

The People Who Pushed for War

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- Kathleen and Bill Christison

About Kathleen and Bill Christison

Kathleen Christison worked for 16 years as a political analyst with the CIA, dealing first with Vietnam and then with the Middle East for her last seven years with the Agency before resigning in 1979. Since leaving the CIA, she has been a free-lance writer, dealing primarily with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She is the author of two books: *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy* and *The Wound of Dispossession: Telling the Palestinian Story*, was published in March 2002.

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The People Who Pushed for War Iraq, Iran, and Syria



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Below is an excerpt from a paper published in CounterPunch in 2002. While the jobs of some of the people described have since changed, their agendas have not. Today this group has its sights on Iran and Syria.

Although much has been written about the neo-cons who dot the Bush administration, their ties to Israel have generally been treated very gingerly. Although much has come to light recently about the fact that ridding Iraq both of its leader and of its weapons inventory has been on the neo-con agenda since long before there was a Bush administration, little has been said about the link between this goal and the neo-cons' overriding desire to provide greater security for Israel.

But an examination of the cast of characters in Bush administration policy-making circles reveals a startlingly pervasive network of pro-Israel activists, and an examination of the neo-cons' voluminous written record shows that Israel comes up constantly as a neo-con reference point, always mentioned with the United States as the beneficiary of a recommended policy, always linked with the United States when national interests are at issue.

THE BEGATS

First to the cast of characters. Beneath cabinet level, the list of pro-Israel neo-cons who are either policy functionaries themselves or advise policy-makers from perches just on the edges of government reads like the old biblical "begats." Deputy Secretary of Defense **Paul Wolfowitz** leads the pack. He was a protégé of **Richard Perle**, who heads the prominent Pentagon advisory body, the Defense Policy Board. Many of today's neo-cons, including Perle, are the intellectual progeny of the late Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson, a strong defense hawk and one of Israel's most strident congressional supporters in the 1970s.

Wolfowitz in turn is the mentor of **Lewis "Scooter" Libby**, now Vice President Cheney's chief of staff who was first a student of Wolfowitz and later a subordinate during the 1980s in both the State and the Defense Departments. Another Perle protégé is **Douglas Feith**, who is currently undersecretary of defense for policy, the department's number-three man, and has worked closely with Perle both as a lobbyist for Turkey and in co-authoring strategy papers for right-wing Israeli governments. Assistant Secretaries **Peter Rodman** and **Dov Zachkeim**, old hands from the Reagan administration when the neo-cons first flourished, fill out the subcabinet ranks at Defense. **At lower levels, the Israel and the Syria/Lebanon desk officers at Defense are imports from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a think tank spun off from the pro-Israel lobby organization,**

and his administration, with the result that the Jewish fundamentalists working for the perpetuation of Israel's domination in Palestine and the Christian fundamentalists working for the Millennium strengthen and reinforce each other's policies in administration councils. The Armageddon that Christian Zionists seem to be actively promoting and that Israeli loyalists inside the administration have tactically allied themselves with raises the horrifying but very real prospect of an apocalyptic Christian-Islamic war. The neo-cons seem unconcerned, and Bush's occasional pro forma remonstrations against blaming all Islam for the sins of Islamic extremists do nothing to make this prospect less likely.

These two strains of Jewish and Christian fundamentalism have dovetailed into an agenda for a vast imperial project to restructure the Middle East, all further reinforced by the happy coincidence of great oil resources up for grabs and a president and vice president heavily invested in oil. All of these factors – the dual loyalties of an extensive network of policymakers allied with Israel, the influence of a fanatical wing of Christian fundamentalists, and oil – probably factor in more or less equally to the administration's calculations on the Palestinian-Israeli situation and on war with Iraq. But the most critical factor directing U.S. policymaking is the group of Israeli loyalists: neither Christian fundamentalist support for Israel nor oil calculations would carry the weight in administration councils that they do without the pivotal input of those loyalists, who clearly know how to play to the Christian fanatics and undoubtedly also know that their own and Israel's bread is buttered by the oil interests of people like Bush and Cheney. This is where loyalty to Israel by government officials colors and influences U.S. policymaking in ways that are extremely dangerous.

