

Pentagon plans Iraq troops cut in 2006

BRADLEY GRAHAM AND
ROBIN WRIGHT

Washington, Nov. 23: Barring any major surprises in Iraq, the Pentagon tentatively plans to reduce the number of US forces there early next year by as many as three combat brigades, from 18 now, but to keep at least one brigade "on call" in Kuwait in case more troops are needed quickly, several senior military officers said.

Pentagon authorities also have set a series of "decision points" during 2006 to consider further force cuts that, under a "moderately optimistic" scenario, would drop the total number of troops from more than 150,000 now to fewer than 100,000, including 10 combat brigades, by the end of the year, the officers said.

Despite an intensified congressional debate about a withdrawal timetable after last week's call by Representative John P. Murtha for a quick pullout, administration officials say that military and political factors heavily constrain how fast US forces

should leave. They cite a continuing need to assist Iraq's fledgling security forces, ensure establishment of a permanent government, suppress the insurgency and reduce the potential for civil war.

US military commanders, too, continue to favour a gradual, phased reduction, saying that too rapid a departure would sacrifice strategic gains made over the past 30 months and provide a propaganda windfall to insurgents.

Lieutenant General John R. Vines, the senior tactical commander in Iraq, indicated to reporters at the Pentagon yesterday that his staff had looked at shrinking US force levels more quickly. But he made his opposition to such a move clear.

"A precipitous pullout, I believe, would be destabilising," Vines said from Baghdad.

Another senior general likened an accelerated withdrawal to "taking the training wheels off of a bike too early", warning that a sudden removal of all US troops would risk the collapse of Iraq's fledgling security forces.

He and several other officers privy to the planning for force reductions said the process has not been affected by the mounting political pressure in the US.

The current number of US forces in Iraq represents an increase of more than 15,000 troops over a base level this year of about 138,000, including 17 combat brigades. The equivalent of another brigade's worth of combat power was added this autumn to bolster security for the October 15 constitutional referendum and the coming De-

cember 15 vote on a new national government.

Defence secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld spoke over the weekend of plans to bring the force level back down to 138,000 after the elections, effectively removing the extra brigade equivalent added for the election period.

In addition, officers said, two combat brigades that had been slated to move into Iraq to replace units coming out are now expected to be held back.

LOS ANGELES TIMES-
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2 NOV 2005

CHINA VISIT ■ Foreign minister Li says achieving balance of trade will be a slow process

Bush wins promises, not concrete actions

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US President George W. Bush and wife Laura (extreme Right) at a Sunday service in Beijing

JOSEPH KAHN & DAVID E. SANGER

BEIJING, NOVEMBER 20

US PRESIDENT George W. Bush began a one-day visit to China on Sunday with a set of meetings with President Hu Jintao of China to defuse a host of tensions, even as many in Beijing argue that he will be able to apply little true pressure on the world's fastest-rising power.

In a brief exchange of prepared comments after conferring at the Great Hall of the People on the edge of Tiananmen Square, Bush and Hu committed themselves to improving their relationship, but also staked out their positions in clear terms.

The Chinese foreign minister, Li Zhaoxing, greeted President Bush last night upon his arrival in Beijing. Hu said he intended to gradually achieve balanced trade between China and the US, a statement that made it

Bush urges for invitation to Dalai Lama

President Bush today said that he had urged China's leaders to invite the Dalai Lama to hear for themselves that the spiritual leader has "no desire" for an independent Tibet.

Bush however, did not say what response China's leaders gave when the Dalai Lama issue was raised.

Dalai Lama had said earlier this month that Tibet should remain within China for the territory's economic development.

clear that the record trade surpluses that Beijing enjoys would be a part of the economic landscape for some time to come.

He said China was willing to step up its protection on intellectual property rights and help on counterterrorism, but he reiterated that on Taiwan, he would brook no compromise. Bush thanked China for "taking the lead" in disarmament talks with North Korea, and noted that

the North Koreans had agreed in principle to give up their nuclear weapons and programs. "The United States expects them to honor that commitment," he said, and without reference to specific human rights concerns he said "we encourage the Chinese to continue to make a historic transition to greater freedom."

White House officials on the trip say the Chinese government rejected the idea of a joint news conference for the two leaders, eliminating any chance that Hu would have to answer questions about the pace of democratization.

In a measure of the wariness felt by the Chinese, the government said that it could only guarantee television coverage for Bush's visit when he goes bicycling with Olympic athletes on Sunday.

Hu said he would travel to the United States early next year for a previously scheduled visit that was postponed by Hurricane Katrina.

Uproar in U.S. House over Iraq troop pullout

Debate descends into a vitriolic fury over President Bush's handling of the war

Eric Schmitt

WASHINGTON: Republicans and Democrats shouted, howled and slung vicious insults on the House floor on Friday as a debate over whether to withdraw American troops from Iraq descended into a vitriolic fury over President Bush's handling of the war and a leading Democrat's call to bring the troops home.

