

The Likud-US neo-co

By Dore Gold

If Israel wanted to get into the business — which it did not — of prodding the US to go to war on its behalf, it would have chosen Iran and not Iraq

AN insidious but steady drumbeat can be discerned over the last several weeks that seeks to link Israel with the United States' decision to launch the Iraq war. Back in 2003, it was Palestinian President Yasser Arafat who charged that the Israeli government was "the first inciter for the war against Iraq". About the same time, American journalist Patrick Buchanan alleged in his American Conservative magazine that "a cabal of polemicists and public officials seek to ensnare our country in a series of wars that are not in America's interests". He went on to blame them for "colluding with Israel to ignite those wars".

On the liberal side, Chris Matthews, who hosts MSNBC's "Hardball", echoed

Buchanan when he spoke about "conservative people out there, some of them Jewish . . . who believe that if we don't fight Iraq, Israel will be in danger". The newest wave in 2004 is often more subtle but also far more mainstream. Thus, in May 2004, CBS's "60 Minutes" interviewed General Anthony Zinni, the former commander of US Central Command, who blasted the civilian leadership in the Pentagon for faulty strategy in Iraq. Steve Kroft of CBS then added fuel to the fire of Zinni's attack by asserting that the neo-conservatives among the civilian leaders in the Pentagon had an agenda to "strengthen the position of Israel".

Another variation on this theme is the assertion, made by The New York Times' Nicholas Kristof that Zinni heard from administration officials that the Iraq war would advance the Israeli-Palestinian peace process because "the road to Jerusalem leads through Baghdad".

The main charge by the current detractors of Israel is that the primary interest of the Bush administration in going to war against former Iraqi president was to defend Israeli security interests. Bush critic and former counter-terrorism official Richard Clarke, who previously served in the administration, also mentions the Israel factor as one of five rationales of the Bush administration for the Iraq war, but at least he sets it aside as a main consideration, preferring instead to focus on the concern with finding a long-term alternative to Saudi Arabian oil.

In the heat of an election year, for critics of President George W Bush who reject the notion that the Iraq war was fought over weapons of mass destruction, the "war on terrorism" or over human rights and a promise of a democratic Iraq, the Israel factor is a useful instrument for bashing the administration by ascribing the war to alien considerations having nothing to do with

with Ghorbanifar, the chief of Italy's military intelligence service, SISMI, and Lebanese rightists, to plan overthrowing the governments of Syria and Iran. SISMI and Ledeen were also involved in the Iraq-Niger uranium hoax that so embarrassed President George Bush.

White House and US media. Feith, Wolfowitz and Perle were key backers and financiers of Chalabi, a convicted swindler with links to Mossad. The neocons planned to make Chalabi the new ruler of Iraq. Chalabi's carefully

Cheney, and engineered the Iraq war to destroy an enemy of Israel. These neocons' confused loyalties convinced them what's good for Sharon's Greater Israel is good for America, and are ardent champions of a worldwide cru-

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conservative cabal is a myth

American interests.

It is important to remember that Iraq is one of several Arab countries that have in the past constituted Israel's "eastern front". Historically, these countries include Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. But whereas Syria devoted almost its entire ground order-of-battle to wars with Israel, Iraq sent only expeditionary forces to fight in wars against Israel, which never exceeded one-third of its total army. Further, by 2003, the Iraqi Army had been severely degraded in both military manpower and equipment.

In contrast, there was one state that threatened Israel about which Israeli statements were unmistakably clear: Iran. Israel used language with respect to Iran that it never used regarding Iraq. Thus, in 2004 Prime Minister Ariel Sharon called Iran "the main existential threat to Israel". Clearly, if Israel wanted to get into the business — which it did not — of prodding the US to go to war on its behalf, it would have chosen Iran

and not Iraq.

The critics of the neo-conservatives in America charge that they constitute a cabal that dragged America into the Iraq war in order to serve the ideological agenda of the Israeli Likud Party. Thus, Columbia University professor Rashid Khalidi branded Elliot Abrams, who serves on the National Security Council, as "an American Likudnik". Maureen Dowd explained to the readers of *The New York Times* that the neo-conservatives seek to make sure that US foreign policy "is good for Ariel Sharon".

Like the charge that the Iraq war was promoted by Israel, the Likud connection has been shown to be groundless. For example, in November 2003, Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz met with the authors of the Ayalon-Nusseibeh plan, which envisions Israel withdrawing to the 1967 lines — a stand that is anathema to the Likud Party. Writing with conservative author David Frum, former Pentagon official

Richard Perle proposed that the US use its influence to help broker the creation of a Palestinian mini-state "with its capital in part of Jerusalem". The re-division of Jerusalem is overwhelmingly opposed by most Israelis, and certainly by the members of the Likud Party. In contrast, the Pentagon's Douglas Feith has criticised the concessions of former Likud Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the pages of *Commentary* magazine. In short, there is no uniform neo-conservative position on Israel. Consequently, there is no set policy that has been coordinated with the leadership of the Likud Party. The Likud-neo-conservative cabal is a myth.

Many neo-isolationist critics of the Iraq war do not understand why America is fighting wars all of a sudden in the distant Middle East. Partly for that reason, they think America's war on terrorism was caused by considerations related to Israel. During most of the 20th century, the main threats to US national security

emanated from the European continent, as evidenced by the decisions of past US administrations to enter World War I and II, and to extend the US military umbrella over Europe during the Cold War.

Given the global pattern of unconventional weapons proliferation, the spread of long-range delivery systems, and the sources of the current wave of international terrorism, the Middle East has replaced Europe as the region that poses the greatest threat to the American heartland. That fact has nothing to do with the purported lobbying efforts of a group of American citizens that has been singled out by irresponsible commentators. In the late 1930s, a group of racists accused US President Franklin D Roosevelt, the British and the Jews of forcing America into war. Their intellectual offspring are doing the same thing 70 years later. COURTESY DAILY STAR

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