
A closer look:

The Israeli origins of Bush II's war

By **STEPHEN J. SNIEGOSKI**

While the **neoconservatives** were the driving force behind the American invasion of Iraq and the consequent efforts to bring about regime change throughout the Middle East, the idea for such a war did not originate with American **neocon** thinkers but rather in **Israel**. An obvious linkage exists between the war position of the **neocons** and what has long been a strategy of the **Israeli Right** and, to a lesser extent, of the **Israeli** mainstream.

The idea of a Middle East war had been bandied about **in Israel for many years as a means of enhancing Israeli security**. War would serve two purposes. It would **enhance Israel's external security** by weakening and splintering Israel's neighbors. Moreover, such a war and the consequent weakening of Israel's external enemies could help **resolve the internal Palestinian demographic problem**, since the Palestinian resistance has derived material and moral support from Israel's neighboring states.

A brief look at the history of the [Zionist movement](#) and its goals will help to provide an understanding of this issue. The Zionist goal of creating an exclusive Jewish state in Palestine was complicated by the fundamental problem that the country was **already settled with a mostly non-Jewish population**. Despite public rhetoric to the contrary, the idea of **expelling** the indigenous **Palestinian population** (euphemistically referred to as a "**transfer**") was an **integral part of the Zionist effort to found a Jewish national state in Palestine**.

"The idea of transfer had accompanied the Zionist movement from its very beginnings, first appearing in [Theodore Herzl's diary](#)," Israeli historian Tom Segev observes. "In practice, the Zionists began executing a mini-transfer from the time they began purchasing the land and evacuating the Arab tenants.... 'Disappearing' the Arabs lay at the heart of the Zionist dream, and was also a necessary condition of its existence.... With few exceptions, none of the Zionists disputed the desirability of forced transfer — or its morality." However, the Zionist leaders learned **not to publicly proclaim their goal** of mass expulsion because "this would cause the Zionists **to lose the world's sympathy**." [1]

The challenge was to find an opportune time to initiate the mass-expulsion process when it would not incur the world's condemnation. In the late 1930s, Ben-Gurion wrote: "**What is inconceivable in normal times is possible in revolutionary times**; and if at this time the opportunity is missed and what is possible in such great hours is not carried out — a whole world is lost." [2] Those "revolutionary times" would come with the first **Arab-Israeli war in 1948**, when the Zionists were able to **expel 750,000 Palestinians** (more than **80 percent** of the indigenous population) and thus achieve an overwhelmingly Jewish state, though the area did not include the entirety of Palestine, or the "Land of Israel," which Zionist leaders thought necessary for a viable country.

The opportunity to grab additional land came as a result of the **1967 war**; however, the occupation of that territory brought with it the **problem of a large**

Palestinian population. World opinion was now totally opposed to forced population transfers, equating such an activity with the unspeakable horror of Nazism. According to Norman Finkelstein, the landmark **Fourth Geneva Convention, ratified in 1949, had "unequivocally prohibited deportation"** of civilians under occupation. [3] Since the 1967 war, the major issue in Israeli politics has been what to do with that conquered territory and its Palestinian population.

Because Israel's neighbors opposed the Zionist project of creating an exclusivist Jewish state, the idea of weakening and dissolving those neighbors was not an idea just of the Israeli Right but a central Zionist goal from a much earlier period, **promoted by [David Ben-Gurion](#)** himself. As Saleh Abdel-Jawwad, a professor at Birzeit University in Ramallah, Palestine, writes:

Israel has supported secessionist movements in Sudan, Iraq, Egypt, and Lebanon and any secessionist movements in the Arab world which Israel considers an enemy. **Yet the concern for Iraq and [Israel's] attempts to weaken or prevent it from developing its strengths has always been a central Zionist objective. At times, Israel succeeded in gaining a foothold in Iraq by forging secret yet strong relationships with leaders from the Kurdish movement.** [4]

