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American Exceptionalism, Power, and the Age of Terror:
Neoconservatism in Theory and Practice

by

Christopher Brian Langille

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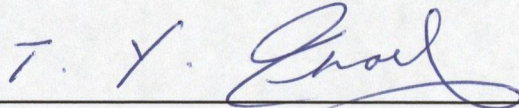
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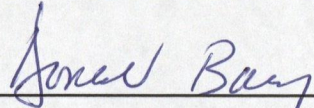
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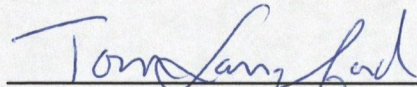
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "American Exceptionalism, Power, and the Age of Terror: Neoconservatism in Theory and Practice" submitted by Christopher Brian Langille in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Political Science.



Supervisor, Dr. Tareq Ismael, Department of Political Science



Dr. Donald Barry, Department of Political Science



Dr. Tom Langford, Department of Sociology

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Date

Abstract

This thesis is an analysis and an interpretation of contemporary American ideology, chiefly *neoconservatism*. Neoconservatism, as a contemporary ideology, is interpreted as an outgrowth of the underlying belief structure of American exceptionalism. The intellectual and ideological development of American exceptionalism is charted through the formative period of American history, and subsequently, the ideology of neoconservatism is placed within this intellectual context. Finally, as a case study of ideology as practice, the rhetoric, moral justifications, and policies of the American “war on terror” are evaluated in terms of their ideological content and their reliance upon motifs established in American exceptionalism and formalized in neoconservative thought.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Introduction: Research Context.....	1
Chapter One: American Exceptionalism	18
Chapter Two: The Neoconservative Intellectual Tradition	37
Chapter Three: Neoconservatism in the Age of Terror	59
Conclusion: Neoconservatism RIP or a Neoconservative Nation?	77
References	87

Introduction: Research Context

The United States at present is the most powerful nation in the world. In terms economic, military, cultural, and even spiritual, its capacity to project its influence on its allies and to force its will on its enemies outstrips that of any organized entity in human history, past or present. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 removed America's primary strategic and ideological opponent, significantly reducing what constraints had previously been placed on the projection of American power. The influence and reach of America's remaining competitors, chiefly a centralizing European bloc and an emergent China, are not negligible, but the geographic scope of their influence and their ability to project power are not truly global. The United States, as of 2009, constitutes nearly half of the world's total military expenditures,¹ more than twice as much as its nearest challenger in the European Union and perhaps ten times that of its most likely challenger, China. In terms of economic output, the United States, with 4.5% (est.) of the world's population, represents 24% (est.) of the Gross World Product.²

As a function of the United States' immense global power, and reflective of national ideology, the American people are: first, uniquely self-confident in their expectations of success in matters military, economic, and cultural; and second, frequent to grant a *prima facie* moral legitimacy to American exercises of power. Therefore, as a function of the United States' immense global power and the reflexive moral sanction the population grants American force, the United States is institutionally predisposed to the

¹ See Department of Defense, *The Budget for Fiscal Year 2009* and Fred Kaplan, "Breaking down the U.S. Military Budget," *Slate* (4 February 2008), <http://www.slate.com/id/2183592/pagnum/all/>

² World Bank, "Gross Domestic Product 2008," *World Development Indicators Database*, World Bank (1 July 2008)

projection of military force. The United States is therefore exceptional not only in terms of material advantages and vast power, but crucially, in terms of its political culture.

World opinion of American power, however, has rarely been so sanguine, particularly given the present conditions of American hyper power. In the first decade of the 21st Century, the United States has proceeded in the invasion and military occupation of two countries, including a country situated in the world's corridor of energy resource production. It is in light of these events that renewed attention has been brought to the question of the United States' role within the world and has raised serious questions as to the underlying tendencies in American political culture. And while the temptation has been attribute these developments in world affairs to some aberrational shift in American political thought, this is **not** the case.

Research Question

The American initiation of a 'war on terror' under the Presidency of George W. Bush, following the attacks of 11 September 2001, culminated with the invasion and military occupation of, first, Afghanistan, and more consequently, Iraq. The rhetorical and moral justifications for these actions, while not without precedent, were unique in their perceived arrogance and unilateralism. Moreover, as the United States endeavored upon a national-security program exemplified by the detainment of enemy combatants in extraterritorial prisons, the implementation of extreme interrogation measures, and the application of internal security measures atypical of a liberal democracy, the United States was accused of engaging in policies that stretched the conventional limits of

political behaviour by a democratic state if not outright violating that customs and laws that govern United Nations member states.

In light of the extraordinary political developments in the first decade of the 21st century, an immense amount of journalistic and academic attention has been paid to the ideological currents that dominate American society. Namely, there has been a significant fascination with the ideology of *American neoconservatism*, particularly its intellectual origins and its impact on the foreign-policy of the United States in the late 20th Century and the early 21st Century. American ideology, thus, is the central question of my research: 1) *What are the fundamental intellectual and cultural bases that underlie American thinking vis-à-vis its role within the world and the application of foreign policy?* 2) *What is neoconservatism and what are its policy prescriptions?* 3) *Where does neoconservatism fit within the larger context of American political thought?* and 4) *in the context of the “war on terror”, what recurring motifs and ideological justifications predominated and what connection does this have to the larger question of neoconservative ideology and the culture of American exceptionalism?*

The central question of my thesis is American ideology and the primary argument of my thesis is a claim of ideological and cultural continuity in America’s self-identity in relation to the outside world. The scope of American foreign policy has ebbed and flowed in relation to its relative power and to the underlying structure of the international system. However, these structural adjustments, while defining America’s parameters of action in foreign policy, have had limited influence on the underlying ideologies of American foreign policy, namely *American exceptionalism*. American exceptionalism, simply defined, is the belief that the United States occupies a unique social and moral position

within the world, represents a historical break from the political values of the ‘old world’, and therefore, the United States a unique moral prerogative in the application of its foreign policy. The neoconservative *theory* of foreign policy is argued to be, thus, entirely representative of preexisting currents in American ideology (exceptionalism), while neoconservative *practice* of foreign policy, as embodied in the expansive policies of the “war on terror”, is argued to represent – not an aberrational turn in American ideology – but the practice of American ideology in a unipolar world.

First then, what is neoconservatism? In strictest sense, contemporary American *neoconservatism* is a doctrine that advocates the broad, and if necessary, the unilateral and forceful use of America’s economic and/or military power: a) to enforce and expand a liberal world order amenable to American interests, namely to secure an international environment of free markets and free trade, and to undermine and isolate ideologies and regimes hostile to America’s political values; at the moral philosophical level, neoconservatism believes that b) America, as a function of its vast power and exceptional nature, has a unique moral responsibility within the world, and that the enforcement of American interests generally corresponds with moral purpose and human progress.

Second, American neoconservatism, as an intellectual tradition, can be explained as both a discrete ideology and as a component of the larger tradition of American exceptionalism. At the discrete level, neoconservatism is an ideology of opposition, an anti-ideology. In its first phase, out of the leftwing political milieu of 1930s New York intellectuals, neoconservatism originated as an ideology of liberal anticommunism, or more precisely, disillusionment with communism as practiced and represented by the Soviet Union. This represents the first stream in the development of early

neoconservatism, *foreign-policy neoconservatism*. The second stream of early neoconservative thought coalesced in the late 1960s as: a) a sympathetic, though thoroughgoing, critique of the liberal political programs of the 1960s, chiefly the anti-poverty measures of Lyndon Johnson's 'Great Society'; and b) hostility to the social upheavals of the 1960s as represented by the 'new left,' the 'counterculture,' and its radical politics concerning aesthetics, sexual mores, forms of identity and racial politics, and so forth. This represents the stream of *domestic neoconservatism* whose principle debates were represented in the journal *The Public Interest*, which was founded in 1965.

The intellectual trajectory of neoconservatism represents a continuous rightward shift away from its leftwing origins, culminating in the 1970s with the emergence of a new generation of neoconservatives who had absorbed the lessons of anticommunism and an opposition to contemporary liberalism, but had by and large, not undergone the process of left-to-right ideological displacement; hence neoconservatism as it developed in the 1970s was integrated within the larger American conservative movement, no longer an ideology of liberal anticommunism and sympathetic skepticism of liberal social policy, but increasingly supportive of conventional conservative economic and social policy. In the 1980s, the neoconservative movement actively supported the administration of President Ronald Reagan and, indeed, several of its figures were prominently featured in the administration's brain trust. Finally, neoconservative ideology crystallized into its contemporary form through the debates of the post Cold War era, where its theoreticians refined their theories of America's strategic objectives and moral obligations in a unipolar world. The most prominent neoconservative journal to emerge during this era was *The Weekly Standard*, though the most significant theoretical contributions and

debates took place in *The National Interest* and *Foreign Affairs*. Key elements of this ideology emerged in the post-9/11 policies of the George W. Bush administration.

This research project is, fundamentally, an interpretation of intellectual history. My predominant motif and argument is that neoconservatism does not represent an ephemeral development in the history of American ideology nor does it represent an alien force in the American intellectual tradition. Neoconservatism is here argued to be but the latest manifestation of the ideologies of American exceptionalism. The formative period in the intellectual development of American exceptionalism, of which neoconservatism subsequently grew out of, is therein argued to be comprised of three historical epochs: a) the revolutionary period, which provided the founding myths and metaphysical concepts of American mission; b) the “era of manifest destiny,” the period of continental expansion from 1812 - 1860 and c) America’s realization as interventionist world power with the outbreak of the Spanish-American war in 1898. Neoconservatism represents an outgrowth of the particular American tradition of ‘liberalism exceptionalism,’³ an orientation which presumes that American exercises of power, because of the country’s special nature, democratic traditions, and anti-colonial origins, are distinct from those of preceding European colonial powers and that America is imbued with a unique moral character.

Finally, the policies of the post-9/11 “war on terror”, up to and including the invasion and occupation of Iraq, are treated as a case study of neoconservative policy. This is not to suggest that neoconservative ideology is a factor, to the exclusion of others, in explaining the contours of American foreign policy post-9/11, but simply that the

³ Julian Go, “The Provinciality of American Empire: ‘Liberal Exceptionalism’ and U.S. colonial rule, 1898 – 1912,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49:1 (2007).

prominence of neoconservative ideology during this era was self-evident and unavoidable. In the spaces of popular media, public debate, and administration rhetoric, the justifications that preceded and accompanied America's "war on terror" were infused with the ideological claims of neoconservatism, which has been instrumental in structuring the nature of the debate. In evaluating the practice of foreign policy during this era, the neoconservative theories of American foreign policy in a unipolar world – as outlined during the internal debates of the 1990s – are considered in depth. Likewise considered are: a) the theoretical debates concerning 'terrorism' as political phenomena; b) the conflict between conservative/neoconservative pressure groups and the academic world, before and after the 9/11 attacks; and c) the stereotypes and antipathies that have shaped the Western image of Muslims and the Islamic world, and hence, form an ideological and cultural reservoir that coloured the rhetoric and justifications surrounding the "war on terror". Each of these three phenomena – terrorism, anti-academia, and cultural stereotype – is placed within the context of the chapter's central question of neoconservatism and the "war on terror".

Research Approach: Intellectual History and Political Culture

The analytical approach of this research project is the investigation of political culture and ideology. Culture, in general, refers to "the socially transmitted habits of mind, traditions, and preferred methods of operation that are more or less specific to a particularly geographically based security community";⁴ whereas political culture, in specific, refers to the orientation of a citizenry towards the exercise of state power, the legitimacy of governmental action, expressions of civil society, and – in terms relating to

⁴ Colin Gray, *War, Peace, and Victory* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), p. 45.

foreign policy – questions of popular and moral legitimacy in the exercise of external power and its relevant ideological dimensions. Cultural interpretations, of course, do not provide a total explanation for the character of a society. Indeed, “culture talk” is a risky and oft-criticized enterprise, particularly in its abusive forms which relate the powerful to the weak as a strategy to enact political and/or economic programs. Yet, while “culture talk” should be avoided as a strategy of denoting ‘essential’ characteristics of peoples without reference to historical experience, culturalist approaches to intellectual history remain useful in outlining the cultural and mythic reference points of a society, and the intellectual foundations of a state. Cultural interpretations, where grounded in recognition of history and political institutions, are a useful mechanism to place the historical behaviour of a state and a society within an intellectual pattern.

Cultural factors represent a sometimes underappreciated factor in the study of policy-making. Policy is, of course, not made in a process of detached rational action – or rather, not merely in a process of detached rational action – but is highly reflective of a nation’s distinct experience and cultural expectations. Conditioned by the nation's political culture, founding myths, and dominant discourses, policy makers are inherently constrained in their choices, and frequently compelled to do what is, in retrospective analysis, “objectively” irrational. Routine, habit, ritual, script, and cue can often shape state behaviour more than is generally estimated. Cultural rituals, in fact, color reality, imposing on policy-makers a culturally subjective understanding of their environment – often to the detriment of material concerns.

Routine, habit, scripts and cues create ideational paradigms, "cognitive backgrounds" that define "underlying theoretical and ontological assumptions."⁵ Ideational paradigms, familiar to policy-makers, reinforced by public sentiment, and propagated by "authorized knowers," are difficult to dismantle. Constrained by dominant paradigms, a nation's foreign policy and ideology have certain predictability. Dominant paradigms, however, are not static: dramatic change within the international system forces revision of dominant ideologies, as old assumptions about reality no longer apply. The collapse of the Soviet bloc, for example, emptied the bipolarity paradigm, and American unipolarity demanded a revision of existing paradigms to adjust to the new reality.

