

Rise and Demise of the New American Century

By Tom Barry | June 28, 2006

The glory days of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) quickly passed. When neoconservatives William Kristol and Robert Kagan formed PNAC in 1997, they aimed to set forth a new agenda for post-Cold War foreign and military policy that would ensure that the United States could claim the 21st century as its own—where U.S. military dominance would not only protect U.S. national security and national interests but would also establish a global Pax Americana.

The election of George W. Bush opened the door to the Pentagon, vice president's office, State Department, and the National Security Council for PNAC associates, many of whom—including Richard Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Douglas Feith, and Paul Wolfowitz—became the leading figures in the Bush administration's foreign policy team. Although not all were neoconservatives themselves, the PNAC associates brought neoconservative ideology and a common conviction of U.S. supremacy with them into government. However, it was not until Sept. 11 that the PNAC-dominated foreign policy team got its chance to fast-forward their plans to remake the world as a U.S. dominion.

Back in 2001 and even into 2002 few Americans—even in foreign policy circles—knew about the Project for the New American Century or could speak knowledgeably about the history and ideological convictions of neoconservatives. Nearly five years after Sept. 11 and more than three years after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, most Americans who follow foreign policy and U.S. politics are familiar with the term neoconservative and probably have heard about the Project for the New American Century.

As the wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan have become quagmires, the glory days of PNAC have been cut short by the limits of U.S. power and the follies of the Bush administration's arrogance. Yet by no means is it certain if the lessons of PNAC's successes and delusions have been learned, either by the U.S. public or the U.S. policy community. The agenda set out by PNAC in its 1997 "Statement of Principles" reflects the exceptionalism and supremacy that still pervades this country. And many of PNAC's policy prescriptions regarding regime change, increased U.S. military budgets, unilateral action, and America's moral mission remain part of the common political discourse.

By 2005 PNAC began to fade from the political landscape, and though the website is still functioning, it has been dormant since late that year. But the neoconservatives, together with their Religious Right and military-industrial complex allies, remain prominent actors in shaping the directions of U.S. foreign and military policy—some within government and others from a wide array of neocon-led think tanks, front groups, and policy institutes.

The IRC is publishing this special report on the Project for the New American Century, along with an accompanying report on the Committee on the Present Danger, as part of an effort to stimulate more reflection on the dangers of the ideology and political projects of the neoconservatives and their allies.



From an office in the same building that houses the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) in downtown Washington and with funding from the Bradley Foundation, William Kristol established the Project for the Republican Future in 1993 in anticipation of the 1994 congressional elections. Following the resounding victory of right-wing Republicans, he founded the Weekly Standard in 1995 in the vacated offices of the Project for the Republican Future. The next year Kristol and Robert Kagan established the Project for the New American Century, whose offices are also located in the American Enterprise Institute building and which is also generously supported by the Bradley Foundation.¹

By the time Kristol and Kagan formulated the idea for the Project for the New American Century in 1996, the widespread conservative frustration at having to endure another four years of Clinton liberals had largely papered over the conservative rift of the late 1980s. Newt Gingrich's "Contract with America" played a key role in unifying conservatives around an almost exclusively domestic agenda of big-government bashing, glorifying in traditional family values, and attacking secular humanism. The domestic side of a reinvigorated right wing was coming together nicely in the 1990s, as seen in the winning role played by the "Contract with America" in ushering in a Republican majority in both houses of Congress under the Clinton presidency.

The right, however, had not recovered from the loss of its chief mobilizing principle: militant anti-communism. Central to the right's role in winning the White House for Ronald Reagan in 1980 was the fusion of three core conservative constituencies: social conservatives, economic libertarians, and national security militarists. In the late 1970s, neoconservatives played a key strategic role in engineering this right-wing fusion, providing many of the key intellectual and ideological frameworks for the right wing's expanding counter-establishment and for the right-wing populists.

If they were to reprise this same unifying role in the late 1990s, the neocons knew that the old political messages daring the Democrats to associate themselves with the "L" word of liberalism

would no longer suffice. Positioning themselves as New Democrats, Bill Clinton and Al Gore had stolen the neoconservative thunder on free market and big government issues.

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The challenge was to create a "neo-Reaganite" agenda—one that would appeal to the same "moral majority" citizens who were still fighting the backlash cultural wars against multiculturalism and the counterculture of the 1960s, who responded to messaging about moral clarity and America's mission, and whose sense of patriotism and nationalism could again be rallied to support increased military spending and interventionism abroad. Collectively, the neoconservatives, the Republican Party's hawks, and the social conservatives aimed to awaken America from its slumber to wage the 'good fight against the forces of evil' that were gathering round the world. PNAC's founding statement in 1997 crystallized this new sense of America's power and moral mission.

