

# IRAQ REPORT

A paratrooper from 1-501 Airborne escorts a rogue Jaish Al Mahdi rocket cell militant to the pickup zone after completing a precision raid to disrupt the cell on August 12.



SGT. ERNEST HENRY / U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE PHOTO

**May 2006 – August 20, 2007**

## Iran's Proxy War against the United States and the Iraqi Government

by KIMBERLY KAGAN

### Summary

*Iran, and its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah, have been actively involved in supporting Shia militias and encouraging sectarian violence in Iraq since the invasion of 2003—and Iranian planning and preparation for that effort began as early as 2002. The precise purposes of this support are unclear and may have changed over time. But one thing is very clear: Iran has consistently supplied weapons, its own advisors, and Lebanese Hezbollah advisors to multiple resistance groups in Iraq, both Sunni and Shia, and has supported these groups as they have targeted Sunni Arabs, Coalition forces, Iraqi Security Forces, and the Iraqi Government itself. Their influence runs from Kurdistan to Basrah, and Coalition sources report that by August 2007, Iranian-backed insurgents accounted for roughly half the attacks on Coalition forces, a dramatic change from previous periods that had seen the overwhelming majority of attacks coming from the Sunni Arab insurgency and al Qaeda.*

*The Coalition has stepped-up its efforts to combat Iranian intervention in Iraq in recent months both because the Iranians have increased their support for violence in Iraq since the start of the surge and because Coalition successes against al Qaeda in Iraq and the larger Sunni Arab insurgency have permitted the re-allocation of*

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*resources and effort against a problem that has plagued attempts to establish a stable government in Iraq from the outset. With those problems increasingly under control, Iranian intervention is the next major problem the Coalition must tackle.*

*Major points about Iranian support for Shia violence in Iraq:*

- *Planning began in 2002, operations began during the invasion of 2003;*
- *Iran has imported numerous Lebanese Hezbollah trainers and advisors into Iraq;*
- *The Iranian Qods Force directly oversees Iranian efforts in Iraq, and cell leaders in Iraq, including Iraqis and Lebanese Hezbollah operatives, report directly and indirectly to Qods Force commanders in Teheran;*
- *The Qods Force has established a network of “secret cells” within the Shia militias that their agents control for the purpose of assassinating key leaders, conducting death-squad activities, and distributing highly-lethal weapons for use against American forces;*
- *Iran supports Ansar al Sunnah, a Sunni terrorist group with close links to al Qaeda, with training camps inside Iran and further assists the group with operations in Iraq;*
- *Iran has provided its Iraqi proxies with advanced weapons, including light and heavy mortars, 107-mm and 240-mm rockets, advanced large-caliber sniper rifles, and explosively-formed penetrators (EFPs), capable of penetrating tank armor;*
- *Iranian rockets and mortars have been fired by secret cells against both the American and the Iraqi portion of the “Green Zone” in Baghdad, and against Coalition bases around the country;*
- *American and Iraqi military forces have responded to these attacks by conducting numerous Special Forces raids against key leaders in the Iranian networks, and a number of more conventional operations in Baghdad, Diwaniyah, and elsewhere;*
- *The Iranians have consistently denied any involvement in the violence in Iraq, including during face-to-face tripartite meetings between U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker, the Iranian ambassador to Iraq, and the Iraqi Government; and*
- *These negotiations with Iran, including the establishment of a tripartite sub-ambassadorial level coordinating committee on security in Iraq, have coincided with a significant increase in Iranian support for violence in Iraq.*

## INTRODUCTION

**T**he question of Iran's involvement in Iraq has been central to discussions of American strategy there for some time. Some have argued that Iran is or could be a stabilizing force if approached properly; others have pointed to evidence of Iranian support for violence as proof of the contrary. Coalition operations against Shia militias in Iraq over the past few months have uncovered a vast trove of evidence about Iranian involvement in Iraq's insurgency, but

that evidence has not yet been compiled in a single location. This Iraq Report summarizes that evidence and presents it so that discussions about Iran's role in the conflict can proceed on the basis of the most solid possible understanding of the realities of Iranian involvement. Iraq Reports do not offer policy recommendations, and developing policies to respond to the complexities of Iranian involvement would be beyond the scope of a paper of this length in any case. The report that follows therefore advocates no particular approach to dealing with Iran's support for violence in Iraq, but attempts instead to describe

that support in full detail.

Iran, and its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah, have been actively involved in supporting Shia militias and encouraging sectarian violence in Iraq since the invasion of 2003—and Iranian planning and preparation for that effort began as early as 2002. The precise purposes of this support are unclear, and may have changed over time. But one thing is very clear: Iran has consistently supplied weapons, its own advisors, and Lebanese Hezbollah advisors to multiple resistance groups in Iraq, both Sunni and Shia, and has supported these groups as they have targeted Sunni Arabs, Coalition forces, Iraqi Security Forces, and the Iraqi Government itself. Their influence runs from Kurdistan to Basrah, and Coalition sources report that by August 2007, Iranian-backed violence accounts for roughly half the attacks on Coalition forces, a dramatic change from previous periods that had seen the overwhelming majority of attacks coming from the Sunni Arab insurgency and al Qaeda.

The Coalition has stepped-up its efforts to combat Iranian intervention in Iraq in recent months for two reasons. First, because the Iranians themselves have increased their support for violence in Iraq since the start of the surge. Second, because Coalition successes against al Qaeda in Iraq and the Sunni Arab insurgency have permitted the re-allocation of resources and effort against a problem that has plagued attempts to establish a stable government in Iraq from the outset. Iranian intervention in Iraq is not a new problem only just now

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discovered. It had been secondary in importance to the raging Sunni Arab insurgency and al Qaeda in Iraq's spectacular attacks. With those problems increasingly under control, Iranian intervention is the next major problem the Coalition must tackle.

## BACKGROUND

**T**he Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' Qods Force has been organizing, training, funding, and equipping Iraqis to fight against Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces. Lebanon's Hezbollah has assisted the Qods force in its effort to train and organize Shia resistance groups since 2003. The Iranian government provided substantial financial and technical support to militias in the second half of 2006 and increased its support in 2007. Hezbollah served as the Qods Force's proxy in its advisory effort.

The U.S. military has catalogued large quantities of enemy weapons in Iraq that have imprints showing they were recently manufactured in Iran. In particular, highly-lethal explosively formed penetrators (EFPs) are made from special copper disks manufactured with highly-calibrated machine

tools. They have been used by Hezbollah in Lebanon, with Iranian military assistance. Many of the EFPs found in Iraq have the markings that indicate that they were manufactured in Iran as recently as 2006.<sup>1</sup> EFPs have accounted for an increasing numbers of U.S. casualties since October 2006. The government of Iran has also exported rockets, sniper rifles, and mortars to enemy groups in Iraq.

The Iranian government has also supported enemy groups by providing them with trainers and advisors responsive to Qods Force commanders. This training and advisory effort has made certain Shia militia groups more

effective and lethal than they had previously been. The evidence for Iran's extensive involvement in training "secret cells" of Shia militias has only surfaced publicly in recent months, even though senior U.S. officials have stated publicly since



November 2006 that the Iranian government has fueled the violence in Iraq by providing funds and weapons (and media reports have suggested it since 2004).<sup>2</sup>

This spring, U.S. and Iraqi forces launched special operations within Iraq to capture the leaders of the Iranian-funded movement. This Iraq Report documents the Special Operations campaign against Iranian agents, secret cells,

and rogue militia elements. The campaign aimed to reduce the ability of Shia extremists to destabilize the government and security of Iraq. These special operations supplemented the counteroffensive against al Qaeda extremists in central Iraq. U.S. and Iraqi forces have captured numerous suspects with links to Iran and evidence documenting how the Iranian government supported violence in Iraq. U.S. forces have publicly released some of this material, and this Iraq Report will review and explain the contents of that dossier. Meanwhile, Coalition and Iraqi forces are taking further steps to reduce the power and destructiveness of the secret cells within Iraq. At the beginning of August 2007, General Ray Odierno, commander of Coalition combat forces in Iraq, announced the beginning of a more aggressive campaign against Shia militias, as well as special groups, in Baghdad.

The governments of the United States and of Iraq have also engaged in diplomatic negotiations with the government of Iran this summer. Trilateral talks between the United States, Iran, and Iraq occurred on May 28 and July 24, 2007. The three governments have discussed Iranian activities that undermine the government of Iraq. This report will provide a brief summary of the nature and results of those talks.

#### *The Qods Force and Hezbollah*

The highest echelons of the Iranian government and the highest echelons of Hezbollah in Lebanon have worked together to organize a violent, Shia resistance movement in Iraq. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps - Qods Force (IRGC-QF) has established, organized, and funded this movement. Ayatollah Khomeini established the Qods Force in 1979 to protect Iran's Islamic Revolution and export it beyond Iran's borders. Brigadier General Qassim

Suleimani has served as its commander since 2005.<sup>3</sup> Although the Qods Force commander has a seat on Iran's national security council, along with the elected President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, he does not report to the president. Rather, he answers directly to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. General David Petraeus, commander of all Coalition forces in Iraq, has stated that "the Qods Force [is] an Iranian special operations organization that answers directly to Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei."<sup>4</sup>

Lebanese Hezbollah is probably the most important group developed with the assistance of the Iranian Qods Force. Lebanese Hezbollah emerged in 1983 to expel Israel from southern Lebanon. From its inception, Hezbollah has enjoyed significant financial and material aid from Iran and Syria. The Qods Force, in particular, played a critical role in Hezbollah's foundation and its funding and training. Since 1992 Hezbollah has participated in governing Lebanon and is now a highly developed political entity. The Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon ended in 2000, and Hezbollah has since used its extensive social support network to expand its political base in southern Lebanon and parts of Beirut.<sup>5</sup> Hezbollah now holds fourteen seats in the Lebanese parliament, a significant achievement given that Shias are only allocated twenty-seven seats in Lebanon's 128-member parliament. Hezbollah's success over the past two decades has led some to view the organization as a "model of resistance."<sup>6</sup>

#### *The Qods Force and Hezbollah*

The Iranian Qods Force and Lebanese Hezbollah worked together since 2003 to support Shia extremists in Iraq and to develop those groups into an organization modeled on Lebanese

Hezbollah. Shia groups accounted for about half of the violence in Iraq in July 2007.<sup>7</sup> U.S. military officials estimate that the Qods Force provides between \$750,000 and \$3 million worth of equipment and funding to the special groups every month.

