



IRAN TODAY & TOMORROW

WEEKLY NEWS BULLETIN

The Committee in Support of Referendum in Iran (CSRI), a 501(c)(3), non-profit and independent group, is committed to advance change in Iran through an internationally monitored referendum as the only peaceful means to bring democracy and establish a secular and representative government in Iran.

August 19, 2005

No. 168

Nuclear Proliferation



Bush casts doubts on EU diplomatic initiative toward Iran, refuses to rule out force

August 12, 2005

US President George W. Bush refused to rule out the use of force against Iran over the Islamic Republic's resumption of nuclear activities, in an interview with Israeli television aired Friday. When asked if the use of force was an alternative to faltering diplomatic efforts, Bush said: "All options are on the table... You know we have used force in the recent past to secure our country," he said. "The Iranians refused to comply with the demands of the free world which is: do not, in any way shape or form, have a program that could lead to a nuclear weapon," he said... "In all these instances we want diplomacy to work and so we are working feverishly on the diplomatic route and, you know, we will see if we are successful or not. As you know I'm skeptical," he said.



Iran pushes ahead on construction of a heavy-water reactor

August 13 2005

As the U.S. and Europe struggle to stop Iran's uranium development, the Iranians are pushing ahead on another track -- construction of a heavy-water reactor... "We have developed this capability. The heavy-water project today is a reality," Gholamreza Aghazadeh, who is vice president, said on state-run television. "This knowledge belongs to Iran. Nobody can take it from us. As they (Europeans) see Iran's determination, they will be forced to show flexibility and accept it..." "Work has not been halted there even for a day, allowing Iran to constantly advance its heavy-water project," lawmaker Rasoul Sediqi Bonabi told The Associated Press on Friday.



In comments that rule out 'civilian nuclear aims' Revolutionary Guards chief stresses nuke technology is for "defense and national security purposes"

August 13, 2005

The commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) said on Friday that nuclear capabilities will guarantee the survival of the Islamic Republic. The IRGC commandant said that nuclear technology was inseparable from "defence and national security". Nations that effectively combine scientific know-how and advanced technology with strategic defense are in a stronger military position," Safavi said. The Revolutionary Guards chief added that the time had come for everyone to be on alert and ready to fight "the enemies of the Islamic Republic". Safavi gave a list of "factors that have enhanced the national power of the Islamic Republic of Iran", citing, for example, "Iran's possession of half of the strategic Persian Gulf, our control of the Strait of Hormuz, and Iran's cultural and ideological influence in neighboring countries and in the Muslim world."

Washington Times
August 13, 2005

Negotiations bankrupt by Iran's defiance as Tehran gained more time to pursue quest

Editorial (excerpts) - This week, Iran broke the protective seals at the Isfahan nuclear facility and resumed uranium-conversion activities. It then scoffed at the International Atomic Energy Agency and international negotiators. In sum, it bankrupted the EU 3 negotiations. This effectively ends the possibility that the negotiations could succeed. It should open the doors to a radically tougher approach, one that ends the kowtowing. Iran's posture should now be clear to everyone: That means the world is back where it was in March. Iran simply managed to buy itself more time to pursue its two-decades-old quest for nuclear weapons. We hope the Europeans recognize that these negotiations have actually moved us backward, causing half a year to be lost. Negotiating away Iran's nuclear ambitions simply isn't in the cards. The next step will be getting Iran to the U.N. Security Council for possible sanctions. It's time for Washington, the EU 3 and the IAEA to take a radically different approach.

AP Associated Press
August 15, 2005

Tehran officials say enrichment will continue

Iran will never again suspend conversion of uranium ore, Tehran officials said Sunday... "The Isfahan issue is over. What is left on the table for discussion is Natanz," Mohammad Saeedi, deputy head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, told state television. We definitely have plans for Natanz in the near future," he added, although he did not give a time frame.



