



## Are We Playing for Keeps?

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On Feb. 22, terrorists bombed the Askariya shrine in Samarra, Iraq. The attack shocked Iraqis and infuriated Shiites. The Iranian government sought to direct public anger toward Washington. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei blamed "intelligence agencies of the occupiers of Iraq and the Zionists." Iran's Arabic-language al-Alam television repeated the accusations on Feb. 23. Because al-Alam is broadcast terrestrially, it is particularly influential among poor Iraqis who cannot afford a satellite dish. Furthermore, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, leader of the powerful Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (Sciri), a movement aligned to Tehran, blamed U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for the attack. "Certainly he is partly responsible for what happened," Mr. al-Hakim said.

He is not, nor is Washington, despite the U.S. policymaking elite's tendency to self-flagellate. Blame for terrorism rests solely upon its perpetrators and their sponsors. Here, though, the White House has lost focus. While journalists concentrate on the daily blood, Iraqis describe a larger pattern which U.S. officials have failed to acknowledge let alone address: Step-by-step, Iranian authorities are replicating in Iraq the strategy which allowed Hezbollah to take over southern Lebanon in the 1980s. The playbook -- military, economic and information operation -- is almost identical.

Hezbollah's story begins in 1982. As the Israeli army evicted the PLO from Lebanon, Ayatollah Khomeini dispatched his elite Revolutionary Guards to the Bekaa Valley to arm and organize its Shiites. Hezbollah

was born. Iranian authorities simultaneously built Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah's Sunni equivalent. (The idea that Shiites do not arm Sunnis is taken far more seriously in Langley than in Lebanon.) Tehran was so brazen in its support that, until the early '90s, it even carried a budgetary line-item. The investment paid off: Even after last year's Cedar Revolution, southern Lebanon remains under Hezbollah's control. Islamic Jihad remains a force.

Just as the Revolutionary Guards helped hone Hezbollah into a deadly force, so do they train the Badr Corps, Sciri's militia. The Badr Corps infiltrated Iraq even before U.S. forces reached Baghdad. This was reflected in the black market of Sadr City where the price of Iraqi documents rose while those of Iranian passports fell. The Iranian strategy was laid bare with its choice of representations. Its first chargé-d'affaires in post-Saddam Iraq was Hassan Kazemi Qomi, the Revolutionary Guard's former liaison to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Nor did Sciri hide its affiliation. In January 2004, a yellow Lebanese Hezbollah flag flew from Sciri's headquarters in the southern city of Basra.

Iraq's subsequent experience reflects the evolution of Hezbollah tactics. In Lebanon, Revolutionary Guard advisers imbued young Lebanese with a cult of martyrdom. Hezbollah suicide bombers moved with deadly accuracy, ultimately driving U.S. and multinational peacekeepers out of Lebanon. In 1984, Hezbollah added kidnapping to its repertoire. The Revolutionary Guards provided

intelligence to the kidnappers and, in some cases, interrogated the victims. The group seized several dozen foreigners, including 17 Americans. Just as in Iraq, journalists received no immunity. In 1987, Hezbollah held ABC's chief Middle East correspondent hostage for two months. Just as in Iraq, the kidnappers sought both to win material concession and shake Western confidence.

Increasingly sophisticated bombs also accompanied Hezbollah's rise. The improvised explosive device has become the bane of coalition patrols. In October 2005, Tony Blair confirmed that bombs used to kill eight British soldiers in Iraq were of a type used by Iran's Revolutionary Guards and its Hezbollah proxies. When pressed in a November 2005 meeting in Sweileh, Jordan, an Iraqi Sunni insurgent leader acknowledged to me the "possibility" that some Iraqi Sunni insurgents took Iranian money, albeit unknowingly.

