

THE NEOCONSERVATIVE MIND

They Knew They Were Right

The Rise of the Neocons

Jacob Heilbrunn

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Reviewed by Kevin MacDonald

By now the history of the neoconservative movement is a bit of a twice-told tale. There have been book-length academic treatments and substantial coverage in the media, especially as the influence of the neocons in the George W. Bush Administration and in promoting the war in Iraq came to be public knowledge. Those with some familiarity with this history will find that Heilbrunn's treatment adds little to available accounts. But what it does better than other mainstream media accounts is to really get at the Jewish nexus of the movement.

This in itself is a major accomplishment because mainstream accounts of neoconservatism routinely ignore the Jewish origins and composition of the movement. Or they dismiss any discussion of Jewish identities and Jewish interests that are so central to neoconservatism as the ravings of anti-Semites.

Heilbrunn is quite clear about the role of Jewishness in neoconservatism. After dismissing other views of what neoconservatism is, he states flatly that neoconservatism "is about a mind set, one that has been decisively shaped by the Jewish immigrant experience, by the Holocaust, and by the twentieth-century struggle against totalitarianism" (p. 10). "Indeed, as much as they may deny it, neoconservatism is in a decisive respect a Jewish phenomenon, reflecting a subset of Jewish concerns" (p. 11).

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MILIEU OF NEOCONSERVATISM

But Heilbrunn goes beyond simply recording the Jewish identities and interests that form the backbone of neoconservatism. He gets at the psychological milieu of neoconservatism, and in this regard I do think he makes a genuine contribution to our understanding of Jewish intellectual and political movements.

Psychological Intensity, Anti-White Hostility

The title of the book—*They Knew They Were Right*—says a great deal. As Heilbrunn shows, the neocons are people “of an uncompromising temperament who use (and treat) ideas as weapons in a moral struggle” (p. 13). He gets at the passion of Jewish involvement in political causes, tracing it back to traditional Jewish attitudes in Eastern Europe: “As one Yiddish newspaper put it, ‘with hatred, with a three-fold curse, we must weave the shroud for the Russian autocratic government, for the entire anti-Semitic criminal gang’” (p. 25). Regarding Max Shachtman, an early neocon follower of Trotsky, “his father transmitted his hatred of the Russian, German, and Austro-Hungarian empires to him” (p. 29). The proto-neocons of the 1930s “reveled in their hatred of capitalism and their snobbish alienation from American society” (p. 43). When George H. W. Bush became president, “the eastern establishment Republicans brought in by Bush, men like James Baker and Brent Scowcroft, represented everything the neocons despised” (p. 194).

These quotes reflect two themes I have stressed in a previous TOQ essay on background traits for Jewish activism: Psychological intensity and the motivating force of hatred of the existing social order as anti-Jewish.¹ There are many passages where he mentions the psychological intensity of the neocons. For example, neocons “always believe what they are saying with the utmost intensity; it’s in their nature as prophetic personalities” (p. 137). And a prime passion is hatred of their enemies. Indeed, he contrasts William Buckley with the passionate intensity of Norman Podhoretz:

The contrast with a Tory conservative such as William F. Buckley Jr. is striking. Buckley didn’t have ex-friends. He never saw political differences as tantamount to personal betrayal. He was best friends, for example, with the legendary journalist Murray Kempton, who was at the other end of the political pole. This is not necessarily to Podhoretz’s discredit. There is something to be said for the almost willful, naïve ferocity of his political passions. (p. 77)

¹ Kevin MacDonald, “Background Traits for Jewish Activism,” in *Cultural Insurrections: Essays on Western Civilization, Jewish Influence, and Anti-Semitism* (Atlanta: The Occidental Press, 2007).

Surprisingly perhaps in a group of self-styled conservatives, Heilbrunn repeatedly states that a major target of hatred for the Jewish neocons was WASP political power and cultural influence. He finds that the neocons were motivated partly by antipathy to the "social exclusion and WASP snobbery that their fathers experienced in the early part of the twentieth century—an attitude they carried with them through the debates of the cold war and into the halls of power after 9/11" (pp. 11-12). Even their Anglophilia was motivated by their view that the British aristocracy had been less anti-Jewish than the American WASPs: "The neoconservatives would play a surprising role in propagating nostalgia for the English aristocracy, supposed by them to be a kind of benign ceremonial caste that might have been stuffy and hidebound but had never frozen out the Jews the way the WASPs back home had" (p. 58).

