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Iran-US Watch

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This report is prepared by our affiliate analyst in Washington, DC. Its contents reflect the perspectives on Iran, from the American lens. For more information, contact rms@atiehbahar.com.

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Recent Developments in Brief

Torricelli drops the MKO after pressure...

After repeated attacks from his Republican opponent, Senator Robert G. Torricelli of New Jersey has dropped his support for the Mujahedin and is no longer seeking to have the group removed from the State Department's terrorist watch list. The Senator, known for his unscrupulous dealings, has recently courted the wider Iranian-American community and is hoping to be able to replace the previous MKO donations to campaign with donations from the pro-rapprochement camp in the Iranian-American community. But the driving force behind this turn of event is his opponent Douglas R. Forrester's accusations that the senator has accepted campaign money from terrorist supporters. The New York Post recently reported that he has received \$140,000 from the MKO in campaign contributions. Torricelli's move is likely to have a domino effect on other lawmakers who have courted the MKO. Another MKO supporter, James Traffiant, recently lost his seat in Congress. And there are now rumors that Torricelli might drop out of the race altogether.

... and Republicans turn heat up on MKO in House...

Several republican lawmakers have requested to be dropped from a letter in support of the MKO after strong efforts from Congressman Bob Ney and Republican Whip Tom Delay. Ney's office took on the MKO after the group lobbied extensively against Ney's resolution on Iran (HRes 505) and after a MKO front group put in a \$15,000 add against the Ohio lawmaker in RollCall, a newspaper widely circulated on the Hill. This is the first time since 1992 that a lawmaker has decided to actively

	confront the activities of the MKO on Capitol Hill (Congressman Lee Hamilton was a vocal opponent of the group in the 1990's).
<i>Bush's new military strategy not aimed at Iran</i>	The Bush administration has published its first comprehensive rationale for shifting American military strategy toward pre-emptive action against hostile states and terrorist groups developing weapons of mass destruction. The strategy document also states, for the first time, that the United States will never allow its military supremacy to be challenged the way it was during the cold war. Although the doctrine is more aimed at China, it can have decisive effects on US-Iran relations as well.
<i>Iran accepts British ambassador</i>	Diplomatic relations between Britain and Iran will be restored to ambassadorial level, after a break of nine months, following Tehran's acceptance of London's second choice as envoy. Iran's foreign ministry confirmed on Monday that it had agreed to the nomination of Richard Dalton, currently ambassador to Libya, after refusing to accept David Reddaway late last year.
<i>Kharrazi reaches out to US public...</i>	Kharrazi was unusually generous with interviews during his recent trip to the US. Interviews with him were conducted by the LA Times, Washington Post and USA Today. Generally speaking, the Iranian FM cautiously hinted that the door towards improved relations with the US is open, even though his government is not appreciative of the Bush Administration's policies and rhetoric towards the Islamic Republic. Kharrazi tried to portray Iran as the more reasonable party in the diplomatic conflict, and said that the US missed a "golden opportunity" to improve relations with Iran over the past year as the two nations increased contacts both publicly and behind the scenes during the war on terrorism in Afghanistan.
<i>...while his message is overshadowed by al-Qaida accusations...</i>	His message was overshadowed, however, by an increasing amount of reports on Iran's alleged cooperation with al-Qaeda, including NBC's claim that they have satellite photos of al-Qaeda camps in Iran.
<i>...fueled by Arab intelligence....</i>	Arab intelligence has given strength to the White House's accusations against Iran in regards to its ties to al-Qaeda. Arab intelligence sources have reported that Iran's Revolutionary Guards are actively supporting the organization, providing everything from safe houses to phony travel documents.
<i>...and unconfirmed NBC reports...</i>	US intelligence has detected what appears to be an al-Qaeda training camp in a remote region of eastern Iran along the border with Afghanistan, according to a NBC report that cites unidentified sources. NBC quoted the sources as saying that Iran's civilian government may not know the camp exists but that Iranian military and intelligence certainly would. U.S. official have declined to comment the report.

<p><i>...resulting in Iran's message falling on deaf ears...</i></p>	<p>Iran has realized that the lack of communication with the US during the war on Iraq can be devastating. This has intensified Iranian diplomatic efforts to reinitiate a diplomatic process between the countries. Government spokesman Abdullah Ramezanzadeh has stated, for instance, "the possibility of re-establishing ties depends on the US making the first step". But Tehran's efforts to reach out to Washington have fallen on deaf ears. The White House is aware of Iran's difficult position and is turning up the heat on Tehran in hope that the Iranians will creep back to the table.</p>
<p><i>Iran only to blame itself for missing deserved points in Washington</i></p>	<p>Iran's expulsion of the head of Al-Ansar, a Kurdish group with alleged ties to al-Qaeda, has received little press in the US. Iran's poor PR machine has again deprived it from deserved points in Washington</p>
<p><i>US Troops on Iranian border</i></p>	<p>The US troops have reached the Nimrouz Province near the border with Iran. Eyewitnesses have reported the Iranian forces are on high alert in the region. Top Afghan officials in Nimruz and Kabul say they have mounting evidence that elements in Iran's armed forces, as well as the religious police, loyal to the country's conservative clerics, are actively assisting Al Qaeda, including Osama bin Laden's second-in-command, the Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri. The Afghan officials, and Western diplomats in Kabul, contend that this collaboration is the real reason for the new US military base on the Iranian border.</p>
<p><i>Region prepares for next Bonn Conference</i></p>	<p>The preparation for Iraq's "Bonn conference" is under way with all regional powers boosting up their proxies and representatives at the future conference. This has intensified competition between Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and other regional powers. In Washington, the value of coordinating efforts with Iran is mainly neglected.</p>
<p><i>American Jewish Congress creates new obstacles to US-Iran rapprochement</i></p>	<p>The American Jewish Congress is pushing for legislation in the Senate and the House (HR 3210) that would allow US citizens to sue foreign states on the State Department's terrorist list and have the assets of those states confiscated. Previous attempts to confiscate the assets of foreign governments in order to compensate victims of terrorism have been prevented by the State Department.</p> <p>The new bill would, however, override the State Department's authority and allow victims of Palestinian terrorism to take money from Iran's frozen assets. The language in the House and Senate versions differ, and the AJC is pushing for a text that would enable plaintiffs to sue foreign states without providing evidence that the states in question are in control of the day to day affairs of the groups perpetrating the actual terrorist acts. In</p>

	reality, this means that the mere accusation would be sufficient evidence. Needless to say, if this bill passes, it will create yet another obstacle to improved US-Iran relations.
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