

THE NEW IVORY TOWERS: THINK TANKS, STRATEGIC STUDIES AND “COUNTERREALISM”

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That’s not the way the world really works anymore.... We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality — judiciously, as you will — we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.

Anonymous Bush administration official¹

I said, why don’t we get together and call ourselves an institute?

Paul Simon, “Graceland”

In his 2001 attack on Middle Eastern studies in the United States, Martin Kramer provided a provocative if superficial institutional history of academic area studies.² He wrote *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America* as a scholar in residence at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), one of several ideologically narrow think tanks that have colonized the intellectual terrain first opened up by interdisciplinary area studies, providing policy recommendations, media performances and even intelligence channels for U.S. interventions in the Middle East. Kramer’s accusation of an academic “culture of irrelevance” is ironic considering that the think tanks systematically foster what might be called a “culture of counterrealism,” with arguably disas-

trous results on the ground. For all their bellicose claims to the contrary, privately funded think tanks have - à la Ibn Khaldun – occupied the ivory towers of area studies and adopted an even more otherworldly culture than they accuse their academic colleagues of indulging in.³ From the RAND Corporation to the American Enterprise Institute’s Project for the New American Century, these institutions have substituted strategy for discipline, ideological litmus tests for peer review, tactics and technology for cultures and history, policy for research and pedagogy, and hypotheticals for empiricals.

The success of these institutions in drowning out the voices of academic Middle East studies has contributed to a culture in which serious inquiry into the real world is pushed aside in favor of fear,

imagination and faith. It is a culture in which investigation into the historical background of the crimes of September 11, 2001, is systematically avoided.⁴ It is the culture in which the Iraq War was justified by a series of lies and forgeries. It is the culture in which intelligence professionals from Coleen Rowley to Valerie Plame are sidelined, in which torture is seen as a defensible and logical means of intelligence gathering. It is a culture in which academic researchers are silenced in the name of free speech. It is a culture in which the mainstream media have forsaken their constitutional role of checking government. It is a culture of looming logical inconsistencies in which the public is assured by the chattering elites that no price is too high to pay for the illusion of Iraqi freedom, while no American political freedom is too dear to be sacrificed to the illusion of homeland security. As defenders of the Bush policy assert, this is far too much to lay at the doorstep of the philosopher Leo Strauss and the simplistic concept of the noble lie.⁵

The current generation of Middle East think tanks and the strategic discourse that emanates copiously from them can be traced back to the Cold War. Strategic-studies think tanks functioned as incubators for hypothetical responses to hypothetical scenarios by scientists largely immune to the intimacy with the object of study that flourished in the postwar academic landscape. By steady work on the periphery of the academy and outside, they were able to quietly build a base from which to reclaim the territory opened up by area studies for interdisciplinary work.

The takeover of area studies by the field now known as strategic studies was a paradigm shift on the order of Edward

Said's critique of orientalism. Middle East scholars should investigate the classic writings of Albert Wohlstetter, the nuclear theorist who founded the field.⁶ Originally conceived of as "opposed-system analysis," strategic studies may or may not observe disciplinary protocols, but it generally eschews the intimacies, local knowledge, and empathetic solidarities that thrive in academic Middle Eastern studies. Strategic studies and think tanks spend virtually no energy on pedagogy, and harness for ideologically driven policy and research the same desire to win and dominate that propels talented people into law, business and sports.

From its inception in the 1950s RAND Corporation papers of Albert Wohlstetter, the paradigm of strategic studies has evolved in and moved through a series of environments from the office of Democratic cold warrior U.S. Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson, to Team B at the CIA, to the decentered A team in the Reagan administration, to the Office of the Vice President and the Department of Defense's Office of Special Plans and their satellite Middle East think tanks in the current Bush administration. What emerged — the "clash of civilizations" — is an uncomfortable blend of grand strategy, low tactics, imaginative gymnastics, ideologically motivated private funding (on average 10 times greater per institution than the total public investment in Middle Eastern Title 6 centers), and a studied avoidance of Middle Eastern human realities. Thus the policy-making think tanks and the strategic studies mentality that they insulate are guilty of a far more dangerous disregard for reality than Kramer's alleged "culture of irrelevance." They have become the new ivory towers

producing cheap, flawed policy that makes the traditional academy — populated by interactive, overworked, competitive, scheming, inefficient purveyors of theoretical cogs and widgets — look very much like the real world.

Martin Kramer's attack on area studies, Daniel Pipes' ongoing attempt to intimidate through Campus Watch⁷, David Horowitz's campaign for "campus diversity," the David Project's attempt to smear the Columbia University Middle East studies faculty, and the righteous monopoly by neoconservative strategists, terrorism experts and their allies in the talking-head market amount to a failed attempt at pre-emption of one of the main camps of pragmatic realism: Middle Eastern studies post-Edward Said.

Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle have pointed out clearly⁸ that the direct and influential link of contemporary Washington to 1960s Chicago is not through Leo Strauss but through Albert Wohlstetter. Even as he identifies Wohlstetter as the more relevant figure, Wolfowitz summarizes Wohlstetter's main contribution as the "recognition of the importance of accurate weapons." While important, this downplays the major contribution of Wohlstetter's intellectual legacy: the foundation of a paradigm of knowledge production that has superseded, in terms of influence over academic and policy circles, both the paradigm of orientalism critiqued by Said and the paradigm of area studies critiqued by Kramer. In strategic studies, the only knowledge that is valued is that which seems to promote victory. In the old orientalism, one objectified the people one studied generally. In strategic studies, one assumes a pointed dynamic adversarial relationship.

Albert Wohlstetter, as a RAND Corporation mathematician in the 1950s, thought about the strategy of the nuclear first strike before embarking on a long career at the University of Chicago.⁹ He mentored Wolfowitz, Perle, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan and Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad and Iraqi National Congress head Ahmad Chalabi. He provided the link between Wolfowitz and Perle and their first practical policy experience in Sen. "Scoop" Jackson's office, and then helped them organize the Team B experiment with classified information and nuclear strategy. The key elements of Wohlstetter's thought and method, presented in the bewildering language of bombers, missiles and bases, were, in the words of Khurram Hussein,

probabilistic reasoning and mathematical modeling that utilized systems analysis and game theory, signature methodologies developed at Rand. The designs or intentions of the enemy were presumed, or presented as a future possibility. This methodology exploited to the hilt the iron law of zero margin of error that was the asymptotic ideal for nuclear strategy. Even a small probability of vulnerability, or a potential future vulnerability, could be presented as a virtual state of national emergency.¹⁰

Uncertainty was the enemy, and the perceived consequences of failure to prepare for all eventualities were apocalyptic in scale, although survivable in theory. In his seminal essay "The Delicate Balance of Terror," which both Wolfowitz and Perle have cited for its transformative effect on their young minds, Wohlstetter addresses not the now-familiar concept of terrorist political violence, but rather the

nuclear brinkmanship of the Cold War era and the possibility of nuclear confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. In the essay, Wohlstetter argues against the conventional wisdom of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) as an effective deterrent to nuclear war. Deterrence, Wohlstetter reasoned, is not automatic due to numerous barriers to a successful response to a surprise nuclear attack, and therefore planning based on that premise is flawed.¹¹ Because nuclear war is survivable, planning must prepare effective responses for surprise attacks, rather than avoiding thoughts of the unthinkable. Furthermore, Wohlstetter derided the idea that stumbling and cooperative Soviets would produce what he called “Western-preferred Soviet responses.” The United States must be prepared for a devastating attack by coldly calculating and ruthlessly efficient Soviet planners. “We must expect a vast increase in the weight of attack which the Soviets can deliver with little warning, and the growth of a significant Russian capability for an essentially warningless attack.”¹² This framework does not reduce the “target culture” to a lifeless, passive entity, as Said asserted the old orientalism did, but rather imbues it with a rigorously imagined aggressiveness.

Wohlstetter argued that the United States must be prepared for devious and improbable enemy moves, and that the logic required was not a cultural logic — that of the Soviet character analysis or Kremlinology practiced by intelligence agencies — but an understanding of probability, uncertainty and surprise. To maintain deterrence, he argued, the United States needed overwhelming systemic superiority. The heavy investment in

diverse weapons systems that he advocated would allow survival of a surprise Soviet attack, but would require steady peacetime commitment to developing weapons systems that could survive enemy attack; decision-making power capable of regrouping and functioning after a surprise enemy attack; and the ability to reach enemy territory, evade the enemy’s defenses and hit enemy targets in the aftermath of an attack. “Prizes for a retaliatory capability,” he wrote, “are not distributed for getting over one of these jumps. A system must get over all six.”¹³ The essay trails off into particulars of 1960s weapons systems and the geography of U.S. bases around the Soviet Union, but the point that so grabbed the attention of Wolfowitz and Perle had been made. Expect and prepare for the worst case imaginable.

Paul Wolfowitz, growing intellectually away from Leo Strauss, met Wohlstetter at the University of Chicago in 1965. Wohlstetter asked him at a faculty-student tea if he knew Jack Wolfowitz, with whom Wohlstetter had studied mathematics. With that exchange, Wolfowitz found a new father figure, who, unlike the elder Wolfowitz, saw clearly the nexus between the real science of mathematics and the soft science of politics.¹⁴ Paul Wolfowitz would write his dissertation for Wohlstetter on the question of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East; it took the form of an extended argument against an Israeli bomb. After the Israeli development of a nuclear program (was this perhaps when Wolfowitz was mugged by reality?), his thought seems to have taken a hard-headed strategic tack toward total domination of adversaries through weapons systems and information advantage.

