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BRIEFS

INTERPOL ISSUES WARRANTS FOR IRANIAN BOMBING SUSPECTS

On November 7 the Interpol General Assembly issued warrants for one Lebanese and five Iranians suspects in connection with the 1994 bombing of the Argentine-Israeli Mutual Association (AMIA) building in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people. Argentine prosecutors claim to have evidence that Lebanese Hezbollah operatives carried out the bombing on the orders of senior Iranian officials. The move was applauded by Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni: "The link between Iran and world terrorism... has long been proven, and the time had come for this decision" (Communiqué of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 8). An Iranian foreign ministry spokesman suggested the case had remained open for 13 years only because of "corruption" in the Argentine judiciary, and further claimed that the same judiciary had been "influenced by the Zionist lobby and community based in Argentina" (Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, November 8). Iranian State Prosecutor-General Qorban Ali Dorri-Najafabadi spoke of "psychological pressure" exerted on Interpol by "Zionist lobbies," noting that Iran is itself "one of the major victims of terrorism" (Fars News Agency, November 8). The suspects include Lebanese terrorist Imad Moughnieh, the former chief of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, Mohsen Rezaei and former Iranian intelligence chief Ali Fallahian. Though frequently described as "international arrest warrants," the documents issued by Interpol are actually "red notices," which identify individuals as being wanted for extradition without compelling the state to actually arrest or extradite the subject.

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SPECULATION RAGES IN AFGHANISTAN OVER BAGHLAN MASSACRE

The killing of six members of parliament, 59 schoolchildren and numerous others in an alleged suicide bombing in Baghlan on November 6 has created outrage throughout Afghanistan. The most prominent of the legislators killed on the visit to a sugar factory was Mostafa Kazemi, spokesman for the opposition National Front and leader of the Hezb-e Eqtedar-e Melli (National Sovereignty Party). Kazemi was frequently mentioned as a possible presidential candidate. In the wake of the tragedy, there have been calls for politicians to end the practice of ordering schoolchildren to greet their arrival, a routine that emerged in response to the general failure of Afghan citizens to form the requisite cheering crowds (*Hasht-e Sobh*, November 10). With denials of responsibility from the Taliban, some have begun to look at the bombing as a deliberate effort to eliminate political rivals (*Cheragh*, November 10). Witnesses claimed that indiscriminate fire from police and bodyguards after the blast was responsible for many of the deaths (Pajhwok Afghan News, November 11). Wounds from gunfire have been found on many of the bodies, including Kazemi and some of his bodyguards, according to other reports (*Rah-e Nejat*, November 10; *Hasht-e Sobh*, November 8). Furthermore, Baghlan is far from the Taliban zone of operations in southern Afghanistan. Both the targeting of civilians and the number of casualties are inconsistent with the usual pattern of Taliban attacks (see Terrorism Monitor, March 1). Forces belonging to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami are operating near Baghlan, but the warlord also denies responsibility for the blast. There are reports that a local preacher and several others have been detained in connection with the attack (*Arman-e Melli*, November 10).

Lebanese Assassinations Create Political Crisis in Intelligence Services

Johnny Abdo, the former head of Lebanese military intelligence, recently predicted continued attacks against members of the pro-government "March 14" parliamentary coalition in the days leading up to the selection of the next president by parliament (*The Daily Star*, October 29). Abdo's comments were issued after the assassination of MP Antoine Ghanem of the March 14-affiliated Kataeb party, whom was killed right before deliberations on the presidential issue began this September between Lebanon's parliamentary leaders.

The attack was the latest in a series against anti-Syrian political figures that began in October of 2004 and has continued to polarize the country politically.

Recognizing Lebanon's penetrability and susceptibility to targeted assassinations, arms smuggling and most recently an influx of jihadist militants, the international community has been aiding the state's security services in order to enable Lebanon to deal with an increasingly complex security situation. These efforts include a U.S. pledge to provide \$60 million worth of aid to Lebanon's Interior Security Forces (ISF) and Germany's supervision over a newly created Common Border Force (CBF). The latter is an interagency initiative aimed at fostering a cooperative effort amongst Lebanon's security services in order to secure Lebanon's porous borders with Syria (*Al-Mustaqbal*, November 1; *The Daily Star*, October 6; November 3).

There are, however, indications that the current political deadlock may undermine these efforts as the current confrontation between pro-government and opposition forces is played out through the security services themselves. According to the pro-government daily *Al-Mustaqbal*, Walid Jumblatt, the leader of Lebanon's Democratic Gathering Bloc and an outspoken critic of Syria, alleges that there are elements within Lebanon's ISF and army that remain loyal to the Syrian regime. He suggests that the only way to end Syria's "guardianship" is to elect a president who is free from Damascus's influence (*Al-Mustaqbal*, October 21). Representative of the opposition's take on the situation, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah recently demanded the release of high-ranking officials of the ISF, Army, Public Security and the Presidential Guard, who were taken into custody after being implicated in the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, suggesting that their incarceration was politically motivated (*Al-Manar TV*, October 31).

