

Perle returns to the scene of the crime

Former Bush administration official seeks cut of Iraqi oil deal

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Richard Perle, the “neocon” defense analyst who played an outspoken role in building the fraudulent case for the invasion of Iraq, is now poised to take a position with a private oil firm working in Iraq and Kazakhstan, according to a *Wall Street Journal* report.

Documents and informants reveal that Perle has held discussions with members of the Kurdistan regional government about oil drilling contracts in northern Iraq. The Kurdish regional government has been handing out lucrative contracts to international concerns in violation of Iraqi national sovereignty, bypassing the Iraqi central government and not awaiting the Washington-crafted national oil law that is expected to be pushed through in the coming months.

According to the *Journal*, the deal “would involve a tract called K18, near the Kurdish city of Erbil.... A consortium founded by Turkish company AK Group International is seeking rights to drill there, the documents say. Potential backers include two Turkish companies as well as Kazakhstan, according to individuals involved.” The Houston-based Endeavour International would then ultimately operate the K18 field.

Involved in the discussions are members of a pro-Turkish lobbying group, the American Turkish Council. Other players include Alexander Mirtchev, described by the *Journal* as “a Washington consultant and adviser to the government of Kazakhstan.” Perle has been an outspoken backer of Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who is under investigation in the US for oil company bribery from the 1990s. Perle has hailed the corrupt Nazarbayev as “visionary and wise.”

Perle offered only a half-denial to the *Wall Street*

Journal story, claiming in an e-mail that he is “not involved in any consortium involving Mr. Mirtchev....” But he did not deny his involvement in private oil concerns in Iraq or Kazakhstan.

Perle is not the only one profiting from the Kurdish regional government’s readiness to sign no-bid contacts. Hunt Oil, another Texas firm that has close ties with President Bush, last year was awarded a contract with the Kurds in apparent contravention of both Iraqi and US policy, a deal now under State Department investigation after protests by the Iraqi central government. (See “Bush-linked Texas company signs oil deal with Iraqi Kurds”)

Prior to the invasion of Iraq, Richard Perle headed the Defense Policy Advisory Board, which played a critical role within the Bush administration in providing the bogus rationales for the invasion. He is a member of numerous right-wing and pro-Israeli think tanks, and has been an important figure in foreign policy circles with close ties to the right-wing Israeli establishment since his days as an office staffer for the anticommunist Democratic Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson in the 1970s.

Just days after 9/11, Perle was busy attempting to link Saddam Hussein to Al Qaeda, and thus realize his long-standing objective of a full US invasion of Iraq. On September 16, 2001, Perle claimed on CNN that “even if we cannot prove to the standards that we enjoy in our own civil society that they were involved, we do know, for example, that Saddam Hussein has ties to Osama Bin Laden....” In the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq, Perle launched attacks on the CIA for what he perceived to be a too-critical attitude toward the claims of Ahmed Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress.

This is by no means the first instance in his career in which Perle has been accused of peddling influence to non-US entities and governments. In March 2003, the *New York Times* discovered that Perle had been contracted by a telecommunications multinational with extensive US military and security contracts—Global Crossing—to assuage FBI and Pentagon opposition to its self-sale to a Chinese corporation. Perle was to receive \$125,000 for his work and another \$600,000 upon the deal's successful completion.

After accusations of bribery, Perle resigned, but remained on the board of Global Crossing. As assistant secretary of defense in the Reagan administration, Perle helped to secure weapons purchases from an Israeli company that had paid him \$50,000 in consulting fees. Veteran journalist Seymour Hersh claimed in a 2003 article that Perle had extensive financial ties to the Saudi royal family. Perle responded by denouncing Hersh as a “terrorist.”

That an individual such as Perle may assume a lucrative position with a corporation exploiting Iraq’s vast oil wealth serves as a stark reminder of the predatory and imperialist character of the war, which has left well over 1 million Iraqis dead, several million more displaced, and an entire society destroyed. The US invasion of Iraq stands as one of the bloodiest crimes of modern history. Now, one of the war’s chief architects appears set to cash in on the destruction.

Perle was a champion, along with Bush himself and prominent members of the media establishment such as Thomas Friedman, of the lie that the invasion was about bringing “freedom” to the people of Iraq and the Middle East. War proponents have always claimed that the invasion had nothing to do with oil. No doubt the propagandists would have us believe that Perle’s forthcoming payday is entirely incidental.

The episode also demonstrates the incestuous and mercenary character of the geostrategic politics that determine the fate of millions. Perle stands to benefit handsomely from his connections with the Washington foreign policy and military establishment. But he is also being used by powerful corporate interests in Houston and Turkey, as well as corrupt government officials in Kazakhstan and the Kurdish regional government, in order to further their own aims. These criminal and wholly parasitic machinations do nothing to benefit the people of Kurdistan, Iraq or the US.

Perle, along with other Bush administration officials and their accomplices in the Democratic Party, deserve to stand trial as war criminals. Perle’s oil dealings shows, however, that the crime against Iraq is still under way, and brazenly so.



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