Thus, as the international system undergoes structural change, dominant paradigms become insufficient; new ideological frameworks, judged against the nation's historical experience and cultural expectations, undergo a process of debate and criticism. That is to say, the most 'rational' ideas may not win out: national identity and underlying political culture, which may or may not provide an accurate conception of the world, remain the frame of reference out of which new paradigms develop. Dominant ideological paradigms, revised in the light of international change may become more, rather than less, pathological. For example, the United States' parameters of action in the world, once constrained by international bipolarity, were expanded with the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the emergence of America as an uncontested hyperpower; likewise, the psychic shock of the 9/11 attacks stirred the United States to launch the vast and expansive policies of a global "war on terror" that, while exceptional in its particulars,

⁵ John Campbell, "Institutional Analysis and the role of ideas in political economy," *Theory and Society* 27:3 (June 1998), p. 389.

nevertheless drew from a preexisting reservoir of theories about, first, America's role within the world, and second, the nature of America's enemies, the Islamic threat in this case.

Political culture is foundational in the attempt to contextualize and explain the nature of American foreign policy. When interpreting policy, it is imperative to consider the social/intellectual environment from which policy springs. Hence, in the interpretation of America's "war on terror" policies, a primary ideological reference point is neoconservatism, which in turn, is to be understood in terms of the civic religion of American exceptionalism

Clarifications of Terminology and Research Scope

Neoconservatism as a Disputed Ideology

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the wide usage of the term 'neoconservatism' in journalism and public discussion, there remains significant confusion as to the appropriate use of the term. For this sake, it is useful to sketch the various usages of the term, including its frequent misusages. Fundamentally, confusion over usage of the term 'neoconservatism' owes to two factors. First, neoconservatism has no doctrinal text or 'manifesto', nor do those frequently identified as 'neoconservatives' generally self-identify as such; it is therefore is an ideology that has revealed itself through time, and thus, is highly subject to interpretation; and second, the meaning of the term *neoconservatism* varies tremendously, depending on the context in which it is used, varying according to geography, chronology, and community. As a term, 'neoconservative' was used sporadically and obscurely throughout the 20th Century,

though its contemporary usage originates in 1973 with Michael Harrington's article "The Welfare State and its Neoconservative critics" in *Dissent Magazine*, as a label for erstwhile leftists who had moved rightward, and had become, in Harrington's derisive phrase, "socialists for Nixon." Its specific usage as a reference to a doctrine of foreign policy is an even more recent development. Hence, references throughout this thesis to the 'neoconservatism' as it developed between the 1930s and the 1970s is a retroactive labeling, signifying that the term 'neoconservative' is a neologism that only entered the popular discourse within the last quarter century of the 20th Century, and that its emergence as a term denoting a doctrine of American foreign policy is even more recent. Nevertheless, as it is argued that the neoconservative *tradition* has long intellectual pedigree, the term is applied throughout this thesis to an intellectual tradition dating as far back as the 1930s, even though this usage is somewhat anachronistic. Occasionally, the term *domestic neoconservatism* will appear, this term refers to a tradition of criticism towards liberal social policy (welfare, affirmative action, etc) which was prominent in *The Public Interest* during the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1980s, with the integration of neoconservatism into the larger American conservative movement, the specific neoconservative critique of domestic policy had become difficult to disentangle from the generic conservative critique, and hence, faded as a separate current; as the domestic policy components of neoconservatism increasingly became interwoven with the larger conservative current, the foreign policy prescriptions of neoconservatism became its most identifiable trait, hence the label 'neoconservatism' increasingly came to refer to foreign policy questions.

Given this mutability of the term ‘neoconservatism’, some have argued against its usefulness as a term or even about the very existence of such a movement. Seymour Martin Lipset, while accepting the term ‘neoconservative’ as an accessible label to describe an American intellectual tradition, nevertheless argued that ‘neoconservatism’:

never referred to a set of doctrines to which a group of adherents subscribed. Rather, it was invented as an invidious label to undermine political opponents, most of whom have been unhappy with being so described.⁶

Others, while accepting the appellation of ‘neoconservative’ and the existence of such an intellectual trend, nevertheless imply dark motives of those who would critique neoconservatism. Conservative classicist, Victor Davis Hanson – writing in the *National Review* – argues that “Neocon” is a slur for “Jew,”⁷ while Julia Gorin – in an opinion piece in the *Wall Street Journal* – similarly claims that ‘neoconservative’ is an epithet for “Jew” and that “by ‘neocon’, the left means the Jewish subset of neocons.”⁸ To be sure, genuine anti-Semites have adopted various conspiratorial notions about the nature of neoconservatism, though those who would advance such arguments are marginal to be sure. It is certainly the case, however, that much confusion over the nature of neoconservatism has been perpetuated by polemical writings on the question, and this is evidenced in rightwing circles as well as leftwing.⁹

⁶ Seymour Martin Lipset, “Neoconservatism: Myth and Reality,” *Society* 25:5 (July/August 1988), p. 29.

⁷ Victor Davis Hanson, “The New Defeatism,” *National Review* (4 June 2004), <http://www.nationalreview.com/hanson/hanson200406040840.asp>

⁸ Julia Gorin, “Blame It on Neo,” *Wall Street Journal* (23 September 2004), <http://www.opinionjournal.com/extra/?id=110005656>

⁹ For example, see Patrick Buchanan, “Whose War?” in *The American Conservative* (24 March 2003), <http://www.amconmag.com/article/2003/mar/24/00007/> and Justin Raimondo, *Trotsky, Strauss, and the Neocons* (13 June 2003), <http://www.antiwar.com/justin/j061303.html>

National and Cultural Contexts of Neoconservatism

Further confusions as to the meaning of ‘neoconservatism’ derive from the fact that it has differing, and sometimes contradictory, meanings according to contexts of geography and community. For example, in the Canadian context, the term has sometimes been used interchangeably with neoliberalism, as reference to privatization measures associated with the Progressive Conservative governments of Brian Mulroney, Mike Harris, and Ralph Klein,¹⁰ and later, with the Conservative government of Stephen Harper. In the Japanese context, neoconservatism has been used interchangeably with the ‘neo-defense school,’ a hawkish rightwing tendency who desire a more militarily assertive Japan and, at the extremes, have historically revisionist attitudes towards Japanese crimes during World War II.¹¹ In the United Kingdom, the usage of the term has recently entered the lexicon – with comparable meaning to its contemporary American usage; in this case, the belief that the United Kingdom should adopt an assertive foreign policy to foster democracy and spread British values – this tendency is associated with the Henry Jackson Society, which was founded in 2005 with the goal of promoting ‘Democratic Geopolitics.’¹²

Further confusion in terminology often persists relating to the relationship between neoliberalism, neoconservatism, and the ‘new right,’ labels frequently used interchangeably. Again, these terms vary in usage according to geography and chronology, though in the American context, neoliberalism refers to policies of

¹⁰ For example, Neil Nevitte and Roger Gibbins, “Neoconservatism: Canadian Variations on an Ideological Theme,” *Canadian Public Policy* 10:4 (1984).

¹¹ See, for example, “Japan’s Neocons Feel no Debt to Korea,” *Chosun English Edition* (14 May 2005), <http://english.chosun.com/w21data/html/news/200503/200503140043.html>

¹² Henry Jackson Society, <http://www.intute.ac.uk/socialsciences/cgi-bin/fullrecord.pl?handle=sosig1141914268-9274>

privatization of the state sector, the loosening of trade barriers, and business-friendly tax policy; while the term ‘new right’ generally refers to the political coalition that emerged in support of Barry Goldwater’s 1964 Presidential campaign, and later coalesced as a coalition supporting Ronald Reagan’s 1980 Presidential campaign; this represented the fusion of strident anticommunism, social/religious conservatism, and business conservatism into a conservative political coalition, gradually displacing preexisting conservative traditions, namely: those orientated in the northeast region of the United States, ideologically moderate conservatism associated with the Rockefeller Republicans, elements of the isolationist ‘old right,’ and other traditions.

The Straussian Question

Finally, the question of the philosopher Leo Strauss and his influence on the neoconservative movement has been given attention in recent interpretations of neoconservatism. The quality and seriousness of these treatments vary tremendously. Shadia B. Drury’s *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (1999) and Anne Norton’s *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire* (2004) are two prominent scholarly treatments of Leo Strauss and the American right. More recently, Adam Curtis’ BBC documentary *The Power of Nightmares* (2005) popularized the Straussian notion, particularly a thread of reasoning which argues that Leo Strauss and neoconservatism represent a parallel and symbiotic development to that of the Egyptian religious thinker Sayyid Qutb and radical Islamist ideology, an analogy drawn from Anne Norton’s book.¹³ Characteristic of the various academic and polemical critiques of Leo Strauss and

¹³ Anne Norton, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 110 – 115.

“Straussian thought” are dark implications of Strauss as an “anti-liberal” and “anti-democrat[ic]” figure, “a true reactionary ... who wanted to go back to a previous, pre-liberal, pre-bourgeois era of blood and guts, of imperial domination, of authoritarian rule, of pure fascism,”¹⁴ and who recommended to his followers the “telling of noble lies in the service of national interest ... for [the] keeping [of] order in the state and in the world.”¹⁵ Much effort has consequently been spent attempting to read the modern neoconservative in “Straussian” terms, dominated by the “disciples” of Leo Strauss; and much effort has been spent attempting to read contemporary American policy through this same lens, with one author claiming that: “One of the great services that Strauss and his disciples have performed for the Bush administration has been the provision of a philosophy of the noble lie, the conviction that lies ... are [the] virtuous and noble instruments of wise policy.”¹⁶

For reasons both practical and theoretical, Leo Strauss and the alleged “Straussian” connection to neoconservatism are not explicitly addressed in my research. In the first place, Leo Strauss was, until recent popularization, a relatively obscure figure in the world of political philosophy, who wrote dense interpretive essays on the ‘exoteric’ and ‘esoteric’ meanings of Greek philosophy, Maimonides, Nietzsche, and others. Leo Strauss’ collected works do not comment on contemporary politics as such nor did he produce formal doctrinal texts. Reading out “Straussian” prescriptions for the practice of modern politics is, therefore, a highly speculative enterprise prone – in my judgment – to wishful thinking. More importantly, the extent of Strauss’ practical influence on the

¹⁴ Nicholas Xenos, “Leo Strauss and the Rhetoric of the War on Terror”, *LogosJournal* 3:2 (2004).

¹⁵ Earl Shorris, “Ignoble Liars: Leo Strauss, George Bush, and the philosophy of mass deception”, *Harper’s Magazine* (June 2004).

¹⁶ Ibid.

world of American conservatism is debatable. To be sure, in the world of academia, there are scores who have identified Leo Strauss as an influence or have otherwise been labeled by their critics as “Straussian”, including Allan Bloom, Harvey Mansfield, Harry Jaffa, Muhsin Mahdi, and others; in the world of practical politics, this alleged connection is even more tenuous. Paul Wolfowitz, the most significant policy-maker of the Bush administration frequently identified as a “disciple” of Leo Strauss,¹⁷ has for his part, provided little indications in his writing or policy-statements of an explicit “Straussian” influence. Wolfowitz’s apparent ‘ties’ to Leo Strauss extend no further than having taken classes from Leo Strauss during his years as a graduate student at the University of Chicago, a not terribly remarkable fact in and of itself. Wolfowitz, in any case, wrote his graduate thesis on nuclear proliferation in the Middle East under nuclear strategist Albert Wohlstetter, who Wolfowitz has identified as his primary influence. Wolfowitz has disclaimed Leo Strauss and “Straussian” thought as a meaningful influence on his thinking.¹⁸

Conclusion

In the pursuit of my argument on the nature of neoconservatism, American exceptionalism, and the contemporary “war on terror”, my thesis is organized as following: Chapter One, *American Exceptionalism*, surveys the intellectual development of the American exceptionalist tradition during the formative periods of American

¹⁷ For treatments of this theory of Paul Wolfowitz as “disciple,” see: Jim Lobe, “Leo Strauss’ Philosophy of Deception,” *Alternet* (19 May 2003), <http://www.alternet.org/story/15935>; Gary Leupp, “Leo Strauss and the Neocons,” *Counterpunch* (24 May 2003), <http://www.counterpunch.org/leupp05242003.html>; Danny Postel, “Noble lies and perpetual war: Leo Strauss, the neocons, and Iraq,” *Open Democracy* (16 October 2003), http://www.opendemocracy.net/faith-iraqwarphilosophy/article_1542.jsp; and Seymour Hersh, “Selective Intelligence,” *The New Yorker* (12 May 2003), http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2003/05/12/030512fa_fact?printable=true

¹⁸ James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 28.

history, from the founding of the republic to the emergence of the United States as a world power; Chapter Two, *The Neoconservative Intellectual Tradition*, surveys the intellectual development of neoconservative ideology from its origins in the 1930s to the present, and moreover places neoconservative ideology within the larger cultural context of American Exceptionalism; Chapter Three, *Neoconservatism in the Age of Terror*, treats America's "war on terror" as a case study of ideology in practice, and argues that American foreign policy during this period is deeply indebted to, first, neoconservative theories on foreign policy, and second, cultural notions related to American identity vis-à-vis its enemies, namely American perceptions of the Muslim world and of Islamic extremism. Finally, my research is summarized and contextualized in the Conclusion, *Neoconservatism RIP or a Neoconservative Nation*, which evaluates the legacy of neoconservative thought in light of the popular opposition that arose against the foreign policies of the Bush administration; and what, if anything, the election of Barack Obama to the Presidency of the United States, and his rhetorical repudiation of previous policies, represents. Claims of neoconservatism's demise as an American ideology are deemed premature, and moreover, considered a misinterpretation of what neoconservatism, in fact, represents in American intellectual history.

