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CONVERSATION SERIES

THE HENRY JACKSON SOCIETY'S
BARAK M. SEENER
in conversation with
RICHARD PERLE

**Unfinished Business: Reflections on U.S. policy, international affairs
and the limitations of the Bush administration**



Richard Perle

In a candid conversation with Barak M. Seener, Richard Perle offers insightful observations and analyses ranging from the current administration's recent departure from neo-conservatism, the failings of the Presidential bureaucracy, and the fundamentally flawed strategy pursued by the U.S. in Iraq. Perle delves into the principles of neo-conservatism and addresses the misconceptions surrounding it. He asserts that the promotion of alternative energy is central to national security. Perle goes on to construct an argument for the continued use of interventionism as a legitimate and justifiable policy option. He also delineates the threat of U.S. military primacy and the steps necessary to sustain it. Finally, he discusses his perception of the inevitable failure of any Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations which ignore the aims of Palestinians, and considers the possibility of militarily engaging Iran and North Korea.

NEO-CONSERVATISM

B.M.S. Do you not find it problematic that the Neo-Conservative movement was short-sighted in the fact that they promoted a coherent philosophy which stated that there exists a nexus between autocratic states which lack human rights and their attempt to provide logistical and financial support to terrorist groups around the world? These same regimes threaten international security by their promotion of nuclear proliferation which may find their way into sub-state actors. On the other hand, they did not conduct a rigorous quantitative study as to how the current troop capacity would be able to achieve the grand aims of macro-democratization in the region.

R.P. I would, firstly, like to say that there does not exist a Neo Conservative 'Movement'. Neo-Conservatism is an inclination and what does exist is a group of like-minded individuals that share the same inclination on a number, but by no means all, issues. The people who advanced the need to promote democratization as a doctrine did not have in mind military force to facilitate this. To associate support for regime-change with the advocacy of military force is a common misconception. Amongst the many of articles I have written, testimony I've given to Congress, television appearance and the like, I have never advocated the use of force as the way to achieve the development of democratic institutions. Douglas Feith and Paul Wolfowitz have argued against the use of military force to achieve this end. Thus, there was no Neo-Conservative focus on the Revolution in Military Affairs in connection with the advancement of democratic institutions. They simply did not consider force. Rather, they saw the necessity in creating institutions such as the National

Endowment for Democracy which would offer political and moral support for subjugated people seeking democracy. Portugal under Salazar or Franco under Spain, as well as Serbia under Milosevic, were all democratized primarily through political action.

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B.M.S. If political incentives were always central to the policy discourse, why did it take so long for the U.S. to begin offering support to Iranian opposition groups? One would have thought that, due to careful deliberation of the Iranian threat which has lasted for quite a number of years, support would have come much sooner. Is it simply that the U.S. finds long-term strategy challenging?

R.P. This option of supporting the opposition did not come quickly or comfortably to the diplomatic establishment that perceived this strategy as meddling in others' affairs. Iranian students, dissidents and Trade Unionists could and should have been supported, but were not. As a result, a huge missed opportunity, spanning a number of years, has left us, even today, without a credible political approach to regime change in Iran.

TENSIONS WITHIN THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION LEAD TO GAP BETWEEN THE BUSH DOCTRINE AND POLICY

B.M.S. Whilst focused upon the U.S.'s lack of strategic foresight, the Office of Nation-building that resides within the State Department does not appear to be functioning at an adequate level. This office was embraced by leading 'Realists' such as Brent Scowcroft who all signed a letter saying that this was of prime concern to U.S. national security interests. This really saw a coming together of 'Realism' and 'Neo-Conservatism'. There are literally only 20 individuals that inhabit this office, with a dearth of individuals specialized in creating civil infrastructure such as civil-engineers. The fact that these individuals are simply not being contracted demonstrates a disparity between the declarations and actions of the Bush Administration. Furthermore this constitutes a huge wasted opportunity to promote nation-building which not only is central to the Bush Doctrine, but has overwhelming support.