The battle boiled over when Jean Schmidt, Republican, the most junior member of the House, told of a phone call she had just received from a Marine

across the chamber's centre aisle to the Republican side screaming that the attack had been unwarranted.

Martin Meehan, Democrat, yelled: "You guys are pathetic. Pathetic."

But as the third hour of debate opened, with the House chamber mostly full on the eve of the Thanksgiving recess, something extraordinary happened: The House collectively seemed to catch itself before careering completely off a partisan cliff.

Two senior Republicans, Henry Hyde and Curt Weldon, rose in defence of Mr. Murtha. "I give him an A-plus as a truly great American," said Mr. Hyde.

Then Mr. Murtha, who normally shuns publicity, gave an

impassioned 15-minute plea for his plan to withdraw American troops who he said had become "a catalyst for violence" in Iraq.

The American people, Mr. Murtha thundered, are "thirsty for some direction; they're thirsty for a solution to this problem."

The exchanges on the floor followed days of mounting tension between Republicans and

Democrats in which the political debate over the war has sharply intensified. With Mr. Bush's popularity dropping in the polls, Democrats have sought anew to portray Mr. Bush as having exaggerated the threat posed by Iraq before the American invasion of 2003. But Republicans have countered that Democrats were equally at fault.

In Friday's battle, Democrats accused Republicans of pulling a political stunt by moving toward a vote on a symbolic alternative to the resolution that Mr. Murtha had offered on Thursday, calling for the swift withdrawal of American troops from Iraq.

The Democrats said the ploy had distorted the meaning of Mr. Murtha's measure and had left

little time for meaningful debate.

Speaker Dennis Hastert, Republican, denied that there were any political tricks and said pulling American forces out of Iraq so rashly would hurt troop morale overseas. "We want to make sure that we support our troops that are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. We will not retreat."

Late Friday night, the measure was defeated, 403-3. But the measure's fate was sealed — and the vote count's significance minimised — when Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi, criticised the Republican tactics and instructed Democrats to join Republicans in voting against an immediate withdrawal. —New York Times News Service

- Shouts, insults on the House floor
- Troops became "a catalyst for violence"
- Bush exaggerated Iraq threat, say Democrats

A U.S.-Japan equation to counter China

P. S. Suryanarayana

140-10
19/11

FOR THE first time since the end of the Cold War over 14 years ago, the United States has now comprehensively reinforced its security alliance with Japan. New proposals for its "transformation" and for a "future realignment" of the Japan-based U.S. military forces have been crafted in the current context of China's political ascendance and "military modernisation."

Japan's popular mood of disenchantment with the U.S., over its security policies, is no less a matter of concern to the leaders of this alliance.

The updated aspects of the Cold-War-era alliance are outlined in the interim "report" which the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee agreed to in Washington on October 29. An "overall package" of firm measures is planned for "no later than March 2006." For now, the strategic blueprint is clear.

Not surprisingly, though, the latest accord has run into rough weather. The people of Japan, especially those in Okinawa and other places that have "hosted" the U.S.' troops and war-machines for several decades, are voicing whole-hearted opposition to the new "security shenanigans" of the two governments.

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and U.S. President George W. Bush, who met in Kyoto on November 16, felt compelled to launch a hard-sell campaign over their new security deal.

Mr. Koizumi's political stock had hit a dramatic high in Japan following his electoral triumph that actually preceded Tokyo's new military consensus with Washington. Still riding the popularity crest, he has now conceded that "the gut feeling of the Japanese people" is clearly "against" having any U.S. base in their neighbourhood, especially when the related issues are viewed purely in the "local" context.

Without downplaying the people's sentiments, Mr. Koizumi is coming up with a candid political spin. The Japanese, he says, "will have to pay a certain cost" for continuing to rely on the U.S.' military strength for their day-to-day "security." Over the past few decades, a stable environment, facilitated by the U.S. military presence in the Asia-Pacific region, had in fact helped the Japanese reach a sustainable level of economic growth.

He has counselled the "local communities" in Japan to "rethink ... very hard" their opposition

The move by the U.S. and Japan to strike a "joint-operations posture" is a qualitatively new feature of the East Asian security landscape. For China and others, this is an emerging reality to reckon with.

to Washington, as they "are enjoying the security being offered through the U.S.-Japan alliance." And, in his view, it is in this environment of safety that Japan can continue to "achieve economic growth." The unstated but obvious factor behind the reasoning about such fundamentals is the rapid rise of China as an economic and political power.

