

(This article will appear as two chapters in Dr. Rea's forthcoming *Mounting Evidence*. Hence the references to earlier chapters in this book.)

# **The Zealots of Dominance: The Neocon Factor in 9/11**

**By Paul W. Rea, Ph.D.**

*Deliver me, O Lord, from evil men . . . who plan evil things in their hearts; they continually gather together for war.*

—“Psalms” 140: 1-2

## **Part I: The Pathology of Power**

In recent years, in at least some quarters, neoconservatives (or “neocons”) have received credit for their key role in promoting the Iraq debacle. But could these same hard-liners have also played a role in the 9/11 attacks? What do the origins, beliefs, and tactics of the neocons contribute to our understanding of this possibility?

The neocons are an ideological group with a long and revealing history. Wielding official power directly or indirectly over five decades, a neocon elite has above all else promoted an aggressive, ultra-nationalistic foreign policy. Even though the group has typically advocated military interventions overseas as a means of spreading democratic freedoms, its conduct at home has scarcely

suggested a commitment to these ideals. The group's approaches typically involved pressuring policy makers, not promoting public debate. It has also shown a keen interest in manipulating public opinion—including the strategic use of planned provocations. As we've seen, the neocon Project for the New American Century (PNAC) has publicly entertained the idea of a "new Pearl Harbor" to arouse public support for military spending and interventions. As part of its plans for American domination, PNAC openly discussed a permanent occupation of Iraq ([www.newamericancentury.org/iraq](http://www.newamericancentury.org/iraq)).

**A "Shadow Government"** Introducing the War on Terror just five days after 9/11, neocon Dick Cheney warned the nation that this "war" would be fought "in the shadows, on the dark side" ("Meet the Press" 9/16/06). While many Americans assumed that these were new measures, finally "taking the gloves off," those more familiar with Cheney and other neocons understood that the group has long promoted an ideology of power and deception.

In the 1980s, for instance, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Col. Oliver North made plans for a "shadow" government, a "government in waiting" after a nuclear attack. Operating completely beyond Congressional oversight, the neocon trio drew up plans for Continuity of Government (COG). The plans involved suspending the Constitution, governing from secret locations outside Washington, invoking martial law, and building massive detention camps for uncooperative American citizens.

The decline of the Soviet nuclear threat after 1990 scarcely altered the plans for COG. Although the Clinton administration displayed less interest in COG, it didn't shut down the program. Along with counterterrorism expert Richard Clarke, Rumsfeld and other neocons participated in regular COG drills throughout the 1990s (Clarke *Against All Enemies* pp. 8-9, 165-75). Rumsfeld loved the COG exercises,

especially those simulating a nuclear war. In “a rehearsal for what might one day be terrifyingly real,” reports biographer Andrew Cockburn, “Rumsfeld . . . always tried to unleash the maximum amount of nuclear firepower possible” (Cockburn *Rumsfeld: His Rise, Fall, and Catastrophic Legacy* p. 107).

Readers may recall that on that fateful day in September, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and other neocons hastened to implement the secret plan for COG (Peter Dale Scott *Road To 9/11* pp. 184-87). While they only partially implemented plans for COG, Wolfowitz did fly to a bunker in Maryland, and over a month later Cheney continued to exert influence from “a secure undisclosed location” ([http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/national/42085\\_cheney10.shtml](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/national/42085_cheney10.shtml)). It’s hardly a coincidence that neocons conceived, promoted, and carried out such plans, for COG represents the ultimate realization of executive power. If COG were completely implemented, neither legislative nor judicial branches could check executive power.

**A Different Breed of Conservative** While neocons exhibit defining characteristics, they share much in common with other conservatives. They, too, exhibit an acute distrust of international institutions, of negotiations with governments designated as “enemies,” and of containment as a way to handle nations perceived as “evil.” It’s highly ironic, then, that President G. W. Bush would appoint neocons such as John Bolton and John Negroponte—both of them strong advocates for the attack on Iraq—as UN ambassadors.

However, neocons differ from free-market, libertarian, law-and-order, cultural/family-values, and fiscal conservatives. Although neocons share much in common with free-market conservatives, their focus characteristically falls less on *laissez-faire* economics than on an imperial reach for power, profits, and control of resources. Neocons also differ drastically from principled libertarian conservatives such as Rep. Ron Paul (R-Tex.) who seek to reduce the size and role of government.

In contrast, neocons plans for power projection require a government powerful enough to fund and field vast military (and paramilitary) forces, extensive “private contractors,” and a far-reaching intelligence apparatus.

**A Preoccupation with Power** Beyond such categories, though, who are these neocons? What are their psychological and ideological origins, how do they behave, and where might they fit into an inquiry into the dominant political culture at the time of 9/11? What are their mental mechanisms, world views, and defining emotional obsessions?

Though the group has exerted influence on a range of issues, including the denial of global warming, neocons are typically perceived as right-wing intellectuals preoccupied with a “strong” foreign policy. Comprised almost entirely of Anglo and Jewish males from privileged socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, most neocons hold advanced degrees from prestigious institutions. Most do handle and communicate ideas skillfully, and many have written books. In these ways, many do resemble intellectuals. Articulate speakers and writers, yes. Clever thinkers, definitely. But truth seekers, certainly not. If, however, intellectuals are defined as those who seek to discover and disseminate truth, then it might be more accurate to characterize the group as “ultraconservative ideologues,” “super-hawks,” and “consummate insiders.” Power is the neocons’ language; morality is but a disregarded dialect.

Nor has the neocon preoccupation with foreign policy precluded a similar appetite for power in domestic matters. With power projection as their ultimate goal, Washington has been their home. Their ultimate, often-stated objective involves nothing short of world domination. If this seems overstated, consider two informed appraisals. NPR’s Ted Koppel, himself on friendly terms with several prominent neocons, has remarked that their ideas have “been called a secret

blueprint for U.S. global domination” (ABC News 3/5/03). Richard Falk, Professor Emeritus of International Law at Princeton, described the Bush administration’s “War on Terror” as the brainchild of the neocons, a logical extension of their “global domination project” (PBS “Frontline” 3/12 & 3/25/03).

Working from the widely held belief in inherent American goodness, the neocons do differ from other American conservatives in their intense commitment to the projection of American military and economic power. In foreign policy, the neocons’ preferred means of power projection include military and paramilitary actions, covert operations, staged provocations, diplomatic intimidation, mass media manipulation, and economic pressures.

**The Neocon Domestic Agenda** In domestic policy, the neocons’ central push has been for ever-greater executive power. The powers they’ve sought include not merely “executive privilege,” but also greatly expanded powers of decision making, free from Congressional oversight or judicial constraints. For a Bush-the-younger administration guided by Cheney, Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice and other neocons, an Imperial Presidency has become a way of life. Norman Ornstein at the American Enterprise Institute has “never seen an administration more interested in preserving and expanding executive privilege” (PBS “Charlie Rose” 11/6/06). The “signing statements” used by President Bush to nullify legislation provide one egregious example among many.

Neocon foreign and domestic positions are hardly unrelated. While the neocons weren’t alone in promoting either the War on Terror or the USA Patriot Act, both developments represent realizations of long-standing neocon aspirations. Increased, often unconstitutional government surveillance, illegal “extraordinary renditions” of foreign nationals, extralegal detention camps, and “coercive interrogation techniques”—all of these are seen as means for amplifying the

projection of American power. It's not surprising that, only a month after 9/11, Rumsfeld would rush to initiate a Special Operations Command to strike secretly at terrorists anywhere (*Washington Post* 10/11/01), or that, for many years afterward, Cheney would doggedly defend the indefensible at Guantánamo Bay.

Preoccupied with projecting power, the neocon program involved not only military methods, but other institutions as well. It's not surprising that arch neocon Paul Wolfowitz would move from Deputy Secretary of Defense to President of the World Bank; once there, he continued to implement Bush-administration commitments to American hegemony through monetary means (*International Herald Tribune* 4/16/07). The fact that Wolfowitz hired Kevin Kellems, former spokesman for Cheney, to fill a \$250,000-a-year job at the Bank suggests his intent to advance a neocon agenda (Robert Scheer *San Francisco Chronicle* 5/9/07). Nor was it surprising that Wolfowitz's successor at the Bank was another neocon, Robert Zoellick. In a speech to the right-wing Heritage Foundation, Zoellick made the case that there's no alternative to globalization and that US companies and consumers were already benefiting from this corporate-led economic integration (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). Though both Wolfowitz and Zoellick talked a lot about alleviating poverty, they had much less to say about the Bank's abuse of loans to developing countries as a way to force privatization of utilities and resources. The Bank's allegiances, after all, are likely to lie with large lenders who furnish the cash.

**Ideological and Psychological Forerunners of the Neocons** To understand the neocons, one needs to expose ideological roots running back to their intellectual forefathers in the 1940s and 50s.

Anticipating the neocon agenda, immediately after World War II James Forrestal became both the first Secretary of Defense (previously of "War") and the main architect of the 1947 National Security Act, which called for a new approach

to national security. Rather than demobilize after defeating Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany, Forrestal contended, “the nation had to be permanently prepared . . . National Security became a grounding rule, a commanding idea” (Daniel Yergin *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the National Security State* p. 220). Rather than accept the consensus that communism could be contained, or possibly “rolled back,” Forrestal (among several others) demanded its destruction. After prevailing over Secretary of State Henry Stimson, who sought to avoid a nuclear arms race by sharing nuclear secrets with the Soviets, Forrestal dedicated himself to bulking up the military budget (James Carroll *House of War* p. 137).

Formerly a Wall Street banker, Forrestal pushed another key provision of the Act, creation of the CIA (Peter Dale Scott *Road To 9/11* p. 12). Wall Street, the CIA, and the National Security Council (NSC) became the legs of a triad supporting an increasingly powerful shadow government, or secret “overstate.” To this day, neocons are seldom identified as such; the cabal receives corporate media coverage completely at variance with its influence.

**James Forrestal: Prototype National Security Ideologue** Once Forrestal had become defense secretary, his personal mission was to generate conditions for unending warfare. His goal, according to Andrew Bacevich, was “promotion of permanent quasi-mobilization as the essential response to a permanent global crisis” (*The Nation* 4/23/07). Forrestal understood that promoting his militaristic goals would require contrived threats. Sen. Arthur C. Vandenberg famously advised him that to get his way, he’d have to “scare hell out of the American people” (Qtd. in J. Carroll *House of War* p. 137). To arouse this level of anxiety, Richard Hofstadter remarks in “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” “fear of an enemy outside is accompanied by fear of an enemy inside” (*Harper’s* 11/64). Here we can observe the genesis both of the Cold War mentality, with its exaggerated communist threats

both abroad and at home, and also of a favorite tactic of the neocons. In the hands of Sen. Joe McCarthy, fear-mongering would soon become a double-edged sword.

Significantly, though, Forrestal came to believe his own rhetoric of exaggerated threats. He became not only a magnifier of threats but “a paranoia impresario” (Carroll *House of War* p. 140). James Forrestal cracked beneath the weight of his own fears. After claiming that communists had infiltrated the White House, he entertained delusions that the Soviet Union was invading the US. Later he was found on the street in his pajamas calling out “the Russians are coming.” Soon afterward, Forrestal apparently committed suicide (T. Hoopes and D. Brinkley *Driven Patriot* p. 454). Like several disturbed militarists in Stanley Kubrick’s classic, *Dr. Strangelove*, Forrestal may have “turned a deaf ear to all but his own paranoid voices” (Alexander Walker *Stanley Kubrick Directs* p. 170). From the very outset, then, the magnification of threats, external or internal, has remained a hallmark of the neocons.

By the early 1950s, the cries of communist conspiracy would reach a crescendo. Joe McCarthy’s notorious Wheeling, W. Va., speech expressed both the neocons’ characteristic dreams of world domination and also anger aroused by a world which resisted American military power. McCarthy’s “witch hunts” for what J. Edgar Hoover called *The Enemy Within* would set the political agenda for much of the decade. It would also provide a climate for early nuclearist neocons such as Edward Teller, proud father of the H-bomb, and Herman Kahn, author and proponent of *Thinking the Unthinkable*. The “unthinkable,” however, was not nuclear war itself but planning to “win” one via game theory. The results were recommendations about nuclear tactics which, though patently absurd, basked in the prestige assigned to mathematics. Kahn also published *On Thermonuclear War*, its title echoing the classic treatise *On War* by German strategist Carl von Clausewitz ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herman\\_Kahn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herman_Kahn)).



The aftershocks following the launch of the Soviet Sputnik in 1957 not only exacerbated fears of communism; they also engendered a cult of science that would drive several other neocon thinkers. The obsession with mathematics, computers and ultra-high-tech warfare would later propel proponents of the “Star Wars” missile defense in the 1980s. It would surface again in the late 1990s with Donald Rumsfeld’s fascination with high-tech gadgetry to replace “boots on the ground” and his fears of a “space Pearl Harbor” ([www.defensetech.org/archives/001182.html](http://www.defensetech.org/archives/001182.html)).

