

A "Clean Break" From Law: Espionage and Engineering the War In Iraq

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A 1996 Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies (IASPS) report, authored by several former and current Bush Administration appointees, has largely become the Bush Administration's platform for deciding Israeli and Middle Eastern policy a decade later.

The document, entitled "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm," may be evidence of a pre-engineered assault on the nation of Iraq and the Arab Middle East as a whole, according to Grant Smith of the Institute for Research: Middle Eastern Policy.

In a discussion last Tuesday, Mr. Smith, Director of Research at the IRMEP, highlighted specific applications of the neoconservative strategy doctrine in the foreign policy of the Bush White House. The paper was written by several Bush Administration officials, including former chairman of the Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee Richard Perle, former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith, and current Middle East Adviser to the Vice President David Wurmser. The study group also had ties to former Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, who later worked with Perle at the Project for the New American Century.

The report came under increased scrutiny in 2003 as perceived connections were discovered between the document's recommendations and the escalating War in Iraq, and the "War on Terror" as a whole. The IRMEP began studying the paper at that time, and the recent conflict between Israeli and Hezbollah in Lebanon has augmented the desire to research the document, and assess options for further action.

Prepared in 1996 for Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, then recently elected PM and leader of the conservative Likud Party, the paper details a strategy for Israeli security and prosperity in the region. It advocates a method for advancing this strategy through the use of "hard power"—military strength instead of diplomacy and incentives—and issue framing. The authors infused rhetorically opaque arguments, crafted around Judeo-Christian and western democratic themes, to make opposition viewpoints seem indefensible.

The specific recommendations of the IASPS group within the "Clean Break" document include several provisions which have, in recent years, become manifest. Among the "laundry list" of proposals: the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, abandonment of the "Land for Peace" or "Comprehensive Peace" strategy in favor of a "Peace for Peace" or "balance of power" solution, engaging Syria and Iran through attacks in Lebanon, and legitimizing the pursuit of Palestinian militants beyond Israeli borders.

The question of whether this document amounts to an engineered coup of American foreign policy control by a non-governmental institution, Smith noted, is dependent largely upon your definition of terms: is it a "conspiracy theory" or a "conspiracy of theories?" Some find the ties between the paper, the persons who authored it, and the similarities in United States foreign policy tenuous; others believe the "Clean Break" theory has been implemented by its creators behind the backs of American citizens, cleanly breaking from precedence and American values rather than achieving its intended goals of peace and prosperity.

Smith noted that the specific attention paid to the paper's rhetorical message is certainly intended to sway the public to adopt a militant attitude towards Israel's—and, by association, America's—perceived enemies. The paper comments that Netanyahu could use the possibility of cooperation between the United States and Israel on the topic of missile defense systems as a boon for the largely unrelated militaristic policies. This would not only advance Israel's goals of security, but "it would *broaden Israel's base of support among many in the United States Congress* who may know little about Israel, but care very much about missile defense." Mr. Smith, and many in the audience, were particularly concerned over this forthright attempt at manipulating US representatives.

And while the "Clean Break" paper may be viewed as an advisory to Congress and the executive branch about how to contextualize policy in the Middle East, it was certainly not originally meant for that purpose. The paper was prepared as a set of guidelines advising an Israeli dignitary about how to construct Israeli foreign policy. While the tactic has been extended to American policy in the region, the catalyst for formulating this paper is certainly at issue.

The ability of the judicial branch to determine the limits of IASPS to occupy this role have been largely overlooked, Smith believes. The Logan Act of 1799 and the Espionage Act of 1917 are two express examples of legislation which made it illegal for non-registered government agents to collude with foreign governments. The legality of the IASPS gainfully advising an Israeli Prime Minister would represent not only a conflict of interest, but an express breach of law. The paper contains an explanatory note saying, "This report is written with key passages of a possible speech marked 'TEXT,'" intended for easy reading but understandably advancing the notion that the group was increasingly involved in the function of the Israeli Prime Minister's office.

The close relationship between America and Israel has already spawned some questionable practices. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) was involved in a related scandal recently for espionage offenses, interestingly involving some of the same players in the IASPS report. Lawrence Franklin, a Defense Department policy analyst under Feith and Wolfowitz, was caught relaying top-secret information to Steve Rosen and Keith Weissman of the AIPAC. Franklin was sentenced to 12 years in prison, while Feith and Wolfowitz have received no castigation for their alleged involvement.

In that particular case, the defense attempted to excuse Franklin's actions by arguing that the aforementioned Acts are rarely enforced. Judge T.S. Ellis, III responded by declaring that, while laws are at times seldom applied, it does not mean they are unenforceable.

While strongly held beliefs by certain officials may explain the foreign policy of the Bush Administration, it does not excuse or explain their

application. In addition to the faulty logic of appointing likeminded officials to counterbalancing positions, there is evidence that individual financial benefits may have played a role in applying the agenda of the 1996 document to United States interests.

Richard Perle, for example, resigned from his post advising the Department of Defense on March 27, 2003—eight days after the US declared war on Iraq and Saddam Hussein. There is considerable evidence that he financially benefited from his influence on government policy through his association with the computer intelligence firm Trireme Partners, LLP. Seymour Hersh originally noted this conflict of interest when Perle predicted that the Iraq War would be over in mere months (*Lunch with the Chairman*, [New York Times](#) 3/9/03). Perle responded in conventionally opaque fashion by likening Hersh to a “terrorist.”

The ties of the IASPS study group to the Bush/Wolfowitz doctrine are apparent: increased emphasis on pre-emptive military action, unilateralism, military superiority by “strength beyond challenge,” and a commitment to democracy building—as well as the vague rhetoric that surrounds it. As such, formerly useful policies of deterrence and containment have fallen by the wayside.


Most centrally, however, critics believe the paper flouts the rule of law and has irreperably damaged the international reputation of the United States. Perhaps more than any other time in history, US citizens have been astonished to discover the ever increasing use by the Administrations of unchecked executive power. Foreigners are are also becoming wary of American values in praxis on a never before realized scale.

The most important realization of this effort has been the increasing extent to which the government has come to rely on members of the partisan intellectual community for advice. There is no guarantee who an elected official will appoint as an advisor or to his cabinet, and the public has no immediate discretion, Smith said. The process of investigating appointees—not only their employment history, but the specific values and conceptions they hold dear—requires mounting gravity.

Additionally, this appointment practice extends the divide between those who formulate policy and those who carry it out. In this instance, a partisan think-tank has created policy to be carried out a half-world away. The involvement of on-the-ground personnel who are familiar with the realities of combat and can fully understand successes and failures, is obscured by the desire for seamless rhetorical punch. The “knowers” and the “doers” often never meet face to face.

For critics of the Bush Administration, the “Clean Break Plan” represents another hidden agenda that has cost the United States, in both lives and dollars, dearly. Implementing the plan has meant sacrificing American values and alienating former allies. For the Administration’s supporters, however, the strategy was well planned then, and is being well orchestrated now—another partisan success story.

“A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm” is available on the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies website, at www.iasps.org/strat1.htm

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