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R.P. You are right, while the President is sincere with his vision of democratization, the machinery of government has largely failed to advance its implementation.

B.M.S. If you are the President and your prime passion and *raison d'être* is democratization, then surely you would bring Strategy Consultants from, for example, Booz Allen and say to them, "I need your help in restructuring the machinations of government in order to implement this agenda which is so important to me and is a central tenet of my Presidency. Let's even become unpopular and change personnel." If I wanted for example to implement changes at the State Department, I would not risk hiring someone who could turn native, but hire someone as yourself. I acknowledge that this would be equivalent to snubbing the French and appointing you as the U.S. Ambassador to France.

R.P. I don't know. The President is overly dependent upon people around him, and they have failed him miserably. Whilst his rhetoric centers around democratization, practically the bureaucratic departments of government continuously undermine him.

B.M.S. You would think in his personal capacity, President Bush would be actively micro-managing.

R.P. That is what you would think. This Presidency is marked by an abject failure to implement policy.

B.M.S. It appears that in practice there is not one president, but multiple presidents that all manage to see their agenda implemented. Condoleezza Rice's diplomatic shuttling between the Israelis and the Palestinians, which is based on an endlessly regurgitated failed paradigm, is contrary to the President's vision of first democracy and then diplomacy. The President considered the conflict as an extension to autocracy reigning within the Palestinian territories and surrounding countries which in turn fostered terrorism. Similarly the Baker-Hamilton report which the President rejected is being implemented with Rice's talks with the Syrians.

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R.P. President Bush came to office with little experience in Washington DC. He appointed Colin Powell, a man of great personal stature, who did not see the main issues in the same way as President Bush, and who presided over a diplomatic establishment that often worked against the president's policies. He appointed Condi Rice, a very close associate and friend, who was not up to the position of National Security Adviser, and who was obsessed with achieving consensus between rivaling governmental departments such as the CIA and Pentagon rather than deciding issues or recommending issues for decision by the president. This could not be achieved in a timely or coherent manner. It is not the end of the world if consensus is not arrived at, as the President decides a specific course of action, and which ideas to subscribe to. It was as if the government acted as a jury which was constantly out to decide before reconvening to decide upon a course of action. President Bush also had weak, inexperienced personnel chief in the White House who, though intelligent, lacked the experience to identify people who could serve the president

effectively—and loyally. Some failings were mechanical in nature. President Bush's first Chief of Staff, Andy Card, believed that the White House budget—a minuscule percentage of the federal budget—should be as small as possible. As a result, the White House became dependent on people seconded from the State Department or the CIA, whilst remaining on their payroll. Very few competent people sympathetic to the President were hired.

B.M.S. Much is made of the conflict between the Pentagon and State Department under Donald Rumsfeld and Colin Powell respectively. However not much emphasis is granted to the Rumsfeld/ Wolfowitz divide as the former was not interested in nation-building and simply wanted troops to be in and out of Iraq. Whilst mentioning 'Representative Government' he, unlike Wolfowitz, did not speak much about democratization.

R.P. Whilst there were some differences between Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, these differences were not profound ideological ones, but rather were practical ones. Furthermore they both have not commented on these differences and so I cannot elucidate further.

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

B.M.S. President Bush has previously declared that "America is addicted to oil". This obviously is partly due to the fact that Saudi Arabia has used its oil revenues to sponsor a network of radical Wahhabism around the globe, and offer financial and logistical support to international terrorism. Whilst this is appealing to Democrats for environmental reasons, and Republicans due to their concentration upon a national security context, to what degree has the President been effective at advancing this policy?

R.P. It is important to remember that investing in alternative energy is expensive and people don't want to spend much money, and would rather defer costs. The costs of the current threats of receiving oil supplies from states such as Saudi Arabia are not well understood by the public. President Bush has taken numerous measures however to counter this threat. He has opened up geographical areas that until now have been closed to oil exploration. He has invested a lot of finances into researching into more usage of coal, and research and development into renewable and alternative fuels.

