

Cheney Hires China-Hawk Author Aaron Friedberg

by Roch Steinbach and Mike Billington

Princeton University Professor of Foreign Policy, Aaron L. Friedberg, was recently appointed to the position of Deputy National Security Advisor to Vice President Dick Cheney, for a one-year period. *EIR* has learned that this appointment results from the concern among the neo-conservatives in the Bush Administration that, since 9/11, Asia policy has slipped out of their control, in deference to an “engagement” policy toward China, under direction of Secretary of State Powell, not dissimilar from that of the Clinton years.

Friedberg’s assignment for the coming year, according to informed sources, is to formulate policy in the run-up to the 2004 Presidential elections, to bring Asia policy back under neo-conservative control in preparation for a desired confrontation with China in Bush’s second term.

Friedberg is well-known as a neo-con and “China-hawk.” He was a founding member of the neo-conservative Project for a New American Century (PNAC), run by Straussians William Kristol and Gary Schmitt. But unlike, say, former Defense Policy Board chairman Richard Perle, he is not considered a fanatic, and maintains a reputation as a sophisticated apologist for a hard-line approach to the Far East in general, and China, in particular.

An Asian expert close to Friedberg told *EIR* that his rigid insistence that China is inherently an enemy which must eventually be confronted by the United States, makes him the perfect candidate for the assigned task.

One of Leo Strauss’ Noble Liars

To understand the character of the man assigned to set America into confrontation with the world’s largest nation, it is useful to review Friedberg’s primary book on United States security policy: *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America’s Anti-Statism and Its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton University Press, 2000). This work is a supposedly phenomenological approach to American political history, primarily of the Cold War, told in terms of viscerally antagonistic “movements” and abstractly competing ideologies.

Caution is advised: In *Garrison State*, we are confronted with a presentation of Leo Strauss’ “noble lie,” which has become the trade-mark of neo-conservative justifications for warfare and related policies. This is evident from the first line of the first chapter, where Friedberg quotes: “The political philosopher Leo Strauss once described the United States as ‘the only country in the world which was founded in explicit



“China expert” Aaron Friedberg, another Straussian devotee of strong state power emerging out of perpetual crisis, has been added to Vice President Cheney’s office, the real center of policy power in the Administration. His brief: a U.S.-China crisis after the 2004 elections.

opposition to Machiavellian principles.’ ”

Although it reaches back to the Civil War for some illustrations, *Garrison State* is primarily a revisionist reassessment of the American military-industrial complex during the Cold War, portraying this era as a healthy expression of laissez-faire American capitalism, and as a vibrant upwelling of what the author refers to as the “anti-statist” impulse among competing American ideologies. According to Friedberg, the privatization and corporate development of industries that might otherwise (e.g., during times of crisis or conditions of national emergency) fall under government control, is a healthy sign of patriotic “anti-statist” influence upon the national economy, which keeps the Federal government appropriately “weak” and therefore (in the author’s binary logic), the nation stronger. These same anti-statist aspirations, he says, dominate the American public’s conception of the proper role of their government.

Friedberg’s argument depends on this simple reduction, falsely dichotomizing American political philosophy into the dual poles of “statism” and “anti-statism,” representing two factional attitudes towards authority—in particular, towards the gathering of powers in the Presidency. He obliterates and subsumes all other issues, whether of substance or nuance, relating to social or political policies, into this false dichotomy. This makes for tedious, mind-numbing reading.

Whitewashing the American System

For Friedberg, the split between statism and anti-statism occurs not merely with reference to the expansion of the Federal government in general, but of the Executive branch

in particular. So Friedberg writes: “‘Anti-statism’ is the body of ideas and arguments used by those who have opposed efforts to increase the size and strength of the Executive branch of the Federal government.” Anti-statism’s patriotic representatives are the captains of industry: those whose business it is to prevent the development of statism, by themselves controlling more and more areas of endeavor. For Friedberg, generally speaking, anti-statism is better than statism, but occasional crisis and wars are needed to justify periods of statist, dictatorial power in a strong leader. This is Straussian—as we have exposed (see *EIR*, May 30), it is synarchist.

