

## The Virtues and Perils of the American Political System

By William R. Polk

The American political system dates from the summer of 1787 when 55 delegates from the original 13 states, then virtually separate republics, gathered to amend the agreement under which the states had been joined. The delegates represented slightly more than 3 million almost entirely English-speaking farmers and townsmen scattered over a vast, underdeveloped land. Excluded from their political community were nearly a million black inhabitants and a hundred thousand or so Indians.

The “Founding Fathers” who had gathered in Philadelphia to write a constitution were driven more by fears than by ambitions. Having only narrowly -- with luck and French help -- won their independence from Britain, they watched with dismay their newly won freedom nearly destroyed by anarchy and, as avid readers of classical history, they dreaded the eventual advent of would-be caesars.

They realized that laws could not, in themselves, prevent ambitious and ruthless men from seizing authority. The people, they believed, could not be relied upon; they were often lazy, ignorant and subject to manipulation by tyrants. The only safeguard they could imagine was to scatter power so widely that no one group could master it all. The system they devised was cumbersome and was meant to be so: the president was to be elected not directly by a popular vote but by an electoral “college” whose members were chosen by popular vote in each separate state. The president was to serve for four years; the legislature was divided with senators, two for each state, elected by their legislatures for terms of six years; representatives were to be elected directly by the people, district by district, for two-year terms. Finally, the federal union was imposed on top of the constituent states whose governments were separately elected and which maintained control over many aspects of their individual affairs.

The America we see today is still the “hybrid” system devised by the Founding Fathers but modified by changes that have come about over two centuries.

The Founding Fathers’ Constitution was a remarkable document not only for what it specified but also for what it left vague. That flexibility enabled it to serve a nation that grew over two centuries from 13 to 50 states, was inflated by the arrival of millions of immigrants from diverse cultures and at least partially integrated millions of blacks released from slavery; it also accommodated to major shifts in power from the states to the federal government and from the legislature to the presidency as well as to the unanticipated rise in stature, power and complexity of the judiciary.

Fundamental to the American political system is the consensus that the Constitution is the absolute law of the land. It has not, however, always been honored. Particularly in times of stress, provisions, especially those pertaining to civil liberties,

have been set aside or violated. Five periods of great danger to the Constitutional liberties of Americans stand out and tell us much about today:

In 1798, shortly after the Constitution was ratified, the Congress passed the “Alien and Sedition Acts” which, among other provisions, forbade the publishing of “malicious” writings that might incite opposition to the Congress or the President. Vigorously opposed by Thomas Jefferson, these acts were never fully implemented and were repealed within four years. During the terrible years of the American Civil War, 1861-1865, President Abraham Lincoln set aside the fundamental right of habeas corpus. Then, following the Russian Revolution, America was convulsed by a “Red Scare.” A “rogue” Attorney General, Alexander Palmer (assisted by the later head of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover) used the “Espionage Act of 1917” to arrest and hold without charge for long periods hundreds of dissidents. Again, within three years, Palmer’s actions were repudiated and he was discredited. During the Second World War, similarly, in fear of a Japanese invasion, thousands of American citizens or residents of Japanese descent were arrested and incarcerated without due process of law.

Finally, in the 1950s during the Cold War, when fear of domestic subversion was rife, “McCarthyism” virtually immobilized the American government. Senator Joe McCarthy was censured by the Senate in 1954, but McCarthyism and the poisonous atmosphere it had engendered lingered far longer. George Kennan, arguably the most successful American opponent Communism ever had -- the “father” of both the Marshall Plan and the policy of Containment -- was a major victim. When he was “purged” from the State Department, as he describes in his memoirs, he could find no one to whom to say goodbye, so fearful of associating with him were his fellow officers.

Today, we are in the midst of a new period of danger. Following the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, America again was caught in the grip of fear and reacted as it had before. The Congress rushed headlong to pass the “USA PATRIOT Act” which gave the Attorney General sweeping powers of arrest, incarceration and avoidance of due process of law; it even gave the government authority to monitor e-mail communications, computer records, bookstore purchases and withdrawals from public libraries.

While the USA PATRIOT Act was passed for a limited time, the “emergency” being defined as ending in 2005, Attorney General John Ashcroft, a religious fundamentalist with presidential ambitions, is attempting to get it made permanent and even to extend its powers to enable him to revoke an American’s citizenship if he determines that the citizen’s words or deeds fall within his definition of treason.

