

Tehran Trip Wire

Iran is conducting a proxy war against the United States in Iraq, declared Amb. Ryan Crocker. How? Gen. David Petraeus explained. The Quds Force of the Iranian

Revolutionary Guard and Hezbollah are arming, training, and directing the Shia militia fighting U.S. and Iraqi forces in Basra and firing rockets into the Green Zone. Said Petraeus, the Quds Force is responsible for killing hundreds of American soldiers.

If true, these are acts of war from a privileged sanctuary. And Bush would be as justified in attacking these Iranian base camps as was Nixon in ordering U.S. forces to clean out the North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia.

While there is no reason to question the truth of what Petraeus and Crocker allege, this proxy war raises a question. What is Tehran's motive?

Iran, after all, is the principal beneficiary of the U.S. invasion that dethroned its enemy Saddam, ended the Sunni Ba'ath Party's monopoly of power, and opened the door to Shia politicians with strong ties to Tehran. The regime in the Green Zone is the same regime that rolled out a red carpet for President Ahmadinejad.

Why then would Iran bloody it up? Why, when things are going Iran's way in Iraq, would it risk war with the United States over Iraq?

The April 16 *Los Angeles Times* offers an answer. Iran's proxy war against us in Iraq may be Tehran's response to a U.S. proxy war being waged against Iran. Ahmadinejad may be exacting blood for blood.

According to *Times* writer Borzou Daragahi, Iran believes the United States is behind groups that are systematically killing Iranians along the border.

One such group is the Party for Free Life in Kurdistan, or PEJAK, which is linked to the PKK that has conducted a terrorist war in Turkey and is considered by the United States a terrorist organization. The founder of PEJAK is Osman Ocalan, brother of the founder of the PKK, who is now serving a life sentence in a Turkish prison.

As Turkey retaliates against the PKK with artillery fire and raids into Kurdistan, Iranians are now doing the same.

A second group, regarded by both the United States and Iran as terrorist, is the Mujaheddin-e Khalq, a cult-like group operating inside Iraq on the Iranian border. Iranians also believe the United States is behind attacks in the oil-rich and Arab Khuzestan region of southwest Iran.

And as Daragahi reports, "Baluch militants have killed dozens of members of Iran's security forces, including 11 elite Revolutionary Guard in a car bomb attack last year in Zahedan, a town near the border with Pakistan and Afghanistan." Jundallah, or God's Party, claimed responsibility for that attack.

Last year also, a Kurdish woman killed several Iranian officers and soldiers in a suicide bombing. According to Daragahi, "Iraqi Kurds say perceived U.S. support for PEJAK and other anti-Iranian groups prompted Iranians to reactivate Ansar al Islam, a Sunni Muslim group with ties to al-Qaida that has been launching attacks against Kurdish officials."

The danger here is that these proxy wars could explode into U.S. air attacks on the Quds Force, followed by Iranian

retaliation against U.S. troops, followed by U.S. strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities and a third U.S. war in the Middle East, dropped into the lap of an overstretched U.S. military and onto the desk of the next president.

In his speech last week, Bush warned that the regime in Tehran "has a choice to make," and if "Iran makes the wrong choice, America will act to protect our interests, and our troops and our Iraqi partners." That is to say, this is Tehran's last warning.

Query: Where is the Congress of the United States? It alone has the power to authorize or declare a war of the magnitude toward which we may be headed because of proxy wars about which the American people know next to nothing.

Up on Capitol Hill, GOP Congressman Walter Jones of North Carolina is seeking to rewrite the War Powers Act to ensure that if the United States goes to war again it be the "collective judgment" of both elected branches, as the Founding Fathers intended.

Needed now are congressional hearings to determine if President Bush has authorized a proxy war against Iran—by funding or arming guerrillas to attack the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, and if that is what is behind the IRG-backed attacks on U.S. forces.