There is a myopic, almost obsessive fixation on “power” in the Executive branch, in *Garrison State*. Friedberg betrays his politics by distorting the peculiar character of the American Revolution—the American System of political economy—and Alexander Hamilton’s unique role in early American economics. All primary authorities on the American System are ignored, while secondary authorities are legion: Max Weber, H.G. Wells, Samuel P. Huntington, Leo Strauss, Charles Tilly, Arthur Schlesinger, and an amen-corner of free-market true-believers. The result is a thoroughly detailed, yet completely superficial account of Federal power—especially Executive power—in the United States, from the Civil War to 2000, considered from the “analytic” categories of “statism” and “anti-statism.”

According to Friedberg, a stronger state necessarily means absolutist powers in the Presidency, referring often to Arthur Schlesinger’s 1973 *Imperial Presidency*. But, nevertheless, Friedberg’s ideological dismissal of the Constitutional institution of balanced powers, never ceases to surprise. For him the state only comes into existence to the degree the Executive branch approaches the acquisition of absolutist power. Starting with Max Weber’s definition of the state, as “an administration and legal order that claims binding authority over its citizens [and] over all action taking place in the area of its jurisdiction,” Friedberg focuses on the strong Executive office as the *sine qua non* of this definition. He writes: “following the spirit of this definition, I will use the term American state to refer to the Executive branch of the Federal (or national) government, including both the office of the President and the various agencies and organization subordinate to it.” So, the essential thesis of an idealist’s imperialist-executive coup against the Constitution is laid out—actually on Friedberg’s first page.

Friedberg seeks to illustrate his thesis with examples from the last 150 years of American history: post-World War II proposals for renewing the military draft; the rise of “voluntarism”; the Industrial Mobilization Planning under President Eisenhower; the Defense Production Act of 1950; and the National Security Resources Board. Each such example in *Garrison State*, however well researched, is represented as a duel between the patriotic laissez-faire anti-statists, and the power-grabbers of the Executive—who are, after all, only

doing their job.

For example, on the matter of policy debates to reinstitute the draft, in the 1950s and ’60s, Friedberg argues that economist Milton Friedman led “a number of capitalism’s most ardent defenders” against the draft, by presenting military conscription as a “tax-in-kind” on a few, where “slightly higher taxes” levied universally, would allow monetary payment to an eager all-volunteer force. Friedberg writes, that, “underlying the technical jargon, was a powerful normative concern. Voluntarism is not only more efficient than conscription, it was also morally superior.” Conscription was “involuntary servitude” according to Friedman, and the draft a “barbarous custom” unworthy of American traditions.

If nothing else, this particular illustration is useful today, for understanding the blinkered, ideological devotion of Rumsfeld and the chicken-hawks, to their “all-volunteer” forces deployed into Iraq and elsewhere.

‘Crises are Critical’

In line with a Straussian political philosophy that sees the source of the state itself within warfare, Friedberg attributes a peculiar “state-building” function to security crises and national emergencies of various sorts: the crisis represents the unique opportunity for executive action. Friedberg writes: “Crises are critical in American political development because the sources of resistance to state-building are so strong.” Friedberg expostulates: It is only when the threat to national stability or survival appears great, that traditional fears of excessive governmental power can be swept aside, temporarily. “Without a sufficiently intense galvanizing atmosphere of crisis, attempts at state-building are doomed to fail. In such cases, despite the exertions of aspiring state-builders, the institutional and ideological obstacles in their way will prove immovable.”

So a crafty “state-builder” situated in the Executive branch (as indeed Friedberg will be), must know how to exploit a crisis in order to expand the powers of the state. Successful attempts at “state-building” must be initiated by the Executive branch. “Emergency justifications are acceptable only for as long as an emergency is generally agreed to be under way.”

Under Friedberg’s counsel within the real seat of power in today’s White House—the Vice President’s office—we can expect to see efforts to make China the next geopolitical target of such contrived emergencies.

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