The Function and Threat of the Terrorists of the Army of God Group in Sistan & Balochistan

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Abstract

Objective: The main purpose of this research is to explain the function and threat of the terrorist group of the Army of God in Sistan & Balochistan and reactions of Iran to the terrorist group.

Method: The method used in this research is descriptive-analytical and collectiong information from the United Nations, Judicary of Iran, the High Council for Human Rights Center of Judiciary of Iran websites; and secondary data and library resources. The main question is that how has the Army of God acted and threatened Iranian Shia state and people in Sistan & Balochistan? How has Iran reacted to it? The hypothesis is that the foreign countries supported the Army of God with modern military technologies and finance, and Iran combated terrorism.

Results: Findings of this research indicates that the Army of God has benefitted from ambushes, kidnappings, suicide bombings, and assassinations to kill the Iranian Shia state and Shias living in Sistan & Balochistan. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps combatted the Army of God Group. Iran also sought to have the support of the international community, the United Nations in specific and reinforced border security with bi-lateral cooperation with Pakistan.

Conclusion: This research concludes with the assertion that Army of God's religious extremism in Sistan & Balochistan has been connected to violence experienced by the Shia communities living along Sistan & Balochistan of Iran. It is further posited that religious differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims have reinforced sectarian conflicts.

Key Words: Army of God, Function, Threat, State of Iran, Shia Population, Combatting Terrorism, Shia and Sunni Conflict

1. Introduction

How the Army of God, a small Sunni extremist terrorist group in Sistan & Balochistan act in the aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq is assessed in this research. The Bush administration in 2003 expected changing the government in Iraq to reduce regional instability and promote the democracy in the Middle East. Instead, the American invasion of Iraq accelerated the rise of several radical sectarian terrorist groups in the region, which were previously marginal. Much of the scholarly work on terrorism has focused on internationally known terrorist groups, like Al Qaeda. The Army of God not internationally known terrorist group has successfully managed to threaten Iran through many terrorist acts, since the American invasion of Iraq, perpetrated in the Tasooki region located in the southwest of Zabol, Balochistan province in 2004, when many of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) were killed in 2005, to name a few.

The main question is: How has the Army of God acted and threatened Iranian Shia state and people in Sistan & Balochistan since its emergence? How has Iran reacted to it? The hypothesis in this research is that the foreign countries supported the Army of God with modern military technologies and finance.

To answer this question, the securitization theory is applied. The theory, developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap De Wilde (1998), addresses the securitization phenomenon, based on the premise that how the Army of God do acts and threatens Iran. The focus of this theory is about the non-state actors, who challenge the traditional state-centric views of international relations, like the neo-realism.

The assessment here is run on Army of God's most active period (2003-2009), while 2009 coincides with the group's leader Abdol Malik Rigi execution. When necessary, references is made to the political rhetoric of Iranian authorities after 2009, as to illustrate the more recent developments. In this period, after putting almost an end to Army of God operations, a new grouping named Ansar Movement of Iran was formed from the Army of God's remaining members who attacked the town of Saravan in October 2013 (Khabar Online, 2013, Shayan, 2017); their operations are not discussed in this research. It is notable that the assessments are not extended to 'Arab Spring', which began in 2011 and thus excludes its possible effects on Army of God.

This research consists of the following sections: the method and sources is presented in Sec. 2; the Army of God in the available related literature is discussed in Sec. 3; the emergence, actions and threats are described in Sec.4 and the research is concluded in Sec. 5.

2. Research Method and Sources

The method used in this research is descriptive-analytical but the absence of a specific framework is evident in the theoretical frameworks adopted on this issue. At best, they are assessed through a realist perception that emphasizes on the internal dynamics of interactions between Army of God and the Iranian state. The focus of this research is on the Iranian political authorities' discursive

construction and securitization of the subject organization. The Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde's (1998) securitization theory constitute the basis for the theoretical approach, here as to realize the causation of why and how was Army of God securitized as a threat to the Shia state and the public in Sistan & Balochistan?

