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I am a steadfast follower of the doctrine of non-violence which was first preached by Lord Buddha, whose divine wisdom is absolute...

– Dalai Lama

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The Return of the Neocons

They were down, but not out...

In the weeks before the Israeli re-invasion of Lebanon, **Israel's amen corner** launched a preemptive attack against **the enemy** – **Condoleezza Rice**. **Richard Perle**, writing in the *Washington Post*, **lashed out** against the "dithering" of the Bush administration:

"For more than five years, the administration has dithered. Bush gave soaring speeches, the Iranians issued extravagant threats and, in 2003, the State Department handed the keys to the impasse to the British, French and Germans (the 'E.U.-3'), who offered diplomatic valet parking to an administration befuddled by contradiction and indecision. And now, on May 31, the administration offered to join talks with Iran on its nuclear program. How is it that Bush, who vowed that on his watch 'the worst weapons will not fall into the worst hands,' has chosen to beat such an ignominious retreat?"

The Lobby was furious: what was holding up the "**transformation**" of the Middle East? How is it that the regimes of **Bashar al-Assad** and the **Iranian mullahs** were still standing? Having led the nation into the Iraqi **sinkhole**, into which the president's **ratings** and the **prospects** of a Republican-led Congress were rapidly vanishing, **Perle** and his gang were **on the outs** with the administration anyway. It was time for a comeback.

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Their policy of "regime change" in the Middle East was **discredited**, and their vaunted influence left for **dead** in the rubble of "liberated" Iraq. But the neocons had been down **before**, and they always came **back**. Besides which, no one knows better than **the War Party** that the best defense is an **aggressive offense**. They could afford to make a few waves, and Perle's broadside caused a stir in Washington: suddenly the discontent of the "conservatives" (i.e., **neoconservatives**) was making itself heard. But even bigger waves were in the making...

The Israeli blitz may **not** have succeeded in cleaning out Hezbollah from the southern precincts of Lebanon, but it will almost certainly accomplish the expulsion of the "**realists**" from the councils of state and put the neocons back in the saddle in Washington. Their enemy, the American secretary of state, has been blown out of the water by **the Israeli strike at Qana**, where 60 civilians, 37 of them children, were slaughtered. This provoked a response from the Lebanese: **Don't bother coming to Lebanon, Condi** – until you call off your dogs.

It's odd, but the United Nations seems to be getting the worst of it: as the Israelis **blasted two** of their observation posts to smithereens, killing four, a crowd of Lebanese invaded UN offices in Beirut, and smashed the place up, yelling "Death to Israel, death to America."

Well, not quite the worst of it – this is a fate reserved for **the Lebanese**. Muslim, Christian, Druze – whatever – all have been targeted for destruction by the Israelis, whose "Justice" Minister Haim Ramon **averred**:

"All those now in south Lebanon are terrorists who are related in some way to Hezbollah."

When Slobodan Milosevic stood **in the dock** of the **war crimes tribunal** in The Hague, the accusation lodged against him by the court and the international media was that of attempted "**ethnic cleansing**." His intent, **said his critics**, was to drive out the Bosnian Muslims and the Albanian Kosovars and sow the bloody soil with the seeds of a regenerated **Greater Serbia**. While there is some **debate** over whether this devilish plan ever existed, even as a concept in **the late Serbian dictator's** feverish brain, there is **no doubt** that this is precisely what is being attempted in Lebanon. They want to set up a sanitized "**zone**" cleansed of all

Arabs, all Muslims, all possible resistance, the northern equivalent of **the great Wall of Separation** they're building to keep the Palestinians from their historic lands.

They're building Fortress Israel, an **impregnable redoubt** of Zionism. But they have no intention of hunkering down and luxuriating in a **U.S.-taxpayer-supported** isolationism. From the security of their base they can expand and extend Israeli influence into Syria, **Kurdistan**, and beyond, taking their place as the regional hegemon, overshadowing even the United States.

Rice's **efforts** to negotiate, rather than let the sheer momentum of events unleashed by **the American invasion of Iraq** take their natural course, undermine Israeli interests. Their agenda includes a **regional war**, the takedown of Syria's Ba'athists, and a confrontation with the Iranians ending in regime change. "**Faster, please,**" exhorts Michael Ledeen, a **leading neocon** and founding president of the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (**JINSA**), who has made a career out of implementing this program.

The Americans **may not have been listening** to Ledeen's advice, but the Israelis sure took it up with alacrity – and so far it's working. In Washington, the Amen Corner is **back in the saddle**, and, more important, two major Israeli goals have so far been achieved.

Israel has drawn **the U.S.** into the conflict, and this may become more than merely rhetorical if and when American soldiers are sent in with the "international" peacekeepers. Unless common sense prevails in Washington – an **unlikely scenario** – or Secretary Rice succeeds in cobbling together an agreement to end the fighting, Americans may soon be fighting and dying for a Greater Israel.

The other objective, however, is equally important, albeit part of a long-term project. The invasion and the American response confirm in Muslim eyes **the central thesis** of Osama bin Laden and his cohorts that the "**Crusaders**" are the real empowering agent of the "**Zionist entity**" – and that it is necessary to strike the American homeland if victory is to be won on the battlefields of the Middle East. Bin Laden's chief adjunct, **Ayman al-Zawahiri**, was **quick to pounce** on the invasion, and crow, in effect, "We told you so!"

Israel's strategy has always been to embolden and

encourage Arab-Muslim radicalism, to **smash secular moderates** in the old PLO and, now, **sideline** Palestinian "president" **Mahmoud Abbas**, and empower nutballs – bin Laden, Hassan Nasrallah, etc. – all the better to rally the West behind Israel's cause. They **nurtured Hamas**, in its early years, as a supposedly quietist alternative to the militant PLO. Now they are reaping the whirlwind, as the "**blowback**" comes back to haunt them in the form of suicide bombers – just as Hezbollah was birthed **by the 1982 invasion of Lebanon**, which ended, ultimately, in Israel's ignominious **retreat** and the establishment of Nasrallah as a **leading voice** in a democratic Lebanon.

That ending, however, is being challenged by the Israelis, whose jealousy of a **thriving** as well as **liberal** Arab neighbor to the north has, in part, driven popular support for the invasion. The cafes and skyscrapers of a revived Beirut attracted visitors from throughout the world, while tourists – except for **Christian fundamentalist crazies** and the thinning trickle of Jews making *aliya* – largely disdained the **Zionist Sparta**. For the Israelis, the sight of an Arab success story was a reproach and a reminder of their one big defeat.

In the poisonous political culture of the Middle East, this meant the Israelis would have to strike back one day – and so they have. Tit for tat, insult for insult, massacre and revenge – it's the infamous "cycle of violence" that has turned the region volcanic and threatened us with the eruption of a **third** (**some** would **say** fourth) world war.

We have allowed ourselves to be dragged into this on the Israeli side, a move that runs counter to American interests – and endangers the security of the nation and the life of every citizen (especially those living abroad). How did we get here? How do we get out? These are questions for another column, but the first requires some sort of partial answer, so I'll just provide a **link**.

This country may be too far gone down the road to **perdition** to be saved at this late date, but we who saw this coming have no choice but to face the future and fight. We don't have to accept that Washington is, today, Israeli-occupied territory, and that the interests of a foreign power trump our own in the minds of our policymakers and leaders. We don't have to sit passively and watch it all unfold on our television screens – we can act, we can challenge our "leaders," we can build a

movement to take back our country's foreign policy from the hijackers and make sure it serves the American people once again.

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