Chapter One: American Exceptionalism

American nationalism, as with nationalism generally, rests upon a panoply of ‘transcendent symbols’, including foundation myths, selectively remembered histories, morality tales, heroic victories, and other assorted historic-cultural artifacts. These symbols and artifacts of a nation’s origins and development form an intellectual reservoir to be drawn upon, to manufacture cultural cohesion, to intellectually and spiritually situate the individual nation within the world community, to give “meaning to the community’s existence,” and to provide “a discursive tool for connecting morality and policy.”¹⁹

American nationalism, in its idealized form, is a project of civic nationalism, premised upon ideology rather than ethnic, racial, or sectarian-religious considerations. This principle, of course, has rarely functioned so neatly in practice, with the American experience – from its outset to the present – littered with forms of racist policy and oppression, religious chauvinism, and successive waves of nativism. Fundamentally, however, the core of American nationalism is ideological, with the factor of exceptionalism figuring most prominently. The precise character of American exceptionalism has evolved through America’s historical experience, waves of crises, and as shifts across the international system have constrained or facilitated America’s ability to project force outward, though several core principles of American exceptionalism have remained consistent throughout.

American exceptionalism, broadly put, is the belief that the United States occupies a special place within the world system, morally and spiritually. Removed from

¹⁹ Roberta L Coles, “Manifest Destiny Adapted for 1990s’ War Discourse: Mission and Destiny Intertwined,” *Sociology of Religion* 63:4 (2002), p. 403.

the vicissitudes of the European experience by both geography and (supposedly) destiny, America was ‘conceived in liberty,’ a shining light to the world, and are therefore “tutors to mankind in its pilgrimage to perfection.”²⁰ Throughout America’s history and in its relations with the outside world, it has been a recurring rhetorical motif that liberty, as embodied in the American exception and derived from a higher moral order, forms of the aspirations of all men.

It is immediately recognizable that the ideology of American exceptionalism, while officially non-sectarian, draws deeply from biblical myth, and more precisely, from the interaction between American political thought and religious myth, giving rise to an American civil religion that operates complementary, parallel, and/or independent of formal religion. The relationship between American exceptionalism and America’s civil religion, and its developments thereafter, owes much to the nature of American Christianity, which Seymour Martin Lipset has characterized as “activist, moralistic and social rather than contemplative, theological, or innerly spiritual.”²¹ Trends in the early development of America’s civil religion and its relationship to the credo of American exceptionalism can be seen in three broad epochs of America’s early history: the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary period, the period of continental expansion and the era of manifest destiny, and crucially, America’s emergence as interventionist world power during the Spanish-American war and the subsequent emergence of American imperial ventures.

²⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Scribner, 1952), p. 71 as quoted in Jonathan Monten, “The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy,” *International Security* 29:4 (2005), p. 128.

²¹ Robert Bellah, Seymour Martin Lipset, “Religion and American Values,” in *The First New Nation* (New York: Basic Books, 1963) referenced in Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* (Winter 1967), pg. 43.

The notion that America is an exceptional nation guided by divine providence is rooted in America's earliest experience, the historical epoch of the pre-revolutionary era and the subsequent American Revolution. Sociologist Robert N. Bellah, in his seminal "Civil religion in America," and subsequent *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*, argues that America's civil religion had as its underlying motivation an obligation, "both collective and individual, to carry out God's will on earth."²² Indeed, even predating the American Revolution, the settlement of territory on the American continent by Puritan settlers was cast as an act of divine providence and of *Exodus* reborn; with the colonies of New England representing "a new heaven, and a new earth, new churches, and a new commonwealth together."²³ John Winthrop, in his oft-quoted sermon (1630) to the colonists on board the *Arabella*, proclaimed:

For we must consider that we shall be a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword through the world.

The *Exodus* narrative of America was made even more explicit with the American Revolution, and the legend subsequently attached to it, with America henceforth representing a new Israel. Abiel Abbott, a Massachusetts religious leader in post-revolutionary America, delivered a sermon (1799) proclaiming that "the people of the United States come nearer to a parallel with Ancient Israel, than any other nation upon the globe."²⁴ In a similar vein, the revolutionary figure Thomas Paine, a man by no means religiously orthodox, nevertheless spoke of America in these terms, American having:

²² Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* (Winter 1967), pg. 43.

²³ Damon Linker, "Calvin and American Exceptionalism," *The New Republic* (9 July 2009), <http://blogs.tnr.com/tnr/blogs/linker/archive/2009/07/09/calvin-and-american-exceptionalism.aspx>

²⁴ Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1961), p. 665.

[in its] power to begin the world over again. A situation, similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birthday of a new world is at hand, and a race of men perhaps as numerous as Europe contains, are to receive their portion of freedom ...²⁵

Hence the hero myths of early American settlement and the American Revolution are tinged with claims of divine providence, marking American exceptionalism with metaphysical claims rooted in a form of cultural Christianity. However, while situated within a tradition “selectively derived from Christianity,” America’s civil religion – owing to the often esoteric religious beliefs of America’s founding fathers and the ingrained principles of religious liberty – is culturally Christian though theoretically non-sectarian; the God of America’s civil religion is both “unitarian” and “austere”, more “related to order, law, and right than [to] salvation and love.”²⁶ Appropriately, references to God in America’s Declaration of Independence are denominationally unspecific:

The first [reference] speaks of the “Laws of nature and of Nature’s God” which entitle any people to be independent. The second is the famous statement that all men “all endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights” ... locating the fundamental legitimacy of [America] in a conception of “higher law” ... The third is an appeal to “the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions,” and the last indicates a “firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence.”²⁷

Following from these culturally Christian, though non-sectarian, claims that the American republic – and indeed all men and all nations – are subject to “natural law” and a “higher order”, the inaugural addresses of America’s first three Presidents are replete with metaphorical references to an inexplicit God of justice. In the addresses of America’s founding fathers are references to the “Patron of Order,” “the Fountain of Justice”, “Providence”, and so forth, though the word *God* itself does not appear until the

²⁵ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (10 January 1776).

²⁶ Op. Cit. Robert N. Bellah, p. 45.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 44.

second inaugural address of President James Monroe in 1821.²⁸ It is deeply revealing that during the first epoch of American history, and in the early development of America's civil religion, the official documents of America's founding and the rhetoric of America's founding fathers was, while again culturally Christian, non-sectarian in specifics; the religious incantations of America's exceptionalist tradition were designed to make universal, rather than sectarian, claims of the "higher moral order" and America's role therein.

The second broad epoch in American history and in the intellectual development of America's exceptionalist tradition is the period represented by continental expansion during the 19th Century, as embodied in the doctrine of "manifest destiny," a spiritual-nationalist policy of war and acquisition justified as an enterprise to "press on west, to settle and civilize, republicanize and democratize."²⁹ This broad historical epoch does not, of course, represent a break from the revolutionary epoch that preceded it, but in fact builds upon it, reinforcing the themes of duty and destiny – as guided by the hand of Providence – that had emerged as part and parcel of America's civil religion during the revolutionary epoch. Continental expansion came to be seen as a "result of a cosmic tendency," a destiny that had arrived, and that it was in the "inexorable logic of events" that America push forward."³⁰ Albert K. Weinberg, in his book *Manifest Destiny: A Study of Expansion in American History* (1935), characterizes the fundamental principle of manifest destiny as: "the doctrine that one nation has a preeminent social worth, a

²⁸ *Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States from George Washington 1789 to Harry S. Truman 1949*, 82d Congress, 2d Session, House Document No. 540, 1952 as quoted in Op. Cit. Robert N. Bellah, p. 45.

²⁹ As characterized in a hagiographical biography of America by conservative historian Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), pg. 371.

³⁰ Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), pg. 177

distinctively lofty mission, and consequently, unique rights in the application of moral principles,” hence a process that ideologically dovetails with the larger question of American exceptionalism.

The epoch of continental expansion, “the era of manifest destiny”, is generally placed between 1812 and 1860. The term “Manifest Destiny” itself, however, does not appear in print until an 1845 article in the Jacksonian newspaper *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* by John L. O’Sullivan, an enthusiastic proponent of American continental expansion. John L. O’Sullivan’s advocacy journalism in favor of continental expansion, particularly “The Great Nation of Futurity” (1839) and “Manifest Destiny” (1845), are highly representative of a romantic idealism that characterized supporters of continental expansion, highly colored by the notions of American civil religion and the exceptionalist doctrines that had been sketched in the previous epoch; to wit, O’Sullivan characterizes America as “destined for better deeds ... [to become] *the great nation of futurity*”; whereas America’s mission is represented as the “defence of humanity, of the oppressed of all nations, of the rights of conscience, the rights of personal enfranchisement ...” and America’s historic fate as bringing forth an era of greatness, “to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High – the Sacred and the True.”³¹ As with the spiritual-nationalist language of the revolutionary epoch, O’Sullivan characterizes American mission in terms culturally Christian, though again not explicitly sectarian; with these pretensions of universalism, America is cast as the agent of a “higher order,” “the worship of the Most High – the Sacred and the True.”

³¹ John L. O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 6:23 (1839), pp. 426-430.

John O'Sullivan would introduce the term 'Manifest Destiny' itself with his advocacy of the annexation of the Republic of Texas, now independent from Mexico, lambasting those who would interfere with American expansion, those who would "limit our greatness ... our *manifest destiny* to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions ..."³² The term and popular notion of 'manifest destiny', however, gained its most significant currency with a subsequent article published in the *New York Morning News*, advocating the annexation of British-controlled Oregon Country. In regards to the annexation of Oregon Country, John L. Sullivan repeated his general claim that America had "the right of our *manifest destiny* to overspread and to possess the whole the continent," while Britain's legal title to the Oregon Country is casually dismissed by O'Sullivan as the "antiquated materials of old black-letter international law," principles of which America is not bound to, divine Providence having granted the territory to America:

for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government ... The God of nature and of nations [having] marked it for our own; and with His blessing we will firmly maintain the incontestable rights He has given, and fearlessly perform the high duties He has imposed.³³

The first incidence in the congressional record of the term 'manifest destiny' came from Representative Robert C. Winthrop, in a speech to the House of Representatives on 3 January 1846, who in opposing a measure to terminate the joint occupation of Oregon, derisively noted that he "suppose[d] the right of a manifest destiny to spread will not be admitted to exist in any nation except the universal Yankee

³² John L. O'Sullivan, "Annexation," *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17:1 (July-August 1845), pp. 5-10.

³³ John L. Sullivan, "The True Title," *New York Weekly News* (3 January 1846).

nation!”³⁴ Nevertheless, as America engaged in a war of continental expansion with Mexico, enthusiastic support for the policy of continental expansion popularized and perpetuated the term, even if its origins were not widely known.

The exact geographic scope of the Manifest Destiny remains debatable, whether the concept represented *merely* expansion through the contiguous territory of North America or whether it was conceived as the capture of the Western hemisphere itself, though in the broad historical epoch of manifest destiny (1812-1860), it was a policy that limited itself to the more limited interpretation of continentalism. However, with the outbreak of the Spanish-America war in 1898 and with the war aim to annex Spain’s overseas territories of the Phillipines, Puerto Rico, and Guam, the principles of ‘manifest destiny’ gave way a broadly-defined third epoch in the development of American exceptionalist thought, the emergence of America as a world power and hence the global expansion of territory targeted for American ‘mission’ and ‘tutelage.’

The preceding historical epochs of the revolutionary era and the era of manifest destiny have often been characterized as broadly ‘isolationist’, based on “sense that America’s very liberal joy lay in the escape from a decadent Old World that could only infect it with its own diseases.”³⁵ The policy of continental expansion, of course, can hardly be described as being truly isolationist, as “manifest destiny” was not the mere appropriation of empty plains, but wars of conquest in which the indigenous ‘Indian’ population was exterminated and deprived of its rights “without violating a single great

³⁴ Julius W. Pratt, “The Origin of Manifest Destiny,” *The American Historical Review* 32:4 (July 1927), p. 795.

³⁵ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.; 1955), p. 285.

principle of morality in the eyes of the world”;³⁶ nevertheless, throughout the 19th Century, America’s conflicts were either limited to the principle of continental expansion (war of 1812 and the Mexican-American war) or defensive wars against negligible powers (i.e. the naval war against pirates of the Barbary states). The entry of the United States into an extra-continental war against a European power hence marked a demarcation point. What, then, were the material and intellectual preconditions that led to such a shift in American affairs; what lessons did America’s entry as a global power imprint on the ideology of American exceptionalism.

In the strictest sense and as a matter of official American rationale, the war against Spain was an application of the Monroe Doctrine in its anti-colonial reading, such that:

the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European power ...

Aside from the strict policy of the *Monroe Doctrine*, there was a psychological backdrop of popular sympathy for the Cuban rebellion against Spain and a growing culture of anti-Spanish bellicosity stoked by their crimes against the captive population of Cuba, exacerbated by the salacious reportage of the Pulitzer and Hearst yellow press. Spain was portrayed in the press as “waging a heartless and inhuman war,” while the Cubans were portrayed as the “noble victims of Spanish tyranny, their situation as analogous to that of Americans in 1776”;³⁷ popular demand for war against Spain, particularly in the aftermath of the alleged sinking of the *USS Maine*, would in fact initially outstrip institutional and elite desire for war. Conservative business interests, though later

³⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* as quoted in Oliver Zunz and Alan S. Kahan (eds.), *The Tocqueville Reader* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), p. 116.

³⁷ Op. Cit. Richard Hofstadter, pg. 159.

entranced by the economic opportunities of America's extra-continental possessions, initially feared war with Spain would threaten the "prosperity that was just returning, and some thought that a war might strengthen the free-silver movement" popular in the southern and western parts of the United States, where Democratic populist figure William Jennings Bryan drew the bulk of his support. Against the war concerns of the business class, the populist rhetoric of the war-supporters only increased in intensity, with the press accusing "the eminently respectable porcine citizens who – for dollars in the money-grubbing sty, support 'conservative' newspapers and consider the starvation of ... inoffensive men, women and children, and the murder of 250 American sailors ... of less importance than a fall of two points in a price of stocks." Peace, in the view of historian Margaret Leach, "had become a symbol of obedience to avarice."³⁸

President William McKinley, for his part, remarked prior to his election that he hoped "the Cuban crisis be settled one way or another" during the intervening period between his election and his inauguration; McKinley, who had promised that there would be no "jingo nonsense under [his] administration" nevertheless found himself "hostage to the war party,"³⁹ and hence in April 1898, America entered into war against Spain. The Spanish-American war, which had "originated not in imperialist ambition but in popular humanitarianism,"⁴⁰ would paradoxically end with the annexation of the Phillipines, Puerto Rico, Guam and the establishment of a protectorate over Cuba.

