



**The Meir Amit Intelligence
and Terrorism Information Center**

Spotlight on Iran

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Editor: Raz Zimmt



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- ✓ Schism in conservative camp as preparations for Majles elections gather momentum
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Strong reactions to assassination of another Iranian scientist

This week Iranian top officials and media voiced anger over the assassination of another Iranian scientist last week.

Majles speaker Ali Larijani blamed Israel and the U.S. for the assassination, saying that it was yet another example of the hostility faced by Iran from the U.S. Tehran's governor Morteza Tamadon also blamed the assassination of Reza'inejad on the U.S. and Israel, referring to it as an "American-Israeli project". Basij chief Mohammad Reza Naqdi announced that the only way to deal with the assassinations of scientists and restore Iran's security is to wipe "the Zionist regime" from history.

The Iranian press also reacted sharply to the third assassination of an Iranian scientist. According to the daily Tehran Emrouz, the assassination is indicative of a change in the tactics employed by Iran's enemies to contend with its scientific progress. This change reflects an understanding that a military attack on the nuclear facilities will have no effect. The daily warned that Iran may retaliate against the wave of assassinations, stressing that it will continue working towards its scientific objectives.

The daily Khorasan also argued that the West is taking action to compromise the nuclear program, driven by the realization that a military attack on Iran is unfeasible and that the economic sanctions have failed. The assassinations of Iranian scientists show how important it is for Iran to obtain nuclear technology and vigorously pursue its nuclear activities.

The Ayandeh website wondered how the Israeli Mossad managed to infiltrate Iran, comparing the failed attempt on the life of the Israeli consul in Istanbul, which the Israeli media attributed to Iran, and the successful assassination supposedly carried out by the Mossad in the center of Tehran. The website recommended a series of measures to prevent the Mossad from carrying out further operations: strengthening the Ministry of Intelligence, compromised by President Ahmadinejad's attempt to remove the intelligence minister from office several months ago; using the several months it will take the Mossad to prepare for additional actions to interfere with its activity; relocating Mossad's potential targets to safe houses and putting them under tighter security; and introducing changes in the counter-activities conducted by the Iranian intelligence to improve its ability to deal with the Mossad's infiltration.

Schism in conservative camp as preparations for Majles elections gather momentum

The conservative camp is gearing up for the Majles elections slated for early March 2012. So far efforts have proven unsuccessful to have the Arrangement Committee, composed of 15 members from all conservative bodies, compile a list of candidates that all political bodies affiliated with this camp would agree on.

Reports out of Iran last week said that two new political fronts were established to represent different factions within the conservative camp. One front is affiliated with the radical wing of the conservative camp and consists of political

activists considered close to President Ahmadinejad. The second front consists of 11 different conservative groups and is mostly affiliated with Expediency Discernment Council chairman and former Revolutionary Guards chief Mohsen Reza'i, who ran against President Ahmadinejad in the last presidential elections in 2009.

The announcement on the establishment of the two conservative fronts deepened concerns among top conservatives over a split ahead of the elections, which may strengthen both the "deviant faction" (the conservative political faction affiliated with Rahim Masha'i, Ahmadinejad's office chief) and the reformist faction, which hasn't decided yet whether it will take part in the elections. This week Assembly of Experts chairman Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Mahdavi Kani strongly criticized the schism in the conservative camp, arguing that the differences of opinion go against the interests of the revolution and help the enemies of Iran.

Meanwhile, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appointed former judiciary chief Ayatollah Mohammad Hashemi Shahroudi as head of the Supreme Council for Resolving Differences of Opinion and Normalizing Relations between the Three Branches. The establishment of the council was motivated by the escalating differences of opinion between the government, the Majles, and the judiciary this past year.

Government critics: government conceals information on state of economy from public and Majles

This week Majles Research Center chief Ahmad Tavakoli accused President Ahmadinejad of concealing data and giving false information on the state of Iran's economy. According to Tavakoli, the president has instructed the Central Bank not to release information on inflation rate and economic growth, does not periodically report to the Majles on the financial performance of the government, and conceals information on the decisions made by the committee in charge of formulating strategies to cope with the economic sanctions.

