

XI 030729-28

25 May 2003

MEMO TO: Secretary Rumsfeld
FROM: Paul Bremer
SUBJECT: Iran II

This supplements my earlier message about the growing dangers posed by Iran (and the Badr Corps), and the Ba'athists. Today I received the following excellent summary of the developing situation in the southeast. It is from our political officer in Al Hilla, in the heartland of Shia Iraq.

The Ba'athist Threat: Ba'athist elements remain at large in the region and still possess substantial reserves of money, weaponry, and vehicles. Local interim governors and tribal shaykhs are alarmed at the continued presence of the Baathists, many of whom committed crimes in office and are continuing to intimidate the local population. These local elites are asking us to take action against Baathist die-hards, whom they accuse of engaging in subversion and plotting a comeback. The tribal leaders, who command large followings, and significant armed support, are holding back for now out of deference to the Coalition, but they will take action against Ba'athist elements if we do not.

The Iranian Threat: The Iranians and their surrogates are infiltrating into Southern Iraq along a front line stretching from Basra to Al-Kut. Their primary vehicles are the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution of Iraq (SCIRI) and its militia, the Badr Corps. Badr has as many as 10,000 fighters in the Shi'ite heartland, with between 4,000 and 5,000 in Najaf alone. Local interim governors and tribal elites are urging us to resist the Iranians. We should do so by disarming Badr and other militias. The early June Najaf election should be postponed until Badr has been disarmed. Otherwise, SCIRI may win it through bribery and intimidation, turning the sacred capital of Iraqi Shi'ism into an Iranian stronghold.

[redacted] the overall assessment of our political officer, though they believe the number of Badr Corp in Najaf is closer to 1,000.

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This assessment is complemented by a growing series of intelligence reports. Moreover, [redacted]

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Unless we act promptly and decisively, we risk a turn of political momentum against us among the Shia. Already, tribal leaders are questioning our seriousness, and threatening to take matters into their own hands. I have today:

1. Ordered the postponement of elections in Najaf.
2. Requested our intelligence and military to present me with a plan tomorrow for putting relentless pressure on these Islamic extremists and Ba'athists. I will discuss their recommendations with you.
3. Urged the British commander in Basra (whom I visited today), to deploy more of his forces against the Iranian border.
4. Issued instructions for the immediate eviction of Islamic Extremists from public buildings. They are turning these buildings into sites for delivery of health and other social services. If we wait, eviction will be more difficult.

These actions will cause problems with some Shia (in particular some elements of the SCIRI, which has a member on the G7). But we cannot allow the continued mobilization of a major militia force under Iranian influence or control to continue to gain momentum while we watch from the sidelines.

We should complement these activities with immediate action against the Iranians here. I will have a precise recommendation on that for you Monday.

I am also concerned that just as we enter a difficult phase in the South, we will be drawing down our Marine presence there. It is unlikely that Polish and Ukrainian troops will be up to the task of confronting these groups. Just to complicate things further,

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