

Paper for Political Science Seminar, Wednesday, July 23rd. This is an unfinished draft which is not for reproduction or quotation without the authors' consent.

Force to the Fore: An Essay on American Elites and Democracy in the Post-9/11 Era

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It is probably safe to assume that George W. Bush and nearly all the people around him have never heard of Vilfredo Pareto. Pareto was, after all, a relatively obscure Italian intellectual who was born in 1848 and died in 1923 and whose treatise on society and politics appeared in 1915 and was not translated into English until 1935. It can be argued, however, that Pareto and a few like-minded contemporaries, of whom Gaetano Mosca (1856-1941) and Robert Michels (1875-1936) are the best remembered, anticipated the main lines of sociopolitical development that Western societies would follow during the twentieth century and beyond. In particular, Pareto sketched the kind of basic political change that George W. Bush and the elite surrounding him appear to embody in the post-9/11 era.

Pareto held that all modern societies are ruled by elites who rely on varying combinations of force and persuasion. If an elite could achieve and maintain a judicious balance of force and persuasion it would rule indefinitely. But no elite succeeds in doing this; inevitably, there is too much reliance on force or too much on persuasion. Through such imbalances elites sow the seeds of their displacement. Fox-like elites, which Pareto depicted as dominant in modern industrial societies, rely too much on persuasion. They appeal to mass material interests and govern through guile and cunning, deceit and fraud. The mainly parliamentary political regimes they create are at base 'demagogic plutocracies'. These regimes grapple alternately with centrifugal and centripetal pressures and tendencies:

The need of the weak for protection is constant and universal, and seeks fulfillment at the hands of whoever possesses power. In a period when centrifugal forces prevail, this protection will be sought for at the hands of certain outstandingly powerful men: the great lords and magnates. When centripetal forces are dominant, the central government will be called on to provide it. Whenever circumstances turn in favor of this second, centripetal phase, a pre-existing central government, or a central authority new both in form and substance, asserts itself sooner or later. Either by sudden violence or by protracted effort it subdues the dominant oligarchy and sets about the task of concentrating all sovereignty in itself. A remarkable thing about this transformation is that it is often promoted by one of the phenomena termed 'religious' (Pareto, 1921: 47).

In his *Treatise on General Sociology*, Pareto held that ‘in international relations, beneath all the surface tinsel of humanitarian and ethical declamation, what prevails is force alone.’ When war or the threat of war impinges, lion-like individuals and groups rise to power. The ruling elite becomes more bellicose and prone to use force. It appeals to patriotic, religious, and xenophobic sentiments to mobilize mass support for this reliance on force (1915/1935, paras. 2180, 2274-77).

This essay argues that concatenating world trends and international pressures, grievously punctuated by the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, are altering the character of elite rule in the United States in rough accord with Pareto’s sketch. With the presidency of George W. Bush an exceptionally cohesive and leonine elite has gained ascendancy. In the international arena, this elite is disposed to act forcibly and unilaterally to staunch perceived threats to American interests and security. Domestically, the elite is making policing and surveillance more widespread, abridgements of civil liberties more frequent, the military-intelligence apparatus much larger, key government agencies more centralized and secretive, and political mobilization more plebiscitory through dramatic and well orchestrated appeals to patriotic-religious sentiments and xenophobic fears. In short, the Bush elite is bringing force to the fore, and this is something new in American politics.

We ask if the Bush elite’s ascendancy is but a brief aberration in response to the 9/11 attacks, or if it marks the start of a new era of elite rule. We answer that because long-term world trends and pressures are the basic drivers of the elite’s disposition to use force, the patterns and practices of the Bush elite, though probably not Bush & Co. themselves, are here to stay. If this is a plausible hypothesis, it raises several important questions. In what ways does the Bush elite manifest a new and continuing kind of ruling elite? If a heavier reliance on force is the key feature, what are others? What implications does the disposition to use force have for the *sine qua non* of democratic politics, namely, restrained electoral and other political competitions between elites? What are its implications for public opinion processes that have been at least partly free from elite management and manipulation? Most basically, is elite reliance on force an effective response to the world pressures and trends that impel it?

These questions constitute the themes of this essay. In concluding it, we will discuss how the framework for analyzing elites and politics, with which we and other scholars have been identified, must be modified to take account of ruling elites and ostensibly democratic regimes like the American in the post-9/11 era. We begin, however, by considering what distinguishes the Bush elite from its predecessors.