Majles Economy Committee member Mohammad Reza Khabbaz also accused the government of presenting the Majles with false economic figures. In an interview to the Fararu website, Khabbaz said that the government conceals from the public figures that may paint its economic performance in a negative light, and releases exaggerated figures on its achievements.

The economic daily Donya-ye Eqtesad also addressed the non-disclosure of economic information by the government, arguing that this policy compromises the ability to successfully deal with the economic challenges facing Iran and forces economic experts, potential investors, and ordinary Iranians to resort to using unofficial figures released in Iran and elsewhere in the world. On several occasions in the past several years, government critics have accused it of releasing false information on Iran's economic situation, including unemployment, inflation, and economic growth.

Concerns over third outbreak of AIDS in Iran

Dr. Abbas Sedaqat, the head of the AIDS Department of the Health Ministry, issued a warning about a third outbreak of AIDS in Iran, primarily among women and young people.

Sedaqat noted an increase in the number of people who have contracted the disease through unprotected sex, as well as in the rate of infection among women. He reported that a third strategic program for combating AIDS will soon be approved by the Supreme Council for Health and Nutrition Safety. The program emphasizes fighting the spread of AIDS through unprotected sex, given the change in the dynamics of AIDS transmission in Iran in recent years.

Official data released by the Iranian Health Ministry put the number of AIDS cases in Iran at 21 thousand (as at May 2010). Estimates made by international health organizations range between 60 and 100 thousand.

The first outbreak of the disease in Iran took place in 1986, when a number of patients received infected blood transfusions imported to Iran. The second outbreak took place in 1995 and mostly affected drug addicts. In recent years Iranian authorities have become more aware of the disease, recognizing that, even in Iran, dangerous sexual behavior is a considerable risk factor for AIDS infection. Public awareness of AIDS, however, is still low. The president of Iran's AIDS Association has recently called for more sex education about AIDS in schools and universities.

Strong reactions to assassination of another Iranian scientist

This week Iranian top officials and media voiced anger over the assassination of another Iranian scientist last week.

In the first several hours after the assassination, the Iranian media released conflicting reports on the identity of the scientist. Initial reports said that the victim was Daryush Reza'i, a nuclear scientist and physics professor in Ardabil University (northwestern Iran). Several hours later some news agencies reported that the victim was Daryush Reza'inejad, an Electronic Engineering Ph.D student from Tehran's Khajeh Nasireddin Tusi University, who was not involved with the nuclear program in any way.



**The Iranian scientist minutes after the assassination,
from www.nasimonline.ir**

Senior Iranian officials voiced strong reactions to the assassination of the scientist. Majles speaker Ali Larijani blamed it on Israel and the U.S., saying that it was yet another example of the hostility faced by Iran from the U.S (ISNA, July 24).

Tehran's governor Morteza Tamadon also blamed the U.S. and Israel for the assassination of Reza'inejad, referring to it as an "American-Israeli project". Speaking at the scientist's funeral, Tamadon said that the assassinations of Iranian scientists are aimed to harm the Iranian people and turn them from the path of technological progress, but have the opposite effect (Mehr, July 24).

Basij chief Mohammad Reza Naqdi claimed that the U.S. and Israel are behind the assassination, and announced that the only way to deal with the assassinations of scientists and restore Iran's security is to wipe "the Zionist regime" from history (ISNA, July 25).



Daryush Reza'inejad's funeral

The Iranian press also reacted sharply to the third assassination of an Iranian scientist in two years. According to the daily Tehran Emrouz, the assassination is indicative of a change in the tactics employed by Iran's enemies to contend with its scientific progress. The enemies of Iran have come to realize that a military attack on Iran's nuclear facilities will have no effect on Iran's determination and eagerness for scientific progress, and that Iran's retaliation will have devastating effects. They also understand that a military action will at best delay the nuclear program for several weeks, just as the Iraqi attacks on the Iranian oil facilities during the Iran-Iraq War did no significant damage to the petroleum industry. It was this understanding that brought about Iranian enemies' decision to assassinate Iranian scientists. Training scientists takes many years and considerable resources, and the enemy is trying to impede Iran's technological progress by assassinating them. Protecting the lives of experts and scientists has therefore become a task of high importance. The enemies of Iran should know that the Muslim nations of the region, particularly the Iranians, will avenge these crimes and assassinations. It is still too early to tell how Iran will react, but a reaction will definitely be coming. At any rate, Iran must continue working towards its scientific objectives (Tehran Emrouz, July 24).

