

Andrés Perezalonso – Not just about oil:  
capillary power relations in the US as the motives behind the 2003 war on Iraq

*Peace Conflict & Development*, Issue 9, July 2006  
available from [www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk](http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk)

# **Not just about oil: capillary power relations in the US as the motives behind the 2003 war on Iraq**

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## **Abstract**

The 2003 invasion of Iraq was neither motivated by the existence of weapons of mass destruction nor by its links to al-Qa'ida. While a feasible alternative explanation is the desire of the invading countries to control Middle Eastern oil, I argue that it is not the only one, nor the most important. An examination of the United States network of capillary power conformed by neoconservatism and the Israel lobby provides a better explanation for the war, since the ideology of these groups has sought to target Iraq, among other countries, long before the events of September 11, 2001. This does not mean that the will to control oil in the region did not play a certain role.

## **Introduction**

Even before the beginning of the 2003 war on Iraq a large portion of the public regarded with suspicion the rationale offered by the George W. Bush administration to justify it. Since then, there have been multiple revelations that confirm the idea that the motivation for the invasion was different from what was originally claimed. One of the most common alternative explanations that critics of the war endorse is that the invading countries wished to control the oil reserves of Iraq. While this is a reasonable assumption, for reasons that I briefly examine below, I argue that an examination of the United States network of capillary power that allowed and encouraged the decision for war shows that it was not the only reason, and perhaps not even the most important one. Indeed, the ideology and influence of the network comprised by neoconservatism and the U.S. Israel lobby offer a better explanation of the intentions of those who took the decision to go to war.

Before analysing this network of power, I review the main evidence contradicting the stated reasons for war and offer some arguments that indeed support the assumption that oil was at least one of the considerations.

### **Not about WMD, not about terrorism**

The reasons given by the Bush administration for invading Iraq – that war was necessary to disarm a country which had major stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, and that there was reliable intelligence about the connections between Saddam Hussein and al-Qa’ida – are now known to have been incorrect. Of the two reasons, the weapons of mass destruction were chosen as the primary justification for war. Indeed, 'chosen' is the correct term, since the Downing Street Memo revealed that “the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy” of removal of Saddam since 2002 and not the other way around, as the public was lead to believe. Iraq’s weapons capability was really “less than that of Libya, North Korea or Iran”.<sup>2</sup> The then Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz admitted as much in a May 2003 interview with Vanity Fair:

The truth is that for reasons that have a lot to do with the U.S. government bureaucracy we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on which was weapons of mass destruction as the core reason, but... there have always been three fundamental concerns. One is weapons of mass destruction, the second is support for terrorism, the third is the criminal treatment of the Iraqi people. Actually I guess you could say there's a fourth overriding one which is the connection between the first two... The third one by itself, as I think I said earlier, is a reason to help the Iraqis but it's not a reason to put American kids' lives at risk, certainly not on the scale we did it. That second issue about links to terrorism is the one about which there's the most disagreement within the bureaucracy...<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “The Secret Downing Street Memo”, *The Sunday Telegraph*, May 1, 2005, <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2087-1593607,00.html>> (accessed November 2005)

<sup>3</sup> “Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Interview with Sam Tannenhaus, Vanity Fair”, *United States Department of Defense*, Updated May 29, 2003,

Zalmay Khalilzad, who was in charge of Iraq policy for Condoleezza Rice's National Security Council, reinforced the idea that the removal of weapons of mass destruction was not the real reason for war by stating that the administration would not be satisfied without regime change.<sup>4</sup> Finally, at the end of March 2006, *The New York Times* confirmed that the weapons of mass destruction were not the relevant issue when it cited a confidential British memorandum where President Bush made clear to Prime Minister Tony Blair in January 2003 that he was determined to invade Iraq without a UN resolution and even if arms inspectors failed to find the weapons in the country.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, we learn from Wolfowitz, Khalilzad, and the British memos that bureaucrats picked a primary justification out of three or four for an invasion that was already decided for a different reason.

On ten separate occasions Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld asked the Central Intelligence Agency to prove that Saddam's regime and al-Qa'ida were linked, but the agency disproved the main piece of evidence: a report by former CIA Director James Woolsey of a meeting that would have taken place in Prague in April 2001 between hijacker Mohamed Atta and an Iraqi intelligence official. The CIA was also unable to prove the existence of weapons of mass destruction. Nevertheless, it published a condensed version of the National Intelligence Estimate that picked its pro-war material and discarded the rest, while Rumsfeld announced that he had "bullet-proof" evidence of Saddam's ties to al-Qa'ida and Vice President Dick Cheney declared that Saddam had already "reconstituted nuclear weapons".

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<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030509-depsecdef0223.html>

<sup>4</sup> James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans, The History of the Bush's War Cabinet* (USA: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 348

<sup>5</sup> "Bush told Blair determined to invade Iraq without UN resolution or WMD", *Agence France Presse*, March 27, 2006, <http://news.yahoo.com/> (last accessed March 29, 2006)

