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Anti-Corruption In the Economic Cooperation Organization

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The Shi'a Crescent

There are few men on the globe as well educated and as insightful about the Middle East as the King of Jordan, Abdullah II.¹ It was the King who, in 2004, first described his concept of The Shi'a Crescent. Initially, it was described in terms of geopolitics: that region of the Middle East where the majority of the population is Shi'a. However, as the Persian strategy has unfolded on the world stage, the concept of the Shi'a Crescent must expand to include the whole of the Iranian vision—the Greater Shi'a Crescent.

The Greater Shi'a Crescent

The Greater Shi'a Crescent is an amorphous force bound by ideology. Attempts to depict it visually in geopolitical terms fail to capture its essence. It is about spheres of influence. To believe that it is confined to the Middle East or even Central Asia underestimates the brilliant strategic thinking of Supreme Grand Ayatollah Khomeini. The Greater Shi'a Crescent describes in a single phrase the long-term strategy of Iran to coalesce the Shi'a religious denomination within a new Persian Empire. This is a paradigm shift in political thinking. It is not geopolitical but socio-religious. Emanating from his groundbreaking work entitled the *Wiliyat al-faqih*, the power, breadth and reach of Iran's Supreme Grand Ayatollah is not confined to physical borders, but to the 200,000,000 Shi'a who occupy every country on the globe, a vast majority of whom are under the age of twenty-five.²

From a Western perspective, the closest analogy to this shift in political thinking is global marketing. When marketing on a worldwide scale, corporations look less at geographical or geopolitical markets and more at similarities in demographics. They build their strength from worldwide customer loyalty—irrespective of citizenship or nationality. This is the Persian strategy. However, the analogy between global marketing and Iranian strategy ends here. Equating corporate customer loyalty to Shi'a devotion to Islam is like comparing a grain of sand to the Arabian Desert. The power of the recognized leader of the Shi'a denomination cannot be underestimated. It rivals the power of a US President—and in many respects surpasses it. The vision of Supreme Grand Ayatollah Khomeini was to capture this power in order to export his Islamic revolution. Today, the continuing mission of Iran is to turn that vision into a reality.

Therefore, every action of Iran must be viewed through the prism of the Greater Shi'a Crescent.

¹ King Abdullah II was educated at Deerfield Academy in Deerfield, Massachusetts after which he joined the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. In 1982, King Abdullah II attended Oxford where he completed a one-year Special Studies course in Middle Eastern Affairs. In 1987, he attended the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

² “*Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population*” Pew Research Center. October 7, 2009; <http://www.pewforum.org/Muslim/Mapping-the-Global-MuslimPopulation%286%29.aspx>

Whether it is surreptitious support of *Al-Shabab Al-Momen* in Yemen or the seemingly innocuous Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Iran has but one vision—to unite the Shi'a worldwide and use them to serve and support the Iranian political/religious dominion.

Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)

At the behest of the Supreme Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, the Economic Cooperation Organization began its mission in 1985.³ The inaugural members were Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. However, in 1992 the organization added seven new members: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The original goal of the ECO was to establish a single market for goods and services, similar to the European Union. Although ostensibly an economic, technical and cultural cooperation organization, the ECO has grown into something much larger both economically and politically.⁴ As a result, Iran has expanded its sphere of influence across the region. More importantly, the ECO also evolved into an important aspect of Iran's strategic communication and messaging for Central and East Asia. Like many Iranian initiatives, this did not develop by happenstance, but took exceptionally long-term planning, which is now paying dividends.

ECO and Social Identity Theory

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the concept of social identity theory was introduced to explain group behavior. In their study, researchers found that by merely joining a group, strong tendencies develop in favor of other members of the group.⁵ These emotions are often translated into actions identified as “in-group favoritism” or “in-group bias.” In international relations, this bias can result in attributing favorable motives to the actions of other members of the group, thus making it easier to identify with the positions and policies of those members.

For example, in November 2006, Iranian Interior Minister Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi declared Iran's readiness to cooperate with the ECO member states in the “development of modern and peaceful nuclear technologies.”⁶ That same day, the Iranian Students News Agency quoted him as saying, “Iran is ready to cooperate with ECO member countries (i.e.: the in-group) in the field of nuclear technology. We are ready to cooperate in more developed and enhanced fields but the U.S. (i.e.: the out-group) cannot tolerate the progress of our country.”⁷ A few years later when Pakistan's Deputy Foreign Minister was explaining to Time Magazine why his country was not

³ The ECO is the successor organization of what was the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD). The RCD was founded in 1964 and ended when the Supreme Grand Ayatollah Khomeini took power in 1979.

⁴ In 2011, the ten ECO member nations conducted more than \$56 billion dollars in trade. Islamic Republic News Agency/IRNA 08 Oct 11; <http://www.irna.ir/ENNewsShow.aspx?NID=30601142>

⁵ H. Tajfel, M. G. Billig and R. P. Bundy, “Social Categorization and Intergroup Behavior,” *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 1 (1971), pp. 149-178.

⁶ Islamic Republic News Agency/IRNA 01 November 2006 1420 GMT, “Iran Ready to Cooperate with ECO for Development of Peaceful Nuclear Technology.”

⁷ Iranian Students News Agency, 1 November 2006 1425 GMT, “Iran Proposes Nuclear Cooperation to ECO Security Conference”

more proactive in non-proliferation with Iran, he stated that, “the government of Pakistan and the average Pakistani citizen looks at Iran as a friendly nation.”⁸

This view of a peaceful Iran persecuted by America is not an anomaly within the ECO.⁹ More importantly, it is a belief that is growing as Iran increases its regional sphere of influence. At the Fifth Regional ECO Conference on Afghanistan held in Dushanbe in late March 2012, Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, a prominent Tajik religious and political figure, provided strong support for the Iranian nuclear program stating, that “The Iranian authorities have repeatedly denied accusations of development of nuclear weapons brought against Iran by the United States and other Western countries . . . Why do Americans see peaceful Iran as posing a threat to the international community?” asked Mr. Turajonzoda.¹⁰ In both the Pakistan and Tajikistan examples the officials were clearly attributing favorable motives to Iranian nuclear development.