Leaving much of such a hard-sell campaign to Mr. Koizumi, Mr. Bush has, however, felt it necessary to explain to the Japanese people that his government negotiated the latest accord in "good faith." He is content that democratic Japan "will work out the issues" on the basis of the "will of the people" and Mr. Koizumi's "leadership." Acknowledging this, Mr. Koizumi is convinced that he "will have to make great efforts towards the resolution of this issue" — the opposition of many Japanese to the prospects of an interminable presence of U.S. military might in their midst.

Now, the timing of the new U.S.-Japan accord randomly coincides with the spectacular success of China's second manned space flight. More significantly, several East Asian diplomats see the politics of the accord as an answer to China's new technological prowess in the outer space, which (in their view) can have long-term military implications for Japan and others. Such a reading of the (proverbial) Chinese tea leaf will not necessarily devalue Beijing's renewed pledge to pursue space exploration for peaceful purposes.

In the fine print, the accord itself "underscore[s] the need to pay attention to modernisation of military capabilities in the ... Asia-Pacific ... region." For those familiar with the global "security environment," no clairvoyance is required to discern this sense of urgency as a coded message that the U.S. and Japan are really mindful of China. The easy inference is derived from the fact that China, by its own

pronouncements, is actively engaged in "modernising [its] military capabilities."

A milder version of this China-focus was indeed envisioned by the U.S. and Japan as early as in February this year, when they agreed upon a set of "common strategic objectives."

More important now is the updating of the coded China-focus with a firm military dimension. Emphatically reaffirmed is the enduring relevance of the 1951 U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, despite its Cold-War vintage, and of the 1997 Guidelines for bilateral defence cooperation. As a follow-up, the two sides have sketched out some of their recently operational moves and potential military postures.

Of these, ballistic missile defence, mainly a U.S.-Japan venture in the Asia-Pacific theatre, and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), a Washington-led multilateral effort, are particularly noteworthy. These recent initiatives have already drawn political fire from China, because their transparent objectives are to erode its ongoing military modernisation. The PSI, while being a measure to roll back the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in regard to "states of concern" and non-state terrorists, is essentially a maritime-patrol initiative at this stage. It is this aspect that is clearly of concern to China.

On a higher strategic plane, the new document emphasises that "[the] U.S.' strike capabilities and the nuclear deterrence provided by the U.S. remain an essential complement to Japan's defence capabilities." The formulation, with a familiar ring, may seem to be no more than a carry-forward legacy of the Cold-War-era features of the alliance between the two.

What is newly significant, though, is that "Japan will defend itself" by strengthening its military posture "in accordance with the 2004 National Defence Programme Guidelines."

A definitive portrayal of such a new Japan, complete with a long-missing "normal" and sov-

ereign military profile, came about some two weeks after the triumphant return to Earth by China's taikonauts (astronauts) on October 17. However, Japan's emerging "military" profile was already a prime cause of the fury that marked Beijing's reaction to Mr. Koizumi's latest pilgrimage to the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo on the very day of China's celebrations over its space feat. The shrine is a memorial to imperial Japan's martyrs and civil-military leaders who were later found guilty of war crimes.

Tokyo's new policies to strengthen its "military" posture will define the promised "transformation" of the U.S.-Japan alliance at this stage. However, there is no move by Japan to give up its access to Washington's nuclear umbrella and forego the "protection" provided by the conventional U.S. forces that will remain "forward-deployed" in the Asia-Pacific region.

Within these parameters and between now and March 2006, plans for the "realignment" of the non-nuclear U.S. forces within Japan's self-defence zones will be firmed up.

By 2008, the U.S. will deploy a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, assuredly with no weapons of mass destruction aboard, at a Japanese port, Yokosuka, despite objections from the people and the "pacifist" leaders there.

The planned relocating of a U.S. air facility within Japan's Okinawa prefecture, overriding its population's long-time resistance to the American military presence there, is also a pointer to the "political will" of the two governments to remodel and firm up their alliance.

No longer taboo

As of now, Tokyo still swears by its official policy of "nuclear pacifism" in response to the ongoing nuclear-weapons-programme of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in Japan's immediate neighbourhood. However, the idea of "nuclear-weapons option" is no longer taboo in Japan's increasingly sophisticated defence-related discourse.

More important for the present is the newly-stated intention of the U.S. and Japan to move towards a "joint-operations posture." Outlined, too, is the "planned transition" by Japan's "pacifist" military or Self-Defence Forces towards such a posture in association with the U.S.

The U.S. and Japan have also emphasised the need to improve "inter-operability" as a key aspect of their current and future military planning. The overall thrust of the new plans, which include a marginal U.S. force reduction in Japan, is to enhance their joint military preparedness.

Regardless of the complex technical details, the move by the U.S. and Japan to strike a "joint-operations posture" is a qualitatively new feature of the East Asian security landscape. For China and others, this is an emerging reality to reckon with.

