

A New “Perle Harbor”: Neocon Foreign Policy Architect Richard Perle reveals US War Plans in the Iranian Theater

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“I think of war with Iran as the ending of America’s present role in the world. Iraq may have been a preview of that, but it’s still redeemable if we get out fast. In a war with Iran, we’ll get dragged down for 20 or 30 years. The world will condemn us. We will lose our position in the world.”

Zbigniew Brzezinski, Vanity Fair, 2006.

One US carrier task force is already in position in the Persian Gulf. Two more task forces are moving swiftly to take up their positions in the Iranian theatre.

The controversial neoconservative American bureaucrat, Richard Perle, visited Britain on the eve of the papal audience between Prime Minister Tony Blair and Pope Benedict XVI. Earlier in the same week, the Iranian Nobel Laureate for Peace, Dr. Shirin Ebadi, was in Britain to voice her concerns about a confrontation between the west and Iran. In London, Metropolitan Police swooped down on two suspected Islamist terrorists believed to be in the process of building a chemical bomb. Summertime tensions are building.

In bland remarks delivered to a small audience of students at the Oxford Union, Richard Perle outlined the Bush administration’s response to the crisis of 9/11 and the neoconservative doctrines of pre-emptive war. In a droning monotone designed to anaesthetize his keen academic audience, Perle explained the need for an invincible American military apparatus and a foreign policy predicated on the Bush Doctrine of pre-emptive war permitting direct and simultaneous interventions into multiple theatres.

While Perle stated his hope that the need for military interventions would be minimal, he left the impression that his definition of excessive use of military power might well differ from that of the average American or European citizen. Perle is on the public record advocating pre-emptive strikes against North Korea, Syria, Iran and a list of other countries. Some of his critics accuse Perle of darkly malignant machinations. (Richard N. Perle, *Sourcewatch*)

Citing Iraq as a glowing example of an obvious need for direct intervention, Perle admitted that he had long advocated military solutions for regime change in that theatre. In his talk, he reminded us that President Bush had launched the invasion on the basis of several triggering factors including Nigerian yellow cake, WMDs, terrorist connections, democracy-

building and humanitarian issues. Thus, Perle was finally reduced to justifying the Iraq War as a humanitarian crusade – a theme that struck hollow in the midst of reports of civil war, torture and US war crimes against innocent civilians in Haditha.

Questioned by a largely supportive audience of admiring students willing to attend a late lecture on a Friday night, Perle touched upon the diplomacy between the West and Iran in the most insipid terms he could muster. Taking into account the latest diplomatic developments, he gave his Oxford audience the impression that the outcome remains obscure in spite of the fact that he is one of the principle architects – and the sternest – of the Iran negotiations.

Perle emphasised that President Ahmadinejad holds fanatical religious beliefs involving the necessity for an Armageddonite conflict to trigger the return of the Hidden Imam at the end of the world in the Shiite tradition for the Last Judgement and the Islamic Apocalypse. Perle singled out the fanaticism of Islamic terrorism as the most serious threat to international security, and he praised the Israeli air-strike against Saddam's nuclear reactor in 1981 as a model of pre-emptive military intervention. In his view, the threat of precision air-strikes against the nuclear infrastructure of Iran constitute the best negotiating option.

An Iranian student asked Perle whether he considered the Mearsheimer and Walt paper, "The Israel Lobby," to be, "anti-Semitic." Castigating the eighty-five page paper as, "bad scholarship," Perle admitted that he did not know what he was talking about when he confessed that he had not read it in its entirety. This question put Perle on the defensive, and he asserted that there was no secret agenda amongst America's plethora of, "Jewish groups," that sought to place the national security of Israel above that of the United States.

In the limited time available, no one was able to follow up Perle's pregnant point about the non-existence of a secret agenda with a question about the Israeli spy scandal that shook his own office at the Pentagon, when Larry Franklin was discovered to be the conduit between the Office of Special Plans and two Israeli officials who were later identified as espionage agents assigned to the embassy. Neither was he questioned about the incident that took place in 1970, when an FBI wiretap revealed that Perle discussed classified intelligence with an official at the Israeli embassy. Washington insiders have long considered Perle to be, "an Israeli agent of influence."