Bloomberg
18-August 2005

Iran Made Thousands of Centrifuges, Breaking Pledge, Exiles Say

New York - Iran has continued to produce centrifuges, which are used in the uranium enrichment process, in contravention of a November 2004 agreement with the U.K., France and Germany to suspend all such activities, the exiled opposition National Council for Resistance in Iran said... Iran's regime has also set up a "massive network of front companies" to conceal nuclear-related activities, Abedini said. He named some of the companies and said some were located in Isfahan and Tehran. He named five officials he said are involved in the production of centrifuges. All the information, obtained from people working within different government departments, has been passed to the IAEA, he said..... Iran's religious regime, led by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is "bent on" acquiring nuclear weapons, continues to produce plutonium in Arak, as well as working on projects to build nuclear warheads, casings and a neutron initiator, Abedini said.



Global Terrorism

WorldNetDaily
August 14, 2005

Iran's new defense minister tied to U.S. marine bombing

The new minister of defense of Iran has direct ties to the suicide bombing in Beirut that killed 241 Marines in 1983. Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar, a veteran commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, was named today to the top military post by the new government. On Oct. 23, 1983, he was a senior commander in the Revolutionary Guards in charge of the expeditionary force in Lebanon. As a result of the deadly attack, Americans withdrew forces from Lebanon. It was the first major suicide operation used by radical Islamic fundamentalists... In July 1987, Iran's then-Minister of Revolutionary Guards, Mohsen Rafiqdoost, was quoted as saying in the Tehran daily Ressalat: "Both the TNT and the ideology which in one blast sent to hell 400 officers, NCOs, and soldiers at the Marines headquarters were provided by Iran."



August 14, 2005

Zarqawi stayed in IRGC garrison during clashes in Fallujah

Al-Watan daily

A high-ranking Iraqi security official told Al-Ray Al-Am that Iran has a large share in the continuation of violence in Iraq and extensively cooperates with the Syrians in this regard. The Revolutionary Guards' Intelligence does not refrain from providing armed groups with ammunition, weapons and particularly frequent funding... He also said, "The Iranian intelligence is one of the biggest intelligence systems in Iraq. That network has such a large establishment that it surpasses Iraq's intelligence establishment and Iraqi security agencies." He added that the IRGC intelligence creates cover-ups for Zarqawi and 20 of his commanders to enter Iran whenever they want. Last year during the developments in Fallujah, Zarqawi was transferred to Iran, where he spent several weeks in an IRGC garrison in the Mehran region near the Iraqi border. Afterwards he left for Baquba, Iraq, with the help of the Revolutionary Guards.



US says makeup of new Iran government a 'couple steps backward'

August 16, 2005

- The U.S. State Department said Tuesday that Iran had taken a "couple steps backward" with the composition of the new government. Spokesman Sean McCormack said "there was a moment several years ago when the Iranian people saw an opportunity with the election of a new government for a greater freedom and democracy. "Unfortunately, that government was not able to fulfill the expectations and aspirations of the Iranian people," he said, according to a transcript of a news briefing. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad named a cabinet Sunday that put men regarded as hardliners in charge of the foreign, interior and intelligence ministries. At Tuesday's briefing McCormack was asked for reaction to the new government ruling out any resumption of ties with the U.S. until Washington respects "the greatness and interests of the Iranian people." McCormack said the U.S. stands with the Iranian people in their aspirations for greater freedom, democracy and human rights. He said "the problem is the behavior of the Iranian government, frankly."

Meddling in Iraq

Al-Jazeera

August 12, 2005

Iraqi MP says plans to give autonomy to Shiite south Iraq is mullahs' scheme

- Mash'an Al-Jabouri, Iraqi MP: "I believe [the plan by SCIRI leader Abdul Aziz Hakim to make southern Iraq a Shiite autonomy] would lead the country to a tragic civil war. This is related to the Islamic Republic of Iran's new position on the atomic issue, and its new policy in challenging international law. I believe this issue and its timing are connected to Iran's new policy in wanting to dominate the oil reserves.