The WASPs in the State Department were a particular focus of their ire. A quote from Douglas Feith is telling: Feith "told me in an interview that because of his family history [i.e., decimated by the Holocaust] he understands the true nature of foreign policy, unlike the 'WASPs' in the State Department" (p. 12). Feith sees foreign policy from a Jewish, Holocaust-centric perspective that the WASPs can never understand. He was at the center of power during recent American history, but he sees himself as an outsider, his enemies the evil WASPs whose fathers didn't allow Jews into their country clubs.

The WASPs in the State Department assume an almost legendary role in the demonology of neoconservatism—consigned to the lowest reaches of hell. Their unforgiveable sin was to fail to see the world fundamentally in terms of Jewish interests, beginning with their opposition to recognizing Israel during the Truman administration. As Howard Sachar notes in his history of Jews in America, Truman's defense secretary, James Forrestal, "was all but obsessed by the threat to [American interests] he discerned in Zionist ambitions. His concern was shared by the State Department and specifically by the Near East Desk."² George Ball, whose co-authored 1992 book, *The Passionate Attachment*,³ was critical of Israel and the Israel lobby, is the prototype of this hated State Department WASP. (Notice that the title of Ball's excellent book reflects the theme of psychological intensity among pro-

² H. M. Sachar, *A History of Jews in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 597.

³ G. Ball and D. Ball, *The Passionate Attachment: America's Involvement with Israel, 1947 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992).

Israel partisans.)

Like their radical cousins, the early neocons sought:

... to overturn the old order in America. . . . After all, no matter how hard they worked, there were still quotas at the Ivy League universities. Then there were the fancy clubs, the legal and financial firms that saw Jews as interlopers who would soil their proud escutcheons and were to be kept at bay. Smarting with unsurpassed social resentment, the young Jews viewed themselves as liberators, proclaiming a new faith." (p. 28)

Heilbrunn mentions "the snobbery of the Columbia English department, where Jews were seen as cultural interlopers. This attitude, which also prevailed on Wall Street and at the State Department, produced a lifelong antipathy toward the patrician class among the neocons and prompted them to create their own parallel establishment" (p. 73). The result, as Norman Podhoretz phrased it, was to proclaim a war against the "WASP patriciate" (p. 83).

The psychological fanaticism of the neocons made them inflexible, but only to a point. They refused to acknowledge the changes in the USSR brought about by Michael Gorbachev, while Reagan happily made an about face and embraced the changes as genuine. Nevertheless, the neocons rapidly regrouped and spearheaded the idea that the United States as the world's only superpower should aggressively pursue an agenda of remaking the Muslim world and preventing any other power from threatening its status.

Moral Posturing and Double Standards

Heilbrunn also notes the tendency for neocons to frame issues in moral terms—a theme that is prominent in my writing on Jewish intellectual movements generally.⁴ When Podhoretz became editor of *Commentary*, he greeted the New Left with enthusiasm: "This left movement will be a moral criticism of all existing social institutions" (p. 78). The neocons, while decamping from the far left, never strayed from framing issues in moral terms.

⁴ Kevin MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique: An Evolutionary Analysis of Jewish Involvement in Twentieth-Century Intellectual and Political Movements* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998; paperback ed.: Bloomington, Ind.: 1stBooks Library, 2002), ch. 6.

Nevertheless, they have never allowed themselves to be swayed by moral crusades that are against their interests. The prime example of this is the demonization of Jimmy Carter. Carter's emphasis on human rights and his appointment of Andrew Young as UN Ambassador infuriated the neocons because Carter had the temerity to see the Palestinians' grievances against Israel in moral terms. Carter has continued his moral criticism of Israel, most recently with his book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*. He is routinely labeled an anti-Semite by the neocons and other activist Jews. Perhaps the most rabid example of this rather extensive genre is *Jimmy Carter's War against the Jews*, written by Jacob Laskin and produced by the David Horowitz Freedom Foundation.⁵

On the other hand, using moral arguments against the USSR became stock-in-trade for the neocons. And after the fall of the USSR, they shifted smoothly to framing the proper role for US foreign policy in the Middle East as a moral crusade for democracy and human rights in the Muslim world.