IRAQ, DEMOCRATIZATION, AND INTERVENTIONISM

B.M.S. Due to the difficulties in the war in Iraq, do you consider that it will in the future be difficult for the U.S. to pursue a policy of interventionism?

R.P. The U.S. has always been wary of interventionism and has obviously been made even more so by the recent experiences in Iraq, however less so by Afghanistan. Even critics of the war in Iraq accepted the need for the U.S. to go into Afghanistan after 9/11.

B.M.S. Do you regret having advocated military intervention as the U.S. faces so many problems in Iraq? Could an alternative strategy for U.S. success have entailed it placing martial law in order to create civil-society and infrastructure before moving towards democracy as Samuel Huntington believes is a good approach?

R.P. I do regret the way things worked out, however I do not regret having advocated the need to go to war against Saddam Hussein. The reason why I thought military intervention was an appropriate course of action is because I maintain that Saddam Hussein posed a threat to U.S. national security interests. I don't believe that martial law is a way to produce democratic reform as this would entail a foreign country

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imposing its will. The seminal error the U.S. committed was that it became an occupier. When Iraq fell, the U.S. should have supported an interim government to make basic decisions whilst preparing for elections. Thus an Iraqi face would have been given to Iraq, rather than the U.S.

B.M.S. It was thought before the invasion of Iraq that due to Iraq's centrality in the region, a domino effect could occur, and promote a democratic trend in the surrounding countries. What has actually happened is that due to the demographic flows caused by the levels of insurgency, there is a toxic mix of

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R.P. I do not believe in the domino theory. Every case of democratization is distinct. Success in one country has only promoted democracy in another at the margins of its landscape. Democracy in one country does not entail a Tsunami wave across the region at large.

B.M.S. In the 2002 National Security Strategy, the President focuses upon democratization, only in 2006's National Security Strategy does he mention civil-society. Is focus upon democratization without mention of civil society a prudent approach, as in areas in the world such the Balkans we see that immediate democratization led to a conflagration of ethnic tension? Had infrastructure and cross-societal organizations

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R.P. While it is important not to undermine the valid aspiration to focus upon democracy as the ultimate goal, it was not wise to advance the idea of instant democratization through immediate elections without the establishment of a robust civil society. Civil society with its cross-societal organizations is a prerequisite for, and not a result of, democratization.

MILITARY OVERSTRETCH AND U.S. PRIMACY

B.M.S. Is it not ironic the military transformation, leading to U.S. military primacy paradoxically undermines it and leads the U.S. to come into a position of overstretch as its key allies simply do not have the ability to achieve strategic lift into U.S. forces? This is why we see that in Iraq; it is U.S. forces that are heavily engaged in intense conflict zones. In contrast, British forces are located to Southern Iraq and do not encounter nearly the same degree of conflict that there U.S. counterparts face.

R.P. There is a serious problem of an ever-widening gap between U.S. military capabilities and those of its allies. The gap is immense in the areas of logistics, intelligence, command and control, precision weapon capabilities and mobility of forces. It is thus hard to fight alongside one another. Sadly, even at a time of joint military engagements in Kosovo, the French contributions, for example, required so much U.S. support that they were, on balance, negative. U.S. support for French air missions exceeded the results produced. This was due to the fact that in comparison with that of the U.S., their military capabilities were minimal.

B.M.S. Does Military Transformation and its Revolution in Military Affairs adequately address the contemporary nature of threats in Iraq such as insurgency and civil war? Surely what are needed are conventional troops, as the current natures of threats in Iraq are traditional.

