

USA and Middle East – the real agenda of the American energy policy: The Balkanization of the Region and the Coming War with Iran

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The not so hidden goal of the American agenda for the Middle East is to completely remodel - “transform” - the whole region by military means. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice aptly summarized the whole strategy, when she was asked whether the United States intended to take up any initiative to bring back peace to Lebanon during the Israeli offensive in the summer of 2006: “I have no interest in diplomacy for the sake of returning Lebanon and Israel to the status quo ante”, she responded. “I think it would be a mistake. What we’re seeing here, in a sense, is the growing — the birth pangs of a new Middle East and whatever we do we have to be certain that we’re pushing forward to the new Middle East not going back to the old one.”¹ According to investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, this war was massively supported and encouraged by Washington because neutralizing Hezbollah is seen as the necessary condition for an attack against Iran, the next target in the “war on terror”. He quotes an unnamed Pentagon adviser to support his claim: “The best terror network in the world has remained neutral in the terror war for the past several years,” the adviser on the war on terror said of Hezbollah. “This will mobilize them and put us up against the group that drove Israel out of southern Lebanon. If we move against Iran, Hezbollah will not sit on the sidelines. Unless the Israelis take them out, they will mobilize against us.”²

So, although the United States try to control the Middle East for decades, we can see an obvious radicalization and militarization of this effort since the inauguration of President George W. Bush in 2001, who made this goal the centerpiece of America’s foreign and military policy.³ As I will lay out, this is a direct consequence of America’s grand strategy which first and foremost aims to preserve Washington’s primacy indefinitely into the future. In this context, the changing geopolitics of oil necessitates to tighten Washington’s control of the Middle East in order to preserve its dominance. Subsequently, I will describe the Neoconservative approach to militarily subordinate and balkanize the whole region which has been fully adopted by the US government,

especially regarding the war preparations against Iran. Following this, I will briefly address the catastrophic consequences of the neoconservative crusade for the people in the region which are the major factor for the growing resistance against the United States. Because, as a result, Washington is caught in a quagmire of major proportions, especially in Iraq, proponents of a more subtle, “intelligent” approach to control the region are currently gaining ground within the American establishment. But, as I will finally argue, there are no alternatives to the violent subordination of the whole region, as long as preserving its primacy continues to be the top priority of America’s grand strategy.

America’s Grand Strategy: The Preservation of Pax Americana

The first explicit expression of America’s post Cold War hegemonic ambitions dates back to the year 1992, when the Defense Planning Guidance (DPG), written under the auspices of then Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, became public.⁴ The document made it unmistakably clear that the United States intends to uphold its preeminence by all means necessary.⁵

The basic thrust of the DPG was afterwards consistently re-emphasized by virtually every official strategy document most explicitly in the Bush administration’s first National Security Strategy issued in November 2002: “The President has no intention of allowing any foreign power to catch up with the huge lead the U.S. has opened up since the fall of the Soviet Union.”⁶ The central factor how to achieve this goal had been already laid out ten years before in the DPG: “Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival. This is a dominant consideration underlying the new regional defense strategy and requires that we endeavor to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power.”⁷ One, if not the most important region mentioned in the DPG is the Middle East.

The Growing Significance of Middle Eastern Oil

Oil is literally the lifeblood of every modern industrialized country. While the assured supply with cheap energy is of tremendous economic importance, it is also impossible to wage wars without the black gold. The combination between its economic and military importance also makes oil a commodity of strategic relevance, because controlling most of the world's oil reserves gives incredible leverage and coercive power over potential adversaries.

Two factors are contributing to an ever growing necessity to control the oil reserves of the world. First, the world oil consumption will rise rapidly by 50% up from now until the year 2020. This is not only due to the rising demand of India and China, but also to a forecasted increase of American energy consumption by ca. 33%. As the reserves of the United States are simultaneously rapidly depleting, this results into an ever growing dependency on energy imports. Second, the worldwide reserves are also declining. Although geologists are disagreeing whether we have already reached the „peak“, the point where global production reached its highest level and will subsequently decline, supply shortfalls will occur in the foreseeable future with a high degree of certainty. So, these two factors are driving the „growing militarization of America's oil dependency.“⁸ As a result, we can already observe the beginning of intensifying conflicts over oil for example between the United States and China in Africa.

Against this backdrop, the importance of the Middle East can hardly be overstated, because two thirds of the remaining worldwide oil reserves are located there and the countries of the region have shown an increasing reluctance to bow to US interests.