#### *The Origins of Iranian-Backed Special Groups in Iraq*

Iran began preparing to combat American forces in Iraq even before the invasion of 2003. According to an August 2005 article by Michael Ware based on classified intelligence documents, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei convened a council of war in Teheran that concluded: "It is necessary to adopt an active policy in order to prevent long-term and short-term dangers to Iran." As a result, Iranian intelligence services organized the various Iraqi resistance groups they had been sheltering under Brigadier General Qassim Sullaimani, the current head of the Qods Force.<sup>8</sup>

Immediately after the U.S. invasion, thousands of members of these resistance groups, primarily from the Badr Corps, moved into Iraq and attempted to seize control of various key locations in the Shia areas. Ware cited an IRGC intelligence report of April 10, 2003 that "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...claims 'forces attached to us' had control of the city of Amarah."<sup>9</sup> Other reports confirm this view: "In a sermon on May 2 [2003], Ayatollah Ahmad Janati, secretary general of Iran's powerful Council of Guardians, called on Iraqis to stage suicide attacks to drive U.S.-led forces from [Iraq]....Two months later...coalition forces uncovered a document describing a fatwa, or religious edict, that had reportedly been issued in Iran for its Shiite supporters in Iraq. The fatwa urged 'holy fighters' in Iraq to get close to the

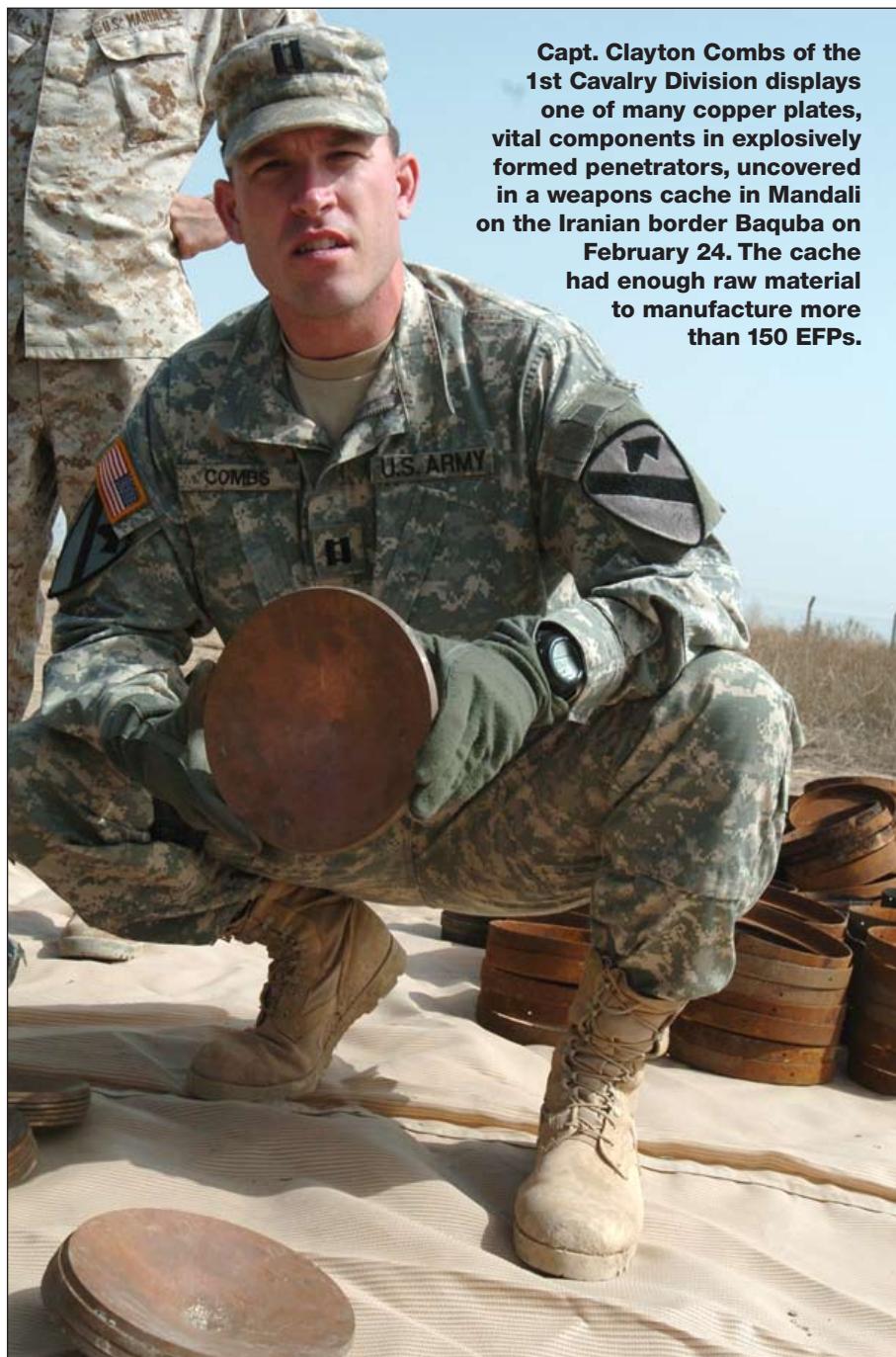
### ■ Iran began preparing to combat American forces in Iraq even before the invasion of 2003...Immediately after the U.S. invasion, thousands of members of these resistance groups, primarily from the Badr Corps, moved into Iraq and attempted to seize control of various key locations in the Shia areas.

enemy—the U.S.-led troops. These fighters, the fatwa said, should ‘maintain good relations with the coalition forces’ but at the same time create ‘a secret group that would conduct attacks against American troops.’<sup>10</sup>

Further details of Iranian support for attacks against American forces in 2003 and 2004 come from reports of the Mujahedeen e-Khalq, an anti-Iranian terrorist group based in Iraq (and guarded, since 2003, by U.S. forces at its base northeast of Baghdad). The U.S. military at the time believed the reporting of this group to be reliable: “The MEK, wrote one Army analyst, is ‘quite proficient at intelligence collection.’”<sup>11</sup> One might nevertheless be suspicious of information from such a source if it were not that subsequent events corroborate it so well, as this report discusses. Thus, according to the MEK, the Iranian Qods Force was developing “‘a widespread network for transferring and distributing arms from Iran to Iraq’ through the Ilam region in western Iran... ‘In order to control and manage the intelligence and terrorist activities in Iraq...the Qods Force has recently moved part of its command staff from Tehran to the border city of Mehran.’” In December 2003, the MEK related, “Iranian agents moved 1,000 rocket-propelled grenades and seven boxes of TNT from western Iran to Iraqi resistance groups,” along with other weapons.<sup>12</sup>

The Badr Corps and Iranian agents were not the only ones involved in training and arming an anti-American Iraqi resistance under Iranian auspices. Lebanese Hezbollah also sent agents into Iraq in 2003—around 800,

according to MEK reports, though there is no other evidence for this number.<sup>13</sup> By August 2005, Abu Mustafa al-Sheibani had developed an extensive “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.” Sheibani’s group introduced into Iraq “‘shaped’ explosive charges,” based on a model used by Hezbollah against the



SPC. CAL TURNER / U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE PHOTO

Israelis, and its fighters trained in Lebanon as well as Sadr City and “another country,” according to U.S. intelligence sources.<sup>14</sup> An American military official in Baghdad explained that “the U.S. believes that Iran has brokered a partnership between Iraqi Shiite militants and Hizballah and facilitated the import of sophisticated weapons that are killing and wounding U.S. and British troops.” An American Special Operations Task Force report claimed “the Lebanese Hizballah leadership believes that the struggle in Iraq is the new battleground in the fight against the U.S.”<sup>15</sup> Sheibani’s group was estimated to include 280 fighters organized into 17 bomb-making teams and death squads.<sup>16</sup>

From the beginning, Iran did not confine its support of anti-American fighters to Shia groups. It also supported Ansar al-Islam, a radical Sunni terrorist group with close ties to al Qaeda. U.S. and British intelligence reports in 2004 “concluded that Ansar al-Islam was working closely with Iran, and also al Qaeda, in its terrorist attacks against coalition forces.... [O]ne British defense report noted pointedly: ‘Some elements of [Ansar al-Islam] remain in Iran. Intelligence indicates that elements’ of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps ‘are providing safe haven and basic training to Iran-based AI [Ansar al-Islam] cadres.’” A report by the Iraq Survey Group noted that a source had reported “approximately 320 Ansar al-Islam terrorists being trained in Iran...for various attack scenarios including suicide bombings, assassinations, and general subversion against U.S. forces in Iraq.” Another British intelligence source “said that Iranian government agencies were also secretly helping Ansar al-Islam members cross into Iraq from Iran, as part of a plan to mount sniper attacks against coalition forces.” American sources confirmed this information, adding that “an Iranian was aiding Ansar al-Islam ‘on how to build and set up’ improvised explosive devices, known as IEDs. An analyst for the U.S. Central Command offered this assessment: ‘AI [Ansar al-Islam] is actively attempting to improve IED effectiveness and sophistication.’”<sup>17</sup>

Teheran had a natural Shia proxy in the Badr Corps and SCIRI, but it hedged its bets from the beginning by backing Moqtada al Sadr as

well. Sadr visited Teheran in June 2003, and was apparently receiving funds from Iranian Grand Ayatollah Kazem al-Haeri until October of that year when al-Haeri started to cut his ties to Sadr.<sup>18</sup> Sadr and three advisors traveled by road from Najaf to Ilam “where Iranian authorities had a 10-seat private plane waiting for them.” In Teheran, the group met with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi. The invitation to Sadr apparently angered Iraqi clerical leaders in Najaf. “‘The marjas [the holy city’s highest leaders] found it offensive that Moqtada would be officially invited to Iran,’ says Sheik Ali al-Rubai, spokesman for one of the holy city’s four top clerics, Grand Ayatollah Ishaq Fayadh. ‘When Khamenei’s representative came to Najaf [in August 2003], the marjas spoke to him in a rough way and demanded to know why they invited Moqtada.’ The lavish reception was a particular slap to Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al Hakim, a major beneficiary of Iranian support for two decades. Hakim threatened to cut ties with Tehran in protest.”<sup>19</sup>

Hezbollah also established a long-term relationship with Sadr. Hezbollah apparently began trying to establish relations with Sadr in July 2003 and had succeeded by August. At the end of that month, according to a U.S. intelligence report, “Hezbollah had established ‘a team of 30 to 40 operatives’ in Najaf in support of Moqtada Sadr’s Shia paramilitary group.” The report added that “Hezbollah was recruiting and training members of Sadr’s militia. A later report...said that Hezbollah was ‘buying rocket-propelled grenades...antitank missiles’ and other weapons for Sadr’s militia.” Unconfirmed reports suggested that Hezbollah’s Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah had sent a senior advisor to deliver funds to Sadr in Najaf.<sup>20</sup> In October 2005, a British government official “alleged that Iran had supplied explosive devices to Sadr’s Mahdi Army.” Prime Minister Tony Blair subsequently supported that assertion and “attributed the shipments to ‘Iranian elements’ or Iran’s ally, Lebanese Hizballah, acting on Iran’s behalf...”<sup>21</sup>

The covert nature of Iranian support for its proxies was clear and disturbing from the outset.

