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The Disappearing Prince of Darkness



by **Jim Lobe**

Where is [Richard Perle](#)?

His virtually total absence from the Iran nuclear debate over the past two years was perhaps one of the most remarkable features of the whole controversy. Ubiquitous in the major media in the run-up to and aftermath of the Iraq war debacle and a long-time advocate of “regime change” by whatever means in Iran, the “[prince of darkness](#),” Washington’s leading neoconservative operative for several decades, seems almost to have entirely disappeared from public view.

A pretty exhaustive search on Google and in Nexis-Lexis found only a couple of instances where he was interviewed about the Iran deal at any length. Both appeared on the right-wing “NewsMax” website. [On March 3](#) this year, he commented on Bibi Netanyahu’s controversial speech to a joint session of Congress: “it was an excellent speech and should put behind us the controversy over whether he should’ve been invited.” And [on March 23](#), he predicted that the deal between Tehran and the P5+1 was headed for a “crash landing” due to congressional opposition. On April 28, he was also interviewed in [a video produced by the Wilson Center](#), but the main subject was the effectiveness of sanctions against other countries. The Iran sanctions “should’ve been part of a strategy for regime change,” he opined.

On June 8, 2015, he was [interviewed on “Secure Freedom Radio,”](#) an outlet of the far-right [Center for Security Policy](#) (CSP), led by his old comrade-in-neocon-arms and former subordinate in Scoop Jackson’s office and at the Pentagon, [Islamophobe Frank Gaffney](#). But the subject of that show was Turkey and the Kurds, not Iran. You would think that the man the Corporation for Public Broadcasting chose to present the hour-long “The Case for War” in its controversial [2007 “Crossroads” series](#) would get a bit more media attention as Washington debated perhaps the most significant Middle East-related diplomatic accord since the Oslo agreement a couple decades ago.

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Warmonger

When I first noticed his glaring absence from the public debate on the Iran deal, I thought it was perhaps a clever tactical move on his part. After all, Perle was a very early promoter of Ahmad Chalabi and, more than any single individual outside the Bush administration, [led the public charge](#) for the Iraq invasion. He repeatedly insisted on the major television and cable networks, even before the proverbial dust had settled on Lower Manhattan, that Saddam Hussein was behind the 9/11 attacks. Later he floated tall tales about meetings in Prague between Saddam's agents and Mohammed Atta and the Iraqi leader's crash nuclear weapons program. For him to take a leading role in rallying opposition to the Iran deal would inevitably evoke memories of his earlier warmongering and thus might prove counter-productive.

Of course, it was also possible that major media had learned that they had a public responsibility not to give a platform to people with well-established records either of mendacity or gullibility—[Perle still thinks Chalabi](#), the architect of de-Baathification, is Iraq's savior-in-waiting—depending on which you category you believe best applies to Perle. But, judging from all the attention they gave to Bibi's views on the Iran deal—not to mention the [recent ravings](#), at AEI no less, of [Dick Cheney](#)—I don't find that explanation particularly persuasive.

In the two *NewsMax* interviews, Perle was identified as a "senior fellow" at the [American Enterprise Institute](#). At the Wilson Center and on "Secure Freedom" interviews, he was referred to as a "resident fellow" at AEI. Remarkably, however, Perle's name no longer appears on the think tank's list of scholars and fellows. (Look at the latest "[Foreign and Defense Policy](#)" list.) On Wednesday, I phoned AEI's press contact to ask exactly what was Perle's position. She hesitated and asked me to send an email that she could refer to the right person. But no reply was forthcoming. When I talked with AEI's receptionist last week, she told me that, although Perle retained an affiliation with the Institute, he was "off-site." And when I inserted his name into the site's "Search" tab, the latest item that comes up dates back to April 20, 2014. This was an article he co-authored with his son, Jonathan, for *The American Interest* entitled "[Leadership as a Last Resort](#)"—a predictable neocon critique of the Obama administration—in which he was described as "a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and former Assistant Secretary of Defense."

So why doesn't he show up on AEI's experts' list? And why can't its press people tell me what his status is?

