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OpEdNews Op Eds 4/22/2009 at 08:47:39 It Is Not Looking Good

By Sandy Shanks (about the author) Permalink

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Recently, I have written several articles on the war in Afghanistan. Most had to do with the unalterable fact that matters in Afghanistan are worse than ever after over seven years of war. The Afghani Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban, and al-Qa'ida are all operating effectively from the lawless Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of western Pakistan, Adding to concerns is that nuclear armed Pakistan's civilian government is in complete disarray, and may fall to Islamic extremists or suffer still another military coup.

So, in the hopes of finding a silver lining somewhere, I turned the page to the six-year long war in Iraq. After all, the mass news media, conservative web sites and talk shows have been telling us for months that Bush's surge was a resounding success.
Unfortunately, the quest for good news encountered huge pot holes filled with discouragement. True, the violence there has not returned to the levels of the bad old days of 2005 - 2007, but, lately, the news in Iraq is not looking so good.

As a matter of fact the SOFA may be abridged. The SOFA in this context is not what you are sitting on. The acronym stands for Status Of Forces Agreement, and such an arrangement was made between Iraq and the U.S. at the midnight hour of George W. Bush's Presidency, Dec. 5, 2008. Bush and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki agreed that U.S. combat troops would leave urban areas by June 30th of this year. They also agreed that all American combat troops would depart Iraq by Jan. 1, 2012. The latter date is so far off it can hardly be contemplated at this time. The former date is a cause for concern in light of recent events.

The latest problems seem to stem from the Iraqi governments crackdown earlier this month on the al-Sahwa (Sons of Iraq), also known as the Awakening Councils. The Sahwa force is a Sunni militia hired by the U.S. in August, 2006, and is comprised of former resistance fighters. The Sahwa grew in number to 100,000, and they were commissioned by General David H. Petraeus to hunt down members of al-Qa'ida of Iraq with whom the Sunnis had become disillusioned. There are some who argue that the Sahwa forces had more to do with bringing relative calm to Iraq then Bush's surge. To be fair, that point is highly debatable. What cannot be argued, though, is that between the two of them, by the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009, attacks were sharply down. Certainly, the Sahwa fighters deserve some credit for that accomplishment. Baghdad is not Honolulu, but at the beginning of the year that city was looking pretty good.

Then the trouble started. The N.Y. Times reported on April 12, "Thirteen members were killed by a suicide bomber while they gathered to collect their pay south of Baghdad on Saturday, in the latest of a string of attacks against Awakening members in recent weeks. Some of the Sunnis also worry that the Shiite-led government has begun singling out the councils' leaders for arrest while their chief patron, the American military, slowly abandons them." The Times also reported that Sunni leaders have long been targeted by Islamist militants and Shiite militias, and there have been arrests of senior Awakening leaders in the past few weeks, including Sheik Maher Sarhan Abbas who was arrested secretly by the Maliki government weeks before the April 12 incident. Some who read this Times report experienced a rather sickening feeling in the pit of their stomachs.

Last week, a suicide truck bomber hit a police compound in Mosul during a visit by US troops, killing five American soldiers and three members of Iraqi security forces in the deadliest attack on US forces in more than a

Also, last week a suicide bomber disguised in military fatigues killed nine people, including soldiers and members of Sahwa forces at their headquarters in the town of Hilla south of Baghdad.

On Wednesday, April 15th, a car bomb tore through a bus carrying police through the disputed oil-rich city of Kirkuk in northern Iraq, killing 10 policemen and wounding 22 more.

On April 16th, at Habbaniyah a suicide bomber disguised in an army uniform blew himself up at an Iraqi military base as newly arrived soldiers queued for lunch on Thursday, killing at least 16 troops and wounding 50.

On April 18th, militants shelled the Green Zone in Baghdad in the first such attack in more than three months.



The Last War Crime n What if there was only one chan

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The rounds were fired from the predominantly Shiite eastern Baghdad. There were no casualties and no reports of damage, but the attack had a sense of ominous foreboding. The Green Zone houses the Iraqi government and the U.S. government in their spanking new \$700M embassy.

On April 20th, a suicide bomber attacked members of an American military unit visiting city officials on Monday in Baguba, a volatile city northeast of Baghdad. At least three Iraqis were killed, and eight American soldiers were wounded. The bomber was wearing an Iraqi special forces uniform and he blew himself up around 10 a.m. outside the city's administrative office on Tabu Street, north of Baquba's center, shortly after the American troops arrived in armored vehicles. It would appear that whenever Iraqi troops or police gather they must each pat themselves down looking for hidden explosive vests. Isn't that a charming thought

It doesn't take a military genius to figure out that there just might be a trend here. Colonel Gary Volesky, a U.S. commander in northern Iraq, was quick to get in the loop. He suggested that American troops would remain in volatile Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, if Maliki asked them to do so. That, of course, begs a question. How about volatile Baghdad, Habbaniyah, Hilla, and Baguba?

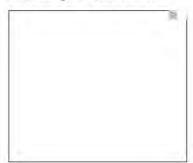
True to form for the past eight years, it only gets worse. On April 14, ten Sahwa-controlled checkpoints were abandoned in Babel, south of Baghdad. The Sahwa forces left their posts after not receiving their salaries. They had not been paid since October. A Sahwa commander in Baghdad feared it was only a matter of time before they would leave their posts to likely resume resistance operations. Also on April 14th, Iraqi Vice President Adel Abdel Mahdi accused members of the Sahwa of biding their time to wait for a chance to resume attacks against the Shiite-led government. Curiously, Mahdi's statements came just after an announcement made by Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, president of the Sahwa of al-Anbar province, stating he was renouncing armed struggle and was prepared to work with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. "If we want a unified Iraq," he said, "we must work in that direction, on uniting Sunnis and Shias, to build one country.'

Dahr Jamail concludes, "The US-created al-Sahwa (Sons of Iraq)... now threatens to fade back into the shadows in order to resume anti-occupation resistance operations against the US military and Iraqi government security forces. The Sahwa, which were to be incorporated into the government security apparatus, have instead been suffering attacks by that same apparatus for several months - attacks that are now occurring daily. And they are reacting in kind.

I am, by nature, the eternal optimist, believing that things will get better despite the chasm of despair now. On the other hand, I need something, anything, on which to hang my hopes. The Maliki government's attack on the al-Sahwa seem incongruous in light of the rather obvious fact that those forces aided the Maliki government in 2007 and 2008. This is a rather formidable force. Turning against it, despite the aid it rendered to the Iraqi government, appears to be abysmally foolish and the policy may revive the threat of civil war in Iraq.

Equally disturbing is America's shunning of al-Sahwa. We hired these fighters to help bring relative peace to Iraq, and they did their job. Noting once again, this is a formidable force financed, armed, and trained by the U.S., how stupid is it to now neglect them?

Hello, Washington. Anyone home? Duh!





I am the author of two novels, "The Bode Testament" and "Impeachment." I am also a columnist who keeps a wary eye on other columnists and the failures of the MSM (mainstream media). I was born in Minnesota, and, to this day, I love the Vikings (more...)



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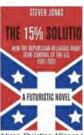
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