Israel's goal has been not simply to weaken external enemies, but, by so doing, also **isolate and weaken the position of the Palestinians** — the internal demographic threat that poses the greatest danger to the Jewish-supremacist state. The reason for this is that the **Arab states provide spiritual and material aid to the Palestinian cause.** Without outside aid the Palestinians would give up hope and be more apt to acquiesce in whatever solution the Israeli government might offer. Abdel-Jawwad writes: "Sequential wars with the Arab world have given Israel opportunities to exhaust the Arab world, as well as tipping the demographic and political situation against Palestinians. Even **regional wars which Israel has not participated in have benefited Israel and weakened the Palestinian national movement.** The **first and second Gulf War are a few examples.**"

Abdel-Jawwad continues: "Finally, the ... Gulf War of 1991 resulted in the **expulsion of the Palestinian community from Kuwait,** which formed one of the primary arteries of **Palestinian income and power in the occupied territories.**" [5]

With the coming to power of the right-wing Likud government in 1977 under [Prime Minister Menachem Begin](#), Israel would pursue a more militant policy whereby war would be seen as the major means of improving Israel's geostrategic situation. The departure of relatively moderate Cabinet ministers after 1980 reinforced that hard-line orientation. Historian Ilan Peleg refers to this dramatic change as the start of Israel's "second republic." [6] He writes:

Begin quickly deserted the traditional defensive posture [of the Israeli Left], of which he was highly critical in the first three decades of Israel when he was in the opposition. He adopted an offensive posture characterized by grandiose expansionist goals, extensive and frequent use of Israel's military machine, and political compellence [sic] rather than military deterrence as a controlling factor. **Begin's final objective was to create a new, Israeli-dominated order in the Middle East,** an order that would have as one of its elements nominal autonomy for the West Bank Palestinians. For the purpose of shaping the new order, he was willing to shift from a position of deterrence and prevention, which characterized Labor's defense policy, to a position of compellence and control. His was a Clausewitzian approach, the use of warfare for purely political goals. [7]

The Right had not governed Israel before 1977, and while there was not a total dichotomy between the Left and Right regarding internal and external relations with Arabs, **the Israeli Right was the more militant in its policies toward the Palestinians and toward Israel's Arab neighbors.** Those policies rested on strong ideological roots.

The Israeli Right originated in Revisionist Zionism, whose founder and spiritual guide was the gifted writer [Zev Jabotinsky](#). Its policies were characterized by the quest for "Eretz Israel" — which entailed, at the minimum, **complete Jewish control of all land on both sides of the Jordan River; and also accorded primacy to military force in foreign-policy matters.** Peleg writes: "Jabotinsky's approach to the conflict came to be dominated by popular ideas of 'blood and soil,' a Jewish version of Social Darwinism." [8]

It was inevitable that, under the leadership of Begin, Israel would follow the hard-line policy of Jabotinsky. In fact, historical events had made Begin and his followers even more militant than Jabotinsky. Their radicalism emerged from Begin's leadership of the terrorist Irgun Tsvai Leumi, which fought the British and Palestinians in the 1940s, and the trauma of the Jewish Holocaust in Europe. **Begin tended to view all criticism of Israel as tantamount to anti-Semitism**, and the militant opposition of the Arabs as comparable to Nazi genocide. [9]

Begin headed the [Herut Party](#) at the beginning of the Israeli state in 1948. However, it was not until after the formation of the Likud bloc of right-wing parties in 1973, of which the Herut constituted the central core, that the Right had the chance to win enough votes to govern.

That first Begin government in 1977 had its moderate and restraining elements, and its crowning achievement was the [Camp David Accords with Egypt](#). Defense Minister Ezer Weizman, along with Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, steered Begin away from expressing his warlike instincts. With the departure of those moderates, the Begin Cabinet fell under the domination of more-militant figures, the most important of whom was [Ariel Sharon](#), who served as defense minister from 1981 to 1983. Sharon, who came from a military background involving counter-terrorism and even terrorism itself, translated Begin's hard-line thinking into actual policy. [10]

With the Likud assumption of power, the most far-reaching militant proposals entered mainstream Zionist thinking, involving **militant destabilization of Israel's neighbors and Palestinian expulsion**. An important article in that genre was [Oded Yinon's](#) "A Strategy for Israel in the 1980s," which appeared in the World Zionist Organization's periodical [Kivunim](#) (Directions) in February 1982. Yinon had been attached to the Foreign Ministry, and his article undoubtedly reflected high-level thinking in the Israeli military and intelligence establishment. According to Peleg, "The Yinon article was an authentic mirror of the thinking mode of the Israeli Right at the height of Begin's rule; it reflected a sense of unlimited and unrestrained power.... There can be no question that the hard-core Neo-Revisionist camp as a whole subscribed, at least until the Lebanese fiasco, to ideas similar to those of Yinon." [11]

