

IRAN-PAKISTAN BORDER INCIDENTS CONTINUE

The last time we checked in on the ongoing incidents along the Iran-Pakistan border, fourteen Iranian border guards had been killed on October 25 in an attack and Iran had promptly executed sixteen prisoners the next day in retaliation. A subgroup within Jundallah, Jeish Al-Adl, was credited for the attack, and Iran made veiled accusations about what countries might be backing the group.

A bit later, on November 5, an Iranian legislator (who seems to make mostly hard-liner pronouncements) publicly accused the United States and Pakistan's ISI of being behind Jeish Al-Adl's actions:

An Iranian lawmaker says the US and Pakistani intelligence services lead the Pakistan-based Jaish-ul-Adl terrorist group responsible for the recent deadly attack on Iranian border guards.

"The key point in this case is the role that US spy agencies play by means of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in conducting such terrorist attacks. This issue has been confirmed in the meeting between representatives of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and members of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee," Javad Karimi Qoddousi said on Monday.

He added, "The direct affiliation of these groups to US spy agencies and the ISI's control over such terrorist outfits have been authenticated."

The next day, a prosecutor in the border town of Zabol was killed. Jeish Al-Adl quickly claimed responsibility:

The Sunni armed group Jaish-ul Adl has claimed responsibility for the assassination of a public prosecutor in Iran's southeast, media reports say.

Thursday's reports came a day after Mousa Nouri – prosecutor of the city of Zabol, which lies near the Afghan border in Sistan-Baluchestan province – was slain in a “terrorist attack,” according to officials.

Jaish-ul Adl, the rebel group formed last year whose name means Army of Justice in Arabic, said in a statement Wednesday night that the killing was carried out in retaliation for a mass hanging last week.

“After the hanging of 16 innocent young Baluchis, the fighters decided to take revenge and kill a judicial official,” read the statement posted on the group's website, jaishuladl.blogspot.fr.

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Security forces later killed four rebels in a separate clash near Mirjaveh, a town close to the border with Pakistan, officials said last week.

But Iran announced on November 18 that they had captured the prosecutor's killers. They went to great lengths to point out that the killers were drug smugglers unrelated to Jeish Al-Adl:

Senior Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) officials announced that the terrorists who assassinated Zabol Prosecutor Mousa Nouri and his driver earlier this month did not pursue any political agenda and were drug-traffickers.

The IRGC Ground Force announced an hour ago that it has arrested the culprits who assassinated Nouri and his driver “in a complicated intelligence

operation”.

Deputy Head of the IRGC’s Public Relations Department General Ramezan Sharif told FNA that the assailants had no political motivation and affiliation and were drug-traffickers.

“This team (of terrorists) was no way related to opposition groups,” he said.

“The terror has been conducted in relation to smuggling,” Gen. Sharif said, but declined to provide any further details.

The article goes on to present further evidence supporting Iran’s claim:

After the assassination, the outlawed Jeish Al-Adl radical Sunni Wahhabi movement whose members had killed 14 Iranian border guards two weeks before Nouri’s terror incident, claimed responsibility for the assassination of the Zabol prosecutor.

But, Iranian officials rejected the claim, saying Jeish Al-Adl was just bluffing to boast about its power. Iranian officials said another terrorist group had most likely conducted the attack.

“Jeish Al-Adl group has claimed responsibility for the assassination of Zabol prosecutor, but it is lying and we did not want to announce this issue on TV; when the group saw that the assassination had taken place, it wanted to attribute it to itself,” Iran’s Deputy Judiciary Chief Ebrahim Rayeesi said Sunday.

He underlined that the judiciary is suspicious of the role of another group and will continue this line of probe until achieving results, adding that the public will be informed of the results

once investigations end.

“This group (Jeish Al-Adl) has made mistakes in its statement; first they said that they killed one person while two people had been killed and they also gave a wrong place and wrong time for the assassination,” he said, explaining that Jeish Al-Adl couldn’t have been behind the assassination.

It appears that Iran is both saying that Nouri’s killers were drug smugglers with no political affiliation and that they were influenced by some group other than Jeish Al-Adl. I’ve seen nothing further on this particular point.

Although they mostly stayed out of the headlines, border incidents have continued at a high pace since Nouri’s killing. But with the capture of five Iranian border guards on February 6, Jeish Al-Adl has claimed responsibility, and this time they have released photos to confirm their role. Yesterday, Iran publicly protested to Pakistan’s ambassador over the incident.

It is interesting that descriptions of Jeish Al-Adl now describe them as being funded by Saudi Arabia and assisted by Pakistan’s ISI. There also now are references to them having al Qaeda connections. The Saudi connection usually is described as coming from Bandar’s growing unease over improving US-Iranian relations.

I doubt we have seen the last moves by the various parties involved in these incidents, so I will keep an eye out for further developments.