

Ansar al-Islam:

Back in Iraq

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Months before the Iraq war of 2003, The New Yorker, Christian Science Monitor, and The New York Times published reports about Ansar al-Islam (“Partisans of Islam”), a brutal band of al-Qa’ida guerrillas based in a Kurdish area of northern Iraq near the Iranian border. U.S. officials pointed to Ansar al-Islam as the “missing link” between al-Qa’ida and Saddam Hussein. When Secretary of State Colin Powell made the U.S. case for war against Saddam at the United Nations on February 5, 2003, he cited Ansar al-Islam as a key reason for invasion. Powell drew links among the group, al-Qa’ida, and Saddam, citing Central Intelligence Agency documents declassified upon the request of the White House. As war approached, however, the Bush administration said less about Ansar al-Islam and al-Qa’ida. Rather, the administration focused on Saddam’s attempts to develop weapons of mass destruction. After the war, it became a matter of common wisdom that Saddam had no links to al-Qa’ida. Carl Levin, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said that the case linking Saddam to al-Qa’ida was never “bullet-proof.” Former vice president Al Gore denied that such ties existed at all. But since the defeat and dispersal of Saddam’s regime, U.S. officials have begun to talk of Ansar al-Islam once more. Thus, analysts are now wondering, who exactly in Iraq represents Ansar al-Islam? Has the group rebounded? Is it connected with other elements in the Iraqi resistance, especially partisans of the old regime? If so, is it possible that it did have ties to the Saddam even before the war?... ❖

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