Authoritative Chinese sources say Japan's historical trait of "militarism" is like the adventurism of Bismarck, and they compare this with India's "historically benign influence" of propagating Buddhism across East Asia. From a Western perspective, steeped in the present-day theories of *realpolitik*, Japan is now as much a factor in the U.S.-China relations as Washington is in the Beijing-Tokyo equation.

According to Robert L. Suettinger, an intelligence-official-turned-international-affairs-expert, the U.S.-China relationship "has become the sum of its disagreements and the product of mistakes and misperceptions." A question now is whether the new U.S.-Japan defence accord will add to "the [existing] sum" of the "disagreements" between Beijing and Washington.

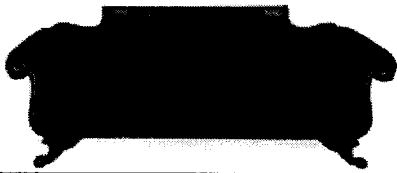
Beijing has already criticised the U.S. and Japan for extending the political sweep of their "common strategic objectives" to include the Taiwan question, which China regards as entirely its internal matter. Identifying these "objectives" in February this year, Japan and the U.S. took it upon themselves to "encourage the peaceful resolution" of the Taiwan issue. China has seen this move as an attempt to seek an unacceptable strategic say over the matter.

Not surprisingly, Mr. Bush, who on November 16 spoke of Taiwan's "democracy" as a possible model for China itself, appeared willing to wound Beijing (diplomatically) but was really afraid to strike. Even before making the comment, he said he was "not necessarily trying to compare one system to another." A relevant question, therefore, is whether Mr. Bush will be equally circumspect about China's sensitivities as he refashions the U.S.' alliance with Japan.

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Ms. Rice's Dealmaking

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WITH A CRUCIAL push from Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Israelis and Palestinians have at last taken a step toward converting Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip into a sustained movement toward peace. An agreement reached early Tuesday morning promises Palestinians in Gaza the access to the outside world necessary to convert their tiny, crowded territory from a detention camp into a statelet. It also gives Israel means to cope with the increased risk to its own security that such access necessarily creates. Needed months ago, the accord was stalled by eruptions of violence, domestic political complications on both sides, and the mutual distrust of Israeli and Palestinian leaders: Each side suspects that the other is not willing or able to follow President Bush's "road map" for a negotiated two-state settlement. By clinching the deal, Ms. Rice preserved the possibility that Mr. Bush's plan could still go forward.

The secretary of state also visibly broke with the Bush administration's self-defeating aversion to the kind of high-level, hands-on diplomacy that a half-dozen previous administrations had relied on to catalyze action in the Middle East. Stopping in the region for the fourth time this year, Ms. Rice extended her stay in Jerusalem by a day and then worked through the night on a laptop with Israeli and Palestinian negotiators. The groundwork for the access agreement had been laid in endless talks brokered by international envoy James D. Wolfensohn. But as several officials observed, it's doubtful that the final deal would have been struck without intervention by Ms. Rice. Her success places her in the company of former secretaries James A. Baker III, George P. Shultz and Henry A. Kissinger -- not to mention former presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton -- who understood that the gulf between Israelis and Palestinians could not be bridged without such personal

NEWS ANALYSIS

For Rice, a Risky Dive Into the Mideast Storm

By STEVEN R. WEISMAN
Published: November 16, 2005

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PUSAN, South Korea, Wednesday, Nov. 16 - Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice spent all day and night successfully brokering an accord on Tuesday on security controls at a Gaza border crossing, suddenly elevating the Bush administration's involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to a new level.

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Mohammed Saber/European Pressphoto Agency

A Palestinian policeman at the Rafah crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. The Gaza side of the border is to come under Palestinian control.

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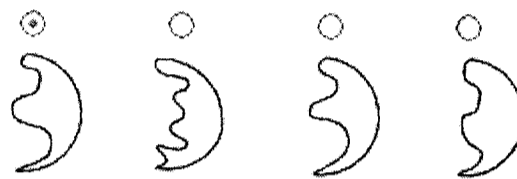
Until now President Bush and Secretary Rice have avoided taking risks in the conflict, confining their diplomacy to

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Forum: The Middle East

consultations, exhortations, drive-by visits to the region and documents like the "road map" to a Palestinian state, which calls for several steps by Palestinians and Israelis, few of which have occurred.

What changed this week, State Department officials said, was mounting alarm at the bitter impasse over the Gaza Strip after the Israeli withdrawal last summer and fear of more instability and frustration that could lead to a rebuke of the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, in parliamentary elections in January.

That sense of urgency, driven by warnings from Washington's Arab and European allies as well as from American envoys, prompted Ms. Rice's unusual personal participation in the negotiations in Jerusalem. That resulted in the accord announced early Tuesday morning giving Palestinians control over a Gaza crossing, with monitors from the European Union. [Page A10.]

