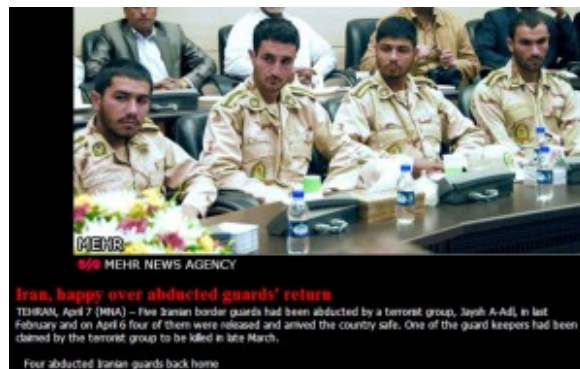


IRAN STILL REFUSING TO CONFIRM DEATH OF MISSING BORDER GUARD



A photo posted yesterday showing the four released border guards in Tehran.

I have been following the story of the five Iranian border guards who were abducted in early February by the Jeish Al-Adl terrorist group. Late in March, the group claimed to have executed one of the guards. Last week, four guards were released and eventually made their way back into Iran, presumably from where they were being held just across the border in Pakistan. Iran's statements relating to the group's claim of killing one guard have been quite strange, alternating between stating flatly that he has been executed while also stating that they can neither confirm nor deny his death.

The speaker of Iran's Parliament added yet another twist to the string of strange statements, today issuing a call for Pakistan to "release" the fifth guard, but the story as it is presented by Fars News appears to leave open whether he is calling for release of a living person or the body of a dead one:

Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani called on the Pakistani officials to double their efforts to release the 5th

Iranian border guard who was abducted by Jeish al-Adl terrorist group in February and kept hostage despite the freedom of his other four colleagues.

"The Pakistani government should certainly be accountable and provide the ground for the freedom of the 5th Iranian border guard as soon as possible," Larijani said in an open session of the parliament in Tehran on Tuesday.

His remarks came amid reports and claims by Jeish al-Adl that the terrorist group has killed, Jamshid Danayee-Far, one of the Iranian border guards kidnapped along Iran-Pakistan borders in February.

The five Iranian border guards were abducted in Jakigour region of Iran's Sistan and Balouchestan Province on February 6 and taken to Pakistan. Jeish al-Adl claimed late last month that it has executed Danayee-Far.

Meantime, Governor-General of Iran's Southeastern Sistan and Balouchestan province Ali Awsat Hashemi this weekend confirmed the death of Danayee-Far, and said Iran is waiting for the transfer of his body.

Just yesterday, we had another "cannot confirm nor deny" version:

Iran's interior minister has said due to lack of sufficient evidence, Iran could not confirm abducted guard's death.

Speaking in the sidelines of country's governors gathering, Abdurreza Rahmani Fazli pointed to the abducted guard's martyrdom. "Available information and document do not compel us to confirm the guard's death," he said, adding that "we do not have sufficient information and four released soldiers who returned back

to the country do not know anything about the other abducted guard – Jamshid Danaeifar.”

Complicating matters even further, Al Monitor reports that no video or photo has appeared to confirm Danaeifar’s death and that Jeish Al-Adl has even removed their claim of killing him from their website:

Of the five guards kidnapped, one, Jamshid Danaeifar, was reportedly killed. However, his body has not been returned and the announcement of his killing on the the Jaish al-Adl website has been taken down. He was the only regular army serviceman of the group. The other four are conscripts. Military service is mandatory for Iranian men.

Commander of the Iranian Border Guard Units General Hossein Zolfaqari told reporters April 6, “Based on Jaish al-Adl’s statements, [Danaeifar] was martyred. But no reason, proof or document ... of his martyrdom has been shown to us. No film or body ... has been presented.” Zolfaqari said that Danaeifar was separated from the other guards approximately a month ago, and the group claims its is unable to deliver his body.

The fact that Danaeifar was separated from the other four guards long before the claim that he had been killed accounts for why the four can shed no light on Danaeifar’s fate.

Meanwhile, we learn that Pakistan has taken action against “separatists” in Baluchistan, killing 30. It is not clear whether Jeish Al-Adl was among those targeted, but the location and aim of the group would be consistent with them. Such action by Pakistan will, of course, find favor in Iran, as the same separatist cause is

active on the Iranian side of the border in the same region. Further Iran-Pakistan cooperation is seen in the start today of a joint naval drill involving the two countries.

Lest we think that Iran and Pakistan have patched up all differences, though, there was yet another twist in the border guard story while I was writing this post. The following story (with an Islamabad dateline) was just put up by the Express Tribune:

A senior official on Monday denied Iranian claims that its border guards, who were abducted by Jaishul Adl militant group, were released in Pakistan.

"According to our information, the Iranian border guards were released after Iran freed 8 members of the Jaishul Adl from Zahedan jail," said the official while requesting anonymity. "The exchange took place on the Iranian soil," the official said, adding that Tehran was deliberately trying to 'externalise' its own domestic problem.

The official said Pakistan extended full cooperation to the Iranian authorities to recover the abducted guards but could not find any evidence suggesting they were brought into the country.

Recall that when Jeish Al-Adl announced that it had killed Danaeifar, it had issued a call for release of some its members held by Iran or another guard would be killed. Pakistan had denied from the start that the guards were inside Pakistan. This latest twist is very interesting in light of this claim on Saturday from Iran:

The Pakistan-based Jeish Al-Adl terrorist group is working on a new scenario to transfer the body of the slain Iranian border guard, Jamshid Danayee-Far, to Iran through smugglers,

informed sources said on Saturday.

“Jeish Al-Adl intends to transfer the body of this martyr to Iran through smugglers in a bid to claim that he has not been killed in Pakistan,” an informed source told FNA on Saturday.

The source pointed to the new statements of Jeish Al-Adl’s Spokesman Abdol Raouf Rigi that the terrorist group would not hand over the body of the slain Iranian border guard to Iran, and said the group wants to pretend that Danayee-Far has been killed in Iran; to do so they need to transfer the body to the country, and “such statements show that this grouplet has so far been unable to transfer the body to Iran”.

Regarding the issue of where the guards were held, the Al Monitor story linked above links to a site with photos purporting to show the guards as they were crossing the mountains from Pakistan back into Iran. That post is not in English (and the English version of the story is only a short summary), but from a quick glance at the photos, it seems to me that it would be very difficult to prove conclusively just where the photos were taken in relation to the Iran-Pakistan border.

It would seem that the issue of Danaeifar’s fate is far from resolved. I will keep an eye on developments.