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POLITICS AND POLICY**Roots of Iraq Policy Are Tested****Postwar Difficulties Have Put Neoconservatism on the Line**

By **ROBERT S. GREENBERGER**
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WASHINGTON -- President Bush's speech at the American Enterprise Institute's annual black-tie dinner last winter was a triumphant moment for many neoconservatives in the audience. Mr. Bush had "borrowed" a number of them from the institute and put them in high places, he said. And he echoed the neocon belief that reshaping key parts of the world in America's image was the surest way to protect U.S. security.

Sitting in the cavernous ballroom of the Washington Hilton hotel that night, Joshua Muravchik, a neocon thinker who wrote a book about exporting American democracy, was elated. "Here is the president delivering sentence after sentence that I agreed with and couldn't have said better myself," he recalls thinking.

But now the glow of that February night is gone. Remaking Iraq in America's image has turned out to be a far more dangerous and costly task than many of the neocons predicted. And neocon thinkers, who rose to prominence when Mr. Bush embraced their doctrine after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and provided much of the justification for the Iraq war, are taking much of the blame for the problems there.

Mr. Muravchik concedes that for himself and his fellow neocons, "there's a tremendous amount on the line," in Iraq. "If this goes wrong, of course, we will be, to some degree, discredited. Justifiably so. We put forward these ideas and they're really being put to the test."

He acknowledges that "some of us may have been too glib about an 'easy liberation,'" but says he still thinks the occupation will succeed if given enough chance. He is especially worried, he says, that there will be "tremendous pressure" on Mr. Bush, both internationally and from "his political handlers" to reduce the U.S. military presence and U.S. political ambitions there. "I think the president is pretty stalwart, but I think there is a danger that the [Iraq] policy could abort."

LEFT TO RIGHT

Joshua Muravchik's path from socialist to defender of President Bush's global campaign against terrorism traces the evolution of the neocon movement.

There will be more tough scrutiny next week, when the Senate Foreign Relations committee plans to hold a hearing on the future U.S. involvement in Iraq. Among the issues the panel's chairman, Sen. Richard Lugar, an Indiana Republican, plans to probe is whether democracy can be implanted at all in Iraq and the rest of the Middle

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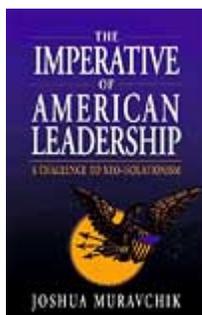
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Have recent events made you more supportive or less supportive of French and German reluctance to enter the war in Iraq? Participate in the [Question of the Day](#)².

**IRAQ IN TRANSITION**

• See [continuing coverage](#)³ of developments in Iraq.

- **Born:** Sept. 17, 1947 in New York City.
- **Childhood:** Family lived in rent-controlled apartment in Washington Heights; father was a leader of the Socialist Party U.S.A. and director of the leftist Jewish Labor Committee.
- **Activism:** Enters City College of New York, a hotbed of left-wing student radicalism, in 1965; becomes National Chairman of the Young People's Socialist League in 1968
- **Falling out:** Disenchanted with the Democrats' dovish foreign policy, joins Coalition for a Democratic Majority, a neocon Washington think tank, in 1974; works on Henry "Scoop" Jackson presidential campaign alongside future neocon luminaries Richard Perle and Jeanne Kirkpatrick, in 1976.
- **Crossing over:** After graduating with a PhD in Government from Georgetown in 1984, begins his long affiliation with conservative American Enterprise Institute, where he is currently a Resident Scholar
- **Prelude to war:** Lays out the tenets of neocon foreign policy in a 1991 book (pictured); writes a 1997 Commentary magazine article advocating support of a guerilla war to oust Iraq's Saddam Hussein.



East -- a central neocon belief.

The anger on Capitol Hill was already white hot at a Senate Armed Services committee hearing last week, where Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, the administration's leading neocon, was grilled on Iraq. Mr. Wolfowitz defended the war with classic neocon rhetoric, comparing the struggle to "World War II and the Cold War. ... The stakes are enormous and our freedom is threatened." Sen. Carl Levin, the committee's ranking Democrat, wasn't persuaded, questioning Mr. Wolfowitz on his prewar predictions that Iraqi oil money, and not American tax dollars, would pay for reconstruction. "Talk about rosy scenarios," he declared.

Of course, the neocons have been tested before. In fact, their name -- neoconservatives, or "new conservatives" -- was pinned on them during old battles in the Democratic Party from which they originally hailed. In addition to Mr. Wolfowitz, other neocons holding prominent positions in the current administration include Douglas Feith, an undersecretary of defense who oversaw the postwar planning for Iraq, Elliott Abrams, who leads Middle East policy at the National Security Council, and Richard Perle, who is chairman of a key Pentagon advisory board.

But Mr. Muravchik is typical of the majority of neocons who labor less visibly outside government but have still provided key support and counsel for Mr. Bush: writing, lecturing, debating and appearing regularly on talk shows to spread the neocon word.

In the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, for instance, the State Department dispatched Mr. Muravchik, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, on a six-nation European tour to argue the case for toppling Saddam Hussein. One evening he sat in the bare-bones television studio of Romania's Realitatea TV speaking with a talk-show host known locally as the Larry King of Romania. Mr. Muravchik argued that the coming conflict was a vital part of the global war on terrorism. But host Ion Christoiu, like many Europeans, was skeptical, wondering if it wasn't all about oil. "If we wanted to invade a country to steal its oil, we would do Venezuela," Mr. Muravchik said, using one of his stock lines. "It's got plenty of oil, it's nearby and it doesn't have an army that can defend it."

With the war over, these days Mr. Muravchik is regularly called on to defend the U.S. occupation. In an interview this month with Japan's Nikkei publications, Mr. Muravchik explained current U.S. troubles as all part of a learning process. He noted that the U.S. had made foolish mistakes when it occupied Japan after World War II, including trying to replace Japanese traditional dances with American square dancing. But the occupation ended successfully with Japan emerging as a strong democracy.

Selling a Republican administration's turn to war may seem a strange task for somebody like Mr. Muravchik, the son and grandson of socialists, who began his political life at age 10, marching for civil rights and school integration under the red banner of the Young People's Socialist League.

But his experience illustrates the journey from far left to right that is typical of many of the neocons.

Like other neocons, Mr. Muravchik considers the 1972 presidential campaign of Henry "Scoop" Jackson the seminal experience of his political career. Sen. Jackson, a Cold War Democrat from Washington state, was defeated in his primary bid by the dovish Sen. George McGovern of South Dakota. In the view of the neocons, Sen. McGovern's candidacy reflected the ascendancy in the Democratic Party of the "counterculture" of antiwar protests, drugs and a moral laxity they despised. Most of them abandoned the party soon after.

The neocons' fortunes have waxed and waned many times since. They were notably not part of the inner circle in the first Bush administration. But candidate George W. Bush made Mr. Wolfowitz an early and prominent campaign adviser, opening the door to neocon thinking and influence. That influence increased markedly in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks and Mr. Bush's decision to confront not just al Qaeda but an entire "axis of evil" around the world.

Aides say Mr. Bush remains committed to that vision and will stay the course in Iraq. But with the occupation taking so much time and resources, these days the White House appears to be toning down some of its rhetoric, if not its animosity, toward other favorite neocon targets including North Korea, Syria and Iran.

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