

9 Detainees Not Iranian, Tehran Says

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P43

TEHRAN -- Iran insisted Sunday that none of its citizens had been arrested in Afghanistan, after an Afghan politician said a Revolutionary Guards general and eight other Iranians were detained and handed over to U.S. forces.

Tehran's statement followed reports that an Iranian group led by a Gen. Razavi was arrested Tuesday while clandestinely distributing money and weapons to allies in western Afghanistan.

"No Iranian national is among those arrested in Afghanistan," government spokesman Abdullah Ramezanzadeh told reporters. "We do not have any military presence in Afghanistan." In Kandahar, Afghanistan, politician Izzatullah Wasafi said the Iranians were handed over to U.S. authorities at the air base there, where coalition forces are holding Taliban and Al Qaeda prisoners.

In Washington, Condoleezza Rice, President Bush's national security advisor, said some people had been taken into custody who "have some relationship to Iran" but that they were still being debriefed.

"What we cannot have is to have Iran playing, surreptitiously, games in the politics in Afghanistan or trying to create conditions that would be dangerous for American forces," she said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Wasafi, who said he had been involved in tracking the Iranian group's activities, said the group included three Iranian border guards and five other members of the Revolutionary Guards--a trusted Iranian military corps with close ties to Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Wasafi said three Afghans serving as the Iranians' guides also were apprehended in the operation, which he described as a trap set by a militia commander in Shindand, in Herat province about 100 miles east of the Iranian border.

According to Wasafi, the commander pretended he was interested in the Iranians' offer of money, but when the group approached a meeting point, the commander's soldiers fired off warning shots, stopped the three vehicles carrying the 12 men and took them into custody.

[Go back to the table of contents](#)

Article #10

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