The securitization is adopted when an issue is considered as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedures by the authorities (Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde, 1998: 24, Wilkinson, 2007: 22).

According to Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde, securitizing actors consist of who securitize issues by declaring an action threatened. Securitization occurs "when a securitizing actor uses a rhetoric of existential threat and thereby takes an issue out of what under those conditions is normal politics" (Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde, 1998: 36; Åtland & K. V. Bruusgaard, 2009: 337). In Iran, the actors include the Shia political, governmental and religious leaders. These actors draw some intelligible decisions as a regime of truth regarding the nature of the threat (Eroukhmanoff 2019, 120-123).

Threats, are referred to the social structure concerning its existential livelihood, like when Army of God claimed that the Shia population has benefitted from the resources and services of the state. Such statements provide the grounds where the Baloch people and Army of God frame their identity as a religious Sunni ethnic minority who believe that they have been and are being oppressed by the Shia Iranian state (Elling, 2013: 74). The Baloch, as an oppressed religious minority, has extended the gap between Shias and Sunnis within the Iranian society. In response, the political narrative, shaped by Iranian politico-religious authorities and Marja, like Vahid-Khorasani and Makarem Shirazi, has resorted to Army of God's securitization.

The threatened actors, consist of who are portrayed as being threatened and who have a legitimate claim to survival (Elling, 2013: 76). The two threatened actors in this research refer to the Shia state, and the majority Shia population in Sistan & Balochistan.

The viewers, an issue is securitized when the collective viewers accept it as a threat and support the adopted measures of securitization, otherwise, the attempt would fail (Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde 1998: 23-24 and Elling, 2013: 79). In this context, focus on viewer requires perception as to differentiating securitization from security (Eroukhmanoff 2019, 180-185; Léonard and Kaunert, 2011: 60-65).

The members of the Iranian society, in general, condemn acts of terror, and for this claim, they do not need to have any formal means to exert pressure on how the state would respond to these acts. At its extreme, here, the IRGC found the core viewer that supported Ayatollah Khamenei's securitizing effort. Next to IRGC, there exist wide range of potential viewers like the members of the political organs, representatives, and Iranian councils to be considered as the supportive means. Attempt is made to assess the three most effective and influential viewers regarding securitization in Iran, the IRGC, the Ministry of Interior, and the Council of Human Rights to United Nations (UN).

An existential threat to a threatened actor occurs when viewers accept a securitizing move. When a movement is securitized subject to urgency, the measures therein are legitimized (Eroukhmanoff 2019, 118-120).when acceptance is gained, the emergency measures are adopted by viewers, which take the form of coercion, sanctions, or consent, in the case here, the emergency measure adopted by the IRGC in response to the threat posed by Army of God was to confront it by resorting to militarily force.

The initial data for this research are extracted from the resources of United States Department of State, UN; IRGC resources and the Human Rights Commission of Iran, and state departments like the Ministries of Judiciary and Interior. The secondary sources, consist of books and researchs. The assessments reflect an almost total consensus on the image of Army of God perceived by the Iranian political authorities in the data, where almost every single treatment frames Army of God as a threat.

3. Army of God in Existing Research

The studies run on Army of God's activities are few due to its being a relatively new terrorist group. This theme is catagorized into three categories.

In the first category the social and economic grounds for Army of God's terrorism are assessed, where, Zambelis (2007) refers to the social and economic difficulties that the Baloch people encounter. To him the causation of social discomfort in Sistan & Balochistan is the poor climatic conditions and social and economic mismanagement unlike other regions of Iran. The Army of God members, in specific, and the Baloch population in general claim that they have been and are being marginalized by the Iranian state due to their ethnic and sectorial identity.

