

Excerpts of Mohsen Rezaie's Interview with *Baztab*

September 28, 2006

Baztab: So you claim that although the slogan was “fighting, fighting till Saddam is toppled,” actually another path was followed.

Rezaie: Yes. Although military strategy was set forth, but never implemented, and stayed at a slogan level. Mr. Hashemi, based on political strategy said “capture Faw, then we will end the war.” In the *Karbala-5* military operation he said the same thing: “capture Shalamcheh and get close to Basra, then we will end the war.” That means we were, all the time, doing operations to end the war. The last five years of the war had become something routine. That was because military operations were used as political tools. Actually, after Khorramshahr was recaptured, politics were shaping the military operations. The only time the Revolutionary Guard was asked to plan a military strategy was in the last year of the war, when the Iraqi army had started its attacks. At that time the Revolutionary Guard declared that in order to change the strategy from political to military and be able to invade Baghdad and end the war, provisions were needed. When the required provisions were announced in a letter to Mr. Hashemi [Rafsanjani], he presented the letter to the Imam and stated that the ministers of the economy had said we could not provide the resources. In fact something that should have been solved by the politicians was put forward to the Imam and that led to the acceptance of Resolution 598.

B: People have the right to know why after Khorramshahr was recaptured, military operations continued, in contrast to your interpretation that in political strategy the aim was only to gain victory in one operation to end the war, and use that victory as a political tool. Weren't the objectives of any of such operations reached, to end the war based on political strategy?

R: Two factors were involved. First, Iraq, the U.S., the Arab and the Western countries learned our intention through negotiations with our politicians. Although the Imam stated that we would continue the war until “the nuisance is eradicated,” they knew those were the words of the Imam and the fighters and was only a slogan. What they were witnessing was “fighting from one operation to another.”

B: So the enemy knew that the objective of the war was not “fighting till ultimate victory” but rather “fighting up to a victory”?

R: Yes. The world had learned our intention. Although politicians were repeating the Imam's slogan, the world did not pay attention to the slogans, the politicians' words behind the scene, and what they did was determining. Very soon the world realized that Iran was looking for a fight to gain one victory. The other thing was that Iran's diplomacy couldn't benefit from our military success. In other words, the political management should have acted stronger. There is

another fact -- that we did not have very many friends in the world; we did not have serious political alliances in the world to benefit from their votes in the United Nations.

B: Was the acceptance of the resolution because it was not possible anymore to continue with military operations or because of changes in strategy?

R: Before accepting the resolution the suggestion made to Iran was for a ceasefire; ceasefire means an unfinished war.

B: It means each side would remain in whatever position he is at, and start negotiating.

R: Yes. Negotiations can take 30 to 40 years and during that time Iran and Iraq should be prepared to fight. This was one option. Another was to pursue military operations and engage in combat insofar as these activities increased the chance of reaching a peaceful political solution. The third option was to move forward with a military strategy to topple Saddam. In this case either Saddam would have fallen or we would attain a huge victory. In fact, this option was before Iran after Khorramshahr was recaptured. But what was implemented was the second strategy, succeeding in an operation in order to gain political advantages. These military operations gave Iran the ability to get Resolution 598 from the world. In this resolution for the first time Iran was given the choice of peace and some other advantages, such as returning to international borders, determining and paying for damages, and the formation of a committee to identify the aggressor.

B: Of course the ideal objectives for political and military strategy were not achieved in Resolution 598.

R: Yes. This was different from what the Imam and the fighters were looking for, but it was considered a victory for a Third World country. Of course because of the ambiguity of certain terms in Resolution 598, accepting it was delayed a few months.

B: Mr. Hashemi has related the acceptance of the resolution to several factors: 1) the exhaustion of the military forces; 2) the letter of the ministers of economy and the director of the Central Bank stating their inability to provide for war expenses; and 3) your letter as the commander-in-chief of the Revolutionary Guards stating the provisions needed to continue the war and the three years needed to train forces.

Of course Mr. Hashemi mentioned that people were willing to continue if the Imam asked them to tolerate and go through austerity. But Mr. Hashemi's letter finalized the acceptance of the resolution. However, what you said above, related the writing of the letter to changes in strategy not the acceptance of the resolution.