Whether Americans will follow past precedents to restore a Constitutional balance or not remains to be seen.

The capacity of the American public to regain its sense of balance has, historically, depended on three factors – the lessening of its sense of threat, its commitment to its fundamental political creed and its access to (and use of) significant

factual information. Critical to an understanding of America today is evaluation of all three.

The sense of threat is very real in America today. The attack mounted by Usama bin Ladin's *al-Qaida* organization on September 11, 2001 was powerful, and America proved to be vulnerable. The attack set in motion seismic shocks that reverberated across its highly articulated industrial society. Because the last serious foreign intervention was the British attack in the war of 1812, Americans had little experience with assaults on their home territory. Bombings were something that happened to foreigners; no one could imagine them happening to Americans. So the shock was enormous. And, as the Bush administration has constantly told the public, the attacks will probably be repeated; indeed, as President Husni Mubarrak of Egypt recently remarked, current American policy is likely to create a hundred Usama bin Ladins; they will not be deterred but rather will be driven to battle by American military action. And, while the threat of terrorist attack is real, the Bush administration has often reacted in ways that have magnified fear rather than by offering sound guidance on reasonable security measures.

Thus, on balance, I think the siege mentality is likely to continue for a considerable time. What then about the commitment of the American public to its fundamental political creed?

Again, the outlook is sobering. Americans have rarely shown a commitment to using and defending their right to choose the representatives who will enact the laws under which they must live. Low voter turn-out has been endemic. Even at the time of the foundation of the nation, 3 out of each 4 of the 640 thousand free adult males did not bother to vote even for delegates to ratify the Constitution.

The Founding Fathers were right: the people have proven to be politically slothful. Are they also ill-informed?

All studies indicate that, thriving in the relative isolation of their vast country, Americans are shockingly ignorant about other nations and cultures. A recent survey for the National Geographic Society indicated that only 13% of American college students could find Iraq on a map. As a former head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral William Crowe, remarked, "Wars are God's way of teaching Americans geography."

Although presumably directed toward acquiring education, many college students evince little interest in intellectual matters. The larger state universities have been characterized as having a "beer and circus culture." Even at the most highly regarded universities, as a Princeton professor commented, "one will frequently hear echoes of a national culture that rewards people with an undisguised passion for knowledge and exact intellectual application with such [pejorative] appellations as nerd, geek and wonk." It is not "cool" to study.

In primary and secondary education, the situation is deplorable. A recent study of secondary school students found only 2% able to read a text and summarize it

intelligently. A 2002 study of California college freshmen (that is, recent secondary school graduates) found that most could not “analyze arguments, synthesize information or write papers that were reasonably free of language errors.” Lack of financial support is partly to blame. As Senator James Jeffords wrote even before the Bush administration’s massive tax cuts and the cost of the Iraq war sent spending on education even lower,<sup>1</sup> “The lack of funding for our schools is disgraceful.”

To supplement formal education, America has always relied heavily on the press. In the Nineteenth century, subsidized mail enabled journals to circulate news, opinion and basic literacy materials widely and cheaply. Today, less attention is paid to literacy, although nearly 50 million adult Americans cannot read above a primary school level, but content is poorly served. In large areas of the country newspapers pay little attention to world or national events. Television news programs are seldom watched except in times of crisis and rarely offer coverage in depth of public affairs. Even in what they should do best, illustrating events, they disappoint. Reporting on the Iraq war, for example, fell far short of the “realism” of such movies as “Finding Private Ryan” and “Black Hawk Down.” The gore and horror of real war was “sanitized” from TV screens. As Peter Sussman, a member of the ethics committee of the Society of Professional Journalists, commented, “the American press played this war as...a video game writ large.” So viewers got no sense of the effect and cost of war.

Dulled by television snippets of news, politicians’ “photo opportunities” and radio “sound bytes,” the public appears to have little appetite for analysis of complex issues. This is not new and has often been lampooned. The American “cowboy philosopher,” Will Rogers, once quipped that “The short memories of American voters is what keeps our politicians in office.” America, in the words of one well-known critic, has been “trivialized.”<sup>2</sup>

So what about that part of the public that wants to be informed? Can it gain timely access to truthful information?