The events that led to the Spanish-American war and hence the emergence of America as an interventionist world power does not seem adequately explained by official doctrinal factors and anti-colonial/anti-Spanish sentiments. Certainly, concerns of

³⁸ Ibid, 160.

³⁹ Ibid. 157.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 145.

national power and imperial glories weighed in the minds of some, as exemplified in the navalist theories of Alfred Thayer Mahan and the belief of, then Assistant-Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, that war – any war – would furnish the United States with a proper navy and system of coastal defense. In the larger intellectual sense, however, out of the epoch of continental expansion, the civil religion of the United States and the intellectual culture surrounding American exceptionalism had developed more expansive contours. The social upheavals and “psychic crisis” of the time spawned a wave of populist and activist movements. On one end was the growing interest in utopianism, Christian Social gospel, and intellectual interest in socialism, while conversely, there was a mood of “national self-assertion, aggression, and expansion; the 1890s saw the proliferation of ‘patriotic groups’ and an immense quickening of the American cult of Napoleon and a vogue of the virile and martial writings of Rudyard Kipling.”⁴¹

At the political cultural level, America’s emergence as an interventionist and global power came as the policy of continental expansion, manifest destiny, had exhausted itself. Frederick Jackson Turner, in his *The Frontier in America History*, made the point that “Not the Constitution, but free land and an abundance of natural resources open to a fit people” had made American democracy possible.⁴² By the 1890s, the frontier line of the United States had settled and hence the process of continental expansion and the “taming” of the land; “four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of one hundred years of life under the Constitution,” the American frontier was gone and hence the closing of an American epoch. The missionary impulse that had come

⁴¹ Ibid. 150.

⁴² As quoted in Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books; 2009), p. 23.

to characterize American exceptionalism, and its inherent expansionist tendencies, had expired itself continentally and necessarily looked outward.

This expanded definition of American mission and exceptionalism suggests not merely an economistic impetus to American expansion, the desire to open new markets, but implies a spiritual development additionally; with the end of the American frontier, America was primed for its shift from an exemplarist model of American exceptionalism, limited to continental expansion, towards a more extensive crusading or vindicationist model of American exceptionalism, with an eye for global expansion and the activist promotion of “American values” abroad. Central to the emergence of this more expansive definition of American expansion was the underlying premise that subsequent American adventures, while resembling imperialism, would be in fact of an entirely different kind. America, with its “anti-colonial tradition, democratic values, and liberal institutions - is not and has never been an empire”;⁴³ America, hence, is premised as a *prima facie* liberating entity.

The application of this expansive vision of American exceptionalism saw the development of a genus of self-serving rhetoric that persists to this day, though in less crude form; namely, the rhetoric of the projection of American military power as the inculcator of liberty and democracy abroad. In America’s wars of annexation during the Spanish-American war, this rhetoric was a fusion of, on one hand, familiar arguments of racial/cultural chauvinism resembling appeals to the “white man’s burden,” and on the other, the aforementioned confidence that American expansion was decidedly different from that of the preceding European powers. Thus, in the writings of colonial officers,

⁴³ Julian Go, “The Provinciality of American Empire: ‘Liberal Exceptionalism’ and U.S. colonial rule, 1898 – 1912,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49:1 (2007), p. 74.

military figures, and popular commentators, self-serving justifications began with contemptuous judgments of the conquered peoples, the belief that it would be “utopian to suggest that the ‘lesser races’ could go without intervention by the ‘superior races’.”⁴⁴ who nevertheless could be transformed by a “wise and beneficent governmental authority over a rude people.”⁴⁵ Conversely, President McKinley would speak to the notions of “democratic tutelage,” proclaiming that America’s objective in the acquired territories was “but to civilize, to develop, to educate, to train in the science of self-government,”⁴⁶ in contrast to preceding Spanish rule, which was tyrannical, American rule was presumed to be benign, directed to “win the confidence, respect, and affection” of the peoples through a policy of “benevolent assimilation, substituting the mild sway of justice and right for arbitrary rule.”⁴⁷

The justifications, thus, that emerged during this epoch of American history provided an adjunct to theories of American exceptionalism that had developed during the revolutionary period and the “era of manifest destiny.” The legend of the American revolutionary period imprinted on the national consciousness the notion that “America had saved itself from being like, and part, of Europe and Europe’s problems”;⁴⁸ building upon this legend of America as a chosen nation apart from European history grew a “manifest destiny to overspread allotted by Providence”; finally, with the “end of the frontier” arose popular concerns of “national power” and projection of the “American model” vis-à-vis the desiccated European powers. America had emerged as a global

⁴⁴ Ibid. 78.

⁴⁵ Bernard Moses, “Control of Dependencies Inhabited by the Less Developed Races,” *University of California Chronicles* 7 (1905).

⁴⁶ Op Cit. Julian Go, p. 76.

⁴⁷ Cameron W. Forbes, *The Phillippine Islands* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company; 1928), p. 438.

⁴⁸ John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed*, rev. ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), p. 279-280.

activist power but, because of its political traditions, would not be an heir to these previous empires; instead, defenders of expansion argued, then and now, that America represents a “behemoth with a conscience” whose projections of power are but “means of advancing the principles of a liberal civilization and a liberal world order ... liberal, humanitarian and entirely reasonable.”⁴⁹ Subsequent debates on the scope of American foreign policy, if not the underlying principles of American exceptionalism, vacillated between the more limited and the more expansive interpretations. In the limited interpretation, America’s primary objectives were “continental sovereignty; expansion and incorporation of the West (Manifest Destiny) ... economic growth, acquisition ... [and] security in the Americas (the Monroe Doctrine)”;⁵⁰ whereas in more expansive interpretations, as embedded in various forms of Wilsonian idealism, the activist and if need be unilateral application of American power was seen as morally necessary, the “United States” having a “unique place in world affairs ... a force for good ... that ultimately, the rest of the world will evolve to look like America.”⁵¹

The corollary to this American belief in moral exceptionalism, however, would be the failure to absorb the lessons of resistance to American domination – whether in the Philippines at the infancy of the 20th Century or Iraq at the infancy of the 21st Century - subsequently, by denying empire, the American popular mind came to exhibit an “imperial amnesia about its past while ‘displacing’ its imperial present.”⁵² With the later emergence of successive “existential threats” to America’s existence (real or imagined) in

⁴⁹ Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), p. 41.

⁵⁰ Adrian E. Lewis, *The American Culture of War* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 21.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 35.

⁵² Op. Cit. Julian Go, p. 74.

the 20th and 21st Century, America's moral exceptionalism, vis-à-vis the self-evident evil of its perceived enemies, only intensified.

Frames of American Exceptionalism and Questions of International Strategy

Out of the historical and intellectual process that gave rise to the civil religion of American exceptionalism, two theoretical frames of exceptionalism have emerged that persist to this day, sometimes in opposition and sometimes complementary: the first is an inward-looking model, concerned with the fulfillment of America's promise and a mission to match the practice of American life with its idealized principles, a priestly conception; while the second frame of American exceptionalism is aggressively outward-looking. These two frames of exceptionalism have been characterized in a variety of fashions; one model, discussed by sociologist Robert Wuthnow is the competing frames of 'conservative civil religion' and 'liberal civil religion.' The "conservative" interpretation emphasizes the "evangelizing" potential of American power: America, as a "God-fearing people, the champions of religious liberty ... [are] chosen to carry out a special mission in the world."⁵³ This "evangelizing" mission can function at the level of literal religious missionary activity and religious sermonizing, but more typically, in terms of preaching the political-religion of Americanism, namely the universal desirability of the "American way of life" and the legitimacy of capitalist democracy as represented by the United States. Conversely, liberal civil religion, while paying fealty to the foundation myths of America, deemphasizes the chauvinistic elements of the American religion, and is more inclined to emphasize the refinement of American

⁵³ Robert Wuthnow, "Divided we Fall: America's Two Civil Religions," *The Christian Century* (1988), p. 395-399.

democratic practice, the pursuit of “social justice,” and concerns for the common problems of humanity as exemplified in “nuclear disarmament, human rights, world hunger, peace and justice.”⁵⁴

Another frame for distinguishing between forms of civil religion in the United States is the dichotomy of ‘mission by example’ vs. ‘mission by intervention’, which grew out of the manifest destiny period. The ‘mission by example’ framework roughly corresponds to the liberal civil religion, emphasizing the perfection of America’s social institutions: “the establishment of a civil society based on religious liberty,” civil rights, social justice, and global concerns; whereas ‘mission by intervention’ emphasizes a project of civilization, “to save the world and mold it in the image of America.” Underling the culture of ‘mission by intervention’ is an ideology of “civil millennialism, a concept in which the United States is perceived as the agent of God’s activity.”⁵⁵ For purposes here however, and to avoid confusions of liberal vs. conservative and religious vs. secular, the most serviceable framework for the dichotomy of American exceptionalism is that of: America as exemplar, a moral beacon and inspiration to the world vs. America as a vindicator or crusader, the forceful adjudicator of natural law in things considering justice and liberty.

‘America as exemplar’ represents the milder notion of America as a providentially chosen nation, where America as an exceptional nation, morally and politically unique, is best suited to be a “redeemer nation, exerting its good influence upon other nations, though their adopting of American ways or by their incorporation into

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Op. Cit. Robert L. Coles, pg. 408.

America.”⁵⁶ As an ‘exemplar’, America brings about international change through the force of its example. The early American experience is often naively characterized in this fashion, as if the process of continental expansion was itself a bloodless affair. Nevertheless, in the ideological narrative of America as ‘exemplar’, it is argued that democracy is fragile, and crass attempts to spread “liberty” tend to concentrate state power and undermine the very liberty that America hopes to project. The path to spreading the American ideal, thus, is not in the unilateral imposition of liberalism abroad, but rather in the reinforcement of liberty at home. One aims to reconcile the American ideal and the practice of American foreign policy, which impresses upon the world the ideal of Americanism. In practice, this theoretical framework suggests that America is crucial in the expansion of liberty and justice, but that democracy is seen as the outcome of a political evolution. America’s role, as exemplar of the democratic idea, is to advance the cause of liberty through force of example and noble behaviour; in a contemporary sense, this might represent material support for fledgling democracies and a dedication to liberal institution-building through consensus.

Conversely, ‘America as vindicator/crusader’ forms the more severe interpretation of American exceptionalism. In this interpretation, the spread of America’s values is not seen as possible by positive example alone. Utopian presumptions that the illiberal world will reform unilaterally and model the American exemplar are seen as “at best inefficient and at worst utopian; [the] United States should expedite the process.”⁵⁷ In the vindicationist perspective, one views the world in inherently conflictual terms and America’s role therefore is said to be necessarily activist and interventionist. Democracy,

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Jonathan Monten, “The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in US Strategy,” *International Security* 29:4 (2005), p. 125.

in the absence of illiberal obstacles, “such as self-serving elites or a subversive, violent minority,”⁵⁸ is the aspirations of all nations. America’s role, then, is to destroy those artificial barriers that block the movement towards liberty. American military force, the method of liberation, is not seen as a failure of diplomacy, but as a response to the imposed tyrannies in the international system. The “rightness” of military force is then to be judged, first, on the ideological principles that drive such force, and second, from the results that force produces. American military force, as it is used “against evil ... [and not in the defense] of material interests” is benign and distinct from motivations of *realpolitik*.⁵⁹ The inherent paradox of such a worldview, of course, is that given the presumption to see American power as a *prima facie* good, the particular exertions of American power are often treated uncritically, American power as a moral justification in itself.

Conclusion

American exceptionalism, as it developed during the early epochs of American history came to form a civil religion that coloured America’s orientation towards the outside world, and hence, the intellectual backdrop for the foreign policy-making. The political culture of American exceptionalism hence served as the intellectual/cultural reservoir that schools and doctrines of American foreign-policy subsequently drew out from, variously influenced by the exemplarist model of exceptionalism, the vindicator model of exceptionalism, or typically, somewhere in between.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 144.

⁵⁹ Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), p. 20.

The next chapter deals with neoconservatism, a model of foreign-policy that is markedly derived from the vindicationist worldview, seeing in America an “evangelizing mission”: to spread “freedom” and “democracy”. The real world and contemporary relevance of the American credo are thus considered in their modern ideological representations.

Chapter Two: The Neoconservative Intellectual Tradition

The origin of American neoconservatism, in the standard account, lies within the lively political debates of the City College of New York (CCNY) during the 1930s. In the account of Irving Kristol, ‘father of neoconservatism’, CCNY – as the ‘Harvard of the Proletariat’ was an environment of ‘mental energy’, ‘pure intellect’, excitement, and generally, of radical politics. Alcove No. 1, where Kristol and the like-minded congregated, is described as a vibrant community of Trotskyists, Social Democrats, and independent socialists represented in the assorted sub-sects and splinter movements of the era; Alcove No. 2, in Irving’s account, was in contrast dominated by the Stalinists, ‘official communists’ whose slavish position towards the Soviet Union threatened to debase “the socialist ideal [so] as to rob humanity of what we [men and women of Alcove 1] were certain was its last, best hope.”⁶⁰

However dramatized or self-serving Irving’s account could very well be, it is certainly true that the milieu of the CCNY during the 1930s was one of significant intellectual debate and radical politics. And indeed, from the milieu of Alcove No. 1 emerged many of the intellectual forbearers of the neoconservative persuasion (though the ideological trajectory of each figure varies significantly). The coterie of those who studied at CCNY during this era, and cumulatively came to generate a distinct intellectual milieu, include: Irving Kristol himself; Irving Howe, initially a “Trotskyist leader and theoretician” who later emerged as a literary critic and democratic socialist opponent of Soviet communism; Daniel Bell, who emerged as a prominent sociologist, and was the author of the influential *End of Ideology* (1976) and the *Cultural Contradictions of*

⁶⁰ Irving Kristol, “Memoirs of a Trotskyist,” in *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 475.