Richard Perle was even younger and

more impressionable than Wolfowitz when he encountered his intellectual mentor in California in the early sixties:

It was Albert Wohlstetter's swimming pool in the Hollywood Hills. Albert's daughter Joan was a classmate at Hollywood High School. We sat next to each other in Spanish class. She passed, I didn't, but she invited me over for a swim, and her dad was there. We got into a conversation about strategy, a subject I really didn't know much about. Albert gave me an article to read; that was typical of Albert. Sitting there at the swimming pool I read the article, which was a brilliant piece of exposition and obviously so. We started talking about it and... It was called "The Delicate Balance of Terror." It became quite a famous article in foreign affairs, and it was a way of looking at the strategic relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union...¹⁵

Further explaining Wohlstetter's role as a mentor, Perle elaborated, "It happens that a number of people who like to regard themselves as protégés of Albert's can probably be described as hawks, but it isn't so much that Albert was a hawk, it's just that Albert was extraordinarily rigorous. For Albert, it was just impermissible to assume anything."¹⁶ Both students would move away from the particulars of weapons systems and zero margins of error, but the legacy of rigorous consideration or dogged anticipation of every possibility of confrontation would be revived decades later.

Albert Wohlstetter was part of a team. While he peered into the future, trying to chart every possible outcome of conflict,

his partner studied past attacks for lessons. His wife Roberta was a historian and also a student of surprise. Roberta Wohlstetter's work *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* is a historian's fleshing out in case-study form of the informational economy of a successful first strike, in this case that of Japan on the United States.¹⁷ Her main contribution is that "we failed to anticipate Pearl Harbor not for want of the relevant materials but because of a plethora of irrelevant ones."¹⁸ "There is a difference, then, between having a signal available somewhere in the heap of irrelevancies and perceiving it as a warning; and there is also a difference between perceiving it as a warning and acting or getting action on it. These distinctions, simple as they are, illuminate the obscurity shrouding this moment in history."¹⁹ Her work stands as a counterargument to those who assert that the breaking of the Japanese diplomatic code (known as Magic) and access to information on the coming attack on Pearl Harbor meant treacherous complicity by the Roosevelt administration.

Roberta Wohlstetter argued that it is banal aspects of information perception, rather than conspiracy, stupidity or negligence, that explain the surprise at Pearl Harbor and the difference between the clarity available after the fact and the obscurity before the fact. Paralleling Albert's list of barriers to successful retaliation, she presented a list of barriers to the perception of warning signals. First, like Albert, she cited the human tendency to see only what one prefers to see: "Human beings have a stubborn attachment to old beliefs and an equally stubborn resistance to new material that will upset them." There is a reluctance to expect and therefore to accept indications of the worst.

Secondly, the clear signal of intention is embedded in noise. “Even at its normal level, noise presents problems in distraction... in addition to the natural clatter of useless information and competing signals.” Roberta cites other factors that raise the confusing noise level: false alarms, sustained tension, secrecy of the plan, spoofs and false traffic, bureaucracy, quick changes in plan and last minute reversibility by the opponent.²⁰ As if chiding her husband’s war on uncertainty, she ends her work with the warning, “We have to accept the fact of uncertainty and learn to live with it. No Magic [sic.], in code or otherwise, will provide certainty. Our plans must work without it.”²¹ The management of noise — irrelevant signals — would be the key to how those plans would work.

The Wohlstetter partnership brought together Roberta’s insights about barriers to communication and Albert’s focus on barriers to accurate and effective strikes to codify a series of obstacles to accurate strikes and responses, and to the effective transmission of signals. This checklist would be important in future projects of their protégés. Surprise, uncertainty, wishful thinking and noise were all to be avoided. Better yet, they were to be managed, avoided by the home team, augmented for the opponent. It is easy to mistake this for the legendary Straussian illusion of the “noble lie”; but it is a far wider project of investment in systems and information management that cannot be reduced to a single falsehood or to mere propaganda campaigns. Together, Albert and Roberta inspired students to learn to strike accurately in halls of mirrors and echo chambers, in which the truth is confusingly presented and represented. Without Roberta’s work on noise, Albert’s

work looks uninteresting to Middle East scholars. But, of course, everyone tends to forget the wife.

All except Wolfowitz. In the summer of 2001, just two months before September 11, Paul Wolfowitz summarized Roberta Wohlstetter’s work on Pearl Harbor for a commencement address at West Point. “Interestingly,” he told the graduates, “that ‘surprise attack’ was preceded by an astonishing number of unheeded warnings and missed signals.... Surprise happens so often that it’s surprising that we’re still surprised by it.” He then reiterated Albert Wohlstetter’s argument against complacency and called upon America to “replace a poverty of expectations with an anticipation of the unfamiliar and unlikely.”²² In May of that same year, Wolfowitz’s boss, the new defense secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, had distributed copies of *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* to the members of the House Armed Services Committee at a closed-door session in which he emphasized the importance of preparing for the unexpected. The murderous attacks of September 11 would validate the Bush administration’s “new” Cold War lessons.²³

