WHO’S AN IRAQI?

First, a news bulletin:

According to Iranians I trust, Osama bin Laden gave the world the most marvelous Christmas present he could possibly give by departing from it in mid-December. The Al Qaeda leader died of kidney failure and was buried in Iran, where he had spent most of his time since the destruction of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. The Iranians who reported this note that this year's message in conjunction with the Moslem Haj came from his number two, Ayman al-Zawahiri, for the first time.

Now on to the subject at hand.

Of all the confusions surrounding the war in Iraq, perhaps none has clouded so many minds as the phony question, "Are we fighting domestic insurgents or foreign terrorists?" The people who purport to answer this question with "data," should look again at the demographics of Iraq, Syria, and Iran, and they can start by asking themselves, "Who's an Iraqi"?

That question is surprisingly difficult to answer, above all because, during the Iran-Iraq war, millions (I say millions) of Iraqi Shiites took the Iranian side, and went to Iran, where they remained for the better part of twenty years.

During that time a large number of them were recruited by Iranian intelligence, folded into the terror network of the Revolutionary Guards and the intelligence ministry, and placed under the command of the Badr Brigade of the SCIRI ("Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq) or other radical Shiite groups.

When we liberated Iraq, many of them returned. What are they? Iraqis or Iranians? It's a surprisingly tough question. If, as is often the case, they show up as suicide terrorists or sharpshooters or IED manufacturers or spooks working for "insurgent" or "terrorist" groups, do they count as "foreign fighters" or "Iraqi insurgents"?

They have Iraqi DNA, but Iranian ideology, and they are under effective Iranian control. But for the most part, it seems that our official bean counters in the intelligence community have defined them as "insurgents," which enables them to argue that we're basically fighting domestic groups. They can thus downplay the decisive role played by Iran (and, on the other side of Iraq, by Syria).

All this was underscored by a nifty story in the Washington Times two days ago (9 January), written by Sharon Behn: "Iraqis receive training in Iran."

It's more of the same, albeit she falls into one of the tempting rhetorical traps set by our "analysts." She writes about young Iraqis being sent to Iran by SCIRI for "political indoctrination and militia training," and later on refers to claims by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (better known

as the MEK, the Mujaheddin Khalq) that "Tehran has been training Iraqi and other nationals in intelligence gathering and terrorists operations."

If you read carefully, you'll see that the so-called militia training is really terrorism: "They (the Iranians) trained them (the young Iraqis)...to go out on patrol, to get people out of their houses, execute them and leave them on the street..."

Let's stop talking about "militia training," okay? This is terrorist training. And let's stop the bogus "analysis" that turns Iranian-trained terrorists into "domestic insurgents" by punching find-and-replace. They're terrorists working at the behest of Iran.

And let's (finally!) stop acting as if Sunnis and Shiites don't cooperate in the killing fields of the Middle East. Zarqawi's a Sunni and he has long been supported by Iran. The surviving bin Ladens are mostly in Iran, as is Zawahiri, Sunnis all.

The basic sermon remains as true as ever: We are playing a sucker's game in Iraq, because we are fighting in a single country even though we are engaged in a regional war. This guarantees we cannot win the broader war.

Administration officials have struggled mightily to avoid this hard truth, because they want to be able to declare "victory" in Iraq as soon as possible, and then get out. But the hard truth remains, as does the unbreakable determination of Iran and Syria to drive us from Iraq.

And if they succeed, they will not stop there. The leaders of Iran have told their people to prepare to "rule the world." You may be sure they will not declare victory simply because they have won the battle for Iraq.