"We must all unite to defeat this dangerous plan that wants to wield hegemony over our country. I remind the Iraqi Shiites to see what your Shiite Arab brothers are exposed to in Iran [reference to brutal crackdown of Ahvaz uprising]. If they are on the verge of annihilation there, do you have any motivation to go to the Iranians' bosom?"

Al-Itijah Al-Akher weekly

August 14, 2005

Sabotage networks guided by IRGC officers - Iraqi intelligence

- Former military officials say Iran had encroached into Iraq about two to four kilometers and has built fully-equipped permanent border checkpoints to impose the idea that those locations are part of Iran. This indicates Iran's colonialist ambitions... Iraq's intelligence services issue declarations at various junctures reporting on the arrest of Iranian sabotage networks that are guided by IRGC officers, and how they influenced the elections in their own interests... Iraqi intelligence also announced that a widespread Iranian network was arrested that traded arms for ancient Iraqi antiquities.

IranMania
August 15, 2005

Influx of Iran's arms destroying Iraq democracy, US ambassador

An influx of Iranians and Iranian weapons is hampering efforts to bring peace and democracy to violence-wracked Iraq, Washington's ambassador to the country said. "Weapons and people coming across the border to undermine Iraq must be stopped, and we're working with the Iraqis, including the prime minister, to make this message clear to the Iranians," Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad told CNN television. "We do oppose weapons and people seeking to undermine stability in Iraq coming across the border from Iran," said Khalilzad, who also fingered Syria as fomenting trouble in Iraq. Khalilzad said he did not oppose good relations between Iraq and neighboring Iran. "But at the same time, there are Iranian activities that undermine the current system," Khalilzad told ABC television in a separate interview. "There are weapons that come across the Iranian border. There are people that come across from the Iranian border into Iraq. There are efforts by some in Iraq to gain influence in parts of Iraq or in some of the institutions," he said. "We are aware of this. We are mindful of that. And we are working with the Iraqis to deal with it," the ambassador said.



US Secretary of Defense reiterates Iran weapons smuggling claim

August 16, 2005

US forces have found Iranian weapons inside Iraq on more than one occasion over the past couple of months, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld says. Mr Rumsfeld says "no-one ought to be surprised" by the arms smuggling since Iran would like to replicate its own Islamic regime in Iraq. "We know that the system of government they have, with a handful of clerics running all over the place telling everybody what to do, is fundamentally inconsistent with the kind of constitution that is currently being drafted in Iraq," he said... In his comments today, Mr Rumsfeld says Iranian weapons have been found on more than one occasion over the past couple of months. He did not elaborate. However, an intelligence official said last week that US intelligence believes at least one cache of newly manufactured bombs came from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. "We know we're finding Iranian weapons inside of the country," Mr Rumsfeld said. "They don't just get there by accidents. They don't drive over the border."



August 15, 2005

Iranian opposition members kidnapped



WASHINGTON, – In eastern Baghdad, two members of the Iranian opposition group Mujahedin-e Khalq were abducted on Aug. 4 while on a routine logistics trip to the city, officials reported. The MEK have been considered protected persons under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which relates to the protection of civilians during times of war, since June 2004. The group relinquished its weapons, including tanks, armored vehicles, and heavy artillery, under a cease-fire agreement. "Multinational Force Iraq strongly condemns the abduction of persons protected by the Geneva Convention," MNFI officials said in a statement. Upon learning of the abduction, MNFI officials immediately requested that the Iraqi police investigate the abduction, and are assisting in attempts to find the missing men. MNFI units have checked with numerous police and Ministry of Interior units and stations and have notified the MNFI hostage working group.

Newsires
August 17, 2005

Commander of kidnapping unit long time member of 9th Badr Brigade, IRCG colonel - NCRI

The Iranian Resistance held a press conference in Paris on Wednesday revealing new details on the abduction of two PMOI members in Iraq and the Iranian regime's role in this crime.

