

A whiff of Armageddon: The Bush team's obsession

by [James M. Wall](#) in the [October 9, 2002](#) issue

Barring a miracle or the sudden discovery of a moral backbone in Congress, President Bush will get his mandate to attack Iraq. Although the U.S. didn't attack either the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China when both were well stocked with nuclear arms, we now want to attack a small country because it has the potential to do us harm. The attack would come at the end of a decade during which we imposed, by military force, a tight economic blockade against Iraq. This leads the London *Independent's* Robert Fisk to ask: If Saddam Hussein is so close to the development of weapons of mass destruction, did a half million Iraqi children die in vain under the American blockade?

The U.S. blockade was so strict that pencils for schoolchildren could not be imported—the carbon in them “might” be used in weapons. Under two administrations, our government—with the help of a compliant Congress and national media—persuaded the American public that the world's sole remaining superpower had to destroy Iraq's infrastructure, eliminate its once outstanding medical and educational systems, and violate all standards of human decency because of what Saddam “might” do.

President Bush says he wants a “regime change,” which means he wants to replace Saddam Hussein and his control of oil with a government made in our own image. No wonder Prime Minister Tony Blair likes the Bush plan: it is 19th-century British colonialism at its worst. Complaining that Iraq “tried to kill my father,” President Bush says he “hates” Saddam, apparently forgetting that scripture warns that he who hates his neighbor is in danger of hellfire.

Some of the war support is religious. Catholic theologian Richard John Neuhaus told National Public Radio that a preemptive strike against Saddam would be permitted under the guidance of just war theory. Neuhaus sounds more like the Lutheran he used to be, imitating the dark side of Martin Luther fighting the peasants, than he

does a Catholic theologian who understands that a distorted patriotism is a danger to all nations.

Fortunately, there are saner voices than those of the theological apologists for war, including Neuhaus's fellow Catholic and syndicated columnist Georgie Anne Geyer, who warned in a recent column that neither Tony Blair's recent dossier on Iraq nor any of President Bush's public statements provide sufficient evidence that there is an *immediate* danger from Saddam.

Geyer ponders what is behind the eerie "Go to Iraq!" craze. She finds an early source of the mania in "A Clear Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm," a paper published in 1996 by an Israeli think tank, the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies. Geyer reports that in a recent series in the London *Guardian*, Brian Whitaker describes the "Clear Break" document as a "political blueprint for the then-incoming right-wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu." The document proposed a plan for shaping Israel's "strategic environment." Geyer says the proposal has turned out to be the Bush administration's blueprint for Iraq policy.

The proposal calls for removing Saddam Hussein and installing a monarchy similar to the Jordanian Hashemite kingdom, which ruled Iraq briefly in the mid-1900s. With Saddam gone, says Whittaker, "Jordan and Turkey would form an axis along with Israel to weaken and roll back Syria. . . . Israel will not only contain its foes, it will transcend them."

Israel can do nothing in the Middle East without broad American support. The Netanyahu blueprint called for policies that would use language "familiar to the Americans by tapping into themes of American administrations during the cold war." The leader of the "prominent opinion-makers" who wrote that report was Richard Perle, now a major Bush adviser pushing for war against Iraq. Perle is also a strong advocate of Bush's war on terror, and a major player in the current academic/media/political project to promote what began as an academic debate and then entered the prowar conversation: the notion there is a clash of civilizations between the Judeo-Christian West and Islam.

Another influential war supporter is Paul Wolfowitz, deputy secretary of defense under Donald Rumsfeld, the intellectual leader of what is essentially President Bush's war cabinet. In a recent essay in the *New York Times* Sunday magazine, Bill Keller writes that Wolfowitz has been obsessed for years with the aim of getting rid

of Hussein.

Writer Michele Steinberg calls the war cabinet the Wolfowitz Cabal, and reports that “according to the *New York Times*, which published a leak about their activities on Oct. 12, 2001, this grouping wants an immediate war with Iraq, [since] . . .

Afghanistan, already an impoverished wasteland, falls far short of the global war that they are hoping for.”

Geyer describes this “Get Iraq” group as zealous fighters who seem to believe “in the efficacy of only the pure use of force.” She adds, “There is more than a whiff of the fires of Armageddon about them.”