

# Neoconservatives Enlist Democrats for Post-War Goals

By Jim Lobe | March 24, 2003

With the war underway, new battle lines to shape the parameters of U.S. policy toward post-war Iraq have moved out of the shadows and into public view. Neoconservatives who allied themselves with traditional right-wing Republicans to push for war in Iraq are now trying to enlist veterans of the Democratic administration of former President Bill Clinton to realize their post-war plans for transforming Iraq.

In a new letter released earlier this week, the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), a neoconservative front group that often speaks for neoconservative hawks in the Pentagon and Vice President Dick Cheney's office, said that the "successful disarming, rebuilding, and democratic reform of Iraq can contribute decisively to the democratization of the wider Middle East," which, the group stressed, should be considered "an objective of overriding strategic importance to the United States."

And, in an implicit swipe at forces, including right-wing administration hawks who have argued for withdrawing U.S. forces as quickly as possible after the ouster of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and the destruction of any weapons of mass destruction (WMD) found in the country, the letter emphasized that Washington should be engaged for the long haul. "Everyone—those who have joined the coalition, those who have stood aside, those who opposed military action, and, most of all, the Iraqi people and their neighbors—must understand that we are committed to the rebuilding of Iraq and will provide the necessary resources and will remain for as long as it takes."

"Any early fixation on exit strategies and departure deadlines will undercut American credibility and greatly diminish the prospects for success," the letter, which was signed by 23 prominent neoconservatives and former Clinton advisers, asserts. The letter must be considered significant if only because previous PNAC letters have anticipated the trajectory of the Bush administration's policy in fighting its war on terrorism since the publication of its first missive on the war nine days after the terrorist attacks on New York and the Pentagon.

On September 20, the group sent a letter signed by 40 individuals—almost all of whom were neoconservatives, traditional Republican right-wingers, or members of

the Christian Right—that called for Bush to extend the war on terrorism beyond al Qaeda and Afghanistan by cutting off aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA), pressing Syria and Iran to cease aiding Lebanon's Hezbollah movement, and removing Hussein from power in Iraq "even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the (Sept. 11) attack." Six months later, the group called for Washington to break ties with the PA's Yassir Arafat and to provide the government of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon with Washington's "full support" in his efforts to suppress Palestinian "terrorism." Bush adopted all those positions fully by the end of June.

There is little question about the source of PNAC's influence. When it was founded in 1997 by two prominent neoconservatives, William Kristol and Robert Kagan, its charter, which called for a U.S. strategy of global pre-eminence based on military power, was signed by men who would become the most influential hawks in the Bush administration, including Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security John Bolton, and Cheney's influential national security adviser, I. Lewis Libby.

But while Rumsfeld, Cheney, and Bolton are traditional right-wing Republicans, most of PNAC's backers are neoconservatives—mostly former Democrats, or even Trotskyites, who moved to the right in reaction to the anti-Vietnam War movement and the UN's denunciations of Israel in the late 1960s and 1970s. While they share the unilateralism of Republican right-wingers, they tend to be much more committed to the idea that the United States has a global mission to fulfill, and that the U.S. political and economic "model" should be exported to the rest of the world, by force if necessary.

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During the 1990s, for example, they excoriated right-wing Republican lawmakers who opposed Clinton's interventions in the Balkans and even in Haiti for neo-isolationism and for betraying Washington's mission to export democracy and protect vulnerable minorities. And, despite their influence within the Bush administration, they have loudly criticized it for failing to devote more resources—particularly in security and reconstruction aid—to Afghanistan after ousting the Taliban regime in late 2001.

Those same criticisms have been voiced by Democrats in Congress who continue to complain that the administration's reliance on military power in the conduct of foreign affairs has been far too narrow. The failure to provide more economic or security support, according to this view, could result in Afghanistan returning to its previous status as a "failed state" in which terrorists could flourish. Within the administration, however, Cheney, Rumsfeld, and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice have rejected these arguments, insisting that the United States should not be in the business of "nation-building" or "social work."

A similar split appears to be developing over Iraq. "For the hard (Republican) right, this is really about getting Saddam Hussein and these weapons of mass destruction and taking out what they see as a threat to American security, and then they're really going to want to come home," says Charles Kupchan of the Council on Foreign Relations. "I think Rumsfeld just doesn't want to remake the Middle East; he probably approaches that task with revulsion." Liberals, on the other hand, "might back a kind of Good Samaritan, let's-occupy-and-change-or-pacify-Islam (project)," Kupchan says.

That appears to be the tack the neoconservatives at PNAC are now taking. In apparent anticipation of Rumsfeld and other Republican right-wingers want-

ing to get out of Iraq relatively early, the neoconservatives are recruiting Clinton veterans to press for a longer and more comprehensive U.S. commitment to transforming Iraq and the greater Middle East.

Thus, among the signers who have never before been associated with PNAC, are Robert Asmus, a former deputy secretary of state for Europe; Ivo Daalder, a prominent member of Clinton's National Security Council staff; Robert Gelbard, a former U.S. ambassador to Chile and Indonesia; Martin Indyk, Clinton's ambassador to Israel; Dennis Ross, his chief adviser on Palestinian-Israeli negotiations; Walter Slocombe, Clinton's top policy official at the Pentagon; and, most important, James Steinberg, Clinton's deputy national security adviser who now heads foreign policy studies at the influential Brookings Institution.

In addition to calling for a major, long-term commitment to rebuilding and transforming Iraq, the letter urges a possible key role for NATO "and other international institutions" in long-term security arrangements and in rebuilding Iraq. Significantly, it does not mention the United Nations by name.

A key neoconservative leader and the chairman of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board, Richard Perle, has in recent days strongly denounced the UN Security Council as an "abject failure." While Perle's signature did not appear on the PNAC letter, those of all of his closest colleagues at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), where he is based, did. PNAC is based in the AEI building in downtown Washington.

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Recommended citation:

Jim Lobe, "Neoconservatives Enlist Democrats for Post-War Goals," (Silver City, NM & Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, March 24, 2003).

Web location:

<http://www.presentdanger.org/commentary/2003/0303pnacletter.html>