

October 4, 1987

Report of the Hungarian Embassy in Iraq on the characteristics of the activity of the opposition forces in Iraq and the reaction of the Iraqi leadership

Citation:

"Report of the Hungarian Embassy in Iraq on the characteristics of the activity of the opposition forces in Iraq and the reaction of the Iraqi leadership", October 4, 1987, Wilson Center Digital Archive, MOL, M-KS-288 f. 32. - 31. ő. e. - 1987. Translated by András Bocz. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/122550>

Summary:

This report issued by the Hungarian Embassy in Iraq gives details on the Kurdish and Shi'ite opposition and role in the Iran-Iraq conflict and the prospects of the controlling regime as of 1987.

Original Language:

Hungarian

Contents:

Translation - English

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002698/1

□□□77/ strictly conf. 1987□□

Made in: 4 copies

□□□Center: 3 copies

□□□Embassy: 1 copy

□□□Referent: Károly Peir□□□

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Strictly confidential! □□□Baghdad, 4 October 1987. □□□Subject: On the continuing activity of the Iraqi opposition force and the reaction of the Iraqi leadership □□□

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To comrade [Foreign Minister] Dr. Péter Várkonyi

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Budapest

The permanently oppressed social and political tensions, worsened by a protracted war, gradually radicalize those groups and layers of society that are interested in bringing problems to the surface and resolving them, reflected especially by the activities of some significant opposition forces.

The process of radicalization is not rapid, and various different, often opposing interests are involved. Opposition forces identified before continue to play a dominant role, but as compared to the previous period of time there are clear differences.

After conciliatory negotiations held in December, 1986 in Tehran the activity of highly organized regular forces has come into the limelight in the Kurdish opposition movement. The regular forces of the Kurdish Democratic Party, estimated at around 15 thousand troops, continuously participate in Iranian offensives, thereby causing a lot of difficulties to the Iraqi leadership.

They participated in three significant offensives between July and September in the area of Suleimania, and according to unconfirmed news they destroyed 5 Iraqi battle-helicopters and captured some 600 Iraqi soldiers.

The primary reason for the regular Kurdish forces becoming more active in the war is that after the failure of earlier negotiations the Iraqi leadership decided to pursue a policy of strong hand in order to settle the Kurdish issue in the hinterland in this way.

The reintroduction of the policy of strong hand is closely related to the appointment of Hussein Madjid who replaced Izzat Ibrahim this spring in the position of Baath party secretary responsible for the Kurdish Autonomous Territories. According to the spokesman of the Kurdish Democratic Party Iraqi troops destroyed some 900 Kurdish villages during the period in question after having deported app. 70 thousand people to provinces to the south. The campaign claimed at least 110 thousand lives; most of them were Kurdish peasants.

As a consequence it is quite understandable that the relatively high number of Kurds fleeing from death and deportation made it possible to bring regular Kurdish forces up to the strength mentioned above.

These changes, however, did not mean that smaller commando units stopped raiding individuals and smaller Iraqi facilities. We have been informed recently that small commando units assaulted primarily representatives of the central government and party functionaries in the Erbil, Suleimania and Dohuk regions, or more recently even in Mosul. With one exception, when they raided and plundered a Yugoslavian camp, all the assaults were of a political character.

Another similar raid took place in the middle of August at the main road leading out of Mosul to the south, claiming the life of four Iraqi university professors. The professors had visited their students in a training camp and were on their way back to Baghdad when they got killed in the raid.

We think it is important to note here that despite recurrent rumors the terrorist actions committed in the capital should not be attributed to Kurdish opposition forces. Since the Kurdish movement is quite divided, there may well be some exceptions, but sources friendly to the Kurds also confirm that such actions are against the political objectives of determinant forces of the Kurdish movement.

In the view of many observers the main obstacle to a more active and marked presence of the Shi'ite opposition is that the majority of Arab Shi'ites in Iraq do not follow the line represented by the name of Khomeini, and therefore they will first have to fight it out with their own religious leaders. Under the leadership of Saddam Hussein the Iraqi government has made serious efforts to convince the Shi'ites in the country that the goal of Khomeini's Iran is to break the Arab Shi'ites, undermine their independence and annex Iraq, relegating it to a mere province of Khomeini's "Persian Empire."

As a consequence of the rivalry for power between Nadjaf and Kum, smartly exploited by the Iraqi leadership to its own advantage, Shi'ite tribal leaders can now be found in secular posts all over the Iraqi system, ranging from the Baath Party to public administration (mostly in their own tribal territories) and the army.

