



**Rise of the Vulcans**  
**The History of Bush's War Cabinet**

James Mann

Viking Penguin

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In his article "Iraq's False Promises" in the January-February issue of *Foreign Policy*, Slavoj Žižek wrote, "If you want to understand why the Bush administration invaded Iraq, read Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, not the National Security Strategy of the United States." However, you should also take a look at President George W. Bush's red circle. That is what James Mann's new book is about.

The aim of this work by *Los Angeles Times* journalist Mann is the analysis of the relationship between Americans and the rest of the world for the last 30 years. The author focuses on the members of Bush's foreign policy team and the way their points of view have developed.

Mann uses the term "Vulcans," making an analogy with the Roman god Vulcan, for he believes this captures the image of President Bush's foreign policy team in the sense of power, strength, resistance and durability. It is no surprise, then, that once Bush became president, he turned to

a group of veterans to fill his highest foreign policy posts. Among the most outstanding are Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Cheney, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, head of the Joint Command, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz.

They have a long history and share a collective memory. In the same way, the two youngest members of Bush's foreign policy team, the president himself and his national security advisor, Condoleezza Rice, are strongly committed to the past. Bush's father became president of the United States after being director of the Central Intelligence Agency and vice president. Rice was the coordinator of U.S. policy on the Soviet Union during the first Bush administration; she was a protégé of Brent Scowcroft, the national security advisor to the first President Bush.

The relationship between academia, private capital and government is the first link that emerges from the history of the Vulcans, at least in the case of Paul Wolfowitz, who has served as a bridge among the three milieus. Condoleezza Rice, for example, was at Stanford's Hoover Institute and later worked for the oil giant Chevron.

In his book, James Mann maintains that disdain for Henry Kissinger and the policy of detente represented a change in U.S. relations with the world. Domestically, the issues and various focuses in the debate on foreign policy were causing a big change. Rumsfeld, Cheney and Wolfowitz played a very active role in these changes. During the Ford administration, the debate on foreign policy turned toward new questions. The main issue was the expansion of U.S. power. Was the United States declining after its military defeat in Vietnam? Was the public ready to abandon its efforts against communism and unnecessarily accept more cordial relations with the Soviet Union? Kissinger's foreign policy was based on a series of answers to these questions. He thought that after Vietnam, it was inevitable that Washington negotiate with Moscow. From the perspective of today's neo-conservatives, the United States was neither weak nor in decline. That was the moment to launch the offensive with the doctrine of preventive security.

For James Mann, that was when the Vulcans forged the building blocks of their foreign policy, that they would put into practice after the Cold War. The Republicans generally did better in matters of foreign policy and national security than the Democrats. This time was no exception. From his first months in the White House, Bush's foreign policy team made it clear that they would relate to the world in

new ways. Their style was a variation of that used during the first Bush administration. In the first nine months of 2001, the new administration adopted a more conflictive relationship with North Korea and China. It quickly pressed to develop the anti-missile system, despite European concerns. In addition, from the start it was clearly skeptical about the value of international accords and treaties.

After the September 11 attacks, the administration's new focus became more visible. A series of new doctrines and ideas were brought into play that broke with past foreign policy orientations and strategies. It was clear they would not continue with the policies of "containment" and "dissuasion" that had been fundamental pillars during the Cold War. In fact, according to the new doctrine, the United States could even begin a war with preemptive or preventive attacks. In the Middle East, where the Americans had worked with authoritarian regimes like the Saudis, they fostered the cause of democracy and of transforming the entire region. In the economy, the Vulcans have opted for leaving their country in the hands of private capital. Their focus is different from that of the presidency of William Clinton, when the National Economic Council was for a time even more important than the National Security Council.

These processes mean much more than a minor change of direction from one Republican administration to another. In fact, they represent a transcendental change: the emergence of a new vision of the United States' place in the world, with the consciousness that its military might is unequalled and it does not require commitments to any other nation or groups of nations. This new vision represents the culmination of the ideas and dreams of this group of Republicans.

James Mann catalogues the Vulcans as a new school in foreign policy. Perhaps this is a bit precipitated. However, the Vulcans focus basically on military power. In the second half of the 1970s, the aim was to build up the army and reconstruct it after Vietnam. In the 1980s and 1990s, their concerns centered on when to re-legitimize military might and how to use it. In the first years of the twenty-first century, they decided to put the new role of the United States in the world to the test in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Vulcans' generation serves as a bridge between the two periods of modern history: the Cold War and the post-Cold War. For them, the disappearance of the Soviet Union was only half a chapter in the story, not the end or the beginning. With the death of the Evil Empire was born a new vision, concretized in Pentagon strategy since 1992 as a world with a single pole.

James Mann aims to examine the Vulcans' beliefs and ways of looking at the world, analyzing the specific histories of its six members: Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell, Armitage, Wolfowitz and Rice. He also wants to understand how and why the United States has related to the world in this way. Where did the Vulcans' ideas come from? Why did these six people reach the heights of the Republicans' foreign policy apparatus? What is there in their past and their experiences that led them to make the decisions they did when they got into the White House in 2001 and after the September 11 terrorist attacks?

To the satisfaction of some and the dissatisfaction of others, President George W. Bush is not the main protagonist in this story. In fact, he only plays a secondary role. Although he does not have the strategic capacity of a von Clausewitz or the creative imagination of a Rachmaninov, perhaps for that reason he did not participate in the design of international policy during the Cold War, the Gulf War or any of the international crises his country has faced. In short, Bush, Jr., has no past in foreign policy. He could not make the decisions if it were not for the options offered him by the Vulcans, nor could he formulate policies without the ideas they bring with them.

The work of journalists like James Mann, Bob Woodward, Tim Suskind and Richard Clarke makes it possible to piece together the puzzle of President Bush's war cabinet. Enrique Krauze says that history moves following trajectories and structures, acts of human will and freedom, but in "clouded times" of identity fanaticism and other theological hatreds,<sup>1</sup> of the paradoxes of U.S. power on the one hand and of soft power on the other, times of nebulous and nihilistic enemies, what are needed are prophets of peace, not of war, witnesses of truth, not of propaganda. The word "empire" only denaturalizes the real condition of the United States. Octavio Paz already said it: if the United States became an empire, it would lose its *raison d'être*. How can it be a democracy and an empire at the same time?

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Octavio Paz referred to the international political situation of the 1980s as "clouded times." [Editor's Note.]