Another fact fuels these suspicions swirling around Perle since he serves as a director of Hollinger International which owns the *Jerusalem Post*. Perle has been paid millions for his "work" for Hollinger even though he is the only 'outside' director on the Executive Committee. Perle's complicated business dealings have brought him under suspicion for conflicts of interest and the charge that he is attempting to profit from wars that he was strenuously working to create and implement through his official capacity in the Department of Defense. In 2004, Perle's conflicts of interest resulted in his resignation from the Defense Policy Board. (*ibid*)

When a perceptive student asked about his preferences for the next president of the United States, Perle made some riveting remarks. He immediately stated his hope that Senator Joseph Lieberman would be the Democratic candidate. Failing that miracle, Perle hopes former Governor Mark Warner will win the Democratic nomination. Perle warmly praised both right-leaning Democrats who are doyens of the Democratic Leadership Council. Richard Giuliani is Perle's favourite Republican. When asked about potential presidential candidates who would cause him concern, Perle swiftly reeled off a long list of Democrats led by

Governor Howard Dean, followed closely by Senator John Kerry, former Vice President Al Gore, former Senator John Edwards, and he finished his list of neoconservative hate figures with a revealing comment about Senator Hillary Clinton.

It is hardly secret that Senator Clinton has attempted to appeal to the Israeli right. When she visited Israel, she condemned the Palestinians, but Perle was not impressed. Quite the contrary, Perle said that while she had made some smart moves in her attempt to appeal to the right, the left did not believe her. This comment gave the clear impression that Perle did not believe her, either. Criticizing other Democrats, Perle said that Senator John Kerry, “did not understand power,” and was not able to perform the duties of the president of America. In his form of damnation by faint praise, Perle said that Howard Dean was a much nicer man off the podium than on it – and he gave him pride of place at the top of his most worrisome Democratic politicians.

The love affair between Perle’s base in Likud on the hard line Israeli right and the neoconservatives of both US political parties is alive and kicking. Perle has long been associated with Likud that has been reduced to a weak rump huddling around Benjamin Netanyahu in the new Knesset. As a close associate of Netanyahu, Perle is seen as Likud’s top-ranking advocate in Europe and America with his tentacles into both political parties, the Bush White House, the Pentagon and many other leading institutions. Next year, it would not be surprising to find Perle’s name on contributors lists to Giuliani, Lieberman and Warner.

The morning after his Oxford talk, Perle appeared on the very influential BBC radio programme, *Today*, where he was interviewed by John Humphries, the ranking heavyweight commentator in Britain. Admitting President Bush’s political weakness, Perle made a revealing comment when Humphries pressed him on US plans to bomb Iran. When Humphries pointed out that a unilateral US bombardment of Iran would be greeted with global howls of derision, Perle said,

“No American president who believes that there is a last opportunity to prevent Iran from becoming a nuclear weapons state is going to be deterred by derision. He will do what he believes to be in the best interests of the protection of those who might come under attack from an Iranian nuclear weapon including the United States.” (Today, BBC4, 3rd June 2006)

When Humphries pressed him harder by pointing out that the former British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, had termed the US bombing of Iran, “inconceivable,” Perle shot back with a revealing retort. “Well, it’s no longer conceivable that he’s the Foreign Secretary.” Humphries then asked whether Straw had been sacked over his offence putting Perle on the spot by asking, “You think there’s a link there?” Perle replied,

“I don’t know. He was expressing a view that the government had not concluded yet in a way that diminished the leverage to produce a political result, a diplomatic result. That’s obviously unwise.” (ibid)

This response left the clear impression that Straw had been removed specifically because he had ridiculed Washington’s negotiating position and that Perle had been intimately involved in ordering and engineering the surprise sacking.

While Perle was undergoing his public interrogation before six million listeners on the BBC, Tony Blair was entering the Vatican for his long-awaited audience with Pope Benedict

XVI. Blair's last papal audience occurred in early 2003 shortly before the launch of the Iraq War, when he pleaded with the late pontiff, John Paul II, to support the Crusade against Islamist terrorism.

The German Pope has been a strident critic of, "fundamentalist terror," the Vatican's code term for Islamism. According to the published accounts, Blair and the pope discussed the current negotiations with Iran. *The Sunday Times* reported, "Pope Benedict XVI pressed Tony Blair to find a diplomatic resolution to the Iran nuclear crisis." The Pope is more than well aware of the escalation of the military planning on both sides.

There can be little serious doubt that George Bush had given Tony Blair his marching orders - the assignment of negotiating a papal blessing for his pre-emptive bombing campaign against Iran. From the Pope's remarks, it is clear that Benedict dreads a new level of violence in Bush's wars in the Middle East. As a very public supporter of George Bush during the 2004 presidential campaign, the Pope rightfully fears the political consequences he will suffer in the aftermath of a new phase in what is seen globally as a western religious crusade against Islam. Smarting from a punishing round of criticism for ignoring the Anti-Semitic dimension of the Holocaust during his visit to Auschwitz only one week ago, Benedict XVI is praying to avoid any more political controversies that would undermine his increasingly challenged papacy.