Governments are commonly obsessed with secrecy. Apart from concern with security, officials naturally seek to cover up their misdeeds or mistakes. The Bush administration is no different. As one commentator has written, its “instinct is to release nothing [to the public].” Already as governor of Texas and in matters having nothing to do with national security, Mr. Bush withheld as much as he could. Today, secrecy has spread far beyond any conceivable justification on grounds of security to include the Agriculture Department, the Department of Health and Human Welfare and the Environment Protection Agency. A new executive order would even allow the reclassification of already publicized documents. Observers generally believe that the Bush administration is the most secretive in American history.

One example of current importance relates to America’s support for Saddam Husain of Iraq. Having engineered the 1963 *coup d’état* that overthrew the regime of General Abdul Karim Qasim, America began to support the Baathists who as anti-Communist, anti-Iranian, anti-Nasser, secular nationalists appeared attractive. The

Reagan administration went far further. Under National Security Decision Directive 114 of November 26, 1983 – the text of which is still secret after twenty years – it began to supply Saddam Husain’s government not only with satellite battlefield intelligence photographs (which enabled the Iraqis to defeat the numerically stronger Persians) but also with such deadly materials as anthrax and bubonic plague viruses and allowed the Iraqis to buy equipment to fashion these horrifying materials and various chemicals into weapons. Such donations and sales were illegal under existing American laws. Not surprisingly, they were treated as highly secret.<sup>3</sup>

Not secret, of course, from the recipients or, in all likelihood, from such sophisticated intelligence services as the Russians and the Israelis, but secret from the American public. There they would have been highly embarrassing.

This is germane because the American government has consistently said that it was Iraq’s possession of such materials and nuclear weapons that justified the attack of 2003. Iraq always maintained that after 1991, it had destroyed its chemical and biological weapons and that it never had nuclear weapons. The truth mattered since thousands of lives and billions of tax-payer’s dollars were at stake. So what was the truth? What did the American government do to reveal or hide it? And what could the public do to find out? These three questions cut to the nerve of democratic rule.

While the answers are complex, we now know the main elements: first, no such weapons have been found either by the exhaustive searches made by UN expert teams or, following the conquest of Iraq, by American specialists. Second, “proof” offered by the American government often was misinterpreted, spurious or worse. UN Chief Weapons Inspector Hans Blix specifically charged the United States government with “fabricating” evidence.

These examples will suffice: 1) White House spokesman Ari Fleischer claimed that Iraq was known to have anthrax stores and probably was the source of an anthrax attack in America. No evidence emerged, and the attack is now blamed on a disgruntled American scientist. 2) America refuted Iraq’s claim to have destroyed its chemical and biological weapons by quotation of an Iraqi defector, a general who was the son-in-law of Saddam Husain, who was extensively interrogated by American security agents. When the records were released, the general was shown to said exactly the opposite to what the administration quoted him as saying. He said, “All weapons – biological, chemical, missile, nuclear – were destroyed.” 3) Contacts and collaboration between Iraq and *al-Qaida* and other terrorist organizations have been repeatedly alleged. When the Defense Intelligence Agency and the CIA found no such links, the Secretary of Defense created a new intelligence agency, the “Office of Special Plans,” to prove them and so justify an attack on Iraq. That Islamic fundamentalist organizations would find common cause with a secular government they have branded as *kafir* (infidel) and have offered to fight is unlikely; each noted contact turned out to be untrue. 4) President Bush quoted an International Atomic Energy Agency document as saying that Iraq was only six months away from being able to make a nuclear bomb. No such report ever existed.

From these and other examples too numerous to deal with here, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the Bush administration has not furnished the public with accurate information; rather it has used untruthful statements to justify a policy upon which it was determined to act.

The Bush administration was not, of course, the first administration to do so. On the Democratic Party side, the most egregious instance was President Lyndon Johnson's use of a "non-event," a fictitious North Vietnamese attack on American warships at the Gulf of Tonkin, to strong-arm the Congress into supporting his Vietnam War policy.<sup>4</sup>

In response, the legislature decided that government dissimulation must be made susceptible to discovery. Two laws were designed to accomplish this.

The 1966 "Freedom of Information Act" sought to force the executive branch to release in an orderly and timely fashion documents that would reveal precisely what it had been doing. The intent was two-fold: first, to serve notice on officials that they would ultimately be held accountable for their actions and, second, to enable the voting public to know what their paid public servants were doing in their name.