Yinon called for Israel to bring about **the dissolution of regional Arab states and their fragmentation into a mosaic of ethnic and sectarian groupings**. He believed that this would not be a difficult undertaking because nearly all the Arab states were afflicted with internal ethnic and religious divisions. In essence, the end result would be a Middle East of powerless mini-states that could in no way confront Israeli power.

Lebanon, then facing divisive chaos, was Yinon's model for the entire Middle East. He wrote:

Lebanon's total dissolution into five provinces serves as a precedent for the entire Arab world including Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and the Arabian peninsula and is already following that track. **The dissolution of [Syria and Iraq](#) later on into ethnically or religiously unique areas such as in Lebanon, is Israel's primary target on the Eastern front in the long run**, while the dissolution of the military power of those states serves as the primary short term target. [12]

Note that Yinon sought the dissolution of countries — **Egypt and Saudi Arabia** — **that were allied to the United States**.

Yinon looked upon [Iraq](#) as a major target for dissolution, and he believed that the ongoing Iran-Iraq war would promote its breakup:

Iraq, rich in oil on the one hand and internally torn on the other, **is guaranteed as a candidate for Israel's targets**. Its dissolution is even more important for us than that of Syria. Iraq is stronger than Syria. In the short run **it is Iraqi power which constitutes the greatest threat to Israel**. An Iraqi-Iranian war will tear Iraq apart and cause its downfall at home even before it is able to organize a struggle on a wide front against us. Every kind of inter-Arab confrontation will assist us in the short run and will shorten the way to the **more important aim of breaking up Iraq into denominations** as in Syria and in Lebanon. In Iraq, a division into provinces along ethnic/religious lines as in Syria during Ottoman times is possible. So, three (or more) states will exist around the three major cities: Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul, and **Shi'ite areas in the south will separate from the Sunni and Kurdish north**. It is possible that the present Iranian-Iraqi confrontation will deepen this polarization. [13]

Yinon's 1982 prediction that war would bring about the [religious/ethnic fragmentation of Iraq](#) fits nicely with what actually occurred in the aftermath of the 2003 U.S. invasion. Certainly his forecast was far closer to being accurate than the **neocons'** rosy public **prognostications**, before the invasion, **about the easy engineering of Iraqi democracy**. But from the Likudnik perspective, the reality of a conquered Iraq was much to be preferred to the **neocon** pipe dream. It comes as no surprise, then, that Israel has developed close ties with the Kurdish separatists. [14]

The goal of Israeli hegemony was inextricably tied to the **expulsion of the Palestinians**. According to Yinon, the policy of Israel must be "to bring about the dissolution of Jordan; the termination of the problem of the [occupied] territories densely populated with Arabs west of the [River] Jordan; and emigration from the territories, and economic-demographic freeze in them." He added, "We have to be active in order to encourage this change speedily, in the nearest time."

Like many Israeli advocates of population transfer, Yinon believed that "Israel has made a strategic mistake in not taking measures [of mass expulsion] towards the Arab population in the new territories during and shortly after the [1967] war.... Such a line would have saved us the bitter and dangerous conflict ever since which we could have already then terminated by giving Jordan to the Palestinians." [15]

In a foreword to his English translation of Yinon's piece, [Israel Shahak](#) made an interesting comparison between the **neoconservative** position and actual **Likudnik** goals: "The **strong connection with Neo-Conservative thought in the U.S.A.** is very prominent, especially in the author's notes. But, while lip service is paid to the idea of the 'defense of the West' from Soviet power, **the real aim of the author, and of the present Israeli establishment is clear: To make an Imperial Israel into a world power.** In other words, **the aim of Sharon is to deceive the Americans after he has deceived all the rest.**" [16]