The daily Arman also said that the assassinations of Iranian scientists cannot be allowed to go on unchecked. An article by Majles member Daryush Qanbari titled "Where is the problem?" criticized the Iranian security services' inability to deal with the assassinations of the scientists and the escalating violence in society. It is unacceptable to sit idly by while these incidents take place, the Majles member said, and it is necessary to determine how they take place in broad daylight (Arman, July 24).

The conservative daily Khorasan also indicated a connection between the assassinations of Iranian scientists on one hand and progress of Iran's nuclear program and nuclear talks with the West on the other. The daily argued that, due to the fact that a military attack by the U.S. and its allies on Iran's nuclear facilities is unfeasible, and due to the failure of the economic sanctions against Iran, the West is using other means to compromise the nuclear program. The elimination of experts and scientists involved with the nuclear program is

considered by the West a warning for Iran, but such actions only show how important it is for Iran to obtain nuclear technology. The fact that Iran's enemies are willing to carry out such actions to keep it from the realization of its capabilities only stresses the need for Iran's vigorous pursuit of its nuclear activities (Khorasan, July 24).

The Ayandeh website discussed Iran's failure to deal with the Israeli Mossad's infiltration into Iran. The website compared the failed attempt on the life of the Israeli consul in Istanbul, which the Israeli media attributed to Iran, and the successful assassination supposedly carried out by the Mossad in the center of Tehran. The website recommended a series of measures to prevent the Mossad from carrying out further operations: strengthening the Ministry of Intelligence, compromised by President Ahmadinejad's attempt to remove the intelligence minister from office several months ago; using the several months it will take the Mossad to prepare for additional actions to interfere with its activity; relocating Mossad's potential targets to safe houses and putting them under tighter security; and introducing changes in the counter-activities conducted by the Iranian intelligence to improve its ability to deal with the Mossad's infiltration. Such changes include setting up surveillance cameras in cities, offering rewards for information leading to the arrest of terrorists, stepping up monitoring of suspicious movements in countries which Mossad operatives may use to cross into Iran (such as Turkey, Azerbaijan, Thailand, and the UAE), and filing complaints against Israel with such international institutions as Interpol and the international tribunal in The Hague (Ayandeh News, July 25).

Schism in conservative camp as preparations for Majles elections gather momentum

The conservative camp is gearing up for the Majles elections slated for early March 2012. So far efforts have proven unsuccessful to have the Arrangement Committee, composed of 15 members from all conservative bodies, compile a list of candidates that all political bodies affiliated with this camp would agree on.

Reports out of Iran last week said that two new political fronts were established to represent different factions within the conservative camp: the Stability Front (Jebhe-ye Paydari) and the Determination Front (Jebhe-ye Istadeji).

The Stability Front is affiliated with the radical wing of the conservative camp and consists of political activists considered close to President Ahmadinejad, including a number of his former cabinet ministers; a number of currently-serving Majles members affiliated with him; political activists belonging to Ammar Headquarters, a think tank affiliated with the radical wing of the conservative camp; and other top conservatives. The reformist opposition website Jaras

reported that the founders of the front, led by former welfare minister Sadeq Mahsouli, had recently met with top conservative clerics Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi and Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi (Jaras, July 20).

The Determination Front consists of 11 different conservative groups and is affiliated with Mohsen Reza'i, chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council and former chief of the Revolutionary Guards, who ran against President Ahmadinejad in the last presidential elections, held in 2009. The front's members are relatively low-level political activists, mostly from the second or third generation of the Islamic revolution, including Ali Reza'i, Mohsen Reza'i's son.

The announcement on the establishment of the two fronts came days after top conservatives announced their intention to reach an agreement on the list of candidates who would take part in the elections on the conservatives' behalf. Last week Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi, former interior minister and chief of the judiciary's General Inspection Organization, said that the conservatives intend to run in the elections as one list (Fars, July 21). Islamic Coalition Party member Hamid Reza Tarraqi also argued that there are no differences of opinion or rivalry among the conservatives (ISNA, July 19).