Of course, he may simply have retired. But given his long service to and association with AEI, doesn't he somehow deserve to be given emeritus status? He no doubt raised lots of money for the institution. When Perle and the neocons were riding high in George W. Bush's first term (when Cheney ruled the roost), [Bruce Kovner](#), a very private but very important neocon philanthropist, served as deputy chairman and then chairman of AEI's board of trustees and was likely its top individual donor. From 2002 through 2005, [he gave AEI some \\$11.5 million](#), according to tax filings. Kovner, who is known to have been close to Perle (as well as Cheney), is still on AEI's board of trustees.

Pletka's Ploy?

I have heard from some well-connected neoconservatives, however, that [Danielle Pletka](#), a former Perle protégée who has served as AEI's vice president for foreign and defense policy for a number of years now, has long looked forward to (and may have lobbied for) Perle's departure. Her unhappiness with him apparently dates at least from 2008 when the *Wall Street Journal* [reported that he was actively exploring investing](#) in oil-related projects in Kurdistan. He was also looking into additional investments in Kazakhstan whose notoriously authoritarian and corrupt president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, he had praised as "visionary and wise," according to the Kazakhstan embassy here.

As the *Journal* noted at the time, Perle resigned as chairman of Don Rumsfeld's Defense Policy Board (DPB) in March 2003 after the exposure of his role as an adviser to a telecom company (Global Crossing) that was seeking the Bush administration's approval of its sale to a Hong Kong-based corporation. Global Crossing had retained his services for \$125,000 with the promise that he would receive an additional \$600,000 if the sale were consummated, [according to *The New York Times*](#). Perle subsequently severed his ties to Global Crossing and pledged to donate any fee for his past service to "the families of American forces killed or injured in Iraq." But he retained his membership on the DPB—which, thanks to Perle and his good friend then-Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, was dominated by fellow neocons—at Rumsfeld's behest. (Perle and Rumsfeld forged close ties dating back to their mutual effort to derail détente in the mid-1970s.)

Pletka's unhappiness reportedly increased in 2011 at the outset of the insurrection against Muammar Qadhafi. Documents made public by the Libyan opposition established that [Perle had travelled to Libya](#) twice in 2006 to meet with Qadhafi as a paid adviser to The Monitor Group, a Massachusetts-based consultancy firm that had been retained by Tripoli for a "Project to Enhance the Profile of Libya and Muammar Qadhafi," as one Monitor memo described its role. Perle, who never

registered as a foreign agent, later reported his findings to Cheney, according to the documents.

If it's true that Pletka has maneuvered Perle out of AEI, it marks something of a watershed. Probably Washington's most influential neocon operative of his generation, he played a critical role in driving the U.S. to war in Iraq, along with Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith (another Perle protégé). But he seems to have retired to the fever swamps of Gaffney's CSP.

His departure, if that indeed is what it is, follows those of his long-time collaborators at the Institute. There's [Joshua Muravchik](#), one of the few neocon apparatchniks who has voiced some regret about Iraq but who has nonetheless promoted war with Iran since at least 2006. And there's also [Michael Ledeen](#), who, judging by his writings, has long occupied a fever swamp of his very own as a columnist at [Pajamas Media](#). Ledeen went from being the "Freedom Scholar" at AEI to the "Freedom Scholar" at the [Foundation for Defense of Democracies](#) (FDD) several years ago. Another former AEI scholar, [Reuel Marc Gerecht](#), moved over to FDD at the same time. It's not clear whether the departure of any or all three were related to Pletka's dissatisfaction with their work (although Muravchik had loudly complained to colleagues before he left that he was under pressure to produce more op-eds in more prominent publications). Or perhaps the promise of FDD's ever-expanding budget—provided by billionaire members of the [Republican Jewish Coalition](#) such as [Sheldon Adelson](#) and [Paul Singer](#)—lured them away.

None of this means, however, that AEI's foreign policy team has lost its belligerent and militaristic stripes. Its most visible "scholar," after all, remains [John Bolton](#), while [Paul Wolfowitz](#) has occupied a perch there since his unceremonious departure from the World Bank. Pletka, who, like Bolton, [once worked for Jesse Helms](#), has herself become something of a television regular as the acerbic critic of the "weakness" and "appeasement" of the Obama administration. Meanwhile, the albeit much more obscure Perle protégé, [Michael Rubin](#), continues to uphold hardline neocon orthodoxy in his contributions to *National Review* and *Commentary's* Contentions blog.



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Jim Lobe served for some 30 years as the Washington DC bureau chief for Inter Press Service and is best known for his coverage of U.S. foreign policy and the influence of the neoconservative movement.

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