

## Realists Resurgent?

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# New Appointments at State Department Suggest Renewed Conflicts with Neoconservatives

By Jim Lobe | January 12, 2005

Ending weeks of sometimes fevered speculation, Bush administration officials confirmed last week that Secretary of State-designate Condoleezza Rice's deputy at the State Department will be a confirmed Atlanticist and arch-realist, U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) Robert Zoellick.

The decision was surprising to foreign policy analysts here not only because Zoellick, by agreeing to take the post, will lose his Cabinet position, but also because he was considered to be a front-runner to replace World Bank President James Wolfensohn when his term expires in mid-2005.

Rice's decision to ask Zoellick also undermines the notion that had increasingly taken hold here that the former national security adviser would defer to administration hawks led by Vice President Dick Cheney who reportedly had pushed for the appointment of their favorite, the ultra-unilateralist Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, John Bolton.

Not only was Bolton passed over for the deputy post, but he will be replaced by Robert Joseph, who retired as the National Security Council's top non-proliferation official several months ago. Bolton is reportedly planning to move to the private sector or to academia, although a position in the Vice President's office is still a possibility.

Next to outgoing Secretary of State Colin Powell, Zoellick, a protégé of former Secretary of State James Baker, is the most internationalist-minded of Bush's cabinet officials who, as perhaps Baker's closest adviser, played a key intellectual role in shaping U.S. foreign policy during the administration of George H.W. Bush, 1989-1993.

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News of Zoellick's appointment offered a sudden and largely unexpected ray of light for foreign-policy realists who had become increasingly gloomy since it

became known two weeks after the November elections that President George W. Bush had essentially told Powell that his services would no longer be required.

Powell's best friend, fellow-realist, and Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, quickly confirmed his intention to leave despite Rice's entreaties to stay on, according to the insider newsletter, *The Nelson Report*, which was the first to report that Zoellick had agreed to take the deputy's position.

Adding to the gloom in the foreign-policy establishment was word last week, first reported by former *Washington Post* reporter and ex-Bill Clinton adviser, Sidney Blumenthal, in *Slate*, that Bush Sr.'s national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, had not been asked to stay on his volunteer post as chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB).

Scowcroft, who had publicly warned Bush Jr. against going to war in Iraq without UN backing and more recently had complained in what he had thought was an off-the-record interview with the *Financial Times* that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon "just had (the president) wrapped around his little finger" when it came to Middle East policy, had apparently become unwelcome in a White House that has a very limited tolerance for dissent.

Blumenthal also reported that Cheney had successfully "imposed his authority" over Rice in order to "blackball" Arnold Kanter, who also served in a top position under Baker and is also a partner in Scowcroft's private consulting firm, although it was



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never clear that Kanter would have agreed to take the position if it had been offered.

These reports all contributed to the impression that the Cheney-led coalition of hawks that led the march to war in Iraq—mainly aggressive nationalists like Pentagon chief Donald Rumsfeld, as well as the vice president himself; pro-Likud neoconservatives, such as Rice’s top Middle East aide, Elliott Abrams, and Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Douglas Feith; and the Christian Right—would face virtually no opposition from the State Department in Bush’s second term, particularly given the ongoing purge since last summer of perceived dissidents in that other stronghold of realist thinking, the Central Intelligence Agency.

### Competing Currents Within the Administration

In reality, the situation was a good deal more complicated, particularly given the ongoing conflict between the neoconservatives and Rumsfeld over U.S. counter-insurgency strategy in Iraq and what neocons have charged is Rumsfeld’s desire to achieve military “transformation” “on the cheap.”

In addition, an ongoing investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) into the activities of the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), a powerful lobby group close to the neo-conservatives, appears to have injected a note of uncharacteristic uncertainty into those forces in recent weeks. Rumors that Feith may soon leave the administration have also gained currency in recent weeks.

What’s more, the hawks have not been able to agree among themselves on how to deal with the increasingly glaring gap between the administration’s ambitious regional agenda and its threats against a nuclearizing Iran and North Korea on the one hand, and its manifest—and increasingly expensive—failure

to stabilize Iraq nearly two years after the invasion on the other.

The administration is currently expected to ask Congress in the coming weeks for \$100 billion for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, bringing expenditures there over the past nearly three years to well over \$200 billion at a time when the fiscal deficit is at a historic high, and the dollar’s value is plunging at a nearly unprecedented rate.

In that respect, Zoellick, who worked in senior positions in the Treasury Department under Baker in the late 1980s and as an investment banker on Wall Street in the 1990s, as well as at the State Department, the National Security Council, and as USTR, is perfectly positioned to argue the realists’ case that Washington can ill afford new military adventures and unilateral actions that alienate it yet further from its traditional allies (or oil producers and potential rivals with huge dollar reserves).

Although Zoellick, like Cheney, Rumsfeld, and half a dozen other top hardliners, signed the war-mongering statements of the neoconservative Project for the New American Century (PNAC) in the 1990s, including a letter calling for “regime change” in Iraq, his general foreign-policy views are considered much closer to those of Baker and Scowcroft.

While Zoellick does not have a close relationship with Bush—indeed, his favorite pastimes of reading and long-distance running, as well as his Europhilism, intellectual sophistication, and reputed aloofness, would probably not be much appreciated at the president’s ranch in Crawford, Texas—that is not something he would have to worry about, since no Cabinet figure, including Cheney, is considered personally closer to Bush than Rice.

Moreover, unlike Rice, Zoellick, who worked closely with her on Europe and Soviet policy under

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Bush Sr., is considered an accomplished manager, deal-maker, and bureaucratic infighter with a keen political ear.

“Bob knows how to get things done, and that is a rare commodity in Washington,” Leslie Gelb, a former president of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, told the *Wall Street Journal*. “Of all the things I’ve heard about what Condi might do, this is the best,” he noted in what constitutes the clearest statement of “Establishment” approval.

That said, a number of other appointments that could signal that the hawks remain in charge have yet to be made. According to some reports, Nicholas Burns, U.S. ambassador to NATO, is slated for the State Department’s third-ranking position, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs. But the *Nelson Report* claims that U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Eric Edelman is Rice’s choice for the post. Both career Foreign Service officers, Edelman is widely regarded as a neoconservative and served as deputy national security adviser to Cheney until late 2003.

Insiders told the *Nelson Report* that Zoellick decided to take the position on the assumption that he would be the logical choice for secretary of state if Rice left to return to academic life or run for the Senate next year against the Democratic incumbent, Dianne Feinstein, or if a Republican candidate wins the 2008 presidential election.

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