R.P. The main reason to transform our forces is because U.S. forces are rooted in the contingencies of the Cold War. Thus, they are not adept at countering terrorist forces. The relaxed pace of the change to a post Cold War force made some sense pre-9/11, but is not proceeding fast enough to counter the threats faced in Iraq. I disagree that the nature of the contemporary threat we face is traditional. The world has not seen a conflict such as this - the current conflict between

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radical Islam and non-fundamentalist societies. The insurgency in Iraq, for example, sustains a level of barbarous attacks against the civilian population in an attempt to create sectarian radicalization. There is no Western army that is trained or equipped to deal with this.

B.M.S. Is Military Transformation adept at dealing with this? Furthermore, by getting bogged down in Iraq, can U.S. forces deal with other potential conflict zones such as Iran or North Korea, especially as reports are that 40 percent of troop gear is overused and weary?

R.P. More effective use of technology, especially precision in the efficient use of force to minimize collateral damage, would help a lot. While the military cannot be dismantled to achieve this new approach, there is a need to have fuller transformation towards advanced technology. This is not a panacea, but it can have an effect of freeing up manpower for the manpower intensive activities associated with anti-terror operations. The military establishment has a huge number of forces. By accelerating the momentum of military transformation through a substantial improvement of efficiency and economy of force, the military establishment can free up people who can effectively engage in terrorist operations. If, for example, the U.S. military achieved a 20 percent improvement in the effectiveness of conventional military forces, this would be equivalent of finding 200,000 troops, within the same budget, that would be able to confront conventional forces or other unconventional asymmetrical threats elsewhere in the globe.

B.M.S. What type of military transformation is needed to address the threats in Iraq?

R.P. What is most needed is a dramatic evolution in intelligence, effective command and control and agility of forces. There is a dearth of good and reliable intelligence on who and where the enemy is. The main method currently at our disposal for finding insurgents is to send troops on patrol. When terrorists fire upon them, we know where they are. This is a costly and inefficient technique. This problem of the intelligence being deficient is made worse by the fact that there are not enough people within the U.S. military who speak Arabic, Farsi and other languages used by terrorists. Technological advancement that increases the agility of our forces can help us to destroy targets that we are able to locate. If intelligence is not rapidly followed up upon, it quickly perishes. A specific example: before 9/11 the U.S. knew Bin Laden was in Afghanistan directing operations against the U.S. We were watching him and listening to him. But too much time elapsed between our locating him and executing an attack against him. He simply moved around enough so we could not manage an attack in time to make use of intelligence

that pinpointed him. Had the time-span been reduced with new-generational technology, he could have been killed. The compression of intelligence cycles with technology could achieve this.

ENGAGING DANGEROUS THREATS: IRAN AND NORTH-KOREA

B.M.S. With other potential conflict zones undermining Western security such as Iran and North Korea, is the current overstretched military capable of adequately engaging in these areas either consecutively or simultaneously whilst being enmeshed in Iraq?

R.P. With North Korea, U.S. engagement would depend upon contingency scenarios. In the worst case scenario, if North-Korea invaded South-Korea, the U.S. could adequately respond with massive airpower. Similarly in Iran, no one seriously - myself included - contemplates using ground troops to invade Iran. Precision air strikes aimed at destroying Iran's capacity to produce nuclear material could be effective, if it comes to that, but not an invasion.

B.M.S. This however would merely stall the Iranians who could resume production at will. This is also symptomatically countering Iran's nuclear aspirations. On a causal level, the reason why Iran seeks to undermine Western security with its nuclear aspirations is because it is an Islamist and authoritarian regime. Could precision air-strikes adequately rectify this reality?

R.P. Effectively stalling a nuclear program is also hugely important and valuable. Had Israel not struck the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak in 1981, Saddam Hussein would have had a

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN ISRAEL AND ANTI-SEMITISM

B.M.S. Why has the U.S. traditionally not focused upon democratization of Israel's surrounding states as an antidote

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to the conflict? Along with the establishment of civil society these states could become more willing to create more homogenous societies by absorbing Palestinians. Jordan is already over 75% Palestinian. Instead, the U.S. has always reverted back to the land-for-peace paradigm which has failed time and again. Last year, Philip Zelikow, Foreign Policy Consultant to Secretary of State, and just recently Deputy National Security Advisor, Elliot Abrams have stated that this is an attempt by the U.S. to placate the Europeans to align their policies to that of the U.S.'s on Iran by pressurizing Israel.