Another central claim for the war, that Iraq tried to buy uranium yellowcake and high-strengthened aluminium tubes from Niger, was discredited in March 2002 by diplomat Joseph C. Wilson IV. Still, Bush used the story in his January 2003 State of the Union address, five days after Condoleezza Rice had done the same. The following month the International Atomic Energy Agency judged that the aluminium tubes were for conventional artillery rockets, the Niger story was a fraud, and Iraq's attempt to buy magnets was for telephones and short-range missiles. The same week of July 2003 that Joseph Wilson revealed that he was the expert that discredited the Niger uranium story, White House officials reacted by exposing Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame, as working undercover for the CIA. They leaked the story to several journalists, ignoring that it is a crime for U.S. government officials to disclose the identity of an undercover agent.<sup>6</sup> Eventually, the Plame affair would lead to the indictment of Cheney's Chief of Staff, Lewis 'Scooter' Libby, in October 2005, though the investigation is still open.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps nothing illustrates better how weak the evidence to go to war was than the February 5, 2003 presentation of the then Secretary of State Colin Powell to the UN Security Council, where he tried to pass old CIA speculations mixed with new exaggerations as facts. He insisted that the above mentioned magnets were for nuclear weapons and that "classified documents" found at the home of a Baghdad nuclear scientist offered "dramatic confirmation" about concealment, ignoring that UN inspectors judged that the documents were old and worthless. Powell showed satellite photos of industrial buildings, bunkers and trucks that he described as chemical and biological weapons facilities – but these sites had been recently inspected by the UN inspection team more than 400 times, finding no sign of wrongdoing. He also claimed that a facility in Fallujah was a chemical weapons factory – it turned out to be an inoperative chlorine

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<sup>6</sup> Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs, Neoconservatism and the New Pax Americana* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2004), p. 183-187

<sup>7</sup> "Cheney's top aide indicted; CIA leak probe continues", *CNN.com*, October 29, 2005,

plant. The four tons of the nerve agent VX that Powell claimed Iraq produced had already been destroyed under UN supervision in the 1990s. Powell also charged that Saddam's regime was linked to al-Qa'ida, specifically to Abu Musab Al Zaraqawi, arguing that he directed a training camp in Iraq – but the site turned out to be located in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq, where Saddam had no access. Quoting testimonies by defectors, especially the words of a witness codenamed "Curveball" (who appears to have been connected to Ahmed Chalabi<sup>8</sup>, further discussed below), Powell charged that Iraq had mobile biological weapons factories. After the invasion, the CIA found two trucks that it claimed were part of the biological weapons programme, but the report was rushed and politicised, and no trace of biological agents was found. The Defence Intelligence Agency, the Institute for Science and International Security, and the intelligence bureau of the State Department judged that the trailers were used to inflate weather balloons for Iraqi artillery. As for the chemical warheads found by the UN inspection team, they were empty. Powell alleged that Iraq field commanders had been recently authorised to use chemical weapons, but seven months later the CIA's Iraq Survey Group acknowledged that there was no evidence to support this accusation.<sup>9</sup>

Powell intimated that the 2001 anthrax attacks in Washington and New York were connected to Saddam.<sup>10</sup> No doubt that he was trying to reinforce Bush's claim of October 2002 that 'intelligence' from Iraqi defector General Hussein Kamel proved that Iraq had "produced more than thirty thousand litres of anthrax and other deadly biological agents... [and] a massive stockpile of weapons that have never been accounted for and is capable of killing millions". But the president's declarations were inaccurate, since, according to the official UN interviews of August 1995, Kamel said something entirely

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<<http://www.cnn.com/2005/POLITICS/10/28/leak.probe/>> (accessed November 2005)

<sup>8</sup> Bob Drogin and John Goetz, "How US Fell Under the Spell of 'Curveball'", *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 2005, <<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-curveball20nov20.0.2053900.full.story?coll=la-home-headlines>> (accessed November 2005)

<sup>9</sup> Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, p. 183-185

different: that Iraq had destroyed all of its weapons of mass destruction in the early 1990s under pressure from UN inspections.<sup>11</sup>

At the moment of writing this article the revelations about false claims being used to justify the war are still appearing. On December 10, 2005, amidst allegations that the CIA uses a network of secret prisons around the world which torture suspects of terrorism, *The Independent* reported that a senior al-Qa'ida operative, Ibn Sheikh al-Libby, is believed to have made false claims about his organisation's links to Iraq in order to avoid being tortured by Egyptian interrogators to whom al-Libby was secretly handed by the U.S. in 2002. In November 2005, it emerged that U.S. intelligence agencies had doubts about his testimony a full year before the invasion of Iraq.<sup>12</sup>

These were not mistakes of the Bush administration, and they were not coming from their lower ranks. According to journalist Seymour Hersh, the Pentagon's Office of Special Plans, an organisation staffed by hawks and set up by Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz to provide alternative intelligence on Iraq from that of the CIA and the DIA, was the primary vehicle for the flawed evidence.<sup>13</sup>

The OSP's sources were not very reliable. As an example, consider Ahmed Chalabi and his Iraqi National Congress, which had political, economic and personal interests in removing Saddam from power. The INC fed politically useful information to Douglas Feith's Policy Counter-terrorism Evaluation Group, which in turn passed it on to Pentagon officials and Cheney.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Fisk, "How the World Was Duped", *The Independent*, October 3, 2005

<sup>11</sup> Jim George, "Leo Strauss, Neoconservatism and US Foreign Policy: Esoteric Nihilism and the Bush Doctrine", *International Politics* 42 (2005), p. 193, 194

<sup>12</sup> Rupert Cornwell, "'Rendered' US prisoner made false claims to avoid torture", *The Independent*, December 10, 2005

<sup>13</sup> Jim George, "Leo Strauss, Neoconservatism and US Foreign Policy", p. 192

Chalabi was a wealthy Iraqi businessman well connected to both former Chairman of the Defence Advisory Board Richard Perle and Wolfowitz. He was on the CIA payroll since 1992 after founding the INC – the same year in which he was convicted of bank fraud and embezzlement by a Jordanian court after the collapse of the Petra Bank, which he founded, and for which he was sentenced in absentia to 22 years in prison.<sup>14</sup>

Chalabi played an important role for the war, receiving support from Wolfowitz and the neoconservative organisation the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) for the lobbying for the Iraqi Liberation Act of 1998. The act, passed by the U.S. Congress in October that year, directed the State Department to grant \$97 million to the INC for the purpose of removing Saddam from power.

