

The Inspiration and Outreach of the Neoconservatives

By

William R. Polk

So rapidly did the Neoconservatives achieve power in the American government, almost overnight after the September 11 terrorist attacks, that they were virtually unknown. Consequently, they have left few clues about their inspiration; only now is the record becoming clear. Their very success makes it possible to trace their evolution and to lay out the ways in which they are organized. Moreover, despite individual differences, they form such a tightly knit group that it is possible to deal with them as a whole.

The record shows four sources of inspiration: first, in their youth, many were influenced by the Trotskyite Communist movement. As they got older, they jumped completely across the political spectrum from the radical left to the radical right. In the jump, they retained a commitment to a version of one of Leon Trotsky's guiding ideas, that world politics could be shaped and controlled by "permanent revolution." His opponents, Trotsky thought, would never be able to mount effective opposition because they would be overwhelmed by an avalanche of insurrection.

American Neoconservatives adapted Trotsky's permanent revolution to their radically rightwing ideology in the guise of "permanent war." As one member of the group, former CIA director James Woolsey, put it, "This fourth world war, I think, will last considerably longer than either World Wars I or II did for us. Hopefully, not the full four-plus decades of the Cold War."¹

Continuous war has been embraced as the key element of the Neoconservatives' ideal American policy. Under the threat it poses and the actual destruction it entails, they believe, foreign opponents would be cowed or destroyed while domestic opponents would be unbalanced, carried along in a tide of events and silenced by the imperatives of patriotism. War would thus give them what Trotsky thought revolution would give Communism: irresistible force.

The second influence on Neoconservatives came from the work of a little-known professor of political science at the University of Chicago where Wolfowitz and Khalilzad studied. Leo Strauss, a German émigré, excited (and flattered) his protégés by his belief that he had found hidden meanings in Greek philosophy that could be understood only by a small elite -- namely them.ⁱⁱ He also justified “the natural right of the stronger” which the neoconservatives later used to justify America's right to suppress any state that could challenge it. That is, preëemptive war.

It followed that, if war is requisite to a successful American policy, attempts at arms control would only weaken America. This conclusion came from the University of Chicago and RAND Corporation Cold War Neoconservative strategist, Albert Wohlstetter. A determined believer in the threat of force, Wohlstetter is credited with coining the chilling phrase for his brand of foreign policy, “the delicate balance of terror.” He is also said to have been one of the models for the character “Dr. Strangelove.”

In addition to the commitment to permanent war and belief that they formed a small esoteric elite directing a policy of unilateral force, the Neoconservatives are motivated by an affinity bordering on patriotism to Israel. And not just to Israel or to

Zionism in general, they identify with the “hard right” of the Zionist movement. In this, they were inspired by the radical Zionist leader, Vladimir Jabotinsky, who in the 1930s advocated employing “muscular Zionism” to win at any cost all of “Eretz Israel.” Picked up by the Likud party, Israel’s extreme rightwing movement that grew out of the terrorist organizations Irgun and Stern, muscular Zionism is now personified by Israeli Prime Ariel Sharon. It is to him and his ideas that the American Neoconservatives identify themselves.

Closely bound by these beliefs, the Neo-conservatives have established an interlocking series of memberships in well-financed, politically-engaged, pro-Israeli “think tanks.” While the half dozen or so of these institutions are legally separate, their boards of directors, benefactors and appointees overlap. They are perhaps the supreme example of what in American business schools has come to be called “networking.” Thus, a “scholar” of one may be a director or fellow of another, and individuals are often directors of two or more. This tight organization and outreach enables Neoconservatives to be mutually reinforcing.

The largest of the group is the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) in Washington which in 2000 was said to work on a budget of \$24.5 million.ⁱⁱⁱ Richard Perle, Michael Ledeen, Joshua Muravchik, Michael Rubin and other neoconservatives are listed as “resident fellows” or “resident scholars” and active in it have been or currently are Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) is somewhat smaller. In 2000, it received tax-deductable grants of \$4.1 million. Its founding director was Martin Indyk who previously had been the research director of the leading pro-Israeli lobby, the

American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). In 1993, hurriedly made an American citizen, Indyk became special assistant to President Clinton and “senior director” for the Middle East at the National Security Council. Later, he was made ambassador to Israel and assistant secretary of state for the Near East and South Asia. WINEP is now directed by Dennis Ross who had served as President Clinton’s coordinator for the Middle East peace process. Among the fellows and staff it shares with other Neoconservative institutes are Robert Satloff (director of policy), Patrick Clawson (director of research), Michael Rubin and Martin Kramer.

The Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), which was founded in 1976, runs on an annual budget of about \$1.5 million. Virtually amalgamated with another group, the Center for Security Policy (CSP), it has an impressive board of directors including Vice President Dick Cheney and Neoconservatives Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Under Secretary of State John Bolton, Under Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith, Michael Ledeen, Former UN ambassador Jeanne J. Kirkpatrick, Stephen Bryen, Joshua Muravchik, Eugene Rostow, former CIA director James Woolsey plus a number of retired generals and admirals.

Perhaps no other group has so relentlessly campaigned for “regime change” in the Middle East, against arms control and in favor of the so-called “Star Wars” program as JINSA/CSP. Not surprisingly, it gets most of its funding from defense contractors, conservative foundations and far-right individuals. It has placed nearly two dozen staff, fellows, directors and advisers in senior Bush administration positions.

The Hudson Institute was founded in 1961 by Herman Kahn who was then the leading advocate of nuclear war with the Soviet Union.^{iv} It maintains an active program

on the Middle East under the leadership of Meyrav Wurmser, whose husband David is the senior adviser to Vice President Dick Cheney. Richard Perle is one of its trustees.

The Middle East Forum, the smallest of the group, is also the most strident. It uses tax-deductible donations of about \$1.5 million yearly to carry on a vigorous campaign in favor of the Likud government of Israel. The key members of its staff are also associated with the AEI and/or with WINEP.

The Forum's director, Daniel Pipes, whom President Bush recently named to the Board of the United States Institute of Peace, organized a program known as "Campus Watch." The purpose of Campus Watch is to expose and attack American university professors who have been critical of Israel or American policy in the Middle East. His colleague, Martin Kramer (former director of the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University), has broadened the attack to include the Department of State much as the old China Lobby attacked China specialists in the McCarthy era.

Supported by this multiplicity of organizations and tightly bound ideologically, by friendship and even by marriage ties, the Neoconservatives have made use of the opportunities given them by the September 11 attacks, to achieve what former Under Secretary of State David Newsom has termed "a largely peaceful coup d'état." By "wrapping the group's members in the flag" he went on, it has "created an atmosphere of intimidation on the basis of patriotism with the aim of muting criticism and contrary views."

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ⁱ In a speech to UCLA students on April 2, 2003 as reported by CNN

ⁱⁱ a similar belief was ascribed to the Greek philosopher Pythagoras to communicate "secret doctrines" to his favored disciples. Secret doctrines are known in what is called "Esoteric Buddhism," Shi'a Islam and in Cabalistic Judaism.

ⁱⁱⁱ This and subsequent figures, the latest publicly available, are drawn from brian.Whitaker@guardian.co.uk 2003.

^{iv} His book, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961) attempted to make the case that America could "afford" nuclear war because, although scores of millions of people would be killed and perhaps a quarter of the country would be destroyed, the survivors could reconstitute the American economy.