The connection between Army of God's acts of terror and economic marginalization is not assessed in Zambelis study. According to James Piazza (2007) the exercise of minority group discrimination and marginalization on the state side are identified as the factors motivating terrorist campaigns in a country. The sense of otherness vis-à-vis the majority, and alienation from the state and mainstream society, enhance the emergence of long-term malcontent among minorities, which, when reaches its peak, a political violence is born. According to Piazza (2007: 339-341), both the malcontent and marginalization of minorities lead to political violence and assessing this issue is essential to gain an in-depth understanding of the connection between the economic discrimination and terrorism. Army of God has been supported by the socio-economically deprived Sistan & Balochistan population and by recruiting many to carry out acts of terror.

In the assessments here it is revealed that the arguments by Zambelis and Piazza, lack some comprehensive elements. This issue is addressed in this research. It is claimed that, even though Army of God has an anti-Iranian stance because of socio-economic deprivation in Sistan & Balochistan, it has an anti-Shia perspective. These issues have not been assessed jointly in the available studies.

In the *second* research category, the influence of the Indo-Pakistani reformist ulama movement which is an Islamic revivalist movement within Sunni Hanafi Islam and formed in India is assessed in Iran. According to Wiig et al. ([2009]) the transformation of Sunni Islam through the growth and success of the austere Indo-Pakistani reformist ulama movement underlies radicalism and sectarian conflict in many Muslim countries, including Iran. Deobandi movement has influenced only Sistan & Balochistan province, residents, thus, formation of Army of God. Both the Army of God and Deobandi members have had close relationships with extremist anti-Shia movements like the extremist group in Pakistan (Dudoignon, 2018: 177-180). In this sense, Army of God is an anti-Iranian, and anti-Shia terrorist group in this research.

In the *third* category the focus is on the threat of Iran to Army of God. Sune Engel Rasmussen (2021) has broadly assessed the relationship between the Baloch and Army of God in Iran, where, the acts of terror perpetrated by Army of God are justified as being the result of malcontent with the Baloch due to isolation and economic marginalization by the state. This researcher sympathizes with the Baloch and shares their viewpoints, and does not consider the threat of Army of God as critical, as the state political authorities think it is.

A different theoretical approach is applied to understand and explain the function and responses of the Iranian state to the threat of Army of God as precis as possible.

4. The Analyses

4.1. The Army of God's Dangers and Functions

The Army of God emerged in March 2004 as a terrorist group in the Tasooki region. Many Iranian political authorities have sought to securitize their threat ever since. Mohammad Khazaee, the then representative of Iran in the UN, is identified as a primary Shia securitization actor, seeking to securitize the Army of God threat at the UN. In his speech delivered in 2008 at the UN Security Council meeting regarding terrorist threats to international peace and security, he characterized Army of God as a terrorist group that has threatened the Iranian Shia state and society to gather international support vs. the Iranian responses to it:

Army of God is a threat to Shiism in Iran. Iran fights Army of God according to the UN Resolution 1267 and other resolutions introduced for targeting the terrorists and extremist groups. Iran needs the support of international community, and the UN plays a vital role in this context. Iran is negotiating with neighboring countries to improve security on its eastern border (Khazaee, 2008).

The officially domestic news agencies, like the Fars, Tabnak, and Gerdab, (RCDC newsletter), have announced Army of God as a threat, because it has applied different many strategies to attack the Iranian Shia state and Shias living along Sistan & Balochistan *(*Habeeb 2012, 47). In this context, Reza Lakzaee, a Shia seminarian of the Quom Seminary, was kidnapped by Army of God in the Tasooki attack, referred to the statements of the former leader of Army of God, Abdol Malik Rigi that Shias must leave Sistan & Balochistan (Lakzaee, 2009).

Ayatollah Hossein Vahid-Khorasani, an Iranian Shia Marja, by condemning the acts of terror and kidnapping strategies by Army of God in Tasooki, emphasizes on the role of Iranian security forces and the necessity of public security (Vahid-Khorasani, 2005).