The Yinon article embodied the thinking of [Likud](#) strategists of the early 1980s. As [Noam Chomsky wrote in *Fateful Triangle*](#): "much of what Yinon discusses is quite close to mainstream thinking." Chomsky described the Israeli incursion into Lebanon in 1982 as representing an attempt to implement Yinon's geostrategy. "The 'new order' that Israel is attempting to impose in Lebanon is based on a conception not unlike what Yinon expresses, and there is every reason to suppose that similar ideas with regard to Syria may seem attractive to the political leadership." [17]

To bolster his thesis regarding Likudnik war strategy, Chomsky discussed an analytical article by [Yoram Peri](#) — former advisor to Prime Minister Rabin and European representative of the Labor Party, and a specialist on civil-military relations in Israel — that came out in the Labor party journal Davar in October 1982. [18] Peri described a "true revolution" in "military-diplomatic conception," which he dated to the coming to power of the Likudniks. (Chomsky saw the shift as being more gradual and "deeply rooted" in the Israeli elite.) Summarizing Peri, Chomsky wrote:

The earlier conception [during the reign of the leftwing Zionists] was based on the search for "coexistence" and maintenance of the status quo. Israel aimed at a peaceful settlement in which its position in the region would be recognized and its security achieved. The new conception is based **on the goal of "hegemony," not "coexistence."** No longer a status quo power, having achieved military dominance **as the world's fourth most powerful military force**, and no longer believing in even the possibility of peace or even its desirability except in terms of **Israeli hegemony**, Israel is now committed to "**destabilization**" of the region, including **Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan**. In accordance with the new conception, **Israel should now use its military dominance to expand its borders and "to create a new reality," a "new order,"** rather than seek recognition within the status quo. [19]

Destabilization of its surrounding enemies would seem to be a perfectly rational strategy for Israel. Certainly, all countries, if they had enemies, would prefer them to be weak rather than strong. As Chomsky pointed out:

It is only natural to expect that Israel will seek to destabilize the surrounding states, for essentially the reasons that lead South Africa on a similar course in its region. In fact, given continuing military tensions, that might be seen virtually as a security imperative. A plausible long-term goal might be what some have called an "Ottomanization" of the region, that is, a return to something like the system of the [Ottoman empire](#), with a powerful

center (Turkey then, Israel with U.S. backing now) and much of the region fragmented into ethnic-religious communities, preferably mutually hostile. [20]

Peri, however, thought that this destabilization policy would ultimately harm Israel because it would **alienate the United States, upon which Israel's security ultimately depended**. Chomsky summarized Peri's critical stance: "The reason is that the U.S. is basically a status quo power itself, opposed to destabilization of the sort to which Israel is increasingly committed. The new strategic conception is based on an illusion of power, and may lead to a willingness, already apparent in some of the rhetoric heard in Israel, to undertake military adventures even without U.S. support." [21]

Israel embarked on just such a unilateral adventure in its invasion of Lebanon in 1982. And the disastrous result demonstrated the grave limitations of a unilateral war-oriented strategy for Israel.

When [Israel Defense Forces invaded Lebanon on June 6, 1982](#), propagandists represented "[Operation Peace for Galilee](#)" to the public as a limited operation to remove Palestinian bases. The real objectives of the operation were far more ambitious: to destroy the Palestine Liberation Organization's military and political infrastructure, to strike a serious blow against Syria, and to install a pro-Israeli Christian regime in Lebanon. Israeli troops advanced far into Lebanon, even beyond Beirut, coming into conflict with Palestinians, Lebanese Muslims, and Syrians. Despite Israeli's deep military penetration, the objectives remained unachievable. Israel became ensnared in Lebanon's ongoing civil war, from which it was unable to free itself for the next three years. [22]

Israel's invasion of Lebanon, which caused well-publicized civilian casualties, including the massacre of Palestinians at the [Sabra and Shatila](#) refugee camps outside Beirut, was a public-relations disaster for the Begin government. World opinion turned against Israel. Strong criticism even arose in Israel, with the country's first mass peace movement demonstrating on the streets of Tel Aviv. The Israeli military was angry about the no-win war. And recriminations flew back and forth within the [Likud Party](#) itself, centering on the claim that Defense Minister Sharon had not informed Begin of the extent of the planned invasion. [23]

Significantly, Israel's brutal actions in Lebanon shook support for the country in the United States, even among American Jews. On August 12, 1982, President Reagan personally demanded of Begin that Israel stop the bombardment of Beirut. Later that month, Reagan insisted that Israeli forces withdraw from West Beirut. Israel quickly complied. Given the fact that **Israel was so heavily dependent on American arms**, the Begin government realized that it would severely harm Israel's power if it were to alienate **its major sponsor**. [24]

The war in Lebanon ultimately led to Begin's resignation in 1983. The invasion turned out to be Israel's least successful and most unpopular conflict in its history. It was [Israel's Vietnam](#).

