

Iraqi hit squads train in Iran

Contributed by AP
Saturday, 16 August 2008

U.S.: Quds, Hezbollah Training Iraqi Hit Squads In Iran

Iraqi hit squads train in Iran
By Pamela Hess
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Iraqi Shiite assassination teams are being trained in at least four locations in Iran by Tehran's elite Quds force and Lebanese Hezbollah and are planning to return to Iraq in the next few months to kill specific Iraqi officials as well as U.S. and Iraqi troops, according to intelligence gleaned from captured militia fighters and other sources in Iraq.

A senior U.S. military intelligence officer in Baghdad described the information Thursday in an interview with The Associated Press. He spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive intelligence.

The officer on Wednesday provided Iraq's national security adviser with several lists of the assassination teams' expected targets. He said the targets include many judges but would not otherwise identify them. Iraq's intelligence service is preparing operations to determine where and when the special group fighters will enter the country and is to provide an assessment to Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

The U.S. official acknowledged disclosing the information in an attempt to pressure Iran to suspend the training and prevent the militia fighters from returning to Iraq. The U.S. military also wants the Iraqi government to take steps to protect the targets. "Wanted" posters picturing men thought to be heading the special groups are being posted around Baghdad, the military officer said.

The fighters are expected to return to Iraq between now and October.

Iran reportedly training assassins
U.S. military intelligence officer tells AP on condition of anonymity
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The U.S. also is encouraging the Iraqi government to confront Iran with the information in diplomatic channels.

The fighters are expected to return to Iraq by October, but the officer said there's no intelligence suggesting they are actually in Iraq yet.

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By PAMELA HESS | Associated Press
August 16, 2008

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The U.S. official acknowledged disclosing the information in an attempt to pressure Iran to suspend the training and prevent the militia fighters from returning to Iraq. The U.S. military also wants the Iraqi government to take steps to protect the targets. "Wanted" posters picturing men believed to be heading the special groups are being posted around Baghdad, the military officer said.

The U.S. also is encouraging the Iraqi government to confront Iran with the information in diplomatic channels, and it wants Iraq to continue pumping money into its own reconstruction. By building stability and Iraqis' confidence in their government, internal support for militia groups should decline, making it more difficult for them to operate.

The fighters are expected to return to Iraq between now and October, but the officer said there's no intelligence suggesting they are actually in Iraq yet. The information came from militia fighters captured in Iraq and other sources in the country that the officer would not describe.

Many of the fighters fled to Iran this spring after Iraqi government forces cracked down first on militia sanctuaries in Basra and Baghdad's Sadr City district, then in Amarah and now in Diyala province, the military officer said.

One of the reasons the U.S. believes the special groups moved out during that period is the sharp decline in the number of deadly roadside bombs bearing Iran's signature explosive design. In March, there were 55 such attacks. By July, that number had dropped to 17 and by Aug. 13 there had been just four, according to U.S. military charts obtained by the AP. U.S. intelligence believes those sophisticated bombs can be traced back to Iran. The military counts 446 of them so far this year; 178 of them were found and disabled before they could explode.

Iran, Hezbollah's benefactor, denies giving any support to Shiite extremists in Iraq.

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Iran training killers: U.S.

By PAMELA HESS, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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'WANTED' POSTERS

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