PNAC's 1997 "Statement of Principles" set forth a new agenda for foreign and military policy that was described by William Kristol and Robert Kagan as being "neo-Reaganite." Signatories of this charter document said that they aimed "to make the case and rally support for American global leadership."² Excerpts from the statement follow:

"We seem to have forgotten the essential elements of the Reagan administration's success: a military that is strong and ready to meet both present and future challenges; a foreign policy that boldly and purposefully promotes American

principles abroad; and national leadership that accepts the United States' global responsibilities.”

“Of course, the United States must be prudent in how it exercises its power. But we cannot safely avoid the responsibilities of global leadership or the costs that are associated with its exercise. America has a vital role in maintaining peace and security in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. If we shirk our responsibilities, we invite challenges to our fundamental interests. The history of the 20th century should have taught us that it is important to shape circumstances before crises emerge, and to meet threats before they become dire. The history of this century should have taught us to embrace the cause of American leadership.”

“Such a Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity may not be fashionable today. But it is necessary if the United States is to build on the successes of this past century and to ensure our security and our greatness in the next.”

Liberals and progressives might regard the success of the Project for the New American Century setting a new foreign policy agenda as an example of how the right's unity, its messaging skills, its networking, and the focused political agenda of its small circle of foundations have enabled it to effect radical political change. Recalling the group's origins in the mid-1990s, PNAC's executive director Gary Schmitt told a different story: “It is actually just the opposite. We started up precisely because the right was so divided—between the realists and the neo-isolationists.” According to Schmitt, “What we thought was that a tradition that was both more American and more particularly Reaganite had been dropped from the agenda.”³

That agenda—one of U.S. moral clarity and the exercise of American power against evil—was articulated in 1996 by Bill Kristol and Robert Kagan in their *Foreign Affairs* essay on creating a “neo-Reaganite” foreign policy agenda.⁴ PNAC, said Schmitt, was the result of Kristol and Kagan's decision to “institutionalize” their vision.

The Project for the New American Century struck a discordant note in the dominant political

discourse. At a time when most pundits and politicians were caught up in national debates about the price of prescription drugs, the future of social security, and the impact of globalization, PNAC warned of “present dangers” to U.S. national security.

On the whole, however, PNAC's associates—many of whom joined the administration of George W. Bush—were hopeful. If conservatives would continue to resist “isolationist impulses from within their own ranks” and if a new government would adopt the history-tested principle of “peace through strength,” the “greatness” of the United States would be ensured in the next century. If the American people were to again embrace “a Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity,” they could look forward to a New American Century.⁵

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The rhetoric, political tactics, and assumptions about America's moral mission articulated by the Project for the New American Century all had deep historical resonance. The three signature features of the Project for the New American Century—the coalition-building to confront the “present danger,” the vision of a planetary Pax Americana, and the laying of a nationalist claim to an entire century—were echoes of former visionaries, statesmen, and political leaders.

In raising the alarm about the present danger, PNAC sounded again the refrain of post-WWII militarists and internationalists. Since the late 1940s, factions of the U.S. foreign policy elite have stoked the patriotism and paranoia of Americans

with warnings about the “present danger” facing the United States if lulled to sleep by dovish political and economic elites. For hawks and ideologues, the term “present danger,” along with the phrase “peace through strength,” has been the recurrent rallying cry of those arguing for a more aggressive national security strategy.

PNAC succeeded in integrating the various tendencies and diverse expertise found within neoconservatism, uniting political intellectuals associated with neocon publications, scholars, military strategists, and cultural/religious warriors.

In the advent of the 2000 presidential election, PNAC’s founders William Kristol and Robert Kagan in their edited book *Present Dangers* invoked the words of Henry Robinson Luce, who had even before the United States entered World War II predicted that the 20th century could be the “American Century” if it created “an international moral order.”⁶ The combination of military strength, “a vital international economic order” established by the United States, and foreign policy guided by America’s God-ordained moral mission would, according to Luce, ensure American supremacy and international peace.⁷

The Team with the Right Stuff

PNAC embodied the new right-wing fusionism of the late 1990s and Bush II presidency, melding the various tendencies in the neoconservative camp with leading social conservatives and national security hawks.

