

Washington Goes to War

By Jim Lobe

War has been declared in Washington, although it's not against any foreign country. At least for the moment, it's an inside the Beltway war, but its outcome will have global repercussions.

The war, which should get into high gear when Congress returns from its August recess early next month, is for the heart and mind of President George W. Bush, who will come under excruciating pressure by October or November to decide whether or not the United States will go to war against Iraq some time during the first half of next year.

This war is strictly among Republicans—between the conservative realists who dominated the administration of former President George H.W. Bush and the predominantly neo-conservative coalition of hawks clustered in the civilian leadership of the Pentagon and in Vice President Dick Cheney's office.

A series of leaks this month from senior military brass who have grown increasingly distrustful of the adventurism of their civilian bosses marked the preliminary skirmishes in the conflict. Recently, the war burst into the open when the elder Bush's national security adviser, ret. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, issued a broadside against the idea of going to war with Iraq in the editorial pages of the staunchly hawkish *Wall Street Journal*.

Arguing that war against Baghdad would likely destroy international cooperation in the war against terrorism, Scowcroft also warned that it "could well destabilize Arab regimes in the region, ironically facilitating one of Saddam's strategic objectives."

Scowcroft, who doubles as the chairman of the current Presidential Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB) and hence has access to top-secret intelligence, also cast doubt on rumors of any link between Iraqi President

Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda, let alone the Sep 11 terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon. Left alone, the Scowcroft op-ed would have created a stir but not the sensation it has as a result of the lead article published by the *New York Times* one day later that cited Scowcroft's dissent as the core of what it headlined, "Top Republicans Break with Bush on Iraq Strategy."

Citing Scowcroft's article as well as another column by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger that argued that war against Saddam Hussein could be justified but that Washington had to do much more in cultivating public and international support for it, the *Times* also quoted unnamed senior State Department officials as saying that they were trying desperately to halt the course toward war in intra-administration debates.

The *Times* also quoted another former Republican secretary of state, Lawrence Eagleburger, as sharing Scowcroft's views and cited a Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as a leading the forces oppose to the war. The response was not long in coming. On Monday morning, readers awakened to a double blast aimed at both the *Times* and Scowcroft by two leading neoconservative organs—the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Weekly Standard*, which often speak for the Pentagon and Cheney hawks in the administration.

In its lead editorial entitled "This is Opposition?" the *Journal* ridiculed the notion of a split in Republican ranks and went after Hagel, Scowcroft, and Secretary of State Colin Powell as practitioners of a *realpolitik* which "striv(es) for balance of power in the old European sense, (and) resists a foreign policy with a strong moral component or one designed to expand U.S. principles and democracy."

“So it typically favors ‘stability,’ even when it’s imposed by dictators, over democratic aspiration,” according to the *Journal’s* writers, who went on to catalogue a series of “mistaken judgments” allegedly made by Scowcroft, Eagleburger, and Powell during the first Bush administration: failure to intervene against Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic; favoring the maintenance of the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev; and, worst, urging Bush I to “stop the Gulf War early, based in part on a CIA fear that a divided Iraq without a dictator was worse than a ‘stable’ Iraq ruled by Saddam or his Baath Party successor.”

In a second article, which looked as though it could have been written by the same author, the *Standard* weighed in Monday morning with its own attack on Scowcroft and the *Times* in an article entitled “The Axis of Appeasement” by the publication’s chief editor, William Kristol, who doubles as cofounder of the Project for a New American Century (PNAC), a five-year-old front group that consists of close associates of the Pentagon-Cheney forces. (Both Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Cheney signed PNAC’s first declarations.)

It accused the *Times* of “shamelessly” mischaracterizing Kissinger’s position, noting that “the establishment fights most bitterly and honestly when it feels cornered and thinks it’s about to lose.”

“Reading the Scowcroft/*New York Times* ‘arguments’ against the war, one is struck by how laughably weak they are,” wrote Kristol, adding “European international-law wishful-

ness and full-blown Pat Buchanan isolationism are the two intellectually honest alternatives to the Bush Doctrine. Scowcroft and the *Times* wish to embrace neither, so they pretend instead to be terribly ‘concerned’ with the administration’s alleged failure to ‘make the case’ (for going to war).”

But the central target of Kristol’s attack was Powell, who served as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Bush I and has long been a target of neoconservative wrath. After citing defenses of Bush policy by Rumsfeld, Cheney and national security adviser Condoleezza Rice (a Scowcroft protégée), Kristol asked, “Where is Colin Powell?” According to Kristol, “This secretary of state, because of his popularity at home and his stature abroad, could be particularly helpful if he were to join the president, the vice president, the national security adviser, and the defense secretary in making the case for the Bush Doctrine with respect to Iraq. Instead, he allows his top aides to tell the *New York Times* on background that he disagrees with the president and is desperately trying to restrain him.” “Colin Powell,” the piece went on, “is an impressive man. He is loyally assisted by the able (Deputy Secretary of State) Richard Armitage. They are entitled to their foreign policy views. But they will soon have to decide whom they wish to serve—the president, or his opponents.”

This first exchange of cannon-fire took place in the sweltering mid-August heat when most Washingtonians have fled for cooler climes in the mountains, the

seashore, or Europe. So a lull in the rhetorical fireworks can be expected over the next two weeks.

But battle lines have for the first time been clearly drawn, and an intensification of the war can be expected. On one side, the ranks will be led by Rumsfeld and Cheney and their cheerleaders outside the administration at the *Journal*, the *Standard*, a handful of other publications; on the other will stand the Bush I veterans led by Scowcroft outside the administration and Powell and the not inconsiderable help of the military brass within.

(The *Journal’s* website this weekend featured an article by PNAC associate and military strategist Eliot Cohen warning that “military leaders must defer to their civilian bosses.”) How the Democrats weigh in—and they, too, face strong divisions on the issue of war on Iraq—remains to be seen.

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For more information on The Project for the New American Century (PNAC) see:

U.S. Foreign Policy—Attention, Right Face, Forward March

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