



Iraqis March, Chanting 'Death to Israel, America'

AUG 4, 2006 10:02 PM

BAGHDAD — Tens of thousands of Shiites thronged a Baghdad slum Friday to show support for Hezbollah as Arab anger toward Israel mounted on the Muslim holy day. Such protests have even reached Saudi Arabia, where public discontent is rare. In the most violent demonstration, about 100 people threw stones and a firebomb at the British Embassy in Tehran, damaging the building but harming nobody as they accused Britain and the United States of being accomplices in Israel's fight against Hezbollah, a Shiite group in Lebanon that is backed by Persian Iran.

Even Sunni Muslim demonstrators took to the streets of Damascus, Cairo and Amman. But their numbers were dwarfed by the huge Shiite turnout in Baghdad, organized by anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. Crowds of al-Sadr supporters from across Iraq's Shiite heartland converged on the capital's Sadr City district, chanting "Death to Israel, Death to America" in the biggest pro-Hezbollah rally since the conflict began July 12.

Demonstrators wearing white shrouds symbolizing willingness to die for Hezbollah waved the guerrillas' banner and chanted slogans in support of their leader, Sheik Hassan Nasrallah.

"Allah, Allah, give victory to Hassan Nasrallah," the crowd chanted before burning Israeli and American flags.

Al-Sadr and his supporters could spell real trouble for American soldiers on the ground, reports CBS News correspondent Mark Strassmann.

"They would like to get the

Americans out," former Ambassador Peter Galbraith, a critic of the Iraq War, told Strassmann. "The attacks on Lebanon become a rallying cry, a vehicle for which they could inflame popular sentiment against the United States."

Organizers and local police said hundreds of thousands attended the rally, but the U.S. military later estimated the crowd at 14,000. Associated Press reporters at the scene thought attendance was at least in the tens of thousands during the high point of the march.

Jamal Dajani of LINK TV translates Arab news for American audiences.

He said, "You have, on this particular issue — the Lebanese issue, a unity because Sunni and Shiites throughout the Muslim world behind Hasran Nasrallah, behind Hezbollah, supporting Lebanon against Israel and thus, supporting Lebanon against United States policy in the Middle East." Hezbollah's political influence among Shiites appears to grow the longer it keeps up the fight with Israel.

George Bisharat teaches Middle East law at Hastings College. "It's because this organization is taking on a task that governments in the region have failed to do, and that's confront Israeli power," Bisharat said.

But Bisharat doesn't see a grand plan for regional Shiite dominance. But he does see a united front in their hatred for America.

And the alliance between Hezbollah header Hassan Nasrallah and Iraqi cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr could spell trouble.

Peter Galbraith, author of *The End of Iraq*, explained, "They would like to get the Americans out. The attacks on Lebanon become

a rallying cry, a vehicle to inflame popular sentiment against the United States."

"So not only is the U.S. hated for its presence in Iraq," Dajani said. "But it's also now being hated for sending weapons to Israel, at UN Security Council, financially, and militarily."

In other developments:

- Two American soldiers were killed Friday in restive Anbar province west of the capital, the U.S. command said. It said only that they died "due to enemy action." At least 17 U.S. soldiers have been killed in Iraq since July 27, all but two of them in Anbar.
- Two dozen people died in a surge of violence in northern Iraq, including 10 at a soccer game hit by a suicide car bombing, police said Friday, while the country's spiraling sectarian and political bloodshed killed at least 17 others elsewhere.
- Gen. John Abizaid, the top U.S. commander in the Middle East and Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told Congress that sectarian violence in Baghdad could throw the country into civil war as more than 3,700 U.S. soldiers were redeployed to the capital.
- A military prosecutor on Friday demanded that four U.S. soldiers be court-martialed for allegedly murdering three Iraqi detainees, saying they are war criminals, not heroes. But a defense lawyer said the Iraqis, who were killed May 9 in



Samarra, got “what they deserved.”