The National Council of Resistance of Iran announced in the press conference that the commander of the 8-man patrol unit that kidnapped Messrs. Pouyan and Zahedi in Baghdad is called Abu-Zahra and is a long-time member of 9th Badr Brigade who served as a colonel in the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps.

According to the revelation made by the Iranian Resistance in Paris on Wednesday, the group that kidnapped the two PMOI members in Baghdad belongs to a hit squad under the command of Iraq's Interior Ministry and the commander of this force is called Mohammad Alzawi.

Inside Iran, Unrest, Human Rights Abuse, Economical Crisis

The New York Times, Unrest in Iran's Kurdish region has left 17 dead

August 14 2005

Unrest has rocked Iran's northwestern region of Kurdistan in recent weeks leading to the deaths of more than a dozen civilians and several members of the country's security forces...

Dozens of activists have been arrested, among them Roya Toloui, a prominent advocate for women's rights, several human rights groups said. The authorities reportedly arrested her at her home in Sanandaj on charges of disturbing the peace and "acting against national security." Two Kurdish newspapers were also shut down. The government is very sensitive about hints of ethnic strife in the country. It has refused to release detailed information about the scale of the turmoil except for several random reports about attacks on government buildings during demonstrations.



IRAN FOCUS

August 17,2005

Civil servants protest for overdue wages

Workers from the city of Abadan, southwest Iran, gathered outside the town hall on Wednesday demanding their overdue wages. The protestors, who were all civil servants, said that they had not received their salaries for several months. They complained that they were unable to provide for their families during this period.



IRAN FOCUS

August 17,2005

Student on trial for acting against national security

The court hearing for a university student from Kerman, central Iran, is scheduled to begin on Wednesday. Hossein Khodayari, a student from Kerman's Bahonar University, is to be charged with "acting against national security", a vague term which encompasses virtually all forms of social protests or actions against the ruling clerical authorities.



IRAN FOCUS

August 18, 2005

Two out of 3 teens in Iran suffer from depression – report

A scientific study conducted by two independent experts found that 71 percent of teenagers in Iran suffer from depression, a Tehran-based news agency reported. Mahdieh Emami and Mona Mir-Mohammad Jaafari noted that teenage girls in Iran were twice as likely as boys to suffer from depression, the news agency SINA reported. They warned that the sharp rise in the incidence of moderate to severe depression among girls would soon develop into a social crisis. The study found that an alarming 11.6 percent of teenagers suffer from severe depression. Experts attribute the predominance of depression among girls to the Islamic Republic's institutionalised gender discrimination, severe legal and social restrictions on girls, forced dress regulation, domestic violence, and lack of hope for a better future.



Payvand Iran,

Human Rights activist charged as unrest in Iran's

August 16 2005

Dr. Roya Toloui, a champion of Kurdish and women's rights who was detained by Iranian authorities on August 2, is reported to be facing charges of "disturbing the peace" and "acting against national security." Toloui's detention is consistent with a pattern of harassment and persecution that she and other human rights activists in Iran's Kurdish region have suffered in recent months in reprisal for their legitimate, peaceful activities in support of basic rights and freedoms...In addition to Dr. Toloui, at least three other human rights defenders are reported to have been detained in recent weeks.

Feature



Inside Iran's Secret War for Iraq

MICHAEL WARE/BAGHDAD



August 15, 2005

A TIME investigation reveals the Tehran regime's strategy to gain influence in Iraq--and why U.S. troops may now face greater dangers as a result

The U.S. Military's new nemesis in Iraq is named Abu Mustafa al-Sheibani, and he is not a Baathist or a member of al-Qaeda. He is working for Iran. According to a U.S. military-intelligence document obtained by TIME, al-Sheibani heads a network of insurgents created by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps with the express purpose of committing violence against U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq. Over the past eight months, his group has introduced a new breed of roadside bomb more lethal than any seen before; based on a design from the Iranian-backed Lebanese militia Hizballah, the weapon employs "shaped" explosive charges that can punch through a battle tank's armor like a fist through the wall. According to the document, the U.S. believes al-Sheibani's team consists of 280 members, divided into 17 bombmaking teams and death squads. The U.S. believes they train in Lebanon, in Baghdad's predominantly Shi'ite Sadr City district and "in another country" and have detonated at least 37 bombs against U.S. forces this year in Baghdad alone.

