

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Former Ambassador Joseph Wilson, Conservative Writer William Kristol to Debate Iraq and War on Terror at UCSB May 24

More than a year after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, Americans and Iraqis continue to die in Iraq.

No weapons of mass destruction have been found.

Controversy continues over alleged but unproven ties between Saddam, al Qaeda and other terrorist groups.

Democratic government seems a distant prospect. Insurgent groups have taken up arms against American forces and Iraqi police.

Even moderate Iraqis seem to want the American military out of their country as soon as possible.

Was the invasion of Iraq a huge mistake?

Former ambassador Joseph Wilson, a leading opponent of the war, and neoconservative editor and writer William Kristol, a highly influential Bush Administration supporter, will come to the University of California, Santa Barbara

Monday, May 24 to debate that question in "Iraq and the War on Terror: Were We Wrong?"

The debate, scheduled for 7:30 p.m. in UCSB's Campbell Hall, is free and open to the public. It is the 2004 installment in the Arthur N. Rupe Great Debate Series, an annual presentation of the Office of the Provost of the College of Letters and Science.

The series is supported by an endowment from the Arthur N. Rupe Foundation.

"One of the primary responsibilities we have as an institution of higher learning is to educate our students about critical issues that are shaping our world and our future," said Aaron Ettenberg, acting provost of the College of Letters and Science.

"As educators, our goal is not to indoctrinate students into a particular way of thinking, but to challenge them to think differently about an issue, to consider alternate views and evaluate different perspectives.

"The upcoming Arthur N. Rupe Great Debate at UCSB on 'Iraq and the War on Terror' is a perfect case in point," Ettenberg said. "The campus and community will have a timely and unique opportunity to hear two fundamentally different perspectives on America in the post-9/11 world. We have every expectation that Ambassador Wilson and Dr. Kristol will provide us with an evening of thought-provoking, stimulating discussion and debate."

Kristol has been one of the standard bearers of the neoconservative movement that so permeates the foreign policy of the Bush Administration.

The son of Irving Kristol, one of the pioneers of neocon thought, Kristol has a Ph.D. in political science from Harvard University and spent his early years working in the presidential administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush.

In the Reagan Administration, Kristol served as chief of staff for Secretary of Education William Bennett.

During the first Bush Administration, he was chief of staff for Vice President Dan Quayle.

He is the former chairman of the Project for the Republican Future and the founder and chairman of the Project for the New American Century, a non-profit organization dedicated to American global leadership and military and diplomatic strength whose

members include Vice President Richard Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

He is also the author or editor of several books, the most recent of which is the best selling "The War Over Iraq: Saddam's Tyranny and America's Mission" (co-author) (2003).

Other titles include "The Future is Now: America Confronts the New Genetics" (co-editor), and "Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy" (co-editor).

Kristol is also founding editor of "The Weekly Standard," a conservative weekly political magazine owned by Rupert Murdoch, who also owns the Fox News Network.

Wilson, a career diplomat and a 1972 graduate of UCSB, has had a unique vantage point of Iraqi matters, having served as the deputy chief of mission in the U.S. embassy in Iraq from 1988 to 1991. Indeed, Wilson was the last American official to meet with Saddam in the days preceding the Operation Desert Storm war with Iraq in 1991.

Wilson joined the U.S. Diplomatic Service in 1976, spending much of his service in Africa and the Middle East. Since his retirement in 1998, he has run JC Wilson International Ventures Corp., an international business development and management company.

Based on his knowledge of Saddam and Iraq, Wilson opposed Bush Administration plans to invade Iraq early in 2003. He later angered members of the administration when he wrote in a New York Times op-ed piece that intelligence that Iraq had been seeking to buy nuclear material from Niger was patently false and that the President and his staff knew that when they nonetheless chose to make that assertion in the President's 2003 State of the Union Address.

Wilson said the CIA had sent him to Niger in 2002 to investigate information suggesting Iraqi interest in purchasing uranium and found the information to be unfounded.

He said he reported that to the CIA and the Administration knew it.

Later, newspaper columnist Bob Novak wrote a piece about the affair that identified Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame, as a CIA operative, effectively blowing her cover and

ending her career undercover.

Novak said his information came from sources in the Bush Administration that he refused to name.

Wilson said he feels the outing of his wife's CIA connections was a calculated Bush Administration reprisal aimed at punishing him for writing the New York Times piece.

He has just published a book, "The Politics of Truth: Inside the Lies that Led to War and Betrayed My Wife's CIA Identity: A Diplomat's Memoir."

Kristol's magazine, "The Weekly Standard," ran a negative review of Wilson's book titled "The Rise and Decline of Joe Wilson" in its May 17 issue.

The article, by Matthew Continetti, criticizes Wilson's book for making unsubstantiated guesses that Elliott Abrams of the National Security Council or I. Lewis Libby, Cheney's chief of staff, might have outted his wife to Novak.

Wilson and Kristol will indeed have much to talk about.

Also involved in supporting the debate is UCSB's Interdisciplinary Humanities Center. Co-sponsors include the Department of Political Science, the Global and International Studies Program and the Santa Barbara News-Press.

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