OPEC's Comeback as a Threat to America's Interests

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) primarily consists of countries of the Middle East. Its main objective is to advance the interests of the oil producing countries for which it has two mechanisms. First, a complete oil embargo, a step which almost instantly leads to heavy economic turbulences in the industrialized states; and second, the production quotas which aim to achieve higher energy prices. The idea was that if OPEC lowers its quotas this will boost the oil price and return higher profits at the expense of the oil consuming countries.

The West reacted to this challenge by massively developing non-OPEC sources (e.g. the North Sea) which enabled them to counter the attempt to control and boost the price of oil. As a result, in the mid-1980s, OPEC was forced to abandon its production quotas and until the year 2000 the average price of oil remained at an extremely low level (17 dollar per barrel).

But, as mentioned, non-OPEC oil sources are rapidly depleting and they are already producing at the limit. So there is virtually no additional non-OPEC oil available on to world market to satisfy the growing demand. As a result, OPEC regained control over the price of oil by the end of the 1990s and the cartel subsequently made it clear that it was willing to

significantly boost the oil price. But this fundamentally collides with America's priorities for cheap oil formulated in the National Energy Policy, which was written under the auspices of vice president Dick Cheney in 2001: „Rising oil prices act like a tax by foreign oil exporters on Americans. Changing energy prices impose economic costs, such as forcing plants to change schedules, replace machinery, or even shut down. These costs can eventually impact economic growth.“⁹

The growing power of OPEC and their obvious intention to use this power against the interests of the United States - Iraq, Iran, Libya and Saudi Arabia even threatened an embargo against the United States - from Washington's point of view further emphasized the need to gain direct control over those countries to counter these ambitions. Especially since OPEC has become a vital financial threat.

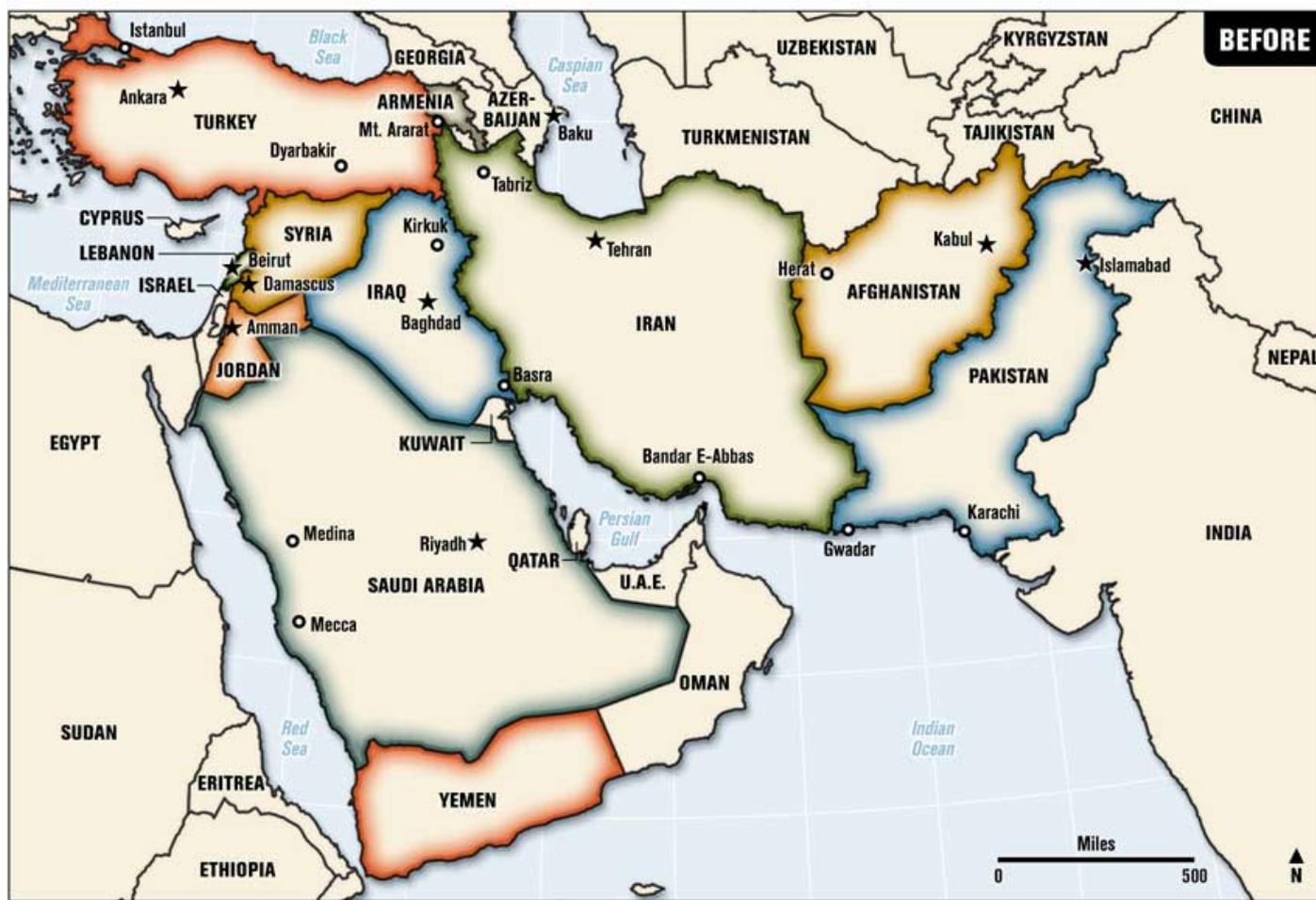
The End of Dollar Hegemony?