Research into Social Identity Theory also shows that members of a group tend to increase their self-image by discriminating against out-groups, often creating a divisive “us” versus “them” mentality.¹¹ A central hypothesis of Social Identity Theory is that the in-group will always find negative aspects of the out-group, thus enhancing their self-image. Just as there is natural ingroup favoritism there is also a natural out-group bias which can result in attributing negative motives to certain out-group members¹². As a result, the Pakistani, Tajik and other Central Asian governments tend to believe Iran when it says it is a victim of Western oppression. When Interior Minister Pour-Mohammadi said, “We are ready to cooperate in more developed and enhanced fields but the U.S. cannot tolerate the progress of our country,” he created the classic “us” versus “them” scenario: “us” being the ECO members and the Shia, and “them” being the United States and Western Europe.¹³ Reinforcing this “us” versus “them” message, President Ahmadinejad recently told a group of dignitaries at the *Afghanistan-Iran-Pakistan Summit* in Islamabad: “In order to promote their goals and ambitions, *the West+ always seeks to promote division among all countries of the

⁸ Time Magazine, Monday, September 14, 2009 <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1922166,00.html>

⁹ When Abdul Qadeer Khan, the father of Pakistan’s atomic bomb, admitted providing secret information to Tehran, he was still hailed as a national hero by the general public. After his conviction his public popularity caused the Prime Minister to commute his sentence to house arrest. See note 8.

In the Middle East and Central Asia, the author has observed that the bond between members of the group and the group leader is stronger than bonds between group members. In fact, there is a strong desire to please the group leader. This may result from historical paternal dominance within the society.

¹⁰ Asia Plus, 31 March 2012, “Tajikistan must not allow itself to be led by US, says Turajonzoda;” <http://news.tj/en/news/tajikistan-must-not-allow-itself-be-led-us-says-turajonzoda>

¹¹ Receiving special benefits as part of a group also re-enforces the social identity of the group and perpetuates feelings of superiority. Every international traveler gets a sense of this when they return to their home country and are allowed to go in special lanes just for citizens. To build cohesion within the ECO, on 3 October 2011, Iranian Foreign Ministry official Hassan Qashqavi proposed removal of visa requirements among all ECO nations. Islamic Republic News Agency/IRNA 03 October 2011 1130 GMT: “Iran Proposes Visa Removal Among ECO Member States”

¹² But see: *Applying Social Identity Theory to the Study of International Politics: A Caution and an Agenda* by Jacques E.C. Hymans. Paper originally prepared for presentation at the International Studies Association Convention, New Orleans Louisiana, March 24-27, 2002.

¹³ Islamic Republic News Agency/IRNA 01 November 2006 1425 GMT: “Iran Proposes Nuclear Cooperation to ECO Security Conference.”

region . . . the foreign powers don't want to allow our nations to develop.” Ahmadinejad then called for the countries in the region (ECO countries) to “stick together in order to advance and achieve our goals.”¹⁴

To group the United States and Western Europe together and use them as scapegoats requires that members of ECO focus on them as the specific targets to blame for their problems. This is where messaging becomes essential and the ECO plays an important part in Iran's strategic communications. The process begins by creating a 'siege mentality' where ECO members are meant to feel victimized and oppressed: “foreign powers don't want to allow our nations to develop.” The theme of victimization is then tied to or intertwined with a regional or domestic problem.

For example, in May 2011, ECO anti-corruption chiefs met in Tehran, President Ahmadinejad told them, “The system that rules the world is a monopolistic and bullying system. Any country that wants to be strong and advanced comes under political and economic pressures. The current leaders of the world's political and economic centers are former slaveholders and colonialists who have kept the world in slavery and colonialism for 300 years and looted all the riches of the nations.”¹⁵

One month later, when the environmental ministers of ECO countries met in Tehran they were greeted personally by President Ahmadinejad who accused “the capitalists, particularly the U.S.,” of destroying the environment.¹⁶ He clearly stated that the only reason for Western intervention in ECO countries was their “insatiable thirst...for exploiting natural and mineral resources” which, he added, is the “main cause of destruction of the environment in the world.”¹⁷ A little more than a week later he added slavery to this victimization rhetoric publicly stating that: “Those who promoted slavery in the ancient times have in the modern times launched an attack on nature...they have disturbed the environment for their interests...two or three countries are responsible for destroying the environment...Today, fighting capitalism is a great step in line with environmental protection.”¹⁸

The inference here is that ECO member states are victims of corrupt Western capitalistic bullies whose presence aims to loot them of their riches, enslave them under political and economic pressures, and degrade their environments.

Iran's theme of victimization is repeated again and again to ECO member states year after year, although linked to different domestic issues. As far back as 2006, at a Ministries of Interior ECO conference in Tehran, President Ahmadinejad told the audience that “Due to the lack of justice,

¹⁴ Payvand Iran News, 12 February 2012; “Iran's President Blames West for “All Region's Problems.”

<http://www.payvand.com/news/12/feb/1176.html>

¹⁵ Fars News Agency, 11 May 2011 1205 GMT: “President Ahmadinejad Blasts Corrupt World Order”

¹⁶ Islamic Republic News Agency/IRNA 09 June 2011 1945 GMT: “Capitalists States Destroying Environment”

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Islamic Republic News Agency/IRNA 18 June 2011 1435 GMT: “Iran Should Be Flag Bearer of Environment Protection”

the superpowers have failed to provide for the interests of the world's nations, some Western powers consider themselves as owners of the world..."¹⁹ At that same conference, Mr. PourMohammadi stated, "expansionism ambitions by big powers created the difficulties of the Middle East: insecurity, terrorism, drugs, human trafficking, corruption, etc." Five years later, when the ECO Ministers of Interior met in Tehran in November 2011, Iranian Brigadier General Esmail Moqaddam claimed, "Foreigners, through their ten-year presence in the region, aim to sow discord among regional countries." And just this year, President Ahmadinejad told a group of dignitaries at the Afghanistan-Iran-Pakistan Summit in Islamabad that, "In order to promote their goals and ambitions, [the West] always seeks to promote division among all countries of the region . . . the foreign powers don't want to allow our nations to develop."

Using its ECO membership, Iran continually attempts to create and reinforce feelings of mutual persecution and oppression. This notion of mutual victimization at the hands of the United States and Western Europe builds strong cohesion among ECO members. Consequently, Iran develops strong regional relationships and significantly increases its sphere of influence. It also helps define what it means to be an ECO member, which is important for Iranian leadership within the organization.