The Army of God poses threat by the acts of ambushes, kidnappings, suicide bombings, and assassinations, (Tabnak and Fars from 2004 and 2008; For a Western source see: United States Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism 2007). The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) at the Center of Excellence of the US Department of Homeland Security provides the statistics regarding the count of Shia incidents, injuries, and targets of terror perpetrated by Army of God, against Shia citizens between 2006 and 2010. According to the 2010 GTD, in this period, Army of God carried out ten acts of terror, by targeting major Shia state official's government, police officers, the military officers, and ordinary citizens, while the domestic news agencies have reported 20 acts of terror in the same period (Mardomsalari 2011). While the reason for such a significant disparity between sources is unclear, one can speculate that the GTD has underestimated the number of attacks for political reasons. Yet, it is possible that the Iranian state may have overstated the frequency of attacks to legitimize its responses further.

In this research, only the acts of terror perpetrated by Army of God, which received widespread publicity in Iran and abroad, are assessed. In 2004, Army of God members attacked cars traveling between Zabol and Zahedan, killing 22 Shia Iranians and injuring many others, including several city officials of Zahedan (Aftab News, 2007). In 2005, members of Army of God bombed a bus in Zahedan with 43 members of IRGC, 13 of whom were killed, and 30 were injured. In 2006, 11 members of the IRGC and nine Army of God members were wounded in an IRGC attack on the group (Syasat Roz, 2013). This incident corresponds with the claim of Maskalenko and McCauley (2009: 240) that terrorism follows a trajectory that begins with grievance and ends in violence against people. The IRGC has attributed the death of its Shia member, Ali Shahriyari, in 2006 to Army of God. The representative of the Supreme Leader of Iran in Sistan & Balochistan, stated in a public address that Shahriyari's death would strengthen the Iranian resolution to resist Army of God efforts in undermining the country (Soleimani, 2006).

In 2007, Army of God members attacked an army checkpoint in Saravan and kidnapped 16 Shia army officials (Ettela'at, 2013). Mohammad Yazdi, the chairman of the Supreme Council of the Society of Quom Seminary Teachers and a religious and political authority, condemned this act of terror: *The enemies of Iran support Army of God to widen the Shia and Sunni conflict and sow dissent* (Yazdi, 2009). Such statements justify the notion that Army of God is a threat to the security of the Shia majority. In 2008, Army of God attacked a Shia gathering event where the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hossain, the third Shia Imam, was being celebrated in Chabahar. While Tabnak reported that in this crowed of Shias 28 died and 50 were injured, while Gerdab reported that 37 died and 80 were injured.

The exact number of casualties is not known. Following the incident, nine Army of God members were arrested, and a delegation consisting of the representatives of the Supreme Leader and Presidential officers with many other authorities, traveled to Chabahar to express sympathy and solidarity with the Shia victims' families and to attend funeral ceremonies. In another incident, Heshmatollah Attarzadeh Niaki, an Iranian Shia diplomat in Pakistan was disappeared on 18 November 2008. Heidar Moslehi, the former Minister of Intelligence, attributed this disappearance of 18 November 2008 to Army of God (Embassy of Iran in Pakistan, 2010). Addressing the Iranian Shia public, an official in Sistan & Balochistan, the Rector General of Sistan & Balochistan in 2009 sought to securitize the Army of God threat by stating that *Army of God wants to destabilize the Iranian Shia state*.

According to Ettela'at (2011), in another incident in 2009, 27 Shias were killed, and 306 were injured in the Amir al-Momenin Great Mosque of Zahedan. Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran and the highest religious and political authority in the country, condemned the acts of terror perpetrated by Army of God in Zahedan. He stated that it is a crime against the Shia people who gather in the mosque to worship Allah. This bloody event is planned by external enemies to spark a conflict between Shias and Sunnis in Iran (Khamenei, 2010). Ayatollah Khamenei was explicitly addressing a Shia audience. Moreover, by refering to the conflict between the Shia majority and Sunni minority in Iran, he was clearly emphasized the religious aspect of the Army of God threat. Ali Abdollahi, the deputy Minister of the Interior, stated that the acts of terror in Amir al-Momenin Mosque in 2009 were conducted by Army of God of which many members were arrested (Abdollahi, 2014).

