

They're Back: Neocons Revive the Committee on the Present Danger, This Time against Terrorism

By Jim Lobe | July 21, 2004

A bipartisan group of 41 mainly neoconservative foreign-policy hawks has launched the latest incarnation of the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD), whose previous two incarnations mobilized public support for rolling back Soviet-led communism but whose new enemy will be “global terrorism.”

The new group, whose formation was announced at a Capitol Hill press conference July 20, said its “single mission” will be to “advocate policies intended to win the war on global terrorism—terrorism carried out by radical Islamists opposed to freedom and democracy.”

“The Committee intends to remain active until the present danger is no longer a threat, however long that takes,” said CPD chairman R. James Woolsey, who served briefly as former President Bill Clinton’s Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director and has often referred to the battle against radical Islam as “World War IV.”

Woolsey appeared with Senators Joseph Lieberman, a neoconservative Democrat who was former Vice President Al Gore’s running-mate in 2000, and John Kyl, a Republican from Arizona with strong connections to the Christian Right. In a joint column published July 20 in the *Washington Post*, the two senators argued, “Too many people are insufficiently aware of our enemy’s evil worldwide designs, which include waging jihad against all Americans and reestablishing a totalitarian religious empire in the Middle East.”

“The past struggle against communism was, in some ways, different from the current war against Islamist terrorism,” the two men wrote, evoking the two past CPDs. “But...the national and international solidarity needed to prevail over both enemies is...the same. In fact, the world war against Islamic terrorism is the test of our time.”

At the press conference later, Lieberman said the purpose of the new group was “to form a bipartisan citizens’ army, which is ready to fight a war of ideas against our Islamist terrorist enemies, and to send a clear signal that their strategy to deceive, demoralize and divide America will not succeed.”

The two senators also claimed that the new CPD consists of “citizens of diverse political persuasions,” although the vast majority of the 41 members are well-known neoconservatives who have strongly helped lead the drive to war in Iraq and have long supported broadening President George W. Bush’s “war on terrorism” to include Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, as well.

Prominently represented are fellows from the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), such as former UN Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Joshua Muravchik, Laurie Mylroie, Danielle Pletka, Michael Rubin, and Ben Wattenberg; from Pentagon chief Donald Rumsfeld’s Defense Policy Board (DPB), such as Kenneth Adelman, Newt Gingrich, and Woolsey himself; and from the Center for Security Policy (CSP), such as its president, Frank Gaffney, Charles Kupperman, William Van Cleave, and Dov Zakheim, who just stepped down as an Undersecretary of Defense under Rumsfeld.

Board members or fellows of several other right-wing or mainly neoconservative think tanks have also joined the new CPD, including the Heritage Foundation, the Hoover Institution, the Manhattan Institute, Freedom House, the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, the former Committee to



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Liberate Iraq, the National Institute for Public Policy, and the Americans for Victory Over Terrorism.

The majority of members are associated with policy statements by the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) whose charter members in 1997 included Rumsfeld, Vice President Dick Cheney and a number of other men and women who have pushed for hawkish positions on the Middle East and China, particularly from their perches at senior levels in the Bush administration.

The original CPD was formed in 1950 with the help of anti-Communist hawks in the administration of former President Harry Truman as a “citizens’ lobby” by a high-powered group of Wall Street businessmen, public-relations specialists, and university administrators to raise public concern about Soviet and Chinese threats and to mobilize support for a huge military budget aimed at maintaining U.S. military supremacy.

CPD-2, which was officially launched immediately after the election of President Jimmy Carter, was created as a coalition of neoconservatives—mostly hawkish Democrats who had supported the unsuccessful presidential candidacy of Sen. Henry Jackson of Washington State (organized as the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, or CDM)—and aggressive Republican nationalists, such as Rumsfeld, opposed to the detentist policies pursued by Henry Kissinger under former Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford.

During the Carter administration, CPD-2 essentially served as a “shadow” foreign-policy cabinet—by churning out position papers and opinion columns, holding conferences, appearing on television news shows, and brokering leaks from unhappy hawks to prominent news media—to build support for much bigger military budgets, a much more confrontational

posture vis-à-vis Moscow and for “rollback” of Soviet gains in what was then called “the Third World.”

When Ronald Reagan was subsequently elected president in 1980, no less than 46 CPD members advised his transition team, and most of them were absorbed into his administration, many at senior foreign-policy-making levels.

While none of the members of new CPD go back to the original one 50 years ago, a significant number played important roles in CPD-2, including Adelman, Kampelman, Van Cleave, Kupperman and Kirkpatrick—all of whom played prominent roles in the older group. Indeed, many CPD-3 members joined CPD-2 from the CDM, which was created to fight the anti-war forces that were becoming dominant in the Democratic Party in the early to mid-1970s.

Besides being hawkish toward the Soviet Union and friendly toward the Pentagon, both the CDM and the CDP-2 were also staunchly pro-Israeli at a time when the Jewish State found itself increasingly isolated on the world stage.

A number of members of the new CPD, including Kampelman, Kemp, Kirkpatrick, Muravchik, Gaffney, and Woolsey himself, overlap with the membership of the advisory boards of the Likud-oriented Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), the Middle East Forum, or the US Committee for a Free Lebanon. In addition, a husband-and-wife team who played key roles in the evolution of neoconservatism from the late 1960s to the present and who also were associated with both CDM and CPD-2, former Commentary editor Norman Podhoretz and his spouse, Midge Decter (who co-chaired the Committee for the Free World with Rumsfeld during the Reagan administration) have also joined the new CPD.

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Still, the new group does not include a number of individuals who would be politically compatible with its political views and institutional genealogy. The former DPB chairman and top Jackson aide, Richard Perle, for example, was not listed as a member; nor was his AEI colleague, Michael Ledeen.

Similarly, the PNAC's leadership, including *Weekly Standard* editor William Kristol, contributing editor Robert Kagan, and staff director Gary Schmitt apparently opted out. Ironically, Kristol and Kagan were co-editors of an influential 2000 foreign-policy book that envisaged much of Bush's post-September 11 foreign policy called *Present Dangers*.

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