PNAC succeeded in integrating the various tendencies and diverse expertise found within neoconservatism, uniting political intellectuals associated with neocon publications (Norman Podhoretz and William Kristol), scholars (Eliot Cohen and Francis Fukuyama), military strategists (Paul Wolfowitz

and Zalmay Khalilzad), and cultural/religious warriors (William Bennett and George Weigel).

Among its 27 founding members, including cochairs Kristol and Kagan, only a handful of individuals didn’t match the neoconservative prototype, although all shared in the agendas and new ideological vision of American supremacism as articulated by the neocon political and military strategists.

The two most prominent in the small number of exceptions—Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld—were national security hard-liners who had worked their way up in the Republican Party. Unlike neocon political intellectuals, who prefer to guide policy with their ideologies rather than to attain political power as elected officials, both Rumsfeld and Cheney worked together at the Office of Economic Opportunity in the Ford administration—and both established a political base in the Republican Party as congressional representatives.

Both men had quickly gravitated to the military-industrial complex—first as strong supporters of higher military budgets while in Congress, later as secretaries of defense and also as directors of and investors in major Pentagon contractors. Rumsfeld and Cheney were closely tied to the economic interests in U.S. foreign and military policy. Both had close ties with the globalizing military-industrial complex, high-tech industries, and energy businesses. Both Cheney and Rumsfeld were corporate CEOs when they signed the PNAC charter.

During their years in politics and business, Rumsfeld and Cheney had forged close alliances with neoconservatives. Rumsfeld, for example, was fundraising chairman of Midge Decter’s Committee for the Free World, and Cheney as defense secretary chose neoconservatives as his closest advisers as he did in 1992 when directing the creation of a new Defense Policy Guidance for the Pentagon.

Albeit sparsely represented, right-wing social conservatives closely associated with the Christian Right constituted another important sector in the PNAC coalition. Among those representing the social conservative faction were Gary Bauer,

former director of the Family Research Council and current president of American Values; former Vice President Dan Quayle; and two other prominent cultural warriors: Steve Forbes and cofounder of Empower America, former Representative Vin Weber.

Forbes, the quintessential corporate conservative, was also a former Empower America director and is associated with other right-wing social conservative and economic libertarian institutes. In 2002 Forbes, with his neocon colleagues, was a founding director of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD). As PNAC continued through 2005 to issue new public declarations, it maintained its strong neoconservative backbone while integrating top figures from other sectors of the right wing's power complex and occasionally a sprinkling of liberal hawks.

Many of the signatories of PNAC's "Statement of Principles" joined the Bush administration. Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Cheney, I. Lewis Libby, and Paul Wolfowitz became key players in setting the administration's foreign and military policy. Other PNAC charter signatories who joined the administration as foreign and military policy officials were: Elliott Abrams, special assistant to the president and senior director for Near East and North African affairs at the National Security Council; Paula Dobriansky, undersecretary of State for Global Affairs; Aaron Friedberg, Vice President Cheney's deputy national security adviser; Zalmay Khalilzad, ambassador to Afghanistan and currently ambassador to Iraq; and Peter Rodman, assistant secretary of defense for International Affairs.

Other signatories of PNAC's "Statement of Principles" joined the administration as advisers or became members of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Eliot Cohen, Dan Quayle, Henry Rowen, and Fred Iklé became members of Rumsfeld's Defense Policy Board. Vin Weber became NED's chairman, while Francis Fukuyama became a NED board member, and was appointed to serve on the administration's Commission on Bioethics.

PNAC Profile

The Project for the New American Century was established in the spring of 1997 as a nonprofit organization "whose goal is to promote American global leadership." PNAC is an initiative of the New Citizenship Project, whose chairman is William Kristol. PNAC describes itself as a "nonprofit educational organization supporting American military, diplomatic, and moral leadership." It has been inactive since late 2005.

PNAC's board of directors has the following members, as listed on its website (May 26, 2006): William Kristol (chairman), Robert Kagan, Bruce Jackson, Mark Gerson, and Randy Scheunemann. Staff members: Ellen Bork (acting executive director), Gary Schmitt (senior fellow), Thomas Donnelly (senior fellow), Reuel Gerech (director of the Middle East Initiative), Timothy Lehman, (assistant director), and Michael Goldfarb (research associate).⁸

