

Editorial

No Break from 'Clean Break'

Despite the announced departure of leading neo-con Douglas Feith from his top Pentagon post, there are no signs that the Bush Administration has, in any substantive way, broken from its policy of perpetual war in Southwest Asia and other raw-materials-rich parts of the planet.

Indeed, while Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's tour of Southwest Asia and Western Europe drew some praise for rhetorical fence-mending, the content of her pronouncements was another version of the "Clean Break" policy that brought you the Iraq mess. While preaching trans-Atlantic collaboration, Rice made clear this "collaboration" is to be on Washington's terms, and includes political/military destabilizations and regime change in Iran and Syria.

This targetting of Iran and Syria comes right out of the pages of the July 1996 "A Clean Break" blueprint, delivered to Israel's then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu by a team of American neo-cons, led by Feith, Richard Perle, and David Wurmser (now in the Office of Vice President Dick Cheney). In that document, Netanyahu was told that the Oslo Accords could be ripped up, by denouncing Yasser Arafat as a terrorist and launching hot-pursuit raids into Palestinian Authority zones, until the Palestinian governing institutions had been gutted. "Clean Break" also spelled out a sequencing of regime changes in the Arab/Muslim world, beginning with Iraq, and moving on to Iran, Syria, and, eventually, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This perspective was clearly visible in President Bush's State of the Union speech.

A number of American and British military specialists with decades of experience in Southwest Asia confirm that the Bush Administration is hell-bent on military action—either American or Israeli—against Iran, perhaps as early as Summer 2005. According to one senior retired American military intelligence official, the U.S. Air Force is set for bombing missions against a dozen Iranian sites, purportedly secret nuclear weapons facilities.

On Feb. 10, *Washington Post* columnist Jim Hoag-

land reminded readers that the real power in the Administration lies with Vice President Dick Cheney, with his round-the-clock access to President Bush, and vise-like control over the White House national security team. Cheney has given two high-profile TV interviews since Inauguration Day, in which he targetted Iran for military action by either the United States or Israel.

Hoagland also pointed out that the new National Security Advisor, Stephen Hadley, is an old Cheney Pentagon protégé, and Hadley's newly appointed deputy, J.D. Crouch, also comes from the Cheney stable. Indeed, White House senior staff meetings, according to leading Republican strategist and newsletter publisher Richard Whalen, are chaired, not by Hadley, but by Cheney's own chief of staff, neo-con Lewis "Scooter" Libby.

Part of Cheney's policy appears to have been let out of the bag on Feb. 3. Before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz admitted that he favors a 50-year American military presence in Iraq. Wolfowitz drew the parallel between Iraq and Korea, where 37,000 U.S. troops have been stationed since the end of the 1950s Korean War.

The next day, the Association of Muslim Scholars, the leading Sunni clerical group in Iraq, met with the United Nations envoy, and offered a cessation of the insurgency, in return for a definite date for withdrawal of all foreign occupation forces from Iraq. But that would mean that the United States would have to abandon the neo-con schemes for permanent military bases in the heart of Iraq, at the center of the Persian Gulf oil patch.

The Sunni offer to end the insurrection, in return for an assured end of foreign military occupation, even if over several years, is clearly worth pursuing. But the silence from the Bush-Cheney Administration on this dramatic offer convinces many that the U.S. plan is for permanent bases in the Iraqi desert—regardless of how many American and Iraqi lives have to be sacrificed.

To get out of disaster, we're going to have to break the Bush Administration, and fast.