If one does only look at the macroeconomic facts there can be only one conclusion: The United States are bankrupt. The trade balance deficit grew from \$39 Bill. in 1992 to \$378,272 Bill. in the year 2000 to an all time high of \$723,616 Bill. in 2005.¹⁰ Because this deficit between imports and exports results into an ever growing debt, this number equally rose from \$4 Trillion in 1992 to - officially - \$8,3 Trillion in 2006.¹¹ If one takes all funding gaps (e.g. medicare) into account, as the Financial Report of the United States Government does, the overall American debt is \$46 Trillion in 2005.¹²

Although in light of such numbers, every other country in the world would have to declare bankruptcy, the US government doesn't seem to be particularly worried about this development: When Paul O'Neill, then secretary of the Treasury, demanded to counter the growing deficit by questioning the sensibility of the planned tax cuts for the rich, vice president Dick Cheney answered: „Reagan proved that deficits don't matter.“¹³ The reason why the administration obviously isn't bothered is because the United States are able to print pieces of paper to pay for their debts: „Almost 70% of the world's currency reserves – the money which nations use to finance international trade and protect themselves against financial speculators – takes the form of US dollars. The dollar is used for this purpose because it is relatively stable, it is produced by a nation with a major share of world trade, and certain commodities, in particular oil, are denominated in it, which means that dollars are required to buy them. [...] The United States does very well from this arrangement. In order to earn dollars, other nations must provide goods and services to the US. When commodities are valued in dollars, the US needs do no more than print pieces of green paper to obtain them: it acquires them, in effect, for free.“¹⁴ In short: „Everyone accepts dollars because dollars can buy oil.“¹⁵

The only serious alternative to the dollar is the euro and every effort by the OPEC countries to sell their oil in euro is obviously seen as a declaration of war by the US government. But exactly that happened in November 2000 when Saddam Hussein announced to switch into the euro and a number of OPEC-countries, among them Saudi Arabia and Iran, signaled that they could soon follow suit. This issue even has

Redrawing the Middle East map



Source: Ralph Peters, *Blood Borders: How a better Middle East would look*, in: *Armed Forces Journal* (June 2006)

been officially discussed and welcomed by senior OPEC-officials. "If this happens, then oil importing nations will no longer need dollar reserves in order to buy oil. The demand for the dollar will fall, and its value is likely to decline. As the dollar slips, central banks will start to move their reserves into safer currencies, such as the euro and possibly the yen and the yuan, precipitating further slippage. The US economy, followed rapidly by US power, could then be expected to falter or collapse."¹⁶

Obviously, as mentioned, even speculating about such a step is seen by Washington as a declaration of war, as republican congressman Ron Paul unmistakably made clear: „The license to create money out of thin air allows the bills to be paid through price inflation. American citizens, as well as average citizens of Japan, China, and other countries suffer from price inflation, which represents the ‚tax‘ that pays the bills for our military adventures. [...] Our whole economic system depends on continuing the current monetary arrangement, which means recycling the dollar is crucial. Currently, we borrow over \$700 billion every year from our gracious benefactors, who work hard and take our paper for their goods. Then we borrow all the money we need to secure the empire (DOD budget \$450 billion) plus more. The military might we enjoy becomes the ‚backing‘ of our currency. There are no other countries that can challenge our military superiority, and therefore they have little choice but to accept

the dollars we declare are today's ‚gold‘. This is why countries that challenge the system - like Iraq, Iran and Venezuela - become targets of our plans for regime change."¹⁷ So, taken together, all those factors made it from Washington's point of view mandatory, to radicalize the American efforts to militarily subordinate the whole region.