Between 2000 and 2003, PNAC received \$170,000 in grants from several conservative foundations, including the Earhart, Olin, and William J. Donner foundations.⁹ From 1994 to 2004, the New Citizenship Project that sponsors PNAC and whose chairman is PNAC's William Kristol received \$3.3 million in grants, mainly from the largest right-wing foundations: Bradley, Olin, and Scaife Foundations. The Bradley Foundation has been PNAC's largest source of foundation support, granting PNAC \$700,000 in 1997-2004. In its first year of operations, PNAC received grants from Bradley, Sarah Scaife, and Olin foundations.¹⁰

PNAC Letters and Statements (1998-2003)

Following its "Statement of Principles," PNAC organized several reports and sign-on letters critical of the Clinton administration's foreign and military policies. These PNAC letters paralleled initiatives by the Republican majority in Congress to pressure Clinton to increase the military budget, implement a missile defense system, and switch to a more confrontational foreign policy that targeted rogue states. A January 1998 letter to Clinton contended that the only "acceptable policy" vis-à-vis Iraq was "one that eliminates the possibility that Iraq will be able to use or threaten to use weapons of mass destruction. In the near term, this means a willingness to undertake military action, as diplomacy is clearly failing. In the long term, it means removing Saddam Hussein and his regime from power. That now needs to become the aim of American foreign policy."¹¹

During the Clinton presidency, PNAC organized two sign-on letters to the president (the second one on Milosevic) and one letter to congressional

leaders (on Iraq), and it published one statement (on the “Defense of Taiwan”).¹² In 2000 PNAC also published a book and a report, both of which were designed as blueprints for a new U.S. foreign and military policy. The book *Present Dangers* was edited by Robert Kagan and William Kristol and included many PNAC associates and other neoconservatives. *Rebuilding America’s Defenses*, written largely by PNAC’s Thomas Donnelly, offered an agenda for military transformation based on the Defense Policy Guidance of 1992, the national security strategy written by Paul Wolfowitz, I. Lewis Libby, and Zalmay Khalilzad under the supervision of then-Defense Secretary Cheney.

The election of George W. Bush enabled PNAC to fast-forward its agenda for the “new American century.” Many PNAC principals moved into the Pentagon, vice president’s office, and State Department. It was not, however, until after Sept. 11 that the PNAC agenda was finally implemented.

On Sept. 20, 2001 PNAC sent an open-letter to President Bush that commended his newly declared war on terrorism and urged him not only to target Osama bin Laden but also other “perpetrators,” including Saddam Hussein and Hezbollah. The letter made one of the first arguments for regime change in Iraq as part of the war on terror. According to the PNAC letter, “It may be that the Iraqi government provided assistance in some form to the recent attack on the United States. But even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. Failure to undertake such an effort will constitute an early and perhaps decisive surrender in the war on international terrorism.”

The letter also pointed out that to undertake this new war, it would be necessary to inject more money into the nation’s defense budget: “A serious and victorious war on terrorism will require a large increase in defense spending. Fighting this war may well require the United States to engage a well-armed foe, and will also require that we

remain capable of defending our interests elsewhere in the world. We urge that there be no hesitation in requesting whatever funds for defense are needed to allow us to win this war.”

Including the first PNAC letter on the war on terrorism, PNAC published four letters to Bush in 2001-2003. In April 2002 PNAC sent a letter to Bush on “Israel and the War on Terrorism.” This was followed on November 25, 2002 by a letter on Hong Kong, and then a January 23, 2003 letter on increasing the military budget. In March 2003, PNAC published two statements on “Post-War Iraq.”¹³

On Sept. 20, 2001 PNAC sent an open-letter to President Bush [stating,] “[E]ven if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq.

Latest from PNAC

The most recent PNAC letter or statement was a January 28, 2005 letter addressed to congressional leaders requesting that they “take the steps necessary to increase substantially the size of the active duty Army and Marine Corps.” It was the judgment of the PNAC letter’s signatories that an increase of 25,000 troops a year would be necessary to meet what Condoleezza Rice described as the country’s “generational commitment” to fighting terrorism in the greater Middle East.

According to the PNAC letter, “The administration has been reluctant to adapt to this new reality.” But the PNAC signatories countered: “We understand the dangers of continued federal deficits,

and the fiscal difficulty of increasing the number of troops. But the defense of the United States is the first priority of the government.”