R: Anyway, I don't know how Mr. Hashemi interpreted the matter, but this was a very common discussion between commanders and Mr. Hashemi. After the *Kheibar* military operation, commanders especially were saying that the political strategy would not render any results, and

were asking for permission to plan a military strategy to finish the war. However, the political officials and Mr. Hashemi never accepted that. Once, Mr. Hashemi said that we could not even provide shoelaces for the soldiers' boots. This showed that the military strategies were never considered. It was always said that they did not have the economic capability to support such a strategy and the economic situation of the country could not tolerate it. However, after the *Ramadan* operation they always accepted the commanders' initiatives for military operations, but not to end the war [by military operations]. The only time they accepted the commanders' advice was close to the end of the war when they realized that the political strategies had been defeated, not to mention that even Resolution 598 was the result of Faw and *Karbala* operations. However, they still felt that Resolution 598 was not effective. At this stage they asked the Revolutionary Guards what was needed to end the war!

At this stage the Revolutionary Guards wrote a letter to Mr. Hashemi, not the Imam, because the facilities and provisions were in possession of political officials. Within that letter the provisions needed to win and finish the war were mentioned.

Mr. Hashemi then presented that letter along with the letters of Mr. Khatami, the then-minister of culture and Islamic guidance, Mr. Mousavi, the head of government and the commanders of the army to the Imam, and stated that this was what the military officials had requested. He also mentioned that economic officials had stated they had no money to finance the provisions and asked the Imam to decide. At that point the Imam accepted the resolution.

These are very important issues and probably the most important ones of our revolution. They should be comprehended and analyzed to make us aware of some of the positions that the Imam and the fighters held. The Imam from the beginning was against the war and in all stages of the war honestly spoke to the people and supported the fighters.

B: At the final stage of the war, how effective was the political analysis of people like you?

R: As a matter of fact, one of the reasons that caused the Imam to decide to end the war was my letter to Mr. Hashemi. Of course I never wrote that letter to the Imam, simply because the resources and provisions that I had asked for were not in the Imam's possession. I was certain that what I had requested could be provided. That is why I didn't write that letter to the Imam but wrote it to the officials. My letter and those of Mr. Khatami, Mr. Mousavi's views and the military commanders had a determining influence on the Imam to accept Resolution 598.

B: What approach did your suggestion take? Did you propose that the Imam end the war?

R: No. In that letter I wrote we should not have planned the war on a one-operation-at-a-time basis. Why? Because in that case, the war would not end; we should have had a broader strategy in mind.

We had to have strategy and lead a number of operations and have a five-year plan. So I wrote the plan for that five years, and asked approximately \$4.5 billion to be allocated.

Considering our \$10 billion revenue in 1987, that was less than 20 percent of the countries revenue over five years. Saddam was providing his army with many times more.

What we had proposed was a long-term plan to end the war and win a definite victory. I had already mentioned that even if all the requested provisions were not provided, we would have won the war; of course the damages in the course of a victory would have been high. So what I wrote in that letter was a long-term plan.

B: Did other letters contain such compelling arguments so as to lead the Imam to a specific conclusion? In other words did they contain suggestions for peace and termination of the war and acceptance of the resolution?

R: No. Most other letters had looked at the matter from other angles. For example, Mr. Khatami claimed in his letter that volunteers [Basiji] and the people did want to go to war and we did not have enough forces at the fronts. Mousavi said the country's economy could not bear the war. I cannot remember the content of the commanders' letter. So, the Imam summarized those letters and made a conclusion. The suggestion for peace was given to the Imam by the Supreme Defense Council.

The political officials had gone to the Imam, even before Imam had accepted the peace treaty, and mentioned to him that should he have the slightest reservation about the terms of the resolution, they could would accept his wisdom. Then the Imam, pretending that they had made that decision without his consent would fire the officials and would say because they had accepted the peace treaty he had to.

Mr. Mousavi Ardebili mentioned that some colleagues went to the Imam crying and claiming that the Iraqi army could invade Khorramabad and could penetrate deeper inside Iran, but the Imam resisted. This was a session that diplomats had with the Imam.

Finally the Imam stated that it is not your burden alone to accept the treaty. When it becomes necessary to accept the terms I will take the burden myself. After that meeting with the politicians, the Imam addressed a letter to the heads of the country and accepted the peace treaty himself.

[Source: Baztab Newsmagazine, September 28, 2006.]