

Iraqi militants enlisting teenagers

by UPI

BAGHDAD, Iran -- The void in the Iraqi Shiite Mehdi militia created by arrests in Baghdad is being filled by gun-toting teenagers, The Washington Post reported Thursday. A Post correspondent interviewed numerous teenagers who all asked to be called by nicknames or be unidentified about their activities as plainclothes observers or assassins, and found many who used their high schools to exert the hard-line Shiite dress and behavior rules on Sunnis and fellow Shiites alike. The Mehdi militia is led by 34-year-old radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, who in August ordered his fighters to stand down while he tried to reorganize the decimated group. Many of the adult members did, Baghdad residents told the newspaper, but in their place came teenagers. One of the young fighters told the Post more than half of the militia is under the age of 20 and residents said this year the militia started to deploy women as spies. "We have to show people we are not weak," Ali, a 19-year-old Mehdi Army fighter, told the Post. "If they (Mehdi) tell you that your father is a bad man, you will be more than happy to kill your father."

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