R.P. Neither Egypt or the rest of the Arab world, except for Jordan, have been willing to absorb or help the Palestinian

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predicament. Even if these states would establish civil societies and democratize they would not be willing to absorb this demographic. The sympathy that these states have with the Palestinians is selective, and has always been associated with an anti-Israel sentiment and agenda. Even when there has been no or little violence in the territories these surrounding states have disproportionately focused upon the Palestinian national agenda. It is important to distinguish between the Palestinian civilians' welfare and the Palestinian national agenda. Despite their vast resources and oil wealth, the Arab world has given little help to the Palestinians vis a vis their civil infrastructure and generic civilian welfare. Rather these resources have attempted to link aiding the Palestinian national agenda with the undermining of Israel. The idea of land-for-peace is entrenched in UN resolutions and conventional wisdom. This, nonetheless, has been predicated upon the dubious basis of considering that the two sides of the conflict are contesting specific areas of territory. The dispute however is not revolving around specific areas of territory. The irredentism of the Palestinians goes further than the 1967 borders. The Palestinians wish to proclaim their sovereignty over the whole area. If the Palestinians genuinely sought only the 1967 borders, the Israelis would have ceded it in a heartbeat.

B.M.S. It is ironic that critiques leveled against Neo-Conservatives have centered upon the concealed Jewish agenda to help Israel who behind the scenes determine U.S. foreign policy. I remember in a joint interview with George

Israel has also astonished many in the U.S. Administration for, at times, not taking a robust approach to defending its national security interests and by proxy that of the U.S.'s. A recent example is the War in Lebanon whereby Israel did not attack Syria which was the source of Hezbollah's sponsorship.

Galloway, he despicably stated, "Where's the Shekels Richard?" What is ironic, however, is that there is a great skepticism in Israel about President Bush's agenda to democratize the Arab world. Israel also considered Iran to be a greater threat than Iraq. Israel has also astonished many in the U.S. Administration for, at times, not taking a robust approach to defending its national security interests and by proxy that of the U.S.'s. A recent example is the War in Lebanon whereby Israel did not attack Syria which was the source of

Hezbollah's sponsorship. Another rebuttal to the anti-Semitic conspiracy theorists is that number of prominent non-Jewish Neo-Conservatives include as Jeanne Kirkpatrick or John Bolton. Neo-Conservatives furthermore did not advance a singular approach towards Israel. Many in contrast to the hawkish stance ascribed to them actually supported Israel's disengagement from the territories or the Oslo Peace Process. You, however, as mentioned above, have not subscribed to the land-for-peace paradigm as a model of resolving the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

R.P. Anti-Semites are always seeking a new template to express their views. Very early on when the Patrick Buchanans in the U.S., and the George Galloways in the UK began to enumerate the risks of Neo-Conservatism, they did not

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mention the non-Jewish subscribers to Neo-Conservative ideas, but only singled out the Jews. This speaks volumes. Regarding the recent war in Lebanon, the right move for Israel would have been to attack Syrian airbases, and not simply focus its military assault on Lebanon. This was a wasted opportunity. Whilst there is widespread skepticism in Israel of the Bush Doctrine, official Israeli policy has always been closer to that of the U.S.'s.

THE FUTURE

B.M.S. Do you predict that a future administration will continue upon a trajectory which promotes policies in line with the democratization ethos of the Bush Administration?

R.P. It remains to be seen whether this Administration abides by the President's ethos. President Bush went to Prague to speak at a conference held by the Shalem Center. It was organized by Natan Sharansky, former Prime Minister Aznar and former president Havel. What he said there reflected his deep belief in the importance of encouraging democratic development in the world. But his government departments will do little, if anything at all, to implement this vision.

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