This article was originally published on 12/13/02 by CounterPunch.org and entitled "A Rose By Any Other Name: The Bush Administration's Dual Loyalties" and can be viewed at www.counterpunch.org/christison1213.html. A related, more detailed booklet on this subject is 'A War for Israel.'

was just as interested in promoting U.S. imperialism and was at that same moment in the early 1990s outlining a plan for world domination by the United States, one that did not include conquering Iraq at any point along the way. The only new ingredient in the mix today that is inducing Cheney to begin the march to U.S. world domination by conquering Iraq is the presence in the Bush-Cheney administration of a bevy of aggressive right-wing neo-con hawks who have long backed the Jewish fundamentalists of Israel's own right wing and who have been advocating some move on Iraq for at least the last half dozen years?

The suggestion that the war with Iraq is being planned at Israel's behest, or at the instigation of policymakers whose main motivation is trying to create a secure environment for Israel, is strong. Many Israeli analysts believe this. **The Israeli commentator Akiva Eldar recently observed frankly in a Ha'aretz column that Perle, Feith, and their fellow strategists "are walking a fine line between their loyalty to American governments and Israeli interests."** The suggestion of dual loyalties is not a verboten subject in the Israeli press, as it is in the United States. Peace activist Uri Avnery, who knows Israeli Prime Minister Sharon well, has written that Sharon has long planned grandiose schemes for restructuring the Middle East and that "the winds blowing now in Washington remind me of Sharon. I have absolutely no proof that the Bushies got their ideas from him. But the style is the same."

The dual loyalists in the Bush administration have given added impetus to the growth of a messianic strain of Christian fundamentalism that has allied itself with Israel in preparation for the so-called End of Days. These crazed fundamentalists see Israel's domination over all of Palestine as a necessary step toward fulfillment of the biblical Millennium, consider any Israeli relinquishment of territory in Palestine as a sacrilege, and view warfare between Jews and Arabs as a divinely ordained prelude to Armageddon. These right-wing Christian extremists have a profound influence on Bush

AIPAC.

Neo-cons have not made many inroads at the State Department, except for John Bolton, an American Enterprise Institute hawk and Israeli proponent who is said to have been forced on a reluctant Colin Powell as under-secretary for arms control. Bolton's special assistant is **David Wurmser**, who wrote and/or co-authored with Perle and Feith at least two strategy papers for Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in 1996. Wurmser's wife, **Meyrav Wurmser**, is a co-founder of the media-watch website **MEMRI** (Middle East Media Research Institute), which is run by retired Israeli military and intelligence officers and specializes in translating and widely circulating Arab media and statements by Arab leaders. A recent investigation by the Guardian of London found that MEMRI's translations are skewed by being highly selective. Although it inevitably translates and circulates the most extreme of Arab statements, it ignores moderate Arab commentary and extremist Hebrew statements.

In the vice president's office, Cheney has established his own personal national security staff, run by aides known to be very pro-Israel. The deputy director of the staff, **John Hannah**, is a former fellow of the Israeli-oriented **Washington Institute**. On the National Security Council staff, the newly appointed director of Middle East affairs is **Elliott Abrams**, who came to prominence after pleading guilty to withholding information from Congress during the Iran-contra scandal (and was pardoned by President Bush the elder) and who has long been a vocal proponent of right-wing Israeli positions. Putting him in a key policymaking position on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is like entrusting the henhouse to a fox.

Pro-Israel activists with close links to the administration are also busy in the information arena inside and outside government. The head of Radio Liberty, a Cold War propaganda holdover now converted to service in the "war on terror," is **Thomas Dine**, who was the very active head of AIPAC

throughout most of the Reagan and the Bush-1 administrations. Elsewhere on the periphery, **William Kristol**, son of neo-con originals Irving Kristol and Gertrude Himmelfarb, is closely linked to the administration's pro-Israel coterie and serves as its cheerleader through the Rupert Murdoch-owned magazine that he edits, **The Weekly Standard**. Some of Bush's speechwriters – including **David Frum**, who coined the term “axis of evil” for Bush's state-of-the-union address but was forced to resign when his wife publicly bragged about his linguistic prowess – have come from *The Weekly Standard*. **Frank Gaffney**, another Jackson and Perle protégé and Reagan administration defense official, puts his pro-Israel oar in from his think tank, the Center for Security Policy, and through frequent media appearances and regular columns in the *Washington Times*.

