

Can Dick Cheney's War Against Iran Be Avoided?

by Carl Osgood

In the British empire's desperate global drive for war and chaos, driven by the breakdown of their bankrupt financial system, Southwest Asia is no exception. The late-March visit by Vice President Dick Cheney to the region followed the British script to a tee, and left Iraq-Iran and Israel-Palestine teetering on the brink of full-scale confrontations, including discussions of possible near-term attacks on Iran and Syria. Cheney, a brute who merely carries out the wishes of his British masters, is determined to get a war against Iran before the Bush Administration leaves office, regardless of the heavy opposition, particularly within the U.S. military.

Thus it is not surprising that Cheney gave his blessing, if not orders, for the Nouri al-Maliki government in Iraq to launch what could have been a suicidal assault against the Mahdi Army of Moqtadar al-Sadr in the formerly British-occupied city of Basra, setting off an explosion of violence beyond what had been seen in that nation for a year. It didn't take long for it to become clear that the Iraqi puppet government was losing, and that even renewed U.S. and British military actions couldn't stop the rapid spread of deadly chaos throughout the region.

In the face of this disaster, there has been a unification of common interest among nations in Asia—including Pakistan, India, China, and Russia—to attempt to cool out the crisis; in effect, to run out the clock until the Bush Administration leaves office. It is in this context that the Iranians acted to negotiate a ceasefire between the rival Shi'ite factions—in the holy city of Qom, no less—and put the war on hold.

But, as Lyndon LaRouche has stressed, it would be a potentially deadly strategic error to believe that the impetus for expanded global irregular warfare could be contained by making local agreements. The British empire's strategic determination is to make it impossible for any nation-states, and par-

ticularly the Eurasian bloc of Russia, China, and India, to survive the ongoing financial blowout intact, and that mission can only be stopped by taking direct aim at the empire, not its local pawns.

U.S. Military Decides To Act

One week before Gen. David Petraeus, the top U.S. military commander in Iraq, and Ryan Crocker, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, are set to testify on the situation in that tortured country, Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman Joseph Biden (D-Del.) began a series of hearings to set the stage for that testimony. *EIR's* sources emphasize that the impetus for these hearings, which featured explosive attacks on the Cheney/neo-con war clique, came from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who have garnered support, all the way up to Defense Secretary Robert Gates, for their view that an expansion of the war in Southwest Asia, a war which has already destroyed the military, must be stopped.

Biden's first hearing, on April 2, brought in three well-known retired generals, Gen. Barry McCaffrey, Lt. Gen. William Odom, and Maj. Gen. Robert Scales, as well as Michelle Flournoy, a former Pentagon official during the Clinton years, and now the president of the Center for a New American Security, a Democratic-leaning think-tank established in Washington last year. Though not in full agreement with each other, McCaffrey and Odom were particularly stark in their assessments of the situation on the ground in Iraq. But it was only towards the end of the hearing that the responsibility of the Congress and of the institution of the military was brought out.

The Army Is Unravelling

McCaffrey began his opening statement by asking, "How did we end up in this mess?" After praising the current senior

civilian and military leadership in the Pentagon, McCaffrey declared that the Maliki government “is completely dysfunctional. There’s not a province in Iraq where the central government dominates.” The Iraqi government is not only incompetent, but it is rife with corruption as well.

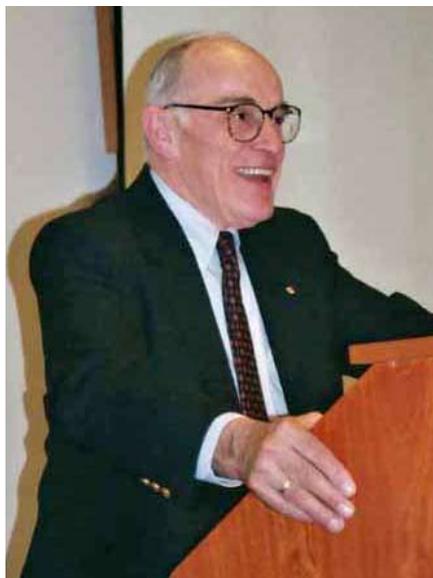
McCaffrey noted, “We’ve run the Army to the wall and they’re still out there,” because of the quality of its people, but “it’s starting to unravel.” McCaffrey noted the testimony of Vice Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Richard Cody to the Senate Armed Services Committee, the day before. The five-brigade surge into Iraq, last year, Cody said, “took all the stroke out of the shock absorber for the United States Army,” by leaving no reserve available for other contingencies. The Air Force and the Navy, McCaffrey said, are not in much better shape. One result of the lack of manpower in the military services, has been the huge reliance on contractors. “Without contractors,” McCaffrey said, “the war grinds to a halt.” He concluded that because there’s no political support to sustain the national security policy of the current administration, “we’re coming out of Iraq. The only question is, whether it’ll take one year or three.”

