

The Unending Neoconservative Crusade

By

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The Neoconservative policy on Iraq has been largely implemented. Where else might the Neoconservatives seek to commit American power? They have already staked out two targets, Syria and Iran.

The key man in each is Michael Ledeen who paradoxically has the same last name, with a slightly different orthography, as Usama bin Ladin. It was Ledeen who came up with the crudely-put but fundamental policy directive: "every ten years or so, the United States needs to pick up some crappy little country and throw it against the wall, just to show the world we mean business."ⁱ

"This doctrine of what they call preemption or preventive war," wrote the noted American historian Eric Foner,ⁱⁱ "...is exactly the same argument that the Japanese used in attacking Pearl Harbor."

Syria is the "crappy little country" the Neoconservatives most love to hate. Syria is important to them because the Israeli government fears that it will be unable to impose its terms on the Palestinians while Syria remains a significant Arab power. Consequently, as Sharon and his colleagues see it, with Iraq now subdued, Syria

should be next in line. This is the policy Richard Perle, Douglas Feith and David Wurmser advocated in their 1996 "clean break" paper for the newly elected Likud government. It is in this context that the recent Israeli air strike against targets in Syria can be evaluated. Its purpose, obviously, was to warn the Syrian government not to support the Palestinian resistance movement.

What about Iran? As Marc Perelman has written, "A budding coalition of conservative hawks, Jewish organizations and Iranian monarchists is pressing the White House to step up American efforts to bring about regime change in Iran...The emerging coalition is reminiscent of the buildup to the invasion of Iraq."ⁱⁱⁱ In the place occupied by Ahmad Chalabi as the Neoconservatives' candidate to rule Iraq, Reza Pahlavi, son of the former shah, has become the favorite to take power in Iran. For his part, the young pretender has established "quiet contacts with top Israeli officials...[including] Prime Minister Sharon and former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu..."

As in the Iraq campaign, publicity for the new venture is being provided by William Kristol's Neoconservative journal, *The Weekly Standard*. More significant is that Michael Rubin, WINEP's specialist on ways to overthrow the current regime, has joined Abram Shulsky's "Office of

Special Plans" to ensure that the intelligence reports substantiate the Neoconservative policy. Also active in the background is Michael Ledeen who has been arguing that the current Iranian regime is on the point of collapse. It just needed a push. We should give it, he said in a lecture at JINSAA on April 30, 2003: "the time for diplomacy is at an end; it is time for a free Iran, free Syria and free Lebanon."

Ledeen and other like-minded men have set up the "Coalition for Democracy in Iran" to gather the forces, funded by Congress, needed to bring about "regime change." Just as they advised President Bush that Iraqis would greet incoming American troops with flowers, so the Neoconservatives assert today that Persians will sing and dance in the streets.

The list to targeted countries does not end with Iran. Pakistan, Libya, Somalia and The Sudan have been mentioned by military planners. A trial balloon was even launched to see the reaction to a drive against Saudi Arabia.

Before he left the chairmanship of The Defense Policy Board, Richard Perle convened a meeting on July 10, 2002 to hear a briefing from an advocate of an attack on Saudi Arabia. Laurent Murawiec described Saudi Arabia as "the kernel of evil, the prime mover, the most dangerous

opponent" of the United States in the Middle East.^{iv} He recommended that "U.S. officials give it an ultimatum to stop backing terrorism or face seizure of its oil fields and its financial assets invested in the United States." The results were predictable: the Saudis immediately withdrew several hundred billion dollars from America and decided not to allow American troops and aircraft to operate against Iraq from Saudi territory.

Undaunted, the Neoconservative magazine, *The Weekly Standard*, published almost simultaneously with the briefing an article entitled "The Coming Saudi Showdown," and its message was picked up by the American Jewish Committee's magazine, *Commentary*, with an even more explicit article entitled "Our Enemies, the Saudis." But, perhaps partly because the Bush family and major business supporters of the Bush administration are deeply involved there, Saudi Arabia seems to have been dropped as a target.

However, many potential targets remain.

North Korea was high on the list until the catastrophic cost of a campaign against it became clear. Since it is thought already to possess nuclear weapons, and forward units of its army are within artillery range of the South Korean capital, Seoul, it appears to have bought itself immunity from attack. Indeed, the roughly 30,000

American troops stationed there are more hostage than deterrent.

The lesson that at least some governments are likely to draw from the contrast between Iraq and Korea is that "regime survival" is to be gained by acquiring a nuclear weapon as quickly and as secretly as possible. Owning a bomb is Korea's ticket to safety; getting caught trying to get one was Saddam's death warrant; many believe that had he waited to attack Kuwait until he had a bomb, he might still be in power.

Iran today may be pondering these lessons as it reflects on its response to the Neoconservative agenda. It is probably not alone.

Meanwhile, American troops are already committed in The Philippines in a protracted guerrilla war; are likely to be drawn more heavily into operations in Colombia; and today maintain bases in at least 14 African countries and dozens more in Central and South Asia, the Pacific and Latin America. These are facts, but fantasies remain: the wilder ones are said even to include mainland China.

To turn fantasies into plans is nearly automatic: the job of staff officers of any army is to plan for future contingencies. To turn plans into action, however,

requires major political decisions. Are such decisions even conceivable?

No one, of course, can possibly know. What we do know are two contradictory positions: on the one hand, the American military command has told the administration that the burden is unsustainable with conventional forces. It wants to develop "usable" nuclear weapons for small wars. It also has urged unilateralism be put aside and efforts be made to enlist the support of at least 70 countries. To date, the response has been meager. As public opinion polls have made clear, current American policy is deeply unpopular almost everywhere.^v

It may also be financially "unbearable" according to many economists including the respected investment banker, Felix Rohatyn."^{vi} As historians have pointed out what ultimately destroyed Rome and other empires was not military defeat but financial collapse. In America, the agenda laid out by Neoconservative James Woolsey for a generation of "permanent war" has been estimated to cost at least \$15 trillion.

Will President Bush take heed?

The omens are not favorable.

In a speech at the American Enterprise Institute, he called the Neoconservatives "some of the best brains in our

country..." But, his opinion could change. As he begins to see the degree of hostility their policies have engendered, as the casualty rate in Afghanistan and Iraq rises and as the American presidential elections draw nearer, perhaps he will find the Neoconservatives a political liability.

Ultimately, the American public and Mr. Bush must realize, as the conservative English journal, *The Economist*, editorialized,^{vii} that the Neoconservatives are not conservative. They are radicals. Their agenda adds up to a world-wide crusade. With all its historic anti-Muslim connotations, it is precisely the word most calculated to perpetuate movement down the path desired by the Neoconservatives, permanent, unending war.

Mr. Bush will have to decide whether the public will accept that path.

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ⁱ Quoted by Jonah Goldberg, "Baghdad Delenda Est, Part Two," *National Review Online*, April 23, 2002.

ⁱⁱ *Columbia Daily Spectator*, November 7, 2002.

ⁱⁱⁱ Marc Perelman, *Forward*, May 16, 2003.

^{iv} Thomas E. Ricks, *The Washington Post*, August 6, 2002.

^v The results of the poll were not published in the American press. For them see Peter Preston, "Can might alone earn a nation love, trust?" *The Guardian*, December 10, 2002.

^{vi} *The Financial Times*, June 10, 2003. His article was not published in America.

^{vii} May 2003.