The incestuous nature of the proliferating boards and think tanks, whose membership lists are more or less identical and totally interchangeable, is frighteningly insidious. Several scholars at the American Enterprise Institute, including former Reagan UN ambassador and long-time supporter of the Israeli right wing Jeane Kirkpatrick, make their pro-Israel views known vocally from the sidelines and occupy positions on other boards. Probably the most important organization, in terms of its influence on Bush administration policy formulation, is the **Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA)**. Formed after the 1973 Arab-Israeli war specifically to bring Israel's security concerns to the attention of U.S. policymakers and concentrating also on broad defense issues, the extremely hawkish, right-wing JINSA has always had a high-powered board able to place its members inside conservative U.S. administrations. Cheney, Bolton, and Feith were members until they entered the Bush administration. Several lower level JINSA functionaries are now working in the Defense Department. Perle is still a member, as are Kirkpatrick, former CIA director and leading Iraq-war hawk James Woolsey, and old-time rabid pro-Israel types like **Eugene Rostow** and

that interests other than Israel's are involved, and indeed to any pragmatic consideration that continued unquestioning accommodation of Israel, far from bringing an end to violence, will actually lead to its tragic escalation and to increased terrorism against both the United States and Israel.

What does it matter, in the end, if these men split their loyalties between the United States and Israel? Apart from the evidence of the policy distortions that arise from zealotry, one need only ask whether it can be mere coincidence that those in the Bush administration who most strongly promote “regime change” in Iraq are also those who most strongly support the policies of the Israeli right wing. And **would it bother most Americans to know that the United States is planning a war against Iraq for the benefit of Israel?** Can it be mere coincidence, for example, that Vice President Cheney, now the leading senior-level proponent of war with Iraq, repudiated just this option for all the right reasons in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War in 1991? He was defense secretary at the time, and in an interview with the *New York Times* on April 13, 1991, he said:

“If you're going to go in and try to topple Saddam Hussein, you have to go to Baghdad. Once you've got Baghdad, it's not clear what you will do with it. It's not clear what kind of government you would put in place of the one that's currently there now. Is it going to be a Shia regime, a Sunni regime or a Kurdish regime? Or one that tilts toward the Ba'athists, or one that tilts toward the Islamic fundamentalists. How much credibility is that government going to have if it's set up by the United States military when it's there? How long does the United States military have to stay to protect the people that sign on for the government, and what happens to it once we leave?”

Since Cheney clearly changed his mind between 1991 and today, is it not legitimate to ask why, and whether Israel might have a greater influence over U.S. foreign policy now than it had in 1991? After all, notwithstanding his wisdom in rejecting an expansion of the war on Iraq a decade ago, Cheney

country. Zealotry clouds judgment, and emotion should never be the basis for policymaking.

Zealotry can lead to extreme actions to sustain policies, as is apparently occurring in the Rumsfeld-Wolfowitz-Feith Defense Department. People knowledgeable of the intelligence community have said, according to a recent article in *The American Prospect*, that the CIA is under tremendous pressure to produce intelligence more supportive of war with Iraq – as one former CIA official put it, “to support policies that have already been adopted.” Key Defense Department officials, including Feith, are said to be attempting to make the case for pre-emptive war by producing their own unverified intelligence. Wolfowitz betrayed his lack of concern for real evidence when, in answer to a recent question about where the evidence is for Iraq’s possession of weapons of mass destruction, he replied, “It’s like the judge said about pornography. I can’t define it, but I will know it when I see it.”

