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USADI Commentary

The Emerging Anti-Fundamentalism Front in Iraq

Iran remains "first enemy of Iraq," so said Iraq's Defense Minister Hazim Shalan in an interview with the *Washington Post*. He warned that Iran "has taken over Iraqi border positions, sent spies and saboteurs into the country and infiltrated the new government -- including his own ministry." "Iran interferes in order to kill democracy," Shalan added.

Last week, the Iraqi Interior Minister Fallah Hassan Al-Naqib also accused Iran of being behind terrorism in Iraq. "It must be acknowledged that Iran plays an important part," he said "in the terrorist and sabotage operations being carried out in Iraq."

Obviously, the new Iraqi Interim government, unlike its predecessor the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), which included many of Iran's Iraqi allies and proxies, is more mindful of Tehran's sinister designs for Iraq.

Since coming to power in 1979, the mullahs have worked to export "Islamic Revolution" throughout the region via Iraq. In fact, immediately after fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, Tehran launched a major covert effort to establish a client regime in Iraq and destroy its main opposition, the Iraq-based People's Mujahedeen.

The Mujahedeen proponents and detractors, alike, share the view that this anti-fundamentalist Muslim group "is singularly dedicated to one goal: overthrowing its 'archenemy,' the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Last December, at the behest of Tehran, the IGC ordered the group expelled from Iraq. Described by the *Washington Post* "a surprise move that could alter the regional balance of power," many experts saw this as a prelude to the hand-over of these dissidents to Iran. Then-U.S. Civil Administrator in Iraq, L. Paul Bremer, overruled the IGC and the decree was never carried out.

Ultimately, the United States recognized the status of Mujahedeen personnel as 'protected persons' under the Fourth Geneva Convention. The determination was made official in a July 21 memorandum, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey D. Miller, the deputy commanding general in Iraq.

This was a very strategically prudent and humanitarian decision by the United States. It put an end, once and for all, to the calls by Tehran and its Washington lobby to engage in "human trade" as part of an "engagement" or "grand bargain" with Iran's terror-mongering tyrants. It also brought relief to Iranian families in the United States, Europe, and Iran who have loved ones it has also brought relief to Iranian families in the United States, Europe, and Iran who have loved ones among the Mujahedeen members in Camp Ashraf, Iraq.

The determination was, according to the State Department's deputy spokesman, due to the fact that the group was not "belligerent" during Iraqi conflict, confirming what these dissidents had said all along that they had not fired a single shot at the Coalition forces during and after the war, despite the latter's bombing of their camps.

More importantly, according to *the New York Times*, following "a 16-month review" and "extensive interviews by officials of the State Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation" there was not "any basis to bring charges against any members of the group" which was blacklisted by the Clinton administration as a "foreign terrorist organization" in 1997 to placate the mullahs following the inauguration of "moderate" Khatami.

The Times continues that according to American officials, the Mujahedeen "is not known to have directed any terrorist acts toward the United States for 25 years" and that "members of the group signed an agreement rejecting violence and terrorism."

The *Christian Science Monitor* reports that although the "State Department says it does not plan to take the Mujahedeen off its terrorism list", the July 21 memo from Gen. Miller told the group's members that the decision "sends a strong signal and is a powerful first step on the road to your final individual disposition."

Meanwhile, the Iraqi *Al-Ahd Al-Jadid* semi weekly reported on July 18 that about 1,200 Iraqi jurists and lawyers had issued a declaration, supporting the "legitimate presence of the Mujahedeen in Iraq". "The signatories believe that the terrorist designation of the Mujahedeen is an unacceptable and illegal measure which encourages the Godfather of international terrorism and its export of fundamentalism which, more than anything, is the main threat to the Iraqi nation."

A consensus appears to be emerging both in Baghdad and Washington that the anti-fundamentalist front taking shape in Iraq made of the Iranian Mujahedeen and secular Iraqi democrats could act as a major obstacle to Iran's export of fundamentalism to Iraq. The time may have come to remove the terror tag against the Iranian Mujahedeen; it would certainly strengthen the democracy movement in Iran and the anti-fundamentalism front in Iraq.

