

Iran should be “Set Up for an Attack”

The Agenda Behind The Anti-Sadr Agenda

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When Gen. David Petraeus along with U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker gave their testimony to the Senate on April 9, they did nothing more than to confirm in spades what had been being mooted and duly leaked by the Washington-based press: that the Bush-Cheney Administration had officially endorsed the line that Iran should be set up for attack, on grounds that it—and not any indigenous resistance—were responsible for the mounting death toll among American troops in Iraq.

While claiming security had improved, Petraeus said the violence involving the Mahdi Army of Moqtadar al Sadr “highlighted the destructive role Iran has played in funding, training, arming and directing the so-called ‘special groups’” which, he added, “pose the greatest long-term threat to the viability of a democratic Iraq.” (See [Washington Post, April 9, 2008](#)). Petraeus even granted that Syria had cut the alleged flow of fighters into Iraq, only to stress by contrast, that “Iran has fuelled the violence in a particularly damaging way, through its lethal support to the special groups.” Finally, Petraeus specified that the “special groups” were run by Iran’s Qods force, the Revolutionary Guards recently placed in the category of terrorists..

There was nothing new about the line: Dick Cheney had dispatched Maj. Gen. Kevin Bergner last year to Iraq, with the task of finding a smoking gun, or, better, a couple of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) with “made in Iran” stamped on them. What was new in the testimony of the top U.S. military and diplomatic officials in the war zone, were the categorical statements, uttered with an air of certainty usually backed up by courtroom evidence, that Iran was the culprit, and the implicit conclusion that Iran must be the target of U.S. aggression. In order to make sure that (as Nixon would have said), the point be perfectly clear, National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley was trotted out to tell an enthusiastic Fox News reporter on April 13, that indeed Iran was the *casus belli*; Iran is “training Iraqis in Iran who come into Iraq and attack our forces, Iraqi forces, Iraqi civilians.” And, therefore, Hadley went on, “We will go after their surrogate operations in Iraq that are killing our forces, killing Iraqi forces.” ([www.foxnews.com](#)). Although Defense Secretary Robert Gates was saying almost simultaneously that he thought “the chances of us stumbling into a confrontation with Iran are very low,” he, too, repeated the mantra that the Iranians were sending weapons into the south of Iraq, etc. etc. President George W. Bush could not be left out of the dramatic build-up, and blessed Petraeus’s testimony with an order for a halt in the troop reductions.

Pat Buchanon performed an important service in immediately blowing the whistle on this fraud, and his piece, “General Petraeus Points to War with Iran,” has fortunately received

wide coverage. (www.buchanon.org, 11.04.2008, globalresearch.ca, 12.04.2008) One would hope that Seymour Hersh would come forth with further ammunition in the fight to prevent an all-too-likely attack against Iran. They are at it again, they are serious, and must be stopped.

The Anti-Shi'ite Surge

But, if war is indeed on the agenda, as Global Research has documented over months, one question to be raised, is: how does the recent "surge" in military actions against the Moqtadar al-Sadr forces, in Basra, Baghdad and numerous other Iraqi cities, fold into the current military-political gameplan? The massive joint U.S.-Iraqi operations at the end of March, against the Mahdi Army, were, militarily speaking, a fiasco. The news reported by AFP on April 14 that the Iraqi government has sacked 1,300 Iraqi troops for not having performed as expected (i.e., for having deserted or joined the enemy) is a not-so-eloquent acknowledgement of this embarrassing fact. And, as has been generally acknowledged by now, it was only due to the diplomatic intervention of Iranian authorities, that the conflict was ended, leading to the decision of al-Sadr to cease hostilities.

Now, however, that ill-conceived offensive has been relaunched in the wake of the performances by the Petraeus-Crocker-Hadley trio, and with a vengeance. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki told CNN on April 7, that the offensive against al-Mahdi would continue "until a decisive victory is achieved .. a victory that will not allow these people to attack the Green Zone or other areas." To signal the renewed thrust, Riyadh al-Nuri, the director of al Sadr's Najaf office, and his brother-in-law, was brutally murdered in the holy city on April 11. Joint U.S.-Iraqi military incursions have continued in Sadr City. Where will this lead? To victory? If so, how does one define victory? If the joint U.S.-Iraqi military operations physically eliminate al-Sadr's forces, it will only be as a result of the deployment of massive brute force as has not yet been used. In this tragic case, the political effect would likely not be the decimation of that political force, but its enhancement. It should not be forgotten that Moqtadar al-Sadr himself comes from a family of martyrs.

One consideration in the minds of the U.S. strategists of the anti-Sadr war, is that they must wipe his organization off the Iraqi political map well before elections take place next October, elections in which his followers could make significant gains, expanding their current 30-seat presence in parliament to a considerable power. The Al-Sadr phenomenon in Iraq is, in this sense, not so different from the Hamas phenomenon in Palestine; both are militant (and military) formations fighting against foreign occupation, while also providing crucial social services to their people, be it schools, clinics, hospitals or the like. It is in this light that one must read the decision by the Iraqi cabinet on April 14 to exclude militias from that vote, i.e. to exclude any political parties that have armed militias. Clearly, this is aimed at al-Sadr. If one were to ask: What about the Badr Brigade, which is the militia of the Shi'ite party, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), led by Abdel-Aziz al-Hakim? one might get the answer: that is no longer to be considered a separate militia, but works as part of the Iraqi military forces.

