

CIA said to step up operations against Iran as hawks seek to tie Iraq bombs to Tehran

'They still need a trigger,' former official says

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In an effort to build congressional and Pentagon support for military options against Iran, the Bush administration has shifted from its earlier strategy of building a case based on an alleged Iranian nuclear weapons program to one invoking improvised explosive devices (IEDs) purportedly manufactured in Iran that are killing US soldiers in Iraq.

According to officials – including two former Central Intelligence Agency case officers with experience in the Middle East – the administration believes that by focusing on the alleged ties between IEDs and Iran, they can link the Iranian government directly to attacks on US forces in Iraq.

The US military has provided credible evidence that the specialized IEDs known as explosively formed penetrators (EFPs), which have been killing US troops in Iraq, appear to have been manufactured in Iran. Intelligence and military officials caution, however, that there is nothing tying the weapons directly to the Iranian government, nor is there a direct evidentiary chain of custody linking the IEDs to Iran.

"There is clear evidence that someone in Iran is manufacturing the EFPs," said a source currently working with military and intelligence joint operations in the Middle East, who wished to remain anonymous due to the sensitive nature of the topic. "They have a distinctive signature. These devices are being used against US troops, Sunnis, and even some Shi'as."

"This is viewed by some in the Bush Administration as sufficient justification for taking military action against Iran," the source concluded.

[Nearly half](#) of all fatalities and serious injuries among US forces in Iraq are caused by IED attacks, including 43% of US casualties in Iraq this month.

CIA reported to step up operations

A senior intelligence official told [RAW STORY](#) Tuesday that the CIA had stepped up operations in the region, shifting their Iran focus to "other" approaches in preference to the "black propaganda" that Raw Story "has already reported on."

The source would not elaborate on what these "other" approaches are. A recent Washington Post report indicated that the US plans to label Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist group, the first such designation for a foreign nation's military.

CIA spokesman Paul Gimigliano would neither confirm nor deny that “other” operations were taking place.

“The CIA does not, as a matter of course, comment on allegations involving clandestine operations, despite the large amount of misinformation that circulates publicly on the subject,” responded Gimigliano in a late Thursday email.

[RAW STORY](#) revealed in June that, according to sources, Iran was [being targeted](#) by CIA activities promoting a “pro-democracy” message and that the agency was supporting overt “pro-democracy” groups.

Two former CIA case officers interviewed said that the administration has zeroed in on the EFPs as proof positive of Iran’s involvement in Iraq, despite lacking any direct trail to Tehran.

One former CIA case officer who served in the Middle East even suggested that politically framing the Iranians for its own failures in Iraq would allow the Bush administration to avoid accountability, as well as providing a casus belli for an attack.

The Bush Administration “can say it’s [the Iranians’] fault we are losing the war in Iraq and that would be a convenient out for their failed policy,” the officer said Monday.

The Iranians “have declared war against the US by sabotaging the war on terror is how they might sell it. I would not be surprised to next hear of Al Qaeda-Iranian connections because these people don’t know the difference between a Sunni and a Shi’a.”

Some continue to press for ‘surgical strikes’

Another former CIA case officer with experience in the Middle East said that some in the administration have continued to make a case for limited or surgical strikes inside Iran, and that preparations are well underway for such an operation to occur before next year’s presidential election.

“If you were to report that a US surgical strike against key targets in Iran were to happen sooner rather than later, you would not be wrong,” said this source, who wished to remain unnamed due to the sensitivity of the topic.

None of the sources interviewed for this article referenced President George W. Bush or alluded to the end of the Bush presidency as the deadline for an Iranian offensive. Each, instead, mentioned either the Office of Vice President Dick Cheney or Cheney himself.

Intelligence expert Steven Aftergood, Research Director for the Project on Government Secrecy at the [Federation of American Scientists](#), said he doesn’t believe a surgical strike would be wise.

“A surgical strike simply refers to a precisely targeted attack on a particular installation, conducted so as to minimize collateral damage. Israel’s 1981 attack on Iraq’s Osirak reactor would be an example,” Aftergood remarked.

“I don’t believe there is a consensus that a surgical strike could be used effectively to disable Iran’s nuclear program, or that it would be wise to attempt such a strike.”

Iranian's Revolutionary Guard

In addition to shifting from a strategy that uses an alleged immediate threat posed by a nuclear-armed Iran to one featuring IEDs as the tool by which Iran is allegedly trying to sabotage the efforts of US forces in Iraq, the administration has also moved toward directly implicating the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps – sometimes referred to as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard – by labeling the group a “specially designated global terrorist” organizations.

According to an August 15, [Washington Post article](#), the Guard will be designated a global terrorist organization under Executive Order 13224, which was issued shortly after the attacks of September 11, 2001 to target and block funding to terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard is the largest branch of Iran's military, boasting well over 100,000 elite active duty soldiers and roughly 300,000 reservists. The designation of the Guard as a “specially designated global terrorist” would be the first time a foreign military has been declared a terrorist organization.

Some officials speculate that the administration is trying to provoke the Iranians into an incident that will justify an airstrike in response, suggesting that the combined effect of circumstantial evidence tying Iran to the IEDs and an event or incident involving the Iranian Revolutionary Guard might “just be enough” to justify military action against Iran.

Experts and officials in the US military and intelligence communities read the administration's move to declare the Guard a terrorist organization as an indication that something ominous is looming over the horizon.

One of the former CIA case officers interviewed for this article explained that the Office of the Vice President is making this drastic move in order to lay the groundwork for a possible incident.

“They still need a trigger and I would not be surprised if we will see some event in Iraq which implicates the Iranians,” said this source. “They need a pretext.”

The motivations for an Iran strike [were laid out](#) as far back as 1992. In classified defense planning guidance – written for then-Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney by then-Pentagon staffers I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, Paul Wolfowitz, and current UN Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad – Cheney's aides called for the United States to assume the position of lone superpower and act preemptively to prevent the emergence of even regional competitors. The draft document was leaked at the time to the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and caused an uproar among Democrats and many in George H. W. Bush's Administration.

Previous attempts at “fixing the facts” around the policy of a military strike against Iran have failed on several occasions, including [ramped up allegations](#) of an Iranian WMD program being close to completion that culminated in a near-offensive in March of 2006 and attempts at provocation by [positioning US aircraft carriers](#) in the region during the summer of 2006.

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