This double standard on moral crusades is also reflected in neocons' support for the war against Serbia. While Israel's expansion of its territory is enshrined as a moral imperative and while many of the neocons (e.g., Douglas Feith) have close associations with the settler movement in Israel, the neocons supported the use of force against Serbia's attempt to retain its historic territory against the invading Kosovars (p. 208). Ethnonationalism is appropriate for Jews, but not Europeans.

Paranoia and Self-Deception

Another very typical Jewish trait is to have a self-image of an embattled, morally superior ingroup fighting against overwhelming odds—in short, a bunker mentality that is entirely typical of traditional Jews⁶ and Jewish intellectual and political movements (e.g., Jewish involvement in leftist politics and psychoanalysis⁷). As Jay Winick described the neocons, "In their eyes, the inhabitants of the Bunker were the beleaguered few, fighting the lonely way against the left-wing

⁵ <http://www.frontpagemag.com/media/pdf/Carter4b.pdf>

⁶ Kevin MacDonald, *A People that Shall Dwell Alone: Judaism as a Group Evolutionary Strategy, with Diaspora Peoples* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994; paperback ed., Lincoln, Nebr.: iUniverse, 2002), ch. 7.

⁷ See *The Culture of Critique*.

forces of darkness, always on the precipice, about to be overwhelmed. Perle constantly talked about lonely battles, the isolation, the attacks on himself and his colleagues" (p. 124). And when the war in Iraq went badly and they were attacked by the left and the right, a "prominent New York neoconservative" stated that being "beleaguered plays into all the old psychological reflexes. Everyone's decided the neocons are wrong. That's vindication" (p. 280).

There is obviously a healthy dose of self-deception in this sort of rhetoric—another common facet of Jewish intellectual activity.⁸ Despite being ensconced in well-funded think tanks and eventually in the corridors of power in Washington, they think of themselves as besieged outsiders—outsiders with "seething rage at the government bureaucracy and social elites" (p. 124). The double standards apparent in Jewish moral posturing noted above also strongly suggest deception or self-deception.

Grandiosity

Another point mentioned by Heilbrunn that I have perhaps paid insufficient attention to in my writing on Jewish intellectuals is that the neocons had a penchant for "sweeping assertions and grandiose ideas" (p. 26). Regarding *Partisan Review* and other "little magazines" of the 1950s that formed the background of the neoconservative movement, "one is struck by their grandiosity and the conviction of self-importance on the part of a tiny group of obscure critics and intellectuals who never doubted their own wisdom, insight, and above all, prescience" (p. 40).

This is good point. All of the movements reviewed in *The Culture of Critique* had a certain grandiosity, and certainly the neoconservative utopian vision of a democratic, pro-Israel Middle East is nothing if not grandiose. I noted the following in a passage of *Culture of Critique* that also describes the grandiosity of Jewish intellectual movements, the passionate intensity with which these utopian views are advocated, and their moral fervor:

These movements have called into question the fundamental moral, political, and economic foundations of Western society. . . .

⁸ Kevin MacDonald, *Separation and Its Discontents: Toward an Evolutionary Theory of Anti-Semitism*. (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1998; paperback ed.: Bloomington, Ind.: 1stbooks Library, 2004), ch. 8.

These movements have been advocated with great intellectual passion and moral fervor and with a very high level of theoretical sophistication. Each movement promised its own often overlapping and complementary version of utopia: a society composed of people with the same biological potential for accomplishment and able to be easily molded by culture into ideal citizens as imagined by a morally and intellectually superior elite; a classless society in which there would be no conflicts of interest and people would altruistically work for the good of the group; a society in which people would be free of neuroses and aggression toward out-groups and in tune with their biological urges; a multicultural paradise in which different racial and ethnic groups would live in harmony and cooperation.⁹

Jewish Hero Worship and Ethnic Networking

Heilbrunn also highlights the hero worship that, in my view, is typical of Jewish intellectual and political movements.¹⁰ In the case of the neocons, the first hero was Leon Trotsky, and then, for many, it was Max Shachtman.¹¹ Then there was Alan Bloom, himself an adoring disciple of Leo Strauss. An acolyte of Bloom, Kenneth Weinstein, notes that being a student of Bloom was like "orbiting the sun" (quoted on p. 97). Bloom's students "tried to model themselves on him, to the point of wearing Turnbull and Asser shirts and squeaky black leather shoes" (p. 97).