The Arab and European allies pressed for more American efforts to untangle the issues paralyzing the peace negotiations. Diplomats from allied countries have said the credibility of Mr. Bush and Ms. Rice is at risk, and they have besieged Ms. Rice to seize the opportunity or lose what they regard as the last chance of making peace for years to come.

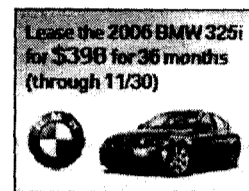
"A lot of diplomacy is about when things are ripe for movement," a senior State Department official said. "There was the sense that now was the time to really

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capitalize on the situation." The official insisted on anonymity under the department's ground rules for briefings.

Ms. Rice arrived in Pusan on Wednesday morning to attend the Asia-Pacific economic conference.

Another form of pressure came from James D. Wolfensohn, the Middle East envoy of the so-called quartet consisting of the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations. Mr. Wolfensohn had begun blaming a lack of American involvement for the impasse behind the scenes.

"If you are an envoy of the quartet you have a certain amount of possibilities in negotiations," Mr. Wolfensohn, a former president of the World Bank, said in Jerusalem on Tuesday. "If you are the secretary of state of the United States, I would have to say, there is a little more clout associated with it. And to push it over the edge one needs not envoys, but secretaries of state."

The challenge for Ms. Rice now is to keep the process going, since the Gaza agreement will be difficult to carry out and the next phase of efforts to ease tensions promises to stir resentment on both sides.

Israelis and Palestinians are now likely to demand more American involvement on a range of issues, from the Palestinians' call for Israel to ease its presence in the West Bank to the Israeli demand for a crackdown on Hamas and other militant groups. Ms. Rice took office early this year amid criticism that the Bush administration had relied largely on force in its first term. "The

time for diplomacy is now," she said then.

But she has effectively outsourced the negotiations on North Korea to a consortium of partners led by China and left dealings with Iran to a team led by Britain, France and Germany. On the Middle East now, the United States is front and center.

Probably the most difficult aspect of Washington's enhanced role is that it could lead to more American pressure on Israel. This week Ms. Rice leaned heavily on Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his aides to ease Israeli controls over the people and goods going in and out of the Gaza Strip. How much pressure she can exert on other matters depends on a peaceful Israeli-Palestinian situation, something that is outside American control.

If suicide or rocket attacks resume, with Gaza as a base, American pressure on Israel to freeze the expansion of its settlements and the building of its security barrier, or to lift checkpoints and roadblocks in the West Bank, will probably be out of the question.

At the same time that Ms. Rice was negotiating the accord, former President Bill Clinton was in Jerusalem for memorials to Yitzhak Rabin, the prime minister who was assassinated 10 years ago. Mr. Clinton got rapturous receptions. But Mr. Bush has deliberately avoided his example in most cases, particularly his personal involvement in the Middle East.

Ms. Rice had also avoided personal involvement, and last February she deliberately left the region to avoid appearing at a summit meeting of Arab, Palestinian and Israeli leaders in Sharm el

Sheik, Egypt, to complete the Gaza withdrawal plan.

But when she arrived in Jerusalem on Sunday, aides said she was determined that this trip was going to be different, in part because of Mr. Wolfensohn's dire warnings about the deteriorating situation.

"We're going to get this done while I'm here," Ms. Rice told Mr. Sharon and Mr. Abbas in separate meetings, according to State Department officials. The two leaders' reaction, the officials said, was skepticism, and there were suggestions that she narrow the scope of what she wanted to accomplish in one day of talks.

Some issues have indeed been put off - not simply the details of carrying out the agreement but also plans for an airport for the Palestinians. Also deferred are the issues of Israel's presence in the West Bank and actions that the Americans wanted Mr. Abbas to undertake to disarm militant groups. Rebuffing American requests, he has said he cannot confront those armed groups until after the elections in January.

American officials vow to hold Mr. Abbas to his promise, saying he should realize how much his standing in Washington will be on the line.

On Tuesday, Ms. Rice, who got two hours of sleep Monday night, was getting some rest. "We have a long road ahead, a long road ahead," Ms. Rice said earlier in the day. "I have to say as a football fan, sometimes the last yard is the hardest, and I think we experienced that today."

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...And Bush begins his tour



In Seoul on Tuesday. — AFP

Indo-Asian News Service

OSAKA, Nov. 15. — US President Mr George W Bush arrived in Japan today as part of his Asia trip that will take him also to China, Mongolia and South Korea.

He arrived at Osaka International Airport and headed for the ancient Japanese city of Kyoto where he is set to meet Japanese Prime Minister Mr Junichiro Koizumi on a string of issues such as Japan's ban on US beef and reinforcement of the two countries' decades-old alliance.

The US President hopes his Asia tour will help improve his image to the world as his popularity stumbles at home.