Since the start of the insurgency in Iraq, the most persistent danger to U.S. troops has come from the Sunni Arab insurgents and terrorists who roam the center and west of the country. But some U.S. officials are worried about a potentially greater challenge to order in Iraq and U.S. interests there: the growing influence of Iran. With an elected Shi'ite-dominated government in place in Baghdad and the U.S. preoccupied with quelling the Sunni-led insurgency, the Iranian regime has deepened its imprint on the political and social fabric of Iraq, buying influence in the new Iraqi government, running intelligence-gathering networks and funneling money and guns to Shi'ite militant groups--all with the aim of fostering a Shi'ite-run state friendly to Iran. In parts of southern Iraq, fundamentalist Shi'ite militias--some of them funded and armed by Iran--have imposed restrictions on the daily lives of Iraqis, banning alcohol and curbing the rights of women. Iraq's Shi'ite leaders, including Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, have tried to forge a strategic alliance with Tehran, even seeking to have Iranians recognized as a minority group under Iraq's proposed constitution. "We have to think anything we tell or share with the Iraqi government ends up in Tehran," says a Western diplomat.

Perhaps most troubling are signs that the rising influence of Iran--a country with which Iraq waged an eight-year war and whose brand of theocracy most Iraqis reject--is exacerbating sectarian tensions between Sunnis and Shi'ites, pulling Iraq closer to all-out civil war. And while top intelligence officials have sought to play down any state-sponsored role by Tehran's regime in directing violence against the coalition, the emergence of al-Sheibani has cast greater suspicion on Iran. Coalition sources told TIME that it was one of al-Sheibani's devices that killed three British soldiers in Amarah last month. "One suspects this would have to have a higher degree of approval [in Tehran]," says a senior U.S. military official in Baghdad. The official says the U.S. believes that Iran has brokered a partnership between Iraqi Shi'ite militants and Hizballah and facilitated the import of sophisticated weapons that are killing and wounding U.S. and British troops. "It is true that weapons clearly, unambiguously, from Iran have been found in Iraq," Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said last week.

How real is the threat? A TIME investigation, based on documents smuggled out of Iran and dozens of interviews with U.S., British and Iraqi intelligence officials, as well as an Iranian agent, armed dissidents and Iraqi militia and political allies, reveals an Iranian plan for gaining influence in Iraq that began before the U.S. invaded. In their scope and ambition, Iran's activities rival those of the U.S. and its allies, especially in the south. There is a gnawing worry within some intelligence circles that the failure to counter Iranian influence may come back to haunt the U.S. and its allies, if Shi'ite factions with heavy Iranian backing eventually come to power and provoke the Sunnis to revolt. Says a British military intelligence officer, about the relative inattention paid to Iranian meddling: "It's as though we are sleepwalking."

