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*Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, May 2003, pages 30, 92*

Special Report

## Richard Perle, the Prince of Darkness, Resigns After Accusations of Profiteering

By Delinda C. Hanley

After dozens of scathing articles and opinion pieces hit newsstands in quick succession, neoconservative Richard Perle, Bush's Iraq-War-architect, resigned March 26 as chairman of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board. The revelations may be nothing new to *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, readers, but it is something of a phenomenon that they finally made it into the mainstream media and actually caused his fall from grace.

Perle's chairmanship of the 30-member civilian board, which has consistently advised Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and the Pentagon to launch an attack on Iraq, was unpaid. Nevertheless, he is subject to government ethics that prohibit using public office for

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private gain. To Rumsfeld's chagrin, it is now common knowledge that Perle and other board members also work for a slew of defense contractors that stand to profit from recent American bellicosity. Those companies make millions from the very wars and heightened domestic security needs that these hawkish board members advocate. Not only will the Defense Policy Board's "free" advice cost this nation the lives of its young soldiers—along with billions of dollars, and the good will of nearly every nation on the planet—but it is done in the name of destroying a nation and a large number of Iraqi lives.

Perle will continue to serve on the board and steer the Defense Department, along with former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, former CIA director John Woolsey, Retired Admiral William Owens, and the other members. At least 9 of his colleagues are board members, executives or lobbyists with private companies doing business with the Pentagon, according to the Center for Public Integrity, a government watchdog group. According to the March 29 *Washington Post*, their companies "have won more than \$76 billion in contracts with the Pentagon over the past two years, raising concerns that they might be using their public office for private gain."

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh broke the story of Perle's most recent abuses of public office for private gain in his eye-opening March 17 *New Yorker* article, "Lunch With the Chairman." In his dramatic report, Hersh provides solid evidence of Perle's major conflicts of interest and accuses him of profiteering from the Gulf war.

Hersh described the chairman's attempts in January to interest Saudi Arabian businessmen in investing millions of dollars in Trireme Partners, L.P., a venture capital firm of which Perle is a managing partner. According to letters Perle's representatives sent to the businessmen, Trireme deals with homeland defense and security technology. Saudi Arabia has spent nearly a billion dollars to survey and mark its border with Yemen, and Trireme wants a piece of the action in phase two of that process, in which Saudi Arabia will spend billions to ensure its homeland defense. Trireme's letter to the Saudi investors noted that in addition to Perle, Kissinger and Gerald Hillman also serve on both the Defense Policy Board and Trireme's advisory group.

## Defense Policy Board members have access to classified information and to senior policymakers.

Perle, who has a home in the South of France, lunched in Marseilles with Adnan Khashoggi, a Saudi Arabian arms dealer who was deeply embroiled in the Iran-Contra scandal. The other Saudi businessman, Saleh Al-Zuhair, told Hersh he had met with Perle because he hoped to talk the Pentagon adviser into avoiding war on Iraq. Given Perle's years-long push to take out Saddam Hussain, this was quite a pipe

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*Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, readers also will recall that Perle is no friend to Saudi Arabia. The chairman invited Laurent Murawiec, a Rand Corporation Analyst, to brief the Policy Board on July 10. At the secret briefing Murawiec denounced Saudi Arabia and called the Kingdom an enemy of the United States (see Sept./Oct. 2002 *Washington Report*, p. 15). Murawiec advised threatening Riyadh with seizure of its financial assets in the United States and its oil wells. When word of the briefing hit newspapers, the State Department found itself with a diplomatic crisis on its hands.

Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the U.S., Prince Bandar Sultan, described the Marseilles lunch—held six months after the anti-Saudi briefing—as a shakedown operation. “There is a split personality to Perle,” he told Hersh. “Here he is, on the one hand, trying to make a \$100 million deal, and on the other hand, there were elements of the appearance of blackmail—If we get in business, he'll back off on Saudi Arabia.”

Perle's career is full of murky wheeling and dealing. In 1983, as an assistant secretary of defense, Perle recommended the Army buy weapons from an Israeli company whose owners had paid him a \$50,000 fee just two years earlier, according to *The New Yorker* article.

## Passing Info to Israel

According to Hersh's book on Henry Kissinger, *The Price of Power*, in the early 1970s FBI wiretaps caught Richard Perle—then foreign policy aide to Sen. Henry “Scoop” Jackson (D-WA)—passing National Security Council classified material to the Israeli Embassy.