The Balkanization of the Middle East and the Coming War With Iran

The approach of the Neoconservatives has been aptly summarized by one of their masterminds, Michael Ledeen, as "creative destruction." Beginning with the war against Iraq, they want to completely remodel - "transform" - the whole region by military means. The chief goal in this context seems to be to partition the region into small units which are no longer able to counter US interests.

Regarding Iraq, U.S. Senator Joseph R. Biden Jr., a leading Democrat, and Council on Foreign Relations President Emeritus Leslie H. Gelb, proposed the Balkanization of the country by "giving each ethno-religious group - Kurd, Sunni Arab and Shiite Arab - room to run its own affairs."¹⁸ Adopting this approach for the whole region, the most ambitious plan was brought forward by Col. Ralph Peters, a prominent Neocon, in the *Armed Forces Journal*. He proposed a complete reordering of the whole region along ethnic lines with countries amicable to US interests gaining and the rest

- especially Saudi Arabia and Iran - substantially losing territory (see graphics).¹⁹ “Although the map does not officially reflect Pentagon doctrine, it has been used in a training program at NATO’s Defense College for senior military officers. This map, as well as other similar maps, has most probably been used at the National War Academy as well as in military planning circles.”²⁰ So, notwithstanding the huge military problems in Iraq, the Neoconservatives, with the US government following suit, are planning to accelerate their efforts to militarily subordinate the region.

The next step for this purpose seems to be an attack against Iran for which many Neoconservatives are currently beating the war drums. For example Richard Perle stated that Washington should and will attack Iran before Bush leaves office: “I have very little doubt that this president would order the necessary military action.”²¹ Similarly, Joshua Muravchik, from the American Enterprise Institute, bluntly declared: “Make no mistake, President Bush will need to bomb Iran’s nuclear facilities before leaving office.”²² In this context, the recent steps to escalate the confrontation with Iran and the obvious war preparations are highly disturbing. For instance, Washington did send an additional aircraft carrier and new Patriot anti-ballistic missile batteries to the Middle East which are useless in Iraq but necessary for an attack against Iran.²³

The Nuclear Posture Review of 2002 already envisioned preventive nuclear first strikes against several countries in a

not very specified “contingency” situation, among them Iran. Following this, in November 2003 then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld “approved a plan known as CONPLAN 8022-02, which for the first time established a pre-emptive-strike capability against Iran [and against North Korea]. That was followed in 2004 by a top-secret ‘Interim Global Strike Alert Order’ that put the military on a state of readiness to launch an airborne and missile attack against Iran, should Bush issue the command.”²⁴ Meanwhile, according to Vanity Fair journalist Craig Unger, Bush has “directed StratCom to draw up plans for a massive strike against Iran.”²⁵ So, not surprisingly, former CIA officer Philip Giraldi indicated, that the decision to attack Iran has already been made: “I’ve heard from sources at the Pentagon that their impression is that the White House has made a decision that war is going to happen.”²⁶

In this context, the accusation of Iran as being a sponsor of anti-American attacks in Iraq²⁷ will serve, along with the harsh criticism of its atomic program, as a pretext to attack the country. The blueprint for such a scenario has been described by Zbigniew Brzezinski, one of the most renowned geopolitical thinkers, in a hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: “If the United States continues to be bogged down in a protracted bloody involvement in Iraq, the final destination on this downhill track is likely to be a head-on conflict with Iran and with much of the world of Islam at large. A plausible scenario for a military collision with Iran



Source: Ralph Peters, *Blood Borders: How a better Middle East would look*, in: *Armed Forces Journal* (June 2006)

involves Iraqi failure to meet the benchmarks; followed by accusations of Iranian responsibility for the failure; then by some provocation in Iraq or a terrorist act in the U.S. blamed on Iran; culminating in a 'defensive' U.S. military action against Iran that plunges a lonely America into a spreading and deepening quagmire eventually ranging across Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan."²⁸