The Bush Elite

To the extent that one can speak of ‘ruling elites’ in the U.S. and other Western countries during the twentieth century’s second half, they were seldom clearly distinct from their predecessors and successors. Typically, they were enmeshed in extended circles and webs of influence and personal acquaintance. Thus studies of American, Australian, Norwegian, and West German (and then re-unified German) national elites conducted

over the last three decades uncovered dense and encompassing ‘central circles’ in which hundreds of the uppermost figures in politics, government administration, business, trade unions, the media, churches, and assorted pressure groups were tied together in formations much tighter than portrayed by the ‘plural elites’ model and much wider than depicted by the ‘power elite’ model (Higley et al., 1991; Bürklin and Rebenstorf, 1997; Gulbrandsen et al., 2002). In and through such circles and webs of influence and power, individuals and factions rose, osmosis-like, to governing positions through lengthy careers that followed parliamentary, party, military, civil service, business, academic, and various other paths.

Once in government, these elites had their actions checked in many ways. Their members had to pay off numerous debts incurred during their rise. They could not ride roughshod over relatively autonomous and powerful elites in other societal sectors. Radical policy departures were stymied by the complexity of established institutions and by policies, programs, and problems inherited from their predecessors in office. Their members’ personal behaviors and political actions were subjected to opponents’ intense scrutiny and criticism, filtered and often magnified by mass media that displayed a strong suspicion of those in government office. Any single-minded pursuit of policies and programs that departed sharply from what had gone before was, in short, extraordinarily difficult. As S.E. Finer (1965) encapsulated Pareto’s thinking, the fox-like elites that have prevailed in most Western countries over a long period routinely took in each other’s washing and scratched each other’s backs.

The elite clustered around President George W. Bush breaks with this pattern. In composition and structure it is an exceptionally cohesive, tightly woven elite. Its principal members have long been political intimates who display a marked élan and share a distinctive set of moral and political beliefs. They possess an internally agreed and dramatically new doctrine for dealing with the world outside the U.S., and in domestic affairs they pursue a program of changes in American society more single-mindedly than any elite since at least the New Deal administration of the 1930s. Much of the elite’s foreign policy doctrine was formulated years before government office was achieved at the start of 2001. Although some amount of improvisation has since been unavoidable, the elite has been tenacious – some would say ruthless – in implementing its doctrine and domestic program. These features of the Bush elite have no clear precedent in recent American history.

Close-up accounts of the Bush elite’s first two years in power – *Bush at War* by Bob Woodward and *The Right Man* by Bush speech writer David Frum (who coined ‘axis of evil’) – discuss the elite’s composition and workings in considerable detail. In addition, numerous journalistic investigations have dissected and highlighted the elite’s singular gestation, cohesiveness, and policies. The gist of these accounts and dissections is as follows.

Cohesion. The elite’s core consists of the Bush family dynasty – the President’s grandfather was US Senator, his father was President, his brother is Florida’s Governor – and a dozen or so intimate and trusted Texas advisers such as political tactician Karl

Rove, Secretary of Commerce Don Evans, White House chief of staff Andrew Card, Press Secretary Andrew McClellan, and media advisor Karen Hughes. Several dense circles overlap and intersect at the elite's core and are given a variety of labels: neo-conservatives, assertive nationalists, democratic imperialists, realists, old-school conservatives. The most powerful of these circles consists of ultra-conservative veterans of the Reagan and Bush Senior administrations, exemplified by Vice President Dick Cheney and his assistant Lewis Libby and by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy Paul Wolfowitz. Around this quartet are two score other Reagan and Bush Senior veterans who spent most of the 1990s located in a handful of conservative think tanks, most of them funded heavily by the defense industry. A second overlapping circle encompasses less radically conservative members of the Bush Senior administration and their protégés: Secretary of State Colin Powell and his deputy Rich Armitage; National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice (protégé of Secretary of State George Shultz in the Reagan administration); Bush Senior cabinet officers such as Brent Scowcroft, James Baker, Lawrence Eagleberger, and intimates such as Henry Kissinger and Warren Rudman. A third circle is distinguished by close ties to Israel and the powerful Israeli lobby: Richard Perle on the Defense Advisory Board; Defense Undersecretary for Policy Douglas Feith and his deputy Stephen Cambone; Undersecretary of State for Arms Control John Bolton and his adviser David Wurmser; and several others who formed a committee to advise Benjamin Netanyahu when he became Israel's Prime Minister in 1996. A fourth circle consists of Bush cabinet officers and high-level White House staff who are held in high regard by the Republican Party's conservative and Christian fundamentalist wings: Attorney General John Ashcroft; Secretary for Homeland Security Tom Ridge; the former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers Lawrence Lindsay; the head of the Office of Management and Budget Mitch McDaniel (who resigned in June 2003 to run for the Indiana governorship); and key figures in Congress such as House Majority Leader Tom Delay from Texas and Trent Lott's successor as Senate Majority Leader, Bill Frist from Tennessee.

