

Schnellrecherche der SFH-Länderanalyse vom 9. November 2015 zu Iran: Rekrutierung afghanischer Flüchtlinge durch iranische Behörden für den Krieg in Syrien

Frage an die SFH-Länderanalyse:

- Werden afghanische Flüchtlinge durch Behörden in Iran rekrutiert, um an Kampfhandlungen in Syrien teilzunehmen?

Die Informationen beruhen auf einer zeitlich begrenzten Recherche (Schnellrecherche) in öffentlich zugänglichen Dokumenten, die uns derzeit zur Verfügung stehen.

1 Rekrutierung afghanischer Flüchtlinge durch iranische Behörden für den Krieg in Syrien

Fatemioun Military Division. Die in Syrien aktive *Fatemioun Military Division*, welche aus in Iran und Syrien lebenden afghanischen Flüchtlingen besteht, ist nach Angaben von *The Guardian* vom 5. November 2015 das zweitgrösste ausländische Militärkontingent, welches in Syrien zur Unterstützung des syrischen Präsidenten Bashar al-Assad kämpft.

Rekrutierung afghanischer Flüchtlinge durch iranische Behörden. Nach Angaben einer Vielzahl von Quellen (*The Guardian*, 5. November 2015; *Sverige Radio*, 23. Oktober 2015; *Kuwait Times*, 27. August 2015; *The Wall Street Journal*, 22. Mai 2014; Philipp Smyth, 3. Juni 2014) werden in Iran lebende afghanische Flüchtlinge durch iranische Behörden für die Teilnahme am Krieg in Syrien zur Unterstützung der syrischen Regierung rekrutiert. Nach Angaben zweier Quellen (*Kuwait Times*, 27. August 2015; *The Wall Street Journal*, 22. Mai 2014) wird die Rekrutierung der afghanischen Flüchtlinge von der iranischen Revolutionsgarde durchgeführt. Bei der Rekrutierung werden laut verschiedenen Quellen (*The Guardian*, 5. November 2015; *Kuwait Times*, 27. August 2015; *The Wall Street Journal*, 22. Mai 2014) den zu Rekrutierenden als Gegenleistung für den Einsatz im Krieg ein monatliches Gehalt und/oder Aufenthaltsbewilligungen in Iran versprochen. Laut des Artikels des *Wall Street Journal* vom 22. Mai 2014 bieten die iranischen Behörden als Anreiz für die Rekrutierung zudem auch sogenannte *Charity Cards* und Schulregistrierungen für die Kinder der rekrutierten afghanischen Flüchtlinge an. Laut *The Guardian* finden in Mashhad und Qom, den zwei iranischen Städten mit der grössten afghanischen Bevölkerung, täglich Rekrutierungen statt.

Rekrutierung unter Zwang. Nach gegenüber verschiedenen Medien (*Sverige Radio*, 23. Oktober 2015; *AFP* in *Kuwait Times*, 27. August 2015) gemachten Angaben des Experten Philipp Smyth¹ werden afghanische Flüchtlinge auch unter Zwang rekrutiert. So werden laut des Experten afghanische Flüchtlinge seit mindestens einem Jahr zur Rekrutierung gedrängt. Dabei würden finanzielle Anreize aber auch Zwang verwendet.

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Rekrutierung Minderjähriger. Gemäss verschiedenen Quellen (*The Guardian*, 5. November 2015; *Sverige Radio*, 23. Oktober 2015) werden von den iranischen Behörden auch minderjährige afghanische Flüchtlinge für die Teilnahme an Kampfhandlungen in Syrien rekrutiert. Nach Angaben von *The Guardian* müssten afghanische Flüchtlinge unter 18 Jahren dafür eine schriftliche Erlaubnis ihrer Eltern vorweisen. Die gleiche Quelle berichtet von mindestens einem 16-jährigen in Iran lebenden afghanischen Flüchtling, welcher in Syrien im Herbst 2015 getötet wurde.

The Guardian, 5. November 2015:

«Iran is recruiting Afghan refugees to fight in Syria, promising a monthly salary and residence permits in exchange for what it claims to be a sacred endeavour to save Shia shrines in Damascus. The Fatemioun military division of Afghan refugees living in Iran and Syria is now the second largest foreign military contingent fighting in support of Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian president, after the Lebanese militia Hezbollah. Iranian state-affiliated agencies reported in May that at least 200 Fatemioun members had been killed in Syria since the beginning of the war. How many more have died since is not clear.(...) Recruitment is taking place on a daily basis in Mashhad and Qom, two Iranian cities with the largest population of Afghan refugees. Mashhad, the second most populous city in Iran, is only three hours' drive from the country's border with Afghanistan. Iran is also accepting Afghans below the age of 18 provided they have written permission from their parents, the Guardian has learned. At least one 16-year-old Iran-based Afghan refugee was killed in Syria earlier this autumn.

