

Behind the Plan to Bomb Iran

By [Prof. Ismael Hossein-Zadeh](#)

Global Research, September 01, 2006

1 September 2006

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?](#)

It is no longer a secret that the Bush administration has been methodically paving the way toward a bombing strike against Iran. The administration's plans of an aerial military attack against that country have recently been exposed by a number of reliable sources. [1]

There is strong evidence that the administration's recent public statements that it is now willing to negotiate with Iran are highly disingenuous: they are designed not to reach a diplomatic solution to the so-called "Iran crisis," but to remove diplomatic hurdles toward a military "solution." The administration's public gestures of a willingness to negotiate with Iran are rendered utterly meaningless because such alleged negotiations are premised on the condition that Iran suspends its uranium enrichment program. Considering the fact that suspension of uranium enrichment, which is altogether within Iran's legitimate rights under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), is supposed to be the main point of negotiations, Iran is asked, in effect, "to concede the main point of the negotiations before they started." [2]

The administration's case against Iran is eerily reminiscent of its case against Iraq in the run up to the invasion of that country. Accordingly, the case against Iran is based not on any hard evidence provided by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), but on dubious allegations that are based on even more dubious sources of intelligence. Iran is asked, in effect, to prove a negative, which is of course *mission impossible*—hence grounds for "noncompliance" and rationale for "punishment."

The administration's case against Iran is so weak, its objectives of a military strike against that country are so fuzzy, and the odds against achieving any kind of meaningful victory are so strong, that even professional military experts are speaking up against the plans of a bombing campaign against Iran. [3] Furthermore, predominant expert views of such a bombing campaign maintain that it would more likely hurt than help the geopolitical and economic interests of the United States.

So, if the administration's "national interests" argument as grounds for a military strike against Iran is suspect, why then is it so adamantly pushing for such a potentially calamitous confrontation? What are the driving forces behind a military confrontation with Iran?

Critics would almost unanimously point to neoconservative militarists in and around the Bush administration. While this is obviously not false, as it is the neoconservative forces that are beating the drums of war with Iran, it falls short of showing the whole picture. In a real sense, it begs the question: who are the neoconservatives to begin with? And what or who do they represent?

The neoconservative ideologues often claim that their aggressive foreign policy is inspired

primarily by democratic ideals and a desire to spread democracy and freedom worldwide—a claim that is far too readily accepted as genuine by corporate media and many foreign-policy circles. This is obviously little more than a masquerade designed to hide some real powerful special interests that lie behind the façade of neoconservative figures and their ideological rhetoric.

The driving force behind the neoconservatives' war juggernaut must be sought not in the alleged defense of democracy or of national interests but in the nefarious special interests that are carefully camouflaged behind the front of national interests. These special interests derive lucrative business gains and high dividends from war and militarism. They include both economic interests (famously known as the military-industrial complex) and geopolitical interests (associated largely with Zionist proponents of "greater Israel" in the Middle East, or the Israeli lobby).

There is an unspoken, de facto alliance between these two extremely powerful interests—an alliance that might be called the military-industrial-Zionist alliance. More than anything else, the alliance is based on a conjunctural convergence of interests on war and international convulsion in the Middle East. Let me elaborate on this point.

The fact that the military-industrial complex, or merchants of arms and wars, flourishes on war and militarism is largely self-evident. Arms industries and powerful beneficiaries of war dividends need an atmosphere of war and international convulsion in order to maintain continued increases in the Pentagon budget and justify their lion's share of the public money. Viewed in this light, unilateral or "preemptive" wars abroad can easily be seen as reflections of domestic fights over national resources and tax dollars.

In the debate over allocation of public resources between the proverbial *guns and butter*, or between military and nonmilitary public spending, powerful beneficiaries of war dividends have proven very resourceful in outmaneuvering proponents of limits on military spending. During the bipolar world of the Cold War era that was not a difficult act to perform as the rationale—the "communist threat"—readily lay at hand. Justification of increased military spending in the post-Cold War period has prompted these beneficiaries to be even more creative in manufacturing "new sources of danger to U.S. interests" in order to justify unilateral wars of aggression. It is not surprising, then, that a wide range of "new sources of threat to U.S. national interests" have emerged in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union: "rogue states, axis of evil, global terrorism, Islamic radicalism, enemies of democracy," and more.