Former President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger figured in one example that showed both the strength and the weakness of the act. On being told by Indonesian President Suharto in 1975 that he planned to invade neighboring East Timor, Kissinger replied that "It is important that whatever you do succeeds quickly." With illegally supplied American equipment it did: It uprooted half the population of East Timor and killed between 100,000 and 230,000 Timorese. Kissinger repeatedly denied that the conversation had ever taken place, saying "Timor was never discussed with us when we were in Indonesia." After 25 years, the documents were made public.

As this example shows, the Act could correct official lying but only after many years. It never functioned as intended. The release process was long, cumbersome and often costly to the petitioner. But, at least theoretically, documents would eventually become public.

Now even that slow and burdensome process has been stopped by Attorney General John Ashcroft. In a secret memorandum dated October 12, 2001 but planned well before the September 11 attacks, he reversed the "open" policy of the Clinton administration; he urged federal agencies to reject requests for documents and declared that the Justice Department would defend any federal official who refused to be bound by the Act.

Similarly, the "Presidential Records Act," passed in 1978 after the "Watergate" scandal, mandated the release of presidential papers twelve years after the incumbent had left office. This Act has been effectively revoked by executive order on March 23, 2001 which forbade release of papers of President Reagan. Although there was admittedly no national security concern, some of papers dealing with the "Iran-Contra" scandal were assumed to be potentially embarrassing to the first President Bush.

Parallel to the malfunction of the laws is another and closely related breakdown: the failure of the “Fourth Estate,” the media, to investigate and disclose instances of government mistake or malfeasance. Again many examples could be given, but consider just one.

President Bush dramatically informed the American public in his State of the Union address that he had documentary proof that Iraq was attempting to buy a component of a nuclear bomb (known as “yellow cake”) from the government of Niger. This was the long-sought “smoking gun” that would justify an attack on Iraq. When examined, the documents proved to be a forgery. So the questions: did some group in his entourage foist them onto a gullible president? If so, who were these criminals? Did the president know the documents were fake when he cited them? If so, is he guilty of a “high crime and misdemeanor” as specified by the Constitution? Or, was the analysis of the documents so incompetent that no one noticed that the signature on the key document was purportedly by an official who had actually left office a decade before? Whichever is correct, it is astonishing that almost no attempt was made by the media to investigate what was surely one of the most important stories of the decade. Where despotic governments manipulate the press, such stories cannot be investigated, but they must be in free societies if they are to survive.

From the press I turn to the nature of the Bush administration: how did it come into being? Who are its essential supporters? Who are its principal actors? What does it intend to do? And, what are its prospects?

Election is never far from the mind of any politician. American politicians have often manipulated the process to achieve victory. Many American cities were controlled until relatively recently by “machines” whose bosses used patronage to deliver votes in national campaigns. Curley in Boston, Crump in Memphis, Pendergast in Kansas City, Daley in Chicago and others welded their constituents into voting blocs they could deliver to national candidates. Without Mayor Daley, Kennedy would not have been elected president.

Chicagoans joked that they were told to “vote early and often.” They did, but reforms gradually overwhelmed the machine system. Then, just when it seemed nearly dead, the presidential election of 2000 appeared to resurrect it in a new form. These are the essential facts.

While the Democratic Party candidate, Al Gore, won a nation-wide plurality of 539,898 votes, because of the way the Founding Fathers had divided the vote by states and mediated it through the Electoral College, Gore’s plurality did not give him victory. After the other states were counted, the vote in the state of Florida turned out to be decisive: who won in Florida would become president.

In Florida, Jeb Bush, the brother of the Republican candidate, was the governor. There also, George Bush’s campaign manager, Katherine Harris, was the secretary of

state in charge of the organization of the electoral process. Working in the spirit of the old-time bosses, Ms. Harris found a new way to shape the vote. She hired a “hi-tech” company, Database Technologies, to examine Florida’s voter registration rolls to remove anyone who had committed a felony and so by Florida law was unable to vote. That was perfectly legal and correct. However, the instructions she gave Database Technologies and the way in which the company implemented them were neither legal nor correct.