## IRANIAN INTERVENTION IN IRAQ

<b>Dec. 2003</b>	Some Qods Force command staff reportedly move from Tehran to Mehran	<b>Dec. 2006</b>	Two Iranian nationals and members of the Qods force detained by US forces in Iraq; expelled to Iran one week later by Iraqi government
<b>April 10, 2003</b>	Qods Force operatives report that they control Kut and Amarah after U.S. invasion	<b>Jan. 11, 2007</b>	Five Iranian nationals with connections to the Qods force detained in Irbil
<b>May 2, 2003</b>	Sermon by Iranian Ayatollah Ahmad Janati urges Iraqis to stage suicide attacks against U.S. led forces	<b>Jan. 20, 2007</b>	Special Groups attack on Karbala Provincial Joint Coordination Center leaves five U.S. soldiers dead
<b>June 2003</b>	Moqtada al Sadr first visits Iran and meets with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi	<b>Jan. 21, 2007</b>	Sadrists rejoin government
<b>July 2003</b>	Lebanese Hezbollah establishes its first contacts with Moqtada al Sadr.	<b>Late Jan., 2007</b>	Sadr leaves Iraq for Iran
<b>Aug. 2003</b>	Hezbollah team established in Najaf to train the Mahdi Army	<b>Mar. 2007</b>	Qais Khazali and Laith Khazali captured along with several other members of the Khazali network
<b>2004</b>	Mahdi Army fights U.S. troops in Najaf and Sadr City	<b>Mar. 20, 2007</b>	Ali Musa Daqduq captured in southern Iraq; member of Hezbollah who helped organize, train, and arm special groups
<b>2004</b>	The first EFPs appear in Iraq	<b>April 20, 2007</b>	Abu Yaser al Shibani captured; deputy in the EFP network in Iraq as well as secret cell logistician and financier
<b>2005</b>	Hezbollah trains Iraqis in Iran	<b>May 4, 2007</b>	Abu Zaki captured in Sadr City; key member of Khazali network
<b>April 21, 2006</b>	Parliamentary factions select Nouri al-Maliki as Prime Minister of Iraq	<b>May 13, 2007</b>	Abu Musah captured in southeast Baghdad; key conduit to special groups for mortars, EFPs, and IEDs
<b>May 2006</b>	Joint Qods-Hezbollah effort to organize these special groups into Hezbollah-like structure begins	<b>May 19, 2007</b>	Azhar Dulaymi killed by US forces; special groups commander and leader of January 20 Karbala raid
<b>May 20, 2006</b>	Maliki's Cabinet takes power	<b>May 30, 2007</b>	Husayn Abu Abdullah captured in Sadr City; secret cell leader and key weapons trafficker
<b>June 2006</b>	Qayis Khazali becomes head of special groups in Iraq	<b>June 15, 2007</b>	Operation Phantom Thunder launched
<b>June 12, 2006</b>	Diyala's provincial Director of Health and Sunni nominee for Deputy Minister of Health kidnapped from within the Ministry of Health in Baghdad	<b>June 28, 2007</b>	Sheikh (Ahmed) Mohammad Hassan Sbahi Al Khafaji captured in Nasiriyah; key secret cell leader
<b>June 22, 2006</b>	Gunmen in camouflage uniforms seize three bus-loads of factory workers on their way home from a government-owned industrial plant in Taji	<b>July 2007</b>	Sadr leaves Iraq for Iran
<b>July 4, 2006</b>	Gunmen kidnap and release Minister of Electricity	<b>July 20, 2007</b>	A "high value" individual detained along with four others in Jisr Diyala. Primary suspect believed responsible for increase in EFP attacks
<b>July 11, 2006</b>	Gunmen kidnap Iraqi diplomat specializing in Iranian relations	<b>July 27, 2007</b>	High-level secret cell leader detained, along with two others in Karbala
<b>July 16, 2006</b>	Gunmen in police uniforms kidnap head of Iraq's Olympic Committee and 35 others	<b>Aug. 13, 2007</b>	Operation Phantom Strike launched; Key special groups financier captured in Bayaa neighborhood of Baghdad
<b>Nov. 15, 2006</b>	Kidnapping of numerous Ministry of Health employees	<b>Aug. 16, 2007</b>	Three killed, Six Detained, including a High-Priority Special Groups Weapons Smuggler
<b>Nov. 19, 2006</b>	Deputy Health Minister Ammar al-Safir abducted	<b>Aug. 20, 2007</b>	Coalition Forces Kill Eight, Detain Three, Capturing a Special Groups Leader and Smuggler of Iranian Weapons
<b>Nov. 21, 2006</b>	Convoy for Minister of State Mohammed Abbas Arafai attacked		
<b>Nov. 29, 2006</b>	Sadrists boycott Iraqi Parliament.		

Iranian intelligence services penetrated Iraq rapidly and thoroughly, and the thrust of their collection efforts was “finding out what weapons U.S. troops were carrying and what kind of body armor they were wearing. Iranian agents also sought information on the location of U.S. Army and intelligence bases; on the routes traveled by U.S. convoys; on the operations of the Special Forces’ elite Delta Force; and on the plans of the U.S. military and intelligence inside Iraq.”<sup>22</sup> The Iranians preferred not to be directly implicated in attacks on U.S. forces, but instead offered bounties to Iraqis for killing Americans, shooting down U.S. helicopters, and destroying American tanks.<sup>23</sup> Iran’s proxies in Iraq also undertook a campaign of targeted assassinations. Reports suggest that in fall 2003 “a senior Iranian cleric in Tehran set up a special 100-member army, known as al Saqar, which means eagle in Arabic, to assassinate [CPA Director L. Paul] Bremer and carry out other terrorist attacks.” This “eagle army” apparently “had trained for 30 days at an Iranian terrorist camp.” By January 2004, MEK reports suggested that the Hezbollah agents in Iraq were to “assassinate their opponents and carry out sabotage operations.”<sup>24</sup>

In August 2005 Michael Ware reported, “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.... 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.”<sup>25</sup> One former Iraqi Army officer reported “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.” The Iranians wanted to know “‘who the Americans trusted and where they were,’ and pestered [the former officer] to find out if [he], 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.” The Iranian agent “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.”<sup>26</sup>

*Lebanese Hezbollah  
Trains Iraqis in Iran*

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The number and quality of special groups increased in 2005, as the Iranian government allowed Lebanese Hezbollah to train Iraqi militias in Iran. The three small camps used for training Iraqi militias were, as of summer 2007, located near Tehran. Twenty to sixty Iraqis can be trained at once in these facilities, and the training courses lasted from four to six weeks.<sup>27</sup>

The recruits were generally members of militias, including but not exclusively Jaysh al-Mahdi.<sup>28</sup>

They crossed the border at Zurbatiya-Mehran, usually unarmed and in pairs, sometimes in buses.<sup>29</sup> Recent arrests by Iraqi Army soldiers reveal one recruiting technique used by special groups in Najaf, the Shia holy city where the Office of the Martyr Sadr and other political and religious organizations are well established. The director of a charity, the Amin Allah Cultural and Humanitarian Establishment, funneled funds designated for humanitarian use through the charity for the purpose of recruiting foreign fighters, training rogue JAM operatives in lethal attack tactics, and trafficking illegal weapons

from Iran.<sup>30</sup> Two employees at the charity took advantage of their positions to offer \$500 to those who would emplace IEDs. These same recruiters also facilitated the training of Iraqis in Iran and received money and weapons from Iran.<sup>31</sup>

The Qods Force and Hezbollah trained Iraqis in groups of 20 to 60 so that they functioned as a unit—a “secret cell” or “special group.” The Iraqis returned to Iraq after their training, maintaining their group’s organization. Thus, each “special group” in Iraq consisted of 20 to 60 Iraqis who had trained together in Iran in how “to use EFPs, mortars, rockets, as well as intelligence, sniper and kidnapping operations.”<sup>32</sup> These special groups could be combined into larger organizations. The director of the Amin Allah charity coordinated “more than 200 rogue JAM members” and “ordered them to conduct assassinations on local citizens and government officials who oppose the group’s illegal activities.”<sup>33</sup>

Lebanese Hezbollah oversaw the special groups training effort by sending one of its members, Yussef Hashim, to serve as the organization’s Head of Special Operations in Iraq.<sup>34</sup> The trainer leading this effort in 2005 was a Lebanese Hezbollah operative named Ali Mussa Daqduq, who had an impressive military career in that organization. He joined Lebanese Hezbollah in 1983. He commanded a Hezbollah special operations unit. He coordinated the personal security of the leader of Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hassan Nasrallah, and he coordinated operations in large sectors of Lebanon before he came to Iran.<sup>35</sup>

#### *The Qods Force Reorganizes the Special Groups by Using Lebanese Hezbollah as a Proxy*

Though the Hezbollah training of special groups in Iran began in 2005, the Iranian government decided to adjust the way these groups were organized in May 2006. A joint Qods Force-Hezbollah effort to organize these trained opposition groups into a Hezbollah-style structure began in May 2006. The Iranian Qods force leadership sponsored the reorganization effort by holding a meeting with two Lebanese Hezbollah leaders who traveled to Tehran for that

purpose: Yussef Hashim, the Hezbollah Head of Special Operations in Iraq, and his subordinate Ali Mussa Daqduq. In Tehran, they met with Hajji Yusif, the Deputy Commander of the Qods Force who heads its Department of External Special Operations. They also met with the commander.<sup>36</sup>

The Qods Force instructed Ali Mussa Daqduq “to make trips in and out of Iraq and report on the training and operations of the Iraqi special groups. In the year prior to his capture, Ali Mussa Daqduq made four such trips to Iraq. He monitored and reported on the training and arming of special groups in mortars and rockets, manufacturing and employment of improvised explosive devices, and kidnapping operations. Most significantly, he was tasked to organize the special groups in ways that mirrored how Hezbollah was organized in Lebanon.”<sup>37</sup>