Zealotry can also lead to a myopic focus on the wrong issues in a conflict or crisis, as is occurring among all Bush policymakers with regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The administration’s obsessive focus on deposing Yasir Arafat, a policy suggested by the neo-cons years before Bush came to office, is a dodge and a diversion that merely perpetuates the conflict by failing to address its real roots. Advocates of this policy fail or refuse to see that, however unappealing the Palestinian leadership, it is not the cause of the conflict, and “regime change” among the Palestinians will do nothing to end the violence. The administration’s utter refusal to engage in any mediation process that might produce a stable, equitable peace, also a neo-con strategy based on the paranoid belief that any peace involving territorial compromise will spell the annihilation of Israel, will also merely prolong the violence. Zealotry produces blindness: the zealous effort to pursue Israel’s right-wing agenda has blinded the dual loyalists in the administration to the true face of Israel as occupier, to any concern for justice or equity and any consideration

Michael Ledeen. Both JINSA and Gaffney’s **Center for Security Policy** are heavily underwritten by **Irving Moskowitz**, a right-wing American Zionist, California business magnate (his money comes from bingo parlors), and JINSA board member who has lavishly financed the establishment of several religious settlements in Arab East Jerusalem.

BY THEIR OWN TESTIMONY

Most of the neo-cons now in government have left a long paper trail giving clear evidence of their fervently right-wing pro-Israel, and fervently anti-Palestinian, sentiments. Whether being pro-Israel, even pro right-wing Israel, constitutes having dual loyalties – that is, a desire to further Israel’s interests that equals or exceeds the desire to further U.S. interests – is obviously not easy to determine, but the record gives some clues.

Wolfowitz himself has been circumspect in public, writing primarily about broader strategic issues rather than about Israel specifically or even the Middle East, but it is clear that at bottom Israel is a major interest and may be the principal reason for his near obsession with the effort, of which he is the primary spearhead, to dump Saddam Hussein, remake the Iraqi government in an American image, and then **further redraw the Middle East map by accomplishing the same goals in Syria, Iran, and perhaps other countries.** Profiles of Wolfowitz paint him as having two distinct aspects: one obsessively bent on advancing U.S. dominance throughout the world, ruthless and uncompromising, seriously prepared to “end states,” as he once put it, that support terrorism in any way, a velociraptor in the words of one former colleague cited in the *Economist*; the other a softer aspect, which shows him to be a soft-spoken political moralist, an ardent democrat, even a bleeding heart on social issues, and desirous for purely moral and humanitarian reasons of modernizing and democratizing the Islamic world.

But his interest in Israel always crops up. Even profiles that downplay his

attachment to Israel nonetheless always mention the influence the Holocaust, in which several of his family perished, has had on his thinking. One source inside the administration has described him frankly as “over-the-top crazy when it comes to Israel.” Although this probably accurately describes most of the rest of the neo-con coterie, and Wolfowitz is guilty at least by association, he is actually more complex and nuanced than this. A recent New York Times Magazine profile by the Times’ Bill Keller cites critics who say that “Israel exercises a powerful gravitational pull on the man” and notes that as a teenager Wolfowitz lived in Israel during his mathematician father’s sabbatical semester there. His sister is married to an Israeli. Keller even somewhat reluctantly acknowledges the accuracy of one characterization of Wolfowitz as “Israel-centric.” But Keller goes through considerable contortions to shun what he calls “the offensive suggestion of dual loyalty” and in the process makes one wonder if he is protesting too much. Keller concludes that Wolfowitz is less animated by the security of Israel than by the promise of a more moderate Islam. He cites as evidence Wolfowitz’s admiration for Egyptian President Anwar Sadat for making peace with Israel and also draws on a former Wolfowitz subordinate who says that “as a moral man, he might have found Israel the heart of the Middle East story. But as a policy maker, Turkey and the gulf and Egypt didn’t loom any less large for him.”