In 2009, Noor Ali Shooshtari, the Deputy Commander of IRGC in the province of Sistan & Balochistan, four senior members of the Revolutionary Guard and 37 other individuals, all Shia where killed in an apparent suicide bombing, (Hamshahri, 2009). Ala'eddin Borojerdi, the Head of National Security Commission of the Parliament, stated that Shooshtari had asked the Baloch tribal leaders to negotiate with Army of God members in the province of Sistan & Balochistan. Army of God sought to undermine these efforts (Borojerdi, 2010). Mohammad Khakpour, the Major General of the IRGC in 2009, stated in a press conference that the martyrdom of Shooshtari and several Baloch leaders symbolize Shia and Sunni unity in Iran. The attack will not go without a response. Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, the Iranian Shia Marja, condemned the Zahedan attack, emphasizing the responsibility of the security forces to provide security for Iranian Shia society. While this address was public, the primary viewer was the Shia Iranian security forces, whose duty is to respond to such attacks. The statement once again emphasized the sectarian nature of the conflict and the threat of Army of God to Shia Iranians (Makarem Shirazee, 2009).

4.2. Foreign Countries' Support for the Army of God

Khazaee's statement in 2008, alleged *the US and Israel's* involvement in Army of God support. His securitizing move at the UN was addressed towards

many key viewers like: the international community, the Iranian security forces, and Iranian political authorities. By alleging foreign powers in violations of sovereignty, he sought to gain support among the international community for the Iranian military response to Army of God and strengthen the internal security institutions. Khazaee's securitizing statement corresponds with the political authorities' statements in Iran. Regardless of these statements being correct or not, the US and Israel's alleged involvement in these operations constitute the central core of the opinions in circulation by the political authorities. Though the US and Israel presumably support Army of God, they are neither threatened actors nor securitizing actors, but have a marginal role as functional actors in the securitization process (Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde, 1998: 36).

The statements by Iranian authorities must be assessed within the context of US and Israeli intelligence agencies' activities increment in the Persian Gulf region since the American invasion of Iraq and the opportunities presented by the lack of centralized control in the regional border in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Rector General of Sistan & Balochistan, 2009; Javani, 2008). Iranian authorities somehow connected this regional dimension to the Army of God threat in state media to provoke reaction and gather support from specific viewers, like the IRGC and the Ministery of the Interior of Iran.

The most politico-religious position and Marja of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran, has promoted the narrative that Army of God members have threatened Shias along Iran's eastern borders by referring to the US and Israel's contributions in supporting the latter. He stated:

Army of God conducted acts of terror, against Shias in Sistan & Balochistan, even though there is no doubt that external powers, the US and Israel, have supported this group. Sunni authorities need to pay attention to the issue and confront Army of God directly (Khamenei, 2009, 2011).

This statement was directed at both Shia and Sunni authorities, once again, emphasizing the sectarian nature of the threat which is being supported by the external powers widen the gap between the two groups. Likewise, the statement reinforced the established narrative that Army of God is an existential threat that needs to be confronted by Iran's security forces.

Basij is of the same opinion, although Israel's involvement is the core of their speeches. They alleged that the Mossad officers by pretending to be American agents under the so-called 'Operation Flag' between recruited members of Army of God 2007 and 2008 (Basij Press of Iran, 2011; Perry, 2012). Basij Press was careful to stress that *Israel generally works with the US, not against it* (Basij Press of Iran, 2011), indicating that the relationships between the US and Israel in this context. These statements introduce Army of God as an existential threat, supported by the enemies of Iran like the US and Israel.

By emphasizing the threat presented by Army of God to the Shia in the subject region, and referring to the support of the US and Israel for their actions, Rigi, the founder of Army of God, added a religious dimension to terrorist operations in order to have more support from the US and Israel. In an interview, after his arrest in 2010, Rigi confirmed US support, by stating that the US military offered advice

on how to conduct terrorist acts in the center of Sistan & Balochistan and provided weapons next to the financial support (Voice of America, 2009).

