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Neo-conservatives contemplate 'W

By Jim Lobe

WASHINGTON: It's always difficult to play defence and offence at the same time, but when the geo-political ground is shifting beneath one's feet and damaging leaks are spurting out of the White House and Downing Street plumbing like Fourth of July fireworks, it's more difficult than usual.

At least, that's the sense one gets after watching the frantic manoeuvrings this week of far-right and neo-conservative personalities who found themselves trying, on the one hand, to persuade their compatriots to prepare to take on new enemies in what they call "World War IV," while, on the other, mounting rear-guard actions against faint-hearted allies who want out of Iraq and Democrats who are calling for the head of President George W. Bush's "brain," Karl Rove.

While, by week's end, most of them, at least judging by their editorials, columns and Fox News television appearances, were focused on defending Rove from charges that he may have compromised national security by "outing" a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer as the immediate priority, they were all over the map — almost literally — for most of the past seven days, dispensing a never-ending stream of geo-strategic advice for all and sundry.

Some of it was entirely familiar, especially with respect to Iran and Syria, favoured neo-conservative targets, for the next phase of the

"global war on terror."

Indeed, since last month's surprise victory late last month of hard-liner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran's presidential elections, neo-conservatives have launched a new campaign for "regime change," urging the Bush administration to take more urgent action to achieve that goal.

"The country is ripe for revolution," enthused Jeffrey Gedmin, the neo-conservative director of the Aspen Institute in Berlin, in the 'Weekly Standard.'

"This regime has to go," he went on, arguing that, what with the EU constitutional process stalemated and the "impending political demise of (French President) Jacques Chirac and (German Chancellor) Gerhard Schroeder," Bush should be able to line up the European Union behind support for the "democracy movement in Iran."

And if that strategy should fail, noted Michael Rubin of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), "Bush may decide that pinpoint military strikes are the only mechanism by which to undercut the Islamic Republic's (nuclear) ambitions."

AEI's Michael Ledeen, just back from safari in Botswana ("The best hope for Africa is tough love. Cut off the aid."), took much the same line in several articles in 'National Review Online,' arguing that new and "abundant evidence" has surfaced over Iranian ties

to Al Qaeda and to the insurgency in Iraq.

"I do not know if ...the Iranians were involved in the London bombings, but it really does not matter, for Iran is the most potent force in the terror network, from which the killers in London undoubtedly drew succour. ...We cannot possibly have decent security in Iraq unless we end the murderous tyrannies in Tehran and Damascus," wrote Ledeen, who, in another piece, argued, as did several other neo-conservatives, that the British "elites" had brought on last week's attacks by their "special relationship with the Arab world" and "anti-Semitism."

While this was all quite familiar, the war hawks also tried to take advantage this week of Congressional concern over an attempted Chinese takeover of US oil giant Unocal and next week's state visit of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to mount a broader strategic vision of allies and enemies.

This was encapsulated in a brief talk Wednesday by the neo-conservative Foundation for the Defence of Democracies director Clifford May to the "US-India League" in which he called on the US to "forge new alliances appropriate to a new era" that would include Eastern Europe, Australia, Israel, Japan, and, "most emphatically, India — the world's largest democracy."

May, who would later in the week devote his considerable polemical talents to defend-

ing Rove, was joined by Kenneth Timmerman, author of "Countdown to Crisis: The Coming Nuclear Showdown with Iran," far-right activist Paul Weyrich, and AEI's Thomas Donnelly, all of whom argued that Delhi should play a key role in countering China's strategic ambitions.

So should Japan, Washington Times and National Review editor Rich Lowry was quick to add in a Washington Times column in which he made an increasingly common argument that Tokyo should tear up its post-war constitution and become "as reliable a partner of the US in Asia as Britain is in Europe" in checking Beijing.

The column, entitled "Unleash Japan," noted that other Asian countries have "nightmarish memories of the Japanese military," but that they should understand that there's a "new Japanese government ...on the side of decency and civilization."

As for China itself, several prominent neo-conservatives appeared before a key Congressional committee this week arguing that Washington should prevent the sale of Unocal, most of whose assets are found on China's doorstep in Asia, to the China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC), because oil is a "national security" issue rather than a simple commodity that should be subject to the free market.

"China is pursuing a national strategy of

World War IV'

domination of the energy markets and strategic dominance of the western Pacific," argued James Woolsey, a former CIA director and prominent neo-conservative who popularized the "World War IV" slogan but who, until now, had confined its use to the war on "Islamofascism" in which Beijing is supposedly allied with Washington.

Appearing on the same panel as Woolsey was Centre for Security Policy (CSP) president Frank Gaffney, another neo-conservative, who warned in the late 1990s that a Hong Kong-based company's lease of two port facilities at either end of the Panama Canal was part of a secret plan to deny the waterway to the US Navy in the event of war.

"China is positioning itself to supplant the United States economically and strategically and, if necessary, to defeat us militarily in the decades to come," said Gaffney who, in a Washington Times article this week, argued that the London bombings should prompt the Bush administration to prevent Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's disengagement from Gaza ("Friends don't let friends commit suicide...").

But while propagating their latest geo-strategic worldview, these same activists and their comrades this week also were forced to play defence, and not just about the damage inflicted on the White House by the growing scandal over Rove.

The leak of a classified memo from the British defence minister to Prime Minister Tony Blair detailing "emerging US plans" to reduce by half the number of soldiers — as well as reports that the Pentagon intended to substantially withdraw its forces from Afghanistan within two years — drew very worried responses from Weekly Standard editor William Kristol who has long assailed Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld for refusing to deploy enough troops to the two countries.

The British memo "shows real efforts within the administration to extricate us from this, and I think ...that's a much greater threat than anything that happens directly in London," he told an AEI audience this week. In a written memo co-authored by Project for the New American Century director Gary Schmitt, Kristol warned that Rumsfeld "is putting the president's strategic vision at risk."

Worried as well about a steady stream of public opinion polls increasing pluralities of US citizens who believe that Bush and his backers lied about the reasons for going to war in Iraq, Kristol also gave over half of this week's Weekly Standard to an article titled "The Mother of All Connections," in which the author, Stephen Hayes, presents what he calls "new evidence" of an operational tie between Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein.—
Dawn/The InterPress News Service.