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Al-Sadr Calls For Less Violence

By Hamza Hendawi The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Anti-U.S. Shiite leader Muqtada al-Sadr ordered most of his militiamen Friday to lay down their arms, and his spokesman said the young cleric might call off all resistance if the Americans accept a timetable to leave Iraq.

In the north, a car bomb exploded Friday evening in a crowded market in the city of Tal Afar, killing at least 21 people and wounding 72, police said.

Tensions have been rising among ethnic groups throughout the north because of a dispute over control of the oil-rich area around Kirkuk — claimed by Arabs, Turkomen and Kurds.

The order from al-Sadr, who mounted two uprisings against U.S.-led forces in 2004, was read to his followers during weekly Friday prayers in Shiite mosques across the country.

He instructed his Mahdi Army militiamen to join religious and social welfare classes as part of a new organization — the "Momahidoun," or "those who pave the way."

Posters announcing the Momahidoun have appeared on walls in Sadr City, the cleric's Baghdad base and home to an estimated 2.5 million Shiites.

Al-Sadr has been moving toward a primarily political role for his militia since August 2007, when he declared a unilateral cease-fire.



AL-SADR: Moving toward political role

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