaders will return to the negotiation table with Israel, and whether there remains any doubt that the only way to solve the regional conflict is to destroy Israel and completely wipe out the artificial, bloodthirsty regime from the political geography of the region. In conclusion, Shariatmadari claimed that, in their action, the Zionists dug their own grave and helped implement the plan drawn up by Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic revolution, to erase Israel from the map (Keyhan, June 1).

Mardom Salari, a daily affiliated with the moderate reformist camp, defined the IDF raid as a “pirate attack on the peace convoy”. The daily praised Turkey for standing up to Israel and for its diplomatic pressure to break the siege imposed by Israel on Gaza since 2005 with the cooperation of the Egyptian government. Unlike pirate operations off the coast of Somalia, carried out by one terrorist group, the daily claimed that the “Zionist regime” took over the flotilla in an act of government-sponsored piracy; however, the hearts of the hundreds of “peace convoy” passengers and their even more numerous supporters broke the Gaza siege and brought the leaders of Tel-Aviv face-to-face with another nightmare (Mardom Salari, June 1).

Revolutionary Guards expand influence on energy market

Ali Vakili, head of the Pars Oil and Gas Company, announced this week the signing of an agreement under which the development of phases 22, 23, and 24 of the South Pars gas field will be assigned to Khatam-ol Anbiya', the construction wing of the Revolutionary Guards. In addition, the development of phases 13 and 14 will be awarded to a consortium of Khatam-ol Anbiya' and several additional Iranian firms. Negotiations with Khatam-ol Anbiya' over the development of phases 22 through 24 began when Turkey backtracked on its intention to invest in the gas field expansion project. The development of phases 13 and 14 was awarded to the consortium after the expiration of a two-week ultimatum given by the Petroleum Ministry to Holland's Shell and Spain's Repsol to announce their decision on the continuation of their involvement in the gas field development (Jaras, May 29; ILNA, May 29).

Jaras, a website affiliated with reformist opposition leader Mir-Hossein Mousavi, reported this week that dozens of development projects in Bushehr Province amounting to 1260 billion tomans (about \$1.26 billion) have recently been awarded to Khatam-ol Anbiya' without a tender. Also awarded to the organization were development phases 15 and 16 of the South Pars gas field (\$97 million) and a \$1.3-billion project to lay a 900-km gas pipeline from Assaluyeh to Iranshahr. The website also reported that during the visit of President Ahmadinejad's first deputy Mohammad Reza Rahimi to southern Iran, it was decided to assign several Petroleum Ministry projects to the Revolutionary Guards (Jaras, May 29).

Speaking at a press conference this week, Majles Speaker Ali Larijani addressed the Revolutionary Guards' increasing economic involvement, saying that it was beneficial to Iran's economic interests. According to Larijani, the Revolutionary Guards perform some of the economic services which necessitate a "spirit of jihad". He noted, however, that he had recently impressed on the Khatam-ol Anbiya' chief the importance of the Revolutionary Guards not competing with the private sector or becoming a force that would stifle economic competition in the country (Mehr, May 29).

In contrast, other senior Iranian officials have recently criticized the increasing involvement of the Revolutionary Guards in the economy. Reformist opposition leader Mir-Hossein Mousavi warned against awarding millions of dollars' worth of contracts to the Revolutionary Guards, saying that it was beneficial only to the Revolutionary Guards but not to the regime (Jaras, May 29). Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council, also addressed the issue, saying that the continuing intensive involvement of the Revolutionary Guards in Iran's economy was unjustified. In a meeting with former governors,

Rafsanjani said that while the involvement of the Revolutionary Guards was necessary following the Iran-Iraq War to revive the industry, it was now redundant (Jaras, May 17).

Khatam-ol Anbiya' was established in 1989, following the Iran-Iraq War, to help rebuild the country. After the war, the corporation expanded into construction, transportation, industry, agriculture, gas, and petroleum. In recent years, the corporation has won billions of dollars' worth of tenders in various fields, including the construction of dams, water supply systems, highways, tunnels, and petroleum and gas pipelines, as well as the development of oil and gas fields. There are currently over 800 firms in the corporation. The corporation has so far carried out over 1700 projects in various fields. Last November, the corporation won a \$2.5-billion tender to construct a railroad network in the free trade zone in Chabahar (southeast Iran).

Tose'e-ye E'temad-e Mobin, a cooperation some of whose firms are associated with the Revolutionary Guards' Cooperation Fund, has recently won the biggest transaction in the history of the Iranian stock exchange, acquiring 50 percent plus one share of Iran Telecommunications.

