

# New York Times to feature neo-conservative war advocate William Kristol as op-ed columnist

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On December 30, the *New York Times* published a brief item on its inside news pages bearing the nondescript headline “The *Times* Adds an Op-Ed Columnist.” The columnist in question, the article reported, is William Kristol, whom the newspaper described as “one of the nation’s leading conservative writers and a vigorous supporter of the Iraq war.”

Kristol is, in fact, one of the most prominent and notorious ideologists of the Republican neo-conservative right. His father, Irving Kristol, is considered one of the founders of American neo-conservatism.

A protégé of Rupert Murdoch, William Kristol is the editor of the *Weekly Standard*, perhaps the most prominent Washington voice for militarism and neo-colonialism abroad and the assault domestically on the social conditions and democratic rights of the American people. Kristol, 55, co-founded the publication in 1994, reportedly with financing from Murdoch.

He is a regular commentator on Murdoch’s Fox News Channel. Both as a television pundit and writer/editor, Kristol stridently defends the war and occupation in Iraq, supports Israel’s attacks on Palestinians and advocates war against Iran. He similarly defends the Bush administration’s use of torture, its concentration camps in Guantánamo and elsewhere, and its illegal domestic spying operations, attacks on habeas corpus and assertion of quasi-dictatorial powers.

The December 30 *Times* article announced that beginning January 7, Kristol will write a weekly column for the newspaper. It offered no explanation for its decision to open its op-ed pages to such an arch-reactionary.

On the contrary, the article reported, without comment, that Kristol “has been a fierce critic of the *Times*.” It continued: “In 2006 he said that the government should consider prosecuting the *Times* for disclosing a secret government program to track international banking transactions.”

This referred to an article published by the *Times* in June of 2006 revealing that the Bush administration was conducting a massive and secret program to monitor international banking transactions. Similar reports were subsequently published by the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

The exposé evoked a witch-hunting attack from the Bush administration and Republican legislators, with Bush, Vice President Cheney and other top administration officials

denouncing the *New York Times* for undermining the so-called “war on terror.”

A number of Republican congressmen accused the *Times* of aiding terrorists and characterized the news report as an act of treason. Some called on the Justice Department to initiate a criminal prosecution. Kristol joined in the McCarthyite campaign, demonstrating his contempt for democratic principles by suggesting criminal sanctions as a means of intimidating and silencing any public criticism of the government’s police-state measures.

The *Times* announcement on Kristol also noted that he wrote in 2003 that the *Times* was not a “first-rate newspaper of record” and was “irredeemable.”

If anything, the *Times* seems to be flaunting these examples of Kristol’s venom. It reports that Kristol was a columnist for *Time* magazine “until that relationship was severed this month.” This suggests that the newspaper was eager to take advantage of Kristol’s departure from the magazine to add him to its stable of commentators.

With this action, the leading organ of the liberal establishment in the US is bringing on board an individual who, on a personal level, bears considerable political responsibility for one of the great war crimes of modern history—the illegal and unprovoked invasion and occupation of Iraq. Over a million Iraqis have been killed and the entire country has been devastated by an imperialist operation that was based on outright lies about non-existent weapons of mass destruction and non-existent ties between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda.

Over 3,900 US soldiers have been killed and at least 29,000 wounded in a war and occupation carried out to establish US imperialist control of the country’s oil resources and American military and geo-political domination of the Middle East.

As chairman and co-founder in 1997 of the Project for the New American Century, Kristol played a key role in the political and ideological agitation for war against Iraq that came to fruition with the March 2003 invasion of the country. His entire political resumé prepared him for this role, beginning with his stint in the Reagan administration as chief of staff to Secretary of Education William Bennett, followed by his position as chief of staff to Vice President Dan Quayle in the administration of the senior George Bush.

Kristol played a significant role in the defeat of the Clinton

health care initiative in 1994, arguing that there was no health care crisis, and advising congressional Republicans to block the establishment of any new program, especially one that might actually help people, because “its success would signal the rebirth of centralized welfare-state policy.”