The intent was to exclude a large portion of the black community, virtually all of whom were thought likely to vote Democratic. Database Technologies was instructed not only to identify felons, even those whose voting privileges had been restored, but also people with similar names, birth dates and/or social security numbers. When the company requested more precise criteria, Florida’s Secretary of State told it to “cast the net widely.” It did. Moreover, it used additional lists supplied by Texas, the state of which George Bush was then governor. So, in total, it recommended the removal of some 173,000 registered Florida voters. Ironically, even the election supervisor of one of Florida’s large counties was erroneously removed.<sup>5</sup>

There were other problems with the election including faulty and confusing polling instructions, complex or non-functioning voting machines, disputed counting, delays, and even police intimidation of some would-be voters. Disputes were referred first to the State Supreme Court and then to the Republican-dominated United States Supreme Court. That court awarded George Bush the state’s electoral vote in what has been termed a “judicial coup d’état.” Al Gore conceded, and George Bush became president.

George Bush had a curious background. After a wild and drunken youth, in which he barely stumbled through college and with the help of his father avoided serious military service, he underwent a religious conversion as a “born-again” Christian fundamentalist. He has made clear his belief that he has a direct relationship with God who, he said, wanted him to become president. In this new guise, he shares the beliefs an estimated 40 million Americans who voted for him and became supporters of his administration.<sup>6</sup>

These mainly Southern Baptists were a necessary but not sufficient part of his campaign. He had also to mobilize his political party, various pressure groups and associations to deliver votes and collect money. In the early days of the Republic, such groups would have been regarded as subversive for putting “interest” above consensus. Today they are not only accepted but actively courted. They have to be courted because electioneering is now ruinously expensive. The average cost of campaigning for a congressional seat rose from \$87,000 in 1976 to \$840,000 in 2000; that was a small fraction of the cost of winning a senate seat; and the cost of a presidential campaign is commensurately vast. In the age of television, the big spenders win – as 94% of the biggest spending candidates did. In the mid-term election in 2002, which the Republicans won, they spent \$184 million more than the Democrats. Even on the city level the cost has become astronomical: his campaign cost the winning mayor of New York \$100 for each vote he received.

There is no doubt that political contributions helped to create the loopholes, exemptions, lax law enforcement, underfunded regulatory oversight and the presumption that the government had been “bought” in which the corporate scandals of 2001-2002 (Enron, Adelphia, Global Crossing, Tyco and World Com) took place. Public officials are caught in an inherent conflict of interest: in order to serve the public, they must put public interest aside to obtain the money to win elections. Having become accustomed to this system, they have a vested interest in keeping it the way it is. In this they find natural allies in the media which profit massively from campaign outlays.

This is relatively new in the American political system. In the early days of the Republic, as I know from family papers, President James K. Polk even had to pay his own way to Washington and hire rooms in which to live until the White House could be got ready. He could draw on no Party funds, no “soft money,” indeed no money of any kind other than his own pocketbook.

We certainly cannot get back to that pristine system, but recognition that the current system imperils American democracy keeps raising the idea of reform. The current effort has been mounted by Senators John McCain (Republican) and Russ Feingold (Democrat) and by Representatives Christopher Shays (Republican) and Martin Meehan (Democrat) to ban large campaign contributions known as “soft money.” The issue they addressed is theoretically simple: there should be a limit on the amount of money that can be donated in large amounts, that is mainly by special interests. But a three-judge panel has ruled that even weak restrictions on campaign contributions are unconstitutional because they violate “free speech.” Messrs. McCain, Feingold, Shays and Meehan have indicated that they will appeal to the Supreme Court, but at present there are few restraints on buying favor. So sordid is the relationship between candidates and donors that Senator Zell Miller described his feeling on leaving fund raising sessions as “like a cheap prostitute who’d had a busy day.”

However he feels, no man arrives at the presidency without obligations to the people who funded his campaign. As elections have become more and more expensive, these individuals and groups have become a sort of hidden or parallel government. Some are rewarded with appointments to prestigious office while others press to achieve satisfaction of their special interests. The Bush administration catered to both. President Bush received \$100,000 each from some 500 “Friends of Bush” in his 2000 campaign; some of these people became ambassadors and others cabinet secretaries.