Iranian Leadership in ECO

According to the social identity approach, group leaders tend to be members that most closely resemble the prototypical group member.²⁰ Consistent with this view of leadership, researchers have found that individual members can manipulate their leadership status by portraying themselves as prototypical to the group.²¹ A prototypical ECO member is a righteous and well-meaning country, but with a multitude of problems, most of which stem from Western oppression or persecution.²² Supporting this notion, President Ahmadinejad recently stated, "There is no fundamental problem among countries of the region. All problems are coming from the outside."²³ However, when viewed against Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan or even Afghanistan, Iran clearly receives greater attention from Western countries. Accordingly, it portrays itself as the most oppressed and, therefore, the best representative of a region with no problems other than those resulting from U.S. and Western persecution and oppression.

¹⁹ Islamic Republic News Agency/IRNA 01 November 2006 1255 GMT: "Iran's Ahmadinezhad *sic+ Addresses ECO MOI Meeting in Tehran"

²⁰ Platow, M. J., Hoar, S., Reid, S., Harley, K. & Morrison, D. (1997). Endorsement of Distributively Fair and Unfair Leaders in Interpersonal and Intergroup Situations. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 27, 465-496

²¹ Haslam, S. Alexander; Reicher, Stephen D.; Platow, Michael J. (2011). *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, Influence and Power*. New York, NY: Psychology Press. [ISBN 978-1-84169-610-2](https://doi.org/10.1080/00140139.2011.6102).

²² In addition, Iran pays most of the costs of the ECO including transportation costs for country delegates. Also, it has certain standing as a founding member of the ECO.

²³ Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty; 17 February 2012, "Iran's President Blames West for 'All' Region's Problems"

Identifying with the Message

The repeated messaging by Iran, through the ECO, has a cumulative effect. Leaders in ECO countries who are continuously inundated by this rhetoric, pick up the messaging and repeat it in their own countries.²⁴ In Afghanistan President Karzai is the direct target of messaging. President Ahmadinejad himself recently summed up the underlying message, “The cause of all of the ills in Afghanistan is the presence on Afghan soil of NATO forces and above all those of the United States.”²⁵ To reinforce this message, evidence of each and every mistake by NATO countries is documented and conveyed to Iranian sympathizers, especially those working closely with the President. Often times, rumors are repeated and presented as truth. Until March 2011, the primary facilitator in President Karzai’s office was his Chief-of-Staff, Umar Daudzai.²⁶ However, sympathizers paid by Iran include deputy ministers and senior government officials.²⁷ The reports presented by these individuals are often based on factual information, but are offered with a decidedly anti-Western spin. Mr. Umar Daudzai and others like him ensure that President Karzai and his Council of Ministers see every mistake of the Western countries and in an unfavorable light.²⁸ After continual inundation year-after-year, we can see the Iranian messaging repeated at the highest levels of government:²⁹

- “Karzi says Foreign Aid is the Prime Source of Corruption” November 10, 2009
- “Karzi Blames West for Election Fraud,” April 2, 2010
- “Karzai Attacks International Forces for the Environmental Damage They Have Done to Afghanistan, Says Such Forces Are in Afghanistan ‘For Their Own Goals,’” June 19, 2011³⁰

²⁴ It is important to note that Iranian messaging is not universally accepted by all ECO countries. In Azerbaijan, for example, the government has engaged the battle against corruption in a significant and meaningful way and is developing infrastructure and capacity to counter corruption and money laundering.

²⁵ Speech by President Ahmadinejad at the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) in Dushanbe, Tajikistan 26 March 2012.

²⁶ Daudzai moved from the position of Presidential Chief of Staff to Ambassador to Pakistan on 26 March 2011, a position he still holds.

²⁷ See N.Y. Times, 23 October 2010; *Iran Is Said to Give Top Karzai Aide Cash by the Bagful* by Dexter Filkins. See also: U.S. Embassy Cables released by Wikileaks and reported in the Guardian 2 December 2010 that Iran had paid MPs, deputy ministers and presidential officials; “Iran is financing a range of Afghan religious and political leaders, grooming Afghan religious scholars, training Taliban militants and even seeking to influence MPs, according to cables from the US embassy in Kabul.” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/dec/02/afghan-mps-scholars-iran-payroll>

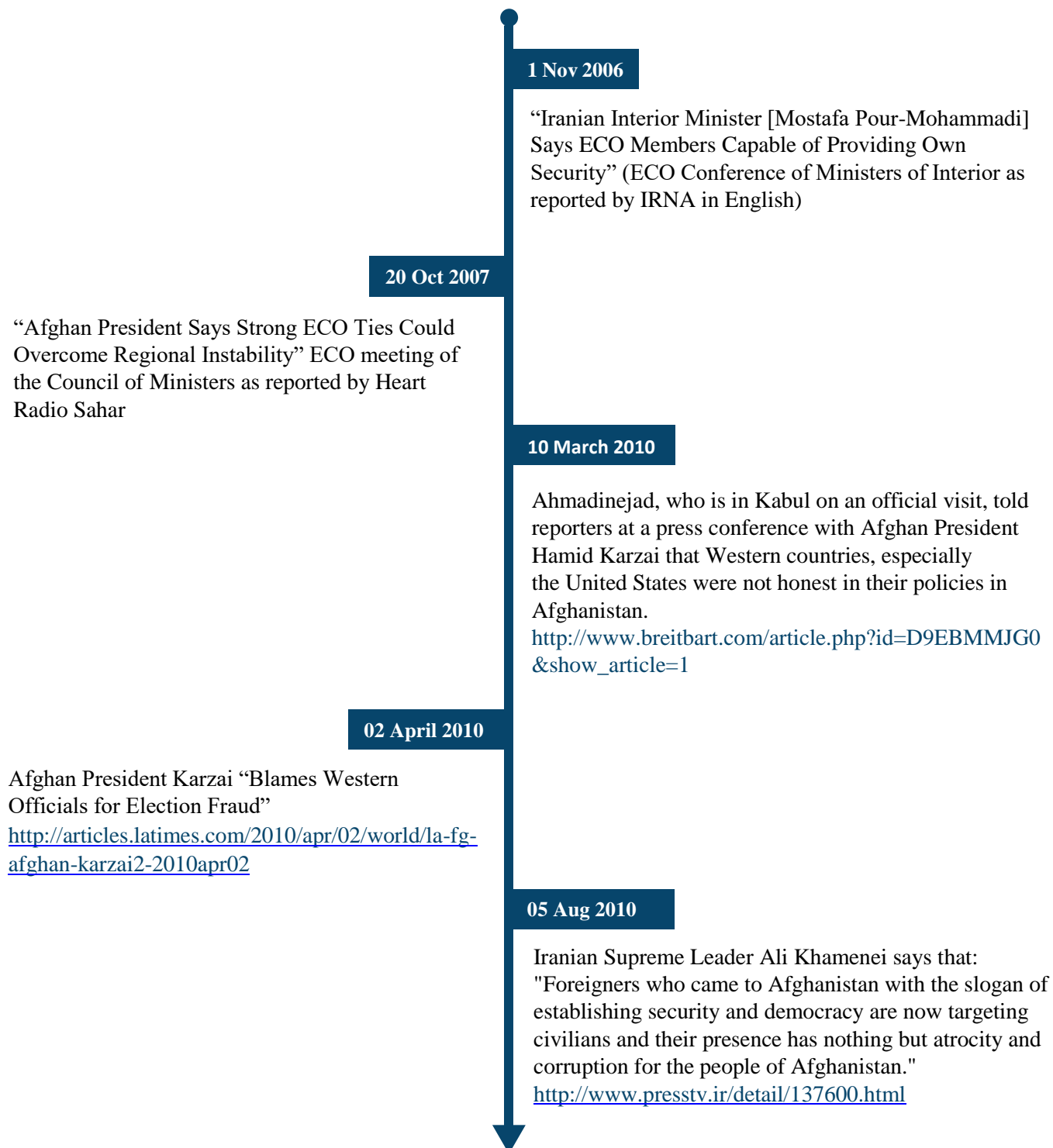
²⁸ See: *Key Influencer Report: Government Elites of Afghanistan*: “President Karzai’s Chief of Staff Umar Daudzai reportedly receives money directly from the Iranian government. Iran tries to use this funding channel to obtain “information, influence policies or change political decisions, administrative and management policies and increase tensions between President Karzai and the United States.”