(...) This is mere exploitation of vulnerable people,' said Mujtaba Jalali, a 24-year-old Iranian-born Afghan refugee from Mashhad who has recently fled to Europe. Jalali, a professional photographer, has visited at least 10 funerals in his city held for Afghans who have lost their lives in Syria. The Guardian is publishing his photographs for the first time, some of which reveal the identities of the Fatemioun members killed. Although Jalali was born in Iran, he has not been able to hold an Iranian nationality, in common with all Afghan children born there. People like Jalali face immense difficulties in continuing their education, having bank accounts, receiving paperwork to leave the country or have access to work in Iran. 'This is the war Iran is fighting at someone else's expense,' Jalali said. 'It's Afghan refugees in Iran who are paying the price of Tehran's support for Assad and they are being lied to about the real motives. It's not religious, it's political. Instead of protecting its refugees, Iran is using them.' According to Jalali, **most Iran-based Afghans, who are also Shia, are not going to Syria to risk their lives on religious grounds but because of the financial and stability benefits that their involvement will bring to them and their families.** Nearly 1 million Afghans are registered as refugees in Iran but the country is believed to host at least 2 million more who are living illegally.» Quelle: The Guardian, Afghan refugees in Iran being sent to fight and die for Assad in Syria, 5. November 2015: www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/05/iran-recruits-afghan-refugees-fight-save-syrias-bashar-al-assad.

Sverige Radio, 23. Oktober 2015:

«Many underage refugees arriving in Sweden bear witness of forced recruitment among Afghans in Iran to fight in the Syria war. (...) Swedish Radio has found a number of similar stories among unaccompanied Afghan minors arriving in Sweden. The payment for an Afghan going to Syria is reportedly about 2 million Iranian toman per month, or SEK 5000. And the families of those who are killed are reportedly paid about 90 million toman, close to SEK 250.000. The fact that these reports are so common right now is connected to the Iran-supported offensive that recently was launched in Syria, said Phillip Smyth, researcher at the University of Maryland who has closely followed the activities of Shia militias in Syria. They've been pushing people quite hard for at least a year to join this effort, whether it's through financial incentives, or just through coercion, Smyth said.» Quelle: Sverige Radio, Iran recruiting Afghan children to fight in Syria, 23. Oktober 2015: www.sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=83&artikel=6286025.

Kuwait Times, 27. August 2015:

«The fate of two brothers from Kabul, one grievously wounded, the other killed fighting in Syria, spotlights Iran's covert but active recruitment of Afghan refugees to buttress President Bashar al-Assad's steadily depleting forces. Shiite Iran, Assad's key military and financial patron, denies enlisting Afghan mercenaries to fight alongside Syrian forces in the four-year conflict against opposition Sunni rebels that has left more than 240,000 people dead and millions displaced. But interviews with Afghan fighters and relatives of combatants killed in Syria point to a vigorous -- and sometimes coerced -- recruitment drive of Shiite Hazara refugees by Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards Corps propping up Assad's floundering regime. Tears well up in Jehantab's rheumy eyes as she recalls the haunting parting words of her husband, 35-year-old Haider, when he called two months ago from Tehran: 'I am going to Syria -- and I may not come back.' 'Very few fighters survive Syria's brutal conflict', he told me,' said Jehantab, swaddled in a white scarf and sitting with three young children on the floor of her Kabul home. Haider, she said, was lured by the monthly salary of \$700 -- a tidy sum for a labourer with no combat experience -- and the promise of an Iranian residency permit, an attractive inducement for refugees who otherwise live in constant fear of deportation. 'I begged him: 'Don't go, don't kill yourself for money', said Jehantab, who asked to be identified only by her first name in order not to jeopardise her chances of getting the permit. Haider's premonition came true -- a few days after he left, an Iranian official informed his relatives, also refugees in Tehran, that he had been killed in battle. Haider was part of a growing wave of jobless young Afghans seeking shelter in neighbouring Iran from decades of turmoil and war tearing their country apart, only to be ensnared in another conflict.

'In terms of how they are recruited, deployed, and utilised in Syria, many Afghan Shiite fighters have suffered the fate of being used as cannon fodder,' said Phillip Smyth, an expert on Shiite militant groups, who estimates there are 2,000 to 3,500 Afghans currently fighting in Syria. 'Some are coerced to fight, others promised residency papers for their family, and a small salary. It demonstrates Iran's exploitation of Afghan Shiite refugees.'

The Iranian embassy in Kabul told AFP it rejects allegations that Tehran is enlisting Afghan refugees as 'completely baseless'. But in a video posted online apparently by anti-Assad rebels last year, a dazed and bloodied Afghan militiaman is seen confessing that he was an illegal immigrant in Iran, where authorities offered him \$600 a month to fight in Syria -- or face deportation. It was not possible for AFP to verify the authenticity of the video.» Quelle: Kuwait Times, Iran enlists Afghan refugees as fighters to bolster Syria's Assad, 27. August 2015:
www.news.kuwaittimes.net/pdf/2015/aug/27/p13.pdf.