- Assault charges were filed Thursday against six Marines stemming from an incident in April in the Iraqi village of Hamdania, military officials said. The alleged assault was uncovered during an investigation that previously led to allegations that seven Marines and a Navy corpsman murdered an Iraqi civilian on April 26.
- CBS News national security correspondent David Martin reports that many of the more than 20,000 soldiers wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan would have died in previous conflicts – and that some, like Corey Briest, have to fight another battle to get the care they need. Martin says Briest, who is paralyzed from his wounds and cannot speak, was moved from a VA hospital in Minneapolis to a private facility by his family due to dissatisfaction with the care he was receiving.

The rally in Baghdad went off peacefully — a remarkable achievement in a city where bombings and shootings are an everyday occurrence. Sadr City is under the effective control of the cleric’s Mahdi Army militia, which maintains its own security network. However, five busloads of Shiite demonstrators were ambushed southwest of Baghdad late Friday as they returned home from the rally, police said. Imam Ali hospital in Sadr city received 14 wounded from the attack, who told them that three others had been killed, Rasool Qasim al Zibon director of media office in hospital said.

At least five members of the Iraqi parliament from al-Sadr’s movement

attended the Baghdad demonstration, but the cleric himself was not there, presumably because of safety concerns.

In Saudi Arabia, hundreds of Shiites, who make up about 12 percent of the predominantly Sunni country’s population, have marched over the past three days in al-Qatif municipality in the Gulf coast region.

Under the watchful eyes of anti-riot police during a demonstration Thursday, protesters chanted: “No Sunni, no Shiites, only one Muslim unity” while others waved posters of Nasrallah chanting “Oh Nasrallah, oh beloved one, destroy destroy Tel Aviv.”

Israel launched its military campaign after Hezbollah guerrillas captured two Israeli soldiers and killed three others in a cross-border raid. Saudi rulers issued a statement chastising the group for “uncalculated adventures,” and a popular Sunni cleric even issued a religious edict that Muslims disavow Hezbollah.

But with the death toll of Lebanese civilians now in the hundreds and some 1 million people displaced, the Saudi government has backpedaled on its stance, even allowing rare demonstrations in favor of Hezbollah.

Support for Hezbollah has spread among Sunnis, despite tensions between the sects over Iraq and the rise of Shiite-dominated Iran. Arab League Spokesman Hesham Youssef said in Cairo an emergency meeting of Arab foreign ministers would be held in Beirut on Monday “as a way to express the Arabs’ solidarity with the Lebanese people, of which they will

discuss the standoff in Lebanon.” During Friday prayers at the Tarek bin Zayed mosque in Bahrain, Sunni preacher Sheik Salah al-Jodar warned against edicts opposing Hezbollah.

Such fatwas are “only benefiting the Zionist entity. ... The ones who are resisting are the Lebanese people and we have to support them,” he said.

Ten people were arrested and four injured, including two police, when demonstrators clashed with officers in Amman, Jordan. Police had to use batons to stop a crowd of about 200, some waving Hezbollah flags, from marching from their mosque to the Israeli Embassy after noon prayers.

In Damascus, the Syrian capital, about 500 Communist Party protesters staged a sit-in. They carried Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian and Hezbollah flags, and photos of Syrian President Bashar Assad and Nasrallah.

The protesters carried banners with slogans like: “Glory to the heroes of the resistance in confronting the outrageous U.S.-Zionist aggression.”

“It’s a clear and big plot led by the U.S. and Israel in the pretext of rebuilding the Middle East,” said Ibrahim Zgheir, 57. “Lebanon is an entrance and the plan would expand to other countries.”

Some 5,000 Egyptians, mostly followers of the banned Muslim Brotherhood, gathered in Cairo’s al-Azhar mosque after prayers. Thousands of Muslim Brotherhood supporters marched in three other Egyptian cities.

“Oh Mubarak Oh Abdullah, you let us down,” protesters chanted while calling on the Egyptian government to open the way for volunteers to join Hezbollah.