Subsequently, Lebanon's ISF has become the object of increased ridicule by figures allied with the Hezbollah-led "March 8" opposition. Most verbal attacks focus on the intelligence branch of the ISF. According to an article that appeared in the pro-opposition daily *Al-Akhbar*, the intelligence branch was created at the request of Hariri in order to compensate for Syrian control of the security services during its occupation of Lebanon (*Al-Akhbar*, September 19). This assertion fed the perception that the branch is an organization subservient to Hariri's son, MP Saad Hariri, and his allies. As the information branch carried out a series of unpopular arrests, entities allied

with the opposition have come to label it as a “militia” and “street gang” acting on behalf of the ruling majority to violate the rights of their constituents (*The Daily Star*, October 5; *Al-Mustaqbal*, November 2).

Overall, these developments provide for a problematic situation in Lebanon. Despite gains made in the resources available to organizations such as the ISF, the ability to achieve any progress on the counterterrorism front may be subject to political trends in Lebanon. If these crises remain unresolved, then the assassinations and attacks will, accordingly, remain a constant threat. Furthermore, cooperative efforts like the CBF that could potentially be beneficial to Lebanon’s long-term security will remain ineffective if entities within the security services are perceived as having particularistic agendas.

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Pakistan Loses Swat to Local Taliban

In recent weeks large swathes of Pakistan’s idyllic mountainous region of Swat—a mere 90 miles from Islamabad—have fallen to militants purportedly led by Maulana Fazlullah, whose Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shari’at-e-Mohammad (Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Laws, or TNSM) *shaheen* (fighters) may number as many as 4,500. Swat’s residents are fleeing to safer ground as the security forces, largely comprised of the poorly trained and under-equipped Frontier Corps, are no match for Fazlullah and his following of belligerents. With Swat and other areas increasingly in the hands of militants, Pakistanis must rise to the challenge of combating an ideology that is fast encroaching into more settled areas.

Romanticized notions of Swat notwithstanding, several factors made this region—like Chitral—vulnerable to Talibanization. Swat has always been religiously conservative, with some parts of it influenced by the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), which has many ideological commonalities with the Muslim Brotherhood. Other areas are inclined towards the Deobandi political party, Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Islam (JUI). The TNSM group of militants, which originated in Malakand, has also entrenched itself within Swat over the last eight years.

Maulana Sufi Mohammad, an active leader in JI throughout the 1980s, founded TNSM in the early 1990s and demanded the enforcement of Shari’a law contemporaneous with the rise of the Taliban. With the October 2001 launch of U.S. Operation Enduring Freedom, Sufi Mohammad dispatched thousands of fighters to support the Taliban against the United States and Northern Alliance, most of whom were killed, soundly defeated or captured. Sufi Mohammad was arrested, disgraced and blamed for the ignominious rout of the locals. After his imprisonment, his son-in-law Fazlullah took over the organization. Famous for his FM radio broadcasts, Fazlullah became known as “Maulana Radio” and spread the message of Islamization and pro-Taliban ideology. TNSM then used the 2005 earthquake to reposition itself and revive the movement (see *Terrorism Focus*, May 17, 2006; *Guardian*, November 5).

The March 2004 military operations in South Waziristan spurred local militants to call themselves Pakistani Taliban and to establish independent administrations enforcing variants of Shari’a throughout Waziristan. As the Pakistani armed forces—mostly Frontier Corps augmented by elements of the army’s 11th Corps—intensified their operations in the tribal areas, Pashtun resistance increasingly became a pro-Taliban Islamist movement, quickly spreading to settled areas adjacent to Waziristan and beyond. Following a series of U.S. assaults on targets in Bajaur in January and October 2006, Talibanization has engulfed nearly every tribal agency as well as several settled districts in the North-West Frontier Province, including Swat, Chitral, Peshawar, Mardan, Charsadda, Mansehra, Malakand and Dir among others. Even the capital itself has not been spared (*The Herald*, July). In June 2007, Pakistan’s National Security Council met to discuss the evolving threat posed by Talibanization throughout the country (*The Herald*, July).

