

Tribal force in Iraq target of attacks

by UPI

BAGHDAD -- Reports out of Iraq suggest a Sunni-led grass-roots volunteer security force partially credited with calming violence is the new target of militant attacks. Iraqi Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani said at least 100 members of the Awakening Council, which oversees the volunteer security force called Concerned Local Citizens, were killed in the past month, The New York Times reported Thursday. U.S. officials credit the citizens group, the U.S. troop surge and a cease-fire by Moqtada Sadr's al-Mahdi Army with the recent lull in violence in Iraq. The recent wave of attacks targeting citizens group members and key Awakening Council members threatens to disenfranchise the militia, forcing the emergence of a rival faction or the return of many of its members to the insurgency, officials said. U.S. and Iraqi authorities blame al-Qaida in Iraq with the wave of violence targeting the group following a Dec. 29 audio message from Osama bin Laden calling the group "traitors" and "infidels," the newspaper said. Sunni and Shiite leaders blame the Iranian-backed Madhi Army and Badr Organization with targeting council members. Many officials say they believe al-Qaida operatives infiltrated the group as well.

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