As leader of the Project for the Republican Future in the mid-1990s, he helped shape the right-wing program of tax cuts for the wealthy and the gutting of social programs for working and poor people that was launched by the Republicans when they gained control of Congress in 1994.

That the *New York Times*, the chief media organ of American liberalism and unofficial mouthpiece of the Democratic Party, chooses such a figure as a regular columnist has definite political significance. Any attempt to justify it as an effort to present a broad spectrum of political views would lack all credibility.

The newspaper’s chief foreign columnist, Thomas Friedman, was an early and enthusiastic supporter of the war in Iraq and continues to churn out occasional apologetics for the occupation of the country. David Brooks, a conservative Republican and supporter of the war, is another regular op-ed writer. The newspaper’s liberal columnists—Frank Rich, Paul Krugman, Bob Herbert and Maureen Dowd—are well within the conventional parameters of American bourgeois politics.

The addition of Kristol does not alter the accepted spectrum of the US media—from the far right to the moderate right—except to tilt the *Times* even further in the direction of reaction. Under conditions of deep and broad popular opposition to the war and the Bush administration, and growing disillusionment with the Democrats as a result of across-the-board congressional complicity with the administration, the addition of Kristol only increases the chasm between popular sentiment and the establishment media.

The naming of Kristol is one more demonstration of the absence of any principled differences within the US media and political establishment and the two major parties. The differences that do exist—whether over the war in Iraq and future militaristic adventures in Iran or elsewhere, the assault on democratic rights, or the ever more pernicious concentration of wealth in the hands of a financial aristocracy—are purely tactical. Undergirding them is a broad consensus within the ruling elite and the corporate-controlled media in support of US imperialism’s geo-strategic aims internationally and the ever-greater enrichment of a privileged stratum at home.

For whom does the *Times* speak? Sections of the Wall Street plutocracy and the wealthiest layers that surround it. These sated social elements have for many years been moving ever further to the right, in parallel with their ever-greater share of the social wealth. And the “newspaper of record” has been moving to the right along with them.

Moreover, Kristol is something of an icon to a very powerful constituency in New York and Washington. A partisan of the right wing of the Israeli establishment, he speaks for a section of the social elite, Jewish and otherwise, that plays a major role in the political life of New York, in particular.

In any event, liberal Democrats and neo-conservative Republicans, whatever their at times bitter differences, rub shoulders within the environs of official New York and

Washington. They are different factions of the same wealthy establishment.

So the promotion of a figure such as Kristol involves no wrenching political or moral soul-searching within the editorial offices and boardroom of the *Times*. One can, as they see it, collaborate in a fraternal manner with an ideological instigator of colonialist atrocities and attacks on the democratic rights of the people.

There is another aspect to the decision to hire Kristol. It has the character of an olive branch to the Bush administration and the military from a newspaper that has come under attack for its occasional revelations of criminality by the administration. In every such case, the *Times* has exhibited a lack of principle and cowardice under fire.

In the 2006 incident noted by the *Times* in its December 30 announcement, for example, Bill Keller, executive editor of the *New York Times*, and Dean Baquet, editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, published a sniveling joint statement in response to the administration’s witch-hunt in which they cited their close collaboration with the administration and the intelligence agencies and their decision on many occasions to suppress stories that would prove embarrassing to the government.

“Few people are aware,” they wrote, “when we decide to hold an article. But each of us, in the past few years, has had the experience of withholding or delaying articles when the administration convinced us that the risk of publication outweighed the benefits.”

And just two weeks ago, the *Times* caved in to White House pressure over its article exposing the role of White House lawyers in the decision to destroy CIA tapes of interrogations of alleged Al Qaeda leaders which showed the use of torture techniques such as waterboarding. The newspaper published a correction of the sub-head on its December 19 story as demanded by the White House. The offending words were “White House Role Was Wider Than It Said,” a perfectly accurate characterization that was well documented by the article itself.



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