



Iran's Secret Plan For Mayhem

BY ELI LAKE - Staff Reporter of the Sun
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WASHINGTON — Iran is supporting both Sunni and Shiite terrorists in the Iraqi civil war, according to secret Iranian documents captured by Americans in Iraq.

The news that American forces had captured Iranians in Iraq was widely reported last month, but less well known is that the Iranians were carrying documents that offered Americans insight into Iranian activities in Iraq.

An American intelligence official said the new material, which has been authenticated within the intelligence community, confirms "that Iran is working closely with both the Shiite militias and Sunni Jihadist groups." The source was careful to stress that the Iranian plans do not extend to cooperation with Baathist groups fighting the government in Baghdad, and said the documents rather show how the Quds Force — the arm of Iran's revolutionary guard that supports Shiite Hezbollah, Sunni Hamas, and Shiite death squads — is working with individuals affiliated with Al Qaeda in Iraq and Ansar al-Sunna.

Another American official who has seen the summaries of the reporting affiliated with the arrests said it comprised a "smoking gun." "We found plans for attacks, phone numbers affiliated with Sunni bad guys, a lot of things that filled in the blanks on what these guys are up to," the official said.

One of the documents captured in the raids, according to two American officials and one Iraqi official, is an assessment of the Iraq civil war and new strategy from the Quds Force. According to the Iraqi source, that assessment is the equivalent of "Iran's Iraq Study Group," a reference to the bipartisan American commission that released war strategy recommendations after the November 7 elections. The document concludes, according to these sources, that Iraq's Sunni neighbors will step up their efforts to aid insurgent groups and that it is imperative for Iran to redouble efforts to retain influence with them, as well as with Shiite militias.

Rough translations of the Iranian assessment and strategy, as well as a summary of the intelligence haul, have been widely distributed throughout the policy community and are likely to influence the Iraq speech President Bush is expected to deliver in the coming days regarding the way forward for the war, according to two Bush administration officials.

The news that Iran's elite Quds Force would be in contact, and clandestinely cooperating, with Sunni Jihadists who attacked the Golden Mosque in Samarra (one of the holiest shrines in Shiism) on February 22, could shake the alliance Iraq's ruling Shiites have forged in recent years with Tehran. Many Iraq analysts believe the bombing vaulted Iraq into the current stage of its civil war.

The top Quds Force commander — known as Chizari, according to a December 30 story in the Washington Post — was captured inside a compound belonging to Abdul Aziz Hakim, the Shiite leader President Bush last month pressed to help forge a new ruling coalition that excludes a firebrand Shiite cleric, Moqtada al-Sadr.

According to one Iraqi official, the two Quds commanders were in Iraq at the behest of the Iraqi government, which had requested more senior Iranian points of contact when the

government complained about Shiite death squad activity. The negotiations were part of an Iraqi effort to establish new rules of the road between Baghdad and Tehran. This arrangement was ironed out by Iraq's president, Jalal Talabani, when he was in Tehran at the end of November.

While Iran has openly supported Iraqi Shiite militias involved in attacks on American soldiers, the Quds Force connection to Sunni insurgents has been murkier.

In 2003, coalition forces captured a playbook outlining Iranian intentions to support insurgents of both stripes, but its authenticity was disputed.

American intelligence reports have suggested that export/import operations run by Sunni terrorists in Fallujah in 2004 received goods from the revolutionary guard.

"We have seen bits and piece of things before, but it was highly compartmentalized suggesting the Iranian link to Sunni groups," a military official said.

A former Iran analyst for the Pentagon who also worked as an adviser to the Coalition Provisional Authority, Michael Rubin, said yesterday: "There has been lots of information suggesting that Iran has not limited its outreach just to the Shiites, but this has been disputed."

He added, "When documents like this are found, usually intelligence officials may confirm their authenticity but argue they prove nothing because they do not reflect a decision to operationalize things."

A former State Department senior analyst on Iraq and Iran who left government service in 2005, Wayne White, said he did not think it was likely the Quds Force was supporting Sunni terrorists who were targeting Shiite political leaders and civilians, but stressed he did not know.

"I have no doubt whatsoever that al-Quds forces are on the ground and active in Iraq," he said. "That's about it. I saw evidence that Moqtada al Sadr was in contact with Sunni Arab insurgents in western Iraq, but I never saw evidence of Iran in that loop."

Mr. White added, "One problem that we all have is that people consistently conduct analysis assuming that the actor is going to act predictably or rationally based on their overall mindset or ideology. Sometimes people don't.

"One example of a mindset that may hinder analysis of Iranian involvement is the belief that Iran would never have any dealings with militant Sunni Arabs. But they allowed hundreds of Al Qaeda operatives to escape from Afghanistan across their territory in 2002," he said.

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