²⁹ President Karzai admitted in 2010 that he received cash payments from Iran. These payments are alleged to be \$600,000 USD per week. NY Times, Oct 25, 2010.

³⁰ “Karzai Attacks International Forces for the Environmental Damage They Have Done to Afghanistan, Says Such Forces Are in Afghanistan ‘For Their Own Goals,’” The Ottawa Citizen; 19 June 2011

- “Karzai Blames West for Creating Chaos,” January 26, 2011
- “Karzai Blames Foreign Advisers for Near-Collapse of Kabul Bank,” April 11, 2011
- “Karzai Blames Foreigners for Corruption,” December 11, 2011

A closer analysis provides evidence of linkage to Iranian messaging through the ECO:



23 Aug 2010

Afghan President Karzai “Blames the United States and its Western allies for most of the corruption in the war-ravaged country.”

<http://www.presstv.ir/detail/139832.html>

22 May 2011

President Ahmadinejad Lambasts Corrupt Systems Governing the World” at ECO Meeting for Anti-Corruption

26 May 2011

“U.S., Western Allies Source of Corruption” Iranian Vice Speaker Mohammad Aboutorabi-Fard told the ECO anti-corruption conference.

11 Dec 2011

Afghan President Karzai “Blames Foreigners for Afghan Corruption”

09 June 2011

Iranian President Ahmadinejad says that: “Capitalist States are Destroying the Environment” He clearly inferred that the only reason for Western intervention in ECO countries was their “insatiable thirst...for exploiting natural and mineral resources” which, he said, is the “main

15 June 2011

Afghan President Karzai “Attacks International Forces for the Environmental Damage They Have Done to Afghanistan, Says Such Forces Are in Afghanistan *‘For Their Own Goals’*”

Having top government officials repeat a message, almost verbatim, is a great success. However, the real victory occurs when that message is translated to action. In Afghanistan, a recent example of a message translated to action occurred in relation to the independent anticorruption Joint Monitoring & Evaluation Committee (MEC). The MEC was established under strong pressure from the international community pursuant to conferences in London and Kabul.³¹ Its primary mission was to “offer policy advice and monitor and evaluate progress against benchmarks.” Colloquially, the international community wanted to “kick start” Afghan anti-corruption initiatives, which they perceived as failing miserably. The MEC, which is comprised of three national and three international members, was to re-invigorate anticorruption initiatives and temper the rampant corruption within the Afghanistan government.³² Ironically, since President Karzai accepts the premise that large-scale corruption emanates from foreign and specifically Western entities, he did not focus the MEC on domestic corruption. To the contrary, he publically stated that “It is the responsibility of your office to evaluate the international assistance in Afghanistan and bring transparency.”³³ Obviously, this is not what the international community intended when they pushed for the MEC’s creation. It is, however, an excellent example of messaging being converted to action.

ECO and Anti-Corruption

Beginning in 2004, the ECO began an unexplained expansion into virtually every aspect of government. From 2004 through 2011, the ECO entered into 53 new areas of cooperation; this included everything from public notary services to veterinary services. One of the new areas of cooperation within the ECO was anti-corruption. However, the ECO anti-corruption initiative was not an adjunct to the organization but a centerpiece in which Iran is expending top assets.

The ECO’s anti-corruption initiative is tied to the Iranian General Inspection Organization (also known as the State Inspectorate Organization or the National General Inspectorate).³⁴ The transformation and integration of anti-corruption into the ECO is closely tied to the former Iranian Minister of Interior, Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi. In its bylaws (called Statutes), the ECO anti-corruption initiative traces its roots to the “First Ministerial Meeting” of Ministers of Interior on

³¹ London Conference, January 2010; Kabul Conference, July 2010.

³² The current members of the committee are: 1. Mohammad Yasin Osmani (Afghan) former director-general of the High Office of Oversight & Anti-Corruption; 2. Dr Mohammad Azam Dadfar (Afghan) former Minister of Higher Education and former Minister of Refugees and Repatriation; 3. Dr Sidiqullah (Afghan) former United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan deputy head of office in Kandahar; 4. Drago Kos (Slovenian) current Chairman of the Council of Europe’s Group of States Against Corruption; 5. Nuhu Ribadu (Nigerian) former Head of the Nigerian Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (2003-2007); 6. Erry Riyana Hardjapamekas (Indonesian) former ViceChairman of the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission (2003-2007).

³³ Statement of President Karzai, 11 February 2012; “President Karzai Receives Joint Anti-Corruption Evaluation and Monitoring Committee.”