In 1996 Perle and Douglas Feith (who is now, thanks to Perle's recommendations, under-secretary of defense for policy), advised newly elected Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, the leader of a foreign government, to ignore Washington's wishes. In “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm,” Perle and Feith called for Israel to repudiate the Oslo accords and its underlying concept of “land for peace”; the permanent annexation of the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip; and the elimination of Saddam Hussain's regime in Baghdad as first steps toward overthrowing or destabilizing the governments of Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Perle's apparent loyalty to Israel and disregard for the diplomatic interests of his own country has always worried the *Washington Report*. As Hersh warned *New Yorker* readers, while Defense Policy Board members may not be government employees, they do have access to classified information and to senior policymakers. They give advice not only on strategic policy, Hersh pointed out, but also on such matters as weapons procurement.

Perle was given the opportunity to defend himself against Hersh's accusations in a March 9 CNN interview with Wolf Blitzer, a former

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Washington correspondent for the *Jerusalem Post*. Perle called the charges ridiculous, but gave no further explanations. In the best tradition of *ad hominem* attacks, he did call Hersh a “terrorist.” Asked to explain, Perle described Hersh, who exposed the My Lai massacre of Vietnamese civilians and has received numerous journalism awards, as “irresponsible” and a “terrorist” because “he sets out to do damage and he will do it by whatever innuendo, whatever distortion he can.”

In addition to his association with Trireme, Perle is a director of the Autonomy Corporation, a British firm that recently won a major federal homeland security contact. While Perle draws no salary from Autonomy, he has been given a reported total of 122,500 share options. He also is a director of DigitalNet, a Virginia-based company with U.S. Army and Defense Department contracts.

Perle stepped down from his chairmanship in March because of his arrangement with yet another company, Global Crossing, Ltd., a bankrupt telecommunications outfit that now wants to be bought by the Chinese. According to *American Politics Journal*, Perle was to help “overcome national security concerns” arising from a Chinese takeover of a U.S. company with huge American military and defense contracts. As *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd explained, “Global Crossing agreed to pay Mr. Perle a fat fee: \$725,000. The fee structure is especially smelly because \$600,000 of the windfall is contingent on government approval of the sale. (In his original agreement, Mr. Perle also asked the company to shell out for working meals, which could add up, given his status as a gourmand from the Potomac to Provence, where he keeps a vacation home among the feckless French.)”

It is Perle’s unconscionable push for a war on Iraq, however, that should rankle the most. As one of the most vocal of the hawks pushing for an invasion of Iraq on TV and radio talk shows and of course, in the Pentagon, he has repeatedly advised the Pentagon to get rid of Saddam Hussain now—even if no link were found between Iraq and the events of Sept. 11. A member of numerous right-wing think tanks, Perle was first to push the fictitious story of a meeting between Mohammed Atta, the leader of the Sept. 11 hijackers, and an Iraqi official in Prague, and continued to repeat the tale long after U.S. officials knew the story was false.

Perle is known as “The Bomber” among high-ranking officers within the Pentagon because of his predilection to go to war at the drop of a hat, according to the *American Politics Journal*. Perle repeatedly claimed that an invasion of Iraq was not only necessary, but would be “a cakewalk,” along with his fellow cabalists, advised the Pentagon that Iraqis would welcome their “liberating” invaders and provide no resistance to the U.S.-led attack. This has turned out to be deadly advice.

The March 21 *Guardian* published an opinion piece originally written by Perle for the *Jewish Spectator* magazine. In it Perle



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gleefully predicted that when Saddam Hussain fell, “He will go quickly, but not alone: in a parting irony, he will take the U.N. down with him. Well, not the whole U.N. The “good works’ part will survive, the low-risk peacekeeping bureaucracies will remain, the chatterbox on the Hudson will continue to bleat. What will die is the fantasy of the U.N. as the foundation of a new world order.”

If the Bush administration and the Defense Department continue to heed the advice of Perle and his neoconservative colleagues, and ignore the U.N., the U.S. could turn into a kind of a power-hungry Empire (a scenario endorsed, in fact, by one of Perle’s many think tanks, the Project for a New American Century). “Civilian” Pentagon advisers (also known as “chicken hawks,” since many of them have declined to fight in the U.S. military) might well push for U.S. attacks on Iran, Syria, Lebanon and other nations—all the while continuing to frighten Americans about threats from international terrorism. And, on the side, these advisers will earn billions of dollars from profiteering—because when it comes to the United States and peace with its neighbors, “frankly, they don’t give a damn.”

*Delinda C. Hanley is news editor of the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, on Middle East Affairs.*

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