The failure in Lebanon led to much soul-searching in Israel. Israeli foreign-policy expert [Yehoshafat Harkabi](#) critiqued the overall Likudnik strategy, oriented as it was toward war, writing of "Israeli intentions to impose a Pax Israelica on the Middle East, to dominate the Arab countries and treat them harshly," in his significant work, [Israel's Fateful Hour](#), published in 1988. Writing from a "realist" perspective, Harkabi argued that Israel did not have the power to achieve the goal of Pax Israelica, given the strength of the Arab states, the large Palestinian population involved, and the vehement opposition of world opinion. Harkabi hoped that "the failed Israeli attempt to impose a new order in the weakest Arab state — Lebanon — **will disabuse people of similar ambitions in other territories.**" [25]

Likudniks, however, did not see the Israeli strategy in the Lebanon debacle as inherently flawed. Some on the [Israeli Right](#) held that Israel did not push hard enough to crush its enemies — that it was affected too much by outside criticism. Harkabi maintained that even if Israeli forces had crossed into Syria and occupied Damascus, Israel still would have failed to achieve true victory but instead would have **provoked an interminable guerrilla war**. Harkabi wrote, "The Lebanon War revealed an ongoing Israeli limitation: no matter how complete [the] Israeli military triumph, the strategic results will prove to be limited. Ben-Gurion

understood this when he said that Israel could not solve its problems once and for all by war. But this view is in stark contradiction to the spirit of the Jabotinsky-Begin ethos. It is no wonder that those who adhere to it cannot accept that the great event is of no avail." [26]

Harkabi was correct about the "[spirit of the Jabotinsky-Begin ethos](#)." To many strategically minded Likudniks, the fiasco of the 1982 invasion of Lebanon had not disproven the claim that destabilization of the area would be beneficial to Israeli security; nor had it disproven the notion that such destabilization was achievable. Instead, the principal lesson many Likudnik-oriented thinkers drew from the failed Lebanon incursion was that **no military campaign to destabilize Israel's enemies could succeed without extensive backing from Israel's principal sponsor, the United States**.

But the chance that the United States would back Israeli destabilization efforts, much less act as Israel's proxy to fight its enemies, seemed slim at the time. **In the 1980s, U.S. Middle East policy, although sympathetic to Israel, differed significantly from Israel's on the issue of stability.** As Yoram Peri recognized, Washington was supportive of the **status quo**. While Likudnik thinking focused on destabilizing Israel's Middle East enemies, **the fundamental goal of U.S. policy was to promote stable governments in the Middle East** that would allow the oil to flow to the Western industrial nations. It was not necessary for oil-rich nations to befriend Israel — in fact, they could openly oppose the Jewish state. The **United States worked for peace between Israel and the Arab states**, but it was a compromise peace that would try to accommodate some demands of the Arab countries — **most crucially demands involving the Palestinians**.

Peri had argued that if Israel went off on its own in destabilizing the Middle East, the United States would abandon Israel, to Israel's detriment. What was needed for the destabilization plan to work **was a transformation of American Middle East policy**. If the United States adopted the same destabilization policy as Israel, then such a policy could succeed. U.S. influence among its allies and in the United Nations, where it held a veto, would be enough to shelter Israel from the animosity of world opinion, preventing it from ending up as a pariah state such as the white-ruled Republic of South Africa. Better yet, though perhaps unimagined in the 1980s, would be **to induce the United States to act in Israel's place to destabilize the region**.

