



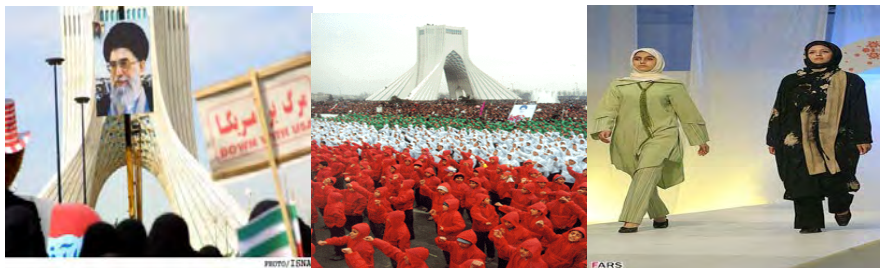
## Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

### Spotlight on Iran

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## **A Hollywood production designed to deflect criticism from the Goldstone Report: Iranian reactions to the interception of the “Francop” cargo ship**

Last week, Iran rejected Israel's claims that the “Francop” cargo ship, seized by Israel one week earlier, carried weapons from Iran to Hezbollah, accusing Israel of an attempt to take advantage of the arms ship affair to avoid the repercussions of the Goldstone Report. An announcement issued by the Iranian mission to the UN stated that Israel's allegations were meant to deflect public opinion from the Goldstone Report, and that Iran strongly rejected the allegations brought up by Israel against it (ISNA, November 7).

Last weekend, IRNA, Iran's official news agency, referred to Israel's allegations as a “public relations trick” to divert attention from the Goldstone Report and to prevent it from influencing public opinion on the issue of Israel (IRNA, November 9).



Asr-e Iran, a website associated with the pragmatic conservative bloc, rejected Israel's claims as well, saying that the affair was a “Hollywood production” designed to let Israel avoid the dangerous repercussions of the Goldstone Report. The report could jeopardize Israel's international status after years of influencing Western media; therefore, Israel had to produce alternative news stories to push aside media reports on the Goldstone Report. The website also rejected the claims that the documents seized on board the vessel indicated that the weapons had originated in Iran. There had never been an incident, according to the website, in which a weapons-smuggling country left behind incriminating documents that could attest to its involvement in the smuggling operation.

Furthermore, even if the ship did carry Iranian weapons to Syria, that is not an argument in favor of Israel's position, since Israel, which was accused of perpetrating war crimes by the UN, holds advanced, modern weaponry, including nuclear arms, without anyone objecting. What is a few missiles and grenades compared to the nuclear arms in the possession of a

country that has not signed the NPT, Asr-e Iran says. Just as the US sells weapons to Israel, Iran has the right to maintain the regional balance of power and its status, engaging in a defensive cooperation with its allies. Israel had better give up its claims, which do nothing but hinder it, and contact international lawyers to defend it from being put to trial for the war crimes it had committed (Asr-e Iran, November 7).

The Tabnak website came up with another possible explanation for Israel's claims, saying that the interception of the ship by Israel and its allegations against Iran were meant to allow Israel to enlist the support of the American administration against Iran, just as it had done in the Karine-A affair in early 2002. In January 2002, Israel took advantage of the Karine-A affair to have Iran included in the "Axis of Evil" by former President George W. Bush. Now, Israel is trying to make use of a similar affair to exert pressure on President Obama following his political initiatives towards Iran. Similarly to what is happening now, the website says, it soon became apparent that Iran was in no way involved in the Karine-A affair, but it was blamed anyway. Therefore, Israel is once again attempting to derail the American initiatives towards Iran, and to persuade the administration to take a hostile stance vis-à-vis Iran (Tabnak, November 6).

### **Different voices in Tehran over the rapprochement with Turkey**

During his visit to Turkey last week as part of an international Islamic economic convention, Iran's president said during a meeting with Turkey's President Tayyip Erdoğan that a further increase could be expected in the cooperation between Iran and Turkey (IRNA, November 9).

However, different voices were heard last week in Iran over the rapprochement between the two countries, particularly from members of the reformist bloc. In an interview granted by Dr. Bahram Amir Ahmadian to the "Iranian Diplomacy" website, the expert on Turkish affairs warned against a possible Turkish attempt to improve its regional status at Iran's expense. Ahmadian did note that the relations between Iran and Turkey were beneficial; he added, however, that they mostly served Turkish economic and political interests. He said that Turkey was interested in becoming a center for transferring energy from Iran to Europe, strengthening its regional status in order to convince the European Union to admit Turkey as a member and a bridge between Europe on one hand and Asia and the Middle East on the other. That Turkish policy, Ahmadian said, did not serve Iranian interests, since it could come at the expense of Iran's position in the regional balance of power. With a population not larger than Iran's and without energy sources of its own, Turkey's GDP is now three times that of Iran. Ahmadian noted that the recent suggestion to transfer enriched uranium from Iran to Turkey could be a Turkish attempt to boost its position as a mediator between Iran and the West. Iran may benefit from its relations with Turkey, Ahmadian concluded, but in

order to do that it must formulate an internal policy based on the cooperation between all of Iran's national forces to better position itself on the international scene (Diplomasi-ye Irani, November 9).

