



The War on Terror: A FOX Fan Expert Forum

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Commentary: Iran Behind Iraq Unrest?

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The recent surge in violence in different Iraqi cities, particularly in the south, has once again directed attention to the role of foreign sources of terrorism who seek to exploit the sentiments of the Shiite majority and derail any future political process in that country.

Even before the recent attacks, there was mounting evidence that Islamic extremists had emerged as the main sources of violence, bombings, and killings, the aim being to force out all foreigners, foment anti-Americanism, and prepare the grounds for the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Iraq modeled after Iran.

For months, Iran has been building a secret underground network of military and intelligence cells that has put it in a position not only to challenge the U.S. and others, but also to gradually gain control the reigns of power after the June 30th handover.

By allocating vast resources, including tens of millions of dollars, to the task of building and spreading an overt network of mosques, local organizations, charity groups, medical and cultural centers, Tehran has also covertly created a number of new Iraqi surrogate groups, including the Hezbollah especially in the south. (This entity is separate from Iraqi Hezbollah, which operates openly). The group has been casing U.S. forces, gathering intelligence and building its military structure. It is headquartered in Al-Amarah, but is also active in a number of

other cities including Al-Kut. Several Iranian Intelligence Ministry agents held extensive talks with Hezbollah officials in Al-Kut on February 15th to coordinate their actions.

In addition, Iran has formed the Nasiriyah-based 15th Shaban and the Basrah-based Seyyed ol-Shohada groups. At least a half a dozen other Iranian sponsored groups are now operating in Baghdad and other places.

Iranian agents have been commuting back and forth to and from Iraq regularly, using different border crossings along the 900-mile frontier with that country. Tehran has, for instance, used the Mandali-Monthariya border in February to send into Iraq a significant number of intelligence agents, who specialize in operations and roadside bombings against the coalition forces. It has also used other border crossing for such purposes.

Sources with access to firsthand information said that a roadside attack by a five-member team of Iraqi Muslim fundamentalists against a U.S. convoy in late February was actually tied to Iran. Other pro-Iranian Iraqi extremists were apparently involved in attacks against Iraqi police vehicles last month, these sources added.

As many as 30,000 people a night were reported to have crossed into Iraq from Iran, ostensibly to visit the holy Shiite shrines; many Iranian intelligence agents were among them. The Iranian regime's intelligence units as well as the Qods (Jerusalem) Force of the Revolutionary Guards often pose as pilgrims and blend in with ordinary people who travel from Iran to the holy sites and other regions of Iraq.

After the U.S. forces arrested a number of Iranian agents, Tehran is relying increasingly on its newly-recruited Iraqi agents, particularly for intelligence gathering operations. It assigned a number of the recruits from Najaf, Karbala, Al-Kazimiyah, Basrah and Ba'qubah to Baghdad where they have set up new intelligence gathering cells.

Iran's intelligence agents are actually working under the cover of local businesses in Iraq. Several Iranian intelligence agents came to the city of Al-Khalis, north of Baghdad, recently, to meet with their Iraqi counterparts. "Islamic Propaganda House" in Ba'qubah acts as cover for the Iranian regime's intelligence agents.

Iranian agents have also been recently spotted in Baghdad, offering Iraqis large sums of money, as much as \$25,000, in exchange for information. Iran has already sneaked in large amounts of weaponry including mortars, anti-aircraft missiles, and RPG-7 rocket launchers, providing them mostly to Iraqi surrogate groups.

It would be naïve to rely on the “goodwill” of Iranian clerics. To prevent Iraq from further sinking into chaos, the United States must take drastic action to curb Iranian influence by stopping the free flow of Iranian intelligence agents into Iraq and warning Tehran of the dire consequences of its continuing meddling in the affairs of its neighbor to the west. The ultimate solution, however, is for the United States to beat the Iranians at their own game by relying on the well-trained anti-fundamentalist Iranian opposition groups, which are working to unseat the clerics. This is not a luxury; it's a prerequisite.

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