In the 1960s, Wohlstetter was a colleague of Leo Strauss at the University of Chicago, and he sent his protégés Wolfowitz and Perle to Senator “Scoop” Jackson’s office in 1969 to “draft a report on the current debate shaping up in the Senate over ballistic missile defense.”²⁴ The eleven years that Perle spent with his new mentor, “the senator from Boeing,” saw the strategic mentality applied to a number of issues. Scoop Jackson embodied the neocon prototype, what Irving Kristol has called a liberal mugged by reality. Jackson was liberal on domestic,

constitutional and spending matters but paranoid on matters of foreign policy, particularly concerning the Soviet Union. According to Perle, "Scoop disagreed profoundly with Kissinger's effort to draw the Soviet Union into a relationship characterized by many interactions that together would, in the Kissinger theory, tie the Soviets down." In the developing rivalry between *realpolitik* and counterrealism, engagement won out over the attempt to preserve a rigorously imagined adversary, but Jackson's opposition to the SALT I agreement resulted in the amendment that attempted to preempt future agreements seen as favoring an asymmetrical status quo. Interest in the Jackson years has recently been piqued by the declassification in 2004 of papers from the Scoop Jackson library archives in Washington state.²⁵ The congressional office, from which one could target policy obliquely from the sidelines in relative obscurity, shared characteristics with the think tanks of the future.

The 1970s offshoot of the embryonic neoconservative movement was an experiment called Team B, which second-guessed George H.W. Bush's CIA. This, as much as the RAND Corporation and the legislative office, was an ancestor of today's think tank — a temporary institution, informal, beyond accountability, with a specific tactical role to play, freedom to fail, and no long-term institutional interests. History and politics were reincorporated into the imagination of opposed systems to buttress the somewhat counterintuitive and dry anti-détente stance. Team B, selected and advised by both Wolfowitz and Perle, was headed by Richard Pipes, a displaced Polish Jew who knew very well the dark side of the culture and history of Nazi Germany and the USSR.

Sen. Jackson's aide Dorothy Fosdick was impressed by Dr. Pipes's uncompromising academic stance on the impossibility of convergence between the Soviet mission and America's destiny, so when Jackson needed substantive support for his opposition to détente, he called on Pipes to testify at a March 1970 hearing on the proposed SALT treaty. "In my testimony," wrote Pipes, "I tried to get across that what mattered were not the capabilities of weapons but the psychology and political mentality of the people wielding them. Communists could not accept the notion of parity basic to American nuclear strategy because to do so would create a military equilibrium, and a military equilibrium meant that they could no longer count on victory in the global conflict which served as justification for both their dictatorship and the poverty in which they kept their subjects."²⁶ In Pipes' thinking, we see the marriage of early Cold War "clash of civilizations" theory with the systems assessment brought to Jackson's office by Wohlstetter, Wolfowitz and Perle. Pipes subsequently became a consultant to Jackson's Committee on National Security and International Operations, publishing a key paper, "Some Operational Principles of Soviet Foreign Policy," which combined attention to strategy with the historian's perspective on culture. Between 1973 and 1975 he was attached to the Stanford Research Institute (SRI), which had a Center for Strategic Studies in Washington, where he studied Soviet grand strategy, a subject unpopular in academic centers and the State Department.

SRI's director, Richard Foster, recruited Pipes in the summer of 1976 to head Team B. This experimental body had been envisioned by Wohlstetter in the early

seventies. Under Pipes's direction, three B teams of "outside experts" competed with three A teams from the CIA to interpret highly classified data on Soviet weapons systems. The new CIA chief, George H.W. Bush, agreed to the experiment even as the Ford administration fought off the Reagan campaign in the 1976 primaries. Discourse on a dangerous and aggressive Soviet buildup, which would become standard fare in the 1980s, was first leaked to the Committee for the Present Danger from the Team B experiment.

When released through a Freedom of Information Act to journalists at the

Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, the Team B papers were found to be a systematic exaggeration of the existing Soviet threat. Reflecting Pipes' inclination away from systems-data analysis to prewar notions of culture and

psychology, Team B interestingly accused the CIA of focusing too heavily on technical or hard data rather than contemplating Soviet strategic objectives in terms of the conception of "strategy" as well as Soviet history, the structure of Soviet society, and "the pronouncements of Soviet leaders." In Anne Cahn's words, "Team B found the Soviet Union immune from Murphy's law."²⁷ Team B's failure to find a Soviet non-acoustic anti-submarine system "was evidence that there could well be one." Team B's interpretation rested on the false premise of a "large and expanding Soviet GNP," which was illusory.²⁸ In another

telling remark, Pipes claimed that "the Soviet leaders did not think in the stark dichotomies common to our culture (war vs. peace, confrontation vs. détente) but dialectically."²⁹ He made such broad statements as this: "Soviet leaders are first and foremost offensively rather than defensively minded.... In sum, the issue was one of understanding a different culture."³⁰ Kissinger's response to the revelation of the Team B project — that the Team B report was "aimed at sabotaging a new treaty limiting arms" — and call for a "rational" debate on the issue of nuclear strategy was dismissed by Pipes,

who added sarcastically, "rational presumably being defined as concurring with (Kissinger's) view that it was irrational to strive for nuclear superiority."³¹