It may be assumed that Chalabi's interests pushed him to provide evidence for the case for war. The fact that Chalabi was being charged with criminal offences made him an even less credible source, perhaps a reason for the Pentagon's decision of May 17, 2004 to cut off its \$335,000 monthly payments. Three days later American and Iraqi forces raided his Baghdad headquarters on charges of possible corruption, fraud, espionage, and kidnapping.<sup>15</sup> In spite of his background, the tide would eventually turn in favour of this man when he was named Deputy Prime Minister in April 2005, and given temporary control of the oil ministry.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, p. 67

<sup>15</sup> Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, p. 67-69, 185, 195

<sup>16</sup> Jamie Tarabay, "Chalabi Named Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq", *ABC News*, April 28, 2005, <<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=712737&page=1>> (accessed November 2005)



## **The oil argument**

It is a common belief among critics of the war on Iraq that the real reason for the invasion was the desire to control the oil of one of the main producing countries of the world. Since it has been shown that the case for war was based on fabrications and exaggerations, it may be assumed that some other powerful reasons that the public would not approve of were at play, such as economics.

Indeed, the importance that the Bush administration and its neoconservative advisers attribute to Persian Gulf oil can be traced at least back to 1976, when Wolfowitz, working as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for Regional Programmes in the Carter administration, wrote the *Limited Contingency Study*, the first extensive examination of the need for the U.S. to defend the Persian Gulf. The document began: “We and our major industrialised allies have a vital and growing stake in the Persian Gulf region because of our need for Persian Gulf oil and because events in the Persian Gulf affect the Arab-Israeli conflict... The importance of Persian Gulf Oil cannot be easily exaggerated.”

If the Soviet Union were to control Persian Gulf oil, Wolfowitz warned, NATO and the U.S.-Japanese alliance would probably be destroyed “without recourse to war by the Soviets”.

The study also addressed the possible threat of Iraq to Western interests. Wolfowitz advised: “we must not only be able to defend the interests of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and ourselves against an Iraqi invasion or show of force, we should also make manifest our

capabilities and commitments to balance Iraq's power – and this may require an increased visibility for US power.”<sup>17</sup>

The personal careers of some of the members of the Bush administration also suggest that the issue of oil had been taken into consideration throughout the years. The former Secretary of Commerce Don Evans was the chairman of Tom Brown, an independent oil and gas company that exploits natural gas in the Rocky Mountains. Cheney was chief executive of Halliburton, the world's largest oil field service company. Bush himself owned a small oil company, Arbusto. That the president's experience shaped his decisions to some degree is revealed by his own words: “I lived the energy industry. I understand its ups and downs. I also know its strategic importance to the United States of America. Access to energy is a mainstay of our national security”.<sup>18</sup>

The assumption that oil was one of the main reasons for war is reinforced by *Crude Designs: The rip-off of Iraq's oil wealth*<sup>19</sup>, a 2005 report authored by Greg Muttitt, from the London-based charity *PLATFORM*, and backed by U.S. and British pressure groups such as *War on Want*, *New Economics Foundation*, *Global Policy Forum* and *Institute for Policy Studies*. Though the point of the report is not to argue that oil was the ultimate reason for war, the reader is tempted to arrive to such conclusion.

Muttitt recalls that the nationalisation in the 1970s of the major oil industries of the Persian Gulf terminated the direct control of Western states over 60% of the world's oil reserves, forcing oil companies to move into the North Sea and Alaska, and later to the Caspian Sea and offshore West Africa. The author argues that these regions are now in

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<sup>17</sup> James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, p. 79-83

<sup>18</sup> Richard Wolffe and Stephen Fidler, “Bush Campaign finds it more comfortable to duck the gasoline price issue”, *Financial Times*, June 23, 2000

<sup>19</sup> Greg Muttitt, *Crude Designs: The rip-off of Iraq's oil wealth*, *PLATFORM*, November, 2005, <http://www.cruededesigns.org/>

decline, with the consequence of the U.S. and the United Kingdom turning back their attention to the Middle East. Cheney is quoted from the time he held his position in Halliburton as describing the Middle East as the place “where the prize ultimately lies” in terms of oil and lamenting that companies are not getting greater access to the region fast enough. Later, as leader of a 2001 U.S. Government Energy Task Force, Cheney added that “Middle East oil producers will remain central to world oil security” and “the Gulf will be a primary focus of U.S. international energy policy”. The report makes also a point for the strategic importance of oil for the UK government, by citing a 1998 Strategic Defence Review paper that stresses the importance of oil for world economy and the overall national interest in the Persian Gulf.<sup>20</sup>

*PLATFORM's* report goes on to claim that Iraq may lose up to \$194bn (£113bn) of oil wealth if a plan to hand over development of its oil reserves to U.S. and British multinationals comes into force in 2006. The document says the new Iraqi constitution opened the way for greater foreign investment and that negotiations with oil companies, such as the Anglo-Dutch Shell group, were already under way ahead of the December 2005 election and before legislation was passed. Those responsible for the report claim to have details of high-level pressure from the U.S. and UK governments on Iraq to look to foreign companies to rebuild its oil industry, adding that the use of production sharing agreements was proposed by the U.S. State Department even before the invasion and adopted by the Coalition Provisional Authority.