Capitalism (1973), and served as editor the *Public Interest* during the 1960s and 1970s; Nathan Glazer, a sociologist and later the editor of the *Public Interest*, is best known for his collaboration with Daniel Patrick Moynihan on writings concerning race and poverty; and Sydney Hook, a philosopher whose intellectual trajectory went from Marxism to anti-communist democratic socialism to a more conservative position, concluded his life as a fellow at the conservative Hoover Institution and as a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Ronald Reagan in 1985.

This is hardly an exhaustive summary of those who comprised the intellectual tradition that gave impetus to the emergence of American neoconservatism, though it is a representative sample. The intellectual tradition that originated out of the CCNY in the 1930s represents an ideological trajectory that began as decidedly leftwing and, over time, moved in varying degrees rightward, while for a period of time remaining a political tradition distinct from that of the traditional right (Irving Kristol's ideological trajectory represents the most dramatic rightward turn, Irving Howe the least, the ideological trajectories of the others tend to fall within these two poles). Given the left-liberal milieu of this culture, those who would later emerge as the forbearers of neoconservative thought can clearly be distinguished, in tradition and composition, from the elements of: the 'Old Right', libertarian conservatism was foreign to this tradition given the working class sensibilities of this generation and their support for Franklin Delano Roosevelt's 'New Deal'; religious traditionalism, rooted in a form of cultural Protestantism, clashed with the intellectual and effectively secular worldview of this group; while conservative isolationism and nativism, with its tendencies of White-Anglo-

Saxon-Protestant chauvinism, was unappealing to an intellectual coterie that was significantly Jewish in composition.

The animating spirit of this intellectual coterie, retroactively labelled as first generation neoconservatives, was anti-communism vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, and to varying degrees, skepticism of liberalism especially in its post-1960s forms. In journals including *Commentary*, *Encounter* and most prominently the *Public Interest*, the forbearers of the neoconservative movement expressed a liberal anti-communism and critiqued the perceived failures of modern liberalism; Irving Kristol, as example, identified the ‘intellectual godfathers’ of his ideological transformation as Lionel Trilling and Reinhold Niebuhr. Trilling, he recalls, pointed to “liberalism’s dirty secret ... [that] its progressive metaphysics [were basically rotten],” whereas Niebuhr provided the ‘intellectual vocabulary’ of religion and hence, a plank to criticize the increasingly libertine character of modern left.”⁶¹ In any event, out of this cultural milieu, as expressed in their various journals, the figures of the movement would opine against the ‘excesses’ of the 1960s, as embodied in black liberation, feminism and sexual liberation, the drug culture, and cultural permissiveness generally.

The first plank of this group was anti-communism measured with an additional hostility to those on the left who failed to recognize the evil that communism as practiced had come to be. These ideological arguments represented, of course, a continuation of the earlier dramas of the CCNY in 1930s, the dramatized struggle between the unofficial and independent leftists of Alcove no. 1 (Trotskyites, social democrats) vs. the “official communists” of Alcove no. 2 (“Stalinists” and apologists for the Soviet Union). The anti-communism of this persuasion represented a liberal anticommunism, or rather the

⁶¹ Ibid. pp 484-485

anticommunism of disillusioned leftists, in contrast to traditional and conservative forms of anticommunism. Conservative anticommunism represented hostility to communism as it was “atheistic, linked to a hostile foreign power, and anti-free market” whereas the liberal anticommunism of first neoconservatives represented a realization of the dangers of good intentions carried to dangerous extremes:

The anticommunist Left, by contrast, sympathized with the social and economic aims, but in the course of the 1930s and 1940s came to realize that “real existing socialism” had become a monstrosity of unintended consequences that completely undermined the idealistic goals it espoused⁶²

The liberal anticommunism and conservative anticommunism of these eras are not entirely distinct ideologies, of course, with a healthy degree of ideological cross-pollination, though for a period the early neoconservatives effectively maintained a real separation from the latter. In the process of their rightward shift, however, the bulk of the Alcove no. 1 cadre had abandoned any commitments towards Marxism; by the 1960s, the rightward shift was in the case of some members of this group even more pronounced, as in the pages of the *Public Interest*, they turned their criticism to the social and economic policies of Lyndon B. Johnson’s ‘Great Society,’ an expansion of earlier ‘New Deal’ policies which they had supported in the 1930s.

The neoconservatism that subsequently emerged represented the next inevitable step in the movement’s continuous shift rightward, and contemporary neoconservatism is almost entirely estranged from the leftist milieu that produced the first generation of neoconservatives. Contemporary neoconservatives, largely having avoided the process of ideological dislocation from left to right, indeed by and large having been right(wing)

⁶² Francis Fukuyama, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pg. 16.

from the start, were easily integrated into the larger conservative movement; contemporary neoconservatism, by and large, now represents a mere component of American conservatism, rather than a novel critique outside the official left or the official right. Neoconservatism, in its contemporary form, is generally perceived as an “expansive, interventionist, [allegedly] democracy-promoting position” whose flagship publication is the *Weekly Standard*, a publication far removed from the more intellectual and expansive social critique as represented in the *Public Interest*, *Commentary*, and *Encounter*.

Given the contours of contemporary neoconservatism, an ideology thoroughly fixated on questions concerning foreign policy and America’s global position, the legacy of *domestic neoconservatism* is frequently obscured. ‘Domestic neoconservatism’ is a retroactive label applied to the neoconservatives’ social and cultural criticism prominent in the 1960s, principally in the *Public Interest*, concerning questions of poverty/welfare, social mores in matters racial and sexual, and the rise of the counterculture. Domestic neoconservatism is thematically distinct from the first generation neoconservatives’ anticommunist critique but not disconnected. The ‘old left’ - whose emphasis was class consciousness, labour movements, and industrial politics – gave way to the emergence of the ‘new left,’ who had disinvested themselves from the sympathies and commitments of ‘old left’ communism, instead introducing concerns of race, identity, and counterculture.

In the 1930s onward, the ‘neoconservatives,’ had defined themselves in opposition to the “official communists” of “old left.” In the 1960s, the neoconservatives now further defined themselves: first, with a sympathetic but critical perspective on the social policies of Lyndon Johnson’s ‘Great Society;’ and second, with a hostile reaction

to the culture and social practices of the emergent 'new left,' who were exemplified by the student radicals. As relates to the policy dimension, through the 1960s and 1970s, domestic neoconservative critiques focussed on questions relating to welfare, affirmative action, and public policy deemed overindulgent of criminal behaviour.

Questions of race and poverty were a frequent theme of domestic neoconservative critiques. In 1963, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan collaborated in the writing of *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (1963), a discussion of American ethnic identities that had persisted long after distinctive language, customs, and culture had been erased. While it was generally well-received, the book's discussion of the black American family remains controversial. This controversy was only accentuated by the publication two years later of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, which focused on the growth of welfare payments among black families, the crisis of fatherless children, and argued that "black poverty had complex origins in culture and family structure," sparking discussion on the efficacy of welfare programs such as the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program and the associated "culture of poverty." Needless to say, the report incited much criticism, most notably William Ryan's *Blaming The Victim* (1970) which saw the Moynihan Report on the "Negro Family" as a classic exercise in victim-blaming, with insufficient attention paid to the legacies and institutions of racism.

The rise of the counterculture and 'new left' activist movements was another theme in the domestic neoconservative writings and, in fact, a primary cause for the exodus of the neoconservative figures from the post-war liberal consensus. The domestic

neoconservatives, while critical of the ‘war on poverty’ measures of Lyndon Johnson’s ‘Great Society’ and in fact “largely responsible for promulgating the notion that the Great Society was an unalloyed failure,” remained within the broad liberal orbit of the Democratic Party. However, the “activities of student protesters, black militants, and antiwar activists” alienated the neoconservatives of the 1960s, leading them to “perceive previously unnoticed merit in traditional bourgeois values and mores ...”⁶³

A newly emerging generation of neoconservatives initially attached themselves to the 1972 candidacy of the hawkish Democrat Henry “Scoop” Jackson, whose staffers and aides included Richard Perle, Doug Feith, Elliot Abrams, and Paul Wolfowitz. The 1972 nomination of George McGovern as Democratic Presidential candidate, however, initiated the process that completed the exodus of the neoconservative persuasion from the (unraveling) liberal consensus. The Democratic Party, in the neoconservatives’ jaundiced view, had become hostage to:

a kind of isolationism, based on the assumption that the United States had lost its proprietary claim to the world’s future ... insist[ing] on American subordination to international organizations ... [and] that the United States had no independent constructive role to play in the world, and opposes the unilateral use of American military power anywhere⁶⁴

Against the backdrop of American defeat in Vietnam, the nomination of George McGovern as Democratic candidate for President, Kissinger-inspired *détente* with the Soviet Union, and a general perception that America’s apex had passed, neoconservatism emerged in its modern form, as a specific ideology of foreign policy. “Neoconservatism” - the term apparently coined by Michael Harrington in a 1972 article in *Dissent Magazine*

⁶³ Barbara Sinclair, *Party War: Polarization and Politics of National Policy Making* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), pg. 37-38.

⁶⁴ Irving Kristol, “American Foreign Policy: A Neoconservative View,” *Jerusalem Journal of International Affairs* (March 1987), p. 78.

– came to prominence in the 1970s as “a movement of anti-Soviet liberals and social democrats in the tradition of Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, Humphrey and Henry (‘Scoop’) Jackson ... [whose] focus was on confrontation with the Soviet bloc ...”⁶⁵ This contemporary generation of neoconservatives absorbed the anticommunism and skepticism of modern liberalism of the preceding generation, but not the intellectual history nor, by and large, its peculiar ideological trajectory. By the late 1970s, it would become “increasingly hard to disentangle neoconservatism from other, more traditional varieties of American conservatism, whether based on small-government libertarianism, religious or social conservatism, or American nationalism.”⁶⁶

The neoconservatives that emerged in 1970s, then were bound together by the related beliefs that, first, the Soviet Union remained an expansionist regime to be challenged, and second, that American power could be revitalized as moral and necessary. In the pursuit of this argument, 1976 saw the resurrection of the *Committee on the Present Danger* (CPD), culminating with the ‘Team B’ report, a parallel assessment of Soviet power and intentions vis-à-vis the CIA’s annual assessment. Under the direction of hardline Sovietologist Richard Pipes, whose advisors included Paul Wolfowitz and Paul Nitze, the Team B report argued that “evidence point[ed] to an undeviating Soviet commitment to what is euphemistically called the ‘worldwide triumph of socialism,’ but in fact connotes global Soviet hegemony”⁶⁷ and concluded that the CIA had underestimated Soviet military capacities, overemphasizing satellite intelligence and

⁶⁵ Michael Lind, “A Tragedy of Errors,” *The Nation* (5 February 2004), <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20040223/lind/2>

⁶⁶ Op. Cit. Fukuyama, p. 38.

⁶⁷ Don Oberforfer, “Report Saw Soviet Buildup for War,” CIA Declassifies Controversial 1976 ‘Team B’ analysis, *Washington Post* (12 October 1992), p. A11 quoted in Op. Cit. Mann, p. 74.

“failing to give enough weight” to Soviet rhetoric.⁶⁸ As policy recommendation, Team B argued for an American arms buildup and a more belligerent anti-communism.

Notwithstanding the fact that Team B’s estimate was characterized, in retrospect, as a wild “fantasy,”⁶⁹ the subsequent election of Ronald Reagan saw the implementation of many of its prescriptions, where neoconservative thought achieved a position of influence. Foreign policy of the Reagan era, at least in its rhetorical justifications, would attain a markedly moralistic quality: the Soviet Union, and its ideology, would transform from being “inordinately feared” to representing an “evil empire.” In this interpretation, the self-evident evil of international communism was such that one could, per Jeane Kirkpatrick’s “Dictatorships and Double Standards,”⁷⁰ make moral distinctions between “rightist authoritarian [pro-American]” regimes and “leftist totalitarian [pro-Soviet]” regimes. Therefore, to support a rightist autocracy under siege, however morally compromising at first blush, protected political systems that had a capacity for reform, a capacity that leftist dictatorships were theorized to lack.

American foreign policy of the 1980s, whether identified as neoconservative, Reaganite, or merely nationalistic and forceful, was characterized by the sentiment that the Soviet Union was a force not merely to be contained, but to be rolled back. The decline and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union would occur in conjunction with, if not necessarily because of, an expansion of American power and vigorous materiel support for anti-Communist forces. With the eventual implosion of the Soviet Bloc and the emergence of a unipolar world, the neoconservative movement would reinvent itself,

⁶⁸ Op. Cit. Mann, p. 74.

⁶⁹ Anne Cahn Hessing, “Team B: The Trillion Dollar Experiment,” *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* 49:3 (1993), pp. 22, 24-27.

⁷⁰ Jeane Kirkpatrick, “Dictatorships and Double Standards,” *Commentary* 68:5 (1979), pp. 34 – 45.

giving way to the revitalized neoconservative persuasion of the 1990s and the post-9/11 era.

