

Iraq-Syria-Iran-Saudi Week Review

Contributed by AP-Reuters-Iranmania-FARS-Stratfor
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Saudi Absence Casts Doubt Over Iraq Security Talks In Syria

August 8, 2007 -- Iraqi envoys urged their country's neighbors today for genuine support as a regional meeting on deteriorating security in Iraq got under way in Damascus.

The two-day meeting reportedly focuses on ways to better control the Syria-Iraq border.

The gathering includes representatives from Iraq, the United States, Iran, Syria, Jordan, Turkey, and Britain. But the absence from the gathering of Saudi Arabia, which has poor relations with Syria, casts doubt over how effective the meeting will be.

U.S. State Department spokesman Tom Casey said the U.S. representatives would mainly be "observers." But he noted that the United States has concerns about Syria's role in the Iraqi crisis, which may be addressed at the meeting.

"The first and foremost issue that we raise with [Syria] is the fact that they do continue to allow their territory to be used by foreign fighters and by networks trying to transport them into Baghdad," Casey said. He said Washington is pressing the Syrian government to follow through on its promises to help improve security in Iraq and create "good neighborly relations between themselves and the Iraqi government."

The United States also accuses Iran of interfering in Iraq by supporting Shi'ite militia fighters.

(AP, Reuters)

 Saudis Absent From Iraq Security Meeting
 By ALBERT AJI 08.08.07, 11:20 AM ET
 Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria - Iraq's deputy foreign minister urged neighboring countries to support its efforts to bolster security, and said he hoped a new regional body meeting for the first time Wednesday would produce real results.

But Saudi Arabia, a key regional player, was absent from the two-day meeting of the Security Committee for Coordination and Cooperation on Iraq, casting doubt on how effective it would be.

"We hope that this meeting ... will come up with effective results that achieve the goal of supporting Iraq in its current dilemma," Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister Labib Abbawi said. "Iraq expects real and genuine support in passing through this dilemma, and its suffering from terrorism and violence."

Iraq and the U.S. have complained about weapons and fighters crossing into Iraq from neighboring nations such as Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia. U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Zalmay Khalilzad said in New York on Tuesday that the Damascus meeting would deal with "the question of foreign fighters coming across the border," among other issues.

"It's the question of weapons coming across the border to illegitimate groups. It's the question of training. It's the question of cooperating to share information," Khalilzad said.

British Embassy official Irfan Siddiq said after the meeting that no specific "demands" had been put on the table. Hesham Youssef, the Arab League's representative, described the atmosphere after the first session as "positive."

Syria's interior minister, Lt. Gen. Bassam Abdul-Majid, said his country has tightened measures on its border with Iraq to prevent foreign fighters from crossing into its eastern neighbor. Those measures include stationing fixed check points and border patrols. It also has tightened measures on the crossing of people who are under the age of 30 and arrested a large number of infiltrators who tried to cross the border and handed them over to authorities in their countries, he said.

The U.S. has repeatedly accused Syria of allowing foreign fighters to cross its border into Iraq to join anti-American

insurgents. Syria denies the charges, saying it is impossible to control the long desert border.

A U.S. delegation headed by Washington's top diplomat in Syria, Charge d'Affaires Michael Corbin, attended the two-day meeting, along with representatives from Iran, the Arab League, Bahrain, Egypt and U.N. Security Council permanent members Russia, China and France.

Corbin and most other attendees did not speak to reporters.

Saudi officials would not comment on their nation's absence, which was seen as a result of bad relations with the Syrian government over Syria's ties to Iran and the Shiite Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon.

A Sunni Muslim country, Saudi Arabia has been keeping Iraq's Shiite-led government at arms length. Under U.S. pressure to be more cooperative, it is now considering reopening an embassy in Baghdad.

Iraq and its neighbors have held a series of meetings in recent years in which Baghdad has repeatedly urged them to help increase cooperation to prevent foreign fighter infiltration, end violence and restore stability to the war-torn country. Sunni Arab nations have pushed the Shiite government to reconcile with Iraq's Sunni Arab minority.

The Security Committee for Coordination and Cooperation on Iraq was created during a May conference on Iraq involving its neighbors, the U.S. and U.N. at Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheik.

By Associated Press 2007.

Syria hosts confab on Iraq, including US & Iran

Friday, August 10, 2007 - ?2005 IranMania.com

LONDON, August 10 (IranMania) - A two-day international security conference on Iraq, which brings together representatives of Iraq's neighbors and the international community, including the US and Iran, opened in the Syrian capital, Iran Daily reported.

The meeting grew out of a May conference on Iraq held at the Egyptian resort city of Sharm El-Sheikh, at which working groups on refugees, energy and border security were formed, Alalam.ir reported.

