

Iran Ties Sunni Insurgents to Base in Pakistan



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TEHRAN, Feb. 18 — The Iranian Foreign Ministry charged Sunday that Sunni insurgents from Iran used Pakistan as a base to plan a bombing that killed 11 people and wounded more than 30 in the southeastern border city of Zahedan last week, and it said that it had demanded an explanation from the Pakistani ambassador.

“We summoned the Pakistani ambassador to explain what happened,” Mohammad Ali Hosseini, a spokesman for the ministry, said during his weekly news conference on Sunday. “Both sides will suffer from insecurity and we decided to set up a committee to raise the security at the borders,” he said.

A car loaded with explosives detonated in front of a bus carrying members of the Revolutionary Guards last Wednesday.

A second bomb was set off in Zahedan on Friday evening. The semiofficial Fars news agency reported that it caused no casualties. But the news agency said the police clashed with an armed group and exchanged gunfire after the blast.

Zahedan, the capital of the province of Sistan-Baluchistan, is home to many ethnic Baluchis, who are Sunni Muslims.

A majority of Iranians are Shiites. A Baluchi group opposed to the government, the Jondollah Organization of Iran, claimed responsibility for both attacks.

A senior security official said 65 people had been arrested in connection to the blasts.

Newspapers in Tehran reported Sunday that the state-run Hamoun channel in Sistan-Baluchistan broadcast a two-minute confession by a suspect, Nasrollah Shamsi Zehi, who was accused of being involved in the deadly bombing. He said he had robbed a bank in Zahedan, then escaped to Pakistan where he was trained by Jondollah for two months and was told that he would receive \$1,200 for each mission.

Iran has accused the United States and Britain of provoking the Sunni insurgents. The authorities have said that the efforts are part of the plot to sow discord among Sunnis and Shiites in the country. Gen. Mohammad Ghaffari, a commander of security forces in the province, told the Fars news agency that a film that was confiscated from the suspects proved that the group was “affiliated to intelligence agencies of some of the foreign countries, such as the U.S. and Britain.”

The news agency also quoted what it called informed sources as saying that the explosives used in the bombings were American.

Iran blamed the United States and Britain for a series of bombings in the southern city of Ahwaz in Khuzestan Province in 2006. Those bombings were also carried out by Iranian Sunnis. The government hanged 12 men after accusing them of carrying out the attacks, which killed eight people.

Tensions have increased between Iran and the United States in recent months. The United States has accused Iran of secretly trying to develop nuclear weapons and of

arming Shiite insurgents in Iraq. Iran has rejected both charges and contends that the United States wants to find a scapegoat for its problems in Iraq.

The Revolutionary Guards announced Sunday that they would hold three days of maneuvers starting Monday. The exercises, at least the second so far this year, are aimed at displaying Iran's military capacity as concerns about a confrontation with the United States are increasing.

The maneuvers will take place in 16 of Iran's 30 provinces, and 60,000 soldiers will take part, the IRNA news agency reported Sunday.