The signatories of the January 2005 letter were: Peter Beinart, Jeffrey Bergner, Daniel Blumenthal, Max Boot, Eliot Cohen, Ivo Daalder, Thomas Donnelly, Michele Fournoy, Frank Gaffney, Reuel Gerecht, Lt. Gen. Buster Glosson (ret.), Bruce Jackson, Frederick Kagan, Robert Kagan, Craig Kennedy, Paul Kennedy, Col. Robert Killebrew (ret.), William Kristol, Will Marshall, Clifford May, Gen. Barry McCaffrey (ret.), Daniel McKivergan, Joshua Muravchik, Steven Nider, Michael O’Hanlon, Mackubin Thomas Owens, Ralph Peters, Danielle Pletka, Stephen Rosen, Maj. Gen. Robert Scales (ret.), Randy Scheunemann, Gary Schmitt, Walter Slocombe, James Steinberg, and James Woolsey.

Although many of the signatories belong to the usual circle of neocons—such as Boot, Cohen, Donnelly, Gaffney, Gerecht, the Kagans, May, Muravchik, Schmitt, and Woolsey—other signatories were such liberal hawks and liberal internationalists as Beinart, Marshall, Paul Kennedy, James Steinberg, and Michael O’Hanlon.¹⁴

Several months before, PNAC published an “Open Letter to the Heads of State and Government of the European Union and NATO” expressing concern about the domestic and foreign policies of the Putin government in Russia. The Sept. 28, 2004 letter stated: “President Putin’s foreign policy is increasingly marked by a threatening attitude toward Russia’s neighbors and Europe’s energy security, the return of rhetoric of militarism and empire, and by a refusal to comply with Russia’s international treaty obligations. In all aspects of Russian political life, the instruments of state power appear to be being rebuilt and the dominance of the security services to grow. We believe that this conduct cannot be accepted as the foundation of a true partnership between Russia and the democracies of NATO and the European Union.”¹⁵

Among the 100 signatories were many prominent neoconservatives, including Max Boot, Ellen Bork, Thomas Donnelly, Carl Gershman, Bruce Jackson,

Robert Kagan, Penn Kemble, Clifford May, Joshua Muravchik, William Kristol, Gary Schmitt, Danielle Pletka, and James Woolsey. Prominent Democrats including Will Marshall, Joseph Biden, Richard Holbrooke, James Steinberg, and Madeleine Albright also signed the PNAC letter.

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The most recent PNAC report, Iraq: Setting the Record Straight, is an apology for the disastrous invasion and war. It concludes that President Bush’s decision to act “derived from a perception of Saddam’s intentions and capabilities, both existing and potential, and was grounded in the reality of Saddam’s prior behavior.” The PNAC report blames the reporting on the UN inspection teams and U.S. government statements that “left wide gaps in the public understanding of what the president faced on March 18, 2003, and what we have learned since.” Also PNAC charges that administration critics “selectively used material in the historical record to reinforce their case against the president’s policy.” In other words, rather than recognizing what we now know—that much of the intelligence presented to the public to justify the attack was false—it insists that the president made the right choice and makes no apology for its own role in urging the administration to invade Iraq.¹⁵

PNAC Loses Traction

PNAC's activities dwindled in 2005, and there are no new postings to its website in 2006. In 2005 PNAC did produce one public letter (on increasing size of U.S. ground forces) and one project report on Iraq. The "What's New" section of its website does not display any new content for 2006 but has articles written in 2005 by PNAC associates Gary Schmitt, Ellen Bork, and Daniel McKivergan, most of which were published in William Kristol's *Weekly Standard*.¹⁷

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The war on terrorism that followed the Sept. 11 attacks spawned an array of other neoconservative organizations and front groups that share PNAC's views about U.S. global dominance and whose key figures have been associated with PNAC. Several of these entities—such as the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq, U.S. Committee on NATO, and the Coalition for Democracy in Iran—were formed as ad hoc pressure groups closely associated with PNAC and have now folded or become dormant. Other groups, notably the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, have emerged as major institutions with a staff and budget far larger than PNAC.

The founders, William Kristol and Robert Kagan, established PNAC as a political project to set a new agenda for U.S. foreign and military policy. Unlike many of the new neoconservative-led foreign policy groups, such as the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies and the Committee on the Present Danger (III), PNAC never had

pretensions of being a bipartisan organization. All PNAC's key figures have been Republicans.

In an administration with a foreign policy team largely composed of PNAC associates, PNAC's role in setting the foreign policy agenda for the new century was quite successful. For the neoconservatives, the new challenge is to forge bipartisan support for this agenda of U.S. supremacy, preventive war, and regime change—focused mainly on the Middle East. FDD and the Committee on the Present Danger aim to meet this challenge, although both groups are primarily Republican.