Two agenda items on Mr Bush's trip were the huge Chinese trade surplus with the USA and a dispute between Washington and Tokyo over US beef imports, National Security

Adviser Mr Stephen Hadley told reporters aboard the presidential plane earlier. Neither dispute was expected to be resolved on the President's trip, Mr Hadley said.

Japan, the first stop on Mr Bush's trip, and Mongolia, the last, are likely to give him the most enthusiastic response, while China and South Korea probably will be cooler, but respectful.

In Japan, the President will deliver what aides bill as the speech of the trip on the power of democracy, not only to better individual lives but to contribute to the long-term prosperity of nations. The remarks, aimed at China, will hold up such nations as Japan, Australia and South Korea as models because of their strong democratic traditions and willingness to help establish democracy in places like Afghanistan and Iraq.

(With AP inputs)

Bush didn't mislead US on Iraq: Aide

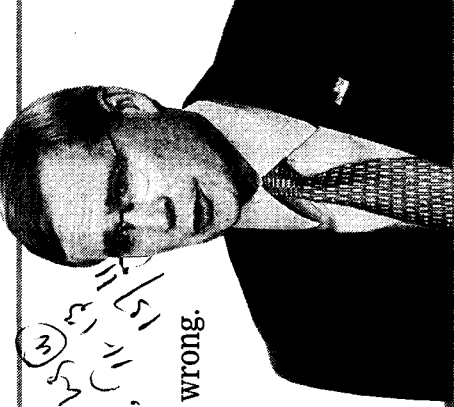
White House Pursues Campaign Against Detractors As Pressure Mounts On Prez

Washington: US President George W Bush did not manipulate pre-war intelligence about Iraq, a top White House aide said on Sunday, as the administration pursued its campaign against critics who say the president misled the country.

National security adviser Stephen Hadley told CNN's *Late Edition* that Bush relied on the same intelligence that his predecessor Bill Clinton saw and that 77 of 100 senators used in 2002 to back Bush on the use of force in Iraq.

"I think the point that we need to emphasise here was, allegations now that the president somehow manipulated intelligence, somehow misled the American people are flat wrong," Hadley said.

With public support for the war in Iraq waning and polls showing Bush reaching new lows in popularity, the White House has begun to strike back at critics who have said his administration misused intelligence on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction to justify the war. Bush used his Veterans Day speech on Friday to defend his use of intelligence, saying it was irresponsible to rewrite the history of how that war began and that his critics were



The allegations that the president somehow manipulated intelligence, somehow misled the American people are flat wrong. Bush relied on the same intelligence as his predecessor and that 77 of 100 senators used in 2002 to back him

—Stephen Hadley

this month imposed a rare closed session of the Senate to push majority Republicans to complete a probe on whether the pre-war intelligence was misused.

Administration officials have acknowledged the intelligence on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction was faulty, but said Democrats, Republicans as well as foreign intelligence agencies believed Baghdad had stockpiles of deadly weapons before the March 2003 US-led invasion. Senator Carl Levin (news, bio, voting record), a Michigan Democrat, said on CNN that it is not just a question of White House officials pressuring analysts to change information. An earlier Senate investigation found no such pressure.

Levin said it was more a question of how the White House manipulated flawed intelligence, particularly as it related to the relationship between ousted Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and Al Qaida. "The intelligence community was dubious of that link, and yet the president of the US made out that link to exist. He said there was no difference between Al Qaida and Saddam Hussein," Levin said. Reuters

top officials, particularly Vice President Dick Cheney, manipulated intelligence on Iraq and leaked classified information to discredit critics of the war.

Lewis 'Scooter' Libby, a top aide to Cheney, was indicted last month for obstructing justice, perjury and lying after a two-year investigation into the leak of covert CIA operative Valerie Plame's identity.

Plame's husband has said she was ousted to get back at him for his criticism of the war. Democrats earlier

sending the wrong signal to US troops as well as to US enemies.

Democratic Party chief Howard Dean, criticised Bush's speech in an interview on NBC's *Meet the Press*. "The president didn't even tell the truth in his speech," Dean said. "He said that the Senate had the same intelligence that everybody else did. That was not true. He withheld some intelligence."

The administration's aggressive campaign followed stepped up charges by Senate Democrats that

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Bush free trade plan fails to take off

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Mar del Plata, November 5



AP A man kicks in a bank window in protest against Bush's presence at the Summit of the Americas.

WITH THE George W. Bush failing to garner support among his fellow leaders at the Summit of the Americas for his free trade zone, the two-day summit which was overshadowed by rampaging protesters, remained deadlocked on Saturday.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said talks to lift trade barriers from Canada to Chile must wait until after the World Trade Organisation hosts key negotiations in Hong Kong next month to craft a global treaty slashing tariffs and farm subsidies and boosting the planet's economy. "Anything we do now could confuse the facts and we'd be creating an impediment to the WTO," Silva said.

