

Neocons: We expected Israel to attack Syria

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It hasn't been a good year for neocons, that group of conservative American intellectuals pulling some strings of US policy, particularly during the George W. Bush administration.

The strongest indictment against them is the war in Iraq, a quagmire in which the US is currently stuck up to its neck. And as Bush's days in the White House grow numbered, they are leaving one by one.

Among the few remaining neocons is David Wurmser, an advisor for Vice President Dick Cheney on Middle Eastern affairs. Wurmser is a Middle East expert, just like his wife, Israeli Meyrav Wurmser, a researcher at the conservative Hudson Institute.

Meyrav Wurmser was also one of the co-founders of MEMRI, which tracks Arab leaders and translating their political statements from Arabic to English.

Despite the fact that many neocons are no longer part of the government, it turns out they're still one big happy family, who make sure to remain in touch.

Many are Jews, who share a love for Israel. Some of the accusations against the government regarding the war in Iraq is that it was undertaken primarily for Israel's sake and that the attack on Iraq was actually an Israeli objective.

In an interview with Ynet, Dr. Meyrav Wurmser refutes the accusations and criticism.

"Since I'm an Israeli in the gang, you wouldn't believe what's been written about me," she said. "That I'm proof of the covert neoconservative connection with Israel and the Mossad."

What are you trying to achieve?

"We believe in a strong and active American foreign policy. America is a good force in the world, a nation that believes in freedom. We believe in exporting American ideas of freedom and democracy, to promote greater stability."

Did you, in practice, bring about the war in Iraq?

"We expressed ideas, but the policy in Iraq was taken out of neocon hands very quickly. The idea was that America has a war on terror and that the only actual place for coping with it is in the Middle East and that a fundamental change would come through a change in leadership. We had to start somewhere.

"The objective was to change the face of the Middle East. But it was impossible to create a mini-democracy amidst a sea of dictatorships looking to destroy this poor democracy, and

thus, where do insurgents in Iraq come from? From [Iran](#) and [Syria](#) .”

Should they have been conquered?

“No. There was a need for massive political action, of threats and pressure on these governments, financial pressure, for example. The sanctions on Syria were nothing. There was a period of time when the Syrians were afraid that they were next. It would have been possible to use this momentum in a smarter way. There’s no need to go in militarily.”

Everyone feels beaten after last 5 years

At their prime, the neocons held the reigns of American decision making. In the Pentagon, there were Deputy Defense Minister Paul Wolfowitz, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas J. Feith, and Harold Rhode, a senior Pentagon advisor on Islam.

In the vice president’s office were Louis Libby and John Hannah. Richard Perle headed the committee advising to the Pentagon. In the White House were Deputy National Security Adviser for Global Democracy Strategy Elliott Abrams and Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security John Bolton, who later became the US ambassador to the UN.

According to Wurmser’s description, the group is comprised of academics, most of them lacking operational experience, who became part of the Bush administration but failed to get their ideas through bureaucracy.

“These are intellectuals who came with great ideas, in which I still believe, but did not find a way to promote their beliefs in the complexities of bureaucracy,” she says.

Your people held senior positions in the Pentagon. Didn’t Deputy Defense Minister Paul Wolfowitz and Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas J. Feith implement your theories?

“The final decisions were no in their hands. In the Pentagon, the decisions were in the hands of the military, and the political leadership had a lot of clashes with the military leadership.”

Did the military leadership ask for more soldiers in Iraq?

“Rumsfeld prevented that. He was a failure. The State Department opposed the neocons’ stances. Also John Bolton, who is also part of the family, and was no. 4 at the State Department under Colin Powell, was incapable of passing decisions...”

“Powell curbed our ideas and they did not pass. There was a lot of frustration over the years in the administration because we didn’t feel we were succeeding.

“Now Bolton left (the UN - Y.B.) and there are others who are about to leave. This administration is in its twilight days. Everyone is now looking for work, looking to make money... We all feel beaten after the past five years... We miss the peace and quiet and writing books...”

“When you enter the administration you have to keep your mouth shut. Now many will resume their writing... Now, from the outside, they will be able to convey all the criticism they kept inside.”

In the meantime you left the US inside Iraq?

“We did not bring the US into Iraq in such a way. Our biggest war which we lost was the idea that before entering Iraq we must train an exile Iraqi government and an Iraqi military force, and hand over the rule to them immediately after the occupation and leave Iraq. That was our idea and it was not accepted.”

Your man was Ahmed Chalabi, who was later suspected of spying for Iran?

“That is true, but we didn’t want him as a dictator but as a person in a government that will act democratically... We must help the current democratic government. The borders with Iran and Syria should have been blocked immediately when we entered Iraq. Now it’s already a disaster.”

Why didn’t you attack Syria?

Many of Wurmser’s friends believe the disaster is not only in Iraq, but in the entire region. They are also very frustrated over the way in which Israel embarked on the war against Hezbollah this summer, and on the way it returned from it.

“Hezbollah defeated Israel in the war. This is the first war Israel lost,” Dr. Wurmser declares.

Is this a popular stance in the administration, that Israel lost the war?

“Yes, there is no doubt. It’s not something one can argue about it. There is a lot of anger at Israel.”

What caused the anger?

“I know this will annoy many of your readers... But the anger is over the fact that Israel did not fight against the Syrians. Instead of Israel fighting against Hezbollah, many parts of the American administration believe that Israel should have fought against the real enemy, which is Syria and not Hezbollah.”

Did the administration expect Israel to attack Syria?

“They hoped Israel would do it. You cannot come to another country and order it to launch a war, but there was hope, and more than hope, that Israel would do the right thing. It would have served both the American and Israeli interests.

“The neocons are responsible for the fact that Israel got a lot of time and space... They believed that Israel should be allowed to win. A great part of it was the thought that Israel should fight against the real enemy, the one backing Hezbollah. It was obvious that it is impossible to fight directly against Iran, but the thought was that its strategic and important ally should be hit.”

“It is difficult for Iran to export its Shiite revolution without joining Syria, which is the last nationalistic Arab country. If Israel had hit Syria, it would have been such a harsh blow for Iran, that it would have weakened it and changes the strategic map in the Middle East.

“The final outcome is that Israel did not do it. It fought the wrong war and lost. Instead of a strategic war that would serve Israel’s objectives, as well as the US objectives in Iraq. If

Syria had been defeated, the rebellion in Iraq would have ended.”

Wurmser says that what most frustrates her is hearing people close to decision makers in Israel asking her if the US would have let Israel attack Syria.

“No one would have stopped you. It was an American interest. They would have applauded you. Think why you received so much time and space to operate. Rice was in the region and Israel embarrassed her with Qana, and still Israel got more time. Why aren't they reading the map correctly in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem?”



Israeli troops invading South Lebanon (Photo: Dan Bronfeld, IDF Spokesperson's Office)

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