The Ministry of Intelligence of Iran, referred to US support of Army of God, the members of which are being trained in special facilities in Texas and Nevada. This ministry reported that Army of God didn't have any specific funding to conduct acts of terror in Iran. The external supports is not limited to the US, Israel is involved as well. Both of them systematically support Army of God in finances and training (Ministry of Intelligence of Iran, 2016). What is revealed in this context supports the provision of additional information to enhance the discussions by the political authorities as to legitimize and justify the measures taken by the Iranian state vs. Army of God.

4.3. Combatting the Army of God

In the Khazaee's announcement the UN 1267 and other resolutions were referenced to support the policies and measures against domestic terrorism, the actions of Army of God in specific. This message is directed to the IRGC, with stressing IRGC's responsibility to defend the country against internal and external terrorist threats. The purpose of this securitizing move was to reinforce the view of Army of God as a threat to the state and Shia Iranians in the eyes of those most directly responsible for Iran's defense. Securitization theory suggests that it cannot merely rely on the speeches by the securitizing actor, instead, viewers need to accept a threat if adopting a security measure is sought. The significance of the IRGC in this process can be explained through its being a powerful and influential pillar in Iran. The IRGCs' *Special Forces*, an affiliation of the Quds Force, is the intelligence arm in defense operations cooperating with the Ministry of Intelligence. The IRGC is not only responsible for Iran's security, but is a crucial viewer for securitizing actors at the apex of the political structure.

The former Commander of the IRGC, Mohammad Ali Ja'fari, at a meeting entitled The Security of Iran and Sistan & Balochistan Region in the East, announced that the IRGC is committed to confront and fight terrorist groups like Army of God. This region, was assigned to the IRGC between 1983 and 1984. This organization demilitarized the terrorists in a short time and restored security in the region (Ja'fari, 2009). According to Ja'fari:

Since 2006-2007, security along Sistan & Balochistan and the responsibility to confront Army of God has been re-assigned to the IRGC. However, this time, we have a long-term commitment to combat Army of God and re-establish a favorable security situation (Ja'fari, 2009).

This statement indicates that the IRGC was receptive to the securitizing means adopted by the higher echelons. The notion of Army of God as a threat was internalized by the Major General of the IRGC, consequently, an emergency measure was undertaken by the organization in response to this threat.

4.4. Other Efforts of Iranian Authorities vs. the Army of God

Iran seeks to have the support of the international community, the UN in specific for its responses to Army of God, though the contents of the speeches on

the issue vary. In speeches made to the UN Human Rights Commission, the killing and acts of terror were described as a violation of human rights by Army of God, (Human Rights Commissions of Iran 2014). Members of the High Council for Human Rights of the Judiciary of Iran similarly sought international support based on human rights, through arguments that the actions of Army of God are anti-human which needs to be assessed in depth (The High Council for Human Rights of Judiciary of Iran 2009).

By emphasizing on the human rights dimension, such speeches seek to make the anti-terrorism measures by Iran legitimate near the key international viewers who are concerned not only with Iran's responses to terrorism, but the effects on its victims as well. As an indication of the success of this strategy, an emergency measure was adopted by this Council (UN News Center, 2011).

Reza Sajjadi, the Iranian representative at the Human Rights Council in 2011, suggested that US support of Army of God contradicts the human rights agenda. He urged this Council to investigate the relationships of the US with Army of God and pointed that the US has a history of abusing human rights, for example those of the Muslims inmates of Guantanamo Bay. According to the Judiciary of Iran, High Council for Human Right (2013), it seems that such claims are effective as to keep the issue open for resolution. The former UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, in 2014 condemned acts of terror by Army of God and extended his condolences to the families of victims of these acts of terror. Such statements reinforce the securitizing message conveyed by speeches delivered by Khazaee and Sajjadi.

