

Subject: Commentary: Iran on points?

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Commentary: Iran on points? By ARNAUD DE BORCHGRAVE, UPI editor at large

WASHINGTON, Aug. 5 (UPI) -- Better late than never. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was on target when he decided to drop the ghastly acronym for the global war on terror, GWOT - sounds like guck in the plumbing - in favor of "Global Ideological Struggle." This is a more accurate description of what will be a generation-long battle between those who live to die and those who live to live -- in freedom.

Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, immediately echoed his boss with the new battle cry. As did Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. A global war on terror is a misnomer. Terror is quite simply the weapons system of choice by the weak against the strong that has been used throughout recorded history. A global ideological struggle is also what the United States and the Soviet Union were involved in, with allies on one side and satellites on the other, for almost half a century.

President Bush clearly did not agree with the clarification. He corrected his two key secretaries of State and Defense by mentioning the "war on terror" five times in one speech. "Make no mistake about it," he said, "we are at war." He used the word "war" 13 times in a 47-minute speech devoted to domestic policy.

In that case, there must be victory for the United States and coalition forces in Iraq and defeat for the insurgents. At the very least, victory means a strong, viable, secular democracy, self-funded through increased oil exports, a relationship with the United States as a close ally, which hopefully would become a magnet for Iraq's undemocratic neighbors - Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia. You can fagetaboutit.

Some are already asking who's who in the "last throes" contest - the U.S. presence in Iraq or the Iraqi insurgency? This is the receding vision of a new Iraq that has now induced a crabwalk toward the exit door. Speaking privately, a former Republican defense secretary, said, "We are handing Iraq over to our enemies."

What the Bush administration considers the world's greatest state-sponsor of Islamist terrorism, a charter member of the "axis of evil," and a Shiite-dominated Iraqi government, are closing ranks with bewildering rapidity. Ahmad Chalabi, a one-time Pentagon favorite to run a liberated Iraq, who still hopes to make it to the top in elections at year's end, has taken the point for Iraq's new Iranian initiative. His latest best friend is Moqtada Sadr, the firebrand Shiite cleric whose Badr Brigade battled U.S. forces in Najaf and Badr City, a gigantic Baghdad slum.

Chalabi was recently quoted to say, "We have the longest border with Iran and share many commonalities and together we can establish security, and embark on political and economic cooperation."

Last spring, the Iranian foreign minister made an official visit to Baghdad and then drove down to Najaf to confer with Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the Shiite religious leader who has declined any contact with Americans.

Last month, Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, who had lived in exile in Iran during the Saddam Hussein regime, took 10 of his ministers to Tehran to seal a rapprochement between the two countries. The Iraqis came home with as \$1 billion gift from the Iranian leadership to build schools and hospitals.

In case the Bush administration didn't get the message, Chalabi explained, "This visit was a token of independence of the Iraqi decision making apparatus and its independence from the U.S." This is the same "axis of evil" Iran that may become a target for Israeli or U.S. airstrikes to kill, or retard, a secret nuclear weapons program that has been under way for the past 18 years.

A recent U.S. intelligence forecast said Iran was still about 10 years away from producing a nuclear weapon, which replaced the previous U.S. estimate of five years. It appeared to be another case of a politicized intelligence prediction, this one designed to obviate the need for pre-emptive action.

Israel does not forget, as we appear to have done, that Russia's then deputy chief of staff said in June 2002, "Iran does have nuclear weapons. But these are non-strategic." In other words, the Iranians have not mastered miniaturization to allow a nuclear warhead in the nose cone of the Shahab-3 1,200-mile range missiles Tehran claims to have.

Israeli intelligence believes Iran is only a year or two away from pulling it off. It did not hesitate to destroy Iraq's nuclear reactor before it went critical in 1981, and they have rehearsed multiple air strikes against a dozen Iranian nuclear facilities with air-to-air refueling there and back.

If that scenario came to pass, Iraq's new government would doubtless side with Iran against Israel -- and blame the United States for not stopping it.

Meanwhile, almost unnoticed in the avalanche of insurgency attacks, Iraq's draft constitution is hardly moving in the direction of freedom and democracy. The foundations for a future theocratic state are being rolled into place.

Human rights obligations are guaranteed - provided they do not contradict Islam or Islamic law. Nor is freedom of religion guaranteed because the draft constitution forbids any law that is contrary to sharia, or Islamic law. As for the constitutional court's justices, they can be sharia jurists. These are not compelled to have had any experience in civil

law. And this, in turn, will align Iraq's judiciary with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Saddam Hussein loyalists and jihadis from neighboring countries have penetrated the new Iraqi military and intelligence service. Hence, the mounting toll of U.S. casualties. And the conclusion of a number of Iraq-watchers that Iran seems to be winning - on points.