³⁴ Article 174 of the Iranian Constitution refers to the “National General Inspectorate”; however, in correspondence and documents, the translation selected by the organization itself, is the “General Inspection Organization.”

November 1, 2006, entitled, “Security, Stability and Sustainable Development.”³⁵ A second organizational meeting was held in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan on May 27, 2008,³⁶ and a third meeting was held in Istanbul on December 24, 2010.³⁷ These organizational meetings eventually led to the “First Meeting of the Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies and Ombudsmen of the ECO Members States,” held in Tehran May 21 – 22, 2011. The power and drive behind this ECO initiative and the General Inspection Organization (GIO) was and continues to be, Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi.

Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi

According to his official biography, Hojjat ol-Eslam val-Moslemin Mostafa Purmohammadi (aka: Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi), was born in the city of Qom in 1959. He reportedly completed his Master’s in Islamic Studies at the Qom Howza (seminary) and his PhD in Islamic Jurisprudence and Theology in Tehran.³⁸ His biography states that from 1979 to 1986 he was appointed and acted as a prosecutor for the military revolutionary courts in Eastern Iran. From 1987 to 1990, he acted in an official capacity as an advisor to the minister at the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, Iran’s primary intelligence agency. In 1990, Mr. Pour-Mohammadi was promoted within the agency to the position of Deputy Minister.³⁹ The following year, he took control of Iran’s Foreign

³⁵ Prior to the “First Ministerial Meeting” there had been a “Senior Officials Meeting” on 30-31 October 2006. Both meetings occurred in Tehran and both were hosted by Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi. At the general meeting, the Interior Ministers endorsed the report of the Senior Officials and adopted a 15-point Tehran Declaration. In the Declaration, the member states acknowledged that terrorism and transnational organized crimes contained “a common threat” that they must fight jointly. They agreed to set up a High Level Experts Group to prepare a comprehensive cooperation plan to launch a coordinated and organized campaign against crimes.

³⁶ The Second ECO Interior Ministers’ reviewed the progress made since the previous ECO Interior Ministers’ meeting (Tehran, 1st November, 2006) and the 1st High Level Experts Group Meeting on Drugs, Terrorism and Trans-National Organized Crimes (Ankara, 29-30 April, 2008). It considered a number of security issues of common concern to the member states, including economic crimes like money laundering. [Interestingly, an ECO Meeting called the 1st Experts Group Meeting on Corruption and Money Laundering held in mid-May 2008 in Ankara is not referenced in the new ECO Anti-Corruption Bylaws]. This Second ECO Interior Ministers’ meeting was also preceded by a Senior Officials Meeting. The Interior Ministers endorsed the report of the Senior Officials and adopted a 21-point Ashgabat Declaration. The Declaration acknowledged that terrorism and transnational organized crimes posed serious challenges to the ECO countries and to regions beyond.

³⁷ Like the two previous meetings, this meeting too was preceded by a Senior Officials Meeting. The general meeting approved the revised “Joint Regional Strategy on Combating Drugs, Terrorism and Trans-national Organized Crime”. The Interior Ministers also adopted the Istanbul Declaration. The Declaration acknowledged that terrorism and transnational organized crimes posed serious challenges to the ECO countries and to regions beyond.

³⁸ The official dates of employment for Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi indicate that he began work as a prosecutor when he was 19 years old and has worked continuously since that time. Therefore, his formal education appears to be unconventional by Western standards.

³⁹ Hadi Ghaemi, formerly a researcher for *Human Rights Watch* and currently the Executive Director of the *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran* has indicated that Pour-Mohammadi was instrumental in the 1988 massacre at Evin Prison in Tehran. Allegedly, Pour-Mohammadi represented the Ministry of Intelligence & Security on the three member committee (informally called the “Death Committee”) that was responsible for ordering the execution of scores of people. Pour Mohammadi has also been accused of complicity in the “Chain Murders” of dissident intellectuals that occurred between 1988 and 1998. On February 16, 2012 Pour-Mohammadi denied his involvement in the Chain Murders (see: Iran Daily Brief; *US Embassy Iran Reporting Office*, Dubai, 28 Feb 2012).

Intelligence Service, a position he would hold for ten years. In 2000, he was promoted to head the Political-Social Section (a Special Department for Security and Intelligence) at the Office of the Al-Faqih in the Supreme Leader's Office (a position he still holds). He was also appointed to be a member of the central council of the conservative Militant Clergy Society.⁴⁰ In August 2005, President Ahmadinejad appointed Mr. PourMohammadi to be the Minister of Interior. However, in May 2008, Ahmadinejad removed Mr.

Pour-Mohammadi during the President's continuing political difficulties with the Supreme Leader.⁴¹ Within a month, on July 2, 2008, Mr. Pour-Mohammadi was appointed to be the Director-General of Iran's General Inspection Organization, the most powerful arm of the Iranian judiciary.⁴² In his new position, Mr. Pour-Mohammadi has sought to transform the GIO within Iran and, through the ECO, to increase its sphere of influence throughout the region.

The GIO: A New Iranian Model for Anti-Corruption⁴³

The Iranian model for anti-corruption combines security, intelligence and investigation under the authority of the judicial inspectorate. As one might assume under the direction of Mr. Pour-Mohammadi, the GIO has adopted an intelligence-led strategy, but it is still deeply connected to security and investigation; all under the penumbra of "judicial inspections".

➤ Authority

The GIO receives its authority under Article 174 of the Iranian Constitution:⁴⁴



“In accordance with the right of the judiciary to supervise the proper conducting of affairs and the correct implementation of laws by the administrative organs of the government, an organization will be constituted under the supervision of the head of the judiciary branch to be known as the National General Inspectorate. The powers and duties of this organization will be determined by law.”

There are numerous laws that stipulate the different duties and obligations of the GIO. Generally, the law prescribes the GIO duties as: “Regular controlling and supervising all the administrations, military and disciplinary forces, state run institutions and companies, municipalities and the offices

⁴⁰ Iranian Press Menu; July 10, 2008. <http://www.istockanalyst.com/article/viewiStockNews/articleid/2386136>

⁴¹ Allegedly, Ahmadinejad believed that Pour-Mohammedi was allied too closely with the Office of the Al-Faqih and circumventing the President's office.

