

# Right-wing US group lobbies for war on Iraq

## Colonial conquest in the name of "liberation"

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Faced with mounting public unease and outright opposition to its preparations for an unprovoked invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration and its right-wing supporters have cobbled together a front group whose aim is to convince Americans that war is necessary to “liberate” the Iraqi people.

Members of the so-called Committee for the Liberation of Iraq (CLI) met November 15 with President Bush’s national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, and the group says it will mount “education and advocacy efforts to mobilize US and international support” for “freeing the Iraqi people from tyranny.”

A review of the CLI’s key members makes clear that it is the creature of a right-wing clique that has played a predominant role in Republican Party politics since the days of the Reagan administration. Twenty years ago, essentially the same personnel formed similar fronts: Friends of the Democratic Center in Central America (Prodemca)—to support the US-backed “contra” terrorist war against Nicaragua and promote the dictatorship in El Salvador, and the Committee for the Present Danger—to advocate the notion of a “winnable” nuclear war against the former Soviet Union.

The core of the CLI is drawn from the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), a right-wing Washington think tank. Its chairman is Bruce Jackson, who is also one of the directors of PNAC. Jackson, a Reagan-era Pentagon official, left government to take a top post at the arms manufacturer Lockheed Martin. He was also a leading figure in the drafting of the Republican Party’s national security platform in the 2000 election.

The Iraq committee’s secretary is Gary Schmitt, a former Reagan White House intelligence advisor who holds the post of executive director of PNAC. CLI’s president is Randy Scheunemann, likewise a leading figure in PNAC, who previously worked as Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott’s national security advisor and served last year as a consultant on Iraq to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

Other prominent Republicans who played a role in

founding PNAC in 1997 were Vice President Richard Cheney and his national security adviser, I. Lewis Libby, together with Rumsfeld and four of his top aides, including Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and US Defense Policy Board Chairman Richard Perle.

The PNAC group came to power along with the Bush White House, having developed over the course of a decade detailed plans for a US invasion of Iraq that had nothing to do with the rights of the Iraqi people and everything to do with consolidating US control over the oil-rich Persian Gulf.

In September 2000, PNAC drafted a report entitled “Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century.” Many of the conceptions advanced in this document were reproduced, in some cases nearly word for word, in the “National Security Strategy of the United States,” issued last September by the Bush administration.

Both documents assert the right of the US to attack any country it chooses and carry out “preemptive” strikes to prevent the emergence of rivals to its military, economic and political dominance worldwide or in any given region.

The PNAC document states in part: “The United States has for decades sought to play a more permanent role in Gulf regional security. While the unresolved conflict with Iraq provides the immediate justification, the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein.”

What is the substance of this “need”? The authors of the document—some of whom now direct the Pentagon and play influential roles within the Bush administration, while others masquerade as the “Committee for the Liberation of Iraq”—declared that the conquest of Iraq was aimed at producing “a global security order that is uniquely friendly to American principles and prosperity,” and “an international security environment conducive to American interests and ideals.”

In short, the document advocates the use of US military superiority to seize by force whatever US corporations and banks desire, including Iraqi oil.

In one of the more chilling sections of the document, PNAC urges Washington to ignore the international ban on biological weapons and move ahead to develop “new methods of attack.” It looks forward to a new era in which “advanced forms of biological warfare that can ‘target’ specific genotypes may transform biological warfare from the realm of terror to a politically useful tool.”

In other words, a scientifically perfected form of race war could become an instrument of imperialist conquest. Were such a weapon available today, it could presumably be used to “liberate” Iraq by murdering its entire Arab population while leaving US troops and the country’s oilfields unscathed.

PNAC’s offspring, the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq, performs a secondary function of backing one faction in the conflict within the Bush administration over the role to be played by the so-called Iraqi opposition. This fractious coalition of royalists, political opportunists, crooked businessmen and ex-military commanders hopes to reenter Baghdad in the wagon train of a US invasion.

The leading figures within the CLI back the position of the civilian leadership of the Pentagon, which calls for the Iraqi National Congress and allied organizations to be set up as a provisional government once US troops have occupied the country. Both the State Department and the CIA have reportedly opposed the plan, insisting that there is no base of support for these elements and that installing them in power would result only in civil war.

According to press reports, this internecine debate has become so poisoned that a rule has been established that no US meeting can take place with the Iraqi exiles unless officials from both the State and Defense departments are present.

In addition to the usual suspects from the inbred world of neo-conservative think tanks and Republican Party platform committees, the membership of the CLI includes two figures worth noting. The first is the former Democratic Senator from Nebraska and current president of the New School for Social Research in New York, Bob Kerrey. The second is the president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), James P. Hoffa.

The participation of Kerrey in an organization run by leading Republican operatives might, on first sight, appear odd. His preoccupation with the Iraq issue, however, dates back to his tenure in the Senate.

Kerrey was one of the most prominent Democrats to join with Republicans Trent Lott and Jesse Helms in pushing through the Iraq Liberation Act in 1998, which set “regime change” as the policy of the US government and funneled some \$98 million into the coffers of the Iraqi National Congress.

In September, Kerrey wrote an opinion piece for *the Wall Street Journal* entitled “Finish the war. Liberate Iraq. We’ve already invaded. Now Saddam must go.” His essential argument was that a US war to conquer the country would be cheaper than continuing the low-level air war over the so-called “no-fly zones” and the surrounding of Iraq by military deployments in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Persian Gulf.

Kerrey dragged out the allegation that the reputed ringleader of the September 11 terrorist attacks, Mohammed Atta, had met with an Iraqi intelligence officer in Prague. In fact, intelligence officials in both the US and the Czech Republic have repeatedly dismissed this story as a fabrication.

Kerrey’s presence on the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq gives some indication of the kind of “liberation” the US is planning for the Iraqi people. The former senator stands accused by the government of Vietnam of “war atrocities” in 1969, when, as a Navy lieutenant, he led a squad of SEAL commandos into a hamlet in the Mekong Delta and carried out the massacre of 21 women, children and elderly men.

The war criminal, turned senator, turned university president has no doubt joined the CLI as part of his preparations to run for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004. He is promoting himself as a foreign policy “hawk” in an effort to win the support of the more right-wing sections of the party.

As for Hoffa, his interest in the fate of the Iraqi people is something new, but he is a man who knows something about “regime change.” Over the past two years he has cultivated close relations with the Bush White House in an effort to end 13 years of federal oversight of the Teamsters union. Last January he was a guest of honor at Bush’s “axis of evil” State of the Union address, sitting beside Laura Bush.

When the administration announced its TIPS program—a proposal to recruit postal workers, meter readers and other civilians as spies in the “war on terrorism”—Hoffa boasted that the 500,000 Teamsters truckers would serve as the “eyes and ears” of the Bush administration on the nation’s roadways.

These then are the self-appointed liberators of Iraq—advocates of imperialist aggression and germ warfare, former war criminals and corrupt union bureaucrats. Nothing could provide a clearer indication of the criminal character of the war of aggression that Washington is preparing.



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