One should note, that due to the extremely strained capacities, not a ground war and an invasion but all out air attacks, possibly even involving nuclear weapons, are the preferred option. This fits in the pattern that CONPLAN 8022 doesn't involve "boots on the ground."²⁹ The goal seems to be to bomb the country back into the Stone Age and using the resulting havoc to further undermine the regime's stability by fuelling ethnic conflicts. According to Seymour Hersh and others, currently implements this plan: "The Pentagon has established covert relationships with Kurdish, Azeri, and Baluchi tribesmen, and has encouraged their efforts to undermine the regime's authority in northern and southeastern Iran."³⁰ This strategy obviously fits neatly in the approach to balkanize the region, laid out by Ralph Peters. But when these plans will be executed, the whole situation will escalate dramatically from very bad to worst.

The Results of Creative Destruction

"Why do they hate us?", was the main question posed after the attacks of September 11. The answer is, because "they" have every reason to do so.³¹ Since operation "Ajax" in 1953, when the CIA toppled the democratically elected Iranian president Mohammad Mossadegh, America is constantly crushing every form of progressive movement in the Middle East which is most ironically done in the name of democracy. „The coup [...] showed the Middle East that the United States did not want to support democracy in the region, and that it preferred strongman rule. This message was heard very clearly throughout the region."³²

Although the United States are a destructive force in the Middle East for decades, the current neoconservative crusade has reached a new dimension. Especially the war against Iraq and even more the subsequent occupation, has led to a catastrophe of major proportions. According to *The Lancet*, Britain's premier medical journal, the invasion caused the death of 654.965 Iraqis since 2003.³³ Simultaneously, Washington is scrupulously looting the country's wealth, the occupation is nothing else than - in the Words of the *Wall Street Journal* - "One of the most audacious hostile takeovers ever." According to *Focus on the global South*, Washington quickly began to "transform" the country's economy: "Invade. This was to be the first step in what has since become the most ambitious, most radical, and most violent project to reconstruct an economy along neoliberal lines in recent history. Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the United States has attempted to open up almost all sectors of Iraq's economy to foreign investors; pry it open to international trade; launch a massive privatization program to sell off over 150 state-owned enterprises; liberalize its financial market and re-orient the role of its Central Bank; impose a flat tax

and remove food and oil subsidies; adopt a patents and intellectual property rights regime beneficial to corporations; and lay the ground for the eventual privatization of Iraq's oil."³⁴

As a result, this policy has led to widespread resistance, seven out of ten Iraqis are now favoring attacks on the American troops.³⁵ So, the country is as far away from being "pacified" as you can guess. But even if - and this is a big if - Iraq could be pacified, the United States have made it perfectly clear, that they intend to preserve their military presence in the region indefinitely into the future. Asked about the probability and the reasons of a continued American military presence in the Middle East, the prominent Neoconservative Donald Kagan responded: "I think that's highly possible. We will probably need a major concentration of forces in the Middle East over a long period of time. That will come at a price, but think of the price of not having it. When we have economic problems, it's been caused by disruptions in our oil supply. If we have a force in Iraq, there will be no disruption in oil supplies."³⁶ Not surprisingly, United States are completely discredited in the whole region. But expressing these sentiments democratically by electing anti-American governments representing the will of the people is not an option, as Brent Scowcroft, the national security adviser to the first President Bush, unmistakably made clear: "What's going to happen the first time we hold an election in Iraq and it turns out the radicals win? What do you do? We're surely not going to let them take over."³⁷ Such a dubious understanding of democracy reveals the hubris of the lonely superpower and inevitably leads Washington on a collision course with the local population. In light of this disastrous situation - and regarding the obvious steps to further escalate the "war on terror" by attacking Iran - there is growing resistance against the neoconservative plans even within the American elite, where an "alternative", "neoliberal" approach is gaining support.

Intelligent Colonialism?