⁴² Other positions currently held by Mostafa Pour-Mohammedi include:

- Instructor of Political Science at Imam Sadeq University in Tehran;
- Founding member of the Masjed-e Soleyman Seminary;
- Member of the Board of Directors of Jame'ah al-Zahra (Sisters' Seminary, Qom); and
- Member of the Board of Trustees of the Center for the Documents of the Islamic Revolution;

⁴³ For an overview of the GIO, see: <http://www.iranembassy.gr/eng/files/HumanRightsinIran.pdf>

⁴⁴ See: http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/ir_indx.html

associating with them, public notary offices, foundations of public utility, revolutionary organs, institutions whose financial resources totally or partially belong to the government or the state in one way or another presides them or financially supports them.”⁴⁵

It is, however, a new law advanced by Mr. Pour-Mohammadi that provides a window into the new Iranian model for anti-corruption. That is, a model based upon intelligence, security and investigations.

➤ **Intelligence**

Acquiring intelligence assets under his control was an important element of Mr. PourMohammadi’s vision for the new GIO. But it did not come without some infighting. Based upon the participant list when the issue was debated at the Expediency Council,⁴⁶ the battle was hard fought.⁴⁷ In fact, the announcement by the Expediency Council noted the objection of the Guardian Council to provisions of the proposed law. Notwithstanding any objections, in its ruling, the Expediency Council made the following determination:

“1: As far as mega financial corruption cases are concerned, the Ministry of Intelligence is considered the judiciary’s executive officer.”

“2: The Ministry of Intelligence will carry out the necessary intelligence support for the existing intelligence bank in the secretariat.”⁴⁸

This was a sizable victory for Mr. Pour-Mohammadi and the GIO. The exact details of the law seem to make it an even bigger win than it first appeared: “In accordance with the definition of Article One of this law and to prevent corruption, the Ministry of Intelligence is required to provide suitable intelligence coverage, after obtaining the necessary judicial permit, for vulnerable and important spots within the general and state mega economic activities such as large-scale foreign contracts and deals, large investments, national plans and also the country’s important economic

⁴⁵ See note 29 at p. 64 also see <http://www.payvand.com/news/09/nov/1019.html>

⁴⁶ The *Expediency Discernment Council of the System* is an administrative assembly appointed by the Supreme Leader. Its primary function is to resolve differences or conflicts between the Majlis and the Council of Guardians, but “it’s true power lies more in its advisory role to the Supreme Leader.” According to Hooman Majd, the Supreme Leader has even “delegated some of his own authority to the council — granting it supervisory powers over all branches of the government.”

⁴⁷ According to Aftabnews in Persian dated 28 May 2011 (online), the following members were present for the debate: The Chief Justice of the Administrative Justice Court; the Economic Deputy of the Ministry of Intelligence & Security; the Deputy Minister of Economy; the Director-General of the GIO; the Chairman of the Majles (Parliament) Economics Committee; the Chairman of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines; and “a number of other relevant officials”

⁴⁸ Aftabnews Online in Persian 28 May 2011; “Iran: Ministry of Intelligence Commanded to Investigate Economic Corruption”

and financial decision making centers inside the executive organization, should there be reliable reports or valid documents that indicate violations or abuse.”⁴⁹

This development was reported in the ECONews on May 28, 2011: “The Expediency Council this morning designated Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence to assist the judiciary in cases of “large financial corruption” by providing the “needed intelligence coverage” and information support.”⁵⁰

With access to intelligence firmly in his grasp, Mr. Pour-Mohammadi moved to bring security and investigation under the amorphous “judicial inspection.”

➤ Security

From very early in his tenure as the Director-General, Mr. Pour-Mohammadi was clear that his vision for the judicially-based GIO included security, publicly stating, "The execution of justice and providing security are the two main, direct, and immediate objectives of the judiciary. If this organization [the GIO] is suitably active while being aware of its influential role, no other organization can take its place.”⁵¹

Equally clear, was the fact that Mr. Pour-Mohammadi was encountering some opposition (within the judiciary) in his endeavor to bring security under the ambit of the GIO. At least that is the inference in his chastising remark, as reported by the Mehr News Agency on July 13, 2010, “Provided the judiciary is aware of its role and the influential place it holds and is appropriately active, its role will be irreplaceable and unique. No other organization will be capable of playing this role.”⁵²

A division within the GIO called the “military, disciplinary forces, and security forces division,” re-enforces Mr. Pour-Mohammadi’s vision of security within the sphere of the GIO.⁵² An obvious power tool, this division has complete and unencumbered authority to review the operations, expenditures and administration of all security forces. Consequently, Mr. PourMohammadi does not need to formalize his control within the security apparatus as he did within the intelligence apparatus. His power, presence and reach provide the necessary influence and authority. His current position within the Supreme Leader’s Office, his position within the GIO and his affiliations from his past terms as Minister of Interior and Deputy Minister of Intelligence, make

⁴⁹ According to this report, the definition of corruption in Article One of this law is as follows (see too Article 49 of the Iranian Constitution):

“Any kind of action or lack of action by a legal or natural entity, individual, group or organization, which deliberately and with the aim of obtaining profit or direct or indirect concession for oneself or others and which leads to violation of the country’s laws and regulations and is detrimental to public possessions, interests, resources, soundness, and security, such as bribery, embezzlement, collusion and abuse of administrative and political position, rank, facilities, or information, illegal payments and receipts from public resources and deviations from these sources to illegal allocations, forgery, destruction or concealment of administrative and financial documents and records are considered corruption in accordance with this law.”

⁵⁰ *ECONews* online - website reporting on economic news in Farsi and English; www.econews.ir 28 May 2011

⁵¹ Mehr News Agency in Persian 13 Jul 10 “Iranian Official Criticizes Lack of Discipline in Government Organizations”

⁵² This division is headed by Mr. Qasim Mazinani; see Iran News Network, on 9 February 2011 as reported in the Open Source Summary for Iran 4 – 10 February 2011

him one of the four or five most powerful men in Iran. However, Mr. Pour-Mohammadi and the Office of the Al-Faqih recognize the benefits of extending that influence regionally. In fact, in an “Unclassified Report on Military Power of Iran” the U.S. Secretary of Defense noted that Iran’s five-year plan (2010-2015) is to become a “top regional power,” expand regional and international relations and strengthen ties with friendly states.⁵³