Earlier in 2005 a *BBC Newsnight* report claimed to have uncovered documents showing the Bush administration made plans to secure Iraqi oil even before September 11, 2001.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Greg Muttitt, *Crude Designs: The rip-off of Iraq's oil wealth*

<sup>21</sup> Philip Thornton, “Iraq’s Oil: The Spoils of War”, *The Independent*, November 22, 2005; “Big Oil has crude designs on Iraq wealth – report”, *Reuters*, November 22, 2005

Add to this picture the above mentioned fact that Chalabi, a close ally of powerful neoconservatives, is currently in control of the oil ministry, and the claim that oil was at least one of the motives for war seems plausible.

Nevertheless, I do not believe that the importance of directly controlling Iraqi oil, and thus gaining a key strategic position in the region, was the *only* motive for war, nor that it was *sufficient* to explain it. There are two reasons for this. First, that a powerful country may have access to oil, and even achieve important strategic and economic goals, without making use of military force. Before the war, Amy Myers Jaffe, from the James A Baker III Institute for Public Policy in Houston, dismissed the notion that the war would be for oil, noting that “if all President Bush was concerned about was American access to oil, he could wave his hand and lift U.S. sanctions [from Libya], and you would get another million barrels of Libyan oil a day.” No matter what scenario turned out for Iraq, she observed, oil would keep flowing from that country to the U.S., and a lifting of sanctions would have been the most efficient option for this purpose, not war.<sup>22</sup> Control over Iraqi oil did not seem to be necessary and war appeared excessive.

Second, and perhaps more relevant, that an exploration of the network of power relations in which those in the U.S. who took the decision to go to war are embedded has more explanatory power than the oil argument, as I will try to show below.

### **Capillary power**

When asking the question about the resolution to use force against another country, there are several different possible theoretical approaches. Contrary to structuralist theories, which view power as the relationship between the elements within a division of society

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<sup>22</sup> David Rennie, “Is oil the ultimate war aim?”, *Telegraph*, March 18, 2003, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2003/03/18/wioil18.xml>

where well defined overarching structures may be found, such as the state, the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, I have chosen an examination based on Michel Foucault's idea of capillary power. Foucault's intention was to approach the problem of power from a more flexible perspective, closer to individual agents. The result was a prioritisation of micro manifestations of power – micro in comparison with the traditional grand structures. An analysis of power, Foucault says, "should be concerned with power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, with those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions".

One of the consequences of taking distance from structuralism is that power becomes something which circulates and which functions in the form of a chain rather than a pyramid. Having mobility, similar to the blood flowing in the smallest veins, it is never localised in a certain place, "never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power".<sup>23</sup>

Reading Foucault's works may suggest that he was mostly interested in capillary power as exercised over people at medium or lower levels of the social hierarchy: students in a school, inmates in a prison, foot soldiers, etc. However, by interpreting his ideas with more flexibility, it is also feasible to examine the capillary network within which power circulates among the members of the elite – without assuming that such a group is a rigid structure, of course – and how such a network makes decisions that will eventually reach civil society, such as invading another nation.

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<sup>23</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 96-98

It may be argued that attempting to comprehend the higher echelons with the notion of capillary power is out of place, since we would be close to returning to a structuralist approach. If so, I would reply that if power moves within society in the same way that blood circulates through the smallest veins, then it must reach also the levels of government in the same way, just as small veins reach the brain and the heart of a body.

It must be added that capillary power does not necessarily negate any other complementary structuralist framework. As Edward Said has noted, even if one fully agrees with Foucault's view that the microphysics of power is exercised rather than possessed, notions such as class and class struggle, the forcible taking of state power, economic domination, imperialist war, dependency relationships, and resistances to power cannot be reduced "to the status of superannuated nineteenth-century conceptions of political economy... a great deal of power remains in such coarse items as the relationships and tensions between rulers and ruled, wealth and privilege, monopolies of coercion, and the central state apparatus".<sup>24</sup> Indeed, power relations within societies are better explained if both approaches, structuralism and capillary power, are integrated.

In this article, however, I intend to apply the notion of capillary power to the analysis of the power network of specific people and institutions that had an effect on the decision for the war on Iraq. Elsewhere, a complementary argument could be constructed around the idea of war as a consequence of socio-economic structures, such as the U.S. Military Industrial Complex.

While Foucault emphasises that power manifests through its material consequences, I do not overlook the fact that ideology runs together with power.

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<sup>24</sup> Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (London-Boston: Faber and Faber, 1983-1984), p. 221

**Relations of power and ideology:  
neoconservatism and the Israel lobby**

A series of power relations of specific groups of people with similar ideologies have converged in a point in time allowing the decision to invade Iraq to take place. This was not an inevitable cause-and-effect relationship; rather a network of power which made the event possible. Not one of these agents or groups is solely responsible for it, much less for all of its consequences, but all had a part to play.