More significant for the country was the policy payback. None was more important than the plan to reduce taxes on corporate dividends and capital gains. Shortly after taking office, the administration pushed through a \$1.3 trillion ten-year tax reduction and then began organizing support for further cuts aggregating over \$726 billion. The cuts were designed to favor the wealthy and particularly Bush’s major supporters. According to the Internal Revenue Service, 70% of tax payers would not benefit from the second round of cuts whereas the top three officers of America’s one hundred largest corporations would each get nearly half a million dollars.<sup>7</sup>

To implement his program, Bush had first to take over the key offices of government. That is, he had to replace the senior presidential appointees of the previous administration with his own men. The head of the “transition team” was his Vice president-elect, Dick Cheney.

Cheney had wide government experience. He had served for 6 terms as a congressman from Wyoming; he also served Richard Nixon as deputy White House counsel, Gerald Ford as chief of staff and the first George Bush as Secretary of Defense. In each of these assignments, Cheney supported the extreme right wing of the Republican Party. During the interval of Democratic Party supremacy under Bill Clinton, he became chief executive officer of the energy-related company, Haliburton, from which he still receives in “deferred compensation” between \$100,000 and \$1 million yearly.

As head of Bush’s transition team, Cheney oversaw the placement of like-minded Republicans in key positions, particularly in the Defense Department, the State Department, the Justice Department and the National Security Council. Donald Rumsfeld, with whom Cheney had served in the Nixon White House, was to be Secretary of Defense; General Colin Powell, former chief-of-staff, was to be Secretary of State; John Ashcroft, a self-proclaimed evangelist, former governor of Missouri and senator, was to be Attorney General. A number of other men and women came from senior positions in industry and finance.

More important than some cabinet-level appointments was the next layer of officials. Many key positions went to what Ari Shavit of the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* described as “a small group of 25 or 30 neoconservatives, almost all of them Jewish, almost all of them intellectuals.”

These “Neo-Conservatives” appear to have been affected by three sources of inspiration: in their youth, many had been influenced by the remnants of the Trotskyite Communist movement; as they got older, they jumped completely across the political spectrum from the radical left to the radical right. In the jump, they retained a commitment to a version of Trotsky’s notion of “permanent revolution” in the guise of permanent (and preëemptive) war. As one member of the group, former CIA director James Woolsey, put it, “This fourth world war, I think, will last considerably longer than either World Wars I or II did for us. Hopefully, not the full four-plus decades of the Cold War.”<sup>8</sup>

The second influence came from the work of a little-known professor of political science at the University of Chicago where several had studied. Leo Strauss, a German émigré, excited (and flattered) his protégés by his belief that he had found hidden meanings in classical texts that could be understood only by a small elite, namely them.<sup>9</sup> He also justified “the natural right of the stronger” which they translated, later, into the notion that America had the right and obligation to suppress any state that could challenge it.

In addition to the commitment to permanent war and belief that they formed a small cabal, an esoteric elite directing a policy of unilateral force, the group is motivated by an affinity bordering on patriotism to Israel. They were inspired by Vladimir Jabotinsky who in the 1930s advocated “muscular Zionism.” Picked up by the extreme right, the Likud party that grew out of the terrorist organizations Irgun and Stern, muscular Zionism is now personified by Israeli Prime Ariel [Arik] Sharon. Several of the Neo-Conservatives have acted as his advisers.

The Neo-Conservatives have formed an interlocking series of memberships in pro-Israel, well-financed, politically-engaged “think tanks” such as the American Enterprise Institute, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Who are these Neo-Conservatives and what positions do they now hold? Paul Wolfowitz became the key official of the Defense Department and along with Richard Perle, appointed chairman of the influential Defense Policy Board,<sup>10</sup> was the principal architect of the Bush administration’s international policy.

Other members include Douglas Feith who became the third highest official of the Pentagon and Stephen Cambone, under-secretary of defense for intelligence. John R. Bolton was appointed under secretary of state and Richard Haass was made director of the State Department’s equivalent to a general staff; Lewis Libby became chief of staff to Vice President Cheney while Elliot Abrams (who was convicted of the felony of lying to Congress but was pardoned by the first President Bush) was put in charge of the Middle East at the National Security Council. James Woolsey, former CIA director, and the Afghan-American Zalmay Khalilzad, sometime adviser to the government of Israel and head of the Pentagon transition team under Cheney, have taken on occasional assignments. Others like William Kristol have remained outside government but are active supporters in the press.

