

## Calls to Attack Syria Come from a Familiar Choir of Hawks

By Jim Lobe | April 16, 2003

Many of the same people who led the campaign for war against Iraq signed a report released three years ago that called for using military force to disarm Syria of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and to end its military presence in Lebanon.

Among the signers are several senior members of the administration of President George W. Bush, including the chief Middle East aide on the National Security Council, Elliott Abrams; Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith; Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky; and senior consultants to both the State Department and the Pentagon on Iraq policy, Michael Rubin and David Wurmser. Also signing were Richard Perle, the powerful former chairman of the Defense Policy Board (DPB); Jeanne Kirkpatrick, former United Nations ambassador; Frank Gaffney, a former Perle aide who heads the Center for Defense Policy; Michael Ledeen, another close Perle collaborator at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI); and David Steinmann, chairman of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA).

The study, *Ending Syria's Occupation of Lebanon: The U.S. Role*, was co-authored by Daniel Pipes, who has just been nominated by Bush to a post at the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP), and Ziad Abdelnour, who heads a group founded by him called the United States Committee for a Free Lebanon (USCFL). The study was released by Pipes' group, the Middle East Forum.

The USCFL, whose 67 "Golden Circle" members include virtually all of the 31 signatories of the report, has been a major force behind the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act that was just reintroduced in the House of Representatives last Friday by Reps. Eliot Engel, a USCFL member, and Ileana Ros Lehtinen. The legislation, which had 150 cosponsors in the House last year, would impose far-reaching economic and diplomatic sanctions against Syria until the president certified that it has stopped all support to Lebanon's Hezbollah militia and other groups that Washington considers "terrorist," the government withdraws its estimated 20,000 troops from Lebanon, and takes other measures long demanded by Washington.

### Getting Serious about Syria

"Now that Saddam Hussein's regime (in Iraq) is defeated," Engel said April 11, "it is time for America to get serious about Syria. The United States must not tolerate (its) continued support of the most deadly terrorist organizations in the world, its development of weapons of mass destruction, and its occupation of Lebanon." He said a companion measure, cosponsored by Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer and Republican Sen. Rick Santorum will soon be introduced in the Senate. The action comes amid a two-week-old flurry of threats by top administration officials against Syria over its alleged failure to cooperate with Washington's military campaign against Baghdad.

Those threats culminated Sunday when Bush himself accused Syria of having chemical weapons, although he did not specify whether they were home-grown or received from Iraq for safe-keeping, as alleged by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon earlier this year and repeated by senior Pentagon officials. Last week, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld accused Syria of harboring members of Hussein's regime, and, asked whether Damascus was "next" after Iraq, replied that "it depends on people's behavior." Intelligence officials told reporters last week that Rumsfeld had ordered the drawing up of contingency plans for a possible invasion of Syria and that Feith, the Pentagon's number three official, had begun work on a policy paper about Syria's support of terrorist groups.

"There's got to be a change in Syria," said Deputy Secretary of State Paul Wolfowitz last Sunday on a TV network news program. "It is a strange regime, one of extreme ruthlessness." At the same time, former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director James Woolsey, a favorite of Wolfowitz and Perle who may be tapped to play a top political role in post-war Iraq, declared that Washington was fighting enemies in a "World War IV" that includes "fascists of Iraq and Syria," a reference to Syria's ruling Baath Party.



---

These statements have contributed to the growing impression that administration hawks do indeed consider Syria next on the list, although some have also made clear that if President Bashar Assad—who CIA sources have said has generally cooperated with U.S. efforts against the al Qaeda terrorist group of Osama bin Laden—meets a number of demands, possibly including turning over Iraqi officials who may have entered Syria, he is unlikely to face the full force of U.S. military power, at least for now.

Still, there is no question that the hawks, boosted by the easier-than-expected victory in Baghdad, are eager to throw their weight around, particularly in Syria's direction. This is especially true of the neoconservatives closest to the right-wing Likud Party in Israel who, 19 years after U.S. Marines completed a humiliating withdrawal from Beirut in the wake of a series of deadly bombings committed by Syria-backed Hezbollah, appear to be itching to get revenge.

Indeed, it was Assad's father Hafez who single-handedly frustrated U.S. efforts to convert the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon into a major strategic advance in the region. At the time, Abrams, Perle, Kirkpatrick, Gaffney, and Ledeen were all serving in the Ronald Reagan administration. Syria intervened in Lebanon's civil war in 1975 and has kept tens of thousands of troops there since, although they have become less conspicuous over the past decade. Except for the 18 months that followed Israel's 1982 invasion (which was led by Sharon), Damascus' influence has been decisive in Beirut's foreign and defense policy.

The 2000 study by Pipes' Middle East Forum stressed that "Syrian rule in Lebanon stands in direct opposition to American ideals," and it rued Washington's habit since 1983 of engaging rather than confronting the regime, the only government on

the State Department's "terrorism" list with which Washington has full diplomatic relations. The "Lebanon Study Group" urged a policy of confrontation, beginning with tough economic and diplomatic sanctions that could not be waived by the president and, if necessary, military force. "The Vietnam legacy and the sour memories of dead American Marines in Beirut notwithstanding," the group wrote, "the United States has entered a new era of undisputed military supremacy coupled with an appreciable drop in human losses on the battlefield." The group also warned that, "This opens the door to a similar decision to act for Lebanon's endangered freedoms and pluralism. But this opportunity may not wait, for as weapons-of-mass-destruction capabilities spread, the risks of such action will rapidly grow," in an argument eerily similar to those the hawks deployed prior to the Iraq invasion. "If there is to be decisive action, it will have to be sooner rather than later."

The USCFL, which lists Amin Gemayel—who as Lebanon's president signed an aborted peace treaty with Israel in 1983—as the top figure in the Lebanese opposition on its website, appears to enjoy strong backing from both the Christian Right and far-right Jewish neoconservatives, such as Perle, Ledeen, Steinmann, Pipes, and Gaffney. While a handful of the Lebanese-Americans listed in its "Golden Circle" are Muslim, most, including Abdelnour, an investment banker, are Christian. A plurality of "Golden Circle" members appears to be Jewish-Americans.

---

*(Jim Lobe <jlobe@starpower.net> is a political analyst with Foreign Policy in Focus (online at [www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org)). He also writes regularly for Inter Press Service.)*

---

Published by Foreign Policy In Focus (FPF), a joint project of the Interhemispheric Resource Center (IRC, online at [www.irc-online.org](http://www.irc-online.org)) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS, online at [www.ips-dc.org](http://www.ips-dc.org)). ©2003. All rights reserved.

## **Foreign Policy In Focus**

"A Think Tank Without Walls"

Established in 1996, Foreign Policy In Focus is a network of policy analysts, advocates, and activists committed to "making the United States a more responsible global leader and global partner." For more information, visit [www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org).

### Recommended citation:

Jim Lobe, "Calls to Attack Syria Come from a Familiar Choir of Hawks," (Silver City, NM & Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, April 16, 2003).

### Web location:

<http://www.presentdanger.org/commentary/2003/0304uscfl.html>

### Production Information:

Writer: Jim Lobe

Editor: John Gershman, IRC

Layout: Tonya Cannariato, IRC