The announcement on the establishment of the two conservative fronts deepened concerns among top conservatives over a split ahead of the elections, which may strengthen both the "deviant faction" (the conservative political faction affiliated with Rahim Masha'i, Ahmadinejad's office chief) and the reformist faction, which hasn't decided yet whether it will take part in the elections. According to Fararu, a website affiliated with Ahmadinejad's critics in the conservative camp, the establishment of the two fronts indicates that the election campaign has entered a new phase. The website noted the silence of the government and the "deviant faction" activists over the recent political developments, arguing the silence indicates that they are pleased with the differences of opinion in the traditional conservative bloc, which may assist the "deviant faction" candidates (Fararu, July 23).

This week Assembly of Experts chairman Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Mahdavi Kani strongly criticized the schism in the conservative camp. Speaking at a conference of clerics held in Tehran's Imam Sadeq University, the top cleric warned about the differences of opinion in the conservative bloc, saying that they go against the interests of the revolution and are used by Iran's enemies to launch a cultural, economic, and political attack against it (Mehr, July 21).

Following the statement made by the Assembly of Experts chairman, elements close to the pragmatic conservative faction and to Mohsen Reza'i claimed that the president's allies were

the ones responsible for the schism. Determination Front member Hossein Kanani-Moqaddam said that the front was established with the purpose of achieving unity and consensus among the conservatives. He noted, however, that unity cannot be brought about by the 15-member committee established to draw up a list of candidates all would agree upon. He called to establish a council consisting of influential political figures, including Assembly of Experts chairman Mohammad Reza Mahdavi Kani, Expediency Discernment Council secretary Mohsen Reza'i, Majles speaker Ali Larijani, and Tehran mayor Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, to reach an agreement on the goals and joint objectives of the conservative camp before formulating an acceptable list of candidates ahead of the elections (Fararu, July 24).

In light of the differences of opinion in the conservative camp, the conservative daily Resalat called on conservative activists to rise above partisan sectarianism. An editorial written by Amir Mohebian, considered one of the major ideologues of the conservative camp, said that the conservative bloc is not just a political faction aiming to secure the political interests of its activists and leaders, but also an important part of the Iranian regime, and that it must not, therefore, sacrifice the main interests of the regime for partisan interests. Given the conditions prevailing in Iran and in the region, it is the duty of the conservative bloc to put most of its energy into the promotion of significant economic projects, collaboration, and preservation of national unity. According to Mohebian, the preoccupation with insignificant details shifts attention away from the major, important issues on the agenda (Resalat, July 23).

Meanwhile, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appointed former judiciary chief Ayatollah Mohammad Hashemi Shahroudi as head of the Supreme Council for Resolving Differences of Opinion and Normalizing Relations between the Three Branches (executive, legislative, and judiciary). The establishment of the council was motivated by the escalating differences of opinion between the government, the Majles, and the judiciary this past year.



Following Shahroudi's appointment as head of the council for resolving differences of opinion between the three branches: "Children, the Arab teacher [referring to Shahroudi's Arab descent] is here!!" (Rooz Online, July 26)

Government critics: government conceals information on state of economy from public and Majles

This week Majles Research Center chief Ahmad Tavakoli accused President Ahmadinejad of concealing data and giving false information on the state of Iran's economy. He said that the president prevents the publication of accurate economic data, thus misleading the public and the decision-makers.

Tavakoli argued that the president had instructed the Central Bank not to release information on the inflation rate. Consequently, in recent months inflation figures have been published only by the Statistical Center of Iran, even though the Central Bank still collects information with regard to this issue. Furthermore, in recent years the bank has refrained from releasing information on the economic growth rate. Tavakoli added that, given the lack of official data from the Central Bank, the president releases fallacious information on the state of the national economy.

In addition, Tavakoli accused Ahmadinejad of failure to provide the Majles with a periodical report on the financial performance of the government, as required by law. He said that, by doing so, the government attempts to conceal from the public the fact that it had instructed the Central Bank to print banknotes to keep up with the payment of the cash benefits under the subsidy policy reform. Tavakoli further claimed that the government conceals information on the decisions made by the committee in charge of formulating strategies to cope with the economic sanctions imposed on Iran, even though such information is vital for ordinary Iranians and economic companies (Alef, July 24).