In the Reagan administration, the principals of Team

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B became, as it were, the A Team, scattered in mid-level positions throughout the bureaucracy. Wolfowitz was an assistant secretary of state, Pipes served on the National Security Council staff, and Perle was an assistant secretary of defense. On the occasion of Reagan's death, Perle remembered Reagan's "valiant" refusal to abandon the Strategic Defense Initiative even though it crippled the 1986 Reykjavik summit.³² Wolfowitz too waxed eloquent, comparing Reagan's response to the continuing threat of communism to Bush's stance on Islamism, a "different kind of threat,.. a kind of totalitarian ideology that

has more in common with fascism and communism than it does with the religion that it claims to represent but which it really desecrates.”³³ But government service was, ironically, restrictive to the young neoconservatives. After the failure of the Iran-Contra adventure there was far less room for bold and imaginative strategic gambits. Perle would retreat to the lucrative private sector and advisory positions (like the Pentagon’s Defense Policy Board) and Richard Pipes observed that “nine-tenths of government work is a waste of time; one simply spins one’s wheels in place.”³⁴

Even Wolfowitz, who embraced government work into the Bush administration, would eventually be frustrated by the limitations of public accountability on grand strategy. In 1992, as undersecretary of defense for policy, he drafted (with the help of his own protégé, one Irving Lewis Libby) a document that circulated in Dick Cheney’s Defense Department envisioning a one-superpower world. The document, which became known as the “Lone Superpower” plan, was leaked to *The New York Times* “by an official who believes this post-cold-war strategy debate should be carried out in the public domain.” The defense-planning document posited the need for “convincing potential competitors that they need not aspire to a greater role or pursue a more aggressive posture to protect their legitimate interests.” It constituted “a rejection of collective internationalism.” Wolfowitz, largely unknown up to that point, came briefly into the limelight when the “lone superpower” policy paper was vigorously attacked by both the right and left.³⁵ Grand strategy was better carried out in relative obscurity.

Eventually Wolfowitz too moved away

from government and back to mainstream academia as the dean of the Johns Hopkins University’s Paul Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. There he was again on the sidelines and had the distance to observe and learn from the Clinton administration’s foreign-policy successes and blunders.³⁶ But, by and large, academia had changed and was not much more comfortable than government for the radical strategists.

In the 1980s, academic Middle Eastern studies was very much under the influence of Edward Said’s paradigm-shifting critique, *Orientalism*.³⁷ From the perspective of Richard Pipes’s son Daniel, who had just finished a Harvard dissertation that was published as “Slave Soldiers and Islam: The Genesis of a Military System,”³⁸ Edward Said’s broadside was a successful academic nuclear first strike. In the aftermath of Said’s critique, someone like Pipes, Jr., was practically unemployable in the mainstream except at military institutions like the Naval War College. These military colleges only had limited slots for regionally specialized military historians.

The Middle East Center founded by Hamilton Gibb at Harvard combined old orientalism with an interest in modernization theory; for this reason, it was “ground zero” of Said’s impact. When the response to the broad, withering, surprising, but poorly planned Saidian critique came, it was from the pre-modernist historians at Bernard Lewis’s Princeton.³⁹ The experience of Nadav Safran, director of Harvard’s Middle East Center in the early 1980s, drove home the inhospitable nature of post-Saidian Middle East studies, even as the Reagan foreign-policy team was gaining ascendancy in Washington. Safran

came under fire for accepting \$150,000 of CIA funding for a book project on Saudi Arabia and a conference on political Islam.⁴⁰ Harvard's rules prohibited outside sponsors from financing secret research at Harvard, but it was the prevailing climate in the field that to a large extent brought public and professional pressure demanding Safran's resignation.⁴¹ Daniel Pipes, by then a professor of strategy at the Naval War College, was one of the few scholars to attend the controversial conference acknowledging the CIA funding. With the exception of Martin Peretz, the editor of *The New Republic*, Safran's other students would not become public figures for a decade and a half. But, as students of the East and servants of empire, John Abizaid (future head of military operations in Iraq) and Laurie Mylroie, famous for doggedly asserting links between Saddam Hussein and Islamist extremism (in collaboration with *New York Times* journalist Judith Miller), made Edward Said look more like an oracle than a historian.

Another surprising book was circulating at Princeton's Department of Near Eastern Studies in 1979-80: a dog-eared, pirated copy of Ayatollah Khomeini's *Vilayet I-Faqih*.⁴² Even as those who were most invested in an old-fashioned orientalism linked to the U.S. imperial destiny were feeling the heat of political correctness in the academy, the message of Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter was being lived out for those who could perceive the signal through the noise. The shock of the Iranian Islamic revolution was the embodiment of Wohlstetter's warnings. The mainstream diplomatic corps and intelligence agencies seemed never to have seriously considered the possibility of an Islamic revolution because it was improb-

able and unpleasant. Everyone was still busily preparing for the Middle Eastern equivalent of "western-preferred Soviet responses." The signals that were clear in hindsight had been drowned in a sea of noise. The blow to U.S. global interests came out of left field, with the graphic ugliness of the U.S. embassy hostage ordeal.