While Washington wrings its hands over the Samarra bombing, it should not play into Iranian hands and repeat the mistake of Najaf: Following the Aug. 29, 2003 bombing at the shrine of Imam Ali, coalition authorities acquiesced to demands to empower militias for security. Once implanted, militias take root. Iran is patient. While Washington rejoices in short-term calm, Tehran looks to long-term influence.

As in southern Lebanon, what cannot be won through bribery is imposed through intimidation. Neither Hezbollah nor Iraq's Shiite militias

tolerate dissent. Constitutions mean little and law even less. In southern Lebanon, Hezbollah is judge, jury and executioner. In Iraq, the Shiite militias do likewise. Militiamen have broken up coed picnics, executed barbers and liquor store owners, instituted their own courts, and posted religious guards in front of girls' schools to ensure Iranian-style dress.

Force, though, is not the only component of the Hezbollah playbook. In Lebanon, Hezbollah used Iranian money to create an extensive social service network. It funded schools, food banks and job centers. It's a tried and true strategy. When I lived in Dushanbe toward the end of Tajikistan's civil war, babushkas lined up under Khomeini's portrait to pick up food from the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee. Driving through Shiite neighborhoods of Baghdad, similar scenes unfold. While the U.S. Embassy boasts billions of dollars spent, it has little to show ordinary Iraqis for its efforts. Not so the Shiite militias. Mr. al-Hakim's son Amar has opened branches of his Shahid al-Mihrab Establishment for Promoting Islam throughout southern Iraq. They distribute food and gifts of money, so long as patrons pledge their allegiance. For impoverished Iraqis lacking electricity and livelihood, it's an easy decision.

U.S. officials have no strategy to counter this. At a recent American Enterprise Institute panel, James Jeffrey, the State Department's Iraq coordinator, said, "We don't believe in bags of money in the middle of

the night like [the Iranians] do." In principle this is fine; in reality it is a recipe for defeat: While Tehran understands the importance of patronage networks, Washington does not. While U.S. funds go to Bechtel and Halliburton, Iran-backed groups address Iraqis' immediate needs. And not only is U.S. policy ineffective, but Foggy Bottom ineptitude has bolstered Tehran. Take Bayan Jabr, a Sciri functionary who, with U.S. acquiescence, became Iraq's Interior Minister: He has transformed the Iraqi police into a Badr Corps jobs program. According to one Iraqi minister, he has employed 1% of the Najaf workforce. These recruits do little, they receive a salary courtesy of the U.S. Congress, and the Badr Corps reaps the gratitude.

The final part of Hezbollah's strategy is information warfare. Since 1991, it has used al-Manar TV to spread its message. Iran founded Al-Alam for the same purpose and succeeded in beginning broadcasts three months before the U.S.-funded Iraqi Media Network commenced. Well-endowed, al-Alam provided cars and video cameras to students, making them correspondents and promising rewards to those providing footage embarrassing to the U.S. mission.

It is in the info-war that Washington has stumbled most severely. The U.S. operates in Iraq as if the country is a vacuum. Sheltered within the Green Zone, diplomats are oblivious to enemy propaganda. Resistance to occupation is Hezbollah's mantra. It is a theme both the

Badr Corps and firebrand cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army adopted. Why then did Foggy Bottom acquiesce on May 22, 2003 to U.N. Security Council Resolution 1483 which formalized U.S. and Britain as "occupying powers." What U.S. diplomats meant as an olive branch to pro-U.N. European allies was, in reality, hemlock. With the stroke of a pen, liberation became occupation: Al-Manar and Al-Alam barraged ordinary Iraqis with montages glorifying "resistance." They then highlighted U.S. fallibility with

images of withdrawal from Vietnam, Lebanon and Somalia.

Tehran has a formula for success in Iraq; Washington does not. Victory will require U.S. diplomats to recognize that any successful policy must include strategies not only to promote U.S. and Iraqi interests, but also to derail our adversaries' strategy. Iran's methods are clear. Less clear is U.S. resolve. The stakes in Iraq are high, and one side is playing for keeps. Are we?

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