

Fifth-generation warfare in Urmia

Behind foiled plot to foment ethnic strife, weaken Iran



People of mostly Azeri descent mourn the martyrdom of Imam Ali (PBUH) during a religious gathering in the northwestern city of Urmia, Iran, on March 22, 2025. Anti-Kurdish slogans chanted at the event incited ethnic tensions.

MEHR



By Navid Kamali
Foreign affairs expert

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The unfortunate events of March 22, 2025, in Urmia, northwestern Iran, were not merely a localized and transient incident, but rather a warning sign and an echo of a geopolitical threat to our nation's security. These bitter events, which occurred after Nowruz celebrations in a targeted, ethnic, and provocative manner in this border city, unveiled the long-standing strategy of Iran's enemies.

The strategy was to engineer chaos and instability by activating ethnic and religious fault lines. It clearly showed that the ill-wishers of the Iranian nation continue to beat the drums of division and fragmentation, exploiting every opportunity and loophole, even misusing national and religious occasions and distorting the cultural rights of ethnic groups, to ignite the flames of ethnic and religious conflicts, ul-

timately aiming for the Balkanization of Iran.

What clearly reveals an asymmetric hybrid strategy at play is that that particular Nowruz celebration was carried out in a biased manner with an emphasis on a specific ethnic identity, was followed by the abuse of the mourning ceremonies for the martyrdom of Imam Ali (PBUH) by certain known individuals, and was peppered with the chanting of divisive and ethnic-nationalist slogans. This was all amidst escalating economic challenges and broad external pressures at a time when the hybrid warfare of enemies against our country had reached its peak. The ultimate goal of this strategy was nothing less than to dismantle the foundations of national unity, create controlled chaos, incite a proxy civil war, and ultimately, fragment and weaken a powerful and independent Iran. These events can be analyzed within the framework of the fifth-generation warfare theory, where the primary focus is on creating instability and internal collapse by provoking social, ethnic,

religious, and economic fault lines. As is evident, these unfortunate events coincided significantly with the intensification of oppressive economic pressures, as well as threatening and interventionist correspondence from the President of the United States Donald Trump regarding Iran's nuclear program. This concurrence adds more complex and worrying dimensions to the situation and underscores the need for heightened strategic vigilance in the country. It appears that Iran's sworn enemies, realizing their inability to confront Iran militarily and witnessing the Iranian nation's resistance to oppressive sanctions, have concluded that they must destabilize and create insecurity within the country. They are relying on their fifth column among certain ethnic and religious groups to pave the way for internal collapse and, ultimately, Iran's submission to their illegitimate and excessive demands.

In this context, one should not overlook the fact that the controversial and tension-inducing issue of the Zangezur Corridor remains

unresolved. The governments of Turkey and Azerbaijan, with an evident desire for this strategic corridor and with the support of extra-regional actors, are waiting for an opportunity to establish a direct communication corridor between themselves. This would effectively create a geopolitical chokehold in our northwest, depriving Iran of direct access to the borders of Armenia and, consequently, Europe. This plan not only seriously endangers our national security, but also could lead to extensive geopolitical changes in the South Caucasus region, altering the balance of power to our detriment.

Furthermore, the audacious and interventionist statements of the director of Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), regarding the launch of a Persian-language network with the explicit purpose of hurting Iran, are clear evidence that the enemies are determined to strike at Iran's territorial integrity, independence, and national sovereignty. In this sinister path, they will not hesitate to use any means, not even provoking ethnic

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and religious fault lines and waging cognitive warfare against the Iranian people. In addition, the statements of this ostensibly cultural but, in reality, intelligence-tied director of TRT clearly show that the enemies are seeking to create a full-scale psychological war against Iran's public opinion.

It is crucial to recognize that Iran is an ancient country with a rich and eventful history and a vibrant civilization. It has always been known as a land of diverse ethnicities and cultures. This ethno-cultural diversity has never been a point of weakness for Iran. Rather, as wisely stated by the Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution, and in accordance with Joseph Nye's theory of soft power, it serves as a source of soft power and a golden, unparalleled opportunity for synergy, prosperity, social capital generation, and the further strengthening of the foundations of national unity and social cohesion.

Throughout the tumultuous history of this land, Iranian ethnicities — Kurds, Azeris, Lurs, Baluchs, Persians, Arabs, Turkmens, and others — have always stood shoulder to shoulder, in joys and sorrows, in hardships and ease, united against foreign threats and aggressions. The eight-year Sacred Defense (Iran-Iraq War) is a shining and undeniable example of this unity, solidarity, and self-sacrifice. During that crucial period, brave and valiant warriors of Islam, from all ethnicities and religions, from all corners of dear Iran, with unwavering faith and iron will, stood together against a fully armed army supported by the arrogant powers of East and West. The formation of combat divisions and brigades based on geographical regions and the presence of fighters from different ethnicities in these units were a clear and inspiring symbol of this unity, integration, and brotherhood. This organic solidarity, unlike the mechanical solidarity proposed by Durkheim, not only doesn't prevent the manifestation of cultural diversity and differences but recognizes it as a source of strength and cultural richness.



People of mostly Kurdish descent gather in Urmia, Iran, on March 21, 2025, to celebrate the Persian New Year (Nowruz). Pan-Kurdish slogans chanted at the event incited ethnic tensions.

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