

Iran's Secret Meeting With Israel

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As the Islamic government in Iran attempts to circle the wagons against the growing popular unrest, cracks within the top leadership itself have begun to appear.

Deep divisions are opening up between President Ahmadinejad and some of his former supporters in the Majles (parliament). On Wednesday, a Majles panel implicated a senior official and Ahmadinejad ally, Saeed Mortazavi, for the murder of three detainees who were arrested during last summer's protests.

Rifts are also developing inside the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), pitting top IRGC generals against the supreme leader. A closed-door meeting last summer between nearly 100 generals and the supreme leader marked a turning point for many IRGC officers, when Gen. Ruholamini accused Ayatollah Khamenei of ordering the murder of detainees — including Ruholamini's own son in Kahrizak prison.

One of the more ironic divisions has opened between Ahmadinejad and Ayatollah Khamenei, surrounding the supposedly secret mission of Ahmadinejad's top adviser to Europe to meet with Israeli emissaries.

Ahmadinejad has repeatedly called for Israel to be "wiped off the map," so the very idea of him sending this chief of staff, Efsandiar Rahim-Mashai, to meet with Israeli emissaries sent shockwaves throughout the Tehran establishment.

Mashai went to a European country to meet with individuals close to the Israeli government to seek their assistance in setting up an "accidental" face-to-face meeting with President Barack Obama during the United Nations General Assembly in New York last September, Iranian sources told Newsmax.

In exchange, he said that Ahmadinejad would tone down his anti-Israeli rhetoric, and stop making statements about wiping Israel off the map.

"Ahmadinejad was frustrated because all the contacts with the U.S. were going through Khamenei," one source told Newsmax on condition of anonymity. "He wanted to be able to show that he was the one who could make the U.S. connection and win concessions from President Obama."

Mashai is married to one of Ahmadinejad's daughters, and is sometimes referred to as "Ahmadinejad's brain" by the Iranian president's detractors in Tehran.

"Mashai was bounced by the supreme leader when Ahmadinejad tried to appoint him vice president last summer because he had made pro-Israel statements in the past," said Kenneth Katzman, an Iran analyst with the Congressional Research Service.

News of Mashai's contact with the Israeli emissaries in Europe filtered back to Tehran and ultimately to Khamenei, who was furious to learn of the unauthorized overture. But until now, Khamenei has not let on that he was aware of Ahmadinejad's ploy.

It's not the first time Ahmadinejad has gone behind Khamenei's back and Khamenei has kept quiet. Two years ago during a routine anti-bugging sweep, Khamenei's security team discovered an electronic eavesdropping device in the Supreme Leader's office and learned that it had been placed there by men working for Davoud Ahmadinejad, the president's brother. At the time, Davoud Ahmadinejad ran the presidential security office.

"If anyone else had been president, Khamenei would have dismissed him because of this," a well-placed source in Tehran told Newsmax. "But he needs Ahmadinejad, because they both agree on the imperative of destroying Israel."

Khamenei and Ahmadinejad share a belief that a nuclear exchange with Israel will usher in the return of the 12th imam and the reign of Islamic government over the entire world.

Unlike earlier presidents, who often needed coaching from Khamenei to make anti-Israeli statements, with Ahmadinejad the anti-Israel vitriol "came naturally," the source said.

This made Ahmadinejad's overture to Israel through Mashai all the more upsetting to Khamenei, who has begun to suspect Ahmadinejad's loyalty to him.

"Even though Ahmadinejad owes his job and his legitimacy to Khamenei, he privately detests him," a source in Tehran tells Newsmax.

Ahmadinejad is secretly working behind the scenes to get rid of Khamenei and ultimately the office of supreme leader itself, to install a military-style dictatorship run by himself and allies in the IRGC. "He is grooming Mashai as his successor," the source added.

Secrets such as these are leaking with increasing frequency to the opposition and to the outside world, especially from inside the Revolutionary Guards and the bassij, congressional analyst Katzman told Newsmax.

“There’s a lot of hedging going on. Lots of Revolutionary Guards are moving out of the country, sending family members to Dubai or to India. Others are putting out feelers to the opposition, to guarantee themselves a future if the regime goes down,” he said.

Digital recordings of intelligence service internal meetings have made their way to the opposition, where they have discussed the best tactics to use in crushing non-violent protests and how to place informants inside opposition organizations.

A recent example of the “hedging” Katzman refers to involves Revolutionary Guards officer Mohammad Reza Madhi, a former top security officer in Khamenei’s office, who sought refuge in Thailand last year and now is calling openly for regime change.

A familiar figure in Iran because of his prominent position in a veterans association of victims of chemical warfare (known as the Bonyad-e Janbazan), Madhi said in a recent interview that he was in touch with his former colleagues and others inside Iran for 10 hours or more every day. “I use mobile phones, e-mails, and other means to communicate with them. I know what is going on in Iran every day.”