Even if imagined, such a policy revolution was certainly impossible in that decade. However, through the long-term efforts of the **American neoconservatives, the transformation actually occurred in the Bush II administration**. The **neocon** advocacy of dramatically altering the Middle Eastern status quo **stood in stark contrast to the traditional American position of maintaining stability in the area — though it did, of course, mesh perfectly with Israel's long-established goal of destabilizing its enemies**.

As [neocon Kenneth Adelman](#) would put it during George W. Bush's first term, **"The starting point is that [neo] conservatives now are for radical change, and the progressives — the establishment foreign-policy makers — are for the status quo."** Adelman emphasized that **"conservatives believe that the status quo in the Middle East is pretty bad, and the old conservative belief that stability is good doesn't apply to the Middle East. The status quo in the Middle East has been breeding terrorists."** [27]

But even many **neocons** did not directly move to the idea that the United States would actually be the military instigator of destabilization in the Middle East. After the Bush I administration failed to occupy Iraq and remove Saddam in the Gulf War of 1991, as the **neoconservatives** would have liked, [28] **the neocons were thinking in terms of an Israeli military venture**, but one enjoying extensive American moral and political support. A clear illustration of the neocon view on this subject — and the intimate connection with Israeli security — was a 1996 paper titled **"[A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm](#),"** published by an Israeli think tank, the **[Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies](#)**. **Included in the study group that produced it were men who would loom large in the Bush II administration's war policy in the Middle East — Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, and David Wurmser**. Perle was listed as the head of the study group. [29]

The "realm" that the study group sought to secure was that of Israel. The purpose of the policy paper was to provide a political blueprint for the incoming Israeli Likud government of **[Benjamin Netanyahu](#)**. The paper stated that Netanyahu should "make a clean break" with the Oslo peace process and reassert Israel's

claim to the West Bank and Gaza. It presented a plan whereby Israel would "shape its strategic environment," **beginning with the removal of Saddam and the installation of a Hashemite monarchy in Baghdad**. By removing Saddam, the study held, Israel would be in a better strategic position to get at its more dangerous foes. In short, **elimination of Saddam was a first step toward reconfiguring the entire Middle East for the benefit of Israel**: "Israel can shape its strategic environment, in cooperation with Turkey and Jordan, by weakening, containing, and even rolling back Syria. This effort can focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq — an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right — as a means of foiling Syria's regional ambitions." [30]

To prevent the debilitating American criticism of Israeli policy that took place during Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the "Clean Break" report advised Netanyahu to present Israeli actions "in language familiar to the Americans by tapping into themes of American administrations during the cold war which apply well to Israel." For example, the report stated that "Mr. Netanyahu can highlight his desire to cooperate more closely with the United States on anti-missile defense in order to remove the threat of blackmail which even a weak and distant army can pose to either state. Not only would such cooperation on missile defense counter a tangible physical threat to Israel's survival, 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." [31]

Israel could also gain American support, the report maintained, **by appealing to Western ideals**. The Netanyahu government should "**promote Western values and traditions**. Such an approach ... will be well received in the United States." The appeal to American values loomed large in the report's reference to Lebanon: "An effective approach, and one with which American can sympathize, would be if Israel seized the strategic initiative along its northern borders by engaging Hizballah, Syria, and Iran, as the principal agents of aggression in Lebanon." **In short, the report saw the use of moral values in largely utilitarian terms**. References to moral values were for American consumption. This was **a means to get American support for a policy to advance Israeli national interests**. [32]

Intelligence writer James Bamford cut to the core of the Israeli manipulations:

To gain the support of the American government and public, a phony pretext would be used as the reason for the original invasion.

The recommendation of **Feith, Perle, and Wurmser** was for Israel to once again invade Lebanon with air strikes. But this time, to counter potentially hostile reactions from the American government and public, they suggested using a pretext. They would claim that the purpose of the invasion was to halt Syria's drug-money and counterfeiting infrastructure located there. **They were subjects in which Israel had virtually no interest, but they were ones, they said, with which America can sympathize.**

Another way to win American support for a pre-empted war against Syria, **they suggested, was by drawing attention to its weapons of mass destruction program**. This claim would be that **Israel's war was really all about protecting Americans from drugs, counterfeit bills, and WMD — nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons**. [33]

