



EURASIA SECURITY WATCH

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
Security in the Post-Soviet Space

Eurasia Security Watch: No. 147

April 10, 2007 **Ilan I. Berman**

Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Terrorism; Middle East; Turkey

FATAH BRACES FOR BATTLE

Despite agreeing in principle to form a coalition government as part of the so-called "Mecca Accords" recently held in Saudi Arabia, the Palestinian Authority's rival political factions appear to be hedging their bets. The secular Fatah party, led by President Mahmoud Abbas, has created a 1,400-man "intervention force" to be deployed "in case of a second conflagration of hostilities." The unit, known as the Special Fatah Force, is intended as a supplement to Fatah's regular security force, the Presidential Guard. The move is being watched with mounting concern by officials of the ruling Hamas movement, who are pressing the Palestinian military, which they control, to "engage Fatah as soon as possible." (Tel Aviv *Ha'aretz*, April 1, 2007)

SAUDI ARABIA VERSUS THE INTERNET

The House of Saud is cracking down on a wave of new Internet and mobile phone technology seeping into the country. Recently, the Saudi government instituted a new training and orientation program for members of its feared religious police, the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Vice, in order to better "deal with the new advances and the proliferation of cyber culture." Authorities in Riyadh have publicly expressed concerns over religiously offensive materials such as "decoder cards" and "pornographic images or clips on mobile phones," which have proliferated with the help of the Internet. The new program is designed to confront this trend, and will educate Commission employees in the rules of Islamic jurisprudence and introduce a new criminal framework for cyber-infractions. Under the new plan, "illegal entry into an Internet site" banned by the Saudi government is a crime, while Internet hacking or "taking unauthorized pictures" with a camera phone will be punishable by one year in prison. (London *Al Sharq al-Awsat*, March 27, 2007)

THINKING TWICE ABOUT DE-BA'ATHIFICATION

In a bid to advance Iraq's long-stalled reconciliation process, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is sending a draft of an Accountability and Reconciliation Law to the country's parliament for approval. The plan, which seeks to woo former Ba'athists back into the political fold, recognizes that the "de-Ba'athification" of the army and civil service carried out after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime left hundreds of thousands of disgruntled Sunnis outside of the political mainstream, and helped to fuel the insurgency in the former Ba'athist state. In an effort to reverse this trend, the controversial bill would offer immunity and reinstated pensions to former Ba'athists if they clear a six month "challenge" period in which they could be sued for past crimes. The bill has been hailed by Shi'ite and Kurdish lawmakers alike, and has been endorsed by U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad. But talk of a constitutional amendment to re-incorporate former Ba'athists so far has met with skepticism from the country's Sunni lawmakers. (Agence France Presse, March 27, 2007)

THE DOMESTIC COSTS OF TURKISH COUNTERTERRORISM

Turkey's mounting concerns over the activities of the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK) – and the role of Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region in sustaining the radical anti-Turkish group – is spilling over into domestic politics. In recent weeks, Turkey's main pro-Kurdish party, the Democratic Society Party, has been the target of a governmental clampdown that has resulted in the arrest of dozens of its political leaders and raids on several party offices. The offensive, coming ahead of the country's parliamentary elections later this year, are raising concerns among observers. "The crackdown is a process of intimidation and judicial harassment of the party," says Reyhan Yalcindag of the Human Rights Association watchdog group. (eurasianet.org, April 5, 2007)