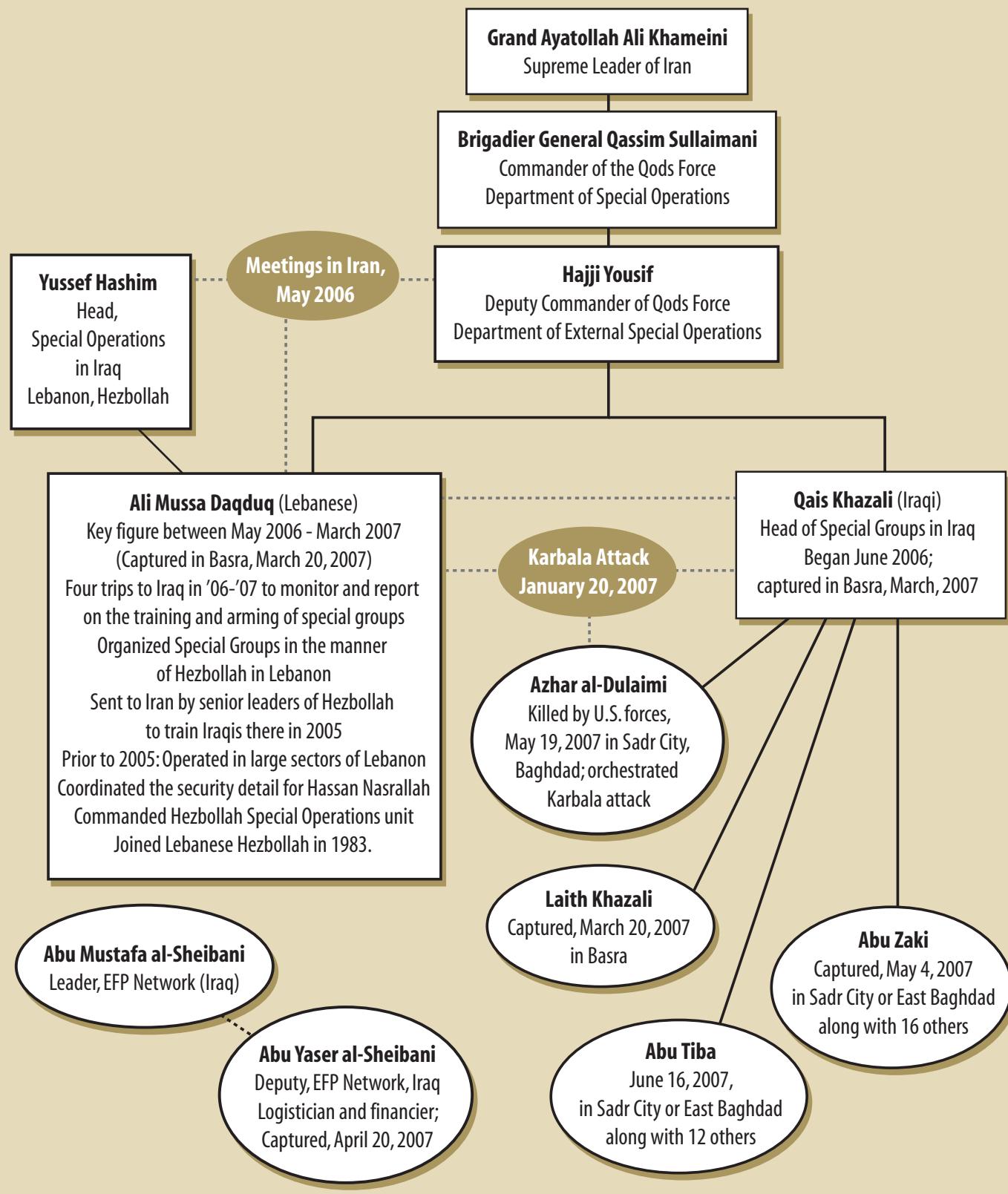
The Qods Force sponsored, or at least accepted, another significant personnel change at the same time. In June 2006, just a month after the Tehran meeting, Qais Khazali became the head of special groups in Iraq (whereas Ali Mussa Daqduq remained the chief advisor).<sup>38</sup> Qais Khazali is an Iraqi who once supported the Sadr movement. According to a Sadr spokesman, Moqtada al Sadr expelled Qais Khazali from his organization in 2004 because the latter gave “unauthorized orders” during the battle for Najaf.<sup>39</sup> Qais Khazali thus had a reputation for working with but undercutting Moqtada al Sadr. It is not clear from the open sources what relationship existed between Qais Khazali and Moqtada al Sadr during his tenure as head of special groups. Qais Khazali’s relationship to Iran is clear: he reported to Hajji Yusif, the deputy commander of the Qods Force, Department of External Special Operations (just as Ali Mussa Daqduq did).<sup>40</sup>

Some members of Iraqi special groups observed or participated in the Hezbollah-Lebanon war in July 2006. They traveled from Iraq to Syria to Lebanon and worked alongside Hezbollah in groups of 20 to 40 fighters.<sup>41</sup>

#### *Possible Aims of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps-Qods Force*

Initially, the Qods Force goal might have

## IRANIAN AND HEBBOLAH CONNECTIONS TO SPECIAL GROUPS IN IRAQ



been pinning U.S. forces in Iraq, rather than ejecting them. According to Ware, “Intelligence sources claim that Brigadier General Sullaimani ordained in a meeting of his militia proxies in the spring of last year [2004] 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.’”<sup>42</sup>

In 2005 and 2006, “The Qods Force goal was to develop the Iraqi special groups into a network similar to the Lebanese Hezbollah. Special groups would be unable to conduct their terrorist attacks in Iraq without Iranian-supplied weapons and other support,” according to a U.S. military spokesman.<sup>43</sup> The purpose of the Qods force effort, then, was to create a highly-lethal network that relied upon the Iranian government to survive. Presumably, this reorganization would increase Tehran’s ability to control and influence operations in Iraq.

Iran and Hezbollah made these changes as the current government of Iraq was being established. Parliamentary factions selected Nouri al-Maliki as Prime Minister on April 21, 2006.<sup>44</sup> His cabinet took power on May 20, 2006. The Qods Force reorganization of the special groups into a Hezbollah-like structure seems likely to have been either a deliberate

Iranian response to the creation of an Iraqi government or, more specifically, to Maliki’s premiership. The Qods Force certainly took these steps as Maliki’s government was forming.

The Qods Force might have aimed to reorganize the Iraqi secret cells into a Hezbollah-style organization because that military advising effort has succeeded well. Yet the IRGC-QF might also have aimed to achieve goals in Iraq similar to those that Hezbollah has pursued in Lebanon. The primary goal of Hezbollah before 2005 was

expelling Israeli forces from occupying territory in southern Lebanon. By extension, it seems possible that Hezbollah and the IRGC-QF viewed the special groups as an organization well-suited to expel Coalition forces from Iraq. That would represent a change from the IRGC-QF strategy of 2004, articulated by Brigadier General Qassim Sullaimani, if Ware reported it correctly.

The IRGC-QF and Lebanese Hezbollah might have reorganized their efforts in 2006 to achieve broader political aims in Iraq and for the effect it would have on American policy. Hezbollah in Lebanon exists despite the existence of an elected government there. Lebanese Hezbollah uses existing government structures and personnel to accomplish some of its goals. So the reorganization of Iraqi special groups into a Hezbollah-like model implies that the Qods Force might have intended that the special groups should operate under the umbrella of Iraqi government institutions in order to compete with (or indeed, effectively replace) Iraq’s elected government, as Hezbollah does in parts of Lebanon.

Ryan Crocker, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, suggested that the Qods Force might have the goal of assuring that southern Iraq remains beyond the control of the central government of Iraq and Iraqi Security Forces. In this

scenario, the Qods Force might desire an end-state in which those who receive their funding, weapons, and military training from special groups provide security and services in southern Iraq and hold political offices there. Ambassador Crocker stated, “The fact that we have arrested the Lebanese Hezbollah trainer and have had many long conversations with the head of the secret cells, so called, of the Jaish al-Mahdi, who has gone on at length about Iranian connections, has to leave you with the issue out there, is Iran

**■ Upon his capture on December 29, 2006, the third-ranking official in the Qods Force and his captured colleague “had detailed weapons lists, documents pertaining to shipments of weapons into Iraq, organizational charts, telephone records, and maps...as well as information about importing modern, specially shaped explosive charges into Iraq, weapons that have been used in roadside bombs to target U.S. military armored vehicles.”**



**U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker, right and his Iranian counterpart Hassan Kazemi Qomi, left, attend a meeting on security in Iraq at the Iraqi Prime Minister's office on May 28, 2007 in the Green Zone Baghdad, Iraq.**

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intending a Lebanonization or a Hezbollahization of parts of the south. So in addition to...criminally driven violence, you cannot rule out the possibility of an overlay of not just politically directed violence but politically directed violence with outside support.”<sup>45</sup>

#### *The Qods Force Advisors In Iraq*

Most members of Special Groups are Iraqis, including Qais Khazali, the former head of Secret Cells. Nevertheless there are Iranian operatives in Iraq assisting the Special Groups.

Iranians tied to the IRGC-Qods Force operated in Iraq at the end of 2006 and the beginning of 2007. U.S. Special Forces detained Chizari, the third-ranking official in the Qods Force, at the Baghdad compound of Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim on December 29, 2006. He and his

captured colleague “had detailed weapons lists, documents pertaining to shipments of weapons into Iraq, organizational charts, telephone records and maps, among other sensitive intelligence information. Officials were particularly concerned by the fact that the Iranians had information about importing modern, specially shaped explosive charges into Iraq, weapons that have been used in roadside bombs to target U.S. military armored vehicles.”<sup>46</sup> These two men claimed they had diplomatic passports. U.S. officials argued that they did not have diplomatic immunity, as they were using aliases. The Iraqi government, disagreeing, decided to expel them.<sup>47</sup> On January 11, Coalition forces detained five Iranians, without proper diplomatic credentials, with links to the IRGC-QF in Irbil, in the Kurdish region in northeastern Iraq.<sup>48</sup> These five Iranians have remained in detention since then. The

IRGC-QF had ties with Ansar al Islam terrorists in the Kurdish region before and after the fall of Saddam Hussein.

There are a significant number of Iranian advisors in Iraq. Iraqis functioned as liaisons for Iranian intelligence officers in the cities of Amarah and Majar al-Kabir, known havens for weapons smugglers.<sup>49</sup> Major General Rick Lynch, Commander of Multi-National Forces-Center, estimated in August that he had about 50 high-value targets in MND-C related to the Special Groups. Roughly 30 of them are “IRGC surrogates, people that have been trained by the IRGC in Iran who’ve come back in Iraq to conduct acts of violence.” In addition, “I believe I got some members of the IRGC, some Iranians, who are working in our battlespace.” He believed that there were about 20 Iranian IRGC advisors “either training Iraqis to conduct acts of violence or conducting those acts of violence themselves.... And what they do is they transit the battlespace. They don’t come in and they stay, but they’re going back and forth.”<sup>50</sup> These Qods Force operatives seem to fill an important advisory niche, perhaps in the wake of the capture of Ali Mussa Daqduq.

## **UNDERMINING THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT: SPECIAL GROUP ACTIVITIES IN 2006**

The special groups’ operations contributed directly to turmoil in Iraq’s central and provincial governments in 2006 and 2007.

The special groups are not solely responsible for political turmoil in Iraq, but they have actively undermined the Maliki government from its inception.

The special groups contributed vigorously to the sectarian violence plaguing Iraq in 2006. Leaders of secret cells organized and facilitated death squad activities by militia groups or government employees. They organized kidnappings of Iraqi government officials and workers from their ministries. They diverted Iraqi government funds to support their operations. Many used their official positions within the

government of Iraq to fund, organize, staff, and execute these “secret cell” operations.

The special groups also directly caused some of the personnel turmoil within the Maliki government that prevented it from functioning in the second half of 2006. Some of the targeted kidnappings of Iraqi officials in spring and summer 2006 are directly linked to secret cell leaders whom U.S. forces have captured and interrogated in recent months. These kidnappings removed mid-level functionaries—often but not exclusively Sunni—from the central government of Iraq and from the provincial governments.