Still, in the "Clean Break," **neocons** were advising *Israeli* military action. It should be emphasized that **the same people — Feith, Wurmser, Perle — who advised the Israeli government on issues of national security would also advise the George W. Bush administration to pursue virtually the same policy regarding the Middle East, but employing American armed forces**. As political observer [William James Martin](#) would astutely comment about "Clean Break": "This document is remarkable for its very existence because it constitutes a policy manifesto for the Israeli government **penned by members of the current U.S. government**." [34] Martin went on to point out that **the similarity between that document's recommendation for Israel and the neocon-inspired Bush administration policy, purportedly designed for the benefit of American interests, was even more remarkable**:

It is amazing how much of this program, though written for the Israeli government of Netanyahu of 1996, has already been implemented, not by the government of Israel, but by the Bush administration. The overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the two-year-old house arrest of Arafat and the attempt to cultivate a new Palestinian leadership, the complete rejection by Sharon of the land for peace agreement on the Golan Heights, with little U.S. demurral, and the bombing inside of "Syria proper" with only the response from Bush, "Israel has a right to defend itself."

The dramatic similarities between the "Clean Break" scenario and actual Bush II administration Middle East policy **are evident not only in the results but also in the sequence of events.** Notably, the "**Clean Break**" report held that **removing Saddam was the key to weakening Israel's other enemies; and after removing Saddam in 2003 the United States would indeed quickly threaten Iran and Syria, and talk of restructuring the entire Middle East.** [36] Evident, too, is a similarity between actual events and the **Yinon proposal of 1982, which also saw regime change in Iraq as a fundamental move in destabilizing Israel's enemies.**

To reiterate the central point of this essay: the vision of "regime change" in the Middle East through external, militant action originated in Israel, and **its sole purpose was to advance the strategic interests of Israel. It had nothing to do with bringing "democracy" to Muslims.** It had **nothing to do with any terrorist threat to the United States.** Those latter arguments accreted to the idea of regime change as the primary military actor changed from Israel to the United States. But the Israeli government would continue to be a fundamental supporter of the regional military action, even as the ostensible justifications for action changed. **The Sharon government advocated the American attacks on Iraq and has preached the necessity of strikes on Iran.**

It would appear that for Ariel Sharon during the Bush II administration, **the strategic benefits that would accrue to Israel from such a militant restructuring of the Middle East were the same as those that Likudniks sought in the 1980s.** But unlike Begin's failed incursion into Lebanon in 1982, **the Bush II effort not only relied upon the much greater power of the United States but also was wrapped in a cover of "democracy" and American national interest, effectively masking the true objective of Israeli hegemony.** That helps to explain the much greater success of this intervention, **which has come at no cost to Israel.**

Instead, it has come at a cost to the United States. The United States has tarnished its international reputation through its militarily aggressive actions in contravention of prevailing international norms. It has also had to pay significant costs in blood and money: rather, the American people have had to pay those costs. And the United States has made itself, and the American people, a major target of international terrorism. In short, **the benefits derived by the United States from its Middle East military adventure are highly questionable;** but that is easily understood if one recognizes **that the policy the Bush II administration has pursued did not originate as one to benefit the interests of the United States but rather to benefit those of Israel, as those interests have been perceived by the Israeli Right.**

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Related analysis may be found in Dr. Sniegowski's extensive series, "[The war on Iraq: Conceived in Israel,](#)" posted at TLD in February 2003.

http://www.thornwalker.com/ditch/snieg_isrorgs.htm

NOTES

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6. Ilan Peleg, *Begin's Foreign Policy, 1977-1983* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987)

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19. Peri, "From coexistence to hegemony," discussed in Chomsky, p. 462.

20. Chomsky, p. 455.

21. Peri, "From coexistence to hegemony," discussed in Chomsky, p. 463.

22. Peri, "Coexistence or Hegemony?," pp. 210-11.

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24. Peri, "Coexistence or Hegemony?," p. 211.

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26. Harkabi, p. 97.

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31. ["A Clean Break"](#); ["Clean Break or Dirty War?"](#)

32. ["A Clean Break"](#); ["Clean Break or Dirty War?"](#)

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35. [Martin](#).

36. ["A Clean Break"](#); ["Clean Break or Dirty War?"](#)

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