Hero worship is also doubtless a general aspect of Jewish networking. Heilbrunn provides numerous examples of Jews helping other Jews climb the ladder to power and influence, often in relationships of mentor and worshipful protégé. Indeed, Heilbrunn's own career is a testament to the power of Jewish networking. His early heroes are almost all Jews: Melvin Lasky, Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, Arthur Koestler. As a budding neocon in college, he invites Richard Pipes, Carl Gershman, and Midge Decter as speakers for the Republican club. He corresponds with Sidney Hook. His first job is working for *National Interest*, an important neocon journal published by Irving Kristol. He co-authored a piece (with Michael Lind) for the *New York*

⁹ *The Culture of Critique*, ch. 6.

¹⁰ *The Culture of Critique*, ch. 6 and *passim*.

¹¹ Kevin MacDonald, "Neoconservatism as a Jewish Movement" and "Neoconservative Portraits," in *Cultural Insurrections*.

Review of Books “examining the anti-Semitic sources” used by Christian evangelical leader Pat Robertson. He then did a series of reviews for the *New Republic* at the invitation of Leon Wieseltier.

Another prime example of Jewish networking described by Heilbrunn is Douglas Feith. Feith was a student and later a colleague of Richard Pipes, a Harvard professor and prominent neocon. Doubtless with a letter of recommendation from Pipes, he interned at the Foreign Policy Research Institute where he developed a relationship with its president, Harvey Sicherman and with John F. Lehman (Secretary of the Navy under Reagan). Feith also developed a relationship with Leslie Gelb, then President of the Council on Foreign Relations and a *New York Times* correspondent. Gelb recommended him to Scoop Jackson’s group in the US Senate. There he then became a protégé of Paul Wolfowitz after being hired by Richard Perle. In 1982, Perle, then Deputy Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy, hired Feith for a position as his Special Counsel, and then as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Negotiations Policy. Wolfowitz and Perle were responsible for Feith being hired as undersecretary of defense working under Wolfowitz where, as head of the Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group in the Defense Department, he hired people like David Wurmser and Abram Shulsky with their own deep ties to Israel and neocons connections. In this role, he also appointed Perle as chairman of the Defense Policy Board.

NON-JEWISH NEOCONSERVATIVES

Heilbrunn has a bit to say on the difficult question of the motives of non-Jews who are involved in neoconservatism. His statement that “the movement’s non-Jewish members were largely bound to the group by a shared commitment to the largest, most important Jewish cause: the survival of Israel” (p. 69) may be correct in some cases. But it is often quite difficult to separate such sentiments from the personal and professional attractions of being involved in neoconservative networks. Nevertheless, he is quite accurate when describing Henry Jackson’s philo-Semitism, and he provides an interesting passage on Ronald Reagan’s philo-Semitism:

Reagan was a former New Deal liberal, and he was, unlike some conservatives, pro-Israel. His sympathy for Israel had deeply personal roots: he never forgot that his father bypassed a

hotel that didn't admit Jews. Reagan, aghast at the Holocaust, backed the creation of Israel and in his weekly radio broadcasts often decried anti-Semitism. He himself had converted to conservatism, and it was natural that he would welcome new converts [i.e., the neocons]. (p. 162)

Passages like this can hardly be seen as definitive, given the complexities of human motivation. (E.g., was Reagan attempting to court Jewish support as he entered conservative politics?) Nevertheless, they are intriguing.

Heilbrunn also has some nice nuggets on George Bush's naiveté in the area of foreign policy.

The first time [Richard Perle] met Bush, he immediately sensed that he was different from his father. Two things were clear to Perle: one was that Bush didn't know much about foreign policy and another was that he wasn't too embarrassed to confess it. Like Wolfowitz, Perle admired Bush's ability, as he saw it, to cut to the heart of the matter rather than become mesmerized by Washington policy talk. (p. 230)

The fact that Bush was a babe in the woods on foreign policy was seen as a plus by the neocons. "In August 1999 an excited Wolfowitz told me over lunch . . . that Bush had the ability to penetrate the dense fog of foreign policy expertise to ask a simple question. 'Tell me what I need to know? [sic]' Bush, Wolfowitz said, was 'another Scoop Jackson'" (p. 230)—a comment that certainly doesn't reflect well on Jackson.