Even as the threat from the Soviet Union diminished with the Afghan quagmire — also dating from 1979 — and ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the new enemy was clear. Princeton historian Bernard Lewis's career-long suspicions of the Islamic world culminated in their most distilled and pointed form in his 1990 essay in *The Atlantic Monthly*, "The Roots of Muslim Rage."⁴³ The phrase he coined in that essay — the "clash of civilizations" — was picked up by Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington in 1993 for a global theory based on the empirically weak proposition of discrete and oppositional civilizational blocks.⁴⁴ This concept gave theoretical panache to the stereotypes of Muslims and Arabs that continued to circulate in the popular culture and imagination, in spite of Said's highbrow and intellectually challenging attacks on them. It effectively combined Wohlstetter's "opposed systems analysis" — discrete, monolithic players spoiling for a fight — with the simplistic culturalism of the elder Pipes regarding the Russians. Bloodied but not bowed by Said's paradigm shift, validated in their methods and ideologies by the Iranian shock, unjustifiedly self-congratulatory (like the Afghan freedom fighters) about the fall of the Soviet Union, the academic orientalist who had now also effectively been "mugged by reality" would turn their full attention to the Middle

Eastern theater, working in relative obscurity from the sidelines. Daniel Pipes and Bernard Lewis's protégé, Martin Kramer, were preparing to mount a second strike at the Saidian academy. The institutional infrastructure they were building was designed, rather like Wohlstetter's ideal system of military bases around the Soviet Union, to both deter the enemy from a first strike and "to support a counterattack which could blunt the strength of an enemy follow-up attack, and so reduce the damage done...."⁴⁵

For the strategists uncomfortable in government and academia, a better model of institutional intellectual collaboration with policy making and security tactics was available in Israel. In that embattled state, there were few qualms about collaboration between military, security, intelligence, policy making and orientalism. Martin Kramer was Bernard Lewis's student at Princeton and spent two decades as a research associate and director at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle East Studies. Named after the famous Israeli general and politician, the Dayan center is "an interdisciplinary research center devoted to the study of the modern history and contemporary affairs of the Middle East." It was founded in 1983 under the auspices of the Reuven Shiloah Center, named for the founder of the Israeli intelligence services.⁴⁶ Other models may have included Benjamin Netanyahu's Jonathan Institute, a private foundation for the study of terrorism, established in 1979 by the future Likud prime minister and active for the better part of a decade, and the Jewish Institute for National Security Policy, a U.S. "non-profit, non-partisan educational institute dedicated to explaining the need for a prudent national security

policy for the United States" and "addressing the security requirements of both the United States and the State of Israel." It was founded in the aftermath of the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

A range of American Middle East studies centers located outside universities, focused on strategy and policy, and similar in style and orientation to these Israeli institutes began to emerge in the 1980s. The Washington Center for Near East Policy (WINEP), founded in 1985 as an "educational foundation supporting scholarly research and informed debate," maintained a liberal, orientalist, educational cast with key ties to Israel and — later — the Clinton administration. It was from here that Kramer launched his new "Ivory Towers" attack on the field of Middle East studies. Daniel Pipes would make a home in his Middle East Forum, founded in 1990. It formed the far right to WINEP's center right. The Middle East Forum, which worked to "define and promote American interests in the Middle East," was less concerned with education and more overt in its ideological assertiveness. The growth of mini think tanks continued within the major U.S. public-policy organizations. The liberal Brookings Institution, the conservative American Enterprise Institute, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (formerly associated with Georgetown University) and the Hudson Institute (founded by Wohlstetter's strangelovian RAND colleague Herbert Kahn) came later to the field of Middle East studies, anchoring and housing programs that fit within their larger mandates. Each maintains a commitment to Israeli security along with programmatic interests in Arab and Islamic reform, democratization and extremism, and rosters

of staff, governing boards and “experts” which pad cores of neoconservative insiders with outsiders and newcomers.⁴⁷

Middle East think tanks provide institutional affiliations for far more specialists than could be accommodated in traditional academic positions. They provide in-house publishing capabilities and credentialing; their numbers, productions and connections in the media are such that they crowd the media market for Middle East expertise, filling the range from center to far right, often debating each other on the nightly news. There are liberal, conservative and libertarian think tanks. There are educational, policy and security-oriented think tanks. There are even nascent Arab and Islamic think tanks, whose electronic presence is promoted by the older brick-and-mortar institutions through internet links and features. But if the physical think tanks provide shelter, funding and identity for experts outside of academia, the virtual think tank environment allows for the multiplication of institutions or “projects” within existing institutions and a division of labor along the principles outlined by the Wohlstetters: asymmetrical deterrence, noise, attack.

Some, like the Campus Watch offshoot of Daniel Pipes’s Middle East Forum, preemptively attack the potential advocates of cultural and historical approaches in the name of improving area studies and protecting free speech. In effect, Campus Watch, like David Horowitz’s campaign for ‘campus diversity’ and the David Project, appear to be oriented to deterring the surprising rise of a figure on the model of Edward Said, who was able to change the field of area studies, address audiences across the disciplines, and survive decades of academic criticism and ideologically

motivated attack. In its early phase, Campus Watch prepared dossiers on individual professors; following criticism, it toned down its more McCarthyesque practices to institutional monitoring, requests for students to monitor professors on their campuses, and limp but persistent attempts to ridicule or smear high-profile academics.⁴⁸ Campus Watch seems to function — in Wohlstetterian terms — to discourage the academic “enemy” from mounting a first strike or effectively responding to one.

