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From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
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Subject: Fw: Kidnapped Iranians are Revolutionary Guards, FSA says in Al Arabiya video (Al Arabiya)

From: OpsNewsTicker@state.gov [mailto:OpsNewsTicker@state.gov]
Sent: Sunday, August 05, 2012 02:51 PM
To: NEWS-Mahogany
Subject: Kidnapped Iranians are Revolutionary Guards, FSA says in Al Arabiya video (Al Arabiya)

Syrian rebels claim that the 48 Iranians it kidnapped on Saturday are members of the elite Iranian Revolutionary Guards and not pilgrims as Iran alleges, in footage aired exclusively by Al Arabiya TV.

The rebels "captured 48 of the Shabiha (militiamen) of Iran who were on a reconnaissance mission in Damascus," said a man dressed as an officer of the Free Syrian Army, in the video aired by Al Arabiya.

"During the investigation, we found that some of them were officers of the Revolutionary Guards," he said, showing ID documents taken from one of the men, who appeared in the background with a large Syrian independence flag held by two armed men behind them.

Abdel Nasser Shmeir, interviewed later by Al Arabiya and presented as the commander of Al-Baraa Brigade, gave similar details.

"They are 48, in addition to an Afghani interpreter," he said, claiming that the captives were members of a 150-strong group sent by Iran for "reconnaissance on the ground."

Iran has appealed to Turkey and Qatar, both with close relations with the Syrian opposition, for help in securing the release of the hostages it claims were pilgrims visiting the Sayyida Zeinab shrine, a Shiite pilgrimage site in the southeastern suburbs of Damascus.

Shmeir said his men "have not yet entered into any contacts" about the hostages.

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