The Iranian penetration of Iraq was a long time in planning. On Sept. 9, 2002, with U.S. bases being readied in Kuwait, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei summoned his war council in Tehran. According to Iranian sources, the Supreme National Security Council concluded, "It is necessary to adopt an active policy in order to prevent long-term and short-term dangers to Iran." Iran's security services had supported the armed wings of several Iraqi groups they had sheltered in Iran from Saddam. Iranian intelligence sources say that the various groups were organized under the command of Brigadier General Qassim Sullaimani, an adviser to Khamenei on both Afghanistan and Iraq and a top officer in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Before the March 2003 invasion, military sources say, elements of up to 46 Iranian infantry and missile brigades moved to buttress the border. Positioned among them were units of the Badr Corps, formed in the 1980s as the armed wing of the Iraqi Shi'ite group known by its acronym SCIRI, now the most powerful party in Iraq. Divided into northern, central and southern axes, Badr's mission was to pour into Iraq in the chaos of the invasion to seize towns and government offices, filling the vacuum left by the collapse of Saddam's regime. As many as 12,000 armed men, along with Iranian intelligence officers, swarmed into Iraq. TIME has obtained copies of what U.S. and British military intelligence say appears to be Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps intelligence reports sent in April 2003. One, dated April 10 and marked CONFIDENTIAL, logs U.S. troops backed by armor moving through the city of Kut. But, it asserts, "we are in control of the city." Another, with the same date, from a unit code-named 1546, claims "forces attached to us" had control of the city of Amarah and had occupied Baath Party properties. A 2004 British army inquiry noted that the Badr organization and another militia were so powerful in Amarah, "it quickly became clear that the coalition needed to work with them to ensure a secure environment in the province."

For many Iraqis in the south, the exile militia groups brought with them forbidding religious strictures. "These guys with beards and Kalashnikovs showed up saying they'd come to protect the campus," says a student leader at a Basra university. "The problem is, they never left." Militants frequently "investigate" youths accused of un-Islamic behavior, such as couples holding hands or girls wearing makeup. "They're watching us, and they're the ones who control the streets, while the police, who are with them, stand by," says a student leader who did not wish to be identified. "From the beginning, the Islamic parties filled the void," says a police lieutenant colonel working closely with British forces. "They still hold the real power. The rank and file all belong to the parties. Everyone does. You can't do anything without them."

Military officials say they believe Iranian-funded militias helped organize a mob attack in the southern township of Majarr al-Kabir on June 24, 2003, that resulted in the execution of six British military-police officers. According to a classified British military-intelligence document, a local militia leader is "implicated in the murder of the 6 RMP [Royal Military Police]." The man heads a cell of the Mujahedin for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (MIRI), a paramilitary outfit coordinated out of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's base in Ahvaz, Iran. Although U.S. and British officers think it unlikely the soldiers were killed on orders from Revolutionary Guard officers, they agree that the slayings fit within the Iranian generals' broad guidelines to bog coalition forces down in sporadic hit-and-run attacks.

The Iranian program is as impressive as it is comprehensive, competing with and sometimes bettering the coalition's endeavors. Businesses, front companies, religious groups, NGOs and aid for schools and universities are all part of the mix. Just as Washington backs Iraqi news outlets like al-Hurra television station, Tehran has funded broadcast and print outlets in Iraq. A 2003 Supreme National Security Council memo, smuggled out of Iran, suggests even the Iranian Red Crescent society, akin to the Red Cross, has coordinated its activities through the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. The memo instructs officials that "the immediate needs of the Iraqi people should be determined" by the Guard's al-Quds Force.

More sinister are signs of death squads charged with eliminating potential opponents and former Baathists. U.S. intelligence sources confirm that early targets included former members of the Iran section of Saddam's intelligence services. In southern cities, Thar-Allah (Vengeance of God) is one of a number of militant groups suspected of assassinations. U.S. commanders in Baghdad and in eastern provinces say similar cells operate in their sectors. The

chief of the Iraqi National Intelligence Service, General Mohammed Abdullah al-Shahwani, has publicly accused Iranian-backed cells of hunting down and killing his officers. In October he blamed agents in Iran's Baghdad embassy of coordinating assassinations of up to 18 of his people, claiming that raids on three safe houses uncovered a trove of documents linking the agents to funds funneled to the Badr Corps for the purposes of "physical liquidation."