The cult of science and technology also served to mask the emotionalism underlying the neocon project. The need to act out personal paranoia led many good minds into the foreign and domestic espionage apparatus, which expanded rapidly during the 1950s. That J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI was rife with suspicion is well known; that the CIA’s institutional culture was also fraught with excessive suspicions is slightly less so. Evan Thomas, a senior editor at *Newsweek* who wrote a book about the CIA, believes that former CIA counterintelligence chief James Angleton led “a cabal of paranoids obsessed with a ‘monster plot’ to infiltrate the CIA” (*New York Times Book Review* 5/3/07). Given their suspicions of any branch of Big Government except for the military, some neocons avoided affiliations with intelligence agencies. Many distrusted their more realistic analyses of actual threats. But when these neocons met their CIA counterparts such as William Casey or James Woolsey at Georgetown dinner parties, they often shared a similar, mutually reinforcing view of the world. Over time, most neocons became strong supporters of CIA covert operations as a tool for power projection when overt military intervention had become unfeasible.

**An Assemblage of Antisocial Personalities** While it’s impossible to make a sweeping diagnosis, it’s clear that mental health has been a problem within this group. Forrestal and McCarthy were clinically paranoid; as a result, the former

committed suicide quickly while the latter drank himself to death. In blithely promoting nuclear “exchange,” Kahn showed a disturbing, heartless failure of affect, a penchant for serious denial, and arrested moral development. In these respects, he was far from alone.

In several cases, the pathology does seem as much moral as clinical. The hypocrisy of the neocons, for instance, knows few bounds. While talking about fighting world poverty as head of the World Bank, Wolfowitz maintained close ties to Wall Street. While leading a campaign against “corruption” in developing countries, Wolfowitz adopted an authoritarian leadership style and indulged in corrupt acts that contributed to his downfall (*International Herald Tribune* 4/16/07). There wasn’t much chance of the President’s man “Wolfie” giving away the Bank. Concealed beneath the charming, friendly faces of both men, according to many who observe them closely, is a steel-edged cunning.

In fact, arrested moral development may be the signature pathology among the neocons. Citing Dr. Hervey Cleckley’s *The Mask of Sanity* (1941), a classic medical text on sociopathology, Kurt Vonnegut expressed concern that “George W. Bush has gathered around him . . . smart, personable people who have no consciences.”

Sociopaths, defined as persons meeting the criteria for the antisocial personality disorder, are characteristically clever, charming and utterly amoral. Lest we be fooled by their poise on TV, Vonnegut cautions that sociopaths “know full well the suffering their actions may cause others, but they do not care.” To convey the extent of the malady, Vonnegut cites the corporate executives who brought on the Enron and WorldCom scandals as well as their foreign-policy counterparts, the neocons (<http://books.guardian.co.uk/extracts/story/0,,1691370,00.html>). Progressive columnist Robert Scheer agreed that moral bankruptcy is “the most plausible explanation of

the headlong pursuit of disaster, for themselves and the planet, on the part of these otherwise canny overachievers” (*San Francisco Chronicle* 5/9/07).

**Father Figures at Chicago** Three University of Chicago ideologues—one of them well known around the world—shaped the emerging neocon mentality: Milton Friedman, Albert Wohlstetter, and Leo Strauss.

***Milton Friedman, Economist*** Founder of the “Chicago School” of laissez-faire economics during the 1960s, Friedman validated the neocons’ penchant for unrestrained capitalism and self-aggrandizement, the economic counterpart to a foreign policy focused on the enlargement of American power. Friedman championed “the Market” as a panacea for all problems and adamantly objected to all government “interference,” even Social Security. Defining “freedom” solely in terms of unrestrained pursuit of wealth, Friedman taught that although individuals bore responsibilities, the corporations they formed to advance their economic goals did not (*Film: The Corporation*). Economics writer William Greider observes that Friedman worked from “an ethic of unrelenting, unapologetic self-interest that effectively pushed aside human sympathy. In fact, humans’ responsibility to one another has been delegitimized—portrayed as an obstacle to the hardheaded analysis that maximizes returns” (*The Nation* 12/11/06).

These economic theories didn’t lack application. In Argentina and Chile, where Friedman’s “neo-liberal” economic policies (adopted under military dictatorships) caused working people to lose their pensions and savings, the Chicago School economist is widely reviled. In Iraq, the neocons who’d promoted the invasion sought to set up a privatization paradise, writing laws intended to allow Western oil companies to siphon off 70 percent of the country’s oil revenues for 30 years. It’s no coincidence that Bush appointed a Wall Street economic consultant, L. Paul Bremer III, as Director of Reconstruction and Humanitarian

Assistance. As background in nation building, Bremer brought experience with Kissinger Associates, a prominent international corporate consulting firm ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kissinger\\_Associates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kissinger_Associates)).

Friedman argued that “only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around” (Qtd. in *Harper's* 10/07), he was psychologically astute. He understood that it would be unlikely for his completely-free-market policies to be adopted unless a cataclysm had left much of the population in shock. Whether in Chile, Argentina or in Iraq, governments fell and their replacements ruled by force. Such shocking disasters, Naomi Klein demonstrates in *The Shock Doctrine*, are in fact often required for privatization and the other economic changes that neocons so desire (*The Nation* 5/2/05).

***Albert Wohlstetter, Military Strategist*** A professor of mathematics and a specialist in nuclear strategy, Dr. Albert Wohlstetter exerted sub-rosa influence over several decades. Along with his colleague, political scientist Leo Strauss, Wohlstetter is widely viewed as a godfather of the neocons. Starting in the 1950s, several prominent members of the group placed themselves under Wohlstetter's tutelary shadow.

Wohlstetter was among the first to promote a completely amoral military strategy during a Cold War notable for its institutionalization of state terrorism and mass murder. In 1959, Wohlstetter published “The Delicate Balance of Terror” (*Foreign Affairs* 12/58). This call to nuclear arms didn't merely characterize the Cold War itself, but also validated the nuclear arms race—especially its central doctrine, Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), the ultimate deterrent. In some ways Wohlstetter paralleled Herman Kahn, a physicist and systems theorist at RAND Corporation. Kahn's “Thinking the Unthinkable,” a better-known apology for

state terrorism based on “game theory,” became a mantra for missile proponents during the early 1980s (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). This neocon fascination with nuclear apocalypse found popular expression in Cold War books and movies such as *Fail Safe*, *On the Beach*, and the classic *Dr. Strangelove*.

Al Wohlstetter became a guru to several prominent neocon players. He shared common threads with Irving and William Kristol, editors of Rupert Murdoch’s *Weekly Standard*, and Ahmed Chalabi, the convicted criminal and Iraqi exile who, working closely with neocons at the Pentagon, promulgated falsehoods about Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction. Professor Wohlstetter was also an intellectual father figure to several superhawks, including Richard Perle, Donald Rumsfeld, and especially Paul Wolfowitz. In the late 1960s, Wohlstetter helped Perle and Wolfowitz break into Washington—in fact, just in time for the debate over ballistic missile defense (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). Given the moral compass they’d derived from Wohlstetter, there was little doubt about which side they’d take.

Despite all this, Ronald Reagan awarded Wohlstetter the Presidential Medal of Freedom, proclaiming him “a brilliant man with enormous strength of character. His intellectual integrity is renowned, and his analytical standards have been . . . unceasingly rigorous” ([www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Albert\\_Wohlstetter](http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Albert_Wohlstetter)). The president made no mention of the recipient’s contributing to a climate in which the murder of millions became much more “thinkable.”

***Roberta Wohlstetter, Donald Rumsfeld, and the Official Story of Pearl Harbor*** Albert Wohlstetter’s wife, Roberta, also served neocon purposes. A graduate of the University of Chicago and an intelligence analyst at Rand Corporation, she, too, was linked to Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld. In her *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*, Mrs. Wohlstetter denied any US complicity in the Japanese

“surprise attack.” Her book rebutted conspiracy-minded skeptics who’d claimed—as did some Republicans during the 1944 election—that Roosevelt knew Pearl Harbor was imminent but allowed it to happen. Applying the logic of *cui bono?* (who benefits?), critics pointed out that the shock had so outraged the US population that FDR became able to lead the country into the two-front world war he deemed necessary. Wohlstetter countered, claiming that even though American intelligence specialists had broken Japanese codes, they hadn’t been able to decipher the enemy’s plans. In addition, their task had been complicated by numerous false alarms in the months before December 7, and they had worried more about Japan attacking Siberia, the Panama Canal, the Philippines, and the oil-rich Dutch East Indies. The parallels to the 9/11 Commission’s highlighting the FAA’s alleged confusion (due to military exercises, poor communication, etc.) on 9/11 are worth noting. Is this another case of historical precedents “rhyming” with later events?

What makes all this even more intriguing is that, according to Roberta Wohlstetter’s obituary, her “book has been cited by some scholars as providing a comparison with the failure of U.S. officials to recognize indicators leading to the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Former Department of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was said to have insisted that his aides read it” ([http://obits.eons.com/national/feature/national\\_war/11912](http://obits.eons.com/national/feature/national_war/11912)). Some reports, in fact, have Rumsfeld passing out copies of the book on Pearl Harbor during the months *before* 9/11.

But whether the Secretary became evangelical about *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* before or after 9/11, his forceful promotion of its viewpoints does raise questions: Why would Rumsfeld be so keenly interested in having his associates—many of them powerful Beltway insiders—believe that the Pearl Harbor disaster was not orchestrated by the US government? Was this myth-

reinforcement simply a precedent intended to validate Rumsfeld's fears of a surprise attack on US space satellites? Did public belief in a major trigger-event precedent for 9/11 pose a threat that the secretary sought to reduce? Did he want to quash any suspicions that might have either hampered plans for the events of 9/11 or made it more difficult for perpetrators in government to avoid detection?

When one recalls Rumsfeld's reputation for keeping his fingerprints off projects that might go wrong, these become cogent questions. They're seldom raised, though, even in the 9/11 truth community.

*Leo Strauss, Ideological Godfather of the Neocons* Whereas Milton Friedman advocated unvarnished self-interest in economics and Albert Wohlstetter applied cold mathematical logic to nuclear strategy, Leo Strauss applied similar outlooks to politics, especially foreign policy. A professor of political philosophy at the University of Chicago during the 1940s and 50s, Strauss is now, even more than Albert Wohlstetter, perceived as the father of today's neocons. In fact, several studied with Leo Strauss. Rumsfeld was drawn to him, and Wolfowitz chose the school because Strauss was teaching there (James Mann *Rise of Vulcans* p. 26).

Straussian thought is deeply unsettling. Strauss endorsed hierarchy as a model and deception as standard operating procedure. While Strauss professed a profound respect for American democracy, he taught that societies should be structured hierarchically, run by elites who should lead the masses. While the elite few could function without moral absolutes, Strauss taught, the masses could not (www.alternet.org/story/15935). If all this evokes *Metropolis*, Hitler's favorite film, the parallel is not coincidental. Strauss, a Jew, fled from Nazi Germany but apparently brought with him a psychological dependence on authority and absolutes.

Echoing Social Darwinist ideas he may have derived from Nazi ideology, Strauss held that those fit to rule realize that there is no true morality, only the

right of the superior to rule the inferior. In order to maintain this division between rulers and ruled, “perpetual deception” will be necessary. If the masses were exposed to the absence of absolute truth, thought Strauss, they would lapse into nihilism and anarchy. Therefore, according to Robert Locke, a Straussian scholar, “the people are told what they need to know and no more.” Not only did Strauss express few qualms about using deception in politics, he saw it as a necessity ([www.alternet.org/story/15935](http://www.alternet.org/story/15935)).

Strauss’s intensely perceived need for absolutes led him to overreact to what he perceived as “a crisis due to the fact that liberalism has abandoned its absolutist basis and is trying to become entirely relativistic” (Qtd. in Thomas Pangle *Rebirth of Political Rationalism* p. 17). His “rational” solution was for ruling elites to supply “noble lies” to live by, fictional absolutes that divert, pacify, or otherwise promote social control.

***Strauss’s Connections to Religious Fundamentalism*** Like many religious fundamentalists, Strauss and his disciples tended to view democracy with contempt. According to the BBC documentary “The Power of Nightmares,” both the neocon and the Islamic fundamentalist movements were “born out of the failure of the liberal dream to build a better world.” As a result of this disenchantment, the film suggests, both groups came to despise democracy itself ([www.archive.org/details/ThePowerOfNightmares](http://www.archive.org/details/ThePowerOfNightmares)). Moreover, assuming with certainty that their cause is moral and just, both neoconservatives and religious fundamentalists tend to believe that any means justify their ends.