Contemporary Neoconservatism

The end of Cold War bipolarity and the emergence of America as an unchallenged “hyperpower” prompted deep debate on the future of America and the world. Would the post-Soviet world encourage liberal institution-building and a retreat of American hard power against a multipolar consensus? Could it be expected that the much vaunted “peace dividend” would convert military resources to domestic spending? Indeed, in the aftermath of the Cold War, this was a hopeful possibility, in the US Congress, “Senator Edward [Ted] M. Kennedy proposed taking \$210 billion from the defense budget over seven years and devoting the money to universal health insurance, education and job programs.”⁷¹

The neoconservative critique, against this culture of post Cold War liberal optimism, offered a counter-intuitive and belligerent vision of the future. In the neoconservative read of history, liberal democracy was forever imperiled and under siege by subsequent “existential threats.” Nazi Germany and Communist Russia were exceptional threats to the liberal democratic order, and if not for America, the liberal project would have fallen against the illiberal onslaught. Accordingly, the conflict between the “democratic” world – i.e. the “West” – and its enemies were not temporal anomalies of power politics but instead a permanent manifestation of this supposed “existential struggle.” America, neoconservatives argued, was the custodian of the

⁷¹ Op. Cit. Mann, p. 208.

international system and could accept the a delusions of liberal optimism, who would have America take a “vacation from history.”

The neoconservatism of the post Cold War era is sketched out in several notable essays and documents. First is Charles Krauthammer’s 1990 “Unipolar Moment”⁷² in *Foreign Affairs*, which argued the coming emergence of an “era of weapons of mass destruction.”⁷³ Weapons proliferation, into the hands of America’s enemies (Iraq and North Korea, among others), would force the “West [to] establish [a] new regime to police these weapons and those who brandish them.”⁷⁴ This “new regime”, in Krauthammer’s presentation, was not multipolar consensus or liberal institutionalism, but unchallengeable American dominance.

Further expression of this neoconservative sentiment is found, first, in the 1992 draft of the Pentagon’s Defense Planning Guidance document, and second, in the 1997 declaratory statement from the *Project for the New American Century*. These documents provided explicit propositions on the role of American hegemonic power and the shape of the post-Soviet world. Associated with Paul Wolfowitz, but penned by Zalmay Khalilzad, and drawing on advice from Richard Perle, Wolfowitz’s former advisor Albert Wohlstetter, and others,⁷⁵ the draft version of the Defense Planning Guide asserted that America’s fundamental interest was to “prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power,”⁷⁶ and moreover, “should discourage the ‘advanced industrial nations’

⁷² Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs: America and the World* 70:1 (1990/1991)

⁷³ Ibid, p. 33.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Under George W. Bush, he variously served as ambassador to the United Nations, ambassador to Afghanistan, and ambassador to Iraq.

⁷⁶ Op. Cit. Mann, p. 210.

from challenging America's leadership" through the maintenance of "unmatchable military strength."⁷⁷ Although this draft document was leaked prematurely, subjected to considerable criticism, and thereafter sanitized before official publication, the principles underlying the document represent the nucleus of contemporary neoconservative strategic thinking. The themes of the Planning document were reiterated five years later in the 'Statement of Principles' of the *Project for a New American Century* – whose signatories included many of those who would emerge within the later Bush administration (Wolfowitz, Elliot Abrams, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, Zalmay Khalilzad, Eliot Cohen, and others). In this document, the appropriate uses of American hegemonic power were to:

"strengthen our ties to democratic allies ... to challenge regimes hostile to our interests and values ... to promote the cause of political freedom abroad ... [and to] accept responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity; and our principles."⁷⁸

Likewise in 1996, William Kristol, the son of Irving Kristol and founding editor of *The Weekly Standard* – house journal of neoconservative thought – and Robert Kagan co-wrote "Towards a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy" for *Foreign Affairs*, arguing that in matters relating to foreign policy, conservatives were adrift, "disdain[ing] the Wilsonian multilateralism of the Clinton administration ... tempted by, but so far resisting, the neoisolationism of Patrick Buchanan ..." Kristol and Kagan likened the culture of foreign policy in the 1990s to the pre-Reagan era of the 1970s, a historical nadir in neoconservative thought, as an era of accommodation and coexistence with the Soviet

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ "Statement of Principles," *Project for a New American Century* (3 June 1997), <http://www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm>

Union and a sense of the inevitable retreat of American power. Kristol and Kagan's prescription for a conservative foreign policy in the post Cold War era was blunt:

benevolent global hegemony ... The first objective of U.S. foreign policy should be to preserve and enhance that predominance by strengthening America's security, supporting its friends, advancing its interests, and standing up for its principles around the world.⁷⁹

As a moral gloss to the fulfillment of America's strategic objectives, Kristol and Kagan continue:

American foreign policy should be informed with a clear moral purpose, based on the understanding that its moral goals and its fundamental interests are almost always in harmony. The United States achieved its present position of strength ... [by] actively promoting American principles of governance abroad -- democracy, free markets, [and] respect for liberty.⁸⁰

Kristol and Kagan's article, though it did not use the term *neoconservatism* itself, is highly representative of the genre and was expanded into a book-length thesis with the 2000 publication of *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy*.

Paul Wolfowitz, himself, published much commentary during this era, particularly concerning Iraq. In the lead-up to the 1996 Presidential election, Wolfowitz criticized President Bill Clinton in a *Wall Street Journal* opinion editorial, arguing that the "United States had virtually abandoned its commitment to protect a besieged people from a bloodthirsty dictator" and derided the administration's "passive commitment policy and our inept covert operations."⁸¹ In the subsequent year, Wolfowitz further hardened his position, arguing in an essay for *The Future of Iraq*, that the existing policy

⁷⁹ William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 1996).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Paul Wolfowitz, "Clinton's Bay of Pigs," *Wall Street Journal* (27 September 1996), p. A18.

of containment and sanctions had failed, engagement or normalization with the Iraqi regime was impossible, and that a revival of the Iraqi regime “would have chilling effect[s] on the Arab-Israeli peace process.”⁸² By the end of 1997, in the article “Overthrow Him” published in the *Weekly Standard*, Paul Wolfowitz and Zalmay Khalilzad argued for a confrontation with the Iraqi regime, advocating the creation of a government-in-exile, the indictment of Saddam Hussein as a war criminal, and the establishment of “liberated zone” in southern Iraq analogous to the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq; Wolfowitz and Khalilzad continued that:

Military force [against Iraq was] not enough ... It must be part of an overall political strategy that sets as its goal not merely the containment of Saddam but the liberation of Iraq from his tyranny.⁸³ [a sentiment Wolfowitz had first advanced in the aftermath of *Desert Storm*]

This was followed in 1998 with a sending of letter to President Bill Clinton under the banner of the *Project for a New Century*, whose signatories – again – included many of the figures who later emerged within the George W. Bush administration. In this letter, the signatories urged President Clinton to abandon the policy of containment, to “eliminate the possibility that Iraq will be able to use or threaten to use weapons of mass destruction,” and ultimately, to implement a policy for the removal of the Saddam Hussein regime.⁸⁴ Under a Republican-controlled congress, this pressure succeeded with the passage of the 1998 *Iraqi Liberation Act*, a rhetorical and practical expression of America’s intent to see Saddam Hussein removed from power; this included support for a host of Iraqi exile and anti-Saddam parties, including Ahmed Chalabi’s *Iraqi National Congress*, the *Kurdish Democratic Party* and the *Patriotic Union of Kurdistan*, as well as

⁸² Op. Cit. Mann, pp. 235-236.

⁸³ Zalmay Khalilzad and Paul Wolfowitz, “Overthrow Him,” *Weekly Standard* (1 December 1997), p. 14.

⁸⁴ “Letter to President Clinton on Iraq,” *Project for a New American Century* (26 January 1998), <http://www.newamericancentury.org/iraqclintonletter.htm>

the *Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq*, groups that would emerge in the aftermath of the 2003 Anglo-American invasion and occupation of Iraq as constituent parts of the Iraqi government.

Neoconservatism as a Theory of International Relations

Thus far, neoconservative foreign-policy has been presented as, first, a statement on the unique nature of America within the international system, and second, as a proposition on how American force should be projected. In reflection on the American exceptionalist tradition, we see a foreign policy doctrine derived from a national experience. Lurking beneath the normative foreign policy recommendations of neoconservatism can be detected, however, a neoconservative argument on the nature of the international system.

Of particular note are neoconservative attempts to rework the formulations of classical realism. At the centre of neoconservatism's international theory is a challenge to realist conceptions of the state, national interest and the interrelated concepts of legitimacy and the balance of power. As a basic supposition, classical realism asserts the functional sameness of state units and the systemic continuity that this sameness produces. The foreign policies of states will thus follow, by necessity, "one of three patterns of activity: maintaining the balance of power, imperialism and ... the politics of prestige."⁸⁵ Realism informs us that America is no exception to the continuities of this international system and it would be misguided to presume otherwise, as utopianism and sentimentalism have little place in the rational exercise of statecraft.

⁸⁵ Marti Griffiths, *Fifty Key Thinkers in International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 38.

Neoconservatism, while adhering to the realist framework of statism, self-help and survival, reworks realism's conception of the state dramatically. America is not merely a similar unit in the international system, but the agent of historical change. What continuity exists in the modern international system is not merely the continuity of conflict and power-maximization, but also, a continuity of American guidance: America as the "redeeming force in international politics."⁸⁶ Irving Kristol speaking on this theme, chided the advocates of political realism, arguing that "pure amoral *Realpolitik* is no part of the American political tradition," and if practiced, would cast a "pall of illegitimacy" over American ideals.⁸⁷ Ultimately, the principles of *realpolitik* are suggested as "foreign" and corrosive to the American diplomatic tradition.⁸⁸ Neoconservatism's criticisms of realism's 'amorality' are highly self-serving, of course, reinforcing the supposedly moral foundation of neoconservative foreign policy which, in practice, are not bloodless affairs nor are their consequences terribly 'moral' in regards to the victims of American policy.

Neoconservatism's placement of America at the apex of the international system, not merely in terms of power, but also in terms of morality, is striking when considered against realist theory. Hans Morgenthau, one of the principle authors of political realism, had warned that "the assumption of [a priori moral greatness] ... [could undermine] the legitimacy and power of the United States."⁸⁹ Greatness is recognized by others, not simply asserted by the self, and hyper-patriotism (as advocated by neoconservatism) risks

⁸⁶ Op. Cit. Monten, p. 141.

⁸⁷ Tibor Mandi, "Conservatism as an Ideology Revisited: The Case of Neoconservatism," presented for the ECPR Joint Session of Workshops, Uppsala (April 2004), p. 15.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Michael C. Williams, "What is the National Interest? The Neoconservative Challenge in IR Theory," *European Journal of International Relations* 11:3 (2005), p. 326.

becoming bellicose nationalism and a disaster for diplomacy, given its tendency to alienate allies and potential allies.⁹⁰

In addition to conceptualizing America as a state apart from any other, neoconservatism is notable in its expansion of the “national interest.” By realist convention, ‘national interest’ tends to be described in functional and minimalist terms, “the defence of the homeland and the preservation of territorial integrity ... all other policy preferences are subordinate.”⁹¹ Furthermore, ‘national interest’ is expected to operate in a similar, predictable fashion across state systems, where the values of survival and self-help are said to predominate. The relative sameness of states’ ‘national interest’ suggests a predictability in the international system, in which every state will consider the integrity of its borders and the expansion of its relative power as forming the crux of ‘national interest’, and this commonly-shared ‘national interest’ will generate international conventions of state sovereignty, whose violation will be seen as a deviation from normative principles and generate backlash against offending parties.

This realist conception of ‘national interest’ undergoes a severe revision in the neoconservative approach. Neoconservative ‘national interest’ is far more extensive. As states are not morally or ideologically similar units, states’ ‘national interest’ cannot be generalized. The ‘national interest’ of a state is, rather than simply a principle imposed by systemic anarchy, is significantly shaped by national ideology and domestic culture.

‘National interest,’ in this vein, is a fusion of, and an interaction between national ideology, domestic culture, as well as capacities. ‘National interest,’ in expression through foreign policy, is said to only succeed where there exists strong moral cohesion

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Op. Cit. Guelke, p. 106.

at the domestic level, with a commonly accepted social order.⁹² Thus, foreign policy driven by abstract principles of *realpolitik* disconnects policy from a nation's political culture and values, draining foreign-policy adventures of the domestic strength they depend upon.

Early neoconservative critiques of the 'counterculture,' then, are not characteristic of simple social conservatism, but rather, as recognition that in a challenge to national identity is an effort, intentional or incidental, to undermine the domestic resources that give a nation a coherent sense of purpose in the world. In the absence of shared values, sometimes religious in nature, a nation lacks the ideological strength to generate a coherent national interest and hence a foreign policy. Shared values, even where entirely or largely mythic, give purpose and identity to society, bind society and give expression to 'national interest.' American foreign policy, thus, is understood as an explicitly ideological project. America's purpose, by self-definition is – per neoconservatism – to empower liberal political and economic institutions throughout the world, amenable to American interest. The purpose and behavior of the Soviet Union, likewise, is ideological rather than strictly rational-acting.

The former Soviet Union, rather than a functionally similar state among others, was an exceptionally expansive threat by ideational self-definition,⁹³ and its behaviour in the international system was not conditioned by the structure of anarchy, but by the very nature of the regime. Per neoconservative theory, the "national interest" of the Soviet Union, as defined by ideology, was to provide a "redeeming mission for all humanity – a

⁹² Op. Cit. Williams, p. 321.

⁹³ Op. Cit. Guelke, p. 105.

mission imposed on it by History,”⁹⁴ hence the Soviet Union was expansionist by ideological self-definition.

