

Ensnared Iran Opposition Leader Alleges U.S. Ties

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In what many believe is a coerced confession, captured Iranian opposition militant Abdolmalek Rigi says he was working with the CIA, a claim likely to further tatter already strained relations between Iran and the United States, observers say.

Iran's state-controlled Press TV released on Friday a heavily-edited video of the alleged "confessions" of Rigi, whom the regime claimed to have captured earlier this week by forcing his plane down.

Rigi, the leader of the Baluchi militant group Jundollah, aka the People's Resistance Movement of Iran, has been waging a low-level guerilla war against the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) since the group's inception in 2003.

In his "confession," Rigi claims he was contacted by the CIA "after Obama was elected" and offered U.S. support including money, arms, weapons-training, and advanced communications gear, and an operational base in Afghanistan along the border with Iran.

Iranians announced that this would be what Rigi would say when they revealed his capture on Tuesday, leading some observers to speculate that Rigi was probably captured earlier and tortured to extract the heavily-edited statements.

"The nature of forced confessions — especially Iranian ones — is that they are as likely to be fiction as fact," said Michael Rubin, a former Pentagon official now with the American Enterprise institute. "However, the fact that Rigi is fingering the CIA in great detail likely foreshadows an increase in Iranian action against U.S. personnel and interests."

For the first half of the tape, Rigi is looking down at his hands and appears to be reading off of papers held in his lap, just out of camera range. Then in the second half, he appears more animated, gesturing with his hands, and looking directly into the camera.

At one point, he says that the Americans asked him to travel from Dubai to Kyrgyzstan to meet with a high-ranking U.S. official on the U.S. base at Manaz near Bishkek, the Kyrgyz capital. But he can't seem to remember the name of the Kyrgyz capital and turns to someone sitting nearby, who gives him a prompt.

A U.S. official called the Iranian claims of CIA interference in Rigi's confession "garbage."

"I wouldn't take at face value anything he says in front of a government camera. That's a state that relies heavily on coercion across the board, and the declarations of prisoners in Iran, clearly designed to serve as propaganda, deserve zero credibility," the official added.

Rigi claimed that the Americans first met him in March 2009 near Quetta, Pakistan, and offered material assistance to Jundollah. "They said that their problem at present is Iran . . . and that they don't have a problem with al-Qaida or the Taliban," Rigi said.

He went on to say that the CIA told him they had no plans to launch a U.S. military attack on Iran, but were looking for groups who could put pressure on the Islamic Republic.

"[The Americans] said they would find a base and guarantee security in Afghanistan or in any of the countries adjacent to Iran," Rigi says in the edited videotape.

A spokesman for U.S. Central Command called the allegation that the U.S. was preparing a base in Afghanistan for Rigi's group "Iranian propaganda," and said that claims the United States had provided support to Jundollah were "patently false."

Nasser Boladai, a spokesman for the Baluchestan People's Party, which is not affiliated with Jundollah, told Newsmax he believes Rigi was drugged.

"He is not the type of person who would do that under physical torture, or even to save his own brother from execution," Boladai



Reuters photo

Abdolmalek Rigi

said. "It can only be because they gave him some kind of drug that made him cooperative and talkative. It's not the first time they've done this."

Boladai noted that during dissident trials in Tehran, one defendant demanded he be allowed to talk and told a similar story of U.S. and foreign assistance, apparently under the influence of drugs. He was later executed.

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