Extending these cognitive parallels between neoconservatism and fundamentalism, Barry Leonardini examines specific political groups. In his *Evangelicals, Zionists and Secular Neocons: Super Power Lobbies That Are Tied Together* (2005), Leonardini points to alliances between the evangelicals, Zionists, and “secular neocons” represented by military-industrial lobbyists. The three



“super power lobbies” are “examined in concert—how they interact, share board members, and work hand-in-hand toward shared objectives.” For many years, Leonardini points out, the result of this collaboration has been “shadow government” and “government from the shadows.” The 9/11 attacks, he believes, could be regarded as “blowback” from policies so effectively advocated by this potent triad (<http://freshcleanday.com/converse.html>).

***Strauss’s Potent Influence on Powerful Neocons*** To support his class-action suit on behalf of 9/11 victims, conservative attorney Stanley Hilton disclosed that he’d attended the University of Chicago along with prominent G. W. Bush-era Pentagon neocons Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and Douglas Feith. As students, all four men came under the influence of Strauss, the ideological godfather of the neocons. Strauss’s other influential protégés include William Bennett, Secretary of Education under Reagan and “Drug Czar” under G. H. W. Bush; Allan Bloom, author of *The Closing of the American Mind*; and William Kristol. Formerly an advisor to Vice-President Dan Quayle, Kristol remains a prominent neocon pundit. According to media critic Eric Alterman, Kristol may be “the most influential Republican/neocon publicist in America today” (*The Nation* 2/24/03).

The professor who trained Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Feith promoted an imperial presidency, one of the neocons’ ongoing objectives. But how might this concentration of power be achieved? Strauss sponsored research exploring the uses of a triggering pretext similar to the Reichstag Fire of 1933 which allowed the Nazis to seize control of Germany. (In the view of some historians, the Nazis staged the fire as a “false-flag” hoax calculated for its political impact.) By seizing the opportunity to make it appear that the fire was set by the communists, their main rivals, the Nazis were able to ride to power on a wave of public outrage (Klaus

Fischer *Nazi Germany: A New History* pp. 146, 191-95). Did Professor Strauss's ideas influence those neocons in power at the time of the 9/11 attacks?

***“Manufacturing a Bogus Pearl Harbor Event”*** Having known Strauss and several other neocons personally, attorney Stanley Hilton has sought to unearth the roots of what he today sees as “their deluded thinking.” The topics pursued by Strauss's students imply his interests. Under his mentor's tutelage at Chicago, Hilton wrote a paper on “How to Create a Presidential Dictatorship under Pretense of National Emergency”—i.e. how to bring about executive-branch domination and martial law by “manufacturing a bogus Pearl Harbor event.” A former nuclear physicist, Dr. Hilton later wrote his graduate thesis on “Atomic War as a Vehicle to World Domination”

([http://mews.kittysafe.net/2006/05/prominent\\_conservatives\\_who\\_qu.html](http://mews.kittysafe.net/2006/05/prominent_conservatives_who_qu.html)).

By the early 1970s, then, prominent neocons were linking dictatorship and martial law to world domination through nuclear war. While obsessions with world domination and nuclear weapons had long haunted the neocon psyche, the addition of contrived provocations for war and domestic dictatorship conjure something still more sinister.

**Myths of Black and White Hats** Neocon views of human nature evoke the darker visions of Renaissance philosophers Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes. Like Hobbes, most neocons believe that “because mankind is intrinsically wicked, it has to be governed.” This governance can only be established, however, “when men are united.” And “they can only be united against other people” (Qtd. in W. R. Clark *Petrodollar Warfare* p. 99). Expanding the English thinker's litany of dangers inside a country, neocons conjured an outside world full of dangers that, in order to protect itself, a strong country must defeat or at least control. Such arousal of fear requires not only a sharply dualistic, often demonizing mentality, but an inflated

estimate of the threats. Thus the neocon mentality extends “the paranoid style in politics” of Forrestal and McCarthy.

Even more important, though, is its tendency toward black-and-white thinking. In the Cold War melodrama, the Americans wore the heroic white hats; the Soviets wore the villainous black ones. When the Cold War ended, new villains had to be found to keep the threat level way up, at or near Code Orange. Since 1991, the replacement polarities have become “the civilized world” (Bill Clinton popularized the phrase) versus “the terrorist threat” (posed by militant Islam). In recent years, the neocons have wielded the broad brush of “Islamofascism” to tar millions of peaceful Muslims. Again the neocons have tapped into deeply rooted mythic patterns offering their listeners a false sense of moral innocence and superiority.

Polarized world views like this are popular, even seductive, because those who adopt them can imagine themselves to be completely noble while they refuse to deal with moral ambiguities. This is a mentality of pure white and black, of “us” vs. “them,” with no gray hats on the rack. The roots of such polarized world views reach back to the Manichees of ancient Persia, who believed in a perpetual struggle between the forces of good and evil. This polarized, oppositional mentality finds more famous expression in the Biblical doctrine of struggle between God and the Devil—as well as in the Apocalyptic prophecies of the Book of Revelations. The latter book, many readers will recall, foretells the Final Days. This describes Armageddon, the ultimate Battle Royal between the forces of Good and Evil which accompanies the End of the World.

Such a mentality not only synched well with nuclear war, which promises a secular doomsday, but has found other applications. The concept of a global religious crusade found new application right after 9/11, when President Bush,

flanked by a priest, a minister, a rabbi and an imam, declared his Holy War at the National Cathedral. Presenting the War on Terror as a global struggle between “Christian soldiers of civilization” and “dark forces of Islamic theocracy,” neocon speechwriters dredged the mythic recesses of the Western mind. With this framing, the administration drew support from religious fundamentalists, Christian, Hebraic, and Islamic (*In These Times* 10/06). This outlook surfaced again in a highly visible way when neocon David Frum, a speechwriter for George W. Bush, echoed Reagan’s “Evil Empire” as he scripted the President to malign three countries on an “axis of evil” (*Vanity Fair* 1/7/05).

***Absolutist Thinking and Nuclear Armageddon*** The neocons’ attraction to absolutist narratives of Good vs. Evil derives from several sources. In some individuals, the tendency may be mainly psychological, a desire for black and white polarities coupled with an intolerance for nuanced shades of gray. For others, the attraction is more polemical; it involves an ultimate threat as a way to motivate followers or control the populace.

Like many fundamentalists, most neocons believe that myths of Good and Evil are necessary to guide and motivate the population. Rulers, many believe, must usurp the power of myth to maintain their authority and control; one’s own nation represents the Good, while foreign nations perceived as threats are characterized as Evil. Believing that the population must be guided by myths that impart a sense of righteousness and meaning to their lives, the neocons again show commonalities with evangelical and fundamentalist religions. What the skeptical may view as simplistic propaganda—or even as dangerous outright lies—most neocons view as “necessary fictions” to lead the masses

([www.archive.org/details/ThePowerOfNightmares](http://www.archive.org/details/ThePowerOfNightmares)).

**The Enabling Myth of American Exceptionalism** The most obvious

example is the prominent cultural myth of America's innocent and noble intentions—that American foreign policy has been unselfishly devoted to spreading democracy around the world. In fact, as G. W. Bush has repeatedly told the public, God has blessed America with democracy, and spreading it around the world “is the calling of our country” ([www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003)). As one of the country's most enduring myths, American exceptionalism has found popular expression in heroes such as Shane, the Lone Ranger, Luke Skywalker, and Marvel Comics' superhero, Captain America. World War II holds such special fascination for the American mind partly because this epic conflict has been recalled, by historical storytellers ranging from Steven Ambrose to Ken Burns, as the “Good War” fought by the “Greatest Generation.”

Like other conservatives, neocons have appropriated and exploited this myth of shining virtue. While Ronald Reagan stood tall like a hero in a Western preparing for a shootout, the neocons have been more subtle. Drawing on American cultural mythology, especially its moralistic and messianic impulses, neocon military analyst Kenneth Adelman defined the group's essential outlook as “a tough foreign policy on behalf of morality, the idea of using our power for moral good in the world” (Qtd. in *Vanity Fair* 1/07). A consummate Washington insider and member of Donald Rumsfeld's Defense Policy Board, Adelman remained oblivious to the fact that many of the worst atrocities in human history have accompanied the most noble-sounding abstractions, including “freedom” and “democracy.” Such deception was a concern shared by two astute critics of authoritarianism, George Orwell and Aldous Huxley.

The attraction of the neocons to grand-narrative myths and august abstractions not only suggests their fundamentalist tendencies, but may also explain their ability to resonate with simplistic thinkers and cultural conservatives. Their

embrace of apocalyptic absolutism, with its cult of ultra-violence, suggests an ability to activate and appropriate deeply-acculturated myths. Exploiting a sense of despair about the future, a longing for redemption, and even a communal death wish, the neocons associated nuclear war with the Apocalypse, the End, the destruction of the planet. This association has not only rendered the neocons more effective but also more dangerous, enabling nuclear war or “shock-and-awe” militarism to seem like ways to hasten God’s plan for cleansing the world.

This ultra-polarized, high-contrast world picture was satirized in Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. This brilliant classic captures the amorality, paranoia, and infatuation with violence so characteristic of most neocons. Kubrick’s classic depicts sociopaths in power who take it upon themselves to start a nuclear war. Some film historians have seen Albert Wohlstetter and Herman Kahn as models for Dr. Strangelove, the sexually obsessed scientist bent on nuclear apocalypse. Most, however, perceive the mad scientist as a composite of three prominent arch-conservatives: Werner von Braun, the ex-Nazi rocket scientist who helped launch the American space program; Edward Teller, the father of the H-bomb; and, in a prophetic stroke, a young Henry Kissinger, who, in a striking irony, would later inform the world that “power is the ultimate aphrodisiac” (Qtd. in *New York Times* 11/19/06). The mindset of Dr. Strangelove, Gen. Jack D. Ripper, and Gen. Buck Turgidson exhibits uncanny parallels to that of many neocons: it, too, is grandiosely egotistical, obsessed with power, prone to deceit, and paranoid to the point of demonizing enemies.

While many early neocons were the products of the 1950s, a time of starkly dualistic Cold-War outlooks and apocalyptic nuclearism, the pervasiveness of such thinking in the American psyche during subsequent decades, combined with ample funding by monied elites, has allowed these ideologues to inhabit the top echelons

of the military, espionage, and foreign-policy establishments.

**Necessary Enemies and Functional Falsifications** Though often moralistic in their rhetoric, the neocons themselves are, as we've seen, typically amoral and sociopathic, like the Cold Warriors in *Dr. Strangelove* who think nothing of vaporizing millions in a blinding flash. Theirs is, after all, a mentality obsessed with ultimate power, with the Doomsday Machine. In such personalities, desired ends are thought to justify any means. Pious moralism and self-ennoblement hide actual motives. Illustrating this tendency to cloak cynical aggression beneath lofty ideals, Kenneth Adelman's "using our power for moral good in the world" runs headlong into historical fact: along with Paul Nitze, Edward Teller, and Richard Perle, Adelman trails a long record of promoting weapons of mass destruction ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth\\_Adelman#Later\\_career](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_Adelman#Later_career)).

This characteristic hypocrisy is also evident in Paul Wolfowitz's attempts to justify an invasion of Iraq in moral terms, making "amends" for his part in first inciting and then failing to support a Shiite rebellion against Saddam in 1991. What Wolfowitz expects us to forget is how he, as a superhawk at the Pentagon, was among those who'd urged this suicidal uprising (Thomas Ricks on PBS "Charlie Rose" 7/25/06). A new attack, Wolfowitz and other neocons contended, would not only compensate for the death and suffering inflicted on the Iraqi people by an overly cautious President G. H. W. Bush, the neocons claimed; it would also help bring democracy to the Middle East. The neocons are often described as "cynical idealists," but that description requires us to believe that they're sincere about promoting democratic ideals. Their own behavior scarcely supports that assumption.

In other cases, the fear-mongering is unvarnished, delivered with little idealistic veneer. A mentor to Rumsfeld, Paul Nitze was a quintessential neocon,

cunning in high-level bureaucratic intrigue and committed to exaggerating threats to the US. Since the dark dawn of the Cold War, Nitze played a central role in crafting national security policy. In 1950, Nitze generated a top-secret document claiming that the Soviets were bent on world domination and that America must rearm [sic!] to “confront them anywhere and everywhere.” For three decades, Nitze’s career in government was devoted to spotlighting the Soviet threat while obscuring comparable American intimidation (A. Cockburn *Rumsfeld: His Rise, Fall, and Catastrophic Legacy* pp. 34, 14).

**Institutionalizing Deceit** While lies are hardly unique to the neocons, their mentor apparently took lying to new depths of deception. In a telling preview of the “us vs. them” mentality of the current administration—and particularly its penchant for lying and secrecy—Professor Strauss taught that “If I tell the truth, I can’t but help the enemy” (Qtd. in *The Nation* 10/25/04). (One is reminded of Vice President Cheney’s attacks on the patriotism of *The New York Times* because, he charged, its unfavorable reportage about Iraq “only helps the terrorists.”) Respected investigative reporter Seymour Hersh shows Strauss teaching that nations “live in constant danger from hostile elements abroad,” and that those in power may need to deceive regular citizens in order to “protect” them (*New Yorker* 4/12/03).