Although Heilbrunn states that we can never know for certain what was going on in Bush's brain in the days and months after 9/11, his comment that Bush "moved further and further into the web that the neoconservatives had woven around him" (p. 235) seems reasonable.

NEOCONS AND PALEOCONS

Heilbrunn ignores completely the battle between neocons and paleocons for influence in the Reagan administration. He describes the neocons as interlopers because they represented no natural constituency in the GOP—interlopers who established themselves with the power of their pens. He leaves the impression that Republicans just

naturally realized the brilliance of the neocons and welcomed them with open arms. This ignores some rather heated conflicts—well described by Sam Francis—in which the neocons ousted the older paleocon intellectual base of the Republican Party. Given this lacuna, Francis's comments are worth repeating here:

There are countless stories of how neoconservatives have succeeded in entering conservative institutions, forcing out or demoting traditional conservatives, and changing the positions and philosophy of such institutions in neoconservative directions. . . . Writers like M. E. Bradford, Joseph Sobran, Pat Buchanan, and Russell Kirk, and institutions like *Chronicles*, the Rockford Institute, the Philadelphia Society, and the Intercollegiate Studies Institute have been among the most respected and distinguished names in American conservatism. The dedication of their neoconservative enemies to driving them out of the movement they have taken over and demonizing them as marginal and dangerous figures has no legitimate basis in reality. It is clear evidence of the ulterior aspirations of those behind neoconservatism to dominate and subvert American conservatism from its original purposes and agenda and turn it to other purposes. . . . What neoconservatives really dislike about their "allies" among traditional conservatives is simply the fact that the conservatives are conservatives at all—that they support "this notion of a Christian civilization," as Midge Decter put it, that they oppose mass immigration . . . that they entertain doubts or strong disagreement over American foreign policy in the Middle East, that they oppose reckless involvement in foreign wars and foreign entanglements, and that, in company with the Founding Fathers of the United States, they reject the concept of a pure democracy and the belief that the United States is or should evolve toward it.¹²

Oddly, Heilbrunn states that in the second Iraq war "it became fashionable on the left to argue that the war had been prosecuted largely, if not exclusively, for the benefit of Israel and its neoconservative allies" (p. 203). Hardly. While the left reflexively blamed the oil indus-

¹² Samuel Francis, "The Neoconservative Subversion," in Brent Nelson, ed., *Neoconservatism. Occasional Papers of the Conservative Citizens' Foundation*, no. 6 (St. Louis: Conservative Citizens' Foundation, 2004), 9.

try, the only people noting the pro-Israel agenda of the war were people like Pat Buchanan — that is, the remnants of the paleocon right.

THE NEOCONS ON DOMESTIC POLICY: POSITIONS OF CONVENIENCE

It is noteworthy that neoconservatism produced no revolutions in domestic policy, only in foreign policy. Heilbrunn's book reflects this, since he spends a tiny percentage of the book on domestic issues, the rest on foreign policy. There is little question that from its beginning, foreign policy was the area that excited the passion of the neocons, with domestic policy pretty much an afterthought. And it's quite clear that Heilbrunn doesn't even believe that the neocons are sincere about many of their stated beliefs on domestic issues.

Indeed, the general impression one gets is that the neocons adopted positions on domestic policies in order to win influence within the Republican Party and then used their influence to further their foreign policy agenda. As a result, domestic policies were never the focus of the intense pressure that neocons were able to muster for their foreign policy initiatives.

For example, Heilbrunn notes that Bill Kristol "made it a particular point to attack homosexuality, even participating in a conference at Georgetown University about 'curing' gays of their supposed pathology. It is hard to imagine that Kristol himself harbors any real prejudice against gays. Politically, however, it remained a highly effective wedge issue" (p. 213).

Similarly, although not mentioned by Heilbrunn, the neocons jumped on the bandwagon when illegal immigration became an issue, although they certainly did not originate this issue. As John O'Sullivan noted regarding Kristol's activism on an amnesty bill, "Kristol, representing many neoconservatives disposed to favor the bill, came out against it. He did so in part because it had serious drafting defects but, more importantly, because it was creating a bitter gulf between rank-and-file Republicans and the party leadership. That in turn was imperiling Republican objectives in other areas, notably Iraq."¹³ Peter Brimelow says it best: "Kristol will return to immigration enthusiasm once he has helped persuade Bush to attack Iran."¹⁴

Again, it is very doubtful that the neocons are personally opposed

¹³ http://www.amconmag.com/2007/2007_07_30/cover.html

¹⁴ <http://blog.vdare.com/archives/2007/08/27/buckley-making-and-breaking-the-conservative-and-immigration-reform-movement/>

to illegal immigration, since they have generally supported anti-restrictionist immigration policies. The poster boy of enthusiasm for unrestricted immigration among the neocons is Ben Wattenberg and his yearning for a post-white America: "The non-Europeanization of America is heartening news of an almost transcendental quality."¹⁵ Wattenberg is a Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, the main neoconservative think tank.