Last week, Ray McGovern, a former high-ranking CIA intelligence analyst, appeared on the Alex Jones Show where he expressed his fears that staged terrorist attacks in Europe and America are being prepared to pave the way for public approval of pre-emptive air-strikes against Iran. McGovern said,

"There is already one carrier task force there in the Gulf, two are steaming toward it at the last report I have at least - they will all be there in another week or so. The propaganda has been laid, the aircraft carriers are in place, it doesn't take much to fly the bombers out of British and US bases - cruise missiles are at the ready, Israel is egging us on." (Former CIA Analyst Says Iran Strike Possibly Set For June Or July)

McGovern predicted dire consequences would result from Bush's policy of pre-emptive war. In McGovern's opinion, Iran would retaliate with a cruise missile attack against the US fleet then launch a military invasion of Iraq and simultaneously activate a world wide ring of terrorists that would make Al-Qaeda look like, "a girls netball team."

McGovern's predictions may be unfolding already. The London police raid that coincided with Perle's visit to Britain netted two men suspected of terrorist plotting to build a massive chemical bomb. But, after four days of excruciating forensic examination of their premises, the police found no evidence of bomb-building activities. Whether this "swoop" was staged or not remains to be seen, but this episode resonates with an official campaign to ratchet up the public concern about terrorism. The non-productive raid has produced a predictable backlash among the local residents who are demanding some form of official confirmation that the raid was based on credible evidence rather than a melange of Islamophobic paranoia.

Last week in Wales at the annual literary festival at Hay-on-Wye, Dr Shirin Ebadi, the Iranian Nobel Laureate for Peace in 2003, explained her opposition to western military intervention in Iran.

“America says that Iran would pose a threat if it gains access to nuclear weapons because it is not a democratic country, and because its government is fundamentalist, and this could pose a danger to the whole region, but America has forgotten that Pakistan has nuclear weapons, and Pakistani Muslims are much more fundamentalist than Iranian Muslims, and Pervez Musharraf did not come to power as a result of an election. The only difference between Iran and Pakistan is that Pakistan is friendly towards America and obeys America, while Iran does not obey America. This double standard is something that the Iranian people cannot understand.”

Exactly as Richard Perle intimated to the BBC, the world is witnessing the machinations in a game of geopolitical poker. The stakes are high. In spite of his perceived weakness, George Bush holds a very strong hand, The White House, the Pentagon, the Supreme Court and both houses of Congress. Yet his political weakness with the American public is the primary factor motivating him to launch a pre-emptive attack against Iran. With his approval rating falling into the low 30s, Bush has too little - if anything - to lose to worry about current public opinion.

Because of his chronic unpopularity, Bush is already in a complicated political predicament. Bush is facing the loss of his American political hegemony in the midterm elections this November. If Bush loses even one house of Congress, he will face the immediate threat of official probes led by partisan special prosecutors and a rising demand for his impeachment. In his game of poker with Ahmadinejad, Bush has nothing to lose by upping the ante and wrapping himself in the American flag while dropping a massive bombardment onto the primary vortex of his Axis of Evil, Iran.

However, if Bush were to attack Iran, he would instantaneously transform Ahmadinejad into the most powerful figure in the increasingly Anti-American world. With that transfiguration, Ahmadinejad would have nothing to constrain him from launching attacks not only against American targets as Ray McGovern suggests, but the Iranian Prime Minister would be free to join forces with Hizbollah and Islamic Jihad in an attack against America’s primary ally in the region, Israel. Bristling with potential targets from its vulnerable nuclear facility at Dimona as well as its major population centers including Tel Aviv, Haifa and Elat, Israel would be in the frontline of any potential counter-attack by Ahmadinejad.

With leaders like Bush, Ahmadinejad, Blair, Olmert and Benedict XVI there can be little wonder why the world - driven by achingly inept religious fundamentalists holding the reigns of power in Washington, London, Tehran, Rome and Tel Aviv - is lurching forward into battle toward what can, indeed, be called a new Perle Harbor.

Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty a distinction not shared with three nuclear states, India, Israel and Pakistan, who have declined to sign the document.

Michael Carmichael became a professional public affairs consultant, author and broadcaster in 1968. He worked in five American presidential campaigns for progressive candidates from RFK to Clinton. In 2003, he founded The Planetary Movement, a nonprofit public affairs organization based in the United Kingdom. He has appeared as a public affairs expert on the BBC’s Today, Hardtalk, and PM, as well as numerous appearances on ITN, NPR and European broadcasts examining politics and culture. He can be reached through his website: www.planetarymovement.org

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