➤ ECOPOL

The extent of Mr. Pour-Mohammadi’s ambitious vision was never limited to simply securing influence over domestic security. Through the ECO, he sought to significantly increase Iranian influence throughout the region. In November 2006, while serving as the Minister of Interior, Pour-Mohammadi advanced the concept of ECOPOL, the ECO counterpart to INTERPOL.⁵⁴ After several years in development, the ECO member states finally agreed to establish ECOPOL on November 23, 2011. According to the public announcement, ECOPOL is “an attempt to fight transnational organized crimes and drug trafficking.”⁵⁵ As defined by the general provisions of its constitution, ECOPOL’s role is to focus on “terrorism, organized crime, illicit drug production and drug trafficking, weapons smuggling, human trafficking and computer crimes.” On February 16, 2012, ECOPOL announced its initial project—attacking drug traffickers in Afghanistan.⁵⁶ Ironically, twenty-one days later the U.S. Department of Treasury named Iranian al-Quds regional commander in Zahedan, General Gholamreza Baghbani, as a narcotics “kingpin.”⁵⁷ In what can only be described as incomprehensible naivety, the initial ECOPOL drug trafficking project in Afghanistan (which will significantly extend Iranian influence in the region as well as remove General Baghbani’s drug trafficking competitors) is being funded by the European Union with a grant of 9.5 million Euros.

⁵³ Unclassified Report on Military Power of Iran, April 2010, submitted to Congress pursuant to Section 1245 of the National Defense Authorization Act. <http://www.foxnews.com/projects/pdf/IranReportUnclassified.pdf>

⁵⁴ ECO Bulletin November 2006

⁵⁵ Iranian Press TV (Wed, 23 November 2011) “ECO Member states to Establish ECOPOL” <http://presstv.com/detail/211741.html> ; see also: <http://english.irib.ir/voj/analyses/commentaries/item/81134ecopol-to-the-rescue>

⁵⁶ Statement by H.E. Mr. Mohammed Yahya Moroofi, Secretary General of the ECO during the Third Ministerial Conference of the Paris Pact Partners on Combating the Afghan Illicit Opiate Trade. 16 February 2012.

⁵⁷ http://www.iranfocus.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24771:us-says-iranian-general-key-in-afghan-heroin-trade&catid=4:iran-general&Itemid=26 See also: <http://ofac-sdn-list-removal.com/2012/03/07/specially-designated-narcotics-trafficking-kingpin-sdntk-entries-added-to-ofacs-sdn-liston-march-7-2012/>

➤ **Mission Laundering**⁵⁸

The concept of money laundering is well known. It is the process of channeling money through legal apparatus in order to conceal its source. “Mission laundering” is a similar concept. Mission laundering is the process of engaging in a legal undertaking in order to conceal a primary alternative mission. This can be an NGO whose stated mission is “rural education” but whose secret primary mission is “insurgent organization.” The NGO will go through the necessary steps in order to ensure the continued flow of funds and in order to maintain the pretense. However, its key objective will always be insurgent organization.

Iran’s participation in ECOPOL is a prime example of mission laundering. ECOPOL’s stated purpose of fighting terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking and weapons smuggling provides Iran the proper pretense. However, its primary mission is to extend its influence in regional security matters for both political as well as operational objectives. Iran’s provisioning of weapons to terrorist groups in Iraq,⁵⁹ Afghanistan,⁶⁰ and other regional countries prompted the United Nations Security Council to impose strict sanctions on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and other Iranian agencies in June 2010.⁶¹ Additionally, the U.S. Department of State has designated Iran as a “state sponsor of international terrorism.”⁶² Consequently, Iran’s creation and participation in ECOPOL at the same time that it is engaged in weapons smuggling for terrorist activities is fairly strong evidence of mission laundering.

➤ **Investigation and Inspection**

Investigations and inspections are the mainstays of the GIO. The GIO is currently involved in major investigations of a multibillion dollar banking embezzlement scheme, embezzlement in the telecommunications privatization initiative and embezzlement in private investment companies. But investigations and inspections are not taken for granted by Mr. PourMohammadi. He recognizes these attributes as pillars of the GIO and the ECO anti-corruption initiatives. The Fars News Agency recently reported, “The former Iranian interior minister *Mr. Pour-Mohammadi] called for increased attention by Islamic communities to the issue of inspection. He added that Iranian society now attaches more significance to the issue as the Iranian elites and educated

⁵⁸ A term created by the author to explain Iranian operations in ECOPOL but with the intent of applying it to the greater concept.

⁵⁹ <http://abcnews.go.com/International/IraqCoverage/story?id=2688501>

⁶⁰ Speech by Adm. Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff delivered Wednesday, March 31, 2010 in Kabul, Afghanistan: “Iran is working to increase its influence in the area. On the one hand, that’s not surprising; she’s a neighbor state – or sorry, neighbor country. On the other hand, the influence that I see is all too often pretty negative. I was advised last night about a significant shipment of weapons, you know, from Iran into Kandahar not too long ago, for an example.” See also: Kabul Tolo Television in Dari 18 Oct 2007 “NATO Commander says Iran Sends Weapons to Afghanistan.” On March 23, 2010 the Bahrain Minister of State, Mansoor bin Rajab, was removed from his post with allegations of money laundering and direct connections to Al Quds.

⁶¹ UN Security Council Resolution 1929 (9 June 2010) <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/sc9948.doc.htm>

⁶² See “State Sponsors of Terrorism,” U.S. Department of State, August 18, 2011 <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2010/170260.htm>

figures have found out the importance of auditing and inspection for campaigning corruption [sic].”⁶³

Additionally, in a televised interview on the role of the GIO, Mr. Pour-Mohammadi stated, “Managers cannot be successful unless they use proper inspection systems, control their own environment, and have regular inspections . . . inspection is complementary to management.”⁶⁴

From the first meeting of the ECO on anti-corruption, Iran’s intent to envelop security, intelligence, and investigations into one regional organization was apparent. At the inaugural ECO anti-corruption meeting, Mr. Pour-Mohammadi stated that “fighting against drugs, human smuggling, money laundering, and organized crimes are among the important goals of this meeting.”⁶⁵ Three year later, he reiterated this sentiment stating, “This fight would be possible only through regional interaction.”⁶⁶ Mission laundering and regional intent aside, the Iranian plan for ECO anti-corruption is formidable and extensive.