Majles Economy Committee member Mohammad Reza Khabbaz also accused the government of presenting the Majles with false economic figures. In an interview to the Fararu website, Khabbaz said that the government conceals from the public figures that may paint its economic performance in a negative light, and releases exaggerated figures on its achievements. The result of this policy, according to Khabbaz, is that the Central Bank and the Statistical Center of Iran release conflicting data on inflation, unemployment, and the poverty threshold. The government is trying to hide the economic reality from public view, Khabbaz said (Fararu, July 25).

The economic daily Donya-ye Eqtesad also addressed the non-disclosure of economic information by the government. Two editorials published by the daily said that it is impossible to implement economic programs and obtain social objectives without official figures on the economic situation. Dealing with the economic challenges facing Iran and mobilizing the necessary resources requires reliable data and economic analysis, the newspaper said. The

Iranian “economy boat” cannot be steered to a safe haven in the stormy waters of the region and the world without a compass. The daily also argued that the non-disclosure of official data by the Central Bank forces economic experts, potential investors, and ordinary Iranians to resort to using unofficial figures released in Iran and elsewhere in the world. The lack of such data makes it difficult for potential investors in Iran, thus exacerbating the recession (Donya-ye Eqtesad, July 25, 26). On several occasions in the past several years, government critics have accused it of releasing false information on Iran’s economic situation, including unemployment, inflation, and economic growth.

Concerns over third outbreak of AIDS in Iran

Dr. Abbas Sedaqat, the head of the AIDS Department of the Health Ministry, issued a warning about a third outbreak of AIDS in Iran, primarily among women and young people.

Sedaqat noted an increase in the number of people who have contracted the disease through unprotected sex, as well as in the rate of infection among women. He reported that a third strategic program for combating AIDS will soon be approved by the Supreme Council for Health and Nutrition Safety. The program emphasizes fighting the spread of AIDS through unprotected sex and inappropriate use of psychotropic substances, given the change in the dynamics of AIDS transmission in Iran in recent years. The program also includes efforts to continue fighting the spread of the disease through drug use, particularly among convicts, building on the earlier success of the second anti-AIDS program in dealing with the phenomenon.

Sedaqat commended the increased cooperation between the Health Ministry and Iran Broadcasting in the fight against AIDS, expressing his hope that the Education Ministry will also take a serious part in the anti-AIDS program (Aftab, July 24).



Dr. Abbas Sedaqat visiting the Behavioral Diseases Consultation Center in south Tehran (from the website of the Tehran University of Medical Sciences)

Official data released by the Iranian Health Ministry put the number of AIDS cases in Iran at 21 thousand (as at May 2010), 92.6 percent of them men and 7.4 percent women. Estimates made by international health organizations are considerably higher, ranging between 60 and 100 thousand. Health Ministry figures show that nearly 70 percent of AIDS sufferers contracted the disease through contaminated needles, some 9 percent due to unprotected sex, 1.2 percent from infected blood transfusions, and 0.6 percent as a result of mother-to-child HIV transmission. The infection cause was not diagnosed in 20 percent of cases.

The Health Ministry figures support Iranian health experts' assessment that in recent years there has been a change in the transmission dynamics of AIDS in Iran, and that unlike in the past, most newly-discovered cases of AIDS have to do with unprotected sex rather than the use of contaminated needles by drug addicts or infected blood transfusions.

The first outbreak of the disease in Iran took place in 1986, when a number of patients received infected blood transfusions imported to Iran. The second outbreak took place in 1995 and mostly affected drug addicts. In recent years Iranian authorities have become more aware of the disease, recognizing that, even in Iran, dangerous sexual behavior is a considerable risk factor for AIDS infection.

While there are now several dozen safe sex counseling centers operating in Iran, low AIDS awareness means that they remain largely unknown to much of the population. Dr. Hamid Reza Sha'eri, the president of Iran's AIDS Association, has recently called for more comprehensive sex education in schools and universities to limit the spread of the disease through sex. He said that as long as young Iranians can't look up information on AIDS on the internet, as it is one of the terms filtered by the authorities, they cannot be expected to know the facts about the disease (HRA News Agency, July 21).

Pictures of the week: Supreme Leader visits Iranian navy facilities on the Persian Gulf coast

