

# Dear Mr. President: Letters from Israel partisans that took America to war

By Maidhc Ó Cathail

According to its June 3, 1997 [Statement of Principles](#), the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) was created to advance a “Reaganite foreign policy of military strength and moral clarity,” a policy PNAC co-founders William Kristol and Robert Kagan had advocated the previous year in [Foreign Affairs](#) to counter what they construed as the American public’s short-sighted indifference to foreign “commitments.” Calling for a significant increase in “defense spending,” PNAC exhorted the United States “to meet threats before they become dire.”

## The Wolfowitz Doctrine

The [idea of preemptive war](#), also known as the [Wolfowitz Doctrine](#)—subsequently dubbed the “Bush Doctrine” by PNAC signatory [Charles Krauthammer](#)—can be traced as far back as [Paul Wolfowitz’s Ph.D. dissertation](#), “Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East,” which was based on “a raft of top-secret documents” his influential mentor, Cold War nuclear strategist [Albert Wohlstetter](#), somehow “got his hands on” during a post-Six Day War trip to Israel. The “top-secret” Israeli documents supposedly showed that Egypt was planning to divert a Johnson administration proposal for regional civilian nuclear energy into a weapons program. Among those who signed PNAC’s Statement of Principles were Wohlstetter protégés Francis Fukuyama, Zalmay Khalilzad, and [Wolfowitz](#), who despite having been investigated for passing a classified document to an Israeli government official through an AIPAC intermediary in 1978 would be appointed Deputy Secretary of Defense in the George W. Bush administration, where he would be the first to suggest attacking Iraq four days after 9/11; Wolfowitz protégé [I. Lewis Libby](#), who later “[hand-picked](#)” Vice President Dick Cheney’s staff mainly from pro-Israel think tanks; Elliott Abrams, who would go on to serve as Bush’s senior director on the [National Security Council](#) for Near East and North African Affairs, his mother-in-law, Midge Decter, and her husband, Norman Podhoretz; and [Eliot A. Cohen](#), who would later smear Walt and Mearsheimer’s research on the Israel lobby’s role in skewing U.S. foreign policy as “anti-Semitic.”

On January 26, 1998, PNAC wrote the [first of its many open letters](#) to U.S. presidents and Congressional leaders, in which they enjoined President Clinton that “removing Saddam Hussein and his regime from power ... now needs to become the aim of American foreign policy.” Failure to eliminate “the possibility that Iraq will be able to use or threaten to use” its non-existent weapons of mass destruction, the letter cautioned, would put at risk “the safety of

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American troops in the region, of our friends and allies like Israel and the moderate Arab states, and a significant portion of the world's supply of oil." An additional signatory this time was another Wohlstetter protégé, Richard Perle, a widely suspected [Israeli agent of influence](#) whose hawkish foreign policy views were shaped when Hollywood High School classmate and girlfriend, Joan Wohlstetter, invited him for a swim in her family's swimming pool and her father handed Perle his 1958 RAND paper, "[The Delicate Balance of Terror](#)," thought to be an [inspiration for Kubrick's Dr. Strangelove](#).

Having helped sow the seeds of the Iraq War five years before Operation Iraqi Freedom, PNAC wrote a second letter to Clinton later that year. Joining with the [International Crisis Group](#), and the short-lived Balkan Action Council and [Coalition for International Justice](#), they took out an [advertisement](#) in the *New York Times* headlined "Mr. President, Milosevic is the Problem." Expressing "deep concern for the plight of the ethnic Albanian population of Kosovo," the letter declared that "[t]here can be no peace and stability in the Balkans so long as Slobodan Milosevic remains in power." It urged the United States to lead an international effort which should demand a unilateral ceasefire by Serbian forces, put massive pressure on Milosevic to agree on "a new political status for Kosovo," increase funding for Serbia's "[democratic opposition](#)," tighten economic sanctions in order to hasten regime change, cease diplomatic efforts to reach a compromise, and support the Hague tribunal's investigation of Milosevic as a war criminal. Now that "[the world's newest state](#)" (prior to [Israel's successful division of Sudan](#)) is run by a "[mafia-like](#)" organization involved in trafficking weapons, drugs and human organs, there appears to be much less concern for the [plight of the ethnic Serbian population](#) of Kosovo.

## **A New Pearl Harbor**

One year after the publication of its September 2000 report, "[Rebuilding America's Defenses](#)," the "new Pearl Harbor" PNAC implied might be necessary to hasten acquiescence to its blueprint for "benevolent global hegemony" occurred, on 9/11. Nine days after that "catastrophic and catalyzing event," it wrote to endorse President Bush's "admirable commitment to 'lead the world to victory' in the war against terrorism." However, capturing or killing Osama bin Laden, the letter stressed, was "by no means the only goal" in the newly-declared war on terror. "[E]ven if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq," cautioned the PNACers. "Failure to undertake such an effort will constitute an early and perhaps decisive surrender in the war on international terrorism." Disingenuously characterizing Israel's enemy Hezbollah as a group "that mean[s] us no good," the Israel partisans called on the administration to "consider appropriate measures of retaliation" against Iran and Syria if they refused to "immediately cease all military, financial, and

political support for Hezbollah.” Touting Israel as “America’s staunchest ally against international terrorism,” they counseled Washington to “fully support our fellow democracy in its fight against terrorism.” The letter concluded by urging President Bush “that there be no hesitation in requesting whatever funds for defense are needed to allow us to win this war.”

