

## The Sanitized Version of Neoconservatism

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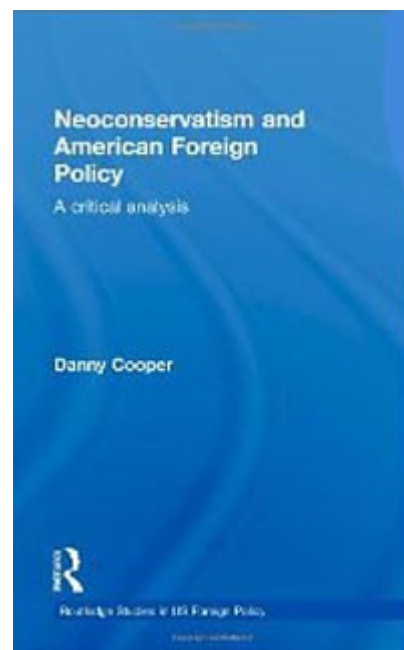
### Neoconservatism and American Foreign Policy: A Critical Analysis

by **Stephen Sniegoski** / [Intifada Palestine](#)

<sup>[2]</sup> **What these books still conceal, however, is the fact that the neocons are motivated by their Jewish ethnicity and the interests of the state of Israel. Instead the neocons are made to appear as an ideological group loyal solely to what they believe is good for the US. Consequently, this approach, despite allowing for some elements of truth, distorts the overall picture in a serious way**

A number of books have come out recently dealing with the neoconservatives, which have been published by mainstream presses. It is significant that these works acknowledge some obvious truths that were denied and even largely taboo some time ago.

They admit, for example, that neoconservatives not only exist (something that was denied a few years ago, most especially by the neocons themselves), but that they have been influential in shaping American policy in the Middle East, a view that continues to be rejected even by many critics of American foreign policy—e.g., Noam Chomsky and his acolytes, who see American foreign policy shaped only by all-powerful corporate interests. What these books still conceal, however, is the fact that the neocons are motivated by their Jewish ethnicity and the interests of the state of Israel. Instead the neocons are made to appear as an ideological group loyal solely to what they believe is good for the US. Consequently, this approach, despite allowing for some elements of truth, distorts the overall picture in a serious way.

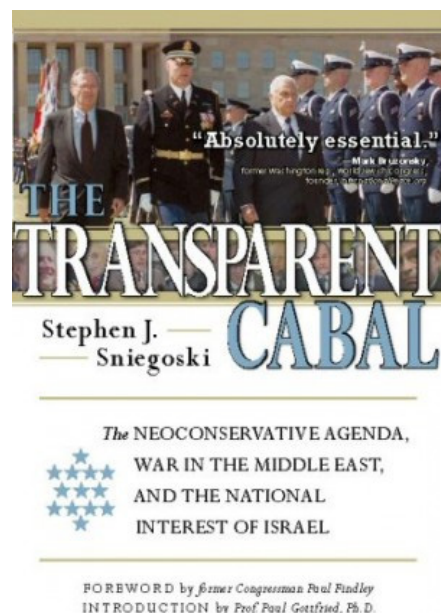


[Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement](#) <sup>[3]</sup> (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), by Justin Vaïsse, which I have reviewed last August, reflects this partial truth approach. The current essay will focus on another recent work of this genre, *Neoconservatism and American Foreign Policy: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2011), authored by Danny Cooper, who is a lecturer at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. [A subsequent review will be of *Neoconservatism and the New American Century* by Maria Ryan (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010)]

### THE TRANSPARENT CABAL

<sup>[4]</sup> Of the recent books on this subject, Cooper's is one of the more revealing in that it actually acknowledges the authors who have presented these taboo views and quotes them—allowing them to speak for themselves. And I must express my delight that Cooper even refers to *The Transparent Cabal*. It is this segment to which I will devote most of my attention in this essay. I do this largely because I have not been able to get hold of Cooper's book but have had to read it on Google Books where only a small section of it is available. The book's cost, exceeding one-hundred dollars from Amazon, is beyond my limited means, and the work is not available in the public and university libraries to which I have access. While I could only look at a small portion of the book, however, the part that I could see does seem to present the work's fundamental thesis.

In discussing claims of the neocons' ties to Israel, Cooper writes that "Mearsheimer and Walt were not the only scholars to discuss the influence of Israel on neoconservative thinking. Stephen Sniegoski's *The Transparent Cabal: The Neoconservative Agenda, War in the Middle East, and the National Interest of Israel* (2008) is the most detailed and exhaustive attempt to link neoconservatives with the policies of Israel's Likud Party." After this favorable introduction, he then implies that my "loyalties" to the Palestinians are "taken to dangerous and irresponsible extremes," asserting



that "[o]ne does not have to be a 'Likudnik' to find Sniegowski's unqualified reference to the 'Palestinian resistance' to be morally offensive . . ." (p. 32)

Presumably, I should have qualified this non-committal reference with some disparaging remarks about the Palestinians, since I was not expressing anything positive about them in referring to their "resistance." Criminals, for example, are said to resist arrest. Perhaps Cooper believes that nothing has been done to the Palestinians that calls for any resistance and that they are instead engaging in aggressive violence. No matter what his specific intent, Cooper's comment would seem to indicate a pro-Israel bias.