It will be noted that in the examination that follows the current president of the U.S. is not mentioned as often as other less known characters. One of the reasons is that Bush was new to foreign policy when he became president in 2000, and as he has insisted himself, his decisions have been nurtured by a group of advisers with a long experience in the subject, both in academia and policy making.<sup>25</sup> Another is that it is possible to identify the influence that the men and women holding positions of power have had, to such an extent that Bush's discourse and actions have followed previous documents prepared by these people almost to the word.

When examining the power relations in the U.S. behind the war, we immediately encounter the group of neoconservatives intervening in the policy process. The most appropriate way to view neoconservatism is as a "special interest" or "faction". Special interests are associations "representing the interests of their members to secure for themselves a privileged seat at the national decision-making table".<sup>26</sup> This particular group has also been identified as "unipolarism", "democratic globalism", "neo-Manifest

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<sup>25</sup> James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, p. ix-xi

<sup>26</sup> Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 32, 36-38

Destinarianism”, “neo-imperialism”, “Pax Americanism”, “neo-Reaganism”, and “liberal imperialism”.<sup>27</sup>

This special interest includes individuals who hold or have held positions in government, such as former Chief of Staff to Cheney, “Scooter” Libby; Special Advisor to President Bush, Elliott Abrams; Wolfowitz, who was appointed head of the World Bank after working in the Pentagon with the current administration; and State Department officials John R. Bolton, later appointed U.S. ambassador to the UN, and David Wurmser. On governmental advisory bodies professor Eliot A. Cohen occupies a position on the Defence Policy Board, one which was also held by Perle until recently.

Perhaps most important are Cheney and Rumsfeld themselves, who could be better described as U.S. nationalists rather than as neoconservatives, but whose careers and views, such as those concerning U.S. exceptionalism and unilateralism, have run closely to those of neoconservatism. Both their signatures can be found on a key neoconservative document, the 1997 Statement of Principles of the PNAC.

Robert Kagan and William Kristol’s book of 2000, *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunities in American Foreign and Defence Policy*, which includes a wide range of contributions from fellow neoconservatives, provides something close to their basic set of beliefs. The authors speak of establishing the “standard of a global superpower that intends to shape the international environment to its own advantage,” and reject a narrow definition of the U.S.’ “vital interests” arguing that “America’s moral purposes and national interests are identical.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, p. 1-5

<sup>28</sup> Stephan Halper & Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone*, p. 17



Their introductory chapter proposes to create:

a strong America capable of projecting force quickly and with devastating effect on important regions of the world. [An America which would act] as if instability in important regions of the world, and the flouting of civilised rules of conduct in those regions, were threats that affected us with almost the same immediacy, [and which] conceives of itself as at once a European power, an Asian power, a Middle Eastern power and, of course, a Western Hemisphere power.

A principal aim of American foreign policy should be to bring about a change of regime in hostile nations – in Baghdad and Belgrade, in Pyongyang and Beijing and wherever tyrannical governments acquire the military power to threaten their neighbours, our allies and the United States.<sup>29</sup>

This projection of neoconservative global intent may be identified as one of the blueprints for what was to become later known as the Bush Doctrine.<sup>30</sup>

The unipolarism of neoconservatives maintains that the U.S. is not like other nations, and that other nations should be more like it. Exceptionalism supports the argument that military power must be returned to the centre of American foreign policy. For early neoconservatives of the 1970s, foreign policy in the post-Vietnam era had become too liberal and soft, and unwilling to confront Soviet expansionism. Years later they argued that during the Clinton era the U.S. was not taken seriously as a global military power because of his reluctance to use real force in Iraq, emboldening enemies to strike.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Kagan and William Kristol, *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defence Policy* (2000) 17-20, cited in George, 190, 191

<sup>30</sup> Jim George, "Leo Strauss, Neoconservatism and US Foreign Policy", p. 190

<sup>31</sup> G. John Ikenberry, "The End of the Neo-Conservative Moment", *Survival* 46, 1 (2004), 8-10

Their promotion of force has also a certain degree of admiration and fascination, as Irving Kristol's words reveal:

Behind all [the neoconservative convictions about foreign policy, there] is a fact: the incredible military superiority of the United States vis-à-vis the nations of the rest of the world, in any imaginable combination. [...] With power come responsibilities, whether sought or not, whether welcome or not. And it is a fact that if you have the kind of power we now have, either you will find opportunities to use it, or the world will discover them for you.<sup>32</sup>

Another neoconservative, Max Boot, looks forward to a new era when the U.S., like the British Empire, will always be fighting some war, somewhere in the globe. Likewise, professor Cohen and Woolsey have suggested that the U.S. is now “on the march” in “World War IV”. Thus, it follows that for neoconservatives the applicability of force is the default response against whatever they label as terrorism. David Frum and Perle's book *And End to Evil*, sets out at length the solution to terror and tyranny that underlies the Bush foreign policy: using military force to overthrow non-cooperative governments in troubled areas.

Both Kagan and Kristol's and Frum and Perle's books are mostly concerned with the Middle East, the need for a strong military, and Islamic-inspired terrorism as the only foreign policy challenge to the U.S. Similarly, scholars at the PNAC pay most attention to the Middle East. Their views tend to be hostile towards the peace process and Islam.