Just as the powerful beneficiaries of war dividends view international peace and stability inimical to their business interests, so too the hard-line Zionist proponents of "greater Israel" perceive peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors perilous to their goal of gaining control over the promised "Land of Israel." The reason for this fear of peace is that, according to a number of the United Nations' resolutions, peace would mean Israel's return to its pre-1967 borders; that is, withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

But because proponents of "greater Israel" are unwilling to withdraw from these territories, they are therefore fearful of peace and genuine dialogue with Palestinians—hence, their continued disregard for UN resolutions and their systematic efforts at sabotaging peace negotiations. By the same token, these proponents view war and convulsion (or, as David Ben-Gurion, one of the key founders of the State of Israel, put it, "revolutionary atmosphere") as opportunities that are conducive to the expulsion of Palestinians, to the

territorial recasting of the region, and to the expansion of Israel's territory. [4]

The military-industrial-Zionist alliance is represented largely by the cabal of neoconservative forces in and around the Bush administration. The institutional framework of the alliance consists of a web of closely knit think tanks that are founded and financed primarily by the armaments lobby and the Israeli lobby. These corporate-backed militaristic think tanks include the American Enterprise Institute, Project for the New American Century, Center for Security Policy, Middle East Media Research Institute, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Middle East Forum, National Institute for Public Policy, and Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs.

These think tanks, which might appropriately be called institutes of war and militarism, are staffed and directed mainly by the neoconservative champions of the military-industrial-Zionist alliance, that is, by the proponents of unilateral wars of aggression. There is strong evidence that the major plans of the Bush administration's foreign policy have been drawn up largely by these think tanks, often in collaboration, directly or indirectly, with the Pentagon, the arms lobby, and the Israeli lobby. These war mongering think tanks and their neoconservative champions serve as direct links, or conveyer belts, between the armaments lobby and the Israeli lobbies on the one hand, and the Bush administration and its Congressional allies on the other.

Take the Center for Security Policy (CSP), for example. It "boasts that no fewer than 22 former advisory board members are close associates in the Bush administration. . . . A sixth of the Center's revenue comes directly from defense corporations." The Center's alumni in key posts in the Bush administration include its former chair of the board, Douglas Feith, who served for more than four years as Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Pentagon Comptroller Dov Zakheim, former Defense Policy Board Chair Richard Perle, and long-time friend and financial supporter Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. In its 1998 annual report, the center "listed virtually every weapons-maker that had supported it from its founding, from Lockheed, Martin Marietta, Northrop, Grumman, and Boeing, to the later 'merged' incarnations of same—Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and so forth." [5]

Likewise, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a major lobbying think tank for the military-industrial-Zionist alliance, can boast of being the metaphorical alma mater of a number of powerful members of the Bush administration. For example, Vice President Dick Cheney and his wife Lynne Cheney, State Department arms control official John Bolton (now U.S. ambassador to the UN), and former chair of the Defense Policy Board Richard Perle all have had long-standing ties with the Institute. The Institute played a key role in promoting Ahmed Chalabi's group of Iraqi exiles as a major Iraqi opposition force "that would be welcomed by the Iraqi people as an alternative to the regime of Saddam Hussein." The group, working closely with the AEI, played an important role in the justification of the invasion of Iraq. It served, for example, as a major source of (largely fabricated) intelligence for the militaristic chicken hawks whenever they found the intelligence gathered by the CIA and the State Department at odds with their plans of invading Iraq. [6]

Another example of the interlocking network of neoconservative forces in the Bush administration and the militaristic think tanks that are dedicated to the advancement of the military-industrial-Zionist agenda is reflected in the affiliation of a number of influential members of the administration with the Jewish Institute for the National Security Affairs (JINSA). These include, for example, Douglas Feith, assistant secretary of defense during the

first term of the Bush administration, General Jay Garner, the initial head of the U.S. occupation authority in Iraq, and Michael Ledeen, who unofficially advises the Bush administration on Middle Eastern issues. JINSA “is on record in its support of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and against the Oslo Accord. . . . In its fervent support for the hard-line, pro-settlement, anti-Palestinian Likud-style policies in Israel, JINSA has essentially recommended that ‘regime change’ in Iraq should be just the beginning of a cascade of toppling dominoes in the Middle East.” [7]

The fact that neoconservative militarists of the Bush administration are organically rooted in the military-industrial-Zionist alliance is even more clearly reflected in their incestuous relationship with the warmongering think tank Project for the New American Century (PNAC). Like most of its lobbying counterparts within the extensive network of neoconservative think tanks, PNAC was founded by a circle of powerful political figures a number of whom later ascended to key positions in the Bush administration. The list of signatories of PNAC’s Founding Statement of Principles include Elliott Abrams, Jeb Bush, Elliott Cohen, Frank Gaffney, Zalmay Khalilzad, I. Lewis Libby, Norman Podhoretz, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz. Add the signature of Vice President Dick Cheney to the list of PNAC founders, “and you have the bulwarks of the neo-con network that is currently in the driver’s seat of the Bush administration’s war without end policies all represented in PNAC’s founding document.” [8]