In an editorial published on November 3, the conservative daily Keyhan also addressed the changes in Turkey's policy and its deteriorating relationship with Israel. The daily noted that the change in the Turkish attitude towards Israel could not be brushed off as a short-term tactical adaptation in order to meet temporary objectives. According to the article, the change in Turkey's policy is rooted in its internal politics and the strengthening Islamic faction. The daily noted, however, that Turkey was still governed by a secular constitution, that it was a member of NATO, and its army was under the control of a group which saw itself as the "defender of secularism"; therefore, an all-encompassing change in its policy towards the West should not be expected. In the near future, Turkey is likely to maintain its relations with the Western bloc and even with Israel. Nevertheless, the daily's assessment is that the strategic change led by the Islamists will likely put an end to Turkey's absolute affiliation with the West, leading to the adoption of a new attitude towards the regional resistance bloc. The strengthening of Turkey's commercial ties with Islamic countries, mainly Iran, may empower the Turkish Islamic movement and lay the groundwork for more significant changes in Turkey in the future.



Meanwhile, in recent days Iranian officials have stepped up their criticism of the energy agreement signed during the Turkish prime minister's visit to Iran approximately two weeks ago. Last week, several Iranian Majles members complained that the Petroleum Ministry had not yet briefed the Majles about the details of the agreement, expressing their concern that the agreement could jeopardize Iranian economic interests. One of the arguments was that Iran's agreement to transport significant quantities of gas to Turkey in exchange for Turkish investments in the development of the South Pars gas field contradicted the recommendations made by Iranian experts in recent years that Iran must avoid exporting gas to other countries in the near future due to the shortage of gas for internal consumption. Moayed Hosseini-Sadr, a member of the Majles Energy Committee, said last week that the

committee intended to summon the Petroleum Minister and have him brief the committee on the details of the energy agreement between Iran and Turkey (Khabar Online, November 8).

Last week, the reformist daily Aftab-e Yazd addressed the Turkish PM's announcement according to which Iran had given Turkey the right to export more than 50 percent of its gas production. An editorial published by the daily strongly criticized the fact that no official Iranian source had commented on or denied that announcement. If Iran did give Turkey such a right, the article said, then it was an unprecedented, troubling development. The daily mentioned that only five years ago, Iran's conservatives had fiercely contested agreements signed by Khatami's government with Turkey in the spheres of telecommunications and development of the new international airport in Tehran, claiming that Turkish companies were under Zionist influence (Aftab-e Yazd, November 5).

### **Yet another example of the Revolutionary Guards' increasing involvement in the economy: Khatam-ol Anbiya Corporation won a railway network construction tender**

Last week, Khatam-ol Anbiya, the Revolutionary Guards' construction corporation, won a 2.5-billion dollar tender for the construction of a railway network in the free trade zone in Chabahar, south-eastern Iran. Transportation Minister Hamid Behbahani, who gave the announcement on the corporation's victory in the tender, said that the project would be carried out in three stages. Other participants in the railway network construction tender included Iran's Port and Shipping Organization, an Iranian-Japanese consortium, an Iranian-Chinese consortium, and three other foreign companies (various news agencies, November 10).

Owned by the Revolutionary Guards, Khatam-ol Anbiya is a corporation which employs about 40 thousand workers. It underwent tremendous growth following the Iran-Iraq War, expanding into construction, transportation, industry, agriculture, oil, and gas. In recent years it won billions of dollars' worth of tenders in such areas as dam construction, water supply systems, highways, tunnels, gas lines, and oil and gas field development.

It should be noted that Tose'e-ye E'temad-e Mobin, a corporation some of whose companies are affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards' Cooperation Fund, has recently won the largest transaction ever to take place on the Iranian stock exchange—a public offering of 50 percent plus one share of the Telecommunications Company of Iran (TCI).

## **The internal security forces chief calls for stricter monitoring of web surfers**

Internal security forces chief Esma'il Ahmadi-Moqaddam announced last week that the internal security forces intended to increase the monitoring of web surfers in Iran. Ahmadi-Moqaddam noted that stricter control of Iran's cyberspace and Internet was one of the security forces' jobs. He complained that the efforts to step up monitoring had so far been unsuccessful due to the opposition of some self-styled intellectual media and civilians, who forced the security forces to back down from their intention to take steps on that issue. During a convention about the war on drugs, Ahmadi-Moqaddam said that the Internet was a fertile ground for many kinds of crime, including smuggling drugs into Iran, and that the internal security forces therefore intended to step up the enforcement of web surfing in the coming years (ISNA, November 9).

Meanwhile, the reformist website Rooz Online reported that in recent days, Iranian website operators had received e-mails and text messages from the authorities, threatening them to cease using the Internet for transferring information that is illegal or information that compromises state security. The operators were warned that unless they cease and desist, legal action would be taken against them (Rooz Online, November 10).

Over the course of the past year, the internal security forces have stepped up the monitoring of Iranian websites and blogs after the Majles passed a computer crime bill and the judiciary announced the establishment of a special court for computer and Internet offenses. Within that context, more effort is put into filtering websites and blogs, while arrests of citizens involved in operating illegal websites have become more commonplace.

According to the computer crime bill recently passed by the Majles, a special committee has been established whose role is to determine the criteria for website filtering. Its members include the morality police chief in the internal security forces, the ministers of education, telecommunications, justice, science, culture, Islamic guidance or their representatives, chairman of the Islamic Information Organization, chairman of the Iranian Broadcasting Authority, an expert on computers and communications technology, and a Majles representative.

## **Picture of the week: the biggest check in the history of the Iranian economy**

The sale of 50 percent plus one share of the Telecommunications Company of Iran (TCI) to the Tose'e-ye E'temad-e Mobin corporation was completed last week.

The corporation transferred 15,638,329,212,448 rials (over 1.5 billion dollars) in cash to the Tehran stock exchange for 20 percent of the company's shares. Fars News Agency, which published a photograph of the historic check, noted that it was the biggest check ever written in the history of the Iranian economy. The total sum of the TCI share offering was about 7.8 billion dollars.