Syrian Interior Minister Bassam Abdel-Majid said the aim of the conference is to help the Iraqi people overcome the crisis and preserve their territory.

The meeting includes delegates from Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Egypt, Russia, China, Britain, France, the United States as well as the Arab League and the United Nations.

It is being held just as Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki arrived in Iran on a visit aimed at boosting friendly ties with the Islamic Republic.

Abdul-Majeed stressed, prior to the conference, that his country had tightened its security measures along its borders with Iraq to prevent the infiltration of Arab fighters.

Syria opposed the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

Since then, it is hosting an estimated 1.4 mln Iraqi refugees who have fled Iraq.

International Conference On Iraq Border Security To Begin On Wednesday [RTTNews]

8/7/2007 3:58:30 PM Representatives from several Middle Eastern nations will discuss the security situation in Iraq at a two-day international conference starting in the Syrian capital Damascus on Wednesday.

Syria is hosting the meeting in a continuation of the Sharm el-Sheikh conference on Iraq held last May, where working groups on refugees, energy, and border security were formed.

The meeting will be attended by officials from Iraq, the United States, Britain, Iran, Turkey and Jordan, a Syrian official said. The meeting will focus on ways to control the 360-kilometer border between Syria and Iraq, ending violence, and

dismantling alleged Iraqi Baathist networks in Syria, he added.

Syria, which opposes the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, is host to an estimated 1.4 million Iraqi refugees.

Kuwaiti news agency KUNA reported Tuesday that representatives from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kuwait, and Bahrain will also take part in the meetings.

Iranian and Syrian officials deny fueling violence in Iraq

The Associated Press
Thursday, August 9, 2007

DAMASCUS, Syria: Iran and Syria defended themselves against accusations by the United States and its allies that they have been fueling violence in Iraq.

The officials spoke Thursday at an international conference in Damascus on security in Iraq attended by the country's neighbors, as well as the U.S., Russia and several others. They were reacting to allegations that Syria has allowed foreign fighters to cross into Iraq and Iran has provided support for militias in the war-torn nation.

Maj. Gen. Mohammed Mansoura, a senior Syrian intelligence official, said his country was serious about controlling its border with Iraq, erecting barriers and putting its troops in harm's way.

"There have been many clashes with terrorists on the border and six of our soldiers were martyred," Mansoura said, revealing for the first time that Syrian troops had been killed defending the border.

His comments, delivered during a closed-door session, were made available to The Associated Press by a person who attended the meeting.

Mohammad Firouznia, head of the Iranian delegation, denied his country was arming militias in Iraq that were attacking U.S. troops, saying "there is no evidence on this subject."

Firouznia's comments followed a recent announcement by Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, the U.S. second-in-command in Iraq, in which he said that Iranian-armed Shiite militiamen were behind 73 percent of the attacks that killed and wounded U.S. troops in Baghdad in July, nearly double the figure six months earlier.

"This isn't an official report. It's not the first time that such accusations are made," Firouznia told reporters on the sidelines of the meeting of a newly set up security committee on Iraq.

The two-day meeting, which opened Wednesday, was attended by a U.S. delegation headed by Washington's top diplomat in Syria, Charge d'Affaires Michael Corbin, along with representatives from Iran, the Arab League, Bahrain, Egypt and U.N. Security Council permanent members Russia, China and France.

Saudi Arabia, a key regional player, was absent from the meeting, casting doubt on how effective it would be. Saudi officials in Riyadh declined to comment on the absence from Damascus.

The meeting also tackled the issue of the flow of weapons and foreign fighters crossing into Iraq from neighboring nations such as Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The U.S. has repeatedly accused Syria of allowing foreign fighters to cross into Iraq to join anti-American insurgents. Syria denies the charges, saying it is impossible to control the long desert border.

According to a press release from the U.S. embassy in Damascus, Corbin called on Iraq's neighbors to take "action on specific security measures that improve the security of Iraq and its neighbors."

"The flow of foreign fighters must be halted, the provision of weapons and training to those involved in acts of violence and terror inside Iraq must also cease," Corbin said.

A statement released at the end of the meeting said the participants agreed to draft recommendations for the next gathering of Iraqi neighbors' foreign and interior ministers that would include "continuing efforts to stop all kinds of support to terrorist and armed groups and the forces that back them inside and outside Iraq."

The participants also agreed to form joint working committees, "exchange security and intelligence information on terrorist groups and their moves" and called for an end to all forms of inciting violence, an apparent reference to religious edicts permitting attacks in Iraq.

But in a bold move, the statement also said insurgent groups in Iraq should be encouraged to join the political process and resort to peaceful means to express their political opinion.

