

After Saddam, Preventing a Second Iran

Dr. Constantine C. Menges, The Hudson Institute, 21 April 2003

The Threat

- Following the removal of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, the Iranian clerical dictatorship is attempting to establish an allied Shia Islamist extremist regime in Iraq (60% of Iraq is Shia)
- Iran has been preparing to do this for more than ten years and has both political and military assets among the hundreds of thousands of Shia Iraqis who have fled to its territory.
- Iran has founded an Iraqi Shia group, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI); it has political cadre, including Iraqi Shia clerics and an estimated 12,000 to 40,000 armed members.
- The Tomb of Ali Mosque in Najaf is the holiest place in Shia Islam. Ayatollah al-Sadr of the nearby main Shia theological school of Hawaz was the formulator of the doctrine promulgated in the 1970s by Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran - that the Shia clergy should govern society directly under Islamic law.
- Now, Al-Sadr's 30-year old son is receiving Iranian backing in his effort to take control of as many Shia mosques and their endowments as quickly as possible. He is working covertly with Iran and SCIRI.

Illustrative Events to Date

- After the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Iran infiltrated personnel from its territory and used covert action to put pro-Iranian Afghans in power in many places. Assassination was used in that process.
- On April 10 2003, in Najaf, a very important Shia cleric, Sheik al-Khoei, who represented the moderate majority of Iraqi Shia clerics and who wanted cooperation with the US was suddenly murdered by a group of knife-wielding attackers.
- On April 12 2003 Sheik Ali al-Sestani, who also wants to cooperate with the US and favors a secular state, and is the most senior of three Iraqi Shia clerics at the leading theological school of Hawaz was confronted by an armed mob and warned to leave Najaf within a day or face murder. He is reportedly in hiding while Iranian-backed Shia clerics with large groups of Iranian-supported armed bodyguards and money take control of major mosques, neighborhoods, and towns in the Shia regions of Iraq.

Action

- To prevent the establishment of a second Iran, an extremist Shia regime, and to end Iran's sponsorship of international terrorism, I believe the time has come for a discreet political action program to help the 80% of the Iranian people who oppose the Iranian clerical regime to replace it with a constitutional democracy.
- The majority of Shia clergy in Iran and Iraq continue in the view that for the Shia clergy to govern directly is counter to Shia Islam's fundamental tenet, which holds this may occur only after the return of the 12th Imam. I have prepared the political analysis and a political action plan that should be used to encourage and support this majority now.