The Wall Street Journal, 22. Mai 2014:

«Iran has been recruiting thousands of Afghan refugees to fight in Syria, offering \$500 a month and Iranian residency to help the Assad regime beat back rebel forces, according to Afghans and a Western official. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC, recruits and trains Shiite militias to fight in Syria. Details of their recruitment efforts were posted this week on a blog focused on Afghan refugees in Iran and confirmed by the office of Grand Ayatollah Mohaghegh Kabuli, an Afghan religious leader in the Iranian holy city of Qom. A member of the IRGC also confirmed the details. 'They [IRGC] find a connection to the refugee community and work on convincing our youth to go and fight in Syria,' said the office administrator of Ayatollah Kabuli, reached by telephone in Qom. 'They give them everything from salary to residency.' Tehran is also offering them school registration for their children and charity cards. Many Afghan young men have written to Ayatollah Kabuli to ask whether fighting in Syria was religiously sanctioned, his office said. He responded only if they were defending Shiite shrines. Lately, his office said he has kept silent and not even attended funerals of Afghans killed in Syria. (...) A Western official in Iran said recruiting Afghans was part of a shifting strategy to send poor foot soldiers to the front lines from a community with little clout to minimize casualties among Hezbollah and Guards members and political fallout. The Afghan recruits, like Hezbollah and most Iranians, are all Shiites and support the Syrian regime dominated by minority Alawites, an offshoot of Shiite Islam. The rebels are predominantly Sunni and backed by the Sunni powers of the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The Guards are convincing Afghans to join the war in Syria by playing off Shiite-Sunni sectarian rivalries. They emphasize the role of hard-line Sunni rebel groups affiliated with al Qaeda, said the Western official. (...) Iran's efforts to recruit Afghan refugees to fight in Syria were confirmed to The Wall Street Journal by a member of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, a Western official in Iran and the office of an Afghan religious leader in Iran.» Quelle: The Wall Street Journal, Iran Pays Afghans to Fight for Assad, Offers Them \$500 Stipend, Residency Benefits, 22. Mai 2014:
www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304908304579564161508613846.

Philipp Smyth, 3. Juni 2014:

«Afghan Shiite militants have been fighting on the Assad regime's side for some time, and the scope and strategic purpose of Iran's involvement is becoming increasingly clear. (...)

The Afghan Shiites fighting in Syria have come from three main sources. First is the contingent already residing in Syria before the war, a number of whom lived near Sayyeda Zainab, a prominent Shiite shrine located south of Damascus. According to researcher Ahmad Shuja, some 2,000 Afghan Shiites, mainly belonging to the Persian-speaking Hazara ethnic group, took up residence in Syria before hostilities broke out. As with Hazara refugees in other countries, many of them had fled Afghanistan after suffering regularly at the hands of the Taliban. Yet once the war started, many were once again reportedly targeted for attacks based on their sectarian identity, quickly becoming internally displaced persons. Some of them joined the fighting; for example, Ali Salehi, a Hazara reportedly residing in Syria, was killed during hostilities in the Damascus area. Fighters from this refugee population appear to have followed an organizational model similar to Liwa Abu Fadl al-Abbas (LAFA), the main pro-regime Shiite brigade in Syria. LAFA's original core consisted of Iraqi Shiite refugees from the Sayyeda Zainab area who assembled in a popular-committee format; their avowed justification for fighting was to defend the Shiite shrine. Iranian-backed recruits and trained fighters from established organizations such as Asaib Ahl al-Haqq (AAH), Kataib Hezbollah, and Lebanese Hezbollah later helped expand the brigade and build its combat abilities.

*A second contingent of Afghan Shiite fighters hails from Iran; according to Iranian government-backed newspapers and Afghan Shiite sources, they are the largest such contingent. **Many of these recruits were originally refugees in Iran, which is home to around half a million Hazaras**; a 2010 Stimson Center report noted that a third of these refugees 'have spent more than half their life in Iran.' Public funerals held in the Islamic Republic in November-December 2013 indicate that Afghan Shiite fighters came from cities throughout the country, including Isfahan, Mashhad, Tehran, and Qom. One young 'martyr,' Reza Ismail, had attended Iran's University of Mashhad, and a photo reportedly taken in Syria showed him holding an M4-type carbine. Apparently, he was beheaded by Sunni jihadist rebels.*

A third and more debatable source of Afghan Shiite fighters is refugee populations in countries other than Iran and Syria. In April 2013, officials in Afghanistan announced that they would look into reports of Afghan nationals fighting for Assad. And just last month, Kabul called on Tehran to not recruit its nationals to fight in Syria. If direct Iranian recruitment were proven, Kabul threatened to file a complaint with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Yet real evidence of direct recruitment in Afghanistan has yet to surface.» Quelle: Philipp Smyth, The Washington Institute, Policy Watch 2262, Iran's Afghan Shiite Fighters in Syria, 3. Juni 2014: www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/irans-afghan-shiite-fighters-in-syria.