*Hakim al Zamili, Special Groups,  
Deputy Minister of Health*

In June 2006, Diyala’s provincial director of health was the Sunni nominee for one of the deputy minister positions in the Maliki government.<sup>51</sup> He traveled to Baghdad that month for a meeting in the Ministry of Health with the minister and was kidnapped while inside the building. His kidnapping was organized by Hakim al Zamili, the deputy minister of Health, whom U.S. and Iraqi forces apprehended on February 9, 2007.<sup>52</sup> The allegations against the Ministry had provoked previous operations by U.S. and Iraqi forces. For example, they had attempted to locate kidnap victims in the Ministry of Health in August 2006, but they failed to find their targets.<sup>53</sup>

In November 2006, officials in the Ministry of Health were targets of kidnappings and assassinations. Men in police uniforms abducted Ammar al-Safir, another deputy minister of Health, on November 19, 2006.<sup>54</sup> Two days later, roadside bombs in eastern Baghdad wounded two guards in the convoy for Minister of State Mohammed Abbas Auraibi. And on that same day, gunmen fired on Hakim al Zamili’s convoy in Baghdad, killing two of his security guards.<sup>55</sup> All three men were Shia officials in the government of Iraq. The U.S. military has not indicated whether Hakim al Zamili and his secret cell were complicit in the November kidnapping of his colleague. Nor have they indicated whether the assassination attempt

against Hakim al Zamili was a reprisal attack against him for that or any other action.

Hakim al Zamili used the resources of the Ministry of Health, such as ambulances, to transport weapons, death squads, and their victims between Sadr City and other locations in Baghdad. Al Zamili allegedly paid the death squad members by including them on the payroll of the Ministry of Health.<sup>56</sup>

As part of the parliamentary compromise that brought Maliki to power, the minister of Health has been appointed by the Sadrists bloc. Many employees in that Ministry have ties to the Office of the Martyr Sadr or to its military wing, the Jaysh al-Mahdi. It is not possible from the evidence presented to conclude firmly whether Sadr personally directed Hakim al Zamili's activities in 2006, or whether Hakim al Zamili acted independently. Hakim al Zamili was one of the first officials arrested after Moqtada al Sadr left Iraq in late January 2007. His arrest preceded the beginning of Operation Fardh al Qanoon, or Enforcing the Law (commonly known as the Baghdad Security Plan).

#### *Mass Kidnapping in June and July 2006*

It is not clear from open sources which organizations—government forces, militia groups, secret cells, or private citizens—organized and perpetrated the mass kidnappings that plagued Iraq in June and July 2006. Many of these attacks were conducted by men wearing the uniforms of Iraq's police forces, probably militia members working also in the Iraqi Security Forces—or indeed, by special groups. Many of these June and July kidnappings targeted government officials, rather than randomly selected civilians, and therefore deserve consideration as part of the destabilization of the Maliki government, whether or not special groups were involved. Gunmen

in camouflage uniforms seized three bus-loads of factory workers on their way home from a government-owned industrial plant in Taji on June 22, 2006.<sup>57</sup> In early July, gunmen kidnapped individuals working for the government of Iraq, including the minister of Electricity (who was released) and his body guards, a female Sunni legislator and her body guards, and a consular official who was on leave in Baghdad from his routine diplomatic assignment in the Iranian city of Kermanshah.<sup>58</sup> On July 16, gunmen in police uniforms and using official vehicles kidnapped the head of Iraq's Olympic Committee and approximately 30 other sports officials while they attended a conference in the Karrada neighborhood in eastern Baghdad.<sup>59</sup>

*Azhar Dulaymi, Special Groups, and the Kidnapping of Iraqi Officials and U.S. Soldiers*

On November 15, 2006, a secret cell organization kidnapped numerous employees of the Iraqi Ministry of Higher Education from its headquarters in Karrada. The event garnered major public attention because of its scale and its contribution to unrest within the Iraqi government, culminating in the withdrawal of Sadrists members from the Iraqi Council of Representatives on November 29, 2006. Secret cell operative Azhar Dulaymi, whom U.S. forces killed during a raid on May 20, 2007, coordinated this operation. Differing reports suggest that between 50 and 80 gunmen, all in police uniforms, stormed past security guards within the Ministry compound. The gunmen separated male from female employees, locked the latter in a room, and loaded the former into roughly 30 trucks belonging to the Interior Ministry, but without license plates.<sup>60</sup> U.S. officials estimated that 55

people had been kidnapped; they believed that the abductors took their victims to the Belidiyat neighborhood on the southeastern fringe of Sadr City.<sup>61</sup> Approximately 40 of the hostages were released by the kidnappers or rescued by the Iraqi Army within 24 hours.<sup>62</sup> In addition, Prime Minister Maliki immediately ordered the arrest of several police officials in Karrada, presumably for complicity in the plot (or alternatively for incompetence).<sup>63</sup>

Azhar Dulaymi organized other high-profile kidnappings executed by members of special groups. He participated in the January kidnapping of U.S. soldiers from the Provincial Joint Coordination Center in Karbala, where a small U.S. team worked with Iraqi Security Forces. Operatives entered the Provincial Joint Coordination Center unopposed in a convoy of civilian vehicles, wearing components of American military uniforms, and stormed into rooms where the U.S. soldiers were working. They ultimately killed the five American soldiers whom they attempted to kidnap.<sup>64</sup>

*U.S. Forces Capture Qais Khazali, and Ali Mussa Daqduq*

U.S. forces captured Qais Khazali, Laith Khazali, and Ali Mussa Daqduq in a single operation on March 20, 2007 in Basra, Iraq's southernmost city. The three obviously worked together on occasion. U.S. forces also captured a computer, false identification cards, and diaries in the raid. From these documents and separate interviews, U.S. forces confirmed that Qais Khazali, Laith Khazali, and Ali Mussa Daqduq were leaders of a network deliberately developed by the Iranian government to foment violence in Iraq. The U.S. military spokesman in Baghdad released a file early in July reproducing some of these documents.<sup>65</sup>

Multi-National Force Iraq reported that "When Qais [Khazali] was captured, we found an in-depth planning and lessons learned document. It was about the attack the special groups coordinated against the Karbala Provincial Joint Coordination Center on January 20th. This 22-page document provides a unique window

into the planning and execution of special group operations here in Iraq. ...Ali Musa Daqduq and Qais Khazali state that senior leadership within the Qods Force knew of and supported planning for the eventual Karbala attack that killed five coalition soldiers. Ali Musa Daqduq contends that the Iraqi special groups could not have conducted this complex operation without the support and direction of the Qods Force. Daqduq and Khazali both confirm that Qais Khazali authorized the operation, and Azhar al- Dulaimi, who we killed in an operation earlier this year, executed the operation.

"The document that we captured showed the following. It showed that the group that attacked the Provincial Joint Coordination Center in Karbala had conducted extensive preparation and drills prior to the attack. Qods Force had developed detailed information regarding our soldiers' activities, shift changes and fences, and this information was shared with the attackers. They had American-looking uniforms, vehicles and identification cards that enabled the attackers to more easily penetrate the Provincial Joint Coordination Center and achieve surprise. [It] reported that the captured soldiers were killed when the attackers' dispersal from the site was interrupted."<sup>66</sup>

U.S. forces exploited the intelligence gained in these documents and from interviews with the captives to identify significant secret cell leaders and members of the weapons' smuggling network. The affiliated kills and captures included secret cell leader Abu Zaki; Azhar al-Dulaimi, the executor of the Ministry of Health and Karbala attacks, and Abu Tiba, one of his gang members;<sup>67</sup> al Hilfi, the head of secret cells in Baghdad;<sup>68</sup> Sheikh (Ahmed) Mohammad Hassan Sbahi Al Khafaji, who supplied weapons to Baghdad;<sup>69</sup> and many others.<sup>70</sup>

*Arming the Secret Cells with EFPs and other Weapons*

A variety of Iranian weapons flowed into Iraq through direct purchases by the government of Iran. Coalition forces first noticed that enemy groups were using EFPs in Iraq in the middle

of 2004. The number of EFPs used against Coalition and Iraqi forces rose “at a rate of 150 percent” between January 2006 and December 2006, and increased every month in November 2006 through January 2007.<sup>71</sup>

Weapons were typically smuggled from Iran to Iraq, and the Qods Force played a role in that process.<sup>72</sup>

The training alliance between Hezbollah, Iran, and Shia militias corresponds, temporally, with the increased use of EFPs in Iraq. The timing is probably not coincidental. Iran originally manufactured EFPs for Lebanese Hezbollah. Copper EFPs require a great deal of metallurgical and technological precision to manufacture. Consequently, they cannot be made without specific machinery, access to which the Iranians have controlled. Abu Mustafa al Sheibani has supplied EFPs to Iraq since 2005, if not earlier.<sup>73</sup> His relative, Abu Yasir al Sheibani, served as “the deputy, key logistician and financier for this group in Iraq.”<sup>74</sup> That is to say, the Sheibani network smuggled EFPs into Iraq.

The Sheibanis relied on a network within Iraq to distribute EFPs to special groups and other extremists, concentrating on Baghdad. Some smugglers in these distribution networks had direct connections to the Qods Force.<sup>75</sup>

Other weapons smuggled from Iran to Iraq in 2007 included: 81 mm mortars (the remainder of the region uses 82 mm mortars); repainted 107 mm rockets imported into Iran from China and marked for sale in the open markets; RPG-7; 60 mm canisters filled with Iranian-manufactured mortar rounds; and 240 mm rockets.<sup>76</sup>

In addition, earlier in 2007, American troops discovered over 100 Austrian made Steyr HS50 .50 caliber sniper rifles in Iraq.<sup>77</sup> These high-powered sniper rifles, which fire Iranian rounds,

“can pierce all body armour from up to a mile and penetrate armoured Humvee troop carriers.”<sup>78</sup> The rifles were part of a larger shipment legally purchased from the Austrian manufacturer by Iran a year ago under the justification that they would be used by the Iranian police to combat drug smugglers.<sup>79</sup> Although eyebrows were raised in both Washington and London at the time, the sale went through and the weapons were shipped to Iran.<sup>80</sup> The presence of these weapons shows a high level of sophistication in the Iranian arms flow into Iraq as the purchase was made officially by the Iranian government.

*The Special Groups Network  
Transit Routes  
for EFPs and other  
Weapons from Iran*

The network of special groups transports EFPs along the major highways to Baghdad from Iranian border crossings in Diyala and Wasit provinces. Most of these routes lacked Coalition forces in 2006; and the mission of Coalition forces in 2006 did not regularly include interdiction operations (but rather, focused on training Iraqi Security Forces for these and other missions).