Nevertheless, the name of the traditional illegal organization of the Shi'ite opposition movement, Dawa, which has weakened considerably in the past few years, keeps coming up in Iraqi circles. They have recently been mentioned as instigators of terrorist attacks committed at night in Baghdad and raids on leaders of the Baath Party around Nadjaf, Kerbala, Samava and Nassiria. The regions where the actions were committed (outskirts of Baghdad, e.g. Saddam City) and the selected targets (leaders of the Baath Party, regional party offices, and military buses) all suggest that the perpetrators were members of the radical wing of the Shi'ite opposition. In addition, the name of Dawa also appears on leaflets distributed by university students that make fun of the Baath leadership and especially the president. Their name was last mentioned in connection with the terrorist raid at the Kadissia meeting

in Nakuba. The incident claimed 16 lives and several dozens of people were injured.

The situation is made even more complex by the fact that the regime has to reckon with the latent strengthening of Iranian influence on the following two bases:

- On the one hand it is well-known that at present the number of Iraqi prisoners of war held in Iran is estimated at around 65-80 thousand.

- On the other hand, since the July of this year we have received information on several occasions that large numbers of deserted soldiers concentrated in the regions of Samawa, Divania, Nadjaf and Karbala, and unlike earlier, when they wandered around as lonely wolves, they now form groups of several hundred to try to survive and are not above occasional raids and robbery either. In the last three months we have learned about 8-10 such incidents in which these groups raided and robbed buses, cars and worker's camps.

In July and August the army launched several offensives to try to eliminate these groups but because of the character of the ground in the region in question (swamp) and partly because many people of the population in the region support these groups, they apparently achieved only limited results, since these incidents still continue to occur.

We cannot exclude the possibility that by resettling retrained and brainwashed Iraqi prisoners of war and winning the support of the deserters who live a hopeless and miserable life, the Shi'ite opposition will become stronger in the future, and such a development may have an influence on the future prospects of the Shi'ite movement against the present Iraqi leadership. Apparently the Iraqi leaders also reckon with this possibility, as demonstrated even to laymen by the various security measures that have been introduced recently.

The presence of security forces is growing stronger in the central districts of Baghdad every day. Rules regulating the security of government offices and institutions become stricter as far as entry or the guarding of these institutions is concerned. The reconstruction of buildings for security purposes and new security installations mushroom in the city by bridges and flyovers.

In August we received information from several different sources that a large number of police forces were drafted in the army and deployed to the front. We have learned in connection with this measure that a riot broke out among the police forces in Samawa that could only be crushed by a sizeable military and security force. Discipline and the increase of severity can be seen even among traffic policemen. There are roads in Baghdad where we can see very resolute and self-confident police officers equipped with a walkie-talkie at every 20 or 30 meters. Unlike before, they are mostly of a higher rank and they check the identity of soldiers too.

It is characteristic of the situation how efficiently and thoroughly the authorities had

planned the supervision of members of artistic and scientific delegations attending the propagandistic "Babilon Festival." They created a situation in which the guests were simply unable to take a single step without their designated Iraqi guides in Baghdad and especially when visiting the country. This obviously restricted the foreign guests to mix with the local people without the control of the authorities. Among the various security measures there is a decision that might turn out to be very important. According to an official statement a "national census" will be held on 17 October that will include foreign citizens too. We have submitted a separate report on this issue, so this time we only want to call attention to the new security measures that may affect the internal opposition, since the national census will also entail a curfew.

As a brief summary, we can establish the following in connection with the events in which opposition forces may have played a role between July and September, 1987 and the measures that were implemented or planned by the regime to counter these developments:

- There is still no sign of any real attempt to form a unity between the main opposition forces (Kurdish and Shi'ite) against the regime.
- Kurdish opposition forces continue to be successful in their commando tactics, but there are clear signs of a more organized use of regular forces especially by the Kurdish Democratic Party in accord with Iranian offensives. It cannot be established with certainty yet how lasting the recent aspirations of different trends of the movement are going to be when it comes to political unity and joint action.
- There are a growing number of Shi'ite opposition actions against the regime, but most of them are not very well-organized, and as a result they do not qualify as dangerous to the regime.
- The Iraqi leadership has to focus mostly on the resolution of military issues arising from the activity of the Kurdish opposition, but at the same time they cannot ignore the dangers deriving from the growing number of deserters and Iraqi prisoners of war who serve as a natural base for the Shi'ite opposition movement.

Finally, we think it is important to note that we continue to evaluate the situation from the point of view of the security of the Hungarian colony and our facilities. We utilize all the information and experience that we gather in this respect in our daily work and in the reports sent to the Center.

Zoltán Pereszlényi
ambassador