During the Cold War, intellectuals such as Midge Decter, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and Podhoretz argued that the UN, Communism, and much of the Third World was anti-Semitic, along with large portions of the U.S. intellectual community. Thus, the U.S. and Israel shared a common ideological struggle against the same enemies. For example, the

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<sup>32</sup> Irving Kristol, “The Neoconservative Persuasion”, *The Weekly Standard* 8, 47, August 25, 2003

neoconservative Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs was established following the 1973 Yom Kippur War, “partially at the prompting of the Pentagon for a counter-balance to liberal sniping at Defence spending.” Podhoretz provided a pro-Israeli voice in what many neoconservatives of the time thought of as an intellectual community lacking in support for Israel as the only genuine democracy in the Middle East. He also maintained that anti-Zionism was simply a mask of anti-Semitism and that it was often found among anti-Americans and radicals. Thus, commitment to Israel’s security and right to exist and a patriotic support of U.S. values were inextricably linked for many neoconservatives.<sup>33</sup>

It should be stressed that what is called the Israel “lobby” is not just a part of the Jewish community, but also major segments of U.S. opinion, including the leadership of labour unions, Christian fundamentalists, conservatives, and cold war warriors which strongly support Israel. A couple of months after completing a first draft of this article, a paper on the subject by John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt made the headlines. The authors defined the Israel lobby as

a convenient short-hand term for the loose coalition of individuals and organisations who actively work to shape U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction... (While it is not a unified movement with a central leadership, its core) is comprised of American Jews who make a significant effort in their daily lives to bend U.S. foreign policy so that it advances Israel's interests. Their activities go beyond merely voting for candidates who are pro-Israel to include letter-writing, financial contributions, and supporting pro-Israel organisations. But not all Jewish-Americans are part of the Lobby, because Israel is not a salient issue for many of them... Jewish-Americans also differ on specific Israeli policies. Many of the key organisations in the Lobby, like AIPAC and the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organisations (CPMJO), are run by hardliners who generally supported the expansionist policies of Israel's Likud Party, including its hostility to the Oslo Peace Process. The bulk of U.S. Jewry, on the other hand, is more favourably disposed to

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<sup>33</sup> Stephan Halper & Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone*, p. 19, 20, 26-30, 58- 60, 144

making concessions to the Palestinians, and a few groups – such as Jewish Voice for Peace – strongly advocate such steps...<sup>34</sup>

Thus, it should be noted that the Israel lobby is far from comprehending the whole of the Jewish-American community. Neither is it a monolithic and clearly defined group.<sup>35</sup> In spite of the authors' distinction between this group of influence which promotes an expansionist agenda of a state, and the Jewish people in general, the reason their article appeared on the newspapers was that it was accused of “anti-semitism” - a charge coming mostly from members of the Israel lobby itself.<sup>36</sup> This kind of attack was a strategy already foreseen and described in Mearsheimer and Walt's article.<sup>37</sup> It should be stressed that the attack is unfounded: if we consider that the expansionist ideas of the Israel lobby may actually bring sorrow to the denizens of the Middle East, especially to Israelis, as a consequence of promoting confrontation with their Arab neighbours, then any criticisms of such ideas are not anti-semitic.

Many have noted that hard-line Zionism is often linked to neoconservatism, mingling both networks and making them often indistinguishable from each other. Gary Dorrien writes:

Most unipolarist leaders were Jewish neoconservatives who took for granted that a militantly pro-Israel policy was in America's interest. Wolfowitz, Perle, Podhoretz, Krauthammer, Wattenberg, Muravchik, both Kristols, Kagan, Boot, and Kaplan fit the description, as did dozens of neocons at all levels of the Bush administration from the Pentagon desk officers to State Department deputy secretaries and advisors in the vice president's office.

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<sup>34</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy”, *The John F. Kennedy School of Government* (Working Paper), March 2006, p. 14. An edited and reworked version was published in the *London Review of Books*, Vol. 28, No. 6 (March 23, 2006), [www.lrb.co.uk](http://www.lrb.co.uk)

<sup>35</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy”, p. 15-26

<sup>36</sup> Julian Borger, “U.S. professors accused of being liars and bigots over essay on pro-Israeli lobby”, *The Guardian*, March 31, 2006, <http://education.guardian.co.uk/higher/news/story/0,,1743769,00.html>

<sup>37</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy”, p. 24

Some of these were members of JINSA: its board of advisors before 2001 included Perle, Woolsey, Cheney, Bolton and Feith. According to Dorrien, JINSA has sometimes outflanked Israel's Likud Party to the right, taking a very hard line against the Palestinians and U.S. diplomatic relations with Syria. Since its foundation, JINSA has grown to a highly connected and well-funded \$1.4-million-a-year operation, much of which goes toward arguing in favour of the link between U.S. National security and Israel's security, facilitating contact between Israeli officials and retired U.S. generals and admirals with influence in Washington. Indeed, one of the military figures connected to JINSA was Jay Garner, the Bush administration's first choice for the reconstruction of Iraq, and one of the signatories of the U.S. Admirals' and Generals' Statement on Palestinian Violence, which stated: "We are appalled by the Palestinian political and military leadership that teaches children the mechanics of war while filling their heads with hate."