Anti-Corruption in the ECO: The RCCACO

In the “Economic Cooperation Organization Strategy for the ECO Region” there is no mention of security, intelligence, or anti-corruption. The history of the ECO is founded on trade, transportation, communication, and energy. However, since the 2005 appointment of Mr. PourMohammadi to the position of Interior Minister and his subsequent 2008 appointment to the GIO, the role of the ECO in security and anti-corruption has grown tremendously. Like ECOPOL, the ECO anti-corruption initiative is the brainchild of Mr. Pour-Mohammadi. His plan calls for the creation of an anti-corruption “ECO Regional Center” headquartered in Tehran called *the Regional Center for Cooperation of Anti Corruption Agencies and Ombudsmen* (RCCACO).⁶⁷ The administration of the proposed anti-corruption center and its top ten objectives are clearly spelled out in the Endorsed Draft Statutes.⁶⁸ Similar to the ECOPOL constitution, which calls for the eradication of drug trafficking and weapons smuggling (at the same time that the government of Iran is actively involved in such activities), the RCCACO statutes articulate altruistic objectives dedicated toward eradicating corruption, money laundering, and other financial crimes.⁶⁹ Unfortunately, while the words portray a clear intent to comply with the United Nations

⁶³ Fars News Agency in English 1335 GMT 05 August 2009, “Iran Ready to Work with Muslim States on AntiCorruption Campaign”

⁶⁴ Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Esfahan Provincial TV in Persian 1752 GMT 03 December 2008; “Iran’s Former Interior Minister on Activities of General Inspection Organization”

⁶⁵ Islamic Republic News Agency/IRNA in English; 0320 GMT 22 May 2011 “Official: Iran Ready to Set up ‘Center to Fight Corruption’ in ECO.”

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ See: “The Experts Group Meeting for finalizing the draft Statute of the Regional Center for Cooperation of Anti Corruption Agencies and Ombudsmen (RCCACO) of the ECO Member States” held in Tehran 30-31 January 2012. http://www.ecosecretariat.org/ftproot/Press_Rls/2012/RCCACO.htm

⁶⁸ These statutes will not be made final until the next ECO Anti-Corruption meeting in Dushanbe, Tajikistan on April 16, 2012.

⁶⁹ See Endorsed Draft Statute of the ECO Regional Centre for Cooperation of Anti-Corruption Agencies and Ombudsmen of the ECO Member States; Article 3; Paragraphs 1 – 10.

Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), like ECOPOL before it, RCCACO appears to be a case of mission laundering.⁷⁰

On November 25, 2011, James H. Freis, U.S. Director of the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) determined that the country of Iran was a jurisdiction of "primary money laundering concern."⁷¹ Just months later, on February 25, 2012, the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) announced that it was prepared to terminate services to Iran's banking industry, effectively isolating it from the rest of the world.⁷²

To assuage the international community, Iran did pass an anti-money laundering law on January 22, 2008 that was approved by the Guardian Council on February 6, 2008.⁷³ In the aftermath of the Iraq war, however, reviewers have learned to look past the Iran's words and instead look at its actions. Unfortunately, as it relates to anti-corruption and money laundering, Iran has become a state participant and not a guardian of the law.

State sponsored corruption (money laundering, drug trafficking, smuggling, etc.) has many permutations. It does not necessarily mean that the state generally engages in or condones corruption as a matter of course. State sponsored corruption means that corruption is a sanctioned alternative for certain state actors in certain conditions with total impunity from prosecution. Often times this is not a case of black or white but gradations of gray. In the case of Iran, the Office of the al-Faqih authorizes (or delegates authority to) Ilaat, al-Quds or the Special Security Office to conduct operations directly linked to Iranian national objectives.⁷⁴ These initiatives are rarely funded directly by the Office of the al-Faqih.⁷⁵ These initiatives are funded by making opportunities available to recipients; most times legal, often times illegal.

⁷⁰ UNCAC: Chapter II, Article 14, paragraph 5.

⁷¹ Federal Register/ Vol. 76, No. 227 / Friday, November 25, 2011 / Notices / Page 72756; "Finding That the Islamic Republic of Iran Is a Jurisdiction of Primary Money Laundering Concern." <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-11-25/pdf/2011-30332.pdf>

⁷² Bloomberg Businessweek; February 28, 2012; "Swift May Expel Iran's Central Bank, Hindering Oil Payments" by Indira A.R. Lakshmanan.

⁷³ Speech of the Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran Before the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; October 8, 2008; see also: AML-CFT News February 1, 2010; http://aml-cft.blogspot.com/2010_02_01_archive.html ; but also see AML Law: http://www.mashpedia.com/Central_Bank_of_the_Islamic_Republic_of_Iran#Anti-money_laundering_law

⁷⁴ See *The History of the Iraq War: The Rise of the Shia Crescent* by Jeffrey Coonjohn for more detailed discussion on Iranian national objectives.

⁷⁵ Obviously, there are exceptions to this policy. According to *Key Influencer Report: Government Elites of Afghanistan*, "President Karzai's Chief of Staff Umar Daudzai reportedly receives money directly from the Iranian government. Iran tries to use this funding channel to obtain "information, influenc*e+ policies or chang*e+ political decisions, administrative and management policies and increas[e] tensions between President Karzai and the United States."

Mission Objective

If we accept that Iran's involvement in anti-corruption is mission laundering, then there must be an alternative primary mission. Iran's primary intent in developing the RCCACO and ECOPOL was and continues to be to increase its sphere of influence within the region and specifically within the security, intelligence and anti-corruption apparatus of ECO countries. With sufficient influence in an anti-corruption organization, Iran can manipulate investigations to remove or obstruct competitors in favor of individuals it wants to promote. Since anti-corruption agencies can reach across government, they have a great deal of power to tarnish reputations or hinder careers. Alternatively, when co-opted, anti-corruption organizations can turn a Nelsonian eye to corruption carried out by Iranian-friendly elements. Iranian motivations in the RCCACO are not altruistic but solely political. The Balkanization of ministries and the rise of Iranian influence in Iraq was accomplished in large part through influence and control at the Commission on Public Integrity. Investigations involving elements sympathetic to Iran were white-washed or ignored while their political competitors were subjected to a magnifying glass.⁷⁶

As Western governments withdraw support from anti-corruption agencies within ECO countries, the vacuum of support is not left unfilled. To the contrary, Iran (working through the ECO) is only too eager to assist a neighboring country in developing an anti-corruption agency based upon its model.



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⁷⁶ Iraqi political elements sympathetic to Iran primarily included SCIRI which eventually transformed into ISCI.



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