*Cooper does acknowledge that the neocons are "strong defenders of the Jewish state" and that some authored the "Clean Break" report (p. 32), though he fails to elucidate the full significance of this work. The "Clean Break" report, which was presented to incoming Prime Minister Netanyahu in 1996, advocated that Israel undertake a war policy to reconfigure the Middle East for the sole purpose of enhancing its own security. Moreover, the neocon authors of the report emphasized the need to justify these belligerent moves in terms of American ideals in order, as I stated in The Transparent Cabal "[t]o prevent the debilitating American criticism of Israeli policy that took place during Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982." (TC, p. 92). And the success of Israel's belligerent activities would have the effect of freeing it from United States pressure. As pointed out in The Transparent Cabal: "It was highly noteworthy that Americans would advise the Israeli government how to induce the United States to support Israeli interests and how to avoid having to follow the policies of the United States government." (TC, p. 93) Since the actual policy prescription of "Clean Break" was broadly similar to what the neoconservatives would later advocate for the United States during the Bush II administration, the neocons, in this latter case, were actually having the United States pursue policies that had originally been developed to advance Israeli interests. As reiterated throughout The Transparent Cabal, the neocons look at U.S. Middle East policy through the "lens of Israel interest." (TC, pp. 4, 5, 7, 193, 211, 365, 366). To state otherwise is to ignore Occam's razor.*

### Who's to blame for the Iraq war?



From top left: Albert Wohlstetter, Oded Yinon, Richard Perle, William Kristol, Robert Kagan, David Wurmser, Paul Wolfowitz, Joseph Lieberman, William Safire, Eliot Cohen, David Frum, Norman Podhoretz, Kenneth Adelman, Charles Krauthammer, Benjamin Netanyahu, Philip Zelikow, Elliott Abrams, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, Douglas Feith and Bernard Lewis.

[5]

When acknowledging the neocons' obvious link to Israel, Cooper simultaneously downplays its role in shaping their views on Middle East policy. "The affection neoconservatives have for the state of Israel cannot be dismissed," Cooper avers. "The authors who demonstrate the degree to which many neoconservatives identify with the Jewish state make a number of thoughtful arguments. Yet what they truly reveal about the neoconservative approach to American foreign policy is a little unclear. Even authors such as Sniegowski who aim to 'expose' the connections between segments of the hard right in Israel and neoconservatives often acknowledge the limitations of their studies." (p. 32)

To support his contention that I acknowledge limitations in my study, Cooper then quotes me: "To state that neoconservatives viewed American foreign policy in the Middle East through the lens of Israeli interest – and that this was the basis of the neocon Middle East war agenda is not to say that their support for Israel has been the be-all and end-all of their foreign policy ideas." (p. 32)

Cooper leaves out my ending "which encompass the entire world" (TC, p. 7), which served to underscore what I meant. I also elaborate on this issue on the same page in my book where I write: "Lest any reader misinterpret

this work, it is necessary to further explain what the book is not. Since it is not an analysis of neoconservatism per se it does not claim that neoconservatism is simply a cover for the support of Israel. Undoubtedly, the overall neoconservative viewpoint does not revolve solely around the security needs of Israel, and the same is true even of the neocons' positions on foreign policy and national-security policy." (TC, p. 7)

As is apparent, I explain the limits, or scope, of my subject—it is about the neocon position on the Middle East (and how they influenced US Middle East policy); it is not about neoconservative foreign policy in general. That my subject does not encompass a broader subject does not mean that I acknowledge any "limitations" in my study. All historical works (works on anything for that matter, even for those physicists who claim to have a "theory of everything") deal with particular subjects—as opposed to everything—but to admit "limitations," the word used by Cooper, would seem to imply that there are weaknesses in dealing with the particular subject matter of the work.

Cooper, however, makes the claim that my "admission [of 'limitations'] raises immediate questions. If neoconservative support for Israel is not the 'be-all and end-all of their foreign policy ideas,' then to what extent are studies such as Sniegowski's truly capable of illuminating the neoconservative approach to foreign policy? Is it not possible that some of these other ideas that go unexamined in *The Transparent Cabal* may even strongly conflict with the those of the Israeli right?"

