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USADI Commentary

Checking Iran's Growing Influence in Iraq

Iran's foreign minister, Kamal Kharrazi began his three day visit to Iraq on Tuesday shortly after the United States' Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice paid a surprise visit there.

During her visit, Rice warned Iran to stop its destabilization campaign in Iraq. In response to a question from CNN's correspondent in Iraq, Dr. Rice said that Iran "need[s] to be transparent, [have] neighborly relations, not relations that try somehow to have undue influence in the country through means that are not transparent..."

She later told Al Arabiya television that "Iran should be a transparent neighbor, that it should be involved in Iraqi affairs as a good neighbor would be involved, not in some surreptitious way,".

The following day in Washington, State Department's spokesman Richard Boucher told reporters that "Iran's relations with people inside Iraq are not transparent" and that it must "stay out of its neighbor's politics." "They need to be normal relations, friendly relations, between neighbors, but they shouldn't be in the nature of political influence," he warned Tehran.

Foreign Minister Kharrazi's trip to Iraq, just 48 hours after Secretary Rice's visit there, was not by chance. It was Iran's way of reacting to strong warnings coming from the Bush administration. It was an attempt to show Tehran was bent on continuing its underhanded and sinister campaign in Iraq.

In response to press questions, Kharrazi stressed Iran's intention to continue to wield influence in Iraq whose new government's cabinet is made up of officials with close personal, religious and political ties to Iran's ruling ayatollahs.

Tehran's designs for Iraq extend beyond a mere geo-political rivalry with the United States. Ayatollah Khomeini published a book entitled *Velayat-e-faqih* while exiled in Najaf seminaries in Iraq. Once in power in 1979, he put in practice the book as a blueprint for new regime. "There are no real boundaries between Islamic countries," Khomeini stressed in his book.

Given its large Shia population and its geo-strategic location, Iraq has always been viewed as fertile ground for Tehran to exercise its expansionist foreign policy rooted in Islamic fundamentalism. Having a regime in Iraq heavily influenced by Tehran would immensely enhance Iran's regional dominance and its ability to project power in the region. And the way Khomeini's mullahs see it, "Iraq would be a ripe apple which would be plucked up sooner or later."

The Washington Times reported last week that Dr. Abdullah Rasheed al-Jabouri, former governor of Iraq's Diyala province told the 'Iran Human Rights and Democracy Caucus' in the House "about the threat facing Iraq from its old enemy, Iran." He told the House hearing that "We managed to capture many Iranian agents or Iraqi and foreign nationals who were on Iran's payroll and had received training in terrorist activities."

Dr. al-Jabouri also said that the "United States made a mistake in 2003 when U.S. forces bombed the camps of the military wing of the resistance, the People's Mojahedin, which had operated from Diyala since 1986. He said the MEK provided essential security against Iranian infiltration."

"I believe the bombing of the Mojahedin camps at the outset of the war was a major blunder, even more so was the U.S. decision to disarm them," he said. "This left the entire province wide open to Iranian meddling and interference."

An Iraqi government, compromised by Iran's ruling theocracy would pose a significant threat to the regional stability. The ensuing power realignment in the region will have huge global reverberations.

Given the realities on the ground in Iraq, there can be no doubt that the clerical regime in Iran, with its abysmal human rights record, nuclear weapons drive and continued destabilizing campaign in Iraq, is a clear and present danger to its own citizens and the rest of the world.

Renowned historian Bernard Lewis, recently wrote in the Foreign Affairs that the main threat "to the development of democracy in Iraq and ultimately in other Arab and Muslim countries lies not in any inherent social quality or characteristic, but in very determined efforts that are being made to ensure democracy's failure." Lewis's comments apply to Iran and illustrate that a coordinated transformation from theocracy to secular democracy is the only way to guarantee an end to Iran's nuclear threat.

Iran is leading "determined efforts" to undermine Iraq's nascent democracy with the aim of consolidating and concentrating its influence there. It must be stopped, whatever it takes. **(USADI)**

The US Alliance for Democratic Iran (USADI), is an independent, non-profit organization, which aims to advance a US policy on Iran that will benefit America's interests, through supporting Iranian people's aspirations for a democratic, secular, and peaceful government, free of tyranny, fundamentalism, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism. The USADI is not affiliated with any government agencies, political groups or parties.

