

Iraq's Sadr reforming his Mahdi Army

by UPI

BAGHDAD - Senior U.S. commanders in Iraq are optimistic about a reform process that is taking place inside the Madhi Army of Shiite cleric Muqtada Sadr. After declaring a six-month freeze in hostilities last August, Sadr is working to rein in lawless elements of his militia, a move that could lead to a much more stable Iraq, The Los Angeles Times reported Friday. A Sadr spokesman says the Madhi Army recently detained three Iranians and an Iraqi fighter who had fired mortar rounds on a nearby U.S. military base. He adds that Iranian-backed insurgents had been provoking some Mahdi factions to attack U.S. forces. U.S. commanders say they think Sadr is trying to make his Madhi Army more appealing to his hundreds of thousands of followers by weeding out rogue elements in his militia. "What we are seeing here is a split in the Sadrist movement," says Army Lt. Gen. Odierno, the day-to-day commander of U.S. forces in Iraq. "We are seeing more than we ever had this internal struggle going on."

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