In Swat, the activities of Fazlullah and his followers intensified following the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) siege in July. Fazlullah’s men launched a crusade against film and music venues, television broadcasts, girls’ schools, national and international charities and barbers who prune men’s beards. Recently, they derailed a government-sponsored polio vaccination program, captured a cleric opposed to them and seized public buildings, including police stations. In September, Swat’s Buddhist heritage came under attack for the first time when militants assaulted an important 23-foot tall Buddha statue in the valley. Failing to inflict damage, local Taliban mustered a second attempt in early November with well-placed

explosives, destroying the statue's head, shoulders and feet (ANI, November 6).

Equally disconcerting, but perhaps explaining in some measure the new brutality witnessed in Swat, are the reports of foreign militants joining Fazlullah. As North and South Waziristan have witnessed intense fighting, many foreign fighters have moved to safer areas, including Swat. Fighters from Uzbekistan and Afghanistan among others reportedly have joined Fazlullah's forces—a claim denied by Fazlullah. Locals claim that the foreigners perpetrated the recent beheadings of four troops (*Daily Times*, November 7).

Despite knowledge of these developments, the government was slow to respond. Local officials are rumored to be either ambivalent or even sympathetic to the militants. The local administrator was replaced in October under a hail of allegations that he aided the fighters. The main religious parties, JI and the JUI have been loath to confront Fazlullah, as they both fight for influence in the region and fear alienating potential supporters.

In July, the government dispatched the first group of army and paramilitary troops to patrol the region, though these proved to be easily intimidated and thus ineffective. After more than two months, on October 24, four detachments of the Frontier Corps were sent in as reinforcements. This force comprised some 3,000 personnel, including 16 platoons of the Frontier Constabulary and six platoons of the Frontier Reserve Police (*The Dawn*, October 25). One day later, a suicide attack in Mingora killed at least 17 troops and four civilians (Reuters UK, October 28). Two days after that, the heads of two paramilitary soldiers were paraded through the streets of Matta with a stern warning that the men were allies of the United States and that other traitors would suffer a similar fate (*New York Times*, November 2).

Since the October 24 deployment, more than 200 men from the Frontier Corps (and possibly some from the Frontier Constabulary) have surrendered to the militants. The morale of the armed forces in Swat and elsewhere is low due to abduction, beheading of captive troops, increasingly sanguinary and brazen suicide attacks, deals with the militants, decisive military defeats and the demoralizing task of fighting one's own citizens. These difficulties have resulted in numerous troop defections and many paramilitary and military personnel choosing to leave service. The evacuation of the government and incapacity of the security forces have left the population

in Swat and elsewhere vulnerable to ravages of the militants and fearful of swift airborne assaults by an ever-more humiliated army.

On November 3, President Pervez Musharraf declared martial law, ostensibly to help fight terrorism. While lawyers, opposition party members, and human rights activists were arrested, Musharraf's government released more than two dozen Islamists from jail. Reportedly, among those released was Mullah Obaidullah Akhund—the highest ranking Taliban official captured by Pakistani forces. Obaidullah was arrested in February 2007, coincident with U.S. Vice President Cheney's visit to Pakistan to protest Pakistani insouciance towards the Taliban. In exchange for releasing these important Taliban operatives, Pakistani Taliban leader Baitullah Mehsud agreed to release the last of the 211 surviving troops taken hostage in Waziristan in late August (*Newsweek*, November 9). With the under-equipped and ill-prepared security forces already demoralized by a war that pits them against their fellow countrymen and in many cases against co-ethnics and fellow tribesmen, Musharraf's actions are not likely to foster confidence and morale amongst his military. Yet this is exactly what is needed if Pakistani forces are to rally to the cause of tackling the Taliban.

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Turkey's Choice with Barzani: The Gun or the Olive Branch

Shortly after the Turkish National Assembly passed a resolution authorizing the Turkish army to enter northern Iraq, President Massoud Barzani of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG) replied: "If they invade there will be war." Barzani added: "We are not a threat to Turkey and I do not accept the language of threatening and blackmailing from the government of Turkey" (*The Independent*, October 29). Barzani was also unwilling to contemplate a Turkish demand that he send his own KRG troops to fight PKK militants operating out of the extremely mountainous terrain of northeastern Iraq, insisting that his "main mission would be not to allow a Kurdish-Kurdish fight to happen within the Kurdish liberation movement."

President Barzani's statements, and particularly his implicit reference to the PKK as part of "the Kurdish

liberation movement,” inflamed Turkish nationalist sentiment, but played well amongst Iraqi Kurds. Barzani also provoked fury in Turkey in April, when he stated that if Turkey has the right to involve itself in the Kirkuk issue, Iraqi Kurds have the right to involve themselves in Diyarbakir, the largest predominantly Kurdish city in Turkey (*Hurriyet*, April 8). Turkish media reacts quickly to any such statements, and Barzani’s name regularly makes the front page of mass circulation Turkish newspapers, although never preceded with honorific titles such as “Mr.” or “President.”

