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The Neo-Conservative Imperial Agenda: A Perverse Project for a New American Century

by **Keith Brekhus**

While the United States has been an empire and the lone global superpower for several years now, President Bush's preemptive attack on Iraq still marks a radical departure in the practice of American foreign policy. This shift in policy has gone largely unnoticed by an American public that has been fed a number of noble sounding rationales for the war on Iraq, including preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction, defending America from terrorists and bringing democracy to the people of Iraq. In reality, however, these rationales are simply imperial alibis for a more Machiavellian agenda that was hatched by neo-conservatives a decade ago and is now being put into practice.

In the 1990s, neo-conservative William Kristol joined with Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle and others to set up a think tank called the Project for a New American Century (PNAC). This group's prescription included dramatic increases in military spending, putting weapons into space and establishing a global military presence that could enforce American economic, military and political hegemony in geo-politically strategic regions like the Middle East and Central and East Asia. This cabal of neo-cons met prior to the 2000 election to reiterate their commitment to this ambitious agenda should their man, George W. Bush, become president. For his part, after "winning" the election, the new president appointed many of these neo-conservatives, including Cheney, Wolfowitz and Perle, to key posts in his administration.

PNAC Agenda for the Middle East

Aside from putting weapons in outer space, the most disturbing and ambitious element of the PNAC foreign policy blueprint was the plan to "democratize" the Middle East through military conquest. The project's dream scenario called for running the table in the Middle East by first imposing regime change on Iraq and then proceeding to take out the regimes in Iran, Syria and eventually moving on into Central and East Asia, culminating with regime change in China. This strategy is explicitly recommended in the PNAC documents (www.newamericancentury.org), and the neo-conservative architects of the plan brazenly call for being able to wage war in multiple theaters simultaneously.

The terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, provided a golden opportunity for the Bush administration to launch the first stages of the PNAC plan, though Iraq was delayed to install a new regime in Afghanistan first because the Taliban was arguably implicated in the Sept. 11 attacks, while Iraq was not. Nevertheless, the administration began drawing up plans for invading Iraq, and it mobilized its propaganda teams to re-demonize Saddam Hussein, attempting to link Iraq to the anthrax scare and to al Qaeda.

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Note that even as the war on Iraq unfolded, Rumsfeld and Bush set the stage for a possible next war by initiating a bellicose war of words with Iran and Syria. The groundwork for invading the next regional enemy is underway, and a year or two from now, don't be surprised to see the administration assert that Syria or Iran has weapons of mass destruction or links to terrorism and that to protect America we must militarily destroy the regimes in those nations. The pattern should become obvious after a couple more examples, but it remains to be seen whether the corporate media or the American public will ever take notice of the continuously recycling scenario.

Unfortunately, the far-reaching PNAC agenda has not been given much attention in the mainstream press. The Bush administration has sold the Iraq war to the public with a humbler sounding agenda, but the hawks in the administration are interested in much more than simply disarming Saddam Hussein. Glimpses of the PNAC agenda surface in the foreign press or in progressive newsweeklies, but for the most part, at least until recently, the TV news has accepted the administration's rationales for war at face value, with no inquiry into the long-term plan for the Middle East.

In fairness to the hawks, their plan ostensibly calls for reshaping the Middle East with democracies in place throughout the region. If the plan actually succeeded at bringing about full-fledged democracies throughout the Middle East, it might merit careful consideration, especially if it could be shown that few innocents would be killed, maimed or displaced in the process. However, the plan is based on so many flawed assumptions that only the most naïve could judge the best-case scenario as even remotely plausible. Furthermore, it appears that many of the policy architects themselves recognize that the plan is a recipe for regional chaos and interminable bloodshed on a truly grotesque scale. However, the potential for disaster, rather than discouraging the neo-cons, actually emboldens them to support the plan, because by creating chaos they actually create the conditions that might make it appear necessary to occupy the region militarily.

Where Are They Taking Us?

An article by Joshua Marshall in the April issue of *Washington Monthly* titled "Practice to Deceive: Chaos in the Middle East is not the Bush hawks' nightmare scenario—it's their plan," explicates the perverse logic that underpins the Bush administration's twisted plans. With the intention of toppling one regime after another in the Middle East region, the administration may actually tacitly welcome an increase in terrorism during and after the Iraq war because this will be used to justify further U.S. involvement in the region and provide the neo-conservative hawks with cause belli to attack Syria, Iran and other regimes in the region. In a sort of inexorable pattern of macabre inertia, each new crisis will draw more U.S. forces into the region, leading to further problems by inspiring counterattacks that require still more troops to be committed in a Sisyphean cycle of ongoing violence. Within a decade, we could be facing the bizarre prospect of trying to maintain a permanent occupation force in multiple Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries and a perpetual war on terror that creates more enemies, further alienates our allies, drains our economy and leads to a regional bloodbath too catastrophic to contemplate.

Quite simply, the hawks in the White House are Pax Americana fundamentalists whose zeal for empire far exceeds their capacity for either reason or compassion. Perle, Wolfowitz and company are thoroughly dangerous men singularly bent on a policy that will enforce regional hegemony in the Middle East through force, and it appears that the neo-conservative mindset has poisoned the thought processes of the entire White House and supplanted foreign policy realism and regional containment as the operating military paradigm.

Many progressives and moderates initially embraced the war, however reluctantly, either to demonstrate their support for the troops or because they feared for our security or perhaps because they clung hopefully to the notion that war would truly liberate the people of Iraq. However, these optimists failed to realize that the same neo-conservatives who assured us that they would liberate Iraq also believed that it would be simple to get the world to approve our invasion of Iraq. Furthermore, a significant number of prominent neo-conservatives in the

administration boldly predicted that the Iraqi people would greet us with open arms and that the Iraqi military would capitulate and surrender in the first couple days of conflict. And of course they also were certain Iraq was armed to the teeth with WMD.

Finally, many of our fellow citizens are waking up and refusing to believe the rosy scenarios painted for us and the outright lies fed to us. We must not continue to march down a ruinous path of perpetual war and face the inevitable anti-American backlash that war will create. We need the courage to stand up to a reckless administration in Washington and demand an end to ceaseless interventions.

Instead of calling for a new American century of military conquest and control, we must begin a project for a new century that is a truly international century based on cooperation rather than conflict. We should begin with the simple and not terribly radical step of rejecting the neo-conservative doctrine of pre-emptive warfare as the new centerpiece of our foreign policy.

The best time to resist is not years from now when war and occupation have already taken a tremendous human toll both home and abroad. The time to stand up and resist the neo-conservative military agenda is today—before the body count rises any higher. The risks that we now face as a nation will only multiply exponentially if we fail to curtail the ambitions of our leaders at this early stage. We must apply the brakes with uncompromising vigor because the White House has both feet on the accelerator and is steering us toward decades of disaster. Rarely, if ever, have the costs of inaction been greater. We can't afford to appease the White House today, or we will face crisis after crisis for years to come. We must continue to resist this war and occupation and work to prevent the realization of the neo-conservative blueprint for global domination.