Lies are also needed to control the populace, the neocons typically believe. In *Leo Strauss and the American Right*, Canadian political scientist Shadia Drury indicates that Strauss believed in “the efficacy of lies”: that “deception by those in power is critical” because the public needs “strong rulers to tell them what’s good for them” ([www.informationclearinghouse.info/article5010.htm](http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article5010.htm)). To subdue the citizenry and suppress resistance, the neocons have exaggerated or even invented outside threats. Saddam’s supposed weapons of mass destruction and ties to al Qaeda provide two



recent examples. Thus the neocons provide a classic case of Machiavellian rationalization whereby a power-oriented state, scheming to aggrandize its own political and economic assets, masks its skullduggery behind noble-sounding myths and high-flying flags.

To rationalize their hunger for power, the neocons have adopted contradictions that seem almost schizoid. On the one hand, they typically convey an extreme distrust of foreign governments, magnifying any actual threats foreign countries might pose; yet on the other, the neocons hold completely opposite notions about both their own noble motives and those of their own country's government. As an extension of this skewed vision, neocons repeatedly charge that Iran's nuclear program is inherently malignant while assuming that Israel's arsenal of several hundred nuclear weapons is entirely benign (John Bolton on "Air America" 6/10/08). In these respects, the neocons differ from both traditional "country club" and libertarian conservatives, who typically hold more nuanced views of foreign threats and who share far more skeptical attitudes toward Big Government. As a result, many traditional conservatives have promoted less-interventionist or even isolationist policies; many opposed US entry into World Wars I and II, for example.

To pursue the question of possible involvement with 9/11, let's look at the ruthless methods of key neocons over the preceding decades, starting with the 1970s.

**Cheney and Rumsfeld's "Halloween Massacre"** Following the downfall of Richard Nixon and his replacement by Gerald Ford, underlings Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld convinced the insecure president to make some big changes in personnel. Together, the trio pulled off the 1975 "Halloween Massacre," the "most extensive cabinet shakeup by any president in modern history" (J. Mann *Rise of the Vulcans* p. 65).

In this neocon power grab, Cheney and Rumsfeld marginalized Henry Kissinger as they aggrandized their own power through no-holds-barred intrigue that established Rumsfeld's reputation as an "infighter with elbows as sharp as knives" (Mark Shields PBS "News Hour" 12/15/06). Even by Washington standards, the neocons' tactics are known as bare-knuckled. This habit of unrestrained combat infected the latest Bush administration; discussing Rumsfeld, Perle, John Bolton and others, columnist Elizabeth Drew deplored a "bitterness and knife-wielding . . . that Washington has seldom seen" (*New York Review of Books* 6/12/03).

Cheney and Rumsfeld didn't just mastermind the "shakeup"; they also became its main beneficiaries: Cheney became the White House Chief of Staff, Rumsfeld the youngest Secretary of Defense in US history. He soon became the Ford administration's leading hawk, working against any and all arms-control treaties (Mann *Rise of the Vulcans* pp. 65-68). Nor were Cheney and Rumsfeld the only players who leapt into higher seats. Richard Armitage, who would become a close friend of Wolfowitz, also rose to greater power, becoming Secretary of Commerce.

An additional impetus for this seizure of power, however, was not personal but ideological. According to David Remick, Editor of *The New Yorker*, "Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and others in the Nixon-Agnew orbit left Washington believing that the imperial Presidency had been disastrously hobbled by a now imperial press" (*New Yorker* 7/10 & 17/06). Cheney, Rumsfeld and others had witnessed not only the disgrace of President Nixon, which they believed had weakened the presidency, but also the decline of American military prestige after the Vietnam debacle. Worse, the press had (for once) become aggressive about blatant abuses of power. The careers of several neocons—not to mention the Bush administration more broadly—would be devoted to rectifying these "wrongs." To accomplish this, for several decades the neocons have made highly effective use of corporate-

funded foundations and non-profit think tanks, such the Hoover Institute, the Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, and Rand Corporation, originally a spinoff from Douglas Aviation ([www.rand.org/about/history](http://www.rand.org/about/history)). And when government intelligence-gathering agencies didn't find the Soviets sufficiently threatening, the neocons created their own Team B.

**Team B and the Committee on the Present Danger** To circumvent resistance from those at the CIA still committed to providing accurate information, neocons, most of them within the administration, spearheaded the formation of Team B, an intelligence unit whose findings they *could* control. No attempts were made to represent a range of perspectives. Set up during the Ford administration by Donald Rumsfeld and Richard Pipes, Team B included Richard Perle, Paul Nitze, and Paul Wolfowitz. Lacking the espionage resources of the CIA, the neocons simply fabricated findings that mirrored their anti-communist obsessions.

Whereas the CIA reported on a USSR slipping into terminal decline, Team B, not surprisingly, found the Soviets more menacing than ever. As Tom Gervasi demonstrates in *The Myth of Soviet Military Supremacy*, this wasn't true then, nor was it ever true. Yet to this day, conservatives “frequently cite Team B as a successful model for challenging moderate threat assessments by the foreign policy establishment, particularly the CIA and the State Department” (<http://rightweb.irc-online.org/profile/2822>).

In 2001, Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz returned to their old tricks when they created the Pentagon's Office of Special Plans, charged with bringing in the most threatening intelligence about Saddam. Threat inflation was back with a vengeance. Abetted by Lewis “Scooter” Libby, Douglas Feith, Abram Shulsky and other neocons, the Office tampered with intelligence reports to make Saddam Hussein appear a major military threat, bristling with weapons of mass destruction

(*New Yorker* 4/12/03). These neocons weren't satisfied with just coming forth with their own intelligence, however. In the leadup to the attack on Iraq, Cheney made repeated and unprecedented visits to CIA headquarters to influence the Agency's National Intelligence Estimate (PBS "Frontline" 'The Dark Side' 6/20/06).

Even in the 1980s, Team B wasn't enough for the neocons. After the defeat in Vietnam, America experienced a reemergence of isolationist and even defeatist sentiments. Since such attitudes tended to inhibit military interventions, the group resurrected the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD), a neocon "citizens lobby." In addition to several carryovers from Team B, prominent members included former Secretary of State Dean Rusk; G. H. W. Bush; Paul Wolfowitz; Jeane Kirkpatrick; President Reagan's waspish Ambassador to the UN; and, significantly, Reagan himself ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Committee\\_on\\_the\\_Present\\_Danger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Committee_on_the_Present_Danger)). Formed in the 1950s by anti-communist hawks, bankers, and businessmen to mobilize support for increased US military supremacy, the CPD reappeared during the 1970s to resist the Carter administration's pursuit of détente with the Soviets ([www.fpiif.org/commentary/2004/0407cpd3.html](http://www.fpiif.org/commentary/2004/0407cpd3.html)).

Here we observe a pattern in the neocons' push for power: when Republicans hold the executive branch, they take top positions, especially at the Pentagon and in the intelligence agencies; when Democrats occupy the White House, they exert influence not only by providing "second-opinion" intelligence interpretations to policy makers, but by inhabiting well-connected, well-financed research and lobby networks. Over several decades, this powerful cabal would function as a shadow government.

As we'll see in the next section, when Reagan came to power, connecting shadow and official governments, the neocons had never had it so good.

## **Part II: The Neocons' Rise To Prominence**

*War should be the only study of a prince. He should consider peace only as a breathing time which gives him leisure to contrive, and furnishes an ability to execute, military plans.*

—Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*

The neocons, as we'll see, have been closely involved in many of the most regressive developments in recent American history: scheming to thwart Jimmy Carter's "October-Surprise" release of prisoners from Iran, planning for unconstitutional Continuity of Government, playing lead roles in the Iran-Contra scandal, authoring "the Wolfowitz Doctrine" of global military supremacy, initiating militaristic pressure groups such as Project for the New American Century, generating the policy of Preemptive War—and, most consequentially, leading the push for an assault on Iraq. Given this malfeasance, plus the amoral mentality delineated in the previous chapter, it's not difficult to imagine the neocons either allowing or abetting the 9/11 attacks. Several key neocons were certainly well positioned to do so.

**The Reagan 1980s: Neocons Converge on Centers of Power** As President Reagan assembled his first administration, he packed it with neocons. A stunning 33 members of the Committee for the Present Danger (CPD) received government jobs, many of them national-security posts. These appointees included James L. Buckley, brother of arch-conservative William F. Buckley; Kenneth

Adelman, Editor of *Washingtonian* magazine and later an architect of the Iraq War, both to the Defense Policy Board; Paul Wolfowitz to the State Department; William Casey, as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency; John Lehman, who later served on the 9/11 Commission, as Secretary of the Navy; Richard Perle, Assistant Secretary of Defense; and George Shultz, the new Secretary of State ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Committee\\_on\\_the\\_Present\\_Danger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Committee_on_the_Present_Danger)). After returning to Bechtel Corporation, a major military contractor, Shultz remained a prominent Republican strategist. On Tuesday, September 11, 2001, Shultz became one of the few Americans to receive a warning not to fly (*San Francisco Chronicle* 9/13/06).

But the Reagan/Bush administration didn't stop with these CPD neocons. Secretary of State Shultz assembled a Policy-Planning Team at the State Department. To staff it, Wolfowitz called upon I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, later known for his long association with Dick Cheney. Wolfowitz also recruited political economist Francis Fukuyama, who later provided academic support for "regime change" in Iraq and still later praised the neocons in *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy*. A consummate Cold Warrior, Wolfowitz sought to subvert the policy of détente with any communist nation. Along with his recent hires, notes historian James Mann, Wolfowitz also "demonstrated himself to be one of Israel's strongest supporters in the Reagan administration." Though the pressure group he formed within the State Department wasn't well received, Wolfowitz and his underlings nevertheless became the "lynch pins for American foreign policy" (James Mann *Rise of the Vulcans* pp. 112-115).

Given the neocons' characteristically adamant support for Israel, the number of Jews in their ranks, and their tendency to substitute Islamic terrorism for a waning communist threat, the neocons often face suspicions that they are Zionists.

If US policies favoring Israel are understood as ways to project American power in a region rich in oil—a crucial resource not only to consume but to deny to others—then neocon support for these policies would logically follow.

Despite the ideological leanings of the group, in practice the neocons have been less about principle than power. In 1983, as Reagan’s special envoy, Donald Rumsfeld spent 90 minutes helping to restore relations with Saddam Hussein. When Rumsfeld returned, having ignored Saddam’s recent use of nerve gas on his enemies, he urged that the US supply Iraq in its war with Iran. A shipment of chemical weapons soon followed ([www.counterpunch.org/scahill0802.html](http://www.counterpunch.org/scahill0802.html)). Later, after disowning his role in mustering support for Saddam, Rumsfeld charged that the dictator’s armies had “killed thousands of their own people with chemical weapons” (PBS “NewsHour” 9/18/02). The next day the Secretary of Defense lied to Congress about his earlier mission to Iraq, falsely claiming that he’d made the trip as a private citizen with no governmental mission (Testimony before Senate Armed Forces Committee 9/19/02). Even among the neocons, Rumsfeld has always stood out for his ability to cover his tracks.

**Super-Hawks Dominate Reagan’s Defense Department** Never before had an ideological clique exerted so much influence at the Pentagon. Another hard-liner, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, brought in Richard Perle, Washington’s most determined opponent of détente, as Assistant Secretary for Soviet relations. Weinberger also brought aboard Gen. Colin Powell, G. W. Bush’s Secretary of State, and Richard Armitage, Bush’s Assistant Secretary of State at the time of 9/11. Since that time conventional wisdom has framed them as “moderates” because they tried to slow the neocon push for war (PBS “Frontline” March 2008). Though more moderate on domestic social issues, Powell and Armitage both remained strongly committed to bulking up the military. Finally, Weinberger would

hire Dov Zakheim, another neocon who later worked for Wolfowitz. After Zakheim quit working for Weinberger at the Defense Department, he joined the reconstituted Committee on the Present Danger. In 1986, all five pushed hard for the decision to bomb Libya (J. Mann *Rise of the Vulcans* p. 120).

In the late 1990s, after Zakheim had joined the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), he helped write its *Rebuilding America's Defenses*, which infamously stressed the importance of “a new Pearl Harbor.” (www.sysplan.com/Radar/FTS/Corporate/Officers/DZakheim) Just months later, Rumsfeld made Zakheim his comptroller, the money manager in charge of all the Pentagon's budgets. As we've discovered elsewhere, Dov Zakheim may have played two key roles in the 9/11 attacks.

Since the neocons opposed isolationism, they didn't want to hear that the Soviet Union was anything but a major menace. To magnify the Soviet threat, a new Reagan administration installed a consummate neocon, William Casey, to head the CIA. Under Casey, intelligence became politicized as never before. Working directly under Casey, Deputy Director Robert Gates “pressured the CIA's analytical division to exaggerate the Soviet threat to fit the ideological perspective of the Reagan administration.” (Robert Parry *In These Times* 12/06) In 2007, when Robert Gates was sworn in to replace Donald Rumsfeld as defense secretary, there was no mention of how Gates had insisted on falsifying the facts—and, in doing so, engendered considerable dissension at the CIA.