PNAC’s concern for “[America’s staunchest ally](#)” was even more evident in its [next letter to the White House](#). On April 3, 2002, it wrote to thank Bush for his “courageous leadership in the war on terrorism,” commending him in particular for his “strong stance in support of the Israeli government as it engages in the present campaign to fight terrorism.” Evoking the memory of the September 11 attacks “still seared in our minds and hearts,” the Israel partisans thought that “we Americans ought to be especially eager to show our solidarity in word and deed with a fellow victim of terrorist violence ... targeted in part because it is our friend, and in part because it is an island of liberal, democratic principles—American principles—in a sea of tyranny, intolerance, and hatred.” Returning to its favorite theme of regime change in Iraq, PNAC cautioned, “If we do not move against Saddam Hussein and his regime, the damage our Israeli friends and we have suffered until now may someday appear but a prelude to much greater horrors.” Prefiguring the cheerleading of [Kristol](#) and [Kagan](#) et al. for the “Arab Spring,” they assured Bush that “the surest path to peace in the Middle East lies not through the appeasement of Saddam and other local tyrants, but through a renewed commitment on our part ... to the birth of freedom and democratic government in the Islamic world.”

## **PNAC Redux**

Having “[developed, sold, enacted, and justified](#)” a disastrous war over non-existent WMD, [PNAC’s final report](#) in April 2005, entitled “[Iraq: Setting the Record Straight](#)”, claimed that “the case for removing Saddam from power went beyond the existence of weapons stockpiles.” Smugly concluding [à la Madame Albright](#) that “the price of the liberation of Iraq has been worth it,” PNAC soon after quietly wound up its operations. However, in 2009, PNAC co-founders Kristol and Kagan were instrumental in setting up its successor organization, the Foreign Policy Initiative (FPI), whose self-appointed [mission](#) is to address the “many foreign policy challenges” facing the United States “and its democratic allies,” allegedly coming from “rising and resurgent powers,” such as China and Russia, and, perhaps most significantly, from “other autocracies that violate the rights of their citizens.”

FPI’s February 25, 2011 [letter to President Obama](#) gave a clear indication of the significance of that mission statement. Approvingly citing the president’s declaration in his 2009 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech that “Inaction tears at our conscience and can lead to more costly intervention later,” they told him that he “must take action in response to the unfolding crisis in Libya.” Warning of an impending “moral and humanitarian catastrophe,” the letter recommended establishing a no-fly zone, freezing all Libyan government assets, temporarily

halting importation of Libyan oil, making a statement that Col. Qaddafi and other officials would be held accountable under international law, and providing humanitarian aid to the Libyan people as quickly as possible. “The United States and our European allies have a moral interest in both an end to the violence and an end to the murderous Libyan regime,” averred FPI. “There is no time for delay and indecisiveness. The people of Libya, the people of the Middle East, and the world require clear U.S. leadership in this time of opportunity and peril.”

With Libya in the midst of a genuine catastrophe brought on by that “humanitarian intervention,” FPI turned its attention to the [foreign-stoked strife](#) in Syria. On February 17, 2012, it joined the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a think tank [closely aligned with the Israel lobby](#) whose [leadership council](#) is dominated by PNAC alumni, in [urging President Obama](#) “to take immediate steps to decisively halt the Assad regime’s atrocities against Syrian civilians, and to hasten the emergence of a post-Assad government in Syria.” Acknowledging that Syria’s future is “not purely a humanitarian concern,” the letter writers revealed their primary concern about Syria in their remark that “for decades, it has closely cooperated with Iran and other agents of violence and instability to menace America’s allies and partners throughout the Middle East.”

### **Wars of Muslim Liberation**

Commenting on Obama’s reluctance to intervene in Libya, Bill Kristol mocked the president’s “doubts and dithering” about “taking us to war in another Muslim country.” Declared the [founder](#) of the [Emergency Committee for Israel](#), “Our ‘invasions’ have in fact been liberations. We have shed blood and expended treasure in Kuwait in 1991, in the Balkans later in the 1990s, and in Afghanistan and Iraq—in our own national interest, of course, but also to protect Muslim peoples and help them free themselves. Libya will be America’s fifth war of Muslim liberation.” In a [follow-up note](#) to the Weekly Standard, Paul Wolfowitz had “one minor quibble”: “Libya, by my count, is not ‘America’s fifth war of Muslim liberation,’ but at least the seventh: Kuwait – February 1991, Northern Iraq – April 1991, Bosnia – 1995, Kosovo – 1999, Afghanistan – 2001 and Iraq – 2003.” With Syria awaiting its “liberation” in 2012, perhaps it’s too early yet to say, “Shukran, Israel.”

*Maidhc Ó Cathail [writes extensively](#) on the Israel lobby’s influence on U.S. foreign policy.*