Beliefs. The elite's beliefs have a strong religious coloration, augmented by a Spartan élan. Bush himself is a born again Christian rescued by God, he believes, from a dissolute life and now destined to serve a Divine purpose. Cabinet and other meetings begin with prayers; Bible study sessions are held among White House personnel; the president's speeches are laced with references to God, the Almighty, Providence, and the Creator; 'evil' is a meaningful concept; and a key domestic policy initiative has been shifting responsibility for the provision of many welfare services to 'faith-based' organizations. There are quasi-military codes of behavior and dress to which all elite members must adhere and which reflect Bush's personal regimen of early-to-bed and early-to-rise, with body-maintaining and mind-clearing exercise daily. Watchwords are loyalty to the president and respect for the chain of command. Public appearances by Bush are closely husbanded and scripted (e.g., between 9/11 and the final UN Security Council showdown over Iraq in mid-March 2003, a period of 18 months, Bush held only two televised press conferences).

Foreign Policy Doctrine. A blueprint for the Bush elite's defense program titled *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century*

(2000) was drawn up during the three years before the elite took office. Among its co-authors were Wolfowitz, Liddy, Bolton, and Cambone, along with Elliot Cohen and Devon Cross, now members of the Defense Policy Board, and Dov Zakheim, now Defense Dept. Comptroller. Work on this blueprint was co-chaired by William Kristol, editor of *The Weekly Standard*, which many regard as the administration's principal media voice, and Robert Kagan, whose book *Of Paradise and Power* (2003) is viewed by many in and around the elite as a seminal essay on trans-Atlantic divide since 9/11. The blueprint refined a plan conceived and recommended by Wolfowitz in 1992 when he was deputy to Cheney, who was Defense Secretary in the Bush Snr. administration. Since taking power at the start of 2001, the Bush elite has implemented much of this blueprint: the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty with the Soviet Union/Russia has been repudiated; a global missile defense system is being built; defense spending has been increased from 3 percent of GDP to the recommended 4 percent; outmoded weapons systems have been cancelled; developing small nuclear bombs ('bunker busters') has been authorized; 'rogue regimes' in Afghanistan and Iraq have been attacked and removed; covert efforts to de-stabilize the Iranian regime have been ordered; and confrontation with the North Korean regime is considered.

The elite's *National Security Strategy*, announced in September 2002, embraces pre-emptive attacks against perceived enemies, rejects as Cold War relics the strategies of containment and deterrence, charts a global configuration of US military bases and long-distance troop deployments, and asserts that no country will be allowed to equal or surpass American military power during the next several decades. The Bush elite's policy toward Israel and the Middle East has reflected documents also written well before the elite gained office. One of these was the advisory paper prepared for Netanyahu in 1996 by members of the elite's Israel-oriented circle. Titled 'A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm,' this recommended de-emphasizing the Oslo peace process in favor 'a traditional concept of strategy based on balance of power' that would involve projecting Israeli military power so as to make it unchallengeable in the region. Another anticipatory document was the 1999 book by David Wurmser, now senior adviser to John Bolton in the State Dept., titled *Tyranny's Ally: America's Failure to Defeat Saddam Hussein*. Wurmser stated quite plainly what many now assume to be the real, as distinct from the public, rationale for eliminating Hussein and his regime, to wit, doing so would de-stabilize the regimes in Syria and Iran, neutralize Lebanon and its support for Hezbollah, thus deprive the Palestine Liberation Authority of external support, and strongly dispose the PLA to accept Israel's terms for a settlement.

Domestic Program. The core of the Bush elite's domestic program is a vision of 'markets released'. Much of what government agencies do is being out-sourced to private companies, which has the benefit of weakening powerful public sector labor unions. Environmental protections are being removed or loosened in the name of 'de-regulation'. It is proposed that Social Security recipients be allowed and encouraged to open private savings accounts invested in the stock market. It is likewise proposed that Medicare coverage of retired citizens' medical costs be placed in the hands of private sector HMO's. The provision of education vouchers enabling parents to move their children into private schools is also proposed. The burden of Medicaid spending for indigent elderly

citizens is being shifted to the states, which are unable to pay for Medicaid costs, so that the program is being whittled down. Above all, federal income taxes are being slashed on the theory that supply-side economic growth will generate new tax revenues with which to eliminate huge budget deficits resulting from the tax cuts, the economy's doldrums, and the costs of the elite's foreign and homeland security policies.

A National Strategy for Homeland Security, announced in July 2002, is being implemented. It involves a vast Department of Homeland Security, created in December 2002, to centralize a host of agencies and measures aimed at preventing, preempting, and if necessary recovering from attacks by terrorists using nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. In service to this *Strategy*, the previous strict domestic/foreign boundary between the FBI and CIA has been made more porous; the Immigration & Naturalization Service and Border Patrol have been fused; a scale of public 'terrorism alerts' has been put into use; thousands of foreign aliens are being registered, photographed, fingerprinted, and deported if found to be illegal; educational institutions are compelled to certify the enrolled statuses of their international students; and a so-called Patriot's Act that eases restrictions on the surveillance and detainment of persons suspected of terrorist ties has been enacted.