In Wasit province, EFPs, weapons, recruits for special groups, and smuggled goods flowed through the major border crossing between Mehran, Iran and Zurbatiya, Iraq.<sup>81</sup> Iranian trucks did not transport weapons into Iraq through Zurbatiya. Rather, goods and weapons were trans-loaded from Iranian to Iraqi trucks near the border.<sup>82</sup> Legitimate commercial traffic also crosses the border at Zurbatiya, as do religious pilgrims and political figures with ties to Iran, such as Amar al-Hakim, now head of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, a major political party in the Maliki government.<sup>83</sup> The city of Kut,

## MAJOR ROADS: Major Supply and Communications Routes for Iranian Weapons and Secret Cells in Iraq



just to the west along the highway, has strong ties with ISCI and its military wing, the Badr Corps.<sup>84</sup> Kut is also the hub of the road and smuggling network from the Iranian border to Baghdad.<sup>85</sup> The road from Mehran runs through Kut, as does

the road from Amarah. U.S. forces conducted a series of operations this summer to interdict the smuggling of Iranian weapons from Amarah to Sadr City.<sup>86</sup> And Iraqi Security Forces with the help of Coalition troops conducted operations

in Kut against rogue elements of the Jaysh al-Mahdi.<sup>87</sup>

Basra might be another point of entry for Iranian arms and weapons. Certainly, there is evidence for the trafficking of weapons along the roads out of Basra to Amarah and Nasiriyah. In mid June, Nasiriyah was the site of a firefight between Iraqi forces and the Mahdi Army.<sup>88</sup> On June 27 Iraqi Special Forces destroyed a weapons cache belonging to rogue Jaysh al-Mahdi militiamen.<sup>89</sup> Among the weapons destroyed were 30 60mm mortar rounds, a weapon known to be Iranian in origin.<sup>90</sup> A day later Iraqi Special Forces captured “a rogue Jaysh al-Mahdi insurgent leader during an operation in Nasiriyah.”<sup>91</sup> The man captured, later identified as Sheikh (Ahmed) Mohammad Hassan Sbahi Al Khafaji, is suspected of having “provide[d] financial support to weapons trafficking networks which supply rogue Jaysh Al-Mahdi units in the Baghdad area.”<sup>92</sup>

Cities like Majjar al-Kabir and Amarah in Maysan province, places known to be “smuggling routes for Secret Cell terrorists who facilitate Iranian lethal aid” as well as safe havens for “liaisons for Iranian intelligence operatives into Iraq,” were the target of disruption operations in mid-June.<sup>93</sup> Weapons and aid entering these towns near the Iranian border must still travel through the heavily Shia central 5-city region before reaching Baghdad, increasing the violence in the south.

Kut, Diwaniyah, Hilla, Karbala, Najaf, Musayyib, Mahmudiyah, Iskandaria, Mahawil, as well as numerous other sites of sectarian violence or Shia militia bases all lie between Nasiriyah and Baghdad. The fight for these cities is likely the fight for control of main Jaysh al-Mahdi supply routes and bases of operation.

Iranian weapons and trained terrorists enter Iraq at key border crossings. Although the exact mechanism of Iranian arms supply remains unclear, they are moved via extensive networks and often the so-called secret cells are responsible for facilitating their transfer.

### *The IRGC-QF in Diyala*

The Qods Force responded to the surge of U.S. troops in Iraq by escalating its support for special groups in central and southern Iraq. Ali Mussa Daqduq recorded information about attacks in Basra, Amarah, Karbala, the Rusafa neighborhood of Baghdad, and Diyala.<sup>94</sup> The special groups also increased attacks in other neighborhoods of Baghdad. As it is not possible to detail every such incident, Diyala province, north and east of Baghdad, is an interesting case study of the special groups’ reaction to the American troop increase in both February and August 2007.

Jaysh al-Mahdi operated in Diyala in 2006 because of the mixture of sectarian and ethnic groups there, the al Qaeda stronghold that emerged in Baqubah, and the region’s proximity to Baghdad. Diyala suffered from sectarian cleansing and terrorism in 2006. The Baghdad Security Plan did not “squirt” Jaysh al-Mahdi fighters into Diyala. Rather, the special groups actively targeted Coalition and Iraqi Forces in Diyala province in March, April, and May by reinforcing the area and supplying it with weapons.

This spring’s conflict in Diyala, described in a previous *Iraq Report*, consisted of a struggle between the Jaysh al-Mahdi, al Qaeda, and U.S. forces to control the lines of communication to Baghdad. Special groups and rogue Jaysh al-Mahdi moved into areas of Diyala as al Qaeda receded from its stronghold in Turki Village and re-concentrated in Baqubah, Tarmiyah, and the Diyala River Valley.<sup>95</sup>

The Special Groups in Diyala received direct attention from the Qods Force proxies in Iraq. Some time before March 20, Ali Mussa Daqduq, the Lebanese Hezbollah operative, met with leaders of special groups who conducted small arms and IED attacks against troops in Diyala, presumably to review their activities.<sup>96</sup> His visit shows the importance of Diyala to the special groups.

The Iranians increased their supply of weapons by February 24, just ten days after Operation Enforcing the Law began in Baghdad. Smuggling networks placed a large cache consisting of a hundred copper disks and other supplies used to

make EFPs in Mandali. Mandali, in Diyala, sits on the secondary road that follows the mountains dividing Iran and Iraq, and is an obvious point on a smuggling route from the legitimate border crossing to its north at Khanaqin. U.S. troops discovered this stockpile on February 24, 2007. Because al Qaeda had been the primary enemy in Balad Ruz in January 2006, the *Iraq Report* previously speculated that Iran was supplying these EFPs to al Qaeda. But U.S. forces subsequently stated that they suspected these EFPs were linked to Shia extremists, rather than to al Qaeda.<sup>97</sup> We now know that secret cell networks in Diyala were being reviewed by the Qods Force proxy before March. The Mandali EFP cache seems, therefore, to have been brought by the special groups network for its own use, in order to escalate the fight against coalition forces in Diyala or in Baghdad in February.

The special groups in Baghdad did rely on weapons stored in and distributed from Diyala province. Coalition forces recently captured an important facilitator near Qasarin, on the Tigris River in Diyala, whose responsibilities included distributing EFPs and other “weapons to Special Groups throughout the Baghdad area.” This weapons smuggler made “numerous” trips to Iran, where he apparently had “ties to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps-Quds Force.”<sup>98</sup>

#### *Special Groups in Baghdad: Mortaring the Green Zone*

Special groups, trained and equipped by Iran, escalated the number of mortar and rocket attacks against targets in the International Zone throughout the spring of 2007. The accuracy of this indirect fire improved as a result of the training they received in Iran and the quality of weapons with which they were supplied. General Odierno reported in June, “We have found a few people that were Shia extremists that...had some training in Iran—those mostly being the mortar and rocket teams inside of Baghdad... [T]hey were trained in Iran and came in here to conduct attacks against not only coalition and Iraqi security forces, but government of Iraq targets inside of the Green Zone.”<sup>99</sup>

Major General Fil, commander of Coalition Forces in Baghdad, elaborated further, explaining that most of the rocket and mortar attacks originate from Sadr City or its environs, and most of the rockets and mortars are recently-made Iranian weapons. According to Fil, “[...]uch of the indirect fire that we receive, especially that which is pointed at the International Zone, the Green Zone, is in fact Iranian. And when we check the tail fins of the mortars, when we find the rockets—and frequently we’re able to find them preemptively, before they actually launch... there’s no doubt that they’re coming out of Iran. Most of them are made fairly recently, in the past several years, and they have lot numbers that we can...trace later on. I’ll also say that most of these are coming from the eastern side of the river, by far the majority, in and around the Sadr City area. And so we focused our efforts very strongly into discovering where these areas are that they’re frequently shooting from and denying those” areas to the enemy.<sup>100</sup>

General Odierno said “I do concern myself, over time, about the Iranian influence on Shia extremist groups and what that means in the future. And we cannot allow this rogue Iranian influence to continue to influence, in my mind, and in many ways attack the government of Iraq. Many of these indirect fire attacks that these groups have done are directly against the government of Iraq in the Green Zone. So they’re clearly challenging the government....We cannot allow that to continue.”<sup>101</sup>

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SECRET CELLS AND THE JAYSH AL-MAHDI IN 2007

The secret cells function alongside the Jaysh al-Mahdi and other militia groups in Iraq. They are not identical, but rather overlapping groups. “They come from militia groups, and they are generally the more extreme members of those militia groups. Some of them have come from Jaysh al-Mahdi. Some have come from other militia groups as well,” according to Brigadier General Kevin Bergner,

a U.S. military spokesman.<sup>102</sup> Bergner stressed, “While some of these people may have come from or been affiliated with Jaysh al-Mahdi at one point—and these special groups were an outgrowth, perhaps, of relationships with Jaysh al-Mahdi—they have in fact broken away from Jaysh al-Mahdi.” Furthermore, “[T]hey are cellular in nature....We believe that these [special groups] are operating outside his [Moqtada al-Sadr’s] control and that he shares our...concern in the seriousness that they represent...”<sup>103</sup>

The Jaysh al-Mahdi fractured this spring. Moqtada al-Sadr publicly ordered his militias not to fight Iraqi Security Forces during Operation Fardh al Qanoon (Enforcing the Law, or the Baghdad Security Plan.) As a result, the Maliki government declared that all militia groups that fought the Iraqi Security Forces were “rogue elements” and therefore were subject to military targeting. Clashes between Iraqi Security Forces and rogue militia elements occurred in Diwaniyah in March and Amarah in June.

Moqtada al-Sadr left Iraq for Iran in late January, which further undermined the leadership structure of the militia. In May, the Golden Mahdi Army, a Najaf-based group that claimed to be dispatched by Sadr, attempted to cleanse the Jaysh al-Mahdi of rogue elements not responsive to Najaf.<sup>104</sup> Local groups, calling themselves the Noble Mahdi Army, emerged in Hurriyah in Baghdad to rebuff the attempt of the Golden JAM.<sup>105</sup> The results of these conflicts are not clear.

General Petraeus emphasized that secret cells are “different from JAM [Jaysh al-Mahdi].” Unlike the standard militiaman in the Mahdi Army, the secret cells “have had extra training and selection,” the training being conducted by the Qods Force.<sup>106</sup> These “secret cells” function as enablers, facilitating Iranian support for the Jaysh al-Mahdi and coordinating continued attacks. Sadr City is the support base for the secret cells, Jaysh al-Mahdi, and many rogue JAM militias within Baghdad. These networks overlap extensively.