Change Policy on Iran

General Odom was even more pessimistic. “The surge,” he said, “is prolonging instability, not creating conditions for unity as the president claims.” He said that while violence has come down over the last few months, there is credible evidence that the political situation is “far more fragmented.” Maliki’s assault on Basra, against his political competitors “is a political setback, not a political solution. Such is the result of the surge tactic.” Equally disturbing, Odom said, is the steady violence in the Mosul area, with tensions among Kurds, Arabs, and Turkomen. “A showdown over control of the oil fields there surely awaits us.”

Odom refuted the notion that al-Qaeda will take over Iraq if U.S. forces leave. He pointed out that everybody in Iraq hates them, and “The Sunnis will soon destroy al-Qaeda if we leave Iraq.” The Kurds don’t allow them in the North, and the Shi’ites, like the Iranians, “detest” them. One can understand why, when one takes note of their public diplomacy campaign over the past year or so on Internet blogs, in which they implore the United States to bomb and invade Iran “and destroy this apostate regime.”

As an aside, Odom added that “it gives me pause to learn that our Vice President and some members of the Senate are aligned with al-Qaeda on spreading the war to Iran.” Interest-



Lt. Gen. William Odom (ret.): “The surge is prolonging instability, not creating conditions for unity as the President claims.”

ingly, no members of the committee took up Odom on this point.

Finally, Odom called for a quick withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq and a change in policy towards Iran. A sensible strategy to withdraw rapidly in good order is the “only step” that “can break the paralysis now gripping U.S. strategy in the region,” he said. “The next step is to choose a new aim, regional stability, not meaningless victory in Iraq,” he said, which goal “requires revising our policy toward Iran.” Just abandoning the regime change policy on Iran “could prompt Iran to lessen its support to Taliban groups in Afghanistan,” Odom said. “Iran detests the Taliban and supports them only because they will kill more Americans in Afghanistan as retaliation in event of a U.S. attack on Iran.” Iran’s policy in Iraq would have to change as the United

States withdraws because “it cannot want instability there.”

Congress Can Cut the Funds

The docility of Congress in the face of the Bush Administration’s war policy was not raised during the hearing until near the end. Sen. George Voinovich (R-Ohio), after enumerating the costs, in both physical and fiscal terms, asked the witnesses what the U.S. Senate should do.

Odom replied by noting that Congress has two important powers, the budget and impeachment. “You could just refuse to pass a bill” funding the war, he said. “If you want to bring this to a halt, it’s in the power of this Congress,” to do that. McCaffrey added that Congress “has been entirely missing at the debate.” He noted that the Democrats have been fearful of being labeled unpatriotic, and the Republicans “stayed with Secretary Rumsfeld when he was leading us over a cliff.” “I think it’s time for the Congress to act,” he said.

But it’s not only the Congress that has been asleep at the switch. Sen. Jim Webb (D-Va.) followed Voinovich by noting that while “the vote for this war was a very regrettable experience for this country, the greatest failure since then has been from the highest leadership (both active and retired) of the military... Too many military officers didn’t speak out.” Webb named the few who did stand up, including Odom, retired Marine Gen. Anthony Zinni, retired Marine Lt. Gen. Gregory Newbold, and former Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki—the latter two having been humiliated by Rumsfeld because they wouldn’t play his game. That failure, Webb said, “is the most regrettable reason we are where we are.” McCaffrey, after noting his own criticisms of Rumsfeld, agreed that “the senior military leadership has been more compliant than it should’ve been.”