One of the most significant members of the group is paradoxically the least known. As director of the “Office of Special Plans,”<sup>11</sup> created by Secretary Rumsfeld when neither the CIA nor the Defense Intelligence Agency, despite pressure placed upon their professional analysts,<sup>12</sup> found his policies justified by the facts, Abram Shulsky provided the justification. He proclaimed “that Saddam Hussein had close ties to Al Qaeda, and that Iraq had an enormous arsenal of chemical, biological, and possibly even nuclear weapons that threatened the region and, potentially, the United States.” None of this has proven to be true, but it certainly encouraged the invasion of Iraq.

The trauma of the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington solidified the power and influence of this group. With the 40 million southern evangelicals in firm support and with the attention and ambition of the business community fixed on getting the administration to cut taxes, the Neo-Conservatives had an opportunity to implement their long-held ideas. They alone appeared to have a clear and available policy.

As a sophisticated political commentator with wide experience in international affairs, former Under Secretary of State David Newsom, wrote, “What we have seen in the last two years is a largely peaceful coup d’état. In the classic pattern of a coup, a small, disciplined, ideological group has seized the reins of power. The executive and the military establishment, wrapping the group’s members in the flag to do so. For the moment, at least, a majority of the public seems to support this and Congress has been sidelined...They have created an atmosphere of intimidation on the basis of patriotism with the aim of muting criticism and contrary views.”<sup>13</sup>

Muting criticism and contrary views has been carried beyond government into the public by another member of the Neo-Conservatives.<sup>14</sup> As head of the Middle East Forum, Daniel Pipes has mounted a venture called “Campus Watch” to encourage faculty members and students to report on the speech, teaching or political action of 1,400 professors and the several thousand students of Middle East studies in American universities so that dossiers can be developed on them.<sup>15</sup>

The McCarthyite scheme Pipes began has now been taken up in an even more frightening form by Republican Senator Rick Santorum. Senator Santorum plans to introduce a bill that would cut federal funding for thousands of colleges and universities that permit teachers, students and student organizations to criticize Israeli policies. Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas wants to go even further, to create what would amount to an ideological police force, a federal commission, to investigate what it loosely terms anti-Semitism.

Such moves are bound to create, as did the earlier McCarthyism, an atmosphere of fear, mutual suspicion and the loss of the spirit of free inquiry which has been the pride and hallmark of the American academic world.

With the Democratic Party leaders intimidated and the public in support, the Bush administration is now shifting its focus from Iraq to the campaign for reëlection. The main elements and timing of the campaign are already evident, but to understand the events to come, it is necessary to focus on a new breed of American political man, the campaign “minder” who specializes in techniques to manipulate the public and so to deliver electoral victory to his client. Unlike the Neo-Conservatives, he is not concerned with policy or ideology but only with winning. Several such men have come to the fore in the last decade but none has achieved the reach and power of the man who has been called President Bush’s “brain,” Karl Rove. Anyone who wishes to understand the Bush administration must begin with him.

Rove joined forces with Bush when he was running for governor of Texas against the very popular incumbent, Ann Richardson. Unlike the candidate who usually tries to appear above “dirty tricks” and smear tactics in order to convince the public that he is worthy of governing it, the political action handler has nothing to lose and everything to gain by doing whatever it takes to get his man to win. Rove’s contribution to Bush’s successful campaign in Texas was mainly to spread the rumor that Ann Richardson was a lesbian.

Rove's strategy for the 2004 presidential election is already clear: George Bush is a wartime president, in the midst of a desperate struggle against the evil forces of terrorism. Not to support him is unpatriotic. The economy will shortly improve as the tax cut takes hold.

The campaign essentially began when Bush, decked out as a fighter pilot, flew out on May 3 to the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln off the California coast in a carefully orchestrated television "photo opportunity" to declare the Iraq campaign a complete success and welcome home his victorious troops. The emotional high point will be orchestrated by his speech accepting the Republican Party nomination on September 2, 2004 after which he will participate in the ceremonies commemorating the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center.

Will Rove's campaign give Bush victory in November 2004? It looks highly likely. I can see only two dangers to it: the first could be a significant rise in the number of American casualties in overseas military actions. So far neither Afghanistan nor Iraq produced enough American casualties to catch the American imagination in the way Vietnam did. A massive increase in guerrilla operations against the Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan or a failure in operations in the Philippines, where American troops are already engaged, or in Syria, where they may be, is unlikely at least in time to affect the 2004 elections.

