UNITED STATES: Architects of empire

By URI AVNERY

After the end of hostilities in Iraq, the world will be faced with two decisive facts. First, the immense superiority of US arms can beat any people in the world, valiant as it may be. Second, the small group that initiated this war — an alliance of Christian fundamentalists and Zionist neo-conservatives — has won big, and from now on it will control Washington almost without limits.

The combination of these two facts constitutes a danger to the world, and especially to the Middle East, the Arab peoples and the future of Israel. Because this alliance is the enemy of peaceful solutions, the enemy of Arab governments, the enemy of the Palestinian people and especially the enemy of the Israeli peace camp.

It does not dream only about a US empire, in the style of the Roman one, but also of an Israeli mini-empire, under the control of the extreme right and the settlers. It wants to change the regimes in all Arab countries. It will cause permanent chaos in the region, the consequences of which are impossible to foresee.

Its mental world consists of a mixture of ideological fervour and crass material interests, an exaggerated US patriotism and right-wing Zionism.

That is a dangerous mixture. There is in it something of the spirit of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, a man who has always had grandiose plans for changing the region with a mix of creative imagination, unbridled chauvinism and a primitive faith in brute force.

The winners are the so-called Washington neo-conservatives. A compact group who hold key positions in the administration of US President George Bush, as well as in the web of right-wing and establishment think tanks that play an important role in formulating US policy and the views of the ed-op pages of influential US newspapers.

For many years, this was a marginal group that fostered a right-wing agenda in all fields. They fought against abortion, homosexuality, pornography and drugs. When Binyamin Netanyahu assumed power in Israel, they offered him advice on how to fight the Arabs.

Big moment

Their big moment arrived with the collapse of the New York Twin Towers. Only nine days after the outrage, William Kristol published an “Open Letter to President Bush”, asserting that it was not enough to annihilate the network of Osama bin Laden, but that it was also imperative to “remove Saddam Hussein from power” and to “retaliate” against Syria and Iran for supporting Hizbullah.

The open letter was published in the Weekly Standard, founded by Kristol and funded by media mogul Rupert Murdoch, who donated US$10 million to the cause. It was signed by 41 leading neo-cons, including Norman Podhoretz, a former leftist who has become an extreme right-wing icon and is editor of the prestigious Encounter magazine, Frank Gaffney of the Center for Security Studies, Robert Kagan, also of the Weekly Standard, Charles Krauthammer of the Washington Post, and, of course, Richard Perle.
Perle is a central character in this play. Until recently, he was the chairperson of the Defense Policy Board (DPB) of the US defence department. Perle is a director of the Jerusalem Post, now owned by extreme right-wing Zionists. He is a leading member of the influential right-wing think tank, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI).

That open letter was, in effect, the beginning of the Iraq war. It was eagerly received by the Bush administration, with members of the group already firmly established in some of its leading positions. Paul Wolfowitz, the ideological father of the war, is number two in the defence department, where another friend of Perle, Douglas Feith, heads the Pentagon Planning Board. John Bolton is state department undersecretary. Eliot Abrams, responsible for the Middle East in the National Security Council and a DPB member, was connected with the 1980s Iran-Contra scandal.

The main hero of that scandal, Oliver North, sits in another influential right-wing group, the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), together with the AEI's Michael Ledeen, another hero of the scandal. Ledeen advocates total war not only against Iraq, but also against Israel's other "enemies", Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia and the Palestinian Authority.

Most of these people, together with US vice-president Dick Cheney and defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld, are associated with the Project for the New American Century lobby group, which is dedicated to "preserve and enhance this `American peace'" — meaning US control of the world.

Meyrav Wurmser is director of the Center for Middle East Policy at the Hudson Institute. She also writes for the Jerusalem Post and is co-founder of the Middle East Media Research Institute that is, according to the London Guardian, connected with Israeli army intelligence. Meyrav's husband, Davis Wurmser, heads the Middle East studies department of Perle's AEI. Mention should also be made of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy's Dennis Ross, who for years was in charge of the "peace process" in the Middle East.

In all the important US corporate newspapers there are people close to the group, such as William Safire, a man hypnotised by Sharon, in the New York Times and Charles Krauthammer in the Washington Post. Another Perle friend, Robert Bartley, is the editor of the Wall Street Journal.

The immense influence of this group stems from its close alliance with extreme right-wing Christian fundamentalists, who nowadays control Bush's Republican Party. The founding fathers were Jerry Falwell of the Moral Majority, who once got a jet plane as a present from Menachem Begin, and Pat Robertson of the Christian Coalition and the Christian Broadcasting Network, which help to finance the Christian Embassy in Jerusalem of JW van der Hoeven, an outfit that supports the settlers and their right-wing allies.

Common to both groups is the adherence to a fanatical ideology of the extreme right in Israel that sees the Iraq war as a struggle between the Children of Light (US and Israel) and the Children of Darkness (Arabs and Muslims).

General Jay Garner, who has been appointed chief of the civilian administration in Iraq, is no anonymous general who has been picked accidentally.

Two years ago he signed, together with 26 other officers, a petition organised by JINSA lauding the Israeli army for "remarkable restraint in the face of lethal violence orchestrated by the leadership of the Palestinian Authority", which is certainly news to the Israeli peace forces. He also stated that "a strong Israel is an asset that American military planners and political leaders can rely on".
In the 1991 Gulf War, Garner praised the performance of the Patriot missiles, which had failed miserably. After leaving the army in 1997, he became, not surprisingly, a defence contractor specialising in missiles. This year he obtained a lucrative defence contract for building Patriot systems in Israel.

There can be no better candidate for the job of chief of the civilian administration in Iraq, especially at a time when contracts for billions of dollars for reconstruction have to be handed out, to be paid for by Iraqi oil.

**A new Balfour declaration**

The ideology of this group, that calls for a US world empire as well as for a Greater Israel, reminds one of bygone days.

The Balfour Declaration of 1917, which promised Jews a homeland in Palestine on another people's land, had two parents. One was Christian Zionism (among whose adherents were illustrious statesmen like Lord Palmerston and Lord Shaftesbury, long before the foundation of the Zionist movement), the other was British imperialism. The Zionist idea allowed the British to crowd out their French competitors and take possession of Palestine, which was needed to safeguard the Suez Canal and the shorter sea route to India.

Now the same thing is happening again. Last year, Perle organised a briefing in which a speaker proposed war not only on Iraq, but on Saudi Arabia and Egypt as well, in order to secure the world's oil heartland. Iraq, he asserted, was only the pivot. One of the justifications for this design is the need to defend Israel.

The neo-cons will cause a long period of chaos in the Arab and Muslim world. The Iraqi war has already shown that their understanding of Arab realities is shaky. Their political assumptions did not stand the test, only brute force saved their undertaking.

Some day the Americans will go home, but Israelis have to live with the Arab peoples. Chaos in the Arab world endangers our future. Wolfowitz and Co may dream about a democratic, liberal, Zionist- and US-loving Middle East, but the result of their adventures may well turn out to be a fanatical and fundamentalist region that will threaten our very existence.


Visit the [Green Left Weekly home page](http://www.greenleft.org.au/).