Meanwhile, Revolutionary Guards' Commander-in-Chief Mohammad Ali Ja'fari has announced this week that the Revolutionary Guards is not just a military, but also a political and defense organization. Speaking at a convention held on the liberation anniversary of the city of Khorramshahr, Ja'fari said that the Revolutionary Guards need to protect the revolution not only with weapons, and their existence philosophy is protecting the revolution and its achievements not just as a military organization but also as a political and defense organization (Ansar News, May 28).

Has Tehran's mayor started campaigning for president?

Last week, Tehran's mayor Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf held a one-day visit to the city of Qom, in which he met with senior officials of the religious establishment. Qalibaf met with the Iranian representative of the senior Iraqi Shi'ite cleric Ayatollah Ali Sistani, Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani, Ayatollah Alavi Gorgani, Ayatollah Safi Golpayegani, and Ayatollah Nouri Hamadani. Some of the talks were held with the press present, and some were held behind closed doors. The mayor gave the clerics a detailed report on various projects and activities recently carried out in Tehran and on future plans (Fars, May 27; Farda, May 29).

Iranian Diplomacy, a website affiliated with the moderate conservative camp, has recently published a detailed profile article on Qalibaf, stating that he may once again run for president in the next presidential elections in three years' time. The article, published on the English-language version of the website, defined the Tehran mayor as a "paradoxical politician" attempting throughout the years to reconcile being a "technocrat and revolutionary, war commander and spruced pilot, reformist and principlist" (Iranian Diplomacy, May 19). In addition, several news websites affiliated with the pragmatic conservative camp published never-before-seen photographs last week, showing Qalibaf during his service as commander in the Iran-Iraq War.



Meanwhile, in recent weeks Qalibaf has spoken out on several issues on the public agenda. At a convention held last week on the occasion of the liberation anniversary of the city of Khorramshahr, Qalibaf condemned those responsible for the riots which broke out in Iran after the latest presidential elections, claiming that it was impossible to absolve the sins of those who took advantage of the conditions prevailing in the country after the elections to create a crisis which served Iran's enemies. Also during the convention, Qalibaf said that the most important objective of the Islamic revolution was to implement Islamic religious law while ensuring social justice, political independence, and economic growth. He called for national unity led by the Supreme Leader to continue the revolution and foil the plots of Iran's enemies (Fararu, May 25).

At the same time, the mayor of Tehran has recently criticized a statement made by President Ahmadinejad in which he claimed he did not agree that two children per family were enough. Speaking at a convention in Tehran, Qalibaf said that one must not ignore the economic and social implications of an increase in birth rate. He noted that every family must decide for itself how many children it is going to have, according to its desires and needs, and that it is wrong to encourage an increase in the number of children among families who are not interested in that (ISNA, May 7).

Qalibaf is currently considered one of the most prominent personalities in Iranian politics. He was born in 1961 in the town of Torghabeh, near the city of Mashhad. In the late '70s, he joined the Revolutionary Guards and fought as a commander in the Iran-Iraq War. He was only 22 when he was appointed the commander of the Nasr division in Khorasan Province. After the war, he was appointed the chief of the Revolutionary Guards construction wing, Khatam-ol Anbiya', and in 1998-2000 served as the Revolutionary Guards' Air Force commander. In 2000 he was appointed the commander of Iran's internal security forces. In 2005, Qalibaf ran for presidency and came in fourth after winning less than 14 percent of votes. He was elected the mayor of Tehran shortly afterwards, when his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was elected president.

Qalibaf is considered a highly successful mayor. Since coming to office, he has made efforts to improve the public transportation network of the city, expand the road infrastructure, and rebuild the city streets. He considerably increased the municipal budget and managed to get both the private sector and foreign investors to invest considerable amounts of money in municipal development projects. Qalibaf decided not to run in the 2009 elections despite heavy pressure exerted on him by the government's critics in the conservative camp.

He holds moderate conservative views and is considered one of President Ahmadinejad's biggest political opponents in recent years. On a number of occasions, Qalibaf has strongly criticized the government's policy. Tehran-e Emrooz (Tehran Today), a daily affiliated with Qalibaf, was even shut down for seven months in June 2008 after publishing a special supplement marking three years of Ahmadinejad's government, strongly criticizing the government's policy.

Pictures of the week: Western fashion on Tehran marketplace

