

Winning peace in Iraq and Iran

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The Washington Times, April 24, 2003, A19

The Bush administration intends to help the people of Iraq establish a moderate constitutional government after their years of suffering under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. This will be difficult but achievable because the Iraqi National Congress, led by Ahmed Chalabi, has worked for nearly a decade to establish a political accord among the moderate leadership of the Kurdish, Sunni, and Shi'ite communities.

Recently, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said that Iran is sending "military forces, intelligence personnel... proxies" into Iraq. This infiltration of Iraqi Shi'ite fighters and agents from Iran is intended to bring about a "second Iran" after the downfall of Saddam.

Saddam's Iraq persecuted the Shi'ites, who comprise 60 percent of the population. Hundreds of thousands then fled to the protection of Shi'ite-ruled Iran. There, they were recruited to overthrow Saddam Hussein. In addition, under the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran became the most active state sponsor of terrorism, supporting terrorist groups seeking to take power in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, as well as terrorists targeting Israel and the United States.

Iran not only promoted terrorism but also has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on propaganda, psychological warfare, and covert political action. U.S. government reports also document that Iran is working to acquire nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons of mass destruction, as well as to build an ever-larger arsenal of ballistic missiles, with China, Russia and North Korea as the leading suppliers.

The Iranian-backed Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq has between 12,000 and 40,000 armed fighters and many thousands of others who are politically organized. The Iranian covert strategy visible since the unraveling of the Saddam regime is to use coercion, ideology and money to take over the institutions of Shi'ite Islam in Iraq. They will seek to use the mosques, their substantial financial endowments and legitimacy, along with social services through the mosques to build a base of support, neighborhood by neighborhood and town by town.

Recently, the moderate Shi'ite Sheik al-Khoei returned to Najaf, the center of Shi'ite Islam, seeking reconciliation and favoring a democratic constitutional government. He was suddenly murdered by a knife-wielding mob. The most senior Shi'ite cleric in Najaf is also a moderate. Two days after the murder, his home was then surrounded by a mob and he was threatened with death unless he left Najaf. In contrast to this intimidation, a pro-Iranian Shi'ite cleric in Kut, a town of 300,000, took over the mosque, declared himself mayor, and began ruling with the help of stacks of Iranian-supplied

money and 300 armed Iranians, a force that grew to 1,000 within a few days. The extremist Shi'ite clerics backed by Iran have taken the initiative and are replacing the coercion of the Saddam regime with intimidation backed by the Iranian clerical dictatorship.

Post-Taliban Afghanistan gave a preview. There, Iran used some of the Afghan refugees who had been on its territory to establish an Afghan Hezbollah terrorist/armed group. These were immediately inserted into Afghanistan after the Taliban regime fled. The U.S. press reported that Iran supplied "cars, trucks, weapons, ammunition and cash" to Afghan factional leaders opposed to the new Afghan government. In February 2002, a U.S. intelligence official was quoted as saying Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and units of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps were operating in Afghanistan against the U.S.-supported government and that they had "lots of money, are armed to the teeth, and call themselves 'soldiers of Mohammed.'" "Iranian covert action is considered responsible for assassinations of some senior Afghan officials.

Iran will almost certainly be even more active in post-Saddam Iraq to bring about a pro-Iranian regime than it has been in Afghanistan. Since both China and Russia have had close relations with the Iranian clerical regime for many years, Iran may have assistance from their extensive covert intelligence resources. The combination of Iranian, Russian and Chinese political, propaganda, paramilitary and covert organizations working together could well overwhelm the good intentions of those many Iraqis who hope to establish a constitutional government.

The best defense against the Iranian destabilization of Iraq is to help the people of Iran use political means to liberate themselves from their dictatorship. Polls and partially open elections reveal that more than 80 percent of Iranians completely reject the extremist Shi'ite clerical regime. Ironically, while the United States may have difficulty defending against Iranian covert political action, it does have the symbolic credibility of its democratic institutions and the knowledge and experience needed to provide discreet assistance to help the people of Iran free themselves.

Consider that with discreet external assistance, the people of Serbia were helped in the short time period from June 1999 to October 1999 to rise up politically and remove the communist/ultranationalist dictatorship of Slobodan Milosevic that had ruled since 1987. Just as in Serbia, once the Iranian people rise up using political means, it is highly probable the Iranian Army — more than 80 percent of whom also voted against the hard-line clerics in the most recent national elections — will not defend the regime. Rather, the Iranian military will act to prevent the extremists in the secret police and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps from successfully repressing the Iranian people's quest for liberty.

President Bush said recently that "the people of Iran want the same freedoms as people around the world." If the United States helps those people obtain that freedom, it will be the dawn of a new day in the Middle East for democracy in both Iraq and Iran, it will enormously reduce the threat from international terrorism and weapons of mass

destruction, and it will prevent the tragic possibility of post-Saddam Iraq coming under the control of Iranian-backed Shi'ite extremists.

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