JINSA overlaps considerably with the Centre for Security Policy, another hardline Zionist organisation. Their membership lists are interchangeable. The CSP is directed by Frank Gaffney, a Perle protégé, and it promotes wars for regime changes throughout the Middle East while stridently defending Israel's settlements policy.<sup>38</sup>

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, founded in the 1950s and with a 100,000 members across the U.S., is another institute mostly concerned about ensuring that Israel is strong enough to meet its security challenges. Its website comments that publications such as *The New York Times* and *Fortune* have described it as one of the most powerful interest groups and the most important organisation affecting the U.S.' relationship with Israel. It helps pass more than 100 pro-Israel legislative initiatives through meetings with

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<sup>38</sup> Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, p. 196, 197; Stephan Halper & Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone*, p. 105, 106

members of Congress.<sup>39</sup> The site fails to mention that it might be involved in a case of espionage. The FBI is investigating Lawrence Franklin, an analyst specialising in Iran who worked with former under secretary of defence for policy Feith, for passing classified information to AIPAC. The FBI has been investigating AIPAC for about four years.<sup>40</sup>

That is not the only case of neoconservatism demonstrating more loyalty to Israel than the U.S. Perle, who functions as a link across many of the neoconservative think tanks, research institutions, and other organisations on the network, was, according to researcher Stephen Green, caught by the FBI in 1970 discussing classified information with an Israeli Embassy official. Wolfowitz was also investigated in 1978 for providing a classified document to an Israeli official via an AIPAC staffer on the proposed sale of a U.S. weapons system to an Arab government.<sup>41</sup>

The loyalty of the neoconservative Jews appears to be mostly related to the Likud Party and the extreme right of Israeli politics. One of the most outstanding events to come out of this relationship was the 1996 research paper published by the Israeli think tank the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies, *A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm*. It was a policy guideline for Israeli Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu which argued that his “new set of ideas” provided an opportunity “to make a clean break” with the Oslo peace process. The paper criticised the “land for peace” initiative and emphasised: “Our claim to the land – to which we have clung for hope for 2000 years – is legitimate and noble.” The “clean break” also meant re-establishing “the

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<sup>39</sup> American Israel Public Affairs Committee, “About AIPAC”,  
<<http://www.aipac.org/documents/whoweare.html>>, (accessed November 22, 2005)

<sup>40</sup> Andrew I. Killgore, “Neocon Douglas Feith to Resign From Pentagon, as AIPAC Investigations Continue”, *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, April 2005,  
<[http://www.wrmea.com/archives/April\\_2005/0504019.html](http://www.wrmea.com/archives/April_2005/0504019.html)> (accessed November 22, 2005)

<sup>41</sup> Jim Lobe, “Spy probe scans neo-cons’ Israel ties”, *Asia Times*, September 2, 2004,  
<[http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/FI02Ak02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/FI02Ak02.html)> (accessed November 2005)

principle of preemption”. The study group that contributed to the report included JINSA member James Colbert, Charles Fairbanks, Feith, Perle, Wurmser and his wife Meyrav.<sup>42</sup> The document also called for the use of proxy armies to destabilise and overthrow Arab governments. It advocated Israeli attacks on Syrian military targets in Lebanon, and, if necessary, Syria itself. Since Iraq was an enemy of Israel, it asked Netanyahu to support Jordanian Hashemites in their challenges to Iraq’s borders. No doubt that Netanyahu paid good attention to the words of neoconservatives, since shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks he implored the U.S. to smash Iraq, Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Palestinian resistance. Neoconservatives added to the list Syria, North Korea, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Sudan and Algeria.<sup>43</sup>

The historical neoconservative commitment to Israel has been so pronounced that even traditional conservatives like Russell Kirk have charged them with mistaking “Tel Aviv for the capital of the United States”. Similarly, Patrick Buchanan commented that neoconservative “tactics – including the smearing of opponents as racists, nativists, fascists, and anti-Semites – left many conservatives wondering if we hadn’t made a terrible mistake when we brought these ideological vagrants in off the street and gave them a place by the fire.” These comments sparked a debate over whether or not Buchanan was anti-Semitic.<sup>44</sup>

The members of the PNAC, perhaps the central neoconservative organisation, had strong links to the national security bureaucracy, the Defence establishment, the media industry, dominant sections of the U.S. Defence industry, and some of the country’s wealthiest conservative foundations. A large portion of the signatories, such as Abrams, Gary Bauer, Cheney, Cohen, Zalmay Khalilzad, Jean Kirkpatrick, Dan Quayle, Rumsfeld, and

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<sup>42</sup> Stephan Halper & Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone*, p. 106, 107

<sup>43</sup> Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, p. 197, 202

<sup>44</sup> John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism, Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs 1945-1994* (New Haven

Wolfowitz had served in the Reagan and Bush senior administrations. Others, for example Woolsey, had worked for the CIA. Among the intellectual members were Francis Fukuyama, Kagan, Podhoretz and Midge Decter. Also members of the PNAC were Jeb Bush, brother of the current president, and Perle.

In February 1998 Wolfowitz told the House International Relations Committee that regime change in Iraq was the “only way to rescue the region and the world from the threat that will continue to be posed by Saddam’s unrelenting effort to acquire weapons of mass destruction...” That month an open letter was sent to the White House suggesting a strategy for bringing down the Iraqi regime, and another one in May with a similar message was addressed to the Speaker of the House and the Senate Majority Leader. Among the signatories of the letter to Clinton were Abrams, Richard Armitage, Bolton, Feith, Khalilzad, Perle, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Wurmser, Dov Zakheim, Graffney, Kagan, Kristol and Muravchik. They called themselves the Committee for Peace and Security in the Gulf. Of the eighteen people who signed the PNAC letter to Clinton, eleven became part of the Bush administration.

