

Iraqi conflict turns political

by UPI

BAGHDAD -- The Iraqi national security effort against Shiite militias may bring about a political and military showdown with the national government, analysts say. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite, ordered a military crackdown against the Mehdi Army, the militia controlled by Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr's political party, in a response to criticism government forces were not as tough against Shiite militias as it was Sunni militias. A poor performance by Iraqi national forces against Shiite elements in Basra, however, uncapped simmering resentment against U.S. and Iraqi forces from the Shiite militias, bringing a new wave of violence, The New York Times said Tuesday. Maliki's response also stoked resentment from the Iraqi public who equate power with authority. The strength of the Mehdi Army turned public opinion against the Maliki government as Iraqi national forces left Basra largely in shambles. But Maliki's crackdown also secured political alliances from other Shiite sects opposed to Sadr. "My view is that what happened could well be a turning point in the political alignments of Iraq," said deputy prime minister, Barham Salih. "What (Maliki) did in taking on his own constituents can give him the credentials to be a national leader rather than the leader of a (Shiite) sect."

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