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US Frames Afghan Shi'ite Militias as an 'Immediate Threat'

Throughout the US occupation of Afghanistan, one of the ongoing examples of violent persecution of religious minorities was the Hazaras, Afghanistan's Shi'ite population. After doing little about this, the US and Afghanistan are now looking to reframe the Shi'ites, and in particular the Fatemiyoun Shi'ite militias, as an "immediate threat" to national security.

Radio Free Europe, ever dutifully playing up these narratives, introduced the story of a few thousand of the Fatemiyoun returning to Afghanistan after volunteering to fight against ISIS in Syria. Afghan nationals, Shi'ite militias, and fighting against ISIS, it's not surprising what happened next.

The Fatemiyoun are being reframed as tantamount to Iranians, with US Gen. Frank McKenzie, the head of CENTCOM, making veiled concerns about Iranian "proxies" in Afghanistan, and saying he is "very concerned."

The Afghan government usually doesn't go out of its way to antagonize the Shi'ite minority, since that's really more the priority of Islamists. After Gen. McKenzie, however, Afghan intelligence officials are also reframing the returnees as a possible immediate threat, saying that threat could rapidly grow if the Fatemiyoun established a central leadership for its group, which is spread out around the country.

The reality is these aren't "Iranian proxies" any more than the rest of the Shi'ites are, and it's just a convenient excuse to create a new scapegoat for future failures, something never in short supply in Afghanistan.

Worse still, the Afghan Shi'ites are under constant, often violent attack, and framing them as outsiders and proxies of the Iranian Ayatollahs are the exact same narrative that Islamists have used to justify attacking them.