

## U.S. Says New Find Shows Iran Still Sends Arms to Iraq

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U.S. Blames Iran for Arms in Iraq Chorus of Officials Cite New Shipments To Shiite Militias

U.S. Says New Find Shows Iran Still Sends Arms to Iraq  
By YOCHI J. DREAZEN  
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WASHINGTON -- The U.S. military says it has found caches of newly made Iranian weapons in Iraq, leading senior officials to conclude Tehran is continuing to funnel armaments into Iraq despite its pledges to the contrary.

Officials in Washington and Baghdad said the purported Iranian mortars, rockets and explosives had date stamps indicating they were manufactured in the past two months. The U.S. plans to publicize the weapons caches in coming days. A pair of senior commanders said a presentation was tentatively planned for Monday.

The allegations, which couldn't be independently verified, mark a further hardening of U.S. rhetoric on Iran, which senior American officials now describe as the greatest long-term threat to Iraq.

This month, Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Iranian support for Shiite extremist groups had grown. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said for the first time that he believed Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad knew about the shipments.

Iran has long denied that its government knowingly funneled weapons into Iraq or trained Shiite militants there. It has derided the U.S. claims as propaganda. Several senior U.S. military officials said the weapons caches would undercut the Iranian denials and provide new evidence of continuing Iranian support for Shiite militants across Iraq.

"You can see the manufacturing dates right on the armaments themselves," one senior commander in Baghdad said. "These are very clearly weapons that were made in the last month or so."

Rear Adm. Gregory Smith, the top American military spokesman in Baghdad, said U.S. officials were "working on a briefing that we hope to be able to deliver in the next week or so." He said he would not be "disclosing the substance of the brief."

Last fall, U.S. and Iraqi officials said Mr. Ahmadinejad had told the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki that Tehran would take steps to curb shipments of Iranian weaponry into Iraq.

The weapons of deepest concern to U.S. officials were explosively formed penetrators, or EFPs, which U.S. officials accuse Iran of manufacturing and shipping to Shiite militants. EFPs, which are capable of punching through even the strongest U.S. armor, have been responsible for hundreds of American deaths.

The number of EFP attacks began to sharply decline after the Iranian assurances, resulting in a significant reduction in U.S. military casualties. That led several senior State Department officials to conclude that Tehran was honoring its commitments.

At the Pentagon, Mr. Gates and other top military officials have been skeptical, arguing it was too soon to draw that conclusion.

The number of EFP attacks against U.S. forces has rebounded this year. American commanders accuse Iran of providing the rockets that rained down on the heavily fortified Green Zone in Baghdad recently, killing several Americans. U.S. officials said Iran provided the weaponry that Shiite militants used in block-by-block fighting with Iraqi government security forces in the southern port city of Basra this month.

Gen. David Petraeus, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, focused his recent congressional testimony almost exclusively on Iran, which he said was playing a "destructive role" by funneling advanced weaponry to Shiite militants in Iraq.

Within the State Department, views about Iran have also been hardening. Ryan Crocker, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, told reporters last year that there were signs Tehran was "using some influence to bring down violence from extremist

Shia militias." Earlier this month, by contrast, he said Iran was playing a "highly dangerous" role in Iraq, and directly accused Tehran of providing the deadly rockets that slammed into the U.S. Embassy compound where he lives and works.

Mr. Crocker also said that recent talks between U.S., Iraqi and Iranian officials had made little progress and failed to persuade Iran to change its behavior in Iraq.

Still, U.S. officials have until recently acknowledged uncertainty when the Iranian armaments used in Iraq were manufactured. If the rockets and explosives were made before Iran's vow to curb weapons shipments, it was possible Tehran was abiding by its commitment.

In light of the new discovery, U.S. officials say they feel confident Iran is continuing to produce weapons and ship them to Iraqi militants. Some of the newly found weapons had manufacturing dates stamped on the weapons themselves, while others were in sealed containers that had similar manufacturing information, the officials said.

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U.S. Blames Iran for Arms in Iraq Chorus of Officials Cite New Shipments To Shiite Militias

By YOCHI J. DREAZEN

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WASHINGTON -- Senior U.S. defense officials accused Iran of stepping up its shipments of weapons to Shiite militias in Iraq, underscoring a marked hardening of American rhetoric about Iran in recent days.

Adm. Michael Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Iranian support for the Shiite-extremist groups had grown, while Defense Secretary Robert Gates said for the first time that he believed Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad knew about the shipments.

"I find it inconceivable that he does not know," Mr. Gates told reporters at the Pentagon, adding that Iran was playing a "malign" role in Iraq.

Iran has long denied providing support to extremists in Iraq, deriding the accusations as U.S. propaganda.

&bull; The News: U.S. officials say Iran is increasing its support for Shiite militias in Iraq.

&bull; Background: U.S. officials had debated whether Iran deserved credit as violence abated in Iraq last year. Defense officials now believe Iran's involvement in Iraq is growing.

&bull; What It Means: The U.S. could step up its military push against Iranian interests in Iraq. When violence in Iraq began decreasing last year, some senior U.S. officials said Iran deserved a measure of credit. Several top State Department officials said that Iran appeared to be taking steps to stem the flow of advanced weaponry -- including powerful armor-piercing bombs -- into Iraq.

Gen. David Petraeus, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, accused Iran of providing the rockets that have rained down on the heavily fortified Green Zone in Baghdad in recent days, killing several Americans. Iran also provided the weaponry that Shiite militants used in block-by-block fighting with Iraqi-government security forces in the southern port city of Basra earlier this month, he said.

On Friday, Adm. Mullen and Mr. Gates said they believed Iranian involvement in Iraq was growing, not decreasing, and that Tehran was providing much of the weaponry to inflict numerous U.S. and Iraqi fatalities in recent days.

"We've discussed over many months about whether or not they were going to decrease their efforts," Adm. Mullen said. "As far as I'm concerned, this action in Basra was very convincing that indeed they haven't."

Mr. Gates, for his part, said that there were signs of "an increased level of supply of weapons and support" to Shiite militias in Iraq.

The tough talk capped a week in which an array of senior U.S. officials denounced what they described as growing Iranian efforts to destabilize Iraq by funneling weapons, training and funding to Shiite militias.

Ryan Crocker, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, told lawmakers that Tehran was pursuing a "Lebanonization strategy" inside Iraq by backing militias and other proxy groups there.

The change in Mr. Crocker's own comments about Iran is striking. Last year, he told reporters in Baghdad that there were "some indicators that the Iranians are using some influence to bring down violence from extremist Shia militias."

At a breakfast with reporters Friday, Mr. Crocker painted a much darker portrait of Iran's role inside Iraq, which he described as "highly dangerous."

Mr. Crocker said Tehran was arming Shiite militias throughout the country and provided the rockets that have slammed into the U.S. Embassy compound in recent days, killing several Americans and keeping hundreds of embassy personnel confined indoors for safety reasons.

"It's been a difficult few weeks," he said. "Rockets are bouncing off your buildings, and maintaining focus can be an occasional challenge."

Mr. Crocker added that Shiite tribal leaders in Basra had complained to him in recent weeks "about militia rule and Iranian influence" there.

Bloodshed in Basra began when Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki ordered thousands of security personnel to oust militants linked to Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army but ended in an Iranian-brokered truce after the militia fought the government forces to a draw. During the assault, violence flared up in other Shiite regions of the country.

"I think the Iraqi government now has a clearer view of the malign impact of Iran's activities inside Iraq," said Mr. Gates. "I think they have had what I would call a growing understanding of that negative Iranian role. But I think what they encountered in Basra was a real eye-opener for them."

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