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## Hezbollah spices up Israel-Iran mix

By Kaveh L Afrasiabi

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Where Iran has Hezbollah, Israel has Jundallah, given Israel's apparent efforts to destabilize Iran by playing an "ethnic card" against it. This, by some reports, it is doing by nurturing the Sunni Islamist group Jundallah to parallel Tehran's support for Lebanon's formidable Shi'ite group, Hezbollah, that is favored to win parliamentary elections on June 7.

Should the Hezbollah-led coalition win as anticipated, the result will be even closer military-to-military relations between Iran and Lebanon, reflected in Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrollah's recent statement that he would look to Tehran to modernize Lebanon's army.

Rattled by the prospect of an even-stronger Iranian influence in Lebanon in the near future, the Israeli government, which is on the defensive internationally over its stance on the Palestinian issue, has gone on the offensive. It is upping the ante against Iran by focusing on covert activities inside Iran, according to a recent report in the Washington Post, to "disrupt Iran's nuclear program" - so far without much success.

Israeli Brigadier-General Yossi Baidatz, head of the research division of Israel's Military Intelligence, said on Monday that Iran could have enough fissile material to build a nuclear bomb by the end of 2009.

"By the end of the year, Iran will have enough fissile material for a first nuclear bomb," Baidatz told the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee of the Knesset (parliament). Iran vigorously insists its uranium-enrichment program is for peaceful purposes.

If Tehran won't halt its nuclear program, Israel may have better results in exploiting the tensions in the ethnically and religiously mixed border provinces of Iran, the scene to terrorist attacks in recent weeks.

The finger of suspicion points to the activities of Israel and its secret service, Mossad, instigating instability among Iran's ethnic populations, particularly the vulnerable and economically deprived Balochis in the province of Sistan and Balochistan bordering Pakistan, where many of the country's minority Sunnis live.

Here, there has been a spate of Sunni-Shi'ite violence. In the most recent incident, a Shi'ite mosque was bombed on May 28 in the city of Zahedan, with 25 people killed and 125 injured.

This has had an unnerving effect on the government as Iran edges closer to [presidential elections](#) on June 12. Jundallah (Soldiers of Allah) claimed responsibility for the mosque attack. Jundallah has launched other attacks in the area, including a 2007 bombing in which more than 10 members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps were killed.

"The Israelis have said that they are willing to enter a pact with the devil himself against Iran and Mossad's signature is all over Jundallah," a Tehran political analyst told the author on condition of anonymity. He said that in his opinion, Israel could be receiving assistance from some regional actors.

Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has said, "There is no doubt that the political architects of some interventionist forces and their spy apparatuses were involved in this bloody incident [in Zahedan]."

In a press conference, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki explicitly linked the Zahedan terrorism to "foreign forces in Afghanistan", though without elaboration.

Some Tehran analysts, however, are hedging their bets on a growing web of intrigue, ranging from dissident elements among the 1.5 to 2 million Iranian Balochis to Jundallah operating from across the border in Pakistan, to al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Israel, the United States and US coalition partners in Afghanistan.

Officially, the US government has condemned the Zahedan bombing and is slowly considering the idea of putting Jundallah on the list of terrorist organizations, much as it did with the Party for the Free Life of Kurdistan in February.

However, despite evidence of al-Qaeda's involvement with Jundallah and its Sunni crusade against the Shi'ite Iranian regime, the US has dragged its feet, something Iranian analysts attribute to the influence of pro-Israel [lobbyists](#), not to mention pro-Jundallah spin by aspects of the US media.

For instance, Dan Rather in his CBS cable news program *Dan Rather Reports*, painted Jundallah as a home-grown organization that receives backing from expatriate Balochis living in Europe, without mentioning any Mossad or US role in propping up the group - even though such support has been exposed by veteran US investigative reporter and Pulitzer prize-winner Seymour Hersh.

In contrast, Iranian Interior Minister Sadegh Mahsouli has directly pointed at US and Israeli operatives as the culprits of the attack on the mosque in Zahedan.

Ahmad Reza Radan, the head of security forces in Zahedan, has announced the arrest of scores of individuals, both Shi'ite and Sunni, following disturbances that have "aimed to foment inter-ethnic violence". Already, three individuals accused of playing a role in these incidents have been executed in Zahedan.

This swift justice reflects a very edgy government that wants to ensure internal peace and stability throughout Iran ahead of the presidential elections in less than two weeks.

In seeking calm between Sunni and Shi'ite groups in Zahedan, the Supreme Leader's special representative, Ayatollah Abasali Soleyman, has met with the imam of a Sunni mosque in Zahedan, Mousavi Abdulhamid Ismail Zehy, and they issued a joint statement on the need to perpetuate the "peaceful coexistence" of Shi'ites and Sunnis.

Inevitably, this issue has seeped into the [presidential campaigns](#) and some newspapers associated with the reformist camp and its leading contender, Mir Hossein Mousavi, blame the government of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad for neglecting the "poor and deprived provinces". The Ahmadinejad camp vigorously denies this, pointing at its plans for a free-trade zone in the region.