

Iraq War. Failure of the US Sponsored Assault: Learn The Lessons of Basra

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If it is true, that political forces in Iran did contribute to preventing the explosive conflict in Basra from careening totally out of control, then that means that prevailing attitudes and preconceptions in Washington have been shown to be totally bankrupt. If cooler heads exist in Washington, especially among the military, they must draw the lessons from the last week's events, and seek to finally introduce an element of rationality into U.S. foreign policy for the region. The lesson, to put it in a nutshell, is that Iran can play a key role in stabilizing Iraq, and therefore the region. If forces in the U.S. were to acknowledge this fact, a lot of precious human lives could be spared, and a perspective for finally ending this God-awful war, could be realized.

Just to review the events briefly: a week ago, the Nuri al-Maliki government of Iraq launched a massive attack against the militias of Shi'ite leader Moqtadar al-Sadr, in the southern city of Basra, provoking the response of their allies in the Shi'ite quarter of Baghdad, known as Sadr City, and many other locations. The attack was launched in political and military coordination with the U.S., and came, not coincidentally, on the heels of Dick Cheney's ominous tour of the region. Despite massive daily attacks, including aerial bombardments, and an estimated 400 deaths, the joint Iraqi-U.S. assault failed to eliminate the enemy. AP reported on March 30, that "The strength of the resistance to the week-old offensive has taken the U.S.-backed government by surprise, forcing it to bring in reinforcements as the number of Iraqi security forces involved in the effort topped 30,000(!)." In Basra, AP reported in another dispatch, Iraqi commanders had to appeal to U.S. and British war planes to block the militiamen's advance. American special forces, it was admitted, were part of the offensive.

At that point, under circumstances not yet fully elucidated, several envoys left Baghdad for Iran, to consult on the crisis, with Iranian representatives whose identities have not yet been made public. Reportedly, the envoys included representatives of al-Maliki's Dawa Party (Shi'ite), of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, and of the al-Sadr group itself, as well as two other groups. They went on Friday March 28 and returned on Sunday March 30.

On Sunday, Moqtadar al-Sadr issued a statement that was read out in all major localities. The 9-point statement (as published in an English version by [www.arablinks](#)), said that his forces would cease hostilities in Basra and other locations; would "renounce those who carry weapons and target the government and security agencies and institutions, or [political] party offices;" and would cooperate with the government to establish security. It added that the al-Sadr movement "does not possess heavy weapons." It demanded, in return for its actions, that the government apply an amnesty and release those prisoners who had not been charged with serious offenses.

Shortly thereafter, the fighting ceased. Last August, al-Sadr had declared a unilateral ceasefire, which had gone into effect, and had, according to U.S. accounts, contributed to reducing the hostilities and casualties in the country. In sum: al-Sadr controls his military forces and can deploy them as he sees fit.

What does this all mean?

First, one must raise the question: what was the rationale, or better, — given that rationality has been painfully absent in the entire U.S. war effort — what was the perceived aim of the unprovoked joint U.S.-Iraqi assault on al-Sadr's forces? It came, as noted, on the heels of war-monger Dick Cheney's regional tour, whose explicit mission was to mobilize Arab support for an imminent strike against Iran. According to William H. White writing in TruthNews on March 30, the military operation may have been the opening salvo of a war against Iran. Russian intelligence sources, according to RiaNovosti on March 27, said they believed the U.S. had put in place the preparations for an air and ground operation against Iran. Threats and other utterings by leading Israeli government officials in the same timeframe of Cheney's tour, indicated a readiness from that side to move militarily against Hezbollah and Hamas, perceived as Iranian allies, again in the perspective of a new war.

Secondly, one must stress the point that, whatever the gameplan may have been in detail, it failed, at least as far as the anti-Sadr offensive is concerned.

Thirdly, and most importantly, it was Iran, the perceived enemy, which contributed indirectly to neutralizing the conflict. This does not mean, simplistically, that Iran "controls" al-Sadr and his militia. Moqtadar al-Sadr's personal history and military activity since the U.S. invasion, point to a more independent phenomenon. To be noted, also, is that the Iraqi delegation that went to Iran for talks included both al-Sadr people and representatives of al-Maliki, whose government had launched the raids. The Iranians who discussed with the Iraqi envoys evidently sought, and found, a framework in which to cool down the conflict, and avoid the worst, in the interest of all.

Why? Why would Iran do this?

This author has had the privilege of exchanging views with many qualified Iranian figures, both in government and outside, and over many years. No matter what factional lineups the one or other interlocutor may belong to, the consistent message communicated has been one: Iran wants to overcome the adversary relationship with the U.S., which originated at the time of the 1979 Islamic revolution; and, Iran is willing to reestablish normal relations, on the basis of equality and mutual self-respect. This Iranian outlook has been documented in several important books recently released in the U.S, including by Iranian-American Trita Parsi and USA Today journalist Barbara Slavin.

But there is more: As part of its bid to reestablish normal relations with the West, Iran seeks above all stability and security in the region, i.e., an arrangement whereby neither it, nor other nations of the region, would be subjected to military attack, invasion or regime change. And, Iran is ready to use the influence which it wields as a regional power, to achieve these aims. Although this may sound like heresy to the ultra-orthodox neocon warmongers in Washington, the fact is, Iran is willing and able to intervene in Iraq to {stabilize} that country. There have been three so-called tripartite meetings to date, between Iraq, Iran and the U.S., at the ambassadorial level, precisely to pursue this agenda. In those meetings, Iran proposed setting up joint security commissions, to this purpose. Iran

has had a certain experience in dealing with terrorist organizations, like the Mujahedeen e-Kalq, who targetted Iranian politicians over decades, not to mention Taliban operatives deployed against it, or Al-Qaeda. Although the joint security committees were indeed formally established, this author has been informed that, whenever Iran provided live intelligence to the al-Maliki government regarding terrorist organizations and planned operations, the U.S. moved in to prevent the Baghdad authorities from acting on it. Iran has also offered its assistance in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan, a country where it has considerable influence.

In short, Tehran has signalled its readiness, in many ways, to contribute to stabilizing the region, which is a crucial precondition for any sane approach to U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq. The recent developments emerging from the confrontation with Moqtadar al-Sadr, should communicate an unequivocal message to whatever clear-headed minds exist in Washington: wake up, before it is too late. Acknowledge the economic, strategic and geopolitical realities of Iran's role in the region, and accept the helping hand being extended to you. You are going to need it.

As a postscript: this is not only a suggestion made in the interests of finally extricating the U.S. from the disastrous Iraq war, but also an attempt to provide a happier glimpse of what that war-torn region might look like, were totally different axioms applied to the case. Peace could be established in the entire region (including Israel-Palestine), if the occupying forces were to leave in an orderly fashion, and Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and all other nations there, were allowed to deal with their own concerns in a sovereign manner. Peace in this great region could come into being, if these independent nations were to engage in massive regional economic cooperative efforts, in transportation, water management and energy — why not nuclear energy with Iran's help? These are the real issues that should be put on the agenda. But first: end the war.

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