By the time Cheney and Rumsfeld took office under the second President Bush, they'd long been pushing for expansions in executive and military power, fabricating information when it suited their purposes. Central to the neocon ideology is the notion that the executive branch should possess “inherent powers”—a concept found nowhere in the Constitution yet supposedly derived



from the president's role as commander in chief. This idea is key to understanding the legacy of 9/11, for it has justified several dubious policies, including the USA Patriot Act. In a circle-the-wagons mentality, magnified threats are typically used to justify the concentration of power and a disregard for checks and balances. The neocons appear to have viewed the prospect of another Pearl Harbor as an opportunity to restore and even expand executive powers—which by 2001 had come to mean their own power.

Under the first Bush administration, the cabal of neocons continued to occupy key positions. These included Zakheim, Armitage, and Philip Zelikow, who worked with the Bush State Department, became Executive Director of the 9/11 Commission, and then returned to the State Department. During his first stint at State, Zelikow articulated a neocon foreign policy based on “preemptive interventions” such as the attack on Iraq (Qtd. in J. Mann *Rise of the Vulcans* p. 316); during his second stint, Zelikow demonstrated his neocon credentials when he became “intimately involved with Iraq policy making” before the Bush administration unveiled its plans for a “surge” of 21,500 additional troops in Iraq (*Washington Post* 1/14/07). Tellingly, this team of eight neocons called themselves “the Vulcans”—a reference to the Roman god not only of volcanoes, but also of fire and weapon-making. This would prove to be an increasingly prophetic self-designation (Mann *Rise of the Vulcans* p. 253).

**The Martial March of the Neocons** During the 1990s, and especially within the Bush administration after the turn of the new century, neocons achieved a prominence that they'd never enjoyed before, even during the Reagan administration. After weathering stress points such as the end of the Cold War and the “failure” to effect “regime change” in the first Gulf War, the neocons regrouped and rode to unprecedented power with the selection of Bush/Cheney in

2000.

Within a single decade, the ideological agenda of the neocons became the foreign policy of the United States. The events of 9/11, observes David Ray Griffin, enabled the neocons to implement much of their agenda ([www.911truth.org/article.php?story=20070227235042773](http://www.911truth.org/article.php?story=20070227235042773)). Even conservative commentators Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke agree that the trauma allowed the “preexisting ideological agenda” of the neocons to be “taken off the shelf . . . and relabeled as the response to terror” (S. Halper and J. Clarke *America Alone: The Neoconservatives and the Global Order* p. 4).

Here we confront one of the great questions of the day: Did the neocons, advantaged and emboldened by more positions of power than they’d ever occupied before, play some role, direct or indirect, in a trauma that enabled them to implement their long-standing agenda? Let’s examine the evidence.

**1990: A Sudden Shortage of Threats** Even more than traditional conservatives, the neocons had become distressed with two developments of the early 1990s: the end of the Cold War and the inconclusive ending to the Gulf War. After the Soviet Bloc dissolved, the national-security establishment of “the world’s only remaining Superpower” faced serious challenges. Neocon pundit Norman Podhoretz lamented that he was confused about what “America’s purpose should be now that the threat of Communism . . . had been decisively eliminated” (*Commentary* July 1991). For many neocons, the question was how, after the dissolution of Soviet communism, could America justify its massive spending on its espionage apparatus and armed forces?

In the Reagan era, the neocons had gained traction when the president characterized the Soviet Union as an “Evil Empire” aiming to destroy America. But after Reagan’s gigantic missile/aerospace expenditures led the Soviets into a

new arms race they could ill afford, hastening the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc, the neocons faced a troubling vacuum. Suddenly an Evil Empire no longer posed a diabolical, monolithic threat to freedom, democracy, capitalism, and the American Way. Self-congratulation in Washington soon plunged into panic. Officialdom wondered how, “in a world where the postwar enemy has ceased to exist, the C.I.A. and its sister agencies, with their billion-dollar budgets,” could “. . . remain relevant in the minds of Americans” (*New York Times* 2/4/92). As J. Peter Scobic reveals in *U.S. vs. THEM*, after 1990 something had to fill the void, somebody had to become the new “*them*.” In Latin America, too, American policies had prevailed, but victory left a void. After elections had swept the supposedly dangerous, undemocratic Sandinistas from power in Nicaragua, some neocons looked to drugs as a new potential threat. Could drug smuggling replace “creeping communism” as the primary pretext for American-sponsored interventions south of the border? To implement this agenda, the first President Bush invaded Panama and declared a “war on drugs”(which Washington has continued to wage, largely unsuccessfully, ever since—and which continues to “justify” military spending (Howard Zinn *People’s History of the United States* pp. 592-4).

But this substitution wouldn’t work in the Middle East, the main source of another addictive import: oil. To justify interventions there, neocons needed to replace the Communist bear with an Islamic wolf howling at the door. To substitute militant Islam for a waning communist threat, a new paradigm was required. Mythmaking intellectuals got to work, and the global replacement for communism came soon enough. In 1993, conservative historian Samuel P. Huntington published an often-cited article, “The Clash of Civilizations?” (*Foreign Affairs* Sum. 1993). After Harvard published Huntington’s book with the same title, neocon pundits intensified their attempts to frame foreign policy in simplistic terms of good and

evil, Christian vs. Muslim—with the latter, the “Other,” posing an increasingly serious menace to Western civilization.

**Bogus Idealism Masks Cynical Opportunism** As if the end of the Cold War hadn’t sufficiently troubled the neocons, leaving them without an overwhelming outside threat, additional distressing developments surrounded the end of the Gulf War in 1991. One was that the US had “failed to complete the job in Iraq.”

The story begins with Iran, not Iraq. Long under the US/Israeli-backed dictatorship of the Shah, Iran had turned against the US in 1979. Concerned that a major oil-producer was “lost,” many neocons became fixated on Iraq, both as a military foothold in the Persian Gulf and, of course, as another huge oil reserve. Many neocons were outraged when, in 1991, President G. H. W. Bush stopped short of seizing the real prize—Saddam’s oil. The fact that the UN mandate only allowed for removal of Saddam’s forces from Kuwait apparently didn’t daunt the neocons.

Instead, they obsessed on a question: if the US didn’t “take out” a brutal dictator when it had the power to do so, how could it continue its claims to be the world’s guardian of freedom and democracy? Their interest lay not only in the continued credibility of American power, but also in enacting a mythic national purpose: American exceptionalism. Robert Zoellick, another neocon, defined this national myth as the belief that America had an exceptional, “transformative, missionary role” to play in the world (PBS “Charlie Rose” 5/10/07). One of the founding signatories of PNAC, Zoellick went on to become Deputy Secretary of State in the first Bush/Cheney administration and President of the World Bank in the second. In the aftermath of 9/11, Zoellick shamelessly “fashioned the administration’s bizarre demand that Congress rubber-stamp trade deals as part of the ‘war on terror’” (*The*

*Nation* 6/25/07). A few years later, this politicized approach to international trade apparently didn't disqualify Zoellick when Bush, following Wolfowitz's departure under a cloud of scandal, appointed him to head the World Bank.

Nor were these the only neocon outlooks espoused by Zoellick. He also became the first member of the Bush team to emphasize the futility of relying on "reason or goodwill" to confront "evil in the world." In the influential journal of the elite Council on Foreign Relations, Zoellick foreshadowed the rhetoric that would become so prevalent after 9/11: ". . . there is still evil in the world—people who hate America and the ideas for which it stands. Today, we face enemies who are hard at work to develop nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, along with the missiles to deliver them. The United States must remain vigilant and have the strength to defeat its enemies" (*Foreign Affairs* Jan. & Feb. 2000).

It's difficult to imagine a more prophetic preview of the fear-mongering that would guide American foreign policy for the next eight years—and likely well beyond. And, even more to the point here, Zoellick's invoking of "people who hate America and the ideas for which it stands" anticipates, almost word for word, the simplistic platitudes used by Bush to explain why Islamic terrorists attacked on 9/11.

**Another "Team B": The Neocon Alternative to Restraint** A second telling response to G. H. W. Bush's stopping short of taking down Saddam came from the Pentagon. In reaction to the President's decision, expansionist hawks led by Dick Cheney once again devised a secret alternative. Defense secretary Cheney asked Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle and Lewis "Scooter" Libby to draft the Pentagon's *Defense Planning Guidance*. (Later, as Chair of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board, Perle would join Cheney and Wolfowitz as primary architects of the Iraq War.)

The Pentagon's *Guidance* plan didn't mince words as it called for global domination. Introducing the characteristic neocon notion of "preemption," it declared that America's new "first objective is to prevent the reemergence of a new rival," that "we must maintain the mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a regional or global role" (DoD "Defense Planning Guidance" 2/18/92). As the only Superpower, the plan stated, the US should now move boldly to control the lion's share of the world's resources—especially its dwindling fossil fuels (Michael Ruppert *Crossing the Rubicon* Chapt. 1 "Petroleum Man"). Early in the first term of G. W. Bush, this plan morphed into the Pentagon's Joint Vision 2020.

If ever there was a grandiose plan for permanent world military and economic domination, this was it. International-relations specialist Dr. Andrew Bacevich concluded that after the demise of Soviet power, "the Department of Defense completed its transformation into a Department of Power Projection" (A. Bacevich *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* p. 127). Washington commentator David Armstrong struck a more strident note, calling the disturbing document Cheney's "plan . . . to rule the world" (*Harper's* 10/02).

With the first President Bush coming up for election, however, Cheney's blueprint didn't play well at the White House: the president demanded that Cheney take his plan and shelve it. It was only Cheney's adroitness in keeping his fingerprints off his misdeeds that allowed his rejected plan to become known as the "Wolfowitz Doctrine."

**Brzezinski: A Foreign-Policy Heavy Weighs In** Later in the 1990s, prominent foreign-policy hawk Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor to President Carter, came forth with an idea he'd been promoting in the back corridors of power. In *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Brzezinski contended that control of resources in the

Middle East and southern Asia held the key to world domination. Though not a neocon himself, Brzezinski often supported their agenda. He shared the group's imperial designs and fascination with power projection, especially in southern Asia and the Middle East.

A perennial fixture on the prestigious Council on Foreign Relations, Dr. Brzezinski understood that public support for “imperial mobilization” would be difficult to muster, for “America is too democratic at home to be autocratic abroad” (Z. Brzezinski *Grand Chessboard* pp. 35-36). In most nations undertaking imperial domination, Brzezinski believed, most of the populace was

infected by imperialist emotions and symbols. The quest for national glory, “the white man's burden,” “*la mission civilisatrice*,” not to speak of the opportunities for personal profit—all served to mobilize support for imperial adventures . . . . [In contrast,] the attitude of the American public toward the external projection of American power has been much more ambivalent.

The public supported America's engagement in World War II largely because of the shock effect of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. . . (Brzezinski *Grand Chessboard* pp. 24-5).

Without another attack on the homeland demonstrating “a truly massive and widely perceived direct external threat,” he warned, Americans wouldn't support a rush for the black gold.

Anticipating the neocons, Brzezinski understood that if leaders are to wage wars which (may) enlarge the nation's prestige, power and wealth, outside threats and staged pretexts will be required. While such discussions of shock-and-fear events weren't any more novel than the plots themselves, they did prove prophetic: the Bush/Cheney administration has exploited shock, terrorism and dread of more attacks to advance nearly every item on its agenda, from domestic

repression and espionage to wars on Afghanistan and Iraq to vastly enlarged military budgets (*Washington Post* 1/11/05). Whenever the Bush administration or Congressional Republicans need to play the fear card, 9/11 is their ace in the hole.

Thus Brzezinski came close to calling for a “trigger event” as a pretext for “the external projection of American power.” He would later make clear that he was well aware of Washington’s propensity for such plots and ploys. In testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in early 2007, the Polish aristocrat warned that a “head-on conflict with Iran” was likely to follow American frustrations in Iraq. “A plausible scenario for a military collision with Iran,” Brzezinski told the senators, involves “a terrorist act in the U.S. blamed on Iran; culminating in a ‘defensive’ U.S. military action against Iran.” Apparently referring to the mythic “clash of civilizations” so popular among neocons, Brzezinski indicated that a “mythical historical narrative” for expanded attacks on Islamic countries “is already being articulated.” Brzezinski went on explain that in such a narrative “9/11 [is already being presented] as the equivalent of the Pearl Harbor attack” ([www.ichblog.eu/content/view/258/52](http://www.ichblog.eu/content/view/258/52)).

The implication of Brzezinski’s warning is that the Bush/Cheney administration was fully capable of staging or exploiting a non-event like the Tonkin Gulf incident or a “false flag” operation such as the sinking of the Battleship *Maine* (H. Zinn *People’s History of the United States* p. 304). When one recalls that most of America’s wars and interventions have involved such contrivances, and that the administration considered creating such a pretext to attack Iraq, this is hardly a radical accusation. Moreover, given what many historians now believe about Pearl Harbor, Brzezinski’s analogy seems to suggest that 9/11, too, was not a surprise attack.