A closer look at the professional records of the neoconservative players in the Bush administration indicates that “32 major administration appointees . . . are former executives with, consultants for, or significant shareholders of top defense contractors.” For example, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is an ex-director of a General Dynamics subsidiary, and his deputy during the first term of the Bush administration, Paul Wolfowitz, acted as a paid consultant to Northrop Grumman. Today the armaments lobby “is exerting more influence over policymaking than at any time since President Dwight D. Eisenhower first warned of the dangers of the military-industrial complex over 40 years ago.” [9]

This sample evidence indicates that the view that the neoconservative militarists’ tendency to war and aggression is inspired by an ideological passion to spread American ideals of democracy is clearly false. Their successful militarization of US foreign policy stems largely from the fact they operate essentially on behalf of two immensely powerful special interests, the military-industrial complex and the influential Israeli lobby. Neoconservative architects of war and militarism derive their political clout and policy effectiveness primarily from the political machine and institutional infrastructure of the military-industrial-Zionist alliance.

It is necessary to note at this point that, despite its immense political influence, the Zionist lobby is *ultimately* a junior, not equal, partner in this unspoken, de facto alliance. Without discounting the extremely important role of the Zionist lobby in the configuration of the U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, I would caution against simplifications and exaggerations of its power and influence over the U.S. policy in the region. It is true that most of the neo-conservative militarists who have been behind the recent U.S. military aggressions in the Middle East have long been active supporters of Israel’s right-wing politicians and/or leaders. It is also no secret that there is a close collaboration over issues of war and militarism between militant Zionism, neoconservative forces in and around the Bush administration, and jingoistic think tanks such as AEI, PNAC, CSP, and JINSA.

It does not follow, however, that, as some critics argue, the U.S.-Israeli relationship represents a case of “tail wagging the dog,” that is, U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East is

shaped by the Israeli/Zionist leaders. While, no doubt, the powerful Zionist lobby exerts considerable influence over U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, the efficacy and the extent of that influence depend, ultimately, on the real economic and geopolitical interests of U.S. foreign policy makers. In other words, U.S. policy makers in the Middle East would go along with the desires and demands of the radical Zionist lobby only if such demands also tend to serve the special interests that those policy makers represent or serve, that is, if there is a convergence of interests over those demands. [10]

Aggressive existential tendencies of the U.S. military-industrial empire to war and militarism are shaped by its own internal or intrinsic dynamics: continued need for arms production as a lucrative business whose fortunes depend on permanent war and international convulsion. Conjunctural or reinforcing factors such as the horrors of 9/11, or the Zionist lobby, or the party in power, or the resident of the White House will, no doubt, exert significant influences. But such supporting influences remain essentially contributory, not defining or determining. The decisive or central role is played, ultimately, by the military-industrial complex itself—that is, by the merchants of arms or wars.

Ismael Hossein-zadeh is an economics professor at Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa, USA. This article draws upon his newly released book, *The Political Economy of U.S. Militarism* (by Palgrave-Macmillan Publishers). Contact: ismael.zadeh@drake.edu, <http://www.cbpa.drake.edu/hossein-zadeh>

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1. See, for example, Seymour M. Hersh, "The military's problem with the President's Iran policy," *The New Yorker* (July 10, 2006): <http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/060710fa_fact>; Evan Eland, "Military Action Against Iran?" *antiwar.com* (January 24, 2006): <http://www.antiwar.com/eland/?articleid=8433>
2. Hersh, "The military's problem with the President's Iran policy."
3. Ibid.; see also Ismael Hossein-zadeh, "[U.S. Iran Policy Irks Senior Commanders: The Military vs. Militaristic Civilian Leadership](http://www.opednews.com/articles/opedne_ismael_h_060724_u_s_iran_policy_irk.htm)," *OpEdNews.com* (July 24, 2006): http://www.opednews.com/articles/opedne_ismael_h_060724_u_s_iran_policy_irk.htm
4. A detailed discussion of this issue, and of the de facto alliance between militant Zionism and the powerful beneficiaries of war dividends, can be found, among other places, in Chapter 6 of my recently released book, *The Political Economy of U.S. Militarism* (Palgrave-Macmillan 2006).
5. William D. Hartung, *How Much Are You Making on the War, Daddy?* (New York: Nation Books, 2003), P. 101; William Hartung and Michelle Ciarrocca, "The Military-Industrial-Think Tank Complex," *Multinational Monitor* 24, nos. 1 & 2 (Jan/Feb 2003):

<<http://multinationalmonitor.org/mm2003/03jan-feb/jan-feb03corp2.html#name>> .

6. Hartung, *How Much Are You Making on the War, Daddy?* PP. 103-106.

7. Ibid., PP. 109-111.

8. Ibid., P. 113.

9. William Hartung and Michelle Ciarrocca, "The Military-Industrial-Think Tank Complex."

10. I have provided a longer discussion of the role of the Zionist lobby in the configuration of the U.S. policy in the Middle East in Chapter 6 of my recently published book, *The Political Economy of U.S. Militarism* (Palgrave-Macmillan 2006).

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