Firouznia, the Iranian envoy, also said Thursday that the Iraqi government has promised to release some 1,300 Iranians arrested in Iraq while they were — as Tehran maintains — visiting Shiite holy sites. He did not elaborate.

Egyptian Deputy Foreign Minister Hani Khalaf said his delegation urged the Iraqis to be more forthcoming in providing names of Egyptian detainees in Iraq. Iraq's neighbors and Egypt had signed a security cooperation protocol which calls for exchange of information.

Khalaf said Iraq holds some 2,670 detainees of different nationalities, including 800 Iranians. He did not say how many Egyptians are held by Iraqi authorities.

The Damascus gathering was the first meeting of the Security Committee for Coordination and Cooperation on Iraq since it was created during a May conference on Iraq involving its neighbors, the U.S. and U.N. at Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheik

Iraq and its neighbors have held a series of meetings in recent years in which Baghdad has repeatedly urged them to help increase cooperation to prevent foreign fighter infiltration, end violence and restore stability to the war-torn country. Sunni Arab nations have pushed the Shiite government to reconcile with Iraq's Sunni Arab minority.

Also Thursday, Ahmad Mousavi, Iran's Vice President for Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, met with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem in Damascus to discuss the situation in Iraq, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories, the state-run Syrian Arab News Agency said.

Iraq, Syria: Al-Maliki Visiting Aug. 20
August 10, 2007 21 04 GMT

Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki is expected to visit Damascus on Aug. 20 to met with Syrian President Bashar al Assad and other Syrian officials, KUNA reported Aug. 10, citing unnamed diplomatic sources. The sources reportedly said the meeting will focus on steps to control the Syrian-Iraqi border to stem the flow of insurgents into Iraq. by STRATFOR

Syria reveals army deaths from militant campaign
By Khaled Yacoub Oweis
Reuters
Thursday, August 9, 2007; 11:09 AM

DAMASCUS (Reuters) - Syria is facing a violent campaign by Islamist militants and six border soldiers died in attacks launched from inside Iraq, a senior Syrian security official said on Thursday.

This is the first time Syria has publicly disclosed details of the fight against militants, which has intensified this year.

"We are conducting operations against terrorist cells and we have taken martyrs," Mohammad Mansoura, head of the Political Security branch of Syria's intelligence apparatus, told a closed door session of an international security conference on Iraq.

"Raids have yielded arsenals of weapons including suicide explosive belts. Our border forces have come under 100 attacks from inside Iraq. Six soldiers died and 17 were injured," he said in a speech obtained by Reuters in a translated copy.

Mansoura said security forces had foiled several attacks in addition to the few already known of, such as the failed attempt to blow up the U.S. embassy in Damascus last year.

Mansoura dismissed U.S. accusations that Syria is letting militants cross into Iraq to fight U.S. forces and repeated the official line that Islamist militants were as much a threat to Syria as to Iraq.

Syria is ruled by the secular Baath Party, which crushed a revolt led by the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s.

Western diplomats have questioned whether Syria has softened its stance against militants as a way of countering U.S. pressure and showing that its secular system is the only guarantor of stability.

Mansoura said Syria was resolutely against the spread of militant Islamist influence in the region.

"We view the attacks that have spared nothing in Iraq as an attempt to destroy the Iraqi people and a threat that could expand to the region," he said.

SHARING INTELLIGENCE

Officials from Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Britain and the United States ended closed talks aimed at coming up with security cooperation measures to help stop the violence in Iraq and attacks on U.S. and Iraqi forces.

The conference concluded with a call to set up intelligence hotlines with Baghdad and take practical measures to stabilize Iraq, delegates said.

A copy of the classified recommendations seen by Reuters called on border experts from Iraq's neighbors to meet in a month to prevent the flow of fighters and weapons into Iraq.

The document said no support should be extended for "terrorist groups" waging a violent campaign against the U.S.-backed government in Baghdad and incitement against it must be banned.

The states agreed to meet again on the sidelines of a foreign ministers' meeting in Istanbul in the next few months.

"The recommendations should be approved in Istanbul. They were an achievement, considering the modest expectations that were pinned on the meeting," one delegate told Reuters.

"A regular mechanism for intelligence sharing is crucial," he said. "The conference also emphasized the need to cut political support for the rebels."

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From the UN9 August 07

Media Stakeout: Informal comments to the Media by the Permanent Representative of the United States of America, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, on the situation in Iraq.
[Webcast: Archived Video - 2 minutes] 7 August 07

Media Stakeout: Informal comments to the Media by the Permanent Representative of the United States of America, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, on the situation in Iraq.
[Webcast: Archived Video - 10 minutes]