**Zelikow and Others Also Ponder Another “Pearl Harbor”** The next



year, 1998, saw the appearance of an article in *Foreign Affairs* on “Catastrophic Terrorism: Tackling the New Danger.” The article revealed that several years prior to 9/11, Philip Zelikow and his co-authors (including former CIA Director John Deutsch) were thinking about both the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the impact of another Pearl Harbor. “If the device that exploded in 1993 under the World Trade Center had been nuclear, or had effectively dispersed a deadly pathogen, the resulting horror and chaos would have exceeded our ability to describe it. . . .” With uncanny accuracy, Zelikow and company predicted the actual effects of the 9/11 trauma: “Like Pearl Harbor, this event would divide our past and future into a before and after. The United States might respond with draconian measures, scaling back civil liberties, allowing wider surveillance of citizens, detention of suspects, and use of deadly force” (*Foreign Affairs* Nov.1998).

Unlike Brzezinski’s book, the article stops short of calling for a traumatic event. It’s equally important, though, because it previews what happened during the first Bush/Cheney administration: a more succinct description of the watershed mentality that has justified post-9/11 “surveillance,” “detention,” and “use of deadly force” is difficult to imagine. And when one realizes that Zelikow later became Executive Director of an “independent and nonpartisan” 9/11 Commission, the implications become even more troubling. “Would it not be interesting,” David Ray Griffin asks, “if we were to learn that those who orchestrated the attacks of 9/11 were able to put one of their own—someone who at least had foreknowledge of the attacks—in charge of carrying out the official investigation into these attacks?” (Griffin *Debunking 9/11 Debunking* p. 111).

**Project for the New American Century: The Ultimate Neocon Pressure Group** When the neocons who had infiltrated the upper echelons of power in the Ford, Reagan, and Bush administrations found themselves out of

office, they did exactly what they'd done earlier: they formed a high-profile pressure group. Founded in 1997, the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) provided a new platform for trumpeting the neocons' hawkish views (Hearst Newspapers 10/1/05).

The members of PNAC became a virtual who's who of the militaristic far right. Beyond Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz, PNAC's founders included Lewis "Scooter" Libby, Cheney's assistant and advisor; arch-conservative Dan Quayle, Vice President under Bush I; Jeb Bush, the Florida governor widely suspected as a tilt factor in the 2000 election; Richard Perle, former chair of the Defense Policy Board; Kenneth Adelman, long a proponent for chemical and biological weapons; and G. Gordon Libby, convicted Watergate "plumber" turned public personality. PNAC welcomed *Weekly Standard* Editor William Kristol and historian Philip Zelikow, the lead author of "Catastrophic Terrorism" and, as we've seen, the Bush doctrine "preemptive war." PNAC's roster also included former Reagan/Bush superhawks Eliot Abrams and John Bolton, who held several State-Department positions before becoming a notoriously nationalistic UN Ambassador (<http://infowars.net/articles/december2005/121205neocons.htm>).

Along with Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Bolton, other prominent PNAC members join the Bush administration: Elliot Abrams (Deputy National Security Advisor), Richard Armitage (Deputy Secretary of State), and Richard Perle (Chairman of the Defense Policy Board) (*Harper's* 2/06), and Philip Zelikow, who, soon after finishing up with the 9/11 Commission, became Counselor to Secretary of State Rice ([www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/biog/50837.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/biog/50837.htm)). The carry over was astounding. Of PNAC's original 25 founders, fully 12 accepted appointments in the first administration of G. W. Bush.

Elliot Abrams is particularly notable because his convictions for withholding

information from Congress during the Iran-Contra investigation didn't prevent him from receiving a pardon from G. H. W. Bush. And, a decade later, the same convictions did not keep Abrams from receiving a top post on the National Security Council ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elliott\\_Abrams](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elliott_Abrams)). Though many critics of the G. W. Bush administration seem to consider lack of accountability as a new problem, it has a long history among the neocons.

**Preemptive “Regime Change”:** PNAC’s **Open Letter to Clinton**  
PNAC’s obsession with Iraq, a prime source of cheap, accessible, high-quality crude, became apparent early on. Reverting to the Wolfowitz Doctrine, the neocons called with increasing stridency for an attack on Iraq. By 1998 the group had sent an open letter to President Clinton demanding “the removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime from power . . . .” and a “willingness to undertake military action” ([www.newamericancentury.org/iraqclintonletter.htm](http://www.newamericancentury.org/iraqclintonletter.htm)). Control of Iraq, they argued openly, would position US forces nearer to both the vast oil reserves of the Persian Gulf and the equally vast, relatively unexploited fields in the Caspian Basin (M. Ruppert *Crossing the Rubicon* Chapt. 1).

In PNAC’s *Statement of Principles* (1997) and especially in its *Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century* (2000), neocons called for corporate control of world resources, using nuclear weapons if necessary. Echoing the teachings of Leo Strauss, these neocon manifestos spoke of the need for the “Orwellian Opposite,” a reversion to the “big lie” technique touted by Nazi propagandists. This pronouncement illuminates neocons’ characteristically deceptive language—speaking of “advancing democracy” when they mean “extending American power,” etc. Despite the title of its second book, PNAC wasn’t about *either* shoring up “America’s defenses” (which needed little “rebuilding”) or about getting American armed forces to carry out their “global

responsibilities.”

PNAC’s plans didn’t call for traditional military conquest, however. Instead, PNAC’s treatise calls for “regime change” when governments become unfavorable to US interests; for more military bases around the globe; and for much greater military spending to support these bases and military interventions ([www.newamericancentury.org](http://www.newamericancentury.org)). Such policies, which have little to do with “defenses” or “global responsibilities,” would enable US corporations to control both resources and markets in order to maximize profits. Such global military aspirations, PNAC believed, would require “full-spectrum dominance” (*Rebuilding America’s Defenses* p. 51).

**PNAC’s Call for “Full-Spectrum Dominance”** Since the 1980s, neocons have pushed for “Star Wars” and other high-tech schemes to intercept incoming missiles. Whether such systems would work or not, they promised huge profits for aerospace contractors. Not surprisingly, *Rebuilding America’s Defenses* placed special emphasis on “missile defense,” described as “a prerequisite for maintaining American preeminence” by making it impossible for other countries to strike back effectively. Then and now, the term “missile defense” is disingenuous, for such systems, were they to work, would hold considerable *offensive*, first-strike potential (Rahul Mahajan *Full Spectrum Dominance: US Power in Iraq and Beyond* pp. 49-59).

Understanding this full well, the neocons called for weapons “to conduct strikes from space,” giving the American military a “global first-strike force.” To these ends, they called for additional funding for the US Space Command (PNAC *Rebuilding America’s Defenses* pp. 38, 54). While the Space Command’s informal motto became “In Your Face from Outer Space,” these neocon fantasies were no laughing matter: they urged the high-tech militarization of space for the stated purpose of striking first, possibly with nuclear weapons.

**Oil On The Brain** While Iraq had long remained an obsession among

neoconservatives, it wasn't the only country of special interest. As we've seen, a trans-Afghanistan pipeline from the Caspian Basin to the Indian Ocean had long been a primary prospect for US corporate giants. These included "the usual suspects"—Exxon Mobil, Chevron, and Cheney's Halliburton (*Wall Street Journal* 5/23/97). Despite the fact that the Taliban government was anything but democratic, and despite the fact "the US government was well aware that the Taliban had been harboring Osama bin Laden since 1996," corporate dealings with the Taliban had raised no complaints among the neocons (Nafeez M. Ahmed *War on Truth* p. 21).

Throughout their history, the neocons have promoted foreign policies that advance corporate capitalism, not democracy. Characteristically, in fact, they've talked of "American interests" when they really mean "corporate interests." Echoing PNAC's obsessions with Middle Eastern oil, in 1999 Dick Cheney argued that "by 2010 we will need [an additional] 50 million barrels a day. The Middle East, with two-thirds of the oil and the lowest cost, is still where the prize lies." Relying on the neocon's favorite device of invoking "the common good" to embellish their motives, Cheney added that "the Middle East is the key to preventing the world from running out of oil" (Qtd. in *The Independent* (UK) 1/7/07).

By 2000, frustrated with failed attempts to negotiate the pipeline, the neocons began to push for an attack on Afghanistan. They were disappointed, though, when the Pentagon had drawn up plans for attacks on both Iran and Afghanistan but the Clinton administration didn't carry them out (*Time* 8/4/02). As we've also seen, once George Bush and Dick Cheney were selected in 2000, the neocon cabal moved rapidly into positions of power. With more neocons occupying key positions than ever before, Washington's stance became more aggressive than that of its predecessors. Resistance to building the trans-Afghan pipeline would no longer be tolerated. Just five weeks *before* 9/11—and just eleven

weeks before the US began to bomb Afghanistan—a Bush administration official told the Taliban government in no uncertain terms that “either you accept our offer of a carpet of gold, or we bury you under a carpet of bombs” (Inter Press Service 11/16/01).

Neocon promotion of the invasion of Iraq was similarly cold and calculating, though fraught with miscalculations. In early 2003, on the eve of the attack, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz contended—completely minimizing the astronomical costs of the war—that “we’re dealing with a country that can really finance its own reconstruction, and relatively soon” (Qtd. in *The Independent* [UK] 1/7/07). In effect, Wolfowitz argued that “we can wage this war on the cheap because we’ll seize Iraq’s oil industry and then divert the vast profits into deals with American contractors to rebuild it. Iraqi oil money will insure lavish profits for contractors like Blackwater USA and Haliburton’s subsidiary, Kellogg, Brown, & Root” (DVD “Iraq for Sale: The Profiteers” [www.iraqforsale.org](http://www.iraqforsale.org)).

**More Rumbings About “a New Pearl Harbor”** Echoing Brzezinski and Zelikow, PNAC in 2000 lamented that “the process of [political and military] transformation, even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catalyzing event, like a new Pearl Harbor”—an attack that would outrage the public. Such a trauma would be necessary, they argued, to justify the increased military spending they saw as essential to ensure “full-spectrum dominance” (*Rebuilding America’s Defenses* p. 51).

In a display of bravado, PNAC released these statements just months before the 2000 elections—while one of its founders was running for vice president. They were apparently confident that the news media wouldn’t bring the policy statements before the American electorate. The lack of interest among politicians, the press, and investigating officials is still astonishing today. In the fall of 2000, for

instance, neither the Gore/Lieberman campaign nor the news media called the public's attention to the fact that Dick Cheney was a founding member of the neocon group making such statements. After the 9/11 tragedy it was equally astounding that officials trying to find out "who done it" would make no reference to obvious "persons of interest": those who'd helped to found a group that first called for an attack on Iraq, and then talked openly about the need for a national trauma to make it happen.

In the year and a half before 9/11, then, prominent neocons in the foreign-policy/military establishment had talked openly about how a national trauma would advance their agenda. If uncritically reported by the media, they believed, such a "Pearl Harbor type event" would drive public opinion toward supporting wars against countries that were militarily weak but resource rich. Afghanistan offered the oil pipeline route, and Iraq contained the world's largest untapped reserves.

**Rumsfeld's "Space Pearl Harbor"** In 1999, extending his long infatuation with a much-ridiculed "Star Wars" scheme, Rumsfeld headed a blue-ribbon committee on "missile defense." Other members of this committee included Wolfowitz, Perle, George Shultz, and Stephen Hadley, who would become Bush's National Security Advisor, plus another rising "vulcan," Condoleezza Rice (*Mann Rise of the Vulcans* p. 253). By 2001, this group had finished up its assessment, known as "US National Security Space Management and Organization."

Known as "The Rumsfeld Commission," its purpose wasn't surprising. Aerospace technologies had long held a special fascination for many neocons—and especially for Rumsfeld. Years earlier, as Secretary of Defense, Rumsfeld had beamed at the cameras after he piloted the new B-1 bomber (*Rise of the Vulcans* photo section). Unlike the vast majority of neocons, Rumsfeld had actually served in the military himself ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald\\_Rumsfeld](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Rumsfeld)). Yet like so many, he exhibited a

boyish fascination with shiny new warplanes.

Previewing his well-known obsessions with high-tech weaponry and small on-the-ground deployments, Rumsfeld recommended pouring resources into a new Space Force. To deal with entrenched resistance—as well as to muster public support for the next war—the Rumsfeld Commission’s report wondered “whether, as in the past, a disabling attack against the country and its people—a ‘Space Pearl Harbor’—will be the only event able to galvanize the nation and cause the US government to act” (*Report of the Commission to Assess U.S. National Security Space Management and Organization* p. 7). As Griffin has pointed out, this is not simply another call for the militarization of space, but “yet another suggestion by a central figure in the Bush administration that another ‘Pearl Harbor’ may be necessary to ‘galvanize the nation’” (*New Pearl Harbor* p. 99). Whether or not top officials left their fingerprints on 9/11, clearly some at the Pentagon were “thinking the unthinkable”—and even thinking it out loud.

