

By Janine R. Wedel and Linda Keenan

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Ever wonder how Libya's terrible image began showing some signs of improvement in recent years? Or how one of Gaddafi's sons would find himself named a "Young Global Leader" at Davos -- the ultimate insider's club?

The answer came in reports last week from *Politico*, the [Huffington Post](#) and [others](#) : Libya has made canny use of both old-school lobbyists, and, crucially, the *new* generation of power brokers: shadow lobbyists.

As *Politico*'s [Laura Rozen](#) wrote last week:

One of the more unlikely figures... is not registered with the Justice Department. Prominent neoconservative Richard Perle... traveled to Libya twice in 2006 to meet with Qadhafi, and afterward briefed Vice President Dick Cheney... according to documents released by a Libyan opposition group...

Our only quibble is her choice of the word "unlikely." Gaddafi has been called "deranged" and "delusional," but in the era of the [shadow elite](#) , his regime made at least one rational choice in choosing to host Perle, a consummate shadow lobbyist who was hired by a firm that makes K-Street look positively passe.

Perle was working with the Monitor Group, a Cambridge-based consulting firm that features an academic all-star list of professors and thinkers, many connected with the Harvard community, including co-founder, Harvard Business School professor Michael Porter. (In a 2007 *Business Week*

interview, Porter says he met Gaddafi's supposedly reform-minded son years earlier over "several dinners" in London. That son looked very far from London's smart set in a

[YouTube clip](#) that's circulated in recent days, showing him rallying loyalists while holding a machine gun. The

World Economic Forum last week suspended his Young Global Leader title.)

These unregistered agents of influence are especially effective when they can trade on a prestigious imprimatur, like the Harvard name. In the case of Richard Perle, his name alone is his calling card: he had unimpeded access to the highest levels of power in the Bush White House. We would be well-advised to study Perle's M.O., because this is how the top influencers of today operate.

A former assistant secretary of defense under President Ronald Reagan, Perle has long surfaced at the epicenter of a head-spinning array of business deals, consulting roles and ideological initiatives, consistently courting and yet skirting charges of conflict of interest.

In the first term of George W. Bush, Perle accepted chairmanship of the Defense Policy Board, a Pentagon advisory body with a mixed state-private character that provides its members access to classified information and top-secret intelligence reports. This is the perfect arrangement for the shadow influencer: access without the accountability that comes with a more formal, visible role.

While serving as chair (later member) of the Defense Policy Board, Perle used the position to call for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein -- a cause for which he had long been working -- and pushed "information" manufactured by Ahmed Chalabi through government and private channels to help make the case for war. In his extensive operations abroad, he left many listeners with the impression that he spoke for the U.S. government.

Quasi-government official Perle gave talks throughout Europe. While Perle was neither a registered lobbyist nor an authorized spokesperson for the U.S. government, he "was making remarks as if he were an official inside the U.S. government," according to Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to the Secretary of State Colin Powell. Powell instructed his chief to compile a dossier of Perle's speeches and activities, of what Perle was saying and to whom. As Wilkerson told Janine:

The Germans, French, Brits, and Japanese perceived him [Perle] as an official purveying official U.S. policy... I had to bring on an extra staff person to keep up [the dossier]. It turned into five notebooks... and they were big notebooks too! One was four inches thick.

And now comes news of his visits to Libya (and subsequent briefings with Vice President Cheney), with Perle acting once again as, reportedly, an unregistered agent of influence. The firm that named him as a senior advisor in 2006 has the hallmarks of a classic shadow lobby organization. A revealing fact about Monitor is what the group says it is *not*: as the CEO himself

states, in those documents released by a Libyan opposition group, "Monitor is not a lobbying organization." This, despite the fact that they were reportedly being paid \$3 million a year plus by Libya to help thaw relations with the West.

This is quite obviously a marketing point for Monitor, and all of the other agile players of the shadow elite era. Shadow lobbyists can do the same things as traditional lobbyists, selling off the public trust to the highest bidder, and then go around bragging about how they've never sullied themselves with actual lobbying.

Shadow lobbyists can be more effective precisely *because* they do not define themselves as lobbyists. By introducing ambiguity they create deniability, which lends them influence with impunity. Moreover, with prestigious imprimaturs and impressive career histories filling up their talent rosters, organizations like Monitor Group can have far more access than your garden variety K-Street lobbyists. And by not registering as full-fledged lobbyists, they fall into a usefully vague area -- a regulatory netherworld. Government watchdogs therefore can do little.

Perhaps the saddest part of this story is the fact that this "news" is actually *old* news. The documents detailing Monitor Group's efforts to enhance Libya's standing were released by the Libyan opposition group in 2009, but back then, Libya wasn't front-page news.

Only when Gaddafi turned his gun on his own people did the lobbying on his behalf warrant a thorough reckoning. And no matter what shadow lobbyists try to portray, or how often they try to fly under the radar, they are, indeed, lobbyists, whether for their own ideological cause or simple financial interest. And they need to be held to account.