The former Minister of the Interior, Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar, in 2010 adopted emergency measures in the insecure eastern border and the threat of Army of God. He condemned foreign countries [such as the US and Israel] that have provided Army of God with technological and military support. In 2009, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Yusef Reza Gilani, discussed a bilateral cooperation as to reinforce border security with Mohammad-Najjar (Ettela'at, 2009). Mohammad-Najjar emphasized on the militant ambitions of Army of God and it's becoming stronger and condemned their role in widening the Shia and Sunni conflict gap in the country and emphasized on the need for increased security along Sistan & Balochistan (Ettela'at, 2009).

The Council of Sustainable Security and Development on Sistan & Balochistan was established by Mohammad-Najjar in 2011. The primary objective of this issue is to control the whole eastern border and observe border traffic (Ettela'at, 2010). Such emergency measures indicate the desire to inhibit Army of God members' free movements across the border and eliminate the widespread acceptance of Army of God labelled as a securitized threat.

5. Conclusion

The function and threat of the Army of God in the aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq is assessed in this research. It is found that the Army of God applied ambushes, kidnappings, suicide bombings, and assassinations to kill

IRGC members, border guards and Iranian diplomats in Pakistan and Shia people in Sistan & Baluchistan.

The differences between the Shia and Sunni sectors of Islam in Iran erupted since the American invasion of Iraq. The US interventions have been aimed at exacerbating this rift. The Baloch people see themselves as a suppressed minority who has not enjoyed its rightful share of Iranian economic resources as to develop its socio-cultural dimentions. The Army of God members belong to Baloch race who as an organization seek to defend the Baloch rights in Iran through extreme measures, that is, committing acts of terror against the Iranian state official and the Shia leaders where the Shia population is not exempt. Speeches made by Makarem Shirazi and Vahid-Khorasani, the two highest Shia Marjas in Iran, highlighted the sectarian feature of the threat by Army of God. Ayatollah Vahid-Khorasani and Makarem Shirazi, in particular, focused on this issue, condemning the terrors committed by Army of God against Shias in Sistan & Balochistan region.

The findings in these assessments also indicate that the economic marginalization of the Baloch minority is the core of all these violation of law, in this context, the Army of God terrorism vs. the Shia state and population in Sistan & Balochistan. Army of God is an anti-Iranian Shia population with a focus on the same in Sistan & Balochistan. The existing Shia and Sunni conflict has been and is exacerbating in Iran since the American invasion of Iraq.

The assessments in this research find that Iranian authorities have pursued multiple strategies and arguments confronting Army of God. The effort to mobilize both national and international support for Iran's response to this threat vary in their forms. At the international level, the issue was portrayed as both a threat to Shia rights and livelyhood. The speeches delivered in the UN Security Council have emphasized on the security extent, and those delivered at the Human Rights Council and other rights-oriented centers have emphasized on the human dimension of the threat to the Shia sect as state and regional levels. The securitization of Army of God at the international level has been successful. The UN Secretary-General strongly condemned the acts of terror and human rights abuses perpetrated by Army of God.

It is found that in this endeavor the former Major General of the IRGC, Ja'fari praised IRGC's involvement in the fight against Army of God in Sistan & Balochistan, indicating that, the IRGC was and is the main actor responsible for providing security in the area.

It should be noted that the Iran former Minister of Interior, Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar, sought to establish more effective control over the border regions and sought cooperation with his counterpart in Pakistan, by emphasizing on the role of Army of God in introducing instability in the border region. The Council of Sustainable Security and Development was established in Iran in response to this threat. Since its establishment, Mohammad-Najjar asked other Iranian ministers to support this new institution to constrain the ability of Army of God's free movement along this region's border.

In this research it is revealed that while the members of Army of God are Iranian nationals, they do not want to be identified by the values of the Iranian Shia state and the Shia public. They feel that it is just to fight against what they see as an oppressive regime. In response, the IRGC has confronted Army of God through military actions.

The overall assessments in this research reveal that Army of God remains an existential threat to Iran, because so far no de-securitization has taken place. Although Rigi was finally executed, other terrorist groups such as Ansar Movement of Iran subsequently emerged, on which serious studies should be run as to not allow them to become a new source of regional or national source of threat.

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