Intra-Shi'ite Conflict Targets Iran

But there is more to the story. The usual assumption made by U.S. military and political leaders, and shared by too many press outlets, is that the conflict inside Iraq should now be reduced to a fight among rival Shi'ite factions: that the ISCI and al-Sadr group are

competing for control over Basra, an oil-rich and strategically situated province; that al-Maliki, whose own Shi'ite party Al Dawa, depends on the support of al-Hakim's faction to survive; that, in sum, the name of the game is intra-Shi'ite conflict.(1)

Yes, the political rivalries among the three main Shi'ite factions in Iraq do exist. To be sure, neither al-Maliki nor al-Hakim would welcome the emergence of a majority force in parliament led by the al-Sadr group. But this is not the salient feature of the situation. Rather, as was shown in the recent, short-lived halt to the operations against al-Sadr, it was Iran which was decisive. The most important factor to be considered, in understanding the current crisis, at least from the inside, is this: Iran has excellent relations with {all three} major Shi'ite factions in Iraq, despite their internal differences. The ISCI, it will be remembered, was given hospitality in Iran, during its years-long exile under the Saddam Hussein regime. Moqtadar al-Sadr enjoys support from Iran. And the greatest foreign support that the al-Maliki government has, is from Tehran.

So, who can be expected to gain from exacerbating the intra-Shi'ite conflict? Most obviously, the U.S. as the occupying power. As qualified Iranian sources have stressed to this author, Iran's power lies in its ability to promote and mediate cooperation among all these factions, as dramatically demonstrated in its mediating the end to the first anti-Sadr offensive at the end of March. The occupying power is seen as intent on utilizing intra-Shi'ite conflict to damage each of these factions, and to hurt Iran.

One generally ignored, but important factor noted by the same Iranian sources, is the factionalized situation {within} the al-Sadr movement. Moqtadar al-Sadr is seen by these sources as a fervently committed fighter, who, however, views the situation from a somewhat narrowly defined local standpoint: he wants to style himself as the leader of the Shia in Iraq, indeed as the national leader—even more national than al-Maliki. His ambitions, according to some, go beyond this; he sees himself as a future leader of the Muslims overall. At the same time, there is a faction within the al-Sadr movement, considered a "sub-group," which is controlled by outside forces, in Saudi Arabia, the Emirates and also the U.S. This sub-group is seen as responsible for provocative actions designed to destabilize Iraq, and therefore welcoming any U.S.-Iraqi joint offensive against al-Sadr. The main reason for this, is that the foreign sponsors of this sub-group, whether Saudi or Emirate or American, are intent on weakening, discrediting and ultimately replacing al-Maliki as Prime Minister of Iraq, while at the same time undermining the role of al-Hakim. A slaughter against al Sadr's forces could doom the al-Maliki government. To put it simply: these outside influences, who are thinking strategically, are hoping to pit al-Sadr against both al-Hakim and al-Maliki; the al-Sadr forces, who are thinking on a more limited, local level, see themselves as competitors to the other two groupings, for future political leadership in Iraq, and miss the point about the broader strategic picture.

In short, the U.S.'s enthusiastic order to al-Maliki to launch his anti-al-Sadr purge, is actually a ploy to discredit and destroy al-Maliki himself, and prepare for permanent occupation. Vice President Dick Cheney has made no secret of the fact that he would like to replace al-Maliki, whom he has always accused of being too close to the Iranians, with one of his own, like Iyad Allawi, and that might be what is in the offing. Another benefit to discrediting al-Maliki is that the Cheney-Bush crew can further argue that, since al-Maliki and co. have proven unable to deal with the al-Sadr threat alone, U.S. occupying forces should remain for a longer period of time, if not for the one-hundred years that John McCain is fantasizing about.

Enter Condi Rice

To complete the picture, a couple of other developments should be mentioned. First, Condi Rice's trip to the region. She follows in the footsteps of Cheney, who toured the region to whip up Arab support for, or at least acquiescence to, a military assault on Iran. This had been Cheney's aim during his late 2006 visit, and now he has returned with the same agenda. Rice, then as now, will be following the same script. She will be meeting with the foreign ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council, plus Egypt and Jordan, the famous "GCC + 2" that she and Cheney have been forging as a Sunni bloc against Iran. Her message will be: prepare for the repercussions of a new assault on Iran. In parallel, the Israelis have been working overtime to heat up tensions in the region, not only against Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas, but also Iran. While National Infrastructures Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer threatened to "destroy the Iranian nation," if it attacked Israel, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni told Arab conference attendees in Qatar that their real enemy was not Israel, but Iran.

At the same time, an ominous event occurred on April 12 in Shiraz, when an explosion rocked a mosque during prayers, killing 12 and wounding more than 200. Although initial Iranian reports ruled out sabotage, the causes of the blast were not immediately identified, and, according to latest press reports, Iranian authorities are still "uncertain" about the affair. If, in the end, it turns out to have been a terror attack, the most likely suspects would be found among the Mujahedeen e Qalk (MKO/MEK) terrorist organization that still enjoys U.S. refuge in Iraq, and the Kurdish terrorists in the PKK-allied Pejak. The PKK also enjoys the protection of the U.S. occupying forces in northern Iraq. Perhaps not coincidentally, the Pejak (Party of Free Life of Kurdistan) warned on April 13, that it would "carry out bombings against Iranian forces" inside the country. Perhaps this is what President Bush has in mind, when he makes his periodic appeals to the "Iranian people" to rise up against their government.

NOTE

1. See Robert Dreyfuss, in "The Lessons of Basra," aljazeera.com, April 3, and also Ramzy Baroud, in "Basra battles: Barely half the story," aljazeera.com, April 13.

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