Since Bush became president in 2000, and especially after Sept. 11, the neoconservatives working outside the administration have attempted to set the broad ideological and specific policy directions of the administration's foreign policy. The American Enterprise Institute has functioned as the neoconservatives' main think tank, and William Kristol's *Weekly Standard* is the neocons' main policy magazine. Both AEI and the *Weekly Standard* have been closely linked to PNAC since its founding.

In the course of the Bush presidency, differences have emerged in the circle of social conservatives and hawks that PNAC brought together in 1997. Some like Francis Fukuyama have backed away from the imperialism of PNAC and the neoconservative camp due to what they view as a dangerous international overreach. Others, while generally supportive of the Bush administration's stance on the "global war on terror," have become increasingly critical of its foreign, military, and domestic policies. The split between PNAC associates inside the government and many outside has consequently grown in recent years.

Some of the problems identified in PNAC's 1997 "Statement of Principles" have come back to undermine conservative unity around foreign policy. The first paragraph of PNAC's statement of principles began with these observations: "American foreign and defense policy is adrift" In addition to criticizing "the incoherent policies of the Clinton administration," conservatives "have also resisted isolationist impulses from within their own ranks. But conservatives have not confidently advanced a strategic vision of

America's role in the world. They have not set forth guiding principles for American foreign policy. They have allowed differences over tactics to obscure potential agreement on strategic objectives. And they have not fought for a defense budget that would maintain American security and advance American interests in the new century."

Although PNAC is dead or dormant, the view that this century should be another American century remains a closely held belief by the neoconservatives, most of whom spread their ideas from their positions within an ever-widening infrastructure of policy institutes, front groups, think tanks, journals, and foundations.

Main areas of current conservative dispute include immigration policy, stem cell-research, levels of troop commitments in Iraq, so-called democracy-promotion strategies, Israel issues, and U.S. relations with China, North Korea, and Iran. Although the neocon camp and their allies, including the Rumsfeld-Cheney foreign policy team, are all hard-liners with respect to Iran, there are public differences over which groups should receive U.S. assistance. While the leading neocon figures on Iran policy, like Michael Rubin and Kenneth Timmerman, oppose funding the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK), a cult-like group with militants in Iraq accused of human rights abuses and considered a terrorist group by the State Department, other players in the Iran policy debate like Raymond Tanter and the Iran Policy Committee, are MEK boosters.

Splits have also emerged on Israel, with groups such the Center for Security Policy adamantly opposing any return of seized land, while others

such as Elliott Abrams cautiously support the policies of former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and current Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Another widening divide among neoconservatives surfaced in the immigration debate, with an increasing number of neoconservatives—including Richard Perle, David Frum, and Frank Gaffney—distancing themselves from the historical support of neoconservatives for a liberal immigration policy, while others, notably William Kristol, have been sharply critical of social conservatives for their restrictionist positions. Two neoconservative centers—FDD and especially the Center for Security Policy—have positioned themselves in the restrictionist camp.

These and other splits have eroded the original PNAC coalition of neoconservatives, militarists, and social conservatives, although the Center for Security Policy, FDD, Committee on the Present Danger (III), and other new groups have established similar coalitions with different memberships. Despite saying that PNAC was modeled after the second Committee on the Present Danger, neither Kristol nor Kagan are members of the newly organized Committee on the Present Danger.¹⁸

Although PNAC is dead or dormant, the view that this century should be another American century remains a closely held belief by the neoconservatives, most of whom spread their ideas from their positions within an ever-widening infrastructure of policy institutes, front groups, think tanks, journals, and foundations. But the determination to reinforce U.S. global power and to serve as the planet's arbiter of what's good and evil, wrong and right, is one that extends far beyond the neocons themselves into other major political actors—social conservatives, nationalists, hawks, self-styled progressive internationalists—and into the heart of Corporate America, especially the military-industrial complex and the U.S. energy sector.

The tragedy and moral depravity of U.S. foreign policy in Iraq and throughout the Middle East should awaken America from delusions of grandeur and superiority—and the global backlash against the imperial ambitions of PNAC and the

PNAC's Kristol and Kagan

PNAC was founded, managed, funded, and shaped almost exclusively by neocons. PNAC's coauthors—William Kristol and Robert Kagan. Both are the offspring of families with deep roots in conservative scholasticism.

Like many neoconservatives, both men have multiple identities as academics, authors, political analysts, former government officials, magazine editors, and political activists, though their political activism does not take the form of involving themselves directly in party politics or running for office. In keeping with neoconservative tradition, they have sought to effect political change by creating new intellectual frameworks to guide elite social and political movements.