A militia commander seized in Najaf illustrates a common relationship between the current special groups and the Jaysh al-Mahdi organization. “The former commander’s Jaysh al-Mahdi cell is suspected of conducting aggressive

insurgent attacks using EFPs throughout southern Iraq during late 2005 and early 2006. After leaving Jaysh al-Mahdi, he allegedly formed an independent cell of more than 150 Shia extremists that is believed to have conducted attacks on Iraqi and Coalition Forces.”<sup>107</sup> U.S. Forces captured another extremist in Sadr City who broke from Jaysh al-Mahdi, ran his own cell, and had ties to weapons provided by special groups.<sup>108</sup>

## THE U.S. AND IRAQI RESPONSE WITHIN IRAQ TO IRANIAN INTERVENTION

United States forces and diplomats in Iraq recognize the destabilizing effect that Iranian support for secret cells is having on the government of Iraq. They aim to “...get the surrogates that are operating within Iraq, which tend to be Iraqis, to reject what Iran is doing. There are Iraqi extremist leaders here that are supporting this effort. If we can get... Iraqis to reject Iranians’ lethal support inside of their country, we can stop this threat,” according to General Odierno.<sup>109</sup> The Coalition and the Iraqi government have taken a multi-pronged approach to reducing Iranian influence within Iraq. “We do that first by taking down their supply networks,” General Odierno stated. The second approach is political and diplomatic: “We do that by continuing to talk [with] the Iraqis” about their “tensions” with Iran and the effects that Iranian influence might have “over your own country.”<sup>110</sup> This coordinated diplomatic and military policy seeks “...to have Iraqis reject Iran doing this. Once that occurs, I think we’ll be able to eliminate this threat from inside of Iraq,” General Odierno remarked.<sup>111</sup>

### *The Military Response*

Although Coalition forces in Iraq concentrated their offensive activities against al Qaeda during Operation Phantom Thunder, they also conducted operations targeting the presence of the Jaysh al-Mahdi. MNF-I removed multiple leaders of



SPC. CAL TURNER / U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE PHOTO

**Maj. Ike Sallee, an operations officer with the 3rd Infantry Division, plans a 'soft knock' mission for Qahiryah, a neighborhood in Baghdad's Adhamiyah District with Iraqi army soldiers on July 10. The mission was to interact with the residents to gather information and disrupt operations of a cell using roadside bombs (EFPs) in the area.**

Sadrists secret cells throughout the country almost daily in May and June, and their targets frequently include Sadrists in Sadr City itself. In May and June alone, Coalition and Iraqi forces executed at least 18 operations in Baghdad and its immediate surroundings targeting secret cell activity. They have also conducted such raids against secret cell leaders and militias in Karbala, Amarah, Nasiriyah, and Basrah.

The operations have yielded the capture or elimination of key secret cell leaders, individuals responsible for EFP attacks against Coalition forces, members of Shia death squads and kidnapping cells, as well as those responsible for the importation and use of Iranian weapons.

#### *Disrupting Networks and Interdicting Illegal Weapons East and South of Baghdad*

Disrupting the supply networks, General Odierno's first step, required a redeployment of Coalition and Iraqi forces along key nodes in the lines of communication between Iran and Iraq. There were insufficient Coalition forces to disrupt these supply lines in 2006, even with targeted raids.

The disposition of U.S. Forces in 2006 left a dramatic hole east of Baghdad, allowing Iranian weapons, secret cell leaders, and militia groups to flow freely through this area. The troop increase brought the Hammer Brigade (3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division) to this area, which had not had U.S. forces for years, in April 2007. Forward Operating Base Hammer is at Besmaya, about 15 or 20 miles east of the city. Southern Diyala province abuts northern Wasit in the desolate terrain east of Baghdad, now within

Hammer Brigade's area of operations. Secondary roads through that terrain link Mandali, the major EFP cache site in Diyala, with the eastern border of Sadr City. Roads along the southeastern edge of Baghdad link the same terrain with the Tigris River Valley.

Secret cells evidently valued this communications route east of Baghdad, which link Sadr City and its surrounding neighborhoods with Diyala Province. Coalition forces have been actively targeting these weapons smugglers east and northeast of Baghdad. U.S. and Iraqi Forces detained a smuggler responsible for transporting EFPs and Katusha rockets from Iran to Iraq and distributing them to secret cells throughout Baghdad.<sup>112</sup> A few days later, U.S. forces detained two suspects with direct links to the IRGC on the Iranian border east of Baghdad.<sup>113</sup>

On July 11, insurgents launched Iranian rockets at FOB Hammer, killing one soldier and wounding 15 others. On August 7, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Combat Team "conducted a raid on a militant house in the town of Nahrawan, which is about 20 miles east of Baghdad on the east side of the Tigris River. They arrested one of our division's most valued targets, high-value targets," according to Major General Rick Lynch, the 3<sup>rd</sup> ID commander. "...[H]e acted as a link between Iran and the Jaish al-Mahdi militia. He was the main Shia conduit in that region for getting Iranian EFPs and rockets into Baghdad, and his capture was a big blow to that network."<sup>114</sup> Whatever the ultimate effect of that particular capture, the incident shows the importance of interdicting the supply lines east of Baghdad.

In 2006, Coalition forces were also spread too thin to cover the lines of communication south of Baghdad. For example, only 200 soldiers from the Polish Division in Multi-National Division Central-South were stationed in Kut through spring 2007, detached from the bulk of their unit.<sup>115</sup> Thus, smugglers could bring Iranian weapons without expecting interdiction along open routes in 2006.

The surge of U.S. and Coalition forces, including the addition of another Division Headquarters, made it possible to begin interdicting weapons flowing along the major

highways and the Tigris River. Multi-National Force-Iraq reinforced Kut with 2,000 soldiers from the Republic of Georgia, who arrived in July and August 2007 for operations that will commence in September.<sup>116</sup> MND-C plans to use this brigade to search every truck coming along the highway through Kut.<sup>117</sup>

Coalition and Iraqi Special Forces and conventional forces targeted rogue Jaysh al-Mahdi units and special groups in Diyala, Baghdad, and southern Iraq in June, July, and August. Some of these activities aimed at disrupting supply networks. General Odierno reported at the end of August 2007, "We've had some success in taking down some of the leaders in the supply networks... within Diyala province, within Sadr City and within southern Iraq."

#### *Capturing Secret Cell Leaders and Rogue Jaysh al-Mahdi Commanders*

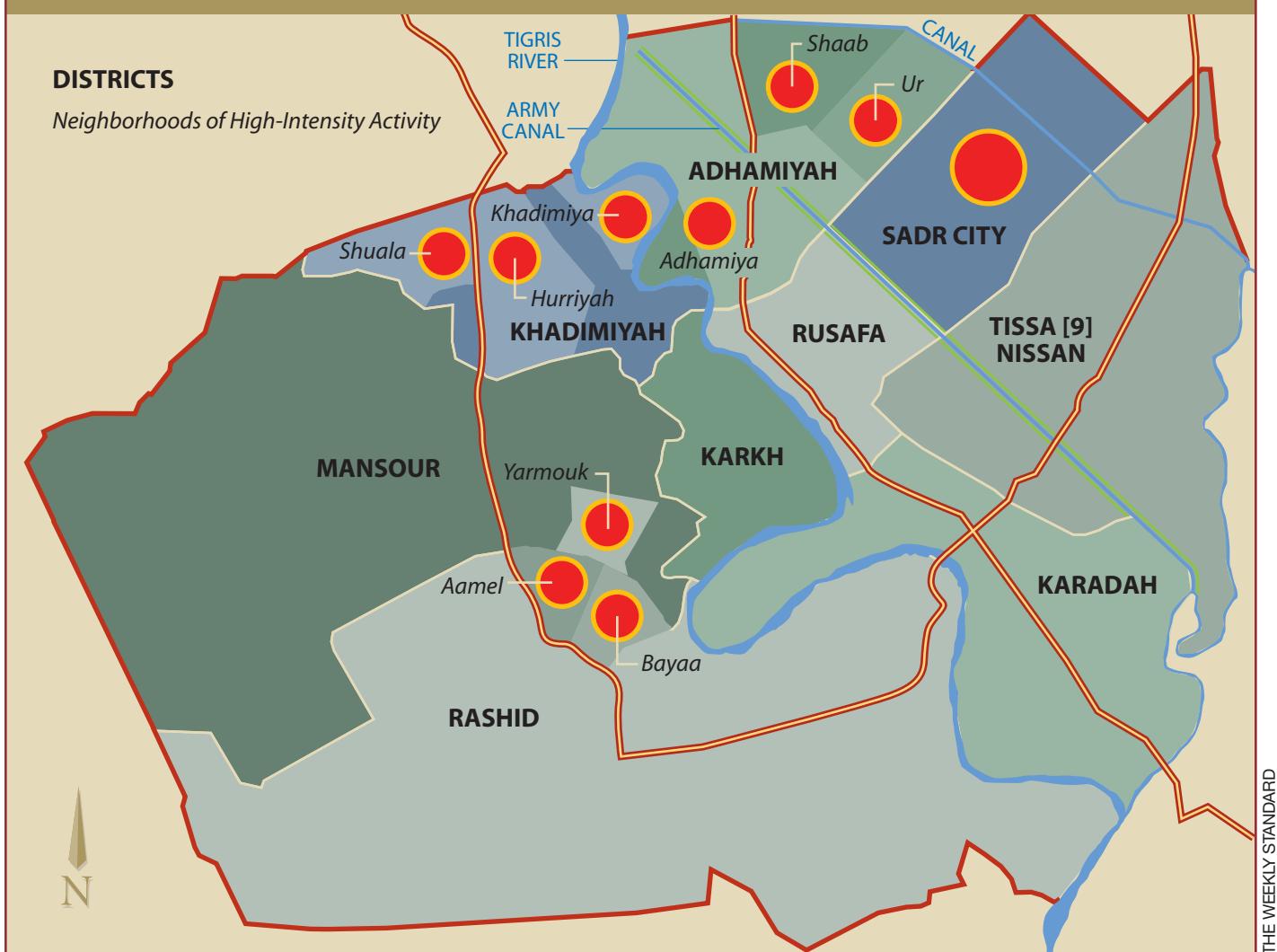
U.S. and Iraqi forces have conducted a multi-phased campaign against secret cell supply networks. First, Special Forces captured or killed high-value targets, exploiting the intelligence gained from the capture of Ali Mussa Daqduq and the Khazali brothers. They focused particularly on Sadr City, the base of special groups in Baghdad, and southern Iraqi cities such as Amarah and Basra. As weapons trafficking networks linked Amarah and Baghdad, the operations in the south contributed directly to captures in the capital.<sup>118</sup>

A second wave of operations against secret cells occurred in July, presumably as Coalition and Iraqi forces gained intelligence in the wake of Phantom Thunder. The scope of these raids widened, and included Diyala province and cities in the south.<sup>119</sup>

Simultaneously, U.S. and Iraqi forces intensified their campaign against secret cell leaders in Baghdad in late July and August, frequently operating against rogue militias in western Baghdad as well as Sadr City.

The weapons provided by the Qods Force and its agents made their way from Sadr City to rogue militias in the western half of the capital. The hotspots for EFP use in Baghdad and for secret cell arrests suggest a path from Sadr City to its

## AREAS OF HIGH-INTENSITY SECRET-CELL ACTIVITY IN BAGHDAD



northeastern outlying neighborhoods, Shaab and Ur; then to Adhamiyah and Hurriyah on the east bank of the Tigris; and from there to Khadimiya and Shula in northern Mansour, Yarmouk in southern Mansour, and Aamel and Bayaa in Rashid.

Iraq Report II already documented Jaysh al-Mahdi activity in Sadr City, Shaab, and Ur, and it documented the arrival of the 1<sup>st</sup> BCT, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne into the Sunni neighborhoods of Adhamiyah and Hurriyah. A rogue JAM brigade commander, captured in mid-August, led a cell of 150 insurgents. They bought and sold weapons in Sadr City for use in Hurriyah. Their death squads targeted Iraqis in the government who opposed their activities. They set up illegal checkpoints in

that neighborhood to kill Sunni civilians. They conducted indirect fire attacks on Iraqis. And finally, they emplaced complex IEDs against Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces.<sup>120</sup>

This report, therefore, traces the projection of rogue elements from Sadr City into western Baghdad.

