

Departure of Key Aide Marks New Powell Setback

By Jim Lobe | June 6, 2003

The announcement on June 5 that the State Department's director for policy planning, Richard Haass, is leaving to become the next president of the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), marks the latest sign of the eclipse of Secretary of State Colin Powell's influence in the Bush administration.

While there is no doubt that his new job, which begins July 1, has real attractions—a lengthy contract to direct the oldest and most prestigious U.S. foreign policy think tank—Haass has historically preferred to be in the thick of the action. He played a key role on the National Security Council under George H.W. Bush during the Gulf War and its aftermath, including the Madrid peace talks, in the early 1990s. Next to Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, Haass has been seen as Powell's closest adviser.

While no official announcement has made, his most likely replacement is said to be the current ambassador to Turkey, Robert Pearson, a career foreign service officer who, while highly regarded as a diplomat and administrator, lacks Haass' reputation as a thinker and grand strategist. The fact that Powell has not put forward anyone of Haass' stature is being interpreted as an indication that the retired general probably intends to step down himself after next year's election, if not before.

Long targeted by neoconservative forces centered in the Pentagon and Vice President Dick Cheney's office, as well as their counterparts outside the administration, Haass has served as an influential voice in favor of traditional Republican realism, a protege of Bush Sr.'s national security adviser, ret. Gen. Brent Scowcroft. During his mere two-and-a-half years in one of the State Department's most coveted positions—George Kennan, the legendary strategist who authored the “containment” doctrine at the dawn of the cold war, was a predecessor—Haass led efforts to define and argue Powell's positions internally and to enunciate more general ideas about where he thought U.S. foreign policy should be headed.

A consummate “realist” in the conservative but pragmatic mold of Scowcroft and George H.W. Bush's secretary of state, James Baker, Haass argued in favor of engaging Iran, a harder line with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, and treating China more as a partner than a rival, although he is best known for his statement early in the first months of the administration that Washington should pursue a gen-

eral policy of “a la carte multilateralism.” That he would even use that noun, however, probably helped to confirm to administration hawks that he was far too sensitive to European and international opinion for their taste.

Haass has been a fixture of Washington foreign policy politics for a remarkably long time given his relatively youthful 51 years. After receiving his doctorate, he worked in Congress, then briefly in the Pentagon under Jimmy Carter, and in various posts in the State Department under Ronald Reagan. He directed Mideast policy in the NSC throughout the first Bush administration 1989-1993, work that earned him the lasting distrust of neo-conservatives, many of whom had served in the Reagan administration and have since returned under the younger Bush to senior policymaking positions.

Closely allied with Israel's right-wing Likud Party, neo-conservatives—such as Under Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith; the former chairman of Pentagon chief's Defense Policy Board, Richard Perle; former UN Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick; and Elliott Abrams, who currently holds Haass's old job on the NSC—strongly and publicly opposed the elder Bush's efforts to force Israel to take part in the Madrid peace conference that eventually led to a Labor-led government and the Oslo peace process.

During the Clinton administration, Haass remained a major player as director of foreign policy studies at one of Washington's most established think tanks, the Brookings Institution. During his tenure there, he maintained his staunchly realist outlook in his area of expertise, arguing in favor of an even-handed approach to the Oslo process and engagement with Iran. He also adopted a strong pro-business stance in foreign policy by co-authoring a study on the use of unilateral U.S. economic sanctions against foreign countries, which concluded that in virtually every case they had proved either ineffective or counter-productive and lost many billions of dollars in trade and investment opportunities for U.S. business.



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The Reluctant Sheriff

In 1997, he published a book on future U.S. foreign policy, which he titled *The Reluctant Sheriff*, in which he attacked the notion that Washington should try to establish and preserve a “unipolar” world order in which it was hegemonic. “Primacy is not to be confused with hegemony,” he wrote. Calling for the return of “great-power politics,” he stressed that “The United States cannot compel others to become more democratic.”

The book even criticized a now-famous draft 1992 strategy document that called for global dominance, drafted by two of the most powerful neoconservatives in the current Bush administration, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Vice President Dick Cheney’s Chief of Staff. Virtually all of its recommendations—which were strongly rejected by Scowcroft, Baker, and Powell, who was then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—were codified last September by the younger Bush in the National Security Strategy of the United States of America (NSS).

By the time he was appointed to office, Haass had become in some ways like a red flag to the neocon bulls who were eager to put their 1992 strategy into practice and were able to do so after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. As director of the policy planning office, Haass continued to argue his positions. He opposed, for example, tightening sanctions against Iran early in the administration. Neoconservative columnists, such as the *New Republic’s* Lawrence Kaplan and The *Weekly Standard’s* Marc Reuel Gerecht, attacked him as a shill for Big Oil.

His importance to Powell became clear after September 11, when he was made the State Department’s point man on Afghanistan. In April, 2002, he gave a major policy address on a new grand strategy, which he said should aim to “integrate other countries and organizations into arrangements to sustain a world consistent with U.S. interests and values.” He called his approach “hard-headed multilateralism,” stressing that, while Washington could and should lead, it could not do so without enduring allies.

Within six months, not only had the administration released its own NSS document on grand strategy, but CFR had reportedly begun talking to Haass about coming to work for it. It appears that nothing happened in the intervening months—including the Road Map for Middle East peace that Haass played a role in drafting—that persuaded him to stay on.

In an interview reported in the *New York Times* Thursday, Haass denied that he was leaving due to any sense of discouragement. “Obviously, in this job you spend a lot of your time in debates,” he said. “Of course, that isn’t the reason I’m leaving. The reason I’m leaving is that this offer came along, and the opportunity to lead an organization with such tremendous influence is not something anyone would lightly pass up.”

Apparently, the State Department no longer fits that definition.

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