These remarks are revealing. Anyone not so fearful of broaching the issue of dual loyalties might at least have raised the suggestion that Wolfowitz’s real concern may indeed be to ensure Israel’s security. Otherwise, why do his overriding interests seem to be reinventing Anwar Sadats throughout the Middle East by transforming the Arab and Muslim worlds and thereby making life safer for Israel, and a passion for fighting a pre-emptive war against Iraq – when there are critical areas totally apart from the Middle East and myriad other broad strategic issues that any deputy secretary of defense should be thinking about just as much? His cur-

NEO-CONS IN THE HENHOUSE

The neo-con strategy papers half a dozen years ago were dotted with concepts like “redefining Iraq,” “redrawing the map of the Middle East,” “nurturing alternatives to Arafat,” all of which have in recent months become familiar parts of the Bush administration’s diplomatic lingo. Objectives laid out in these papers as important strategic goals for Israel – including the ouster of Saddam Hussein, the strategic transformation of the entire Middle East, the death of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, regime change wherever the U.S. and Israel don’t happen to like the existing government, the abandonment of any effort to forge a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace or even a narrower Palestinian-Israeli peace – have now become, under the guidance of this group of pro-Israel neo-cons, important strategic goals for the United States. The enthusiasm with which senior administration officials like Bush himself, Cheney, and Rumsfeld have adopted strategic themes originally defined for Israel’s guidance — and did so in many cases well before September 11 and the so-called war on terror – testifies to the persuasiveness of a neo-con philosophy focused narrowly on Israel and the pervasiveness of the network throughout policymaking councils.

Does all this add up to dual loyalties to Israel and the United States? Many would still contend indignantly that it does not, and that it is anti-Semitic to suggest such a thing. In fact, zealous advocacy of Israel’s causes may be just that – zealotry, an emotional connection to Israel that still leaves room for primary loyalty to the United States – and affection for Israel is not in any case a sentiment limited to Jews. But passion and emotion — and, as George Washington wisely advised, a passionate attachment to any country – have no place in foreign policy formulation, and it is mere hair-splitting to suggest that a passionate attachment to another country is not loyalty to that

nals that the White House will not cede control of Middle East policy to Colin Powell and the “foreign service bureaucrats.” Abrams comes to the post after a year in which it had effectively been left vacant. His predecessor, Zalmay Khalilzad, has been serving concurrently as Bush’s personal representative to Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban and has devoted little time to the NSC job, but several attempts to appoint a successor early this year were vetoed by neo-con hawks who felt the appointees were not devoted enough to Israel.

Although Abrams has no particular Middle East expertise, he has managed to insert himself in the Middle East debate repeatedly over the years. He has a family interest in propounding a pro-Israel view; he is the son-in-law of **Norman Podhoretz**, one of the original neo-cons and a long-time strident supporter of right-wing Israeli causes as editor of *Commentary* magazine, and Midge Decter, a frequent right-wing commentator. Abrams has written a good deal on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, opposing U.S. mediation and any effort to press for Israeli concessions. In an article published in advance of the 2000 elections, he propounded a rationale for a U.S. missile defense system, and a foreign policy agenda in general, geared almost entirely toward ensuring Israel’s security. “It is a simple fact,” he wrote, that the possession of missiles and weapons of mass destruction by Iraq and Iran vastly increases Israel’s vulnerability, and this threat would be greatly diminished if the U.S. provided a missile shield and brought about the demise of Saddam Hussein. He concluded with a wholehearted assertion of the identity of U.S. and Israeli interests: “The next decade will present enormous opportunities to advance American interests in the Middle East [by] boldly asserting our support of our friends” – that is, of course, Israel. Many of the fundamental negotiating issues critical to Israel, he said, are also critical to U.S. policy in the region and “require the United States to defend its interests and allies” rather than giving in to Palestinian demands.

rent interest in Turkey, which is shared by the other neo-cons, some of whom have served as lobbyists for Turkey, seems also to be directed at securing Israel’s place in the region; there seems little reason for particular interest in this moderate Islamic, non-Arab country, other than that it is a moderate Islamic but non-Arab neighbor of Israel.

Furthermore, the notion suggested by the Wolfowitz subordinate that any moral man would obviously look to Israel as the “heart of the Middle East story” is itself an Israel-centered idea: the assumption that Israel is a moral state, always pursuing moral policies, and that any moral person would naturally attach himself to Israel automatically presumes that there is an identity of interests between the United States and Israel; only those who assume such a complete coincidence of interests accept the notion that Israel is, across the board, a moral state.