Khadimiya is the most significant Shia pilgrimage site in Baghdad. Different groups of the Jaysh al-Mahdi, some from Baghdad and others from Najaf, have competed with one another for control of the Khadamiya shrine this spring.<sup>121</sup> Presumably, some of these fall into the category of rogue Jaysh al-Mahdi or secret cells.

Militia elements and al Qaeda likewise threaten the population of the nearby Sunni enclave in

Mansour and mixed neighborhoods such as Shula. Accordingly, on July 31 U.S. forces conducted raids against weapons traffickers with links to the Qods Force in Shula.<sup>122</sup> U.S. and Iraqi Security Forces also captured members of an assassination cell in Shula on August 8.<sup>123</sup> Rogue militia attacked U.S. troops who were searching for a weapons cache in Shula, which, indeed, contained EFPs and other weapons. Ground forces and their close air support killed the militiamen who opened fire.<sup>124</sup> In northwestern Baghdad, the 6<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Scout Platoon captured members of a cell that conducted extra-judicial killings in the Atafiyah neighborhood as well as IED attacks against coalition forces.<sup>125</sup>

The Rashid district of Baghdad also contains a major Sunni-Shia faultline and a great deal of militia activity. U.S. Forces conducted major clearing operations in Rashid in May, and focused intensely on the al Qaeda stronghold in Dora and the JAM network in Bayaa in June and July. Iraqi and Coalition Forces also targeted rogue Jaysh al-Mahdi leaders in Baghdad and in the south. Iraqi and Coalition Forces targeted rogue Jaysh al-Mahdi leaders and special cell operatives in Rashid, just as they have in Shula: a death-squad leader on July 25;<sup>126</sup> an IED and EFP facilitator for Bayaa and Aamel on July 26;<sup>127</sup> a rogue JAM insurgent group that conducted attacks against Coalition forces and Iraqi citizens on August 6;<sup>128</sup> a rogue JAM death squad leader and four of his cell members in East Rashid on August 8; a high-value special groups financier for Bayaa on August 13;<sup>129</sup> and a rogue JAM sniper on August 16.<sup>130</sup> In addition, they targeted a splinter Jaysh al-Mahdi group that conducted extra-judicial killings in southwestern Baghdad.<sup>131</sup>

Operation Phantom Strike, the Corps offensive that began on August 15, targeted secret cells and rogue Jaysh al-Mahdi units that benefit from their support. Some of the most recent operations presumably fall under that new operation's heading.

#### *The Iraqi Army fights Rogue Shia Militias*

Prime Minister Maliki supported operations against the secret cells this summer with Iraqi

Security Forces, particularly Iraqi Special Operations Forces and some units of the Iraqi Army. General Odierno confirmed, "They [the secret cells] are attacking the government of Iraq. The Iraqis understand this, and they've understood this because they have sent their own forces on operations against these elements. So it's clear that Prime Minister Maliki is very aware that they are conducting attacks against the government of Iraq, or they [the Iraqis] wouldn't use their own security forces, along with our forces, to take down these elements."<sup>132</sup>

The Eighth Iraqi Army Division is perhaps the best example of conventional Iraqi forces engaging rogue Jaysh al-Mahdi militias. They conducted a series of operations against militias in Diwaniyah, the capital of Qadisiyah province, in 2007. Polish troops and some U.S. Special Forces, support the Eighth Iraqi Army Division, as does an American Military Transition Team.

One reporter described the situation in Diwaniyah as the Baghdad Security Plan began. "In the city of Ad Diwaniyah, 80 miles south of Baghdad, a fragile truce had held between Badr and Mahdi fighters since last August, when heavy clashes left dozens dead. Then in March, militiamen from the capital began to join up with a local Mahdi commander named Kifah al-Qureity. Emboldened, Qureity turned his guns on the local government, run by SCIRI officials, and on Coalition forces. (Locals in Ad Diwaniyah say he rallied his new forces, some 400 strong, while wearing a suicide vest.)"<sup>133</sup>

The Eighth Iraqi Army Division, commanded by General Oothman Ali Farhood, contested the attempt of rogue Jaysh al-Mahdi to control the city. He launched Operation Black Eagle on April 6, 2007, supported by the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.<sup>134</sup> General Oothman aimed to clear and hold a portion of the city during this multi-week counteroffensive. He launched the next phase of Black Eagle on June 4, while troops from the Polish Division conducted a supporting operation in Kut.<sup>135</sup> During this operation, the Eighth Iraqi Army Division raided a market in search of two individuals wanted by Coalition Forces and known to be militia leaders. His efforts yielded the capture of one as

well as the successful identification of weapons caches.<sup>136</sup> He undertook subsequent operations against militia groups in Diwaniyah, including a major fight in August against extremist militias. The Eighth Iraqi Army Division also vigorously pursued special groups operatives throughout its area, apprehending a recruiter for special groups in Najaf on July 15, another on August 4, and a third on August 12.<sup>137</sup> An independent militia commander who was formerly affiliated with the Jaysh al-Mahdi participated in the August battle, along with his organization of 150 operatives. The Eighth Iraqi Army Division detained him after a raid in eastern Najaf on August 14.<sup>138</sup>

#### *The Diplomatic Response*

Ambassador Ryan Crocker began engaging in direct discussions with Iran about security in Iraq in May 2007. On May 29, he met with Iran's ambassador to Iraq in a four-hour session hosted and chaired by Prime Minister Maliki. He made it clear that the discussion was confined to Iraq and avoided any of the other issues in conflict between Iran and the United States. He said, "We also made it clear, from the American point of view, that this is about actions, not just principles, and I laid out before the Iranians a number of our direct specific concerns about their behavior in Iraq, their support for militias that are fighting both the Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition forces, the fact that a lot of the explosives and ammunition that are used by these groups are coming from Iran, that such activities, led by the IRGC Qods Force, needed to cease, and that we would be looking for results." He continued, "The Iranians did not respond directly to that. They did, again, emphasize that their policy is support

of the government [of Iraq]." About the specific concerns Crocker described he said "The Iranians did not go into any great detail. They made the assertion that the Coalition presence was an occupation and that the effort to train and equip Iraqi Security Forces had been inadequate to the challenges it faced." The Iranians then proposed a "trilateral mechanism to coordinate on security matters," which Crocker referred to Washington. Asked again about the Iranian response to the specific accusations he had made, Crocker repeated: "In terms of security specifics, we laid out a number of them. The Iranians did not offer any detailed response. They did say they rejected such allegations, but again, there was no detailed exchange."<sup>139</sup>

The prospects for follow-up meetings did not appear good in the weeks following this exchange. State Department Spokesman Sean McCormack repeated on several occasions in June and July that there had been no formal request from any party for an additional meeting, and said that the U.S. was more interested in what the Iranians were doing than in what they said at such meetings: "We said that we're not going to have another meeting just for the sake of having another meeting. We would like to see these—this mechanism actually result in some changes. I think at this point, it's safe to say we

haven't seen any substantial change in terms of Iranian behavior." Asked what changes he was looking for, McCormack responded, "Well, for starters, stop supplying money, technology, and training for people who are trying to kill our troops... They can stop funding those individuals and groups who are trying to stoke sectarian tensions in Iraq."<sup>140</sup>

Nevertheless, Crocker met once again with the

**■ Before the surge, American forces in Iraq were generally stretched too thin to interdict the main routes of supply the Iranians used to support their proxies. The arrival of new forces east of Baghdad and in Kut will allow the U.S. to work much more effectively within Iraq to reduce the flow of Iranian weapons and the free passage of Iranian advisors. The Iranian networks within Iraq are nevertheless highly developed and closely linked both to Lebanese Hezbollah and to the Qods Force, and they will not be easy to uproot.**

Iranian ambassador, the Iraqi foreign minister, and the Iraqi national security advisor, at the request of the Iraqi Government on July 24, 2007. Crocker repeated the concerns he had laid out in the May meeting about Iranian involvement in the violence in Iraq, noting that, in fact, “over the roughly two months since our last meeting we’ve actually seen militia related activity that can be attributed to Iranian support go up and not down... [T]hus far what we’ve seen on the ground over the last couple of months has in many respects represented an escalation and not a de-escalation.” He noted, “The Iranians, in their response, followed pretty much the same line as the Iranian foreign ministry spokesman...which is to say we have absolutely nothing to do with this.” The Iranians nevertheless proposed establishing a security subcommittee “to discuss the problem of extremist militias.”<sup>141</sup> Such a committee was apparently established, as McCormack noted that it met at the sub-ambassadorial level in early August “to talk about security issues related to Iraq.”<sup>142</sup> McCormack also noted that representatives from MNF-I and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad attended a meeting of Iraq’s neighbors (as observers) in Damascus on August 8 to address “the issue of Iraq’s borders and the flow of foreign fighters, the flow of the kind of technologies and money that are adding to the instability in Iraq.” He concluded, “Thus far, our diplomatic engagement through the channel that Ambassador Crocker has set up hasn’t yielded positive results.... As a matter of fact, you’ve seen, as General Odierno pointed out, an actual increase in the attacks from these EFP networks.”

Both Crocker and McCormack repeatedly pointed out that Iran’s publicly declared policy matched that of the United States and the government of Iraq, but that its actions did not match its stated policy, and that it denied any involvement in supporting violence within Iraq despite all evidence to the contrary. They stressed the conclusion that it was unlikely that further talks or additional diplomatic mechanisms would be productive until the Iranians adjusted their behavior to match their public and private

statements. They also noted that between May and July, Iranian actions had moved even farther from Iranian statements as Iranian weapons and advisors flowed into Iraq in increasing numbers.

## CONCLUSION

**T**here can be no question that Iran is actively engaged in promoting violence against Americans and sectarian violence in Iraq, that its efforts began even before the American invasion, that they have included the provision of direct support in the form of weapons and advisors, and that they have involved facilitating the growth of a solid relationship between Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi Shia militias, particularly the Jaysh al-Mahdi. Iranian agents and proxies in Iraq have attacked Iraqi government officials in Baghdad and in the provinces, suggesting that their aims do not include supporting or solidifying the democratically-elected, Shia-dominated government of Nuri al-Maliki. They have been lavish with their support to all groups engaged in violence against the Coalition, including Sunni groups with ties to al Qaeda, and they have supported a number of different Shia groups even when they are in competition with one another.

Before the surge, American forces in Iraq were generally stretched too thin to interdict the main routes of supply the Iranians used to support their proxies. The arrival of new forces east of Baghdad and in Kut will allow the U.S. to work much more effectively within Iraq to reduce the flow of Iranian weapons and the free passage of Iranian advisors. The Iranian networks within Iraq are nevertheless highly developed and closely linked both to Lebanese Hezbollah and to the Qods Force, and they will not be easy to uproot. Progress is likely to be slow and fitful, particularly in the first few months of the effort. Operations against Iranian-backed militias are very likely to be one of the major efforts of Coalition forces and the Iraqi Security Forces over the coming year.

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