While the stealth of Cheney is notorious, that of Rumsfeld is also notable. A co-author of *Cobra II*, Marine General Bernard Trainor (Ret.) describes the defense secretary as “very cagey about [not] leaving his fingerprints on anything that might not turn out well” (PBS “Charlie Rose” 3/13/06). In light of the catastrophe in Iraq, this appraisal might seem ironically off the mark. But his caginess may help to explain why Rumsfeld gave the appearance of staying outside the command loop as the 9/11 attacks were unfolding. Or why, in the immediate aftermath when top Pentagon commanders were indicating that jets were supposedly scrambled, the defense secretary didn’t make such statements. Otherwise, his silence seems quite uncharacteristic of the man.

**Shultz, Cheney, and the Neocon Network** Beyond PNAC, the neocon network also included top-echelon insiders, most of them former high officials from



the Reagan and Bush administrations. Former Secretary of State James Baker III, a slick but tough Texas oil man, is not typically regarded as a neocon. He's remembered for two roles: leading Bush/Cheney's push-and-shove recount campaign in Florida, and co-chairing the Iraq Study Group, which made policy recommendations to Bush but raised no questions about the overall wisdom of the invasion and occupation (*New York Times* 11/13/06). To this latter involvement, Baker brought blatant conflicts of interest almost completely overlooked by the news media: his law firm had maintained interests in Iraq's repayment of debts to Kuwait and other Gulf States ([www.commondreams.org/views06/1208-31.htm](http://www.commondreams.org/views06/1208-31.htm)). For years, Baker had stayed closely connected with the Bush family's fortunes as senior counsel for Exxon Mobil, Saudi Arabia, and the Carlyle Group of investors (*New York Times* 3/5/01). These involvements hardly qualified the former Secretary as a "clean and honest broker."

Nor was this the first time that these conflicts slipped under the radar. In 2001 the Council on Foreign Relations cosponsored an Independent Task Force on Strategic Energy Policy Challenges with a conservative partner: the James A. Baker III Institute of Public Policy. The former Secretary of State was among those authoring the Task Force's final report. Pointing to "a new era of energy scarcity," the report warned that "if political factors were to block the development of new oil fields in the Middle East, the ramifications for world oil markets could be quite severe" (Larry Shoup *Z Magazine* Mar. 2006). Again we note a characteristic orientation toward oil supplies and prices, corporate profits, control of foreign resources—and the hint that deadly force could ensure America's supply of crude.

Almost as though by plan, the Energy Task Force's recommendations funneled perfectly into those of Vice President Cheney's Task Force, which also

convened in early 2001. Again, transparency to the public was nonexistent, and the focus would have horrified Al Gore. The Vice President held meetings behind closed doors at the White House, reserving places for select members of the administration and especially for oil, gas, and coal company executives. There were no places at the table for consumer, environmental, or public-health groups, for the public, or even for the press. Why, many have asked, were these deliberations held in secret—and why, seven years later, does the administration continue to keep both lists of Task Force participants and records of its deliberations from the public? Why, too, have federal courts not forced the information in the public realm? ([www.projectcensored.org/publications/2005/8.html](http://www.projectcensored.org/publications/2005/8.html)).

An easy answer would be that secrecy on such matters has increased the power of the executive branch, or that, if exposed, pre-9/11 discussions of Iraqi resources would prove politically embarrassing. Judicial Watch, a conservative watchdog group, discovered that the Task Force poured over maps of oil and gas fields in Iraq ([www.judicialwatch.org/071703.c\\_.shtml](http://www.judicialwatch.org/071703.c_.shtml)). Even more politically explosive is that fact that, according to a National Security Council document, the Task Force was looking at new policies toward “rogue” states and the “capture of new and existing oil and gas fields.” It would be difficult not to read this as covert language for “invade Iraq for oil” (Linda McCuaig *It's the Crude, Dude* pp. 84-85). Even former “Fed” Chairman Alan Greenspan, once the country’s staid establishment economic oracle, has come to agree: “I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil.” (Greenspan *Age of Turbulence* p. 463)

In addition to the control of oil reserves, it’s widely believed that the closed-door discussions of Cheney’s Energy Task Force focused on neocon concerns over economic security and corporate profits rendered possible through power

projection in the Middle East and Central Asia (Associated Press 12/9/02).

**“War on Terror” and “Preemptive War”** The neocons made sure that 9/11 advanced their objectives: control of Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries in southern Asia, made possible via full-spectrum dominance and “preemptive” first strikes. Toward these ends, the 9/11 tragedy was used to launch an open-ended War on Terror. Unlike other wars, though, there would be no way to tell when this one was finally over. Thus the War on Terror supplied a long-awaited replacement for the Cold War, which had reliably provided “a widely perceived direct external threat” for 45 years. Better yet, a War on Terror promised perpetual warfare for “generations” conducted under the unprecedented doctrine of “preemptive wars” (Washington Post 11/18/01).

The idea of initiating an attack to eliminate a potential future threat first found expression in Bush’s West Point speech of June 2002 ([www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html)). In its wake, others in the administration sought to formalize its new policy of threatening a preemptive strike as the Bush Doctrine. Foreign-policy “realists” Colin Powell and Richard Haass at the State Department attempted it, but their draft incurred the displeasure of National Security Advisor Condi Rice. To rewrite *The National Security Strategy of the US* (NSS 2002) ([www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/html)), Rice turned to her former colleague, neocon Philip Zelikow. Working with Stephen Hadley, who would himself become the Bush’s National Security Advisor, Zelikow produced NSS 2002 (Mann *Rise of the Vulcans* pp. 316, 331). As Griffin observes, Zelikow’s rewrite “declared that American behavior would no longer be constrained by the basic principle of international law as embodied by the charter of the United Nations” (Griffin *Debunking 9/11 Debunking* p. 109).

Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the United States can no

longer rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today's threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries' choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first (NSS 2002 pp. 6, 15). Alluding to Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, the "rogue states" Bush would later designate as an "Axis of Evil," the President indicated that in response to "our enemies' efforts to acquire dangerous technologies," America will, in self-defense, "act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed" (NSS 2002 Cover Letter). One prominent neocon proudly described the NSS as a "quintessentially neoconservative document" ([www.cfr.org/publication/7592/think\\_again.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/7592/think_again.html)).

In making this seemingly radical break in US policy, the new guidelines indirectly referred to the 9/11 attacks, the supposed linkage between al Qaeda and Iraq, and the War on Terror. The result was a slick piece of propaganda:

**Close Neocon Connections to Israel** The policy of preemptive war wasn't new, however. Neocons had already proposed it, but for another country: Israel. Uncovering a document developed in 1996 by the Center for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies, a conservative Israeli think tank, foreign-policy analyst James Bamford made a telling revelation: "the blueprint for the new Bush policy[of military preemption] had actually been drawn up five years earlier by three of his [the president's] top national security advisors." Soon to be appointed to top positions, they were none other than arch-neocons Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, and David Wurmser. However, their plan for preemption wasn't written for the Bush administration; it was intended for an Israel's Likud Party leader, Benjamin Netanyahu (Bamford *Pretext for War* p. 261). Years later, in a revealing statement tellingly underreported by US media, Netanyahu would indicate that the 9/11 attacks had

been very good for Israel ([www.haaretz.com:80/hasen/spages/975574.html](http://www.haaretz.com:80/hasen/spages/975574.html)).

When the first Bush administration failed to remove Saddam in the Gulf War of 1991, neocons were outraged. When a second Clinton administration looked inevitable, several began to think of an Israeli military strike against Saddam enjoying extensive American moral, political, and military support. Several prominent neocons met at the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies (IASPS), which according to its website pursues “the limitation of Israeli socialist statism . . . by means of free market reform and a robust missile defense” The study group’s institutional connections are telling. In addition to Perle, its chair, representing the American Enterprise Institute, and Wurmser, representing IASPS, its roster included Meyrav Wurmser from Johns Hopkins University and Robert Loewenberg, President of IASPS. The group also included representation from the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and from Israeli military intelligence ([www.israeleconomy.org/strat1.htm](http://www.israeleconomy.org/strat1.htm)). TV anchors such as Jim Lehrer have long made a practice of calling on such think tanks without identifying their funding sources or ideological biases.

**Pretexts for Wars in the Middle East** The IASP study group’s 1996 report, “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm,” illustrated not only the neocons’ close connections with Israeli national security but also their fondness for preemptive attacks. At the core of the report, however, were its recommendations for the removal of Saddam Hussein “as the first step in remaking the Middle East into a region friendly, instead of hostile to Israel” (Qtd. in J. Bamford *Pretext for War* p. 262). In addition, the plan called for an attack on Syria; it recommended that the attack be based on several pretexts—notably that Syria had a “weapons of mass destruction program.” The IASP group even supplied

Netanyahu with a TV address touting these pretexts for the attacks. This address would closely resemble Bush-administration speeches attempting to justify their own Middle-East war: As Bamford remarks, “Iraq would simply replace Syria and the United States would replace Israel” (Bamford *Pretext for War* pp. 262-63).

Although much has come to light about neocons’ long-term obsession with Saddam and his much-touted weapons, American media have done far less reporting on the links between this objective and those of Israel. Nor have they reported on the neocons’ interest in providing for the security of Israel, past or present. However, neocon writings reveal that Israel comes up constantly as a concern and point of reference, one frequently mentioned along with the United States as the supposed beneficiary of a policy being promoted.

**Running the Pentagon, Waging the Wars** Given that the new Bush administration placed so many neocons in positions of power, it’s not surprising that its policies have made their dreams come true while generating nightmares for nearly everyone else. At the Pentagon, the neocons wasted no time. Under the direction of Rumsfeld, the neocons immediately dominated the Pentagon’s Office of Special Plans ([www.gpoaccess.gov/911/index.html](http://www.gpoaccess.gov/911/index.html)). Its “Special Plans” included “incursions” into Afghanistan and Iraq.

As readers of Timeline VI will recall, neocon behavior right after the 9/11 attacks was even more telling. Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Feith—plus Cheney and Libby at the White House—wasted no time in calling for more military spending. Never one to dawdle, Rumsfeld had his rhetoric ready on the very night of 9/11. Just hours after Flight 77 had apparently slammed into the Pentagon, killing 125 people working there, Rumsfeld began calling for more military spending. “Does this sort of thing convince you that an emergency exists in this country to increase defense spending, to dip into Social Security, if necessary?” ([www.defenselink.mil/cgi-](http://www.defenselink.mil/cgi-)

bin/dlprint.cgi). Few members of Congress or the press ever asked whether *all* those billions would go solely for “defense.”

Moreover, according to Bob Woodward, former Naval intelligence officer turned insider journalist, on 9/11 Rumsfeld also began to link the 9/11 attacks to Iraq (PBS “Frontline” ‘The Dark Side’ 6/20/06). If we assume that the 9/11 attacks came as a complete surprise, as the Official Story claims, then how, within only a few hours, could anyone possibly assemble evidence of such a connection? This bluster could more logically be read as preparing public opinion for a war Rumsfeld and others had been itching to start. It could also, however, be seen as a distraction from the actual perpetrators—and thus as a first step to cover up the deception, if not the crime itself.

**Temptations of Unprecedented Military Power** Eugene Jarecki, director of the documentary *Why We Fight*, points to a situation in which “the military-industrial complex,” with its 700-plus American bases in 130 countries, is overbuilt to the point where the abuse of military power has become a major temptation. As he laments “the disastrous rise of misplaced power,” Jarecki compares this excessive military power to “a hot rod left in the driveway with its engine running” outside a garage full of teenage boys (PBS “Charlie Rose” 1/19/06). The power-seeking adolescents represent the militarists who drive the country off a cliff, and the “hot rod” symbolizes the “toys for the good old boys”—everything from aircraft carriers to Predator drones to nuclear weapons. While the “gee-whiz” gadgetry factor is no doubt important, the neocons tend to be more stealthy and strategic, as in quietly planning permanent bases to guard “our” oil in Iraq.

Since producing high-tech weapons and seizing other countries’ resources yield high profits, an obvious question arises: Are some of the neocons well-paid promoters? To what extent have neocons acted out their own psychological needs,

followed their own personal ambitions, and advanced their own ideological commitments, and to what extent might they represent the dominant military/industrial/financial interests—those of bankers and executives whom they’d met at elite universities and who have often bankrolled the think tanks that support them? The fact that many of the neocons have taken well-paid jobs at corporate-sponsored think tanks (such as the Heritage Foundation, the Hoover Institute, or the American Enterprise Institute) suggests that their usefulness to prominent corporate players has hardly gone unrewarded. Corporate money underwrites the think tanks that pay the neocon elite to write books and articles, prepare position papers, and make media appearances that generate a climate favorable to corporate expansion and profits, including those made from selling weapons. The American Enterprise Institute, for instance, was one of the original funders of PNAC and neocons at the Institute later helped the Bush administration to refine its plans for a “surge” of troops in Iraq (*Air America Radio* 1/11/07). In one of the most striking examples of corporate/neocon connections, Chevron named one of its tankers the *Condoleezza Rice* after its longtime Board member. But shortly after Rice became Bush’s National Security Advisor in 2001, the White House asked the oil behemoth to change the name of its supertanker (*San Francisco Chronicle* 5/5/01).