This function was amply demonstrated in the attacks on Dr. Joseph Massad at Columbia University. A bold, critical, sophisticated and productive scholar in the tradition of Edward Said, he was initially targeted by something called the David Project, which solicited denunciations of Massad from Columbia University students, most of whom had not participated in his classes. These denunciations were made into a film which has never been publicly shown. Pipes’ Campus Watch publicized and amplified the baseless accusations of antisemitism and intimidation. Campus Watch followed up with a so-called “Columbia project” designed to pressure the institution associated with this outspoken and gifted scholar through e-mail campaigns and boycotts against critical or dissenting speech. In effect, the think tanks mobilized in apparent support of aggrieved students. If this case was not chilling for some Middle East scholars, it certainly alarmed many of the institutions they work in.⁴⁹

The centrality of noise in distracting the mainstream from the signals that will become clear in hindsight is done by a think tank called MEMRI, the Middle East Media Research Institute. MEMRI is an

“independent, non-partisan, non-profit” tax-deductible-status organization that claims to bridge the language gap between the Middle East and the West with timely translations from the Arabic, Farsi and Hebrew media. Founded by a former Israeli-intelligence counterterrorism adviser to two Israeli prime ministers, and run by Meyrav Wurmsler, the head of the Hudson Institute’s Middle East program, and Richard Perle, it sends out translations of inflammatory and extremist journalism from the Arabic press to a list serve of journalists and politicians.⁵⁰

MEMRI’s critics claim that only the negative is translated, never the positive. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, MEMRI translated comments from the Kuwaiti paper *al-Siyassa* asserting that Katrina was Allah’s revenge on the United States. The comments were subsequently translated into stories at *The World Tribune*, *The New York Sun* and Newsmax.com. MEMRI did not find articles in the Kuwaiti press about the \$100 million of hurricane relief offered to the United States by Kuwait, or editorials in the Israeli press attributing Katrina to divine displeasure with U.S. support for Ariel Sharon’s evacuation of 9,000 illegal Israeli settlers from the Gaza strip. MEMRI simultaneously highlights stories emphasizing the most extreme stereotypes of clashing Arab and Islamic civilization, which would not otherwise come to light. In effect, it amplifies the noise that most effectively distracts from the projects of engagement and negotiation. This is compounded by the interlinked series of websites, blogs and forums on the right wing of the think-tank periphery. Like the Israeli disinformation site Debka.com, MEMRI produces and amplifies noise,

while buttressing the weak “clash of civilizations” theory with selective extremist writing.

Meanwhile, even more disembodied think tanks, like the American Enterprise Institute’s Project for the New American Century, have pursued projects that appear so improbably far from the center of power that there is no need to hide them.⁵¹ It is useful to contrast the Defense Planning Document of 1992 authored by Wolfowitz in government service with the PNAC statement of principles in 1997 and the series of letters on Iraq in 1998 that brought together a bipartisan array of signatories. The former, produced by an accountable government official, was subject to unwelcome scrutiny and critique, while the PNAC’s shrill calls for the ouster of Saddam Hussein in the late 1990s, which are in hindsight a clear roadmap for the U.S. invasion of Iraq in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, were understandably ignored as irrelevant barking. The signatories are a who’s who of the future Bush administration’s power elite, announcing their intentions clearly. But who was looking for that particular signal or could see it at the time? Like its probable model, then Israeli prime ministerial candidate Netanyahu’s roadmap, “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm” of 1996, the PNAC project benefited from being planned and presented outside government. The strategy was no less “real” for originating in the think tank periphery.

The strategic paradigm of knowledge founded by the Wohlstetters has had a catastrophic success. Its offspring have multiplied, built institutions, purveyed information to the American political machine, and had little effective competi-

tion. The erstwhile members of the Project for the New American Century quietly form and implement their policies in the shadowy, oblique, informal bases of the Bush administration's Office of the Vice President, the Pentagon's Office of Special Plans, the Defence Policy Advisory Board and the American Enterprise Institute's Wohlstetter Conference Room. They got their improbable and shocking war in Iraq. With Elliot Abrams, Paula Dobriansky, Zalmay Khalilzad, Vin Weber, Robert Zoellick, et al. positioned strategically throughout the Bush administration and its ideological partners (like the National Endowment for Democracy), they have achieved and will continue to achieve subsidiary goals. But the cost of their success has been very high. Its price in blood, treasure, credibility — and as we now see in this hurricane season — opportunity costs have been staggering.

The catastrophic success of the strategic paradigm has been so rapid that we can begin to see only too well the dangers of anticipating the perfect enemy. The issue of mirror imaging came up in Wohlstetter's late writings in a rather ambiguous *New York Times* op-ed from 1979, "The Uses of Irrelevance," arguing for the deployment of force in regional conflicts and affairs like the Iranian

revolution. He began the essay with the metaphor of a musical canon, in which point and counterpoint are exactly the same.

