

In search of a new Pearl Harbor

Two years ago a project set up by the men who now surround George W Bush said what America needed was “a new Pearl Harbor”. Its published aims have, alarmingly, come true. The threat posed by US terrorism to the security of nations and individuals was outlined in prophetic detail in a document written more than two years ago and disclosed only recently. What was needed for America to dominate much of humanity and the world’s resources, it said, was “some catastrophic and catalysing event – like a new Pearl Harbor”.

The attacks of 11 September 2001 provided the “new Pearl Harbor”, described as “the opportunity of ages”. The extremists who have since exploited 11 September come from the era of Ronald Reagan, when far-right groups and “think-tanks” were established to avenge the American “defeat” in Vietnam. In the 1990s, there was an added agenda: to justify the denial of a “peace dividend” following the cold war. The Project for the New American Century was formed, along with the American Enterprise Institute, the Hudson Institute and others that have since merged the ambitions of the Reagan administration with those of the current Bush regime.

One of George W Bush’s “thinkers” is Richard Perle. I interviewed Perle when he was advising Reagan; and when he spoke about “total war”, I mistakenly dismissed him as mad. He recently used the term again in describing America’s “war on terror”. “No stages,” he said. “This is total war. We are fighting a variety of enemies. There are lots of them out there. All this talk about first we are going to do Afghanistan, then we will do Iraq ... this is entirely the wrong way to go about it. If we just let our vision of the world go forth, and we embrace it entirely and we don’t try to piece together clever diplomacy, but just wage a total war... our children will sing great songs about us years from now.”

Perle is one of the founders of the Project for the New American Century, the

JOHN PILGER | IN SEARCH OF A NEW PEARL HARBOR

PNAC. Other founders include Dick Cheney, now vice-president, Donald Rumsfeld, defence secretary, Paul Wolfowitz, deputy defence secretary, I Lewis Libby, Cheney's chief of staff, William J Bennett, Reagan's education secretary, and Zalmay Khalilzad, Bush's ambassador to Afghanistan. These are the modern chartists of American terrorism. The PNAC's seminal report, *Rebuilding America's Defences: strategy, forces and resources for a new century*, was a blueprint of American aims in all but name. Two years ago it recommended an increase in arms-spending by \$48bn so that Washington could "fight and win multiple, simultaneous major theatre wars". This has happened. It said the United States should develop "bunker-buster" nuclear weapons and make "star wars" a national priority. This is happening. It said that, in the event of Bush taking power, Iraq should be a target. And so it is.

As for Iraq's alleged "weapons of mass destruction", these were dismissed, in so many words, as a convenient excuse, which it is. "While the unresolved conflict with Iraq provides the immediate justification," it says, "the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein." How has this grand strategy been implemented? A series of articles in the *Washington Post*, co-authored by Bob Woodward of Watergate fame and based on long interviews with senior members of the Bush administration, reveals how 11 September was manipulated.

On the morning of 12 September 2001, without any evidence of who the hijackers were, Rumsfeld demanded that the US attack Iraq. According to Woodward, Rumsfeld told a cabinet meeting that Iraq should be "a principal target of the first round in the war against terrorism". Iraq was temporarily spared only because Colin Powell, the secretary of state, persuaded Bush that "public opinion has to be prepared before a move against Iraq is possible". Afghanistan was chosen as the softer option. If Jonathan Steele's estimate in the *Guardian* is correct, some 20,000 people in Afghanistan paid the price of this debate with their lives.

Time and again, 11 September is described as an "opportunity". In last April's *New Yorker*, the investigative reporter Nicholas Lemann wrote that Bush's most senior adviser, Condoleezza Rice, told him she had called together senior members of the National Security Council and asked them "to think about 'how do you capitalise on these opportunities'", which she compared with those of "1945 to 1947": the start of the cold war. Since 11 September, America has established bases at the gateways to all the major sources of fossil fuels,

JOHN PILGER | IN SEARCH OF A NEW PEARL HARBOR

especially central Asia. The Unocal oil company is to build a pipeline across Afghanistan. Bush has scrapped the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions, the war crimes provisions of the International Criminal Court and the anti-ballistic missile treaty. He has said he will use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states “if necessary”. Under cover of propaganda about Iraq’s alleged weapons of mass destruction, the Bush regime is developing new weapons of mass destruction that undermine international treaties on biological and chemical warfare.

In the Los Angeles Times, the military analyst William Arkin describes a secret army set up by Donald Rumsfeld, similar to those run by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger and which Congress outlawed. This “super-intelligence support activity” will bring together the “CIA and military covert action, information warfare, and deception”. According to a classified document prepared for Rumsfeld, the new organisation, known by its Orwellian moniker as the Proactive Pre-emptive Operations Group, or P2OG, will provoke terrorist attacks which would then require “counter-attack” by the United States on countries “harbouring the terrorists”.

In other words, innocent people will be killed by the United States. This is reminiscent of Operation Northwoods, the plan put to President Kennedy by his military chiefs for a phoney terrorist campaign – complete with bombings, hijackings, plane crashes and dead Americans - as justification for an invasion of Cuba. Kennedy rejected it. He was assassinated a few months later. Now Rumsfeld has resurrected Northwoods, but with resources undreamt of in 1963 and with no global rival to invite caution. You have to keep reminding yourself this is not fantasy: that truly dangerous men, such as Perle and Rumsfeld and Cheney, have power. The thread running through their ruminations is the importance of the media: “the prioritised task of bringing on board journalists of repute to accept our position”.

“Our position” is code for lying. Certainly, as a journalist, I have never known official lying to be more pervasive than today. We may laugh at the vacuities in Tony Blair’s “Iraq dossier” and Jack Straw’s inept lie that Iraq has developed a nuclear bomb (which his minions rushed to “explain”). But the more insidious lies, justifying an unprovoked attack on Iraq and linking it to would-be terrorists who are said to lurk in every Tube station, are routinely channelled as news. They are not news; they are black propaganda.

This corruption makes journalists and broadcasters mere ventriloquists’

JOHN PILGER | IN SEARCH OF A NEW PEARL HARBOR

dummies. An attack on a nation of 22 million suffering people is discussed by liberal commentators as if it were a subject at an academic seminar, at which pieces can be pushed around a map, as the old imperialists used to do.

The issue for these humanitarians is not primarily the brutality of modern imperial domination, but how “bad” Saddam Hussein is. There is no admission that their decision to join the war party further seals the fate of perhaps thousands of innocent Iraqis condemned to wait on America’s international death row. Their doublethink will not work. You cannot support murderous piracy in the name of humanitarianism. Moreover, the extremes of American fundamentalism that we now face have been staring at us for too long for those of good heart and sense not to recognise them. **JP**

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