

Can the Islamic Republic of Iran Survive to 2030?

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps commander, Brigadier General Esmail Qaani, has [Reuters](#), January 30, 2021 :

Iran executed on Saturday an ethnic Baloch militant convicted of killing Revolutionary Guards members, the judiciary's official website reported, a day after the United Nations urged Iranian authorities to spare his life.

The Mizan site said Javid Dehghan, who it said was a leader of the Sunni militant group Jaish al-Adl, or the Army of Justice, was hanged for shooting dead two Guards five years ago in the southeastern Sistan-Balochistan province...

The impoverished Sistan-Balochestan province, which borders

Afghanistan and Pakistan, has long been the scene of frequent clashes between security forces and Sunni militants and drug smugglers. The population of the province is predominantly Sunni Muslim, while most Iranians are Shi'ite.

Jaish al-Adl, which says it seeks greater rights and better living conditions for ethnic minority Balochis, has claimed responsibility for several attacks in recent years on Iranian security forces in the province.

The Baloch separatists in both eastern Iran and western Pakistan are fighting to create an independent Balochistan on land carved out of both countries. While Jaish al-Adl says it merely wants to improve living conditions and greater rights for the Baloch people, this understates the threat to Iran; Jaish al-Adl's ultimate aim is to create an independent state. The authorities in Tehran know this perfectly well.

The Iranian regime has forbidden the exclusive use of the Baluchi language in writing – that means any Baluchi text must always include a Farsi translation. It's a way to keep track of what the Baluchis are saying to one another, a part of intelligence gathering. In 2002 Baluchis founded the Jundullah, a religious and political organisation that has claimed rights for the Baluchis in eastern Iran. It has carried out both attacks on the Iranian military, and suicide bombings of Shi'a mosques. It is also suspected of kidnapping an Iranian nuclear scientist. Like the Kurds and the Azeris, the Baluchis can count on aid, including men, money, and materiel, coming from the other side of a porous Iranian border. In the case of the two million Baluchis in Iran, there are another nine million Baluchis in Pakistan, who are keenly aware of the mistreatment of their fellow Baluchis – all of them Sunnis – by the Shi'a government in Iran.

The final minority that has been mistreated by the Persians are the Arabs in Khuzestan, the oil-producing southern

province on the Gulf that was devastated in the Iran-Iraq war, with much of the area left in ruins. The Iranians claim there are only two million of them; the Arabs claim there are five million Arabs in Khuzestan. Whatever their number, the Khuzestanian Arabs have long complained of discrimination by the Persians. In 2005, there were mass riots and mass arrests of 25,000 people in Khuzestan, and many Arabs were summarily executed. Arrests, torture, and executions have continued to imperfectly keep the peace. There were more riots in 2007, followed by more repression; in 2015, there were a wave of arrests made so as to head off any tenth-anniversary revolt; the rage remains. But if those Khuzestanian Arabs were supplied directly with arms, and with the money to buy additional arms, and to pay Arab fighters from outside, they could cause a great deal of destruction to the oilfields and thus to the Iranian economy. Given that Iran has sent arms to the Houthis in order to establish an Iran-backed Yemen that would serve as a base for anti-Saudi activities (including whipping up the Shi'a in Saudi Arabia's oil-rich Eastern Province), why should the Saudis, and other Arabs, not do likewise, and supply the Khuzestanian Arabs with weapons and "volunteers" to fight their Persian masters?

Were Iran to lose control of Khuzestan, it would also be losing the region from which 85% of its oil, and 60% of its gas, is produced. In other words, the loss of Khuzestan would likely destroy the Iranian economy. And even if the territory were not lost to separatists, if the Arabs of Khuzestan rose in revolt, armed with weapons bought or supplied by Saudi Arabia and the other oil-rich Gulf Arab states, the destruction unavoidably wrought on the oilfields and pipelines, either by the Arabs in revolt, or by the Iranians fighting those Arabs, could put much of Iran's oil production out of commission for years. The prospect of this is no doubt causing nightmares in Tehran. From the viewpoint of the Arab members of OPEC, there's an added bonus to a heavily-armed insurrection in Khuzestan, which is that even when the

American sanctions are lifted – which kept sales of Iranian oil low – Iranian oil production could still stay way down as a result both of deliberate sabotage of the oilfields and pipelines, and from interruptions in the flow that would be the result of armed conflict between Iran's army and the Khuzestanian separatists.

Kurds, Azeris, Baluchis, Arabs make up half – a disgruntled half – of Iran's population. Beyond Mossad agents running circles around the intelligence services of the Islamic Republic, Iran has much else to worry about. This brief response to IRGC commander Essam Qaani fits the bill: The real food for thought, General Qaani, is not that that Jews should leave their tiny state now because "Israel Will Not Survive" – we've seen how the Jewish state has managed for 73 years to survive everything its enemies have tried to do to it, and even to thrive. No, a different question is more to the point. And that question is: "Can the Islamic Republic of Iran Survive To 2030"?

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