The vindicationist strain of American exceptionalism, now identifiable in neoconservatism, has never existed in a more favourable international environment as that of today. The Soviet bloc, the countervailing force that once limited America’s exceptional purpose, is now a historical footnote. As the international environment is now one of unchallenged American unipolarity, could America’s present direction have been predicted? Realism informs us, after all, that the relative power of the state creates its international ambitions: where a revisionist state faces conditions of bipolarity or multipolarity, its grand objectives are restrained, but where the condition is unipolarity, its purpose is given opportunity. In such an environment, American unipolar dominance, how do realist and neoconservative perspectives imagine “balance of power” mechanics?

As states are threatened by the expansion of a revisionist power, directly or indirectly, efforts will be made at balancing. States will balance against those most threatening, most threatening to the continuity of the international system. This “policy of equilibrium” is a major prediction of international theory. America’s expansion, then, an attack on accepted international norms, should be met by the formation of defensive alliances, sources of countervailing power. Even traditional allies would be compelled to engage in balancing behaviour. Is this realist expectation shared by neoconservative “international theory?”

However, American projections of unilateral power, rather than push reticent states, friend and foe alike, into balancing behaviour, is said to encourage a bandwagon effect. This neoconservative position, rooted in the exceptionalist belief that the United

⁹⁴ Op. Cit. Irving Kristol, “American Foreign Policy,” p. 71.

States is a “peculiarly virtuous nation,”⁹⁵ that its force is benign, predicts that American force will impress friends into cooperation and distress foes into submission. In the demonstration of leadership, states will come to acknowledge America’s purpose.

The fact that neoconservatives genuinely believe this principle of the international system is manifestly clear when one evaluates their public statements and documents. In a 1997 statement, Paul Wolfowitz would characterize American unilateral force as a “most effective way of securing effective collective action.”⁹⁶ This same logic, in a time of more consequence, and from the mouth of President Bush, would assert that “confident action yields positive results [and provides] a slipstream into which reluctant nations and leaders can get behind.”⁹⁷ As this bandwagon theory was tested against the Iraqi experience, the operating presumption remained that bandwagoning would occur: the stabilization of Iraq would include four peacekeeping divisions, “including Arab and NATO troops,⁹⁸” and reconstruction efforts would eventually incorporate the broad international community.⁹⁹ American efforts, while met with initial suspicion, would be legitimated *ex post facto*.

The neoconservative “theory” of the international system is seen as a composition of three parts. First, America sits at the apex of the international system, not merely in terms of its power, but by its moral destiny to *direct* the system. Second, ‘national interest’ cannot be reduced to merely the defense of one’s national borders; the ‘national interest,’ international purpose as defined by national ideology, is the imposition of one’s

⁹⁵ Op. Cit. Monten, p. 145

⁹⁶ Paul Wolfowitz, “Rebuilding the Anti-Saddam Coalition,” *Wall Street Journal* (18 November 1997), p. A22.

⁹⁷ Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), p. 162.

⁹⁸ Michael R. Gordon, “The Strategy to Secure Iraq Did Not Foresee a Second War,” *New York Times* (19 October 2004), p. A1

⁹⁹ Op. Cit. Woodward. p. 328.

values upon the system as a whole. This ‘national interest,’ is then either moral or immoral depending on the motives that drive policy: as neoconservatives believe it is America’s national interest to “‘vindicate the right’ in an otherwise illiberal world,”¹⁰⁰ to enact man’s universal aspirations, this rationale is fairly circular and self-serving. And third, neoconservatism reworks the realist conception of international legitimacy and power balancing: the expansion of American power encourages “bandwagoning” behind benign American power, not balancing.

Conclusion

Neoconservatism, as it developed as an American ideology, emerged from a progressive milieu as a liberal/progressive school of anticommunism, and increasingly, skepticism of liberal social planning. By the 1970s, neoconservatism had largely disentangled itself from its progressive origins and had shifted towards the conservative orbit in American politics. Nevertheless, as contemporary neoconservatism developed as a doctrine of foreign-policy in the 1970s onwards, it remained a school of thought that could be identified as separate from the larger conservative movement. Increasingly, particularly after 9/11 (see next chapter), neoconservative foreign-policy became dominant within American political conservatism.

In this sketch, post Cold War neoconservative thought is characterized as a hyper-moralistic reaction against the sentiments of international accommodation. The belligerence of the neoconservative argument, then and now, is met with significant criticism, not merely from progressive circles, but also from realist and traditional-conservative critics. Neoconservatism, thus, is frequently characterized as something

¹⁰⁰ Op. Cit. Monten, 125.

aberrant, deviant from the “true” values that guide America’s foreign policy.

Neoconservatism, however, is not an ephemeral blip removed from the larger tradition of American political history. Understanding neoconservatism is understanding the American exceptionalist idea, of which neoconservatism is merely an extreme manifestation.

Chapter Three: Neoconservatism in the Age of Terror

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 changed the world. Indeed, the attacks were the catalyst that initiated America's "war on terror", culminating with the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Yet for the neoconservative theorists and commentators, the terrorist attacks were a confirmation of their underlying fears and of the rightness of their policy prescriptions. The September 11th attacks, hence, were not interpreted by the neoconservatives, or in the larger culture, as political *blowback* or a terroristic, yet political, act originating against America's Middle East policy, but as a confirmation of the successive existential threats to America and the liberal order. Indeed, this metaphor of the "war on terror" as a grand and existential struggle was made quite literal in much post-9/11 writing, with America's "war on terror" representing, according to neoconservative writer Norman Podhoretz, *World War IV: The Long Struggle Against Islamofascism*.

America's "war on terror" represents an expansive set of policies initiated under the Presidency of George W. Bush, exemplified in the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, the use of torture/'enhanced interrogation techniques', extraordinary rendition, and warrantless surveillance. As a means of interpreting America's "war on terror", it is useful to investigate the intellectual environment that surrounded the war on terror: first, with a survey of scholarly treatments of terrorism generally and Islamic terrorism particularly, with a brief subsequent comment on the various battles that have emerged in the post-9/11 world between American academia and its critics; and second, and more substantially, with an assessment of a) the historical and contemporary 'cultural motifs' concerning Muslims, the Islamic world, and Islamic

politics, which represent the cultural models used to conceive of America's new "enemy" and b) neoconservative 'ideological justification' for the "war on terror" and the subsequent invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Interpretations of Terrorism, Islamic Terrorism, and the Islamic World

Terrorism: Islamic and New

Although terrorism as a phenomenon is in no sense new, various academics throughout the 1990s argued that the established categories used to explain terrorist activity had become inadequate, and in fact, that a "new" category of terrorism had emerged, infused with explicitly religious and metaphysical motivations, rather than the instrumental political objectives of terrorism old. Bruce Hoffman, professor at Georgetown University and proponent of the "new terrorism" thesis argued that religion, as a key component of "new terrorism", creates "radically different value systems, mechanisms of legitimization and justifications, concepts of morality and, world view";¹⁰¹ accordingly, for the religious terrorist, it is argued that "violence is a divine duty."¹⁰² Along these lines, historian Walter Lacquer argued that "new terrorism is different in character, aiming not at clearly defined political demands but at the destruction of society and the elimination of large sections of the population."¹⁰³ In practical terms, it has been argued that the "new terrorism", unlike the terrorism of old is: 1) is motivated by the phantasmal rather than the political; 2) that the new terrorists have the will and the way to acquire "weapons of mass destruction" (WMDs); and that 3) the

¹⁰¹ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (1999), p. 87.

¹⁰² Lynne L. Snowden and Bradley C. Whitsel, *Terrorism: Research, Readings and Realities* (2004), p. 307.

¹⁰³ Walter Lacquer, *New Terrorism* (1999), p. 9.

new terrorists indiscriminately kill civilians, seeking mass casualties where possible. Against the backdrop of the 11 September 2001 attacks, the “new terrorism” thesis is, thus, very accessible and its underlying presumptions have become prominent in popular discussion of Islamic terrorism.

Thus as the terrorism of old was thought to be fundamentally secular and instrumental, the “new terrorism” is categorized by motives more phantasmal, and hence, far less negotiable. The violence of the “new terrorist” sees its acts as a “sacramental act or divine duty,”¹⁰⁴ violence as a political program. The underlying tone of these arguments has been recurring in subsequent treatments of terrorism in the circles of journalism and polemical writings, and in neoconservative writings, has been carelessly used to categorize any number of Islamic movements (whether characterized as ‘terrorist’ or ‘resistance movements’). As example, David Frum and Richard Perle, in their book *An End to Evil*, argued that the root cause of violence against Israel and United States was “militant Islam,” who represent forces who would “overthrow our civilization and remake the nations of the West into Islamic societies, imposing on the whole world its religion and its law,”¹⁰⁵ hence an “existential threat” to the liberal world guaranteed by American power.

Conversely, some have questioned the ‘newness’ of ‘new terrorism,’ or more specifically, the nature use of suicide-bombings by Islamic groups, an act that by its very nature implies highly religious motives. Robert Pape, in *Dying to Win: The Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, argued: 1) that suicide-bombings, the most visible act associated with the “new terrorism” has been used by both religious-movements as well as avowedly-

¹⁰⁴ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 94.

¹⁰⁵ David Frum & Richard Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* (New York: Random House, 2003), p. 42.

secular movements; and 2) that the primary objective of suicide-terrorist attacks “are not driven by religion as much as they are by a clear strategic objective ... to compel modern democracies to withdraw military forces from the territory [under occupation].” Of 188 documented suicide bombings (1980-2001), Pape argued that “95 percent of all the incidents- had as its strategic objective to compel a democratic state to withdraw.”¹⁰⁶ Needless to say, the implications of this research, that military occupation increases one’s vulnerability to terrorism, is generally not accepted – at least at the level of rhetorical justification – by those involved in policies of military occupation nor those who advocate such policies.

In any case, it is certain that there is significant variation in the underlying motivations of the various Islamic groups engaged in terrorism and/or political violence. The various Islamic movements involved in violence, with the glaring exception of *al Qaeda* and other *Takfiri*¹⁰⁷ groups, clearly have localized political objectives and constituencies. The most prominent of the Islamic movements involved in terrorism/political violence – Hamas and Hezbollah – have readily identifiable political objectives and are characterizable in the same sense as ‘old terrorism.’ Hamas, for its part, is an Islamo-nationalist Palestinian organization that emerged as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood and came to prominence in the first Palestinian uprising. Hezbollah, likewise, is an Islamo-nationalist movement that emerged in resistance to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The subsequent popularity of these movements, and their dual function as sociopolitical movements that participate in electoral politics, suggests rather earthly objectives in their activities.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Robert Pape, *The American Conservative* (18 July 2005), <http://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/154/26773.html>

¹⁰⁷ Those who practice *Takfir*, to declare other Muslims of apostasy.

Needless to say, neoconservative theorists and polemicists have tended to dismiss the instrumental explanations of Islamic terrorism – regardless of the ‘terrorist’ movement in question – instead adopting a highly caricatured form of the “new terrorism” thesis. Moreover, drawing upon a host of cultural stereotypes concerning the Muslim world, Islamic precepts themselves has been implicated as the motivator of terrorism emanating from the Islamic world.

The War on Terror and American Academia

The heated intellectual environment surrounding the “terrorism” question is highly represented in the assorted battles that taken shape between the world of American academia and its critics. Long the *bête noire* of the American right, the academic world was frequently accused in the context of the “war on terror” of insufficient patriotism or outright betrayal of cause; no where was this most evident than in the debates surrounding Middle Eastern studies, which represents a culture war that began as early as the 1980s and only accelerated in the post-9/11 environment. Generally, criticism of this sort has originated from pro-Israel advocacy groups or from conservative watchdog groups.

In the case of the former, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) initiated a campaign as early as the 1980s criticizing the field of Middle East Studies, distributing a booklet in 1983 in response to the Israel invasion of Lebanon, designed “to help Jewish students deal with anti-Zionist” attitudes on campus. The same year, the ADL distributed *Pro-Arab Propaganda in America: vehicles and voices, a handbook*; the subsequent year, AIPAC

“compiled a 187-page college guide whose objective was to expose the anti-Israel campaign on campus.”¹⁰⁸ The primary target of these campaigns was the Middle East Studies Association, which was characterized by one such opponent as a “preserve of Middle Eastern Arabs, who have brought their views with them.”¹⁰⁹

In the post-9/11 era, attacks of this sort only became more acute. Speaking before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Stanley Kurtz, senior fellow at the conservative Hoover Institute and contributing editor to the *National Review*, argued that ‘Middle East Studies (and other area studies) tend to purvey extreme and one-sided criticisms of American foreign policy’ and therefore argued congressional action to ensure ‘balance.’¹¹⁰ In another prominent example, neoconservative figure Daniel Pipes launched *Campus Watch*, declaring as its project the “monitor[ing] and gather[ing of] information on professors who fan the flames of misinformation, incitement, and ignorance.”¹¹¹

While Campus Watch is the most prominent of these activities, it is one amongst several similarly-motivated groups. Americans for Victory over Terrorism (AVOT), an organization founded by former drug czar and Secretary of Education William Bennett, was formed in the aftermath of 9/11, declaring as its mission to “take to task those blame American first and do not understand – or who are unwilling to defend – our fundamental principles.”¹¹² Similarly, one points to the ‘Academic freedom’ movement of David Horowitz, a conservative writer and pamphleteer; and the *American Council of Trustees*

¹⁰⁸ Joel Beinin, “The New American Mccarthyism: Policing Thought about the Middle East,” *Race and Class* 46 (2004), p. 108.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 110.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 111.

¹¹¹ Joel Beinin, “Who’s Watching the Watchers,” *History News Network* (30 September 2002), <http://hnn.us/articles/1001.html>

¹¹² Ibid.

and Alumni, founded by the former Vice President Richard Cheney's wife, Lynne Cheney, who attacked the academy in the post-9/11 world in *Defending Civilization: How Our Universities are Failing America and What Can Be Done About It*.

The activities of the conservative “watchdog” groups in the post-9/11 environment represent, fundamentally, guardianship of the ideological orthodoxy of the post-9/11 world. The academic world, which often provided alternative interpretations of the “war on terror”, was hence deemed insufficiently supportive of the American mission and the overall political culture of the “war on terror” as it developed post-9/11.