One wonders what might have happened if the neocons had pursued a restrictionist immigration policy with as much fervor as they pursued a pro-Israel foreign policy. The reality is, however, that after two Republican administrations where neocons exerted a huge influence on foreign policy (especially under George W. Bush), the hegemony of the left over immigration policy remains intact. It is difficult not to conclude that the neocons' softness on immigration is intimately related to their hatred for the white power structure—a theme that I have explored elsewhere as generally motivating Jews on this issue.¹⁶

It is worth remembering that neocons and the mainstream Jewish community despised not only the WASPs with whom they were in competition, but also the rest of the white population of traditional America. For example, although not mentioned by Heilbrunn, it is well known that the early neocons—often labeled the New York Intellectuals—despised rural, small town America and particularly the American South at least as much as they despised the WASP elite.¹⁷ This is true despite the fact—noted by Heilbrunn—that neocons like Norman Podhoretz pandered to Christian social conservatives and their white, rural, small town base in an attempt to develop a viable coalition within the Republican Party. But, as we have seen, these are positions of convenience, not conviction.

GAPS IN HEILBRUNN'S ACCOUNT

Heilbrunn states that Dick Cheney was not a neocon. This is simply false. Cheney was well-connected to the neocon foreign policy net-

¹⁵ Ben Wattenberg, *The Good News Is the Bad News Is Wrong* (Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1984), 84.

¹⁶ MacDonald, 2003, *ibid.*

¹⁷ See *The Culture of Critique*, ch. 6. Ben Stein shows that dislike of small town, rural America is also apparent in mass media produced by Jews. See: Ben Stein, *The View from Sunset Boulevard: America as Brought to You by the People Who Make Television* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

work throughout the 1990s, and he has a long history of aligning himself with Jewish interests.¹⁸ Moreover, as Heilbrunn notes, he appointed Scooter Libby (a Wolfowitz protégé) as his chief of staff. Heilbrunn also notes that Cheney was influenced heavily by Bernard Lewis, the Princeton University historian of the Muslim world with strong personal ties to the Likud party. Lewis, who was also a guru to Scoop Jackson as well as a confidant of a long succession of Israeli Prime Ministers, must be viewed as having committed one of the most spectacular academic frauds in history by providing a veneer of academic respectability to the idea that only a modicum of force would be sufficient to unleash natural Arabic tendencies toward democracy.¹⁹ Doubtless as a result of Cheney's influence, Lewis became "Bush's historian"²⁰

Heilbrunn portrays Paul Wolfowitz as a "pawn for Rumsfeld and Bush" (p. 234), with no evidence at all that this was the case. This seems highly unlikely given the passionate intensity with which the neocons in general, and Wolfowitz in particular, pursued their goals over decades and long before they joined the Bush II administration.

Heilbrunn also portrays Wolfowitz's appointment of Douglas Feith as a "catastrophic mistake" (p. 230), not because Feith was a dedicated Zionist who played a leading role in producing the false intelligence that provided a justification for the Iraq war, but because he didn't run meetings properly.

Indeed, without any evidence at all, Wolfowitz, whose personal background is characterized by the usual neocon obsession with Israel, the Holocaust, and other Jewish issues,²¹ is presented as motivated by his humanitarianism, not his commitment to Zionism:

Unlike Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz was genuinely obsessed with the Middle East. But Wolfowitz was a humanitarian, not a warrior. He relished the fact that he had become a kind of folk hero in Indonesia for championing democracy as ambassador. He wanted to do good, to help the weak, to bask in the applause of foreign populations. He was especially concerned with human rights.

¹⁸ "Neoconservative Portraits," *Cultural Insurrections*, 187–90.

¹⁹ "Neoconservative Portraits," *Cultural Insurrections*, 185–86.