Taking cues from older neoconservatives, their close attention to the power of ideas did not keep them ensconced in ivory towers. As second-generation neoconservatives, they are keenly aware that ideas won't have results unless there is a network of publications, media outlets, think tanks, and coalitions to give them political projection.

William Kristol is the son of Irving Kristol and Gertrude Himmelfarb, two of the most influential first-generation neoconservatives. The elder Kristol is widely described as the "godfather of neoconservatism."

The younger Kristol is a Harvard-trained and Straussian political scientist who was associated with the right-wing Federalist Society in its early years. His graduate thesis argued that the judiciary should take more seriously its elite role in protecting the stability of the political regime by obstructing excessively democratic and egalitarian demands for radical change in the conservative constitutional order. As a precocious teenager, Kristol was a Democratic Party volunteer in the electoral campaigns of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Hubert Humphrey, and Henry Jackson. Like his father, Bill abandoned the Democratic Party in the 1970s to become a Republican Party stalwart.^{1,9}

During the second Reagan administration, Kristol was chief of staff to Secretary of Education William Bennett. Upon leaving the administration in late 1988, Kristol became a fellow at the Madison Center for Education Affairs, founded in 1978 as the Institute for Education Affairs by Kristol's father and William Simon.

Kristol was Vice President Dan Quayle's chief of staff during the administration of George H.W. Bush. Dubbed "Dan Quayle's Brain" in a 1990 New Republic article, Kristol endeared himself to big business in his role as director of the Council on Competitiveness, housed in Quayle's office. Kristol's technique for increasing the competitiveness of U.S. industries was to respond to corporate requests for a review of federal regulations that affected their businesses and then to wield the influence of the vice president's office to soften the regulations.^{2,0} A New York Times profile of Vice President Quayle called Kristol's staff "one of the leanest and meanest operations in Washington."^{2,1} After Bush's electoral defeat to Bill Clinton in November 1992, Kristol mounted a personal campaign to persuade the lame-duck president to extend pardons to all of the indicted Iran-contra figures. Bush had been planning to pardon Caspar Weinberger, a long-time Republican Party stalwart, but had planned to leave others such as Elliott Abrams and John Poindexter to face jail time. Kristol, a personal friend of Abrams, prevailed upon the elder Bush to pardon Elliott and his cohorts on Christmas Eve 1992—sealing Kristol's mounting reputation as a skilled political operator.^{2,2}

During the Clinton presidency, Kristol took on the challenge of setting a new political course for Republicans in the post-Cold War era. With support from right-wing foundations, largely the Bradley Foundation, Kristol spearheaded two closely interrelated initiatives: the New Citizenship Project, which is the sponsor of PNAC, and the Project for the Republican Future. Working outside the Republican Party structure, Kristol helped formulate the strategy and agenda that contributed to the party's successful comeback in the 1994 elections. In 1996, Kristol, together with neocon scion John Podhoretz, founded the highly influential neocon magazine Weekly Standard with the backing of Rupert Murdoch, and the next year cofounded PNAC with Robert Kagan.

In 2002 Media Bypass reported, "In what has been called 'punditgate,' conservative journalists Bill Kristol and Erwin Stelzer of the Weekly Standard ... have been exposed for accepting Enron largesse. ... Kristol, chief of staff to former Vice President Dan Quayle, took \$100,000 without disclosing the payments at the time. ... Kristol, the editor of the Weekly Standard who postures as an independent journalist, got the money for serving on an Enron advisory board, and, in the words of Stelzer, keeping Enron Chairman Ken Lay and his team 'up to date on general public policy trends'."^{2,3}

Donald Kagan, the father of the clan, author of numerous books on classical military history, and a contributor to such neoconservative outlets as Public Interest, Commentary, and the Wall Street Journal, is perhaps best known for *While America Sleeps*, a book he coauthored in 2000 with his son Frederick Kagan. Along with William Kristol, Robert Kagan, son of Donald and brother of Frederick, founded the Project for the New American Century and helped establish the Weekly Standard. All three Kagans are PNAC signatories, and they all participated on the PNAC study team that produced *Rebuilding America's Defenses* and also contributed chapters to the *Present Dangers* blueprint of a U.S. grand strategy. Robert Kagan, in addition to being an excellent writer, has involved himself directly in politics, serving in the Reagan administration in a variety of posts (1983-88) at the U.S. Information Agency and State Department, including chief speechwriter for Secretary of State George Shultz. Robert Kagan's wife, Victoria Nuland, is a career diplomat, who before becoming national security adviser to Vice President Cheney in March 2003 served as deputy ambassador to NATO.^{2,4}

The Committees on the Present Danger as PNAC Model

The Project for the New American Century represented the third time since 1950 that an elite coalition of individuals had joined together to raise the “present danger” alarm. In 1950 and again in 1976, leading figures in the foreign policy establishment, corporate America, and academia formed groups—both called the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD)—to make the case to the U.S. public and policy community that the Soviet Union had achieved a degree of military superiority over the United States.