Political Culture of the War on the Terror and the Nature of the Enemy

In his first address to congress following the September 11th attacks, George W. Bush captured the mood that came to dominate the enterprise of the war on terror, namely the threat of Islamic extremism as today's existential evil:

We have seen their kind [*Al Qaeda*] before. They're the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th Century ... they follow in the path of fascism, Nazism, and totalitarianism.

Nor could the United States' mission be more grandiose, with President George W. Bush declaring that ‘Our nation, this generation, will lift the dark threat of violence from our people and our future.’

Bush's State of the Union address, and his subsequent expositions on good and evil undoubtedly set the tenor of his presidency and its myriad of wars; and certainly, for neoconservative thinkers and ideologues, but American society more generally, Bush's commentary on the nature of the struggle comfortably fit within pre-existing notions of American mission within the world. But it was also immediately obvious that in the discovery of the 21st Century's ‘existential evil’, the advocates of the “war on terror” had

at their disposal an overflowing reservoir of racial and religious motifs vis-à-vis the Muslim foe. Prominent among the cultural motifs of the “war on terror” have been certain conceptions of the foe: notions of moral deviance, political irrationality and social atavism.

In popular interpretations of political Islam, two themes are predominant: first, that political Islam is inherently reactionary, there are no ideological gradients within Islamic political thought, no moderate or liberal strains; and second, that Islamism has, in fact, no political claims, only the outbursts of fanatical “Muslim rage,” opposed to two enemies “secularism and modernism ... [variously attributed] to Jews, the West, and the United States.”¹¹³ Islamism therefore represents “an aggressive revolutionary movement as militant and violent as the Bolshevik, fascist, and Nazi movements of the past.”¹¹⁴ The Islamic extremist as Nazi motif was frequent, most prominently with the emergence of the term “Islamofascism” as a descriptive label for the enemy.

The lineage of the term “Islamofascism” is unclear, having sporadically appeared throughout the 1990s, it was understandably popularized in the aftermath of 9/11. In one of its earlier uses post-9/11, Christopher Hitchens, writing in *The Nation*, labeled the perpetrators of 9/11 (along with their ilk) as representing “fascism with an Islamic face.”¹¹⁵ Since this early usage, the term ‘Islamofascism’ has earned quite a bit of coinage, extending to President George W. Bush who in an August 2006 Press conference, characterized the struggle as a war against those who would “try to spread

¹¹³ Bernard Lewis, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” *The Atlantic* 266: 3 (1990), pp. 47–58

¹¹⁴ Amos Perlmutter, “Wishful Thinking about Islamic Fundamentalism,” *Washington Post* (19 January 1992).

¹¹⁵ Christopher Hitchens, “Against Rationalization,” *The Nation* (8 October 2001).

their jihadist message – a message I call ... Islamic radicalism, Islamic fascism,”

Islamofascism, he continued, was “an ideology that is real and profound.”¹¹⁶

Notwithstanding the ahistorical nature of such an appellation, its rhetorical appeal is obvious, strategically implicating America’s contemporary enemies as the moral equivalent of Nazis, and invoking the triumphs of antifascism. This analogy of Islamic radicalism as Nazism was not limited to the United States, and in speech to B’nai Brith on 18 October 2006, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper categorized Israel’s conflict with Hezbollah in similarly antifascist terms:

The world was too slow to fully grasp the threat of fascism, too willing in the early years to make excuses for it, too blind to see what it meant for all of us ... those who attacked Israel and those that sponsor such attacks don’t seek merely to gain some leverage ... They seek what they and those like them have always sought: the destruction of Israel and the destruction of the Jewish people. Why? ... because the Jews are different¹¹⁷

Cultural Representations

American cultural perceptions of the Muslim world are rooted in a multitude of factors: the historical memory of Western-Islamic conflicts, the competing religious claim of the Western and Islamic worlds, academic interpretations of the ‘orient’, and the various representations of the orient in cultural mediums. Undergirding tension between the West and the Islamic world are a reservoir of cultural suspicions and clichés, mutually-serving representations that divide the two worlds into separate, irreconcilable, peoples.

¹¹⁶ Richard Allen Greene, “Bush’s language angers US Muslims,” BBC News (12 August 2006), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4785065.stm>

¹¹⁷ Stephen Harper, Speech to B’nai Brith (18 October 2006), <http://www.bnaibrith.org.au/newsletterPopup.asp?NewsletterID=76>

In the religious-cultural sphere, Islam has frequently been perceived in the West as the religion of an imposter. In the Medieval era, Mohammad was represented as a “deceiving prophet”, who provided “nothing true” except “human bloodshed.”¹¹⁸ Similarly, Mohammad was frequently represented as a failed Cardinal, who formed the Islamic faith to compensate for his thwarted aspirations within the Roman Church. Appropriate of the mindset, the brilliant poet Dante Aligheri provided the most memorable Medieval treatment of the Islamic prophet, dooming him and his son-in-law Ali to eternal punishment by demons:

See how maimed Mohammad is! And he
who walks and weeps before me is Ali
whose face is opened wide from chin to forelock¹¹⁹

Representations of these tortures would be reproduced by popular illustrator Gustave Dore, romantic William Blake, and later, surrealist Salvador Dali. Indeed, medieval representations of this sort continued to cause tension even as late as 2002, as complaints and threats arose concerning Giovanni de Modena’s *The Last Judgement*, an Italian fresco depicting Islam’s prophet facing hellish torments.¹²⁰

Contemporary religious interpretations of Islam and its prophet tend to be removed from medieval sentiments, though the religious component has not fully receded. At the popular, demagogic, level, televangelist Jerry Falwell – in a 6 October 2002 appearance on CBS’ *60 Minutes* - commented “I think Muhammad was a terrorist,” while at the more elevated level, Pope Benedict XVI quoted a medieval dialogue recounted by Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus:

¹¹⁸ Walter Emil Kaegi, Jr., “Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest”, *Church History* 38:2 (June 1969), p. 139-149, p. 139-142, quoting from *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati* 86-87

¹¹⁹ Dante Aligheri, “Inferno,” *Divine Comedy*, canto XXVIII, line 31 – 33.

¹²⁰ Frank Bruni, “Italy Arrests 5; Fresco Showing Muhammad is Issue,” *New York Times* (21 August 2002).

Show me what Muhammad brought that was new and there you will find
things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword
the faith he preached¹²¹

The Pope's brief commentary, nominally part of an academic treatise criticizing violence in the name of religion – all religion – nevertheless engendered an expected backlash, revealing the continuing resonance of religious tension and rivalry.

Further strains of conflict and tension have emerged from a series of cultural conflagrations, including the Danish “cartoon controversy”, the Sudan “teddy bear” case, Theo Van Gogh and Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Submission*, rightwing Danish politician Geert Wilders' *Fitna*, “human rights” lawsuits in Canada, and so forth. At the level of popular media, representations of the ‘orient’ have ranged from portrayals of otherworldly exoticism, as in the early popular films *The Sheik* (1921) and George Fitzmaurice's *Son of the Sheik* (1926) to straightforward portrayals of the Arab world and Islam as terroristic, a motif in films too numerous to list.¹²² Likewise, representations of this sort are replicated in more modern media, including video games, where the Arab world represents an essential land of conflict and the enemy is represented by hordes of faceless terrorists.

The cultural interpretations of Muslim motivation have been given academic veneer in the assorted writings of Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, Raphael Patai, and others, who argue the existence of essential components of Arab Muslim identity, primordial traits that drive the whole of his social/political behaviour. The 'Arab' component of his

¹²¹ Speech by Pope Benedict at the University of Regensburg, *Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections* (12 September 2006), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html

¹²² See Jack Sheehan, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (Northampton: Interlink Publishing Group, 2001).

personality is argued to drive tribalism, shame/honour intensity, sexual repression, etc, while the 'Islamic' component of his personality imposes a propensity towards collective violence, fatalism and submission, and a preference for despotism. Arabs, supposedly, are then ruled by passions and "pre-modern sentiments," essential characteristics that, aggregated, add up to inevitable conflict; in this scheme, honour and shame factor prominently, particularly as relates to sexual matters. The Arab's true nature is "[an] all-encompassing preoccupation with sex. Arab shame, then, is best induced with the public display of his private sexuality."¹²³

More substantial are the variety of academic representations, where Arab and Muslim life is routinely interpreted as a world of pre-modern fatalism, unaffected by the scientific revolution; the "Arab mind" is endowed with "a calm equanimity in the face of adversity," incapable of long-range planning, as "it seems to imply that one does not put one's trust in divine providence."¹²⁴ In such treatments, the Arab is portrayed as capricious and self-destructive, his passions and superstitions precluding the development of liberal institutions: "Any collective action for common benefit or mutual profit is alien to them [Arabs] ... The Arab has little chance to develop his potentialities and define his position in society, holds little belief in progress and change ..."¹²⁵

The Muslim world's lack of political sophistication is a prominent theme in cultural and journalistic representations, and Islamic politics, in the treatments of Bernard Lewis, Samuel Huntington, and others, emphasizes the themes of a "clash of civilization," "Muslim rage," a "resurgence of Islam," and so forth. In these treatments, "Muslim rage" is portrayed as a reactionary backlash to the West, a rejection of its culture

¹²³ Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind* (Long Island City: Hatherleigh Press, 2002, rev. ed.)

¹²⁴ Ibid. 160.

¹²⁵ Sainia Hamady, as quoted in Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 40-42.

and values, rather than a critique of its policy. Muslim opposition to America, thus, is variously described as a sociopsychological pathology: David Landes - professor at Harvard and author of *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* - characterized Mohammad Atta and his confederates as driven by sexual angst, and their terrorist attack hence, as a rejection of women's emancipation;¹²⁶ Norman Podhoretz, prominent neoconservative journalist, was first to characterize the September 11th attacks as attacks on what we stand for - democracy and freedom - which would later become President Bush's "they hate us for our freedom" rationale;¹²⁷ at the cruder end of the spectrum, Islam is itself the pathology, the religion of over a billion "evil and wicked"¹²⁸ and its prophet a "demon possessed pedophile."¹²⁹

"Muslim rage" is deduced as so irrational and so without political cause, that it is interpreted as a function of religion. Here represents a tendency to view Islam as a total explanation for all political uprisings in the Muslim world; Islam is a political force to be feared, it is thought to preclude modernity, to impose on its followers a slavish devotion to jihad and terrorism.

The political implications of such beliefs is obvious; as the Muslim world is conceived to be fundamentally apart from the West, and as America represents a force for good *prima facie*, conflict is inevitable. America, inspired by the exaggerated exceptionalism of modern neoconservatism, has come to view its efforts in the war on terror as a liberating enterprise. American violence is justified by virtue of it being

¹²⁶ David Landes, "Girl Power," *New Republic* (October 8, 2001).

¹²⁷ Norman Podhoretz, "Israel is not the issue," *Wall Street Journal* (September 20, 2001).

¹²⁸ Franklin Graham quoted in Martin Durham, "Evangelical Protestantism and Foreign Policy in the United States after September 11," *Patterns of Prejudice* 38:2 (2004), p. 148.

¹²⁹ Jerry Vines, former president of Southern Baptist Convention, quoted in *Ibid*.

American, and America's enemies, by virtue of opposing America, are anti-modern and despotic. Liberal democracy is to be imposed through the process of Western tutelage.

The literature of such a worldview, including that of Daniel Pipes, Bernard Lewis, Raphael Patai, and others, obviously has found a receptive audience in the post-9/11 world. The "green menace" thesis, Islam as liberalism's newest "existential threat," is replete in the works of these authors, and several of these figures have subsequently found themselves within the world of government: Daniel Pipes previously acted as an advisor to the State Department and sat on the board of the *U.S. Institute of Peace*; Bernard Lewis, doyen of Middle East Studies, was tasked by Vice President Dick Cheney to lecture at the White House on Islam and the Middle East; Fouad Ajami, Director of the Middle East Studies Program at John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, provided the trope that American troops would be welcome as liberators by Iraqis; and Raphael Patai's *Arab Mind*, the apparent "Bible of the neocons of Arab behaviour,"¹³⁰ remains a standard text at the JFK special warfare school, instilling in future officers the worst anti-Arab caricatures.

Neoconservative Theory and the Practice of the War on Terror

The policies of the post-9/11 world are marked by two components: first, at the strategic level, a revision of the accepted conventions of preemptive military action and a marked unilateralism; and second, at the level of moral justification, broad appeals to the notions of American mission and democracy-promotion rooted in American cultural tradition. At the strategic level, the policies of the "war on terror" are best exemplified of

¹³⁰ Seymour Hersh, *Chains of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Gharib* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), p. 39.

the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States, henceforth considered the “Bush Doctrine.” The Bush Doctrine, broadly speaking, proclaimed an America prerogative to launch preventive wars against states harboring or giving aid to terrorists, and crucially, the prerogative to launch preventive attacks on “rogue states” with the possession of “weapons of mass destruction” who constitute a real or merely “emergent” threat; to wit, the ‘Bush Doctrine’ proclaimed that:

the United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today’s threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries’ choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first.¹³¹

The 2002 NSS document, the “Bush Doctrine” was remarkable in its expansion of the notion of preemption “to include what amounted to preventive war. Preemption is usually understood to be an effort to break up an imminent military attack; preventive war is a military operation designed to head off a threat that is months or years away from materializing.”¹³² At the level of moral justification, the theme of America as the guarantor of the liberal order was restated, with the NSS arguing that there remained only “a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise” and that the power of United States was so significant to dissuade [any] potential adversaries who might challenge the order of American preeminence.¹³³ Moreover, the “Bush Doctrine” was heavily couched in the language of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy-promotion,’ declaring the aim of the United States