Mobilization of Support. The Bush elite's mobilization of public support is choreographed in impressive detail. The most prominent elite members daily invoke the horror of the 9/11 attacks and consequent necessity for a 'global war on terrorism'. Foreign and domestic policy aims are couched in strong value terms: compassion, democracy, an era of responsibility, leave no child behind. They are also dressed in nationalist garb, to wit, 'America's duty as the greatest and strongest country the world has ever seen'. A flag button is on every elite member's lapel. Speeches are carefully sequenced by the White House Communications Office to escalate public awareness of the threats facing the country. Principal elite members are made available for background briefings of local television news anchors to promote a nationally uniform and sympathetic media presentation of the case for forceful actions. Cable television channels are provided large amounts of Defense Department film footage for programs that demonize America's enemies – Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, Kim Jong Il – and depict America's military might and heroic sacrifices and victories in past wars fought to 'defend freedom'. Television and radio talk shows are fed leaks and copy by the public relations sections of government departments, Republican Party national headquarters, and the array of allied conservative think tanks, so that the hosts of these shows are better able to deride domestic critics and vascillating allies such as 'the French' and 'the Germans'.

Elite Divisions. The Bush elite is strikingly cohesive, but it is not without internal divisions. In the State Department there is a policy fault line between top-level actors who helped plan the elite's program before gaining power – Armitage and Bolton, for example – and those who did not – Colin Powell and the Department's professional diplomats. More 'multilateralist' in their foreign policy preferences, Powell and his camp also clash with the 'unilateralist' proclivities of the Defense Department leadership clustered around Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, the National Security Council run by Rice, and Cheney and his advisors. This foreign policy fault line also runs between various

figures who by virtue of earlier service are influential in the public discussion of foreign policy: on the one side, 'moderates' such as Scowcroft, Eagleberger, and Kissinger; on the other side, 'hawks' connected to think tanks closely associated with the Bush elite, such as Perle and Kagan, as well as media commentators like George Will, William Safire, and Rush Limbaugh, who have pipelines to the elite's inner circles. In economic policy there is a fault line running between a broad camp of 'tax-cut zealots' based in the Council of Economic Advisers, Office of Management and Budget, and White House staff in the person of political tactician Karl Rove, and 'deficit hawks' centered in the Treasury and Federal Reserve. As with the foreign policy fault line, this economic policy divide also runs through a thicket of influential private sector advisors and media commentators.

It must also be noted that while the executive branch is controlled firmly by the Bush elite, Congress is not so reliably under its sway. Before the mid-term elections in November 2002, the Democrats had knife-edge control of the Senate, while the Republicans who controlled the House of Representatives had to contend with diverse factions and constituencies that diluted their alignment with the executive branch. However, in the wake of the victory won by Bush and his supporters in the 2002 elections, a new Republican majority leader in the House, Tom Delay of Texas, imposed much tighter control on the House Republicans, and a new majority leader in the Senate, Bill Frist of Tennessee, has sought to do the same there.

A New Power Elite

Is the Bush elite an aberration in American politics? There are two respects in which this might be so. The first is that its ascendancy is the accidental result of the political train wreck that occurred in the 2000 presidential election. Not only did Al Gore flub his campaign, but the third party candidacy of Ralph Nader, Florida's deeply flawed election machinery and machinations, and the antique curiosity of the Electoral College combined to deprive Gore of the presidency, despite his popular vote victory. So the Bush elite's ascendancy results from a chance conjunction of political-electoral circumstances and the elite's fairly ruthless exploitation of them, especially in Florida. Even then, the Bush elite had to rely on a friendly majority of Supreme Court Justices to gain power through a decision, in *Gore v. Bush*, that nearly all constitutional scholars agree was without sound legal basis. In short, the elite's ascendancy is an accident, its hold on power is wafer thin, the ambitiousness of its program far outreaches its electoral base, and in the normal cycles and practices of American politics it will soon be driven from office. It is simply a short-lived aberration.

In another respect, however, it can be argued that Bush and his associates are aberrant in that they alter long-term patterns and trends in the structure of elite power. These include the increasing concentration of corporate power, the military's swelling power, and the growing recourse to plebiscitary mobilizations of political support. While the Bush elite can be seen to embody a continuation of these trends, it can also be viewed as so accelerating and magnifying them that it constitutes a new kind of power elite, a fusion of political, military, and corporate power that supersedes what has gone before.

Let us examine trends in these three power domains over the past half century and then discuss how the Bush elite newly fuses them.