The two CPDs argued that only by vastly increasing U.S. military spending could America achieve the military dominance necessary to protect the homeland and maintain international peace and stability. They also called for stronger commitments to foreign and military policies that would reinforce an expanding U.S. global reach—militarily, economically, and politically.

William Kristol and Robert Kagan credit the Committee on the Present Danger (II) as an elite social model that successfully realigned U.S. foreign and military policy. They recalled how “a group of concerned citizens” formed the second CPD in the mid-1970s “to rally Americans to confront” the Soviet Union. Moreover, the CPD “challenged the comfortable consensus” and “called for a military build-up and a broad ideological and strategic assault on Soviet communism.” Initially, the CPD’s recommendations were dismissed as “either naïve or reckless,” but, claimed PNAC’s founders, events demonstrated “how right” the Committee on the Present Danger was in its assessment of the communist threat.^{2 5}

Although the 25 signatories (together with PNAC’s cofounders Kristol and Kagan) of PNAC’s “Statement of Principles” were Republican Party stalwarts, PNAC was established more as an agenda-setting and ideologically political project than a committee of Republican Party strategists. In contrast to the Committee on the Present Danger II model, PNAC did not seek a broad bipartisan coalition either. Rather, it was established in the conviction that the right combination of ideas was the fundamental first step for putting the right wing into political power.

Like the second Committee on the Present Danger, the Project for the New American Century functioned as a coalition that advocated a sharp shift in U.S. foreign policy toward greater militarism and away from liberal internationalism. However, unlike either of the first two CPDs, PNAC was formed less as a committee of prominent citizens than as a political project, and is driven more by ideology than by disagreements within America’s power elite.

Also unlike its CPD predecessors, PNAC did not see the need to include the presidents or CEOs of major universities, foundations, or even corporations. Independent and brash, PNAC takes stock in the power of its ideas rather than in formal alliances with political party loyalists or grassroots constituencies. Like Kristol’s Project for the Republican Future, PNAC has the chutzpah to mount a political project outside the structures and processes of either political party. Each person in the original PNAC team was carefully chosen to represent different sectors of the right-wing coalition as part of this ambitious political project.

At least initially, PNAC took care not to be too alarmist about the perceived dangers threatening America and the country’s inadequate defenses. The first CPD had inadvertently fueled a right-wing populist movement that targeted the very architects of containment militarism for being too soft on communism and being overly concerned with Europe (as opposed to Asia). The fear-mongering agenda of the second CPD, as implemented by the Reagan administration, so frightened Americans that it sparked a widespread citizens’ anti-nuclear weapons movement that succeeded in pressuring the president himself to adopt—at least rhetorically—an anti-nuclear weapons policy.

Wolfowitz, Cheney, Khalilzad, and Libby constituted the team that fashioned the 1992 Defense Policy Guidance. But the “Statement of Principles” was situated within the standard “peace through strength” framework of foreign policy hawks. It omitted any language that would have explicitly foreshadowed PNAC’s agenda of preemptive strikes, regime change, and other measures to block any challenges to U.S. supremacy in the next century—all of which were prefigured in the 1992 Defense Policy Guidance.

In June 2004 a new coalition of neoconservatives and hawks formed a new Committee on the Present Danger. Like the first and second CPDs, the third incarnation is a bipartisan political project, although dominated by neoconservatives. (See IRC Special Report: The “Present Danger” War Parties, June 2006, online at: www.irc-online.org/content/3297.)

Bush administration signal that a U.S. imperium would have few subjects. But the ideologues will keep calling for military and “democracy-building” intervention, and those business sectors who stand to gain from an imperial policy of controlling resources and making war will continue to justify U.S. interventionism with “peace through strength” and pretentious talk of America’s moral mission.

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Endnotes

¹ In 2001 alone, PNAC received \$450,000 from the right-wing Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation. Other major PNAC funders include the John M. Olin Foundation, the Sarah Scaife Foundation, and the Scaife Family Foundations.

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