²⁰ Brian Whitaker, "Bush's Historian," *The Guardian*, May 2, 2006.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/may/02/thehistoryman>

²¹ See "Neoconservative Portraits," *Cultural Insurrections*, 171–76.

These were laudable impulses. But they also allowed emotion to outstrip analysis when it came to the Middle East. (p. 234)

Later, Heilbrunn depicts Wolfowitz as tortured by guilt about leaving Kurds and Shiites to the revenge of Saddam Hussein after the first Gulf war. Again, no evidence is provided.

NEOCONSERVATIVE DISLOYALTY

Heilbrunn's most significant failing is that despite adopting a generally critical tone toward the neocons, he goes to great lengths to absolve his subjects of the charge of disloyalty. His argument is quite simple: neocons are not disloyal because they are sincere in their belief that American and Israeli interests are fundamentally the same:

One cannot avoid the fact that these accusations of Jewish "dual loyalty" point not to traitorous behavior but to something else—a conflation of America's and Israel's interests. After all, it is quite true that while not all neoconservatives are Jews, the majority of neoconservatives were, and are, Jewish; it is also true that they tend to propose foreign policy goals that support and favor Israel. The fact that they argue, and sincerely believe, that Israeli and American interests are closely aligned only makes them look more "ideological" in the eyes of their critics. (p. 10)

Further, Heilbrunn makes the following comment on a *New York Times* advertisement advocating greater US support for Israel in the context of George H. W. Bush's brief attempt in 1992 to stand up to the Israel Lobby over \$10 billion in housing loan guarantees in exchange for ceasing construction of West Bank settlements: "This wasn't a cynical desire to manipulate American foreign policy, as the critics of the neoconservatives would allege, but a sincere belief that (Pat Buchanan to the contrary) there was a deep and abiding tie between Israel and the United States" (p. 206).

Pat Buchanan to the contrary indeed.

Most egregiously, Heilbrunn credulously quotes a "Bush administration friend" of neocon operative David Wurmser:

For Wurmser, Israel is the driving force. He had ideas about Israel—we're both arsenals of democracy. He is the son of two

émigré Jews, Swiss and Czech. He met his wife, Meyrav, in Israel and they are the dynamic duo of think tank Zionism. His wife writes about Israel losing its Zionist view. What people describe in conspiratorial terms isn't true; it's an intellectual connection. . . . They just believe this stuff. They're not agents. David is completely without guile. (p. 224)

Despite his failure to infer disloyalty in his subjects, Heilbrunn actually marshals quite a bit of the evidence that indeed many neocons were motivated by their Jewish identity. For example, he describes the notorious "clean break" paper co-authored by American neocons and advocating a policy of regime change in the Middle East beginning with Saddam Hussein's Iraq. He dwells on Charles Krauthammer's deep commitment to Israel, and he makes a point of Elliott Abrams' extraordinary commitment to Israel and the Jewish people. He has a long section detailing Douglas Feith's obsession with Zionism beginning in his youth.

Heilbrunn does manage to quote Pat Buchanan's classic 2003 *American Conservative* article "Whose War?"²², including Buchanan's comment, "We charge them with colluding with Israel to ignite those wars and destroy the Oslo accords." But he dismisses Buchanan simply by stating that the charges "don't amount to an intellectual argument so much as a criminal indictment. The overheated language suggests the extent to which the foes of neoconservatism sometimes become mirror images of it in their eagerness to debunk and expose the movement" (p. 249).

Instead, Heilbrunn depicts the neocons as motivated by legitimate moral concerns about preventing another situation where America stands by as another Holocaust unfolds. "As Jews, they (and their Catholic conservative allies) were haunted by the memory that the Allies had not stopped the Holocaust—and they strongly believed that it was America's obligation to act preemptively to avert another one" (p. 243).

One wonders: Who are these Catholic conservatives who believed in American guilt over the Holocaust to the point that they were willing to promote wars in the Middle East for this reason? No evidence is

²² Pat Buchanan, "Whose War? A neoconservative clique seeks to ensnare our country in a series of wars that are not in America's interest," *The American Conservative*, March 24, 2003. http://www.amconmag.com/03_24_03/cover.html

ever provided that guilt over the role of the putative US role in the Holocaust was a motivating factor for the neocons. In the end, it is just another convenient fiction – an effective “just so” story that makes the neocons into moral actors rather than scheming (or self-deceived) agents acting on behalf of a foreign government.