Published in 1956, C. Wright Mills' *The Power Elite* hit the social science and intellectual community of the 1950s like a bombshell. At the time, most sociologists and political scientists denied that America had anything approaching a ruling elite. They held, instead, to a pluralist perspective in which power was viewed as widely dispersed among a multitude of competing interest groups that roughly balanced one another and thereby ensured that citizens' interests were taken into account in government decision making. In the Cold War atmosphere of the 1950's, moreover, intellectuals were beginning what proved to be a long celebration of America's democratic virtues, while most ordinary citizens professed to believe Lincoln's dictum that American government was of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Mills would have none of this. He contended that semblances of democracy in American history had been abrogated in the post-World War II period by a marked centralization of power in the hands of a few tightly interlocked groups whose members occupied the top positions in business, the military, and the federal government's executive branch. This power elite made all major decisions having to do with war and peace and with macro economic issues. Decisions about lesser matters were left to stalemated 'middle levels' of power, which consisted of Congress, a variety of interest groups, as well as officials in the several states. These middle-level figures and groups operated in rough approximation to the pluralist model. At the bottom of the power hierarchy, Mills saw an emerging 'mass society' of passive individuals whose political opinions, to the extent they had any, were spoon-fed by the power elite and its publicity flacks through commercial media that were engaged in a race to the bottom – to the lowest common denominator that yielding the greatest number of listeners/consumers.

Proponents of the prevailing pluralist view roundly rejected Mills' thesis, while advocates of the less influential Marxist 'ruling class' thesis thought that Mills essentially supported their position but did so in an ad hoc and theoretically barren way. Nevertheless, Mills' postulation of a power elite showed remarkable durability over the years and decades that followed. The ranks of hard line pluralists thinned greatly after the 1950s. Robert Dahl, one of Mills' sharpest critics early on (Dahl, 1958), was soon describing the American political system as a 'polyarchy' (Dahl, 1967, 1972) – a system in which elites achieve ruling power through democratic electoral contests. In still later writings, Dahl expressed much concern about the concentration of power in large corporations and other inequalities that arise from market capitalism (Dahl 1980, 1998). Gradually, most scholars and political observers came round to the view that, yes, power is concentrated in an elite, but this elite is more differentiated and more inclusive of the position holders that Mills relegated to the 'middle levels' of power.

Mills became an intellectual hero to the New Left activists of the 1960s and 1970s. The entry of many of these activists into positions of power during the twentieth century's last quarter helped ensure his continuing influence. A leading example is G. William Domhoff. In successive editions of *Who Rules America?* (fourth ed., 2002),

Domhoff built an increasingly persuasive case that a corporate-based social upper class dominates American policy-making. Indeed, several trends strongly suggest that corporate dominance has become greater since the 1950's when Mills wrote. Labor union membership has declined from a third of the work force in the 1950's to not much over ten percent today. Corporate financing of political campaigns has increased exponentially. The Republican Party has been made over into a party of conservative and ultra-conservative activists closely allied with corporate interests and think tanks funded by those interests. The Democratic Party has adopted more corporate-friendly policies, and when it most recently held executive power it privatized and truncated welfare state services previously provided by governments.

Let us look more closely at these developments and how they have culminated in the Bush elite's fusion of corporate and military power with political mobilization by plebiscitary means.

The Military

Especially important for our theme of force coming to the fore is Mills' thesis of 'the military ascendancy'. Mills argued that by the mid-1950s the military elite had risen to the pinnacle of power as a result three key developments: the successful prosecution of World War II, the development and use of nuclear weapons, and the Cold War's onset. Whereas military leaders had previously been prominent only in wartime, 'they are now operating in a nation whose elite and whose underlying population have accepted what can only be defined as a military definition of reality' (Mills, 1956: 198). The power of the 'warlords' lay not just in their military roles, but also in their economic and political influence. As key decision makers in formulating and allocating the bulk of demands on the federal budget (about 60 percent in the Eisenhower/Kennedy years), as highly effective proponents of their interests in the halls of Congress, as often the best-informed people at the table when foreign policy issues were discussed, as executives of major corporations after retiring from active duty, top military officers were full-fledged members of the power elite. Indeed, Mills portrayed the executive branch political elite as playing second fiddle to military and corporate and elites in a 'permanent war economy'.

The idea that a permanent national emergency greatly enhances the influence of 'the specialist on violence' was not original with Mills. Before World War II (and before the invention of nuclear weapons) it was stated cogently by Harold Lasswell. In his *China Quarterly* (1937) and *American Journal of Sociology* (1941) articles on 'The Garrison State', Lasswell prophesied that modern weapons, especially aerial warfare, would produce a 'socialization of danger' by making civilian casualties greatly outnumber military ones. He speculated that this could, in turn, create a garrison state, in which

Decisions will be more dictatorial than democratic, and institutional practices long connected with modern democracy will disappear... Rival political parties will be suppressed by the monopolization of legality in one political party...or by the abolition of all political

parties...[I]nstrumental democracy will be in abeyance, although the symbols of mystic 'democracy' will doubtless continue...The elite of the garrison state will have a professional interest in multiplying gadgets specialized for acts of violence' (Lasswell, 1941: 461-465).