"In the musical form known as a canon, two voices state the same theme, note for note interval by interval, one slightly after another. To the untrained ear they may sound different, but they are not."⁵²

He could have been describing Richard Pipes' doublespeak response to accusations of nuclear brinkmanship in the Reagan administration: "I was amused to see how readily American liberals adopted the communist habit of attributing communist views to the critics of communism." The Orwellian nature of Daniel Pipes's attacks on the Middle East studies profession in the name of freedom of speech, or MEMRI's claim to "bridge the language gap between the Middle East and the west" are not lies but a strange distortion of real relationships — a counterreality. And as the United States continues to play a dangerous baiting game with Iran, while asserting its own right to use nuclear weapons preemptively, one wonders if the strategists have not, as Ibn Khaldun might have predicted, become the very enemy they imagined.

¹ Ron Suskind, "Without a Doubt," *New York Times Magazine*, October 17, 2004.

² Martin Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America* (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001).

³ Ibn Khaldun and Franz Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah: an Introduction to History*, 2nd ed., with corrections and augmented bibliography (Princeton University Press, 1967).

⁴ "9/11 Commission Chimera," at TomPaine.com [database online], June 13 [cited 2004]. Available from http://www.tompaine.com/articles/911_commission_chimera.php.

⁵ Department of Defense, Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, interview with Sam Tannenhaus, *Vanity Fair*, May 9, 2003, available at www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030509-depsecdef0223.html; see also Ben Wattenberg's PBS *Think Tank* show, *Richard Perle: The Making of a Neoconservative*, at http://www.pbs.org/thinktank/show_1017.html.

⁶ Albert Wohlstetter, "The Delicate Balance of Terror," *RAND Corporation*, November 6, 1958.

⁷ Eyal Press, "Neocon Man," *Nation* 278, no. 18, 2004, pp. 18-23.

⁸ Wolfowitz, *Vanity Fair*.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Khurram Husain, "Neocons: The Men Behind the Curtain," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 59, no. 6, 2003, pp. 62-71.

¹¹ Wohlstetter, 1958.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jim Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (Viking, 2004), p. 426).

¹⁵ Wattenberg.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Stanford University Press, 1962).

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 387.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 389

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 393-397

²¹ Ibid.

²² Mann. p. 426.

²³ Robert Burns, "Rumsfeld: Preparing for Surprises Key for U.S. Plans," Associated Press, May 24, 2001.

²⁴ Wattenberg, 2003.

²⁵ Lara Bain, "CIA Seizes, Classifies Already-Public Papers," *The Miami Herald*, February 15, 2005.

²⁶ Richard Pipes, *Vixi: Memoirs of a Non-Belonger* (Yale University Press, 1981), p. 264.

²⁷ Anne .Hessing Cahn, "Team B: The Trillion Dollar Experiment," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 49, no. 3, 1993.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Pipes, 2003, p. 136.

³⁰ Ibid., p.137.

³¹ Ibid., p. 138.

³² R. Perle, "The Reagan I Knew," *Benador Online*, June 11, 2004.

³³ Paul Wolfowitz 2004, Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Interview with CNN International Business, in U.S. Department of Defense [database online], 2004 [cited 9/22 2005]. Available at <http://www.dod.mil/transcripts/2004/tr20040607-depsecdef0841.html>.

³⁴ Pipes. 2003.

³⁵ P. Tyler, "Lone Superpower: Ammunition for Critics?" *The New York Times*, 1992.

³⁶ Paul Wolfowitz, "Clinton's First Year," *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 1, 1994.

³⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage, 1994), p. 394.

³⁸ Daniel Pipes, *Slave Soldiers and Islam: The Genesis of a Military System* (Yale University Press, 1981), p. 264.

³⁹ Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *Atlantic Monthly* 266, no. 3, 1990, p. 47.

⁴⁰ Nadav Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security* (Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1985), p. 524.

⁴¹ "Which Research Grants are Clean?" *Time Magazine* 127, no. 2, 1986, p. 62.

⁴² Martin Kramer, personal communication.

⁴³ Lewis, p. 47.

⁴⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3, 1993, p. 22.

⁴⁵ Wohlstetter.

⁴⁶ Zackary Lockman, "Behind the Battles Over Middle East Studies," *Middle East Report Online*, January 2004, available at www.merip.org/mero/interventions/lockman_interv.html.

⁴⁷ Brian Whitaker, "U.S. Think Tanks Give Lessons in Foreign Policy," in *the Guardian*, August 19, 2002, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/elsewhere/journalist/story/0,7792,777100,00.html>.

⁴⁸ Lockman, 2004.

⁴⁹ For an introduction to the Massad affair see Monique Dols, "Smearing Joseph Massad, Scapegoating Columbia," April 11, 2005, available at <http://www.counterpunch.org/dols04112005.html>.

⁵⁰ Brian Whitaker, "Selective Memri" in *The Guardian Unlimited*, August 12, 2002.

⁵¹ <http://www.newamericancentury.org/lettersstatements.htm>.

⁵² Albert Wohlstetter, "Uses of Irrelevance," *The New York Times*, 1979.