Beyond institutional sponsorship, though, it’s essential to look at a power-obsessed mentality characterized by a belief that ends can justify any means deemed necessary. Propelled by an ultra-nationalistic credo, these means involve military force as well as power projection and economic manipulation.

**“Crazies” in High Places** Much has been made of Bush’s personal inability to deal with reality, but has his administration come under the more generic influence of pathological personalities? The neocons’ incessant threat-inflation, fear-mongering, and saber-rattling have caused more than one Republican policy maker



to call them “the crazies.” Former Secretary of State Colin Powell added an intensifier, referring to Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz as “fucking crazies” (*The Guardian* [UK] 9/12/04). In 2006, after Pentagon plans to drop nuclear weapons on Iran were exposed, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, once a staunch defender of the Iraq “adventure,” called the idea “completely nuts” (Associated Press 4/9/06). Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the international nuclear watchdog agency, referred to “neocon hawks on steroids” as “crazies” (Reuters 6/1/07). He later warned anew that a strike against Iran would “be an act of madness” (*New York Times* 6/16/07).

First the neocons brought the world Iraq, the gift that keeps on giving; then, in the waning months of the Bush administration, they pushed to leave the country another legacy: Iran. In June of 2007, neocon editor Norman Podhoretz laid out “The Case for Bombing Iran” (*Commentary* June 2007). Neocon icon John Bolton, Bush’s abrasive former Ambassador to the UN, indicated that “regime change or the use of force are the only available options to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapons capability.” And David Wurmser, now a top aide to Cheney, told conservative think tanks that the Vice President believed “Mr. Bush might have to decide whether to take military action” (*New York Times* 6/16/07). Cheney’s office was widely reported to be the most hawkish force within the internal debate about attacking Iran.

Is this just amped-up “aircraft-carrier diplomacy,” or does it suggest another departure from reality? Could rogue elements resemble the crazies in *Dr. Strangelove*?

As usual, the past informs the present. In 1960, President Eisenhower found his efforts toward détente sabotaged when a CIA U-2 spy plane managed to get itself shot down over the USSR. In 1961, hoping to avoid antagonizing the CIA, a young President Kennedy foolishly approved its secret plan to invade Cuba at the

Bay of Pigs (Zinn *People's History* pp. 440-41). Later on, Kennedy quashed the Pentagon's plans for Operation Northwoods, a "false flag" provocation contrived to justify an American attack on Cuba (Bamford *Body of Secrets* pp. 82-89). With both the CIA and the Pentagon pushing for independence from the executive and legislative branches, the prospect of rogue, sociopathic types making decisions on war and peace hardly seems far-fetched.

**Neocon Involvement in 9/11?** If the neocons had long sought "full-spectrum dominance," what might they have considered doing to shift public opinion toward support for invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq? Because the neocons had written explicitly that a "new Pearl Harbor" would advance their objectives, we can reasonably wonder whether some of them might have ignored warnings about, played along with, or even helped to execute the 9/11 attacks. To do so, after all, would have helped them implement their published agenda.

***Mental and Moral Makeup*** Possible involvement would also fit with the neocon mentality presented in the previous chapter. It's well to recall both their aptitudes for deception, their interest in mythmaking, and their belief that the public requires traumas before it will support wars. Above all, neocons have repeatedly promoted a relentless pursuit of power, especially through military intervention, unchecked by legal or moral restraints. Neocons are indeed the high priests of war.

Shadow stuff often hides beneath smiling surfaces. It's not for nothing that Richard Perle is known as "the Prince of Darkness," that the BBC aired a documentary on "The Power of Nightmares," or that PBS "Frontline" explored "The Dark Side," focusing on Cheney and his top aides. Daniel Ellsberg, the patriot who released the *Pentagon Papers*, has expressed concerns that criminal elements of the US government were psychologically capable of contributing to, or even carrying out the 9/11 attacks ([www.infowars.com/articles/terror/pe...ybe\\_did\\_911.htm](http://www.infowars.com/articles/terror/pe...ybe_did_911.htm)). Closer

to the political mainstream, public intellectual and Air America radio host Thom Hartmann has concluded that “Cheney had all those warnings, and just let it happen” (Air America Radio 1/9/07).

As we’ve seen, for decades the neocons have displayed a mindset rife with desires for dominance and amoral, deceptive schemes for achieving that end. Their own statements reveal that a “contrived event,” a staged pretext for war, had haunted their thinking for many years. Members of the group had experience in traitorous “dirty tricks” such as those that sabotaged Jimmy Carter’s “October Surprise” as well as devious cover-ups such as those following the Iran/Contra scandal. And they stood to benefit enormously from a domestic terrorist attack on the US. Bearing in mind not only this mentality, and not only this experience, but key neocons’ demonstrable role in a coverup of 9/11, one has to suspect their likely involvement in its planning or even execution.

Given all this suspicious background, it’s amazing—and probably revealing—to realize that the 9/11 Commission’s *Report* mentions neither PNAC nor Brzezinski’s book nor Zelikow’s article nor Rumsfeld’s Space Pearl Harbor. With Bush in the White House and Zelikow running the show, the Commissioners weren’t about to compare the positions taken by key players before 9/11 with either what happened on that day or with the neocons’ *actions* during and after the attacks.

***Positioning for Involvement*** In 2001, a clique of hardened ideologues and clever in-fighters who’d been talking about a “new Pearl Harbor” and demanding an attack on Iraq moved into key positions in the Bush administration, many of them at the Pentagon. Imagine that neocon officials, perched near the epicenter of power, had learned of a terrorist plot which promised to deliver a shocking blow. Would these neocons, given everything we know about them, seem likely to have

worked wholeheartedly to avert the attack? Would they have put aside their longings for a “new Pearl Harbor,” or would at least some of them have become accessories—or even accomplices—to the crime of the century? “Neocon Job” may be more than a clever bumper sticker.

Given their mentality, their backgrounds, their political records in and out of power, their well-known personal and ideological agendas, and the perceptions of them held by others in government, the neocons would have to appear on any good detective’s short list of “persons of interest.” However, rather than being treated as the subjects of or suspects in the two official investigations, the neocons often managed to position themselves as authorities rather than witnesses. From positions of unprecedented influence in a White House well-known for its secrecy and deceit, plus its reflexive assertions of “executive privilege,” neocons have controlled the 9/11 investigations from both inside (Zelikow) and outside (Cheney).

**Lingering in the Shadows, Unrepentant** One might hope that the the neocon juggernaut has ground to a halt, its wheels sunk deep in the oil sands of Iraq, their pet project, the place they’d so long hoped to conquer. If so, may they rest in peace. But given both their prominence in American foreign policy and their extraordinary influence on both Bush administrations, to imagine them appropriately discredited, let alone moribund, would be premature. As we’ve seen, those most responsible for the air-defense failures on 9/11 have not been held accountable. In a culture of unaccountability, it’s possible to fail one’s way to the top.

Though several recent books have cast them in an unfavorable light, the neocons haven’t fled the field. Instead, as the prospects for their Iraq venture continue a downslide toward fiasco, well-known neocons are attempting to dissociate themselves from their pet project (*Vanity Fair* Jan. 2007). On the fifth

anniversary of the attack, Richard Perle blamed Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice for US failures to run a self-financing occupation or establish an Islamic democracy (*New York Times* 3/16/08). The neocons don't mention, let alone question, their disastrous failure to set up either model democracy or a free-market paradise in Iraq. Nor have they altered their fundamental belief in Washington's imperial project, in which Israel and Saudi Arabia remain central and Afghanistan and Iraq are only parts.

**A Complete Lack of Accountability** In mainstream circles, neocons are seldom identified, much less linked with the most disastrous policies of the Bush administration or held accountable for them. In fact, members of the group continue to receive acceptance and even validation from programmers and media outlets. Despite his well-deserved reputation for bullying State-Department colleagues and abrading foreign diplomats, former UN Ambassador John Bolton continues to receive invitations to speak on "international relations" ([www.commondreams.org/archive/2008/05/28/9236/](http://www.commondreams.org/archive/2008/05/28/9236/)). *The New York Times* makes no mention of neoconservatism when it runs the op-eds of William Kristol, longtime editor of *The Weekly Standard*. Jim Lehrer and Charlie Rose don't introduce Robert Zoellick as a neocon, successor to Paul Wolfowitz, or former head of the Center for Strategic and International Studies ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Zoellick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Zoellick)); instead, they simply present him as "the President of the World Bank."

Historically, liberal Democrats have also tended to normalize the neocon militarism. Historian Tony Judt has pointed out that "liberal hawks" have often provided political cover for more extreme neocon militarists: "in today's America, neo-conservatives generate brutish policies for which liberals provide the ethical fig leaf" (*London Review of Books* 9/21/06). Thus, much as domestic-issue liberals such as Sen. Joe Biden (D-Del.) or columnist Tom Friedman gave neocons the green light on Iraq,

most have done little to spotlight neocon failures. Though the American news media do occasionally link Cheney, Rumsfeld, or Wolfowitz to the catastrophe in Iraq, they rarely identify the neocon group or implicate its mindset in disastrous policies. To do so would likely call for discussion of their ideology, and that isn't something that, even today, most corporate media owners seem to want discussed.

One could ask, along with seasoned media critic Greg Mitchell, author of *So Wrong for So Long*, How wrong do you have to be? Mitchell's response is "you can't be wrong enough" (PBS "Bill Moyers Journal" 6/5/08). While many of those who got it *right* about Iraq, such as Scott Ritter or Phil Donahue, have received big punishments and little acknowledgement, neocons and right-wing pundits have faced no consequences for getting it so colossally *wrong*. This failure to hold the neocons responsible for the disasters in Afghanistan and Iraq, where their involvement was so demonstrably crucial, makes it all the more difficult to investigate their likely role in 9/11.

Occasionally, though, someone does blow the neocons' cover.

**Black Market Sales of Nukes?** In a stunning exposé done early in 2008, FBI whistleblower Sibel Edmunds pulled the shroud from a black-market scheme for selling US nuclear technology. Including the US, Pakistan, Israel, and Turkey, this syndicate relies on "a network of moles in sensitive military and nuclear institutions" to procure technology that US officials can sell to countries seeking it. Published in England after American news outlets refused to run the story, Edmunds's revelations pointed toward "one well-known senior official in the US State Department" who appeared to be "selling the information to black market buyers, including Pakistan." Edmunds indicated that the FBI, where she used to work, was looking at several "senior Pentagon officials—including household names—who were aiding foreign agents" (*London Times* 1/6/08).

Subsequent sleuthing revealed that one likely suspect is Marc Grossman, a former US ambassador to Turkey. Grossman held high positions at the State Department during the Clinton and Bush administrations before joining the Cohen Group, headed by former Secretary of Defense William Cohen ([www.cohengroup.net/expertise/index.cfm](http://www.cohengroup.net/expertise/index.cfm)). But since Grossman hadn't worked at the Pentagon and Wolfowitz is a "household name" while Grossman is not, "Wolfie" could be the main suspect. Further investigation also suggests that other neocons, including Douglas Feith and Richard Perle, may have also profited by representing foreign nuclear interests (*Z Magazine* March 2008). Given the dire prospects of nuclear proliferation, more research is urgently needed.

If these accusations are true, they would extend a characteristic pattern of neocon involvement with high-tech (and particularly nuclear) weapons, with power projection and military dominance, with sociopathic projects done under clandestine cover, and, once again, with secret actions potentially affecting hundreds of millions of people.

**Involvement with 9/11 or other Crimes** To narrow the list of suspects in most crimes, investigators ask about who had the *motive*, the *means*, and the *opportunity*. In the case of possible neocon involvement in 9/11, though, we have to add another question: "who had the *mentality*, the intelligence and amorality to make a such a scheme succeed?" Finally, in addition to the detective's question of *cui bono?*—*who benefitted* from the crime?—one must ask "who had *discussed its desirability* before the treasonous act was committed?" When these questions are posed, neocons do come to mind as possible enablers or perpetrators.

Any valid new investigation of 9/11 will need to treat key neocons, particularly Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Feith as *suspects*, not as witnesses or experts. It will also need to receive their testimony under oath. Even if the

neocons are exonerated of any collusion, passive or active, having them testify would put the spotlight on a group mainstream media rarely names. For the health of American democracy, if for no other reason, this conspiracy of silence must end: the public needs to understand who the neocons are, what they've wanted to do, and how, over several decades, they've exerted so much influence over American policies.

**Acknowledgements:** The writer wishes to acknowledge helpful input from Kyle Gardner, Brian Good, Mickey Huff, Chuck Millar, Kai Middleton, Rowland Morgan, Gregg Roberts, and Chuck Thurston.

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