Although Mills' thesis about a 'military ascendancy' found a strong echo in Dwight D. Eisenhower's farewell address warning against a military-industrial complex, the thesis has in recent years been given less currency. In the seventh edition of *Who's Running America?* (2002), Thomas Dye writes '[W]hatever the power of defense contractors and the military at the height of the Cold War, their influence today in governing circles is minuscule' (p. 93). The military elite does not figure at all in Domhoff's most recent analysis. And Alan Wolfe argues in his afterword to *The Power Elite's* re-issuance in 2000 that Mills' emphasis on the military ascendancy was overdrawn and was an artifact of the Cold War years. Wolfe points out that defense spending as a proportion of all federal outlays declined from about 60 percent in the 1950s and early 1960s to less than 20 percent in the 1990s, and that as a percentage of GDP it declined from nearly 10 percent to about 3.5 percent over this period. After Vietnam, the U.S. 'has been unable to muster its forces for any sustained use in any foreign conflict', Wolfe writes. He claims that this is in part because Americans' opposition to higher taxes has blocked military growth and in part because 'The rhetoric of emergency...is not a rhetoric to which [taxpayers] are attracted' (Wolfe, 2000: 372-74). In the post-9/11 era it may be that these authors will want to revise their views of the military's place in the American power structure. For the aftermath of 9/11 gives new relevance to Mills' claims of 'an emergency without a foreseeable end' in which America is destined to live in 'a military neighborhood'.

It is worth considering why America's reliance on the instruments of force in foreign policy, and thus the centrality of the military elite, never really declined after the tense Cold War years when Mills wrote *The Power Elite*. Declining proportions of federal budgets and GDP devoted to military spending do not capture the military's place in the power elite. It is true that federal outlays for non-military spending grew enormously from the 1960s onwards, but so did GDP. This made it possible for America to have very nearly all the military capability its military and civilian leaders wanted even while the proportion of the country's wealth devoted to the military declined relative to other expenditures.

The Vietnam War came hard on the heels of Mill's 'military ascendancy' in the 1950's. American elites elected to use massive military force to deal with a vaguely evidenced security threat in Southeast Asia. The knotty question arises of how much this course of action resulted from the military elite's power vis-à-vis its civilian bosses. It is generally agreed that the military did not have its way in prosecuting the Vietnam War. But it is equally agreed that the Vietnam policy and the War's operational details were formulated primarily in the Pentagon and National Security Council and for the most part simply approved in a White House headed by a foreign policy novice, Lyndon B. Johnson (cf. Eliot Cohen's new book and the extended soul searching of Johnson's Secretary of Defense, Robert B. McNamara).

In the years following America's withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973 and the Reagan administration's massive defense spending in the 1980's the military elite developed the so-called Powell Doctrine. To be invoked when asked to undertake major engagements, this requires that (1) national security must be in jeopardy; (2) goals must be clear; (3) measures to win decisively – the use of overwhelming force – must be permitted; (4) there must be a clear exit strategy. During the Reagan and post-Reagan years, in any case, the military and allied intelligence agencies were hardly inactive. Anti-communist forces in Central America were trained and assisted, the *mujahadeen* in Afghanistan were provided with sufficient training and hardware to drive the Soviet Union out of the country, Grenada and Panama were invaded, Libya was bombed and otherwise harassed militarily, and in 1990 there was, of course, the full-scale Gulf War that drove Iraqi forces out of Kuwait. Although military spending underwent a decade-long decline after the Gulf War and the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, Robert D. Kaplan (2003) observes that between 1993 and the attack on Iraq ten years later, some 80 small-scale American military actions by 'quiet professionals' were conducted around the world.

During the 1990's and before the Iraq War in 2003, a prime indicator of the military elite's power and autonomy was the growing importance of CINCs, the four-star regional combat commanders for Northern Europe, Southern Europe, the Middle East and Africa, the Pacific, plus the five 'functional' CINCs who deal with space, special operations, transportation, nuclear forces, and joint forces. Since passage of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act, the CINCs' line of authority runs directly to the Secretary of Defense and President, instead of through the Joint Chiefs of Staff as previously. Throughout the 1990's, defense budget allocations to the CINCs increased dramatically, to the point where Dana Priest (2003) thinks of them as 'Proconsuls to Empire'. Another observer of imperial tendencies, Andrew Bracevich, also characterizes the CINCs as 'proconsuls'. In using this label, Priest and Bracevich follow the lead of a former CINC, Gen. Anthony Zinni, who freely described himself as a proconsul. Andrew Bracevich's observations are worth quoting at some length:

A greater reliance on coercion as an instrument of policy offered only one manifestation of the increasing militarization of American statecraft after the Cold War. Equally striking was the tendency of serving officers to displace civilians in implementing foreign policy. At the very top, civilians might remain the architects of overall strategy, but just beneath them the military provided the engineers who converted design into reality...A CINC's take on his region was not necessarily congruent with views prevailing back in the State Department, the Pentagon, or even the White House. The willingness of a Zinni or a [Adm. Dennis C.] Blair to express views at odds with those of their nominal superiors offered one measure of their growing autonomy. When the Clinton administration declared its support for efforts to overthrow Saddam Hussein, Zinni publicly dismissed the idea as a stupid one...When Blair found himself in

disagreement with the State Department over demands that he sever all contacts with the Indonesian military for its running rampant in East Timor in 1998, a nasty bureaucratic row ensued. In the end, the CINC's preferences – not those of the US ambassador to Indonesia – prevailed. To work around a foreign policy apparatus that the CINCs found to be unresponsive and overly cautious, the operative principle was to act first and seek permission later' (Bracevich, 2002: 167, 180).

The military elite's fortunes have waxed while the diplomatic elite's have waned. Fifty years ago Mills lamented America's historical unwillingness to build a robust Foreign Service and the Service's return to its usual atrophied state after World War II. For Mills this meant that instead of diplomatic solutions there were only military ones. Writing about the State Department today, Dana Priest (2003) documents the Foreign Service's still greater impoverishment. Congress slashed State Department funding by 20 percent during the 1970's and 1980's, forcing closure of more than 30 embassies and consulates, as well as a 22 percent reduction of employees. Where four percent of the federal budget was spent on diplomacy during the 1960's, in 2000 the proportion was less than one percent. Priest contends that successive administrations have relied increasingly on the military to deal with foreign problems, and the military have seized the moment with unmatched esprit, cohesiveness, and leadership skills. Operating expertly within the civilian political world, dozens of uniformed officers have joined the staffs of the State Department, National Security Council, and CIA. All the military branches have large congressional staffs that lobby as effectively as the best Washington law firms, even though explicit lobbying by the military is legally forbidden. Over the last several decades, and conspicuously during the Clinton administration, 'The military simply filled a vacuum left by an indecisive White House, an atrophied State Department, and a distracted Congress.' Priest adds that since 9/11 'Without a doubt, US-sponsored political reform abroad is being eclipsed by new military pacts focusing on anti-terrorism and intelligence-sharing.' As Priest and others (e.g. Kaplan, op. cit.) argue, military-to-military negotiations and agreements may be the most significant arm of US foreign policy today. For example, Jim Hoagland, the respected foreign affairs columnist for the *Washington Post*, observes that 'Classical diplomacy and meaningful international negotiation have virtually disappeared as agents of global change and leadership. The Bush administration's war on terrorism has led to a significant militarization of US foreign policy that has become the dominant force in world affairs...Change today flows from the barrel of a gun' (*Washington Post*, June 19,2003).

Corporate Power

Corporate power is great in all modern capitalist societies; in all of them corporate chieftains, as Mills sometimes called them, form an elite of central importance. The reasons are not mysterious, and Harold Wilensky states the most important of them succinctly:

[B]usiness is not merely another interest group; it inevitably dominates modern political economies because of its unique indispensability, its control over

technology, the organization of work, the location of industry, market structure, resource allocation, and what is to be produced in what quantities. Everyone's standard of living is in its hands. All of these business decisions are therefore strongly resistant to government control or to other countervailing democratic forces. Politicians are much more receptive to business pressure than to any other; the most powerful among them, left or right, always seek to gain the confidence of the business and financial communities. Consequently, business enjoys not only extraordinary sources of funds and organizations at the ready, but also special access to government (Wilensky, 2002: 155).

The most cursory survey of rich democracies shows that corporate and political elites are everywhere tightly interlocked: prominent business leaders are regularly appointed to head commissions and policy task forces by British governments; the lines separating top business managers, politicians, and civil servants in France are exceedingly vague; governments of any political stripe subsidize and prop up large corporations in Germany; in Japan the 'iron triangle' of business, bureaucratic, and political leaders is infamous; and so on.

In his richly documented study, however, Wilensky (2001) captures the ways in which corporate power in the U.S. departs markedly from patterns of corporate power in nearly all other rich democracies. Wilensky focuses on the institutions that structure relations among government officials and major organized economic interests, in particular those who control corporations, lead trade unions that organize corporate work forces, and head professional associations that negotiate between business and labor. Delineating the extent of 'democratic corporatism' – collaboration and intermediation among the key groups in deciding major economic and social policies – Wilensky divides 19 rich democracies into three types of political economy: (1) corporatist – Sweden, Norway, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Finland, Denmark, Italy, Israel, Germany; (2) corporatist without the full integration of organized labor – Japan, France, and Switzerland; (3) fragmented and decentralized – the U.S., U.K. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland (2002: 84). He observes that the first five English-speaking countries (Ireland is something of an outlier) have in common 'confrontational industrial relations and a weak labor movement; poverty, inequality, means testing, and the welfare mess; limited and erratic influence by experts and intellectuals on socioeconomic policies; and great difficulty in linking national policies that belong together' (2002: 682-83).