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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Iran's Meddling in Iraq: An Overview

Iraq minister hopes Iran hears message on "interference", Agence France Presse, July 28 - Iraqi Defense Minister Hazem al-Shaalan said in remarks published Wednesday that he hoped Iran understood his earlier message that it remains Iraq's "first enemy" by interfering in his country's affairs. Shaalan had told the Washington Post on Monday that he had seen "clear interference in Iraqi issues by Iran," which he claimed "interferes in order to kill democracy." He told the Arabic daily Al-Hayat newspaper that he hoped his message "was well understood by the Iranians" because Iraq "is a solidly secular country supported by the (other) Arab countries."

Iran does not control its borders, Radio Farda, July 24 - The Iraqi Interior Minister Falah Naqib stressed in his trip to Damascus that Iran and Syria do not control their borders. In an interview with reporters Falah Naqib, added: "If the neighbors do not seriously control their borders, we will not consider our hands tied and we have the power to make these countries insecure."

All Iraqi people want their officials to take brave stances, Al-Manar Al-Yawm (Iraqi daily), July 23 - The Iranian regime tried with all its might to create a climate of instability in Iraq by extensively dispatching agents to that country... The Defense Minister notes this reality; the Interior Minister also confirmed it by conveying Iraq's firm stance against future interferences. What poses a danger for Iraq is the clear interference in its affairs by Iran's abject lackeys who try to send the missiles of death and destruction to Iraq in various methods. All Iraqi people want the government officials to take brave positions against these interferences. At this juncture in time, we put our hands in the hands of Iraqi government officials, those who conveyed a reality that many are scared to pronounce.

Growing concerns in Baghdad about Iranian meddling, Christian Science Monitor, July 22, Baghdad - There is growing suspicion among some Iraqi officials and political leaders that Iran is playing a role here.... "The Iranians are our old enemies," says a senior Sunni tribal leader, who asked not to be identified. "I expect they're behind a lot of our problems. They don't want a stable and prosperous Iraq."

Creating a power base, Middle East Newline, July 21, Washington - Iran has been using Hamas and Hizbullah as part of plans to impose Teheran's authority in Iraq. A report by the New York-based Hudson Institute said Iran has been sponsoring and cooperating with a range of Shi'ite insurgency groups in an effort to develop a power base in Iraq.

Iraq's Foreign Minister accuses some neighbors of wanting to fight US on Iraqi soil, Agence France Press, July 20 - Iraqis may be paying the price of a desire by some neighboring countries to fight the United States on their soil, Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari warned on Monday. "Iraq's neighbors must understand that if the unrest and instability in Iraq is not brought under control it will just flare up and spread to their backyards," Zebari said.

U.S. commander criticizes Iran, Syria for meddling in Iraq, Associated Press, July 20 - The top U.S. military commander in the Middle East accused Iraq's neighbors Syria and Iran of tolerating cross-border infiltration and meddling by groups bent on further destabilizing a country wracked by violence...

Seeking influence in Iraq, MSNBC, July 20 - There is a growing concern among some Iraqis that Iran's interest in this country is more than just religious — that the goal of the hard-line mullahs in Iran's Islamic government is to bring Iraq under its sphere of influence — using money, funding hundreds of charities, promoting ideology at events like book fairs, and with spies. That's a problem for the United States, but it's an advantage for mullahs in Tehran, who want the United States to stay focused on the chaos in Iraq, and not turn its sights on Iran

Justice Minister Points finger at Rafsanjani, Al-Arabia, July 18 - Interview with Malek Dowhan, the Iraqi Minister of Justice: "Those arrested are from the countries in the region. It is possible that an organization has dispatched them or some officials have funded and sent them to Iraq. I cannot be officially suspicious of any one except once that Rafsanjani said, 'We want to deal with the Americans in Iraq so that the US army will not be able to attack Iran!'"

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