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Asharq Al-Awsat

Jundallah Spokesman: Rigi was Caught in Kandahar

By Khaled Mahmoud

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Cairo - Baluchi Kamal Narui, spokesman for the armed Sunni Jundallah Organization, which opposes the current Iranian regime, told Asharq Al-Awsat that the organization -- which has been engaged in confrontations to restore the rights of the Sunnis and Baluchi minority for years now -- will soon publish confessions made by an Afghan agent who works for the Mossad who was involved in the arrest of Jundallah leader Abdolmalek Rigi.

Speaking to Asharq al-Awsat by phone, Narui stressed that Rigi was arrested at a friend's house in the Afghan City of Kandahar. He dismissed the Iranian version of events, which claims that Rigi was arrested after the plane on which he was traveling to Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan, to meet with American officials, was forced to land at the airport of Bandar-Abbas City.

The official spokesman for Jundallah recounted the details of Rigi's arrest. He said that the internal security investigations, which the organization has conducted, showed that Rigi was arrested by US forces. He referred to a clear role by Mossad in this case.

The spokesman noted that Rigi had to leave Iran because of the stepped up security measures that were taken following the Sarbaz operation, which Jundallah carried out in October last year. The operation resulted in the killing of 31 people, including six high-ranking commanders of the Revolutionary Guard.

He added: "The situation was not favorable for the Emir [leader] to stay there. Therefore, he went to see a Baluchi man whom we know upon his invitation and stayed three days in his house

in Kandahar. I personally talked to him by phone when he was there. He said that he would return to us across the mountains in a day or two after the situation calms a little. However, contact between us discontinued only two days before Iran's announcement of his arrest and detention."

Narui was speaking from somewhere on the joint borders between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. He refused to disclose his location for security reasons. He said Rigi was arrested at night in a house in the Afghan City of Kandahar in a joint action by the US forces and Afghan authorities. He added that the Jundallah Organization has arrested an Afghan man working for the Israeli Mossad and that the man made full confessions in this respect. The organization will publish these confessions afterward, said Narui.

Ridiculing Tehran's official version of the arrest of Rigi, Narui asked: "How can they say he was traveling to Kyrgyzstan to meet with US officials at a time when there is a large US base in Afghanistan? Why should he travel to that country to meet with them when there was no need for him to do so because there are Americans in Afghanistan and Pakistan?"

He also asked: "Which is closer? Kyrgyzstan or Dubai? Why would he take a long route and travel via Dubai while he knew that the plane would fly in Iranian airspace and that there was a possibility he would be kidnapped?" "That is why we say they are lying", he remarked.

Narui said Pakistan did not play a major role in this operation and added that the Pakistanis only provided intelligence information on the Jundallah Organization and the movement of its members in the joint border areas.

He noted that Rigi's confessions, which the Iranian official television recently broadcast, were taken after he was threatened with sexual assault. He said that Rigi's arrest will not affect the movement and will not lessen its activity in the face of the Iranian authorities. He added: "If they violate, degrade, and threaten a person, he will do whatever they want in their prison."

Responding to Iran's charges that the organization is associated with Arab and foreign intelligence agencies, Narui said that his organization did not receive any foreign aid from any party and that Iran levels these charges to distort facts.

He added: "When someone demands his rights, they say he is connected with foreign intelligence agencies. According to our Emir's confession, which they broadcast, the Americans proposed to give aid to the organization, and this contradicts their claims."

Narui excused the Sunni Muslims in Iran who renounced Rigi and said he is a "terrorist." He noted that the Sunnis in Iran live in a state of great fear of the Iranian Government and cannot discuss their basic rights because if they do they will be arrested and executed.

He added: "If they object, the Iranians execute a large number of them and if they defend the movement and its Emir, they will all be killed. Iranian Judge in Baluchistan Ibrahim Hamidi openly said on the Iranian Television: 'We will sentence to death anyone who defends the movement [Jundallah] in articles, statements, or any other way.'"

Narui said the Iranian authorities prevent various international and Arab media journalists from approaching the areas where Sunnis and Baluchis live. He added that a French journalist was recently arrested and expelled after he visited these areas.

Explaining the movement's demands from Iran, Narui said: "As a Sunni-Baluchi movement, we want the rights of the peoples who live in Iran under a federal government and local governments in Baluchistan, Arabistan, and Kurdistan. We will attain our rights only under a federal government in Iran."

He called on Muslims in all parts of the world to support the movement, the Sunnis, and Baluchis who suffer hardship under the Iranian authorities, as he put it.

Narui said Rigi's arrest will not diminish the severity of the movement's operations and added that the movement took emergency security measures after Rigi's arrest.

He said: "Under our security procedures and norms, if someone is arrested, his arrest does not affect the movement. They now arrested the Emir. Yes, he was the commander, but he did not know everything about the movement."

He added: "This is our technique to avoid the effect of arrest, and there are security procedures in place to limit the danger to the movement."

Narui disclosed that there are Continuous official Iranian attempts to negotiate with the organization, the latest of which was made about two weeks ago. He said: "Meetings took place between Iranian officials and senior officials of the movement, but they did not fulfill our demands. Therefore, we postponed the meetings."

Narui said: "We do not seek war. As far as we are concerned, war is not the main issue. The main issue is the rights of the Sunnis and Baluchistan. We want to resolve these problems. If they can be resolved through negotiations, we welcome this. Failing that, there will be war and we will be compelled to fight and continue fighting."

On the other hand, Narui denied the existence of any relationship with Al-Qaeda because of what he termed difference of goals and objectives. He said: "We are a moderate Islamic movement, and there is a large difference between us. To begin with, they fight for international goals at a time when we fight to achieve the interests of the Sunni and Baluchi people inside Iran."

Asked if the appointment of Zahir Baloch as a successor to Rigi means that the detained leader's role is over, Narui said: "No. He is now detained in the enemy's cell and has no power to act. Therefore, we chose a deputy. Thus, he is the Emir, not because he is the leader of the movement, but because he is the leader of the Baluchistan revolution."

Narui said the new leader is a 30-year-old youngster and noted that security considerations prevented the organization from publishing his pictures. He explained: "There was disagreement at the shura [consultative] council over this issue, and we decided not to publish any picture at present for security reasons."