A former Iraqi official and member of Saddam's armored corps, who identifies himself as Abu Hassan, told TIME last summer that he was recruited by an Iranian intelligence agent in 2004 to compile the names and addresses of Ministry of Interior officials in close contact with American military officers and liaisons. Abu Hassan's Iranian handler wanted to know "who the Americans trusted and where they were" and pestered him to find out if Abu Hassan, using his membership in the Iraqi National Accord political party, could get someone inside the office of then Prime Minister Iyad Allawi without being searched. (Allawi has told TIME he believes Iranian agents plotted to assassinate him.) And the handler also demanded information on U.S. troop concentrations in a particular area of Baghdad and details of U.S. weaponry, armor, routes and reaction times. After revealing his conversations to U.S. and Iraqi authorities, Abu Hassan disappeared; earlier this year, one of his Iraqi superiors was convicted of espionage.

Intelligence agencies say Tehran still funds various political parties in Iraq. Documents from Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps files obtained by TIME include voluminous pay records from August 2004 that appear to indicate that Iran was paying the salaries of at least 11,740 members of the Badr Corps. British and U.S. military intelligence suspect those salaries are still being paid, although Badr leader Hadi al-Amri denies that. "I've told the American officers to bring us the evidence that we have a deal with Iran, and we will be ready, but they say they don't have any," he says. What remains murky is the extent to which Iran is encouraging its proxies to stage attacks against the U.S.-led coalition. Military intelligence officers describe their Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps counterparts' strategy as one of using "nonattributable attacks" by proxy forces to maximize deniability. What's uncertain, says a senior U.S. officer, is what factions within Tehran's splintered security apparatus are behind the strategy and how much the top leaders have endorsed it. Intelligence sources claim that Brigadier General Sullaimani ordained in a meeting of his militia proxies in the spring of last year that "any move that would wear out the U.S. forces in Iraq should be done. Every possible means should be used to keep the U.S. forces engaged in Iraq." Secret British military-intelligence documents show that British forces are tracking several paramilitary outfits in Southern Iraq that are backed by the Revolutionary Guard. Coalition and Iraqi intelligence agencies track Iranian officers' visits to Iraq on inspection tours akin to those of their American counterparts. "We know they come, but often not until after they've left," says a British intelligence officer.

Shi'ite political parties do not dispute that the visits occur. And a steady flow of weapons continues to arrive from Iran through the porous southern border. "They use the legal checkpoints to move personnel, and the weapons travel through the marshes and areas to our north," says a British officer in Basra. Top diplomats and intelligence officials know that some Iranian officers are providing assistance to Shi'ite insurgents, but it's dwarfed by the amount of money and matériel flowing in from Iraq's Arab neighbors to Sunni insurgents.

Western diplomats say that so far, the ayatullahs appear to be acting defensively rather than offensively. An encouraging sign is that even Shi'ite beneficiaries of Tehran exhibit strains of Iraqi and Arab nationalism; and many have strong familial and tribal ties with the Sunnis. "We are sons of Iraq. The circumstances that forced me to leave did not change my identity," says Badr leader al-Amri. He's proud of his cooperation with the Revolutionary Guard to battle Saddam but says it extended only "to the limit of our interests." An informed Western observer thinks that while those groups maintain a "shared world view" with Tehran, much as Brits and Americans share each other's, they are now trying to balance their interests with those of their backers and are eager to wield power in Baghdad in their own right. "I think you'll never break a lifelong relationship," says the senior U.S. military officer, "but as time goes by, as they become politicians fighting local issues, they will change."

That may be true. But Iran shows every sign of upping the ante in Iraq, which may ultimately force the U.S. to search out new allies in Iraq—including some of the same elements it has been trying to subdue for almost 2½ years—who can counter the mullahs' encroachment. The Western diplomat acknowledges that Iran's seemingly manageable activities could still escalate into a bigger crisis. "We've dealt with governments allied to our enemies many times in the past," he says. "The rub, however, is, Could it affect [counterinsurgency efforts]? To that I say, 'It hasn't happened yet, but it could.'" The war in Iraq could get a whole lot messier if it does.