Wilensky lists the ways in which the U.S. is the extreme case, even among the fragmented and decentralized English-speaking democracies:

[T]he de-alignment of parties; the swift rise of the commercial media in politics and culture; the polarization of congressional politics; arcane Senate rules that thwart the will of even substantial majorities; the criminalization of politics; the heavy weight of lawyers and judges in shaping public policy and the related pattern of adversarial legalism; and a score for murder, mayhem, and

imprisonment that puts the U.S. in a class of its own. All of the above sometimes results in lengthy public-policy paralysis...’ (Wilensky, 2002: 687).

Progressively over the past half century, top position holders in the corporate elite have moved directly into top political positions. Mills dissected the ‘political directorate’ of the Eisenhower administration in its first year of office (1953) and showed that only 14 of the 53 holders of the highest positions (president and vice president, cabinet members, heads of major departments, bureaus, agencies and commissions, as well as top White House staff) had any substantial prior experience in politics or government administration. Thirty-nine were, instead, outsiders, of whom 30 came directly from the corporate elite. When Mills looked at the second echelon of political office-holders appointed by Eisenhower – 32 deputies of departments, agencies and commissions – he discovered that only 4 had previously held no high-level corporate positions. ‘As a group,’ he concluded, ‘the political outsiders who occupy the executive command posts and form the political directorate are legal, managerial, and financial members of the corporate rich’ (1956: 235). Similarly, a study by Beth Mintz of the 205 individuals who served as cabinet ministers between 1897 and 1972 found that 78 percent of them came to these top political positions from the corporate elite (Mintz, 1975).

Domhoff (2002: 153-57) shows that the top political positions in the Bush elite are larded with members of the corporate elite. The president himself owned an oil company and co-owned a baseball team before his brief interlude as Texas Governor. His vice-president, Dick Cheney, came directly from being CEO of Halliburton (though he’d had extensive political experience in all three previous Republican administrations). Andrew Card, the White House chief of staff, had been the chief lobbyist for General Motors; Condoleezza Rice, the national security advisor, had been on the boards of Chevron and Transamerica; Mitch Daniels, director of the Office of Management and Budget, had been a senior executive at Eli Lilly; Colin Powell resigned board memberships at Gulfstream Aerospace and American Online to become secretary of state; Donald Rumsfeld, secretary of defense, had earlier, in addition to extensive political experience like Cheney’s, been CEO of G.D. Searle and also General Instruments, plus a board member of Kellogg, Sears Roebuck, Tribune Publishing, and Gulfstream Aerospace; Paul O’Neill, Bush’s first treasury secretary, had been CEO of Alcoa, and John Snow, Bush’s second treasury secretary, had headed CSX; Bush’s secretary of commerce and chief fund-raiser, Don Evans, was CEO of a Texas oil company; Norman Mineta, the secretary of transportation, had been vice president of Lockheed Marieta; Elaine Chao, the secretary of labor, was recruited from Bank of America and Citicorp management ranks and from the boards of Clorox, Dole Foods, and Northwest Airlines; the secretary for veterans affairs, Anthony Principi, joined the cabinet from the presidency of QTC Medical Services; Ann Venneman was a corporate lobbyist before her appointment as secretary of agriculture; Gale Norton, secretary of the interior, had been Colorado attorney-general and then a registered corporate lobbyist immediately before her appointment.

Less than a handful of Bush's uppermost political appointees have had no strong formal ties to the corporate elite: John Ashcroft, attorney-general, had been governor of Missouri and then senator from that state; Christine Todd Whitman was governor of New Jersey when appointed to head the Environmental Protection Agency (from which she resigned in May 2003); Rod Paige, secretary of education, had been superintendant of schools in Houston; Tommy Thompson, secretary of health and human services, was governor of Wisconsin when appointed; and Spencer Abraham, was earlier a senator from Michigan.

Just below cabinet level appointees in the Bush elite, the civilian secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force had earlier headed or held other key positions in major corporations. More widely, of the 200 or so leading fund-raisers for the Bush campaign in 2000 – the so-called 'pioneers' – at least 40 obtained high-level jobs in the administration (*The Economist*, June 28, 2003). Although not initiated by the Bush elite, at least \$90 billion a year in corporate welfare flows from the federal budget, with the large farm subsidies and protective tariffs for the steel industry announced by Bush in June 2002 greatly increasing this corporate welfare.

Also Kevin Philips on US as a plutocracy

Also book on Carlyle Group: Dan Briody, *The Iron Triangle* (Wiley, 2003).