Cooper's logic escapes me here unless his purpose is to place me in a no-win position. Obviously, if I had stated that support for Israel (or any other factor) explained the neocons' entire foreign policy thinking, I could be faulted for that, too. The idea that one factor might explain part of a group's or individual's world view, but not the totality of that world view, would seem perfectly appropriate.

For Cooper to imply that my claim that the neocons' Middle East policy position revolves around their concern for Israel is invalidated by my unwillingness to apply that same motive to their policies elsewhere—for instance, the neocons' China policy—makes no sense. My arguments are based on inductive reasoning. I have provided extensive empirical evidence to prove the case regarding the Middle East (inductive reasoning can only lead to tentative proofs); but I have made no in-depth study of the neocons' China policy so I cannot draw a comparable conclusion.

He then implies, or at least, seems to imply, that the allegation that the Israeli government backed the war on Iraq was false, citing the view of one international relations expert (Russell Walter Mead), who held that "the Israeli defense establishment was deeply skeptical of neoconservative hopes for a democratic renaissance in the Middle East following the removal of Saddam Hussein (2007)." From that he asks rhetorically: "Is it not possible, in other words, that there is something distinctly American about neoconservatism?" (p. 33)

Here Cooper describes an alleged neocon position never expressed by me, or strictly speaking, anyone else, as far as I know. Since no one claims that there was ever democracy in the Middle East, no one could expect a "renaissance," which, of course, means rebirth. And it is probably true that there is no evidence that the Israeli defense establishment, or anyone else with expertise on the Middle East, actually believed that the elimination of Saddam Hussein would create democracy in Iraq. And in *The Transparent Cabal*, I questioned the idea that the neocons themselves actually believed that their policies would lead to democracy, as democracy is conventionally understood. But whatever their beliefs on the eventual social systems in the Middle East, the policies they prescribed dovetailed with those of the Israeli Likudniks, which were designed solely for the enhancement of the national interest of the state of Israel. And, as documented in *The Transparent Cabal*, the Sharon government did promote the war on Iraq. (TC, pp. 169-72)

Moreover, contrary to Cooper's insinuation, I never denied that there was "something distinctly American about neoconservatism," since, as I explained in the book, neoconservatism in general was not my topic. There could very well be "something distinctly American about neoconservatism" while, simultaneously, their view on Middle East policy was shaped by their identification with Israel security interests. The two beliefs are not mutually exclusive.

In an effort to counter the claim of neocon loyalty to Israel, Cooper holds that the neocons are "just as steadfast in their support for Taiwan as they are in their support for Israel." (p. 33) This is based on an article by William Kristol and Robert Kagan stating that the US should defend Taiwan from China. Viewing this as the overall position of the neocons, Cooper attributes neocon support for Israel and Taiwan to their belief that the two countries are "endangered liberal democracies living in hostile regions." (p. 33) Cooper next cites a general statement by Irving Kristol, that "Barring extraordinary events, the United States will always feel obliged to defend, if possible, a democratic nation under attack from non-democratic forces, external or internal (2003)." These statements allegedly provide sufficient evidence to prove that the neocons are "driven more by feelings of ideological solidarity than ethnic identification." (p. 33-34)

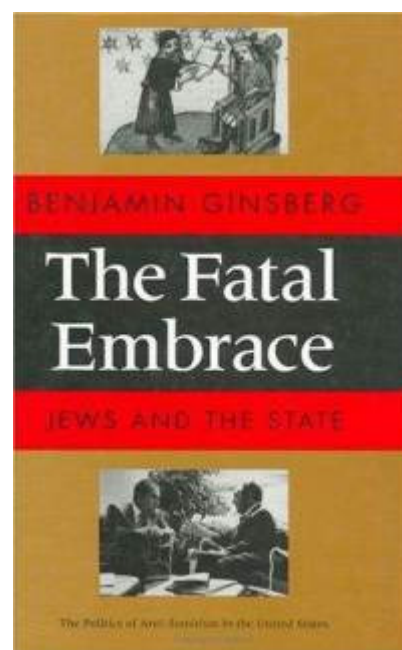
There are a number of problems with this notion of neocon support for Taiwan and other democratic nations being comparable to their support for Israel. A simple statement of support for Taiwan if threatened with attack, or in Irving Kristol's case, a claim that the US "if possible" would "feel obliged" to defend democratic countries is obviously not equivalent to launching aggressive wars to weaken or eliminate Israel's enemies. Furthermore, the connection of the neocons to other democratic foreign countries is not in anyway equal to the deep personal loyalty and intimate connection the neocons have with the state of Israel, which is illustrated throughout *The Transparent Cabal*.