That these people sought the removal of Saddam for a long time is revealed by the regular complaints in neoconservative publications such as *Commentary* when Bush Sr. failed to end the first Gulf War with the removal of Saddam.<sup>45</sup>

The document that is generally taken to be the basis for the so-called Bush Doctrine of preemption guiding the post September 11, 2001 ‘war on terror’ is the *Defence Planning Guidance* of 1992, ordered by the then Secretary of Defence Cheney, supervised by the then Pentagon Undersecretary for Policy Wolfowitz, and prepared by his team. It had the input of “Scooter” Libby, Khalilzad, Andrew Marshall, Perle, Eric Edelman and Albert

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and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 186

<sup>45</sup> Stephan Halper & Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone*, p. 81, 98-104



Wohlstetter, among others. The document was a military plan for fiscal years 1994 through 1999. It was never officially finalised, but it was leaked to the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*.

The strategy declared the U.S.' right to wage preemptive wars – the word “preempt” was actually included – to avoid attacks with weapons of mass destruction or to punish aggressors. It called for a global missile defence system and a “U.S.-led system for collective security”. It opposed the development of nuclear programs in other countries while asserting the U.S.' need to maintain a strong nuclear arsenal. The DPG warned that the country might have to take “military steps to prevent the development or use of weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq (Wolfowitz acknowledges that he personally started worrying about Iraq in 1979), North Korea, Pakistan, and India; and that allowing Japan or South Korea to grow into regional powers would be destabilising in East Asia. It judged that the U.S. needed to thwart Germany's aspirations for leadership in Europe and restrain India's “hegemonic aspirations” in South Asia. In the Middle East and Southwest Asia, the overall objective was “to remain the predominant outside power in the region and preserve U.S. and Western access to the region's oil.” It also cautioned that a Russian relapse was a dangerous possibility. In short, the U.S. had to become so powerful militarily that no other power or coalition of powers could any longer prevent it from shaping the world as it pleased.

Since the report was leaked, Bush Sr. and Cheney were forced to distance themselves from it. However, it was later published as the *Regional Defence Strategy* of 1993 and its promotion of preemptive military action in Iraq suggests that it did become policy in 2002.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, p. 39, 40; Jim George, “Leo Strauss, Neoconservatism and US Foreign Policy”, p. 187, 188; Stephan Halper & Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone*, p. 33, 145

## Conclusion

The policies which allowed and encouraged an invasion to Iraq are difficult to dismiss and echo the ideas of the neoconservative network of capillary power relations and the Israel lobby with which it overlaps. Though the issue of oil was part of the considerations for focusing on Iraq in the mind of the people and organisations that comprise these networks, it was not the only motivation – not even the most important, as far as the available evidence shows. The notions of unipolarism, exceptionalism and the applications of military power of both the U.S. and Israel had at least as much weight in the decision to invade, and we would be ignoring the most important variables of neoconservatism and the Israel lobby if we focused exclusively in the oil issue.

Even when Mearsheimer and Walt's concern with the Israel lobby had a different motivation than simply understanding the real reasons for the war on Iraq, they reached a similar conclusion on the subject to the one presented in here:

Pressure from Israel and the Lobby was not the only factor behind the U.S. decision to attack Iraq in March 2003, but it was a critical element. Some Americans believe this was a “war for oil”, but there is hardly any evidence to support this claim. Instead, the war was motivated in good part by a desire to make Israel more secure.<sup>47</sup>

The difference is perhaps a subtle one: the degree of importance ascribed to each of the factors. The Israel lobby is at the centre of their argument, and is so extensively discussed that a casual reader may conclude that they believe it to be the only one. I prefer to regard it as a fundamental part of a larger open network, where the other main group overlaps with it to a considerable extent, while still recognising that the strategic and economic significance of oil had certain value in the equation, albeit not the crucial one.

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<sup>47</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy”, p. 30

Mearsheimer and Walt cite Philip Zelikow, Counsellor to Secretary of State Rice, declaring that the real threat from Iraq was for Israel, not for the U.S.<sup>48</sup> However, as it has been shown above, the alleged main threat, Saddam's weapons of mass destruction, was non-existent. Not only was the Arab country not a danger to the rest of the world, but there have been no indications of any links to al-Qa'ida from Hussein's regime. We must conclude that neoconservatives and some supporters of Israel in the U.S. viewed the regime not as a threat in the apocalyptic terms in which they presented it to the public, but rather as a threat to the aspirations of U.S. and Israeli expansionism in the Middle East. By taking advantage of their privileged positions of power and influence, these groups played a central role in changing the face of the region violently. ■

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The United States relies on oil to supply about 40% of its energy requirements, more than any other source. At one time, it relied almost entirely on domestic oil to supply its needs, but the demand has grown rapidly, and the U.S. oil fields are rapidly being exhausted. Today, the U.S.A. now relies on imported oil for 55 percent of its requirements, and this percentage is expected to rise to 65 percent in 2020, and keep growing thereafter. The Persian Gulf area currently accounts for 30% of global oil production, but contains two-thirds of the planet's known reserves, so its access is vitally important. Early in the morning of March 20, Pope John Paul II was informed that the United States had begun the war against Iraq. He went to his chapel and prayed. But why did the US invade and occupy Iraq in the first place? To this day, there is a divisive debate about what the Bush administration's motives were, with the most likely explanation being a combination of all of the reasons offered. The fact that Iraq has the world's second largest reserves of oil can also not be overlooked. The term "War on Terror" originated from President George W. Bush's 2002 State of the Union, in which he made clear that the US would not only combat terrorist organisations aggressively, but also any country deemed to be training, equipping or supporting them (Bush, 2002). In his words, "States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, aiming to threaten the peace of the world" (Bush, 2002).