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The Washington Times

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Putting Tehran on notice

Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi's defiant proclamation at the United Nations that Iran will press on with its nuclear-enrichment program is yet another ominous sign that ruling mullahcracy is hellbent on obtaining the A-bomb. In early April, the Iranian National Council of Resistance revealed Tehran had been digging tunnels close to the Parchin military facility, a suspected nuclear site northeast of the capital, to disguise its nuclear-enrichment activities.

There is also ample evidence that Iran's money, weapons and agents are fanning the flames of insurgency in Iraq. Tehran has spent some \$4 billion in Iraq since the ouster of Saddam Hussein and has 40,000 Iraqi operatives on its payroll.

The Iranian regime is keen on using Iraq as a springboard to spread its fundamentalist brand of Islam throughout the entire Middle East. Ahmad Jannati, chairman of Iran's powerful, unelected body known as the Guardian Council, said, "It is the duty of every Muslim to stand against the United States and threaten its interests anywhere." Taking heed, hundreds of suicide volunteers marched in Tehran last month, vowing to attack Americans in Iraq and targets in Israel. These developments underscore the need for the world community to meet the Iranian challenge -- head-on and without delay.

For more than two decades, the international community has tried to placate the mullahs. While the Europeans, taking the appeasement route, have insisted on an all-carrot approach to tame Tehran's rogue behavior, the United States has offered its own set of incentives, starting with trading arms for hostages in 1985, blacklisting the main Iranian opposition group, the People's Mujahedeen, or PMOI, in 1997, easing the anti-Tehran sanctions in 2000 and bombing PMOI camps during the Iraq war in 2003, despite the group's steering clear of the conflict.

This olive-branch policy has only served to solidify the grip of the most anti-Western wing of the ruling theocracy... It does not take a rocket scientist, however, to realize that no amount of economic and political concessions would bring Iran's hardline rulers around. The likelihood of a moderate state emerging from the ruling theocracy is as remote as that of a leopard changing its spots. The Iranian regime remains the world's worst abuser of human rights, a terrorist state second to none and unwavering in its pursuit of nuclear weapons.

There is a growing consensus that the liberation of Iran is a prerequisite for a nuclear-free Middle East and a stable, democratic Iraq. To achieve this goal, however, there is no need for foreign military intervention. Developments in recent months inside and outside of Iran have made it plain that the corrupt fundamentalists in Iran can be defeated by the men and women they have oppressed for a quarter century...

In his State of the Union Address, President Bush told the Iranian people, "As you stand for your own liberty, America stands with you." To translate those words into action, the administration should reach out to Tehran's greatest and most feared nemesis, the highly trained People's Mujahedeen. The first step is to end the blacklisting of the group, which a majority in the House and 32 Senators have described as a "legitimate resistance movement."

The timing could not be better, considering that the State Department has recognized its personnel as "protected persons" under the Fourth Geneva Convention and 2.8 million Iraqis have backed this anti-fundamentalist group as the most effective bulwark against Iranian-inspired extremism in Iraq. This would put Tehran on notice that Washington means business and assure the millions who are pursuing democratic change in Iran that America is on their side.

Excerpts from a piece by Ali Safavi, president of Near East Policy Research, a consulting and policy-analysis firm in Washington.

The Globe and Mail

May 17, 2005

Canada Curbing Iran Diplomatic Contacts

Ottawa -- Canada will further limit diplomatic contacts with Iran to push for a new investigation into the death of a Canadian photojournalist. Foreign Affairs Minister Pierre Pettigrew said Tuesday that he will not close the Canadian embassy in Tehran or recall the ambassador, but will keep pressing Iran for a new investigation into the death of Zahra Kazemi.

He said formal contacts with Iran will be limited to three subjects: Ms. Kazemi, Iran's human rights records and Iran's flouting of nuclear non-proliferation rules.

An Iranian appeal court listened Monday to arguments from Kazemi family lawyers urging a new investigation into her death, but it adjourned without a decision.

Mr. Pettigrew said the Iranians have to come clean on questions about Ms. Kazemi, who died in Iranian custody two years ago.