Since Barzani became president of the KRG and his fellow Kurd and erstwhile rival Jalal Talabani became president of Iraq, the former made public statements that have tended to be more confrontational towards Turkey, while the latter appears to have pursued a more diplomatic discourse with Ankara. Part of the explanation for this difference may come from the fact that KRG President Barzani views his role as catering more to the sensibilities of his Iraqi Kurdish constituents, while Iraqi President Talabani tries to represent all of Iraq. Another part of the explanation may be more personal, however: As President of Iraq, Jalal Talabani receives full Turkish recognition and all the respect due a head of state. In contrast, Turkish media and government officials have consistently snubbed Massoud Barzani, refusing to refer to him as “President,” unwilling to accord him diplomatic honors or dialogue with high Turkish officials, and apparently reluctant to even say “Kurdistan Regional Government.” In an interview with the Turkish newspaper *Milliyet* on October 30, after insisting that he was a friend of Turkey and desired good relations, Barzani asked: “You [Turkey] do not talk to me in an official capacity. You do not accept me as a partner for talks. You do not maintain a dialogue with me. Then suddenly you want me to take action for you against the PKK? Is this a way to do things?”

Governments may conduct politics and diplomacy, but governments are made up of people, and people want recognition and respect from one another. So while Iraqi Kurdish leaders such as Jalal Talabani, Hoshiyar Zebari (Iraq’s foreign minister), Barham Salih (Iraq’s deputy prime minister) and Nechirvan Barzani (the KRG’s prime minister) try to smooth over disputes with Ankara, President Barzani may increasingly see himself as the repository of Iraqi Kurdish pride and dignity in the face of Turkish bullying.

In the October 30 interview with *Milliyet*, Barzani went on to question whether or not a Turkish military incursion into Iraq would really be aimed at the PKK, given that

many such incursions failed in the 1990s. He suggested that perhaps Turkey was more interested in targeting Iraqi Kurdistan as a whole, despite the region’s desire for friendly relations with Turkey. If the Turkish government is indeed intent on targeting Kurdish autonomy in Iraq, then Barzani may reason that nothing will dissuade it, and there is no point in submitting to Ankara or taking the difficult steps needed to contain the PKK militants based in his region. Asked about what would happen if Turkey enacted an embargo on Iraqi Kurdistan, Barzani replied: “We would not starve” (*The Independent*, October 29).

Nonetheless, President Barzani is well aware of landlocked Iraqi Kurdistan’s dependence on Turkey for trade, investment (80% of which comes from Turkey) and an outlet to the world. The KRG’s peshmerga militias are no match for the second largest army in NATO, although together with the PKK they could certainly wage a mountain-based guerrilla war and exact a very heavy toll on Turkish forces. Barzani wishes to avoid a conflict with Turkey, although not at any price. He has ordered stricter measures to deny PKK militants freedom of movement and ease of supply in Iraqi Kurdistan. His prime minister and nephew, Nechirvan Barzani, published an op-ed in the November 5 issue of the *Washington Post* calling for peaceful relations and cooperation between Turkey and the KRG, insisting that the PKK is friend to neither.

Either a military confrontation or an economic embargo would cost Turkey dearly. Turkey’s military knows that it cannot completely dislodge the PKK from the extremely rugged mountains near the border, and an embargo on the KRG would impact Turkey’s economically depressed and volatile Kurdish southeast almost as negatively as it would Iraqi Kurdistan. Turkish companies are also doing brisk business in Iraqi Kurdistan. Such considerations are leading prominent voices in Turkey to begin suggesting that Ankara change its approach and embrace Iraqi Kurdistan. Deniz Baykal, leader of Turkey’s main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), recently stated that Turkey should strengthen its trade and friendly relations with northern Iraq as part of a more sustainable way of reducing terrorism in the long-term (*Hurriyet*, November 10). Influential Turkish columnist Mehmet Ali Birand likewise advocates a new approach towards KRG President Barzani: “Massoud Barzani eats at the White House with President Bush. Then he goes to the European Parliament and has lunch with the representatives. He even tours Europe and makes friends with leaders. What does he find when goes back home? Turkey calls him a tribal chieftain. He is refused admittance. He’s treated as a nobody. This is the attitude that upsets Massoud

Barzani most and goads him into protecting the PKK”
(*Turkish Daily News*, November 10).

Should Turkey’s political and military leadership recognize Iraqi Kurdish autonomy and begin treating KRG leaders with the same level of respect they accord to Turkish Cypriot leaders, the new approach might go a long way towards reassuring Iraqi Kurds and fostering the kind of relationship necessary for cooperation against PKK incursions.

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