Earlier, protesters opposed to Bush and the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas clashed on the streets with riot police, burning and ransacking businesses just 10 blocks from the summit venue. No major injuries were reported. Security remained tight at the summit site, where a huge downtown section remained closed by metal barriers and police and soldiers toted semiautomatic weapons.

While Bush's harshest critic Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez declared the deal dead, Mexican President Vicente Fox insisted it was "a personal position of the Venezuelan President".

Summit participants were expected to include language in their final declaration about the FTA, but appeared set to fail to include an April date to restart high-level talks wanted by 29 of the 34 Latin American and Caribbean nations holding the event.

The declaration also was expected to address key issues for Latin America — including job creation, immigration and disaster relief for an area that is often devastated by hurricanes and earthquakes.

But the battle over FTAA's future dominated the summit. Fox said the 29 countries want a version adopted that sets the April deadline for negotiations, but the dissenters were holding out for language that mentions no date because key issues like agricultural subsidies for American farmers have not been addressed.

Venezuela is the only country that vehemently opposes the trade zone. Chavez has said an anti-FTA deal should be formed just for Latin America and the Caribbean based on socialist ideals.



TORTURE LICENSE

US Vice President Dick Cheney (left) made an unusual personal appeal to his fellow Republican senators this week to exempt the CIA from a proposed ban on torture of terror suspects in US custody.

ETHICS LESSONS

Under pressure to set his house in order following the CIA leak scandal, George W. Bush has asked his staff to undergo compulsory briefings on ethical behaviour and handling of classified material.

HITTING BACK

A top Bush aide hit back at the US President's arch rival Hugo Chavez, expressing concern about the status of democracy in his home country Venezuela, and doubted whether it needs a nuclear reactor.

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Pro-Israel Group Criticizes White House Policy on Iran

At Issue Is New Stance on Tehran's Nuclear Program
[FINAL Edition]

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After years of unwavering support for the Bush administration, the powerful pro-Israel lobbying group AIPAC has begun to s the White House over its handling of Iran's nuclear program.

In lengthy news releases and talking points circulated to supporters on Capitol Hill, AIPAC describes the Bush administratio policy decisions on Iran as "dangerous," "disturbing" and "inappropriate." One background paper suggests that White House actually helping Iran -- a sworn enemy of the Jewish state -- to acquire nuclear weapons.

The tough words from one of Washington's most well-connected and influential lobbies come at a difficult time for President been struggling with low poll numbers and growing public discontent over the war in Iraq.

Bush raised AIPAC's concerns in a recent telephone conversation with British Prime Minister Tony Blair when the two discu officials said.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee has tussled with past administrations -- Democratic and Republican -- but not has staked his presidency on a vow to bring democracy to a region dominated by Israel's enemies -- chiefly Iran, Iraq and S

At issue for AIPAC is Bush's decision last month to hold off on pushing to report Iran's nuclear case to the U.N. Security Co president and Israel have favored reporting it for the past two years. But with little support from other key U.S. allies, Bush r

and endorsed a Russian offer that would allow Iran to conduct some, but not all, of the nuclear work it says it needs for an independent nuclear energy program.

Iran has not been receptive to the Russian offer. Iranian diplomats met with their European counterparts in Vienna on Wednesday to discuss the offer. Diplomats said there were no breakthroughs, but the parties agreed to meet again in January.

If Iran accepts the terms, it would be allowed to produce unlimited quantities of converted uranium. That material would be sent to Russia for enrichment and then returned to Iran to fuel a nuclear power reactor.

In a statement to members of Congress, AIPAC said that it "is concerned that the decision not to go to the Security Council, the U.S. decision to support the 'Russian proposal,' indicates a disturbing shift in the Administration's policy on Iran and poses a threat to the U.S. and our allies."

National security adviser Stephen J. Hadley said he hopes the plan "may provide a way out" of a two-year crisis over a nuclear program that Iran says is peaceful but was secretly built over 18 years.

Critics of the Russian plan, including some inside the administration, argue that it would allow Iran to master a critical component of a nuclear program: converted uranium. Converted uranium, if enriched to bomb-grade, can be used for the core of a nuclear reactor.

U.N. nuclear inspectors are on the third year of an investigation of Iran's nuclear program. They have not found proof of a weapons program, but mounting evidence suggests that the Iranians have spent the past two decades acquiring the knowledge and technology that could be used to build an atomic bomb.

"This decision will facilitate Iran's quest for nuclear weapons and undermines international efforts to stop Iran from achieving that capability," AIPAC told supporters and policymakers in a paper circulated after Thanksgiving. The position paper urged the administration to work quickly toward reporting Iran's case to the Security Council, where it could face sanctions or an oil embargo.

