

More Awakening Council revolts feared

by UPI

BAGHDAD -- Violent weekend clashes in Baghdad involving Iraqi soldiers, U.S. forces and a Sunni Arab Awakening Council foreshadow challenges ahead, analysts say.

Witnesses said the violence began Saturday after Iraqi and U.S. troops arrested an Awakening leader in Baghdad's Fadhil neighborhood for alleged criminal and terrorist acts, such as extortion and launching roadside bomb attacks against Iraqi security forces, The New York Times reported Monday.

Gun battles reportedly erupted as Awakening fighters took to the streets and rooftops. At least eight Iraqi soldiers sustained injuries in the fighting.

The Awakening Councils were assembled and paid by the U.S. military to divert former Sunni insurgents from fighting coalition forces to attacking al-Qaida and other Islamic extremist groups. The strategy has been credited with greatly reducing the number of terror attacks in Iraq. But moves to integrate council members into the Shiite-dominated Iraqi army have proven difficult and some say anti-government uprisings could erupt in other Awakening-controlled areas.

"The situation is now very fragile and no Awakening member would remain silent over this injustice," Saad Abbas al-Luhaibi, leader of an Awakening group in Anbar province, told the Times.

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