And of course, what is missing from Heilbrunn’s account is the one-sidedness of it all. No mention is made of Israeli aggression in seizing land on the West Bank and Gaza or their brutal and degrading treatment of the Palestinians as critical ingredients in the hostility toward Israel throughout the Muslim world. Moral posturing is entirely reserved for Jews and defenders of Israel.

One need not be a professional psychologist to realize that sincere beliefs can be influenced in subtle ways by one’s ethnic commitments.²³ The neocons may not be consciously disloyal, but there is every reason to suppose that their beliefs are tailor-made to conform to their perception of ethnic interests. And in the case of the neocons, as Heilbrunn shows, there is overwhelming evidence for deep ethnic commitments among neoconservative Jews.

Heilbrunn asks whether the neocons knowingly fudged the facts on intelligence. His answer: “Not really. They fit the facts to conform with their own preconceived theories” (p. 260). Unfortunately, it’s impossible to understand their preconceived theories as anything but a reflection of their ethnic commitment.

As I noted in *The Culture of Critique*, “many of the Jews involved in the movements reviewed here may sincerely believe that these movements are really divorced from specifically Jewish interests or are in the best interests of other groups as well as Jews. . . . But, as [evolutionary theorist Robert] Trivers . . . notes, the best deceivers are those who are self-deceived.”

HEILBRUNN AS A JEWISH APOLOGIST

Sadly, Heilbrunn must be counted among those afflicted by this form of self-deception. It is encouraging that discussion of the loyalty issue is becoming more common. In a post to his blog for *Time Magazine* on June 28, 2008, Joe Klein made a point that has been obvious to many for quite some time: “The fact that a great many Jewish neocon-

²³ See MacDonald, K. Review of *The Israel Lobby*, by John Mearsheimer and Steven Walt. *Occidental Quarterly*, 7(3), Fall 2007, 33-58.

servatives – people like Joe Lieberman and the crowd over at *Commentary* – plumped for this war, and now for an even more foolish assault on Iran, raised the question of divided loyalties: using US military power, US lives and money, to make the world safe for Israel.”²⁴

Needless to say, he was lambasted for this indiscretion. John Podhoretz, writing in the *Commentary* blog, labeled him “manifestly intellectually unstable”;²⁵ others called him an anti-Semite and called his firing from *Time*. And the ADL went into its usual hysteria whenever such comments surface:

The notion that Jews with “divided loyalties” were behind the decision to go to war is reminiscent of age-old anti-Semitic canards about a Jewish conspiracy to control and manipulate government, which has unfortunately gained new currency of late with public figures such as Jimmy Carter and professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt suggesting that American Jews are disloyal and that pro-Israel groups have undue influence over American foreign policy.²⁶

As Klein has noted, these attempts at silencing, character assassination, and intimidation are “happening because I said something that is palpably true, but unspoken in polite society.”²⁷

It is indeed true that an important theme of historical anti-Semitism has been that when there are conflicts between Jewish interests and the interests of the societies they live in, Jews are more loyal to Jewish interests.²⁸ Given what we know about human evolved psychology, this is not at all surprising.²⁹

The good news, then, is that even though Heilbrunn’s book pushed the envelope a bit in discussing the Jewish nature of neoconservatism in the mainstream media, he is already well behind the curve in terms of frank discussion of Jewish identities and influence in the main-

²⁴ Joe Klein, “Surge protection.” *Time Magazine Swampland Blog*, June 24, 2008. http://www.time-blog.com/swampland/2008/06/surge_protection.html

²⁵ John Podhoretz, writing in his *Commentary* blog, July, 29, 2008 <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/blogs/index.php/jpodhoretz/18451>

²⁶ ADL letter to Joe Klein, June 25, 2008. http://www.adl.org/media_watch/internet/Time_Swampland_Klein.htm

²⁷ http://www.time-blog.com/swampland/2008/07/when_extremists_attack.html

²⁸ *Separation and Its Discontents*, ch. 2

²⁹ *Separation and Its Discontents*, ch. 1.

stream media. Issues that were formerly only discussed in places like *The Occidental Quarterly* or *The Occidental Observer* are now discussed in *Time Magazine*, *Commentary*, and the *Huffington Post*. The times they are indeed a-changin'.

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