Neocons present Israel as a model democracy but this is hardly the case, as liberal democracy is generally defined today. Rather, Israel is a Jewish supremacist ethno-state that favors Jews over Palestinians, going to the extent of dispossessing them of their land on the West Bank for Jewish settlements. Instead of supporting measures by

Jewish leftists and liberals to allow more rights for the Palestinians in order to move Israel in the direction of a typical liberal democracy, the neocons support the Likudnik (explicitly Jewish supremacist) hard-line anti-Palestinian position, which is anything but pro-liberal democracy. Their goal is to maintain Israel as an ethnically-Jewish state instead of creating a modern liberal democracy with equal rights for all people. That the neocons see this Jewish ethno-state as a model democracy would illustrate their ethnic bias, since they find no fault with the type of ethnic discrimination that Jews have historically railed against when applied against them in gentile countries.

It would seem that the predominantly Jewish composition of the core membership of neoconservatism, the latter's close connection to and championing of Israel, and the fact that the neocons advocated that the US take militant positions against the enemies of Israel would, taken together, provide strong prima facie evidence that Jewish ethnicity shaped the neocons Middle East policy. As pointed out in *The Transparent Cabal*, the Jewish orientation of neoconservatism has been acknowledged by some close students of the movement, including those who happen to be Jewish. For example, Gal Beckerman wrote in the Jewish weekly newspaper *Forward* in January 2006: "[I]t is a fact that as a political philosophy, neoconservatism was born among the children of Jewish immigrants and is now largely the intellectual domain of those immigrants' grandchildren." In fact, Beckerman went so far as to maintain that "[i]f there is an intellectual movement in America to whose invention Jews can lay sole claim, neoconservatism is it." (TC, p. 26) Murray Friedman wrote a favorable book about the neocons entitled *The Neoconservative Revolution: Jewish Intellectuals and the Shaping of Public Policy*, which stresses the significance of their Jewish ethnicity. In it he shows that the neocons explicitly mentioned their group loyalty: "A central element in [neocon godfather Norman] Podhoretz's evolving views, which would soon become his and many of the neocons' governing principle was the question, "Is It Good for the Jews," the title of a February 1972 *Commentary* piece." [quoted in TC, p. 27; Friedman, p. 147]

[6]In the much reviewed *The Fatal Embrace: Jews and the State* (University of Chicago Press, 1993), noted political scientist (Johns Hopkins University) Benjamin Ginsberg writes: "One major factor that drew them [future Jewish neocons] inexorably to the right was their attachment to Israel and their growing frustration during the 1960s with a Democratic party that was becoming increasingly opposed to American military preparedness and increasingly enamored of Third World causes [e.g., Palestinian rights]. In the Reaganite right's hard-line anti-communism, commitment to American military strength, and willingness to intervene politically and militarily in the affairs of other nations to promote democratic values (and American interests), neocons found a political movement that would guarantee Israel's security." (T.C., p. 26; Ginsberg, *Fatal Embrace*, p. 231)



The aforementioned illustrations of the neocons' Jewish ethnicity shaping their policy positions represent cases where this issue was broached in the mainstream. However, the mainstream media has left out this ethnic reference when dealing with recent U.S. Middle East policy. For to include such a reference would imply that Jews are influential and exhibit "dual loyalty"- ideas that are taboo in the United States mainstream. It was these taboos that caused the whole idea of the neocons being the leading element for the war on Iraq to be blacked-out in mainstream presentations of the subject, a situation that recent works are only willing to change by discussing the role of the neoconservatives in a sanitized fashion, with the taboos expurgated or explained away.

However, there is nothing unusual in concluding that neocons would be motivated by ethnic loyalty to Israel. Historians and other commentators on American foreign policy have readily attributed ethnic loyalty as a fundamental factor in shaping the views of other groups - German-, Greek-, Polish-, Irish-, and Cuban-Americans. There is no reason to think that this interpretation would not also apply to the predominantly Jewish neoconservatives, especially since there is so much evidence of their close ties to the Jewish state.

That recent mainstream works on the neocons do everything possible to skirt their obviously ethnically-motivated concern for Israel represents not only a misinterpretation of a historical event, but has serious, negative ramifications for the understanding of ongoing U.S. Middle East policy. For neocons constitute only a more extreme element of the overall Israel lobby, which influences U.S. Middle East policy under both Democratic and Republican administrations. Without the willingness to recognize this major force behind America's belligerent policy in the Middle East, it will not only be impossible to extricate the United States from the current Middle East morass, but there will be a strong possibility that the US will be involved in future wars in the region.



[7] **Dr. Stephen Sniegowski** earned his Ph.D. doctorate in American history, with a focus on American foreign policy, at the University of Maryland. His focus on the neoconservative involvement in American foreign policy antedates September 11, and his first major work on the subject, "The War on Iraq: Conceived in Israel" was published February 10, 2003, more than a month before the American attack. He is the author of "The Transparent Cabal: The Neoconservative Agenda, War in the Middle East, and the National Interest of Israel". Read more articles by Stephen J. Sniegowski. [The Transparent Cabal](#)



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