AIPAC, which describes itself as nonpartisan, has criticized nearly every administration's Middle East policies, often speaking out against Israeli government officials who express private frustration with U.S. policies.

But the news releases mark the first major criticism of the Bush White House and come as the administration is focused on Iraq and has no clear path on Iran.

At the same time, Iran's new president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has become increasingly hostile toward Israel. In October, after he took office, Ahmadinejad said that Israel should be "wiped off the map." Earlier this month, he told Iranians in a national television speech that the murder of 6 million Jews at the hands of the Nazis during World War II is "a myth."

"AIPAC is taking the public statements seriously. They're alarmed by a nuclear capability, and the administration appears to be taking an approach that isn't changing Iranian behavior," said Dennis Ross, a U.S. envoy to the Middle East during the Clinton administration.

Ross said the criticisms, though serious, are unlikely to lead to an all-out rift between AIPAC and the administration. "At the end of the day, every administration does what it needs to do, but obviously they will have to pay attention to this," he said.

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President Bush last night hailed Thursday's Iraqi elections as a vital step toward stabilizing that nation, but warned that despite the political progress more violence lies ahead as Iraq struggles to establish a democracy amid a raging insurgency.

Speaking in a nationally televised prime-time address, Bush made a direct appeal to war opponents, conveying a more humble tone in saying he understands their arguments but asserting that there is no choice but to forge on. "I have heard your disagreement and I know how deeply it is felt," Bush said. "Yet now there are only two options before our country: victory or defeat."

The speech also included his most forthright statement to date about how often Iraq has confounded his own expectations, from weapons of mass destruction that were not found to the problems of reconstructing a civil society in Iraq. "Much of the intelligence turned out to be wrong. And as your president, I am responsible for the decision to go into Iraq," he said. "Yet it was right to remove Saddam Hussein from power."

The 17-minute address capped



President Bush said in his nationally televised speech about the war in Iraq that "to retreat before victory would be an act of recklessness and dishonor -- and I will not allow it." (Aptn Via Associated Press)

Transcript of President Bush's Remarks on Iraq
Read the text of the president's televised

an intense campaign in recent weeks by the White House to recast the Iraq debate, at a time when rising public skepticism threatens to overwhelm his presidency. Over the past three weeks, Bush has released a new plan for victory, hosted private White House briefings for skeptical members of Congress and delivered four other speeches laying out a more detailed explanation of his war strategy, 33 months after U.S. forces first invaded.

Despite the U.S. death toll -- which is approaching 2,200 -- and widespread skepticism about the war on Capitol Hill and with citizens across in the country, Bush said the United States is making steady gains in Iraq, and suggested that these will lead to troop reductions in the year ahead.

"Some look at the challenges in Iraq and conclude that the war is lost, and not worth another dime or another day," Bush said. "I don't believe that. Our military commanders don't believe that. Our troops in the field, who bear the burden and make the sacrifice, do not believe that America has lost. And not even the terrorists believe it."

Even as he struck a more deferential tone, Bush sought to put his political adversaries on the defensive, saying that "defeatism may have its partisan uses, but it is not justified by the facts."

He also repeated his warning against a rapid withdrawal from Iraq, saying that "to retreat before

speech.



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POLITICS TRIVIA

Former Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis.) died at age 90 on Thursday. Proxmire used to give an award each month acknowledging examples of government waste. What was the name of that award?

- Big Spender Award
- Pork Barrel Prize
- Golden Fleece Award
- William's Waste Award

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victory would be an act of recklessness and dishonor -- and I will not allow it." The carnage from roadside bombs and suicide attacks by insurgents in Iraq does not constitute defeat, he added: "This proves that the war is difficult -- it does not mean that we are losing."

Earlier in the day, Vice President Cheney made an unannounced trip to Iraq, keeping it secret even from Iraq's prime minister, who did not know the vice president would be there until walking into a meeting and finding Cheney waiting for him. Cheney's visit occurred against the backdrop of renewed violence, as more than 30 people died in suicide bombings and other attacks since Saturday night.

Visiting with U.S. troops, Cheney -- who in May said the insurgency in Iraq was in its "last throes" -- said that "remarkable" progress is being made there. "I think we've turned the corner, if you will," he said in response to a question from a Marine corporal. "I think when we look back from 10 years hence, we'll see that the year '05 was in fact a watershed year here in Iraq."

Officials traveling with Cheney called it a coincidence that his first visit to Iraq since the fall of Hussein in April 2003 occurred on the same day as Bush's speech. "It just worked out that way," a senior administration said.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the White House hopes the success of Iraq's parliamentary election, particularly in drawing the country's embittered Sunni minority to the polls, proves to be a turning point in the difficult war. Bush was uncharacteristically contrite in his remarks, as he appealed for continued patience from the American people in coming months.

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