The second would be a further acceleration of the downturn of the American economy. The Bush administration is the first since President Herbert Hoover's that has witnessed a loss in the number of jobs available in the economy. The official unemployment rate of 6% does not take into account people who have given up looking for employment. These changes together with bankruptcies of large companies and the decline of the stock market have cut into pensions and savings and endangered mortgages and other obligations for the middle class. Meanwhile, public services are under great fiscal pressure. As Washington state governor Gary Locke, facing a \$2.5 billion budget deficit, said on January 28, 2003, "We're being forced to cut vital services, from police to fire to health care."

In conclusion, it is clear that the political landscape of America is undergoing a glacial change; countervailing forces have been swept under the bewildering, massive and rapid flow of events; few citizens appear to have the opportunity, energy or concern to keep themselves fully informed; the government does not help them to meet this fundamental obligation of citizenship; and, even if the drift of events ultimately founders on unacceptable military cost and painful domestic failure, nothing is likely, I believe, to derail President Bush's march toward reelection in 2004.

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<sup>1</sup> *The New York Times* (November 30, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Norman Corwin, *Trivializing American: The Triumph of Mediocrity*; Paul Fussell: *BAD or The Dumbing of America*; Allan Bloom: *The Closing of the American Mind: How Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*.

<sup>3</sup> The Berlin newspaper *Die Tageszeitung* of December 19, 2002 published a partial list of the secret suppliers. For the German text see <http://www.taz.de/pt/2002/12/19/a0012.nf/text> Also see *The Washington Post* of December 30, 2002. Three quarters of the 12,000 pages released by the Iraqi government, particularly those dealing with procurement from Western countries, were excised from the report given to the UN.

<sup>4</sup> Numerous other (but by no means all) examples are provided by Ray McGovern and David MacMichael of "Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity." May 2, 2003 [rmcgovern@slschool.org](mailto:rmcgovern@slschool.org) The group is made up of former CIA officers.

<sup>5</sup> Although a few newspapers picked up this information, it was generally little mentioned. The best account is in Michael Moore's polemical account, *Stupid Whitemen*. One should not be put off by the folksy style; the book is solidly researched and annotated.

<sup>6</sup> A great deal has been written about him. I find most useful Michael Lind's *Made in Texas: George W. Bush and the Southern Takeover of American Politics* and James Moore and Wayne Slater's *Bush's Brain: How Karl Rove Made George W. Bush Presidential*.

<sup>7</sup> The tax bill is, of course, justified as being a means to stimulate the economy and so to create new jobs, but it is the rare economist who believes either that this will be the effect or that it was the cause.

<sup>8</sup> In a speech to UCLA students on April 2, 2003 as reported by CNN

<sup>9</sup> Such belief has surfaced occasionally since it ascribed to the practice of Pythagoras to communicate "secret doctrines" to his favored disciples. Secret doctrines are known in what is called "Esoteric Buddhism," Shi'a Islam where inner or *batin* interpretations are placed on the text of the Qur'an, and in Cabalistic Judaism.

<sup>10</sup> Perle had been a lobbyist for Israeli weapons manufacturers and still acts as a consultant for private firms doing business with the federal government; he is also a member of the board of the Israeli newspaper, *The Jerusalem Post*.

<sup>11</sup> The best description of this new office, its director and its impact on the traditional intelligence agencies, the CIA and DIA, is Seymour M. Hersh's "Selective Intelligence" in *The New Yorker* of May 12, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Presumably knowing that the results would be unfavorable, the Bush administration did not call upon the CIA Office of National Estimates to produce a "national intelligence estimate" to ascertain the need for, the cost of and the possible benefit from such an action. It is the first administration in half a century to bypass the organization set up to give the government sound, impartial advice on the basis of all sources of information.

<sup>13</sup> Former Under Secretary of State David Newsom.

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<sup>14</sup> Daniel Pipes famously put forward his anti-Semitic prejudices, this time Arab rather than Jew, when he wrote of the “massive immigration of brown-skinned peoples cooking strange foods and not exactly maintaining Germanic standards of hygiene.” [www.danielpipes.org](http://www.danielpipes.org)

<sup>15</sup> [www.campus-watch.org](http://www.campus-watch.org)