Even before such hearings, both Houses should pass a joint resolution declaring that no appropriated funds may be used for any pre-emptive American air strikes on Iran—unless and until Congress has authorized such acts of war. If we are headed for war with Iran, it should be the collective judgment of all the nation's elected leadership, and not done on the whim of a lame-duck president unsure about his place in history. ■

Gang Warfare

Criminals have found a new way to hone their combat skills: joining the U.S. military.

By Matthew A. Roberts

ON JAN. 9, 2005, Andres Raya caught police in a calculated ambush outside a liquor store in Ceres, California. He shot two officers, killing one, before the police returned fire and killed him. After the incident, detectives discovered that Raya belonged to the Norteños gang. Video from a break-in at Ceres High School showed him throwing gang signs and flashing gang graffiti, and displayed an American flag cut up to spell “F--k Bush” on the floor of the gymnasium. Lance Corporal Raya was a Marine on leave from a tour in Iraq.

Street gangs—particularly Hispanic gangs, the fastest growing in the U.S.—are making major inroads into America’s Armed Forces. Hunter Glass, a retired police detective and gang expert in Fayetteville, N.C., home to Fort Bragg and the 82nd Airborne, knows of members of Florencia 13, Latin Kings, Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), Norteños, and Sureños serving in the military. A 2006 report produced by the Los Angeles Joint Drug Intelligence Group also lists the 18th Street Gang, Eastside Longos, and Vagos as having military-trained members. According to the FBI, “Members of nearly every major street gang ... have been documented on military installations both domestically and internationally.”

Glass points out, “The military is merely a reflection of the society it serves. As gangs grow in the U.S., they will grow somewhat comparatively in the military.” But recent figures indicate that gang membership in the Armed

Forced significantly surpasses civilian levels. *Stars and Stripes* reported that 1 to 2 percent of the military are gang members, compared to 0.02 percent of the general population. The proliferation of gang graffiti in Iraq and the prevalence of gang tattoos among soldiers underscores the point.

Hispanic gangs often rumble with black gangs, like the Gangster Disciples and Crips. Members of the Avenues, a Latino gang in Los Angeles, were convicted in 2006 of federal hate crimes for deliberately targeting African-Americans. An informant told the FBI that the Avenues members were under orders to kill blacks on sight in their Highland Park neighborhood.

These rivalries spill over into the military. Texans saw the problem up close after soldiers associated with the Gangster Disciples and Crips transferred from Fort Hood to Fort Bliss in El Paso, where the mestizo gang Barrio Azteca dominates. Reginald Moton, Gang Investigations Supervisor of the El Paso Police Department, recalls an incident on Feb. 20, 2005, when two black men with possible gang connections, a soldier from Fort Bliss and a former soldier recently chaptered out of the military, wrangled with members of Barrio Azteca at a nightclub. Words were exchanged and afterwards, at a nearby fast-food restaurant, the dispute “resulted with both sides of the altercation firing handguns at each other.”

So pronounced is the gang problem at Fort Hood that when 23,000 troops and

their families were slated to transfer to Fort Carlson, Colorado last year, the *Colorado Springs Independent* ran a piece warning, “In recent years, the Chicago-based Gangster Disciples have been active at Fort Hood, and alleged members have been linked to slayings, robberies and drug and gun trafficking. Police in Colorado Springs and Killeen, Texas, which is home to Fort Hood, confirm that they are sharing gang information to prepare for this relocation.”

Gang-related incidents in the military are isolated now, but law-enforcement officials worry about long-term dangers. The Los Angeles Joint Drug Intelligence Group’s report saw a twofold threat. First, gangs “infect America’s armed forces with the degeneration and violence characteristic of gangs,” and some even recruit while serving in the military. Second, gang members return to their gangs “having acquired new soldiering skills and weapons training and pose an even greater threat to civilians and law enforcement.” The report goes on to say that over 100 military-trained gang members in the Los Angeles area “present a latent danger to its residents.” If each of these gang members were to pass on his military training to just four others in LA, they would “overwhelm present law enforcement tactics.”

The tactics of military-trained gang members already overwhelm police. When Andres Raya opened fire with an SKS assault rifle, he used a military tactic known as “slicing the pie.” He was able to outmaneuver police, wounding one