Others among the neo-con policymakers have been more direct and open in expressing their pro-Israel views. **Douglas Feith** has been the most prolific of the group, with a two-decade-long record of policy papers, many co-authored with **Perle**, propounding a strongly anti-Palestinian, pro-Likud view. He views the Palestinians as not constituting a legitimate national group, believes that the West Bank and Gaza belong to Israel by right, and has long advocated that the U.S. abandon any mediating effort altogether and particularly foreswear the land-for-peace formula.

In 1996, Feith, Perle, and both **David and Meyrav Wurmser** were among the authors of a policy paper issued by an Israeli think tank and written for newly elected Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu that urged Israel to make a “**clean break**” from pursuit of the peace process, particularly its land-for-peace aspects, which the authors regarded as a prescription for Israel’s annihilation. Arabs must rather accept a “peace-for-peace” formula through unconditional acceptance of Israel’s rights, including its territorial rights in the occupied territories. The paper advocated that Israel “engage every pos-

sible energy on rebuilding Zionism” by disengaging from economic and political dependence on the U.S. while maintaining a more “mature,” self-reliant partnership with the U.S. not focused “narrowly on territorial disputes.” Greater self-reliance would, these freelance policymakers told Netanyahu, give Israel “greater freedom of action and remove a significant lever of pressure [i.e., U.S. pressure] used against it in the past.”

The paper advocated, even as far back as 1996, containment of the threat against Israel by working closely with – guess who? — Turkey, as well as with Jordan, apparently regarded as the only reliably moderate Arab regime. Jordan had become attractive for these strategists because it was at the time

working with opposition elements in Iraq to reestablish a Hashemite monarchy there that would have been allied by blood lines and political leanings to the Hashemite throne in Jordan.

The paper’s authors saw the principal threat to Israel coming, we should not be surprised to discover now, from Iraq and Syria and advised

that focusing on the removal of Saddam Hussein would kill two birds with one stone by also thwarting Syria’s regional ambitions. In what amounts to a prelude to the neo-cons’ principal policy thrust in the Bush administration, the paper spoke frankly of Israel’s interest in overturning the Iraqi leadership and replacing it with a malleable monarchy. Referring to Saddam Hussein’s ouster as “an important Israeli strategic objective,” the paper observed that “Iraq’s future could affect the strategic balance in the Middle East profoundly” — meaning give Israel unquestioned predominance in the region. The authors urged therefore that Israel support the Hashemites in their “efforts to redefine Iraq.”

In a much longer policy document written at about the same time for the same Israeli think tank, David Wurmser repeatedly linked the U.S. and Israel

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when talking about national interests in the Middle East. The “battle to dominate and define Iraq,” he wrote “is, by extension, the battle to dominate the balance of power in the Levant over the long run,” and “the United States and Israel” can fight this battle together. **Repeated references to U.S. and Israeli strategic policy, pitted against a “Saudi-Iraqi-Syrian-Iranian-PLO axis,” and to strategic moves that establish a balance of power in which the United States and Israel are ascendant, in alliance with Turkey and Jordan, betray a thought process that cannot separate U.S. from Israeli interests.**

Perle gave further impetus to this thrust when six years later, in September 2002, he gave a briefing for Pentagon officials that included a slide

depicting a recommended strategic goal for the U.S. in the Middle East: all of Palestine as Israel, Jordan as Palestine, and Iraq as the Hashemite kingdom. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld seems to have taken this aboard, since he spoke at about the same time of the West Bank and Gaza as the “so-called occupied territories” – effectively turning all of Palestine into Israel.

Elliott Abrams is another unabashed supporter of the Israeli right, now bringing his links with Israel into the service of U.S. policymaking on Palestinian-Israeli issues. The neo-con community is crowing about Abrams’ appointment as Middle East director on the NSC staff (where this Iran-contra criminal has already been working since mid-2001, badly miscast as the director for, of all things, democracy and human rights). The Weekly Standard’s Fred Barnes has hailed his appointment as a decisive move that neatly cocks a snook at the pro-Palestinian wimps at the State Department. Accurately characterizing Abrams as “more pro-Israel, less solicitous of Palestinians” than the State Department and strongly opposed to the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, Barnes gloats that the Abrams triumph sig-