In his testimony before the Senate, Brezinski made it clear, that the Neoconservatives have massively lost support, even among many war hawks: „It is obvious by now that the American national interest calls for a significant change of direction. There is in fact a dominant consensus in favor of a change"³⁸ Leading conservatives like Ex-President Gerald Ford, former Secretary of State James Baker, and several leading Republican senators, John Warner, Chuck Hagel, and Gordon Smith and especially many Democrats are favoring a new approach which is typically described as "less confrontational" than that of the administration.³⁹

According to two protagonists of the „other“ variant, the question is not „if“ but „how“ to subordinate the Middle East. For this purpose they propose a more subtle and intelligent approach: „A consensus is emerging in Washington that the greater Middle East constitutes the primary strategic challenge of our time and that the West must fundamentally rethink the way it approaches this region. The question now is how best to transform the Middle East so that it no longer produces people who want to kill us in great numbers

and increasingly have the ability to do so. [T]he debate is increasingly between the neoconservative strategy of coercive democratization and what might be called the neoliberal alternative emerging among internationalist Democrats and moderate Republicans.⁴⁰ Instead of primarily relying on “creative destruction”, the control of the region should be assured by integrating the countries of the Middle East more tightly into the world economic system. “It would mean a new form of democracy in the Greater Middle East. It would mean a new economic system that could provide work, dignity, and livelihoods for the people of the region. It would mean helping Middle Eastern societies come to grips with modernity and create new civil societies that allow them to compete and integrate in the modern world without losing their sense of cultural uniqueness.” But they also see the military as an integral part of their approach: “To be sure, such a strategy must have a military component.”⁴¹ So we should not fool ourselves - especially in light of the next presidential election and a possible future democratic agenda - that this is really an alternative approach. When push comes to shove, the Neoliberals will also rely on the military, too.

This is not surprising, because as long as the preservation of American primacy continues to be the top priority of the whole American establishment, there are few alternatives to the complete subordination of the region by violent means. Because what would the Democrats do, if the countries of the Middle East will continue to resist bowing to America’s interests? In the words of the godfather of American geopolitics, Henry Kissinger: “Oil is much too important a commodity to be left in the hands of the Arabs.”

Currently, some of the most ardent proponents of American supremacy correctly argue that further escalating the “war on terror” by attacking Iran will fundamentally weaken American hegemony and could even foreshadow its ending. Brzesinski for example writes: “It follows that an attack on Iran would be an act of political folly, setting in motion a progressive upheaval in world affairs. With America increasingly the object of widespread hostility, the era of American preponderance could come to a premature end.”⁴² But the fundamental dilemma of America’s hegemonic aspirations is, that, because of the changing geopolitics of oil, without those wars, upholding Washington’s dominance will also gradually slip away.

So, one way or the other, the United States cannot escape the law of uneven growth rates, especially not by military means. This will only lead into a major catastrophe as Immanuel Wallerstein has pointed out: “Pax Americana is over. Challenges from Vietnam and the Balkans to the Middle East and September 11 have revealed the limits of American supremacy. Will the United States learn to fade quietly, or will U.S. conservatives resist and thereby transform a gradual decline into a rapid and dangerous fall?”⁴³ Although currently it seems that the whole establishment has set the course in this direction, only adjusting its grand strategy and accepting the rise of other great powers, will save the United States and the rest of the world from a catastrophe of historical dimensions.⁴⁴

Endnotes

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- 3 This goal has been officially adopted in a speech before the American Enterprise Institute in February 2003. Although this was the most explicit adoption of the strategy to transform the region, it had been already an integral element of the National Security Strategy issued in 2002, as historian John L. Gaddis, A Grand Strategy, in: Foreign Policy, No. 141 (November/December 2002), pp. 50-57, pp. 54-55 points out: “If I’m right about this, then it’s a truly grand strategy. What appears at first glance to be a lack of clarity about who’s deterrable and who’s not turns out, upon closer examination, to be a plan for transforming the entire Muslim Middle East: for bringing it, once and for all, into the modern world.”
- 4 The origins of the DPG date back to 1989 when Dick Cheney called for papers about the future American foreign policy in light of the crumbling Soviet Union, at the grand strategic level. Cheney’s close association with the neoconservative movement is underscored by the fact that he fully endorsed the propositions of the neoconservative mastermind Paul Wolfowitz and totally dismissed the alternative version prepared by then Joint Chief of Staff Colin Powell. On Cheney’s behalf Wolfowitz and two other outstanding Neoconservatives, Lewis Libby and Zalmay Khalilzad, prepared the final 46-page memorandum. See Nicholas Lemann, The Next World Order: The Bush Administration may have a brand-new doctrine of power, in: The New Yorker, April 1, 2002.
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- 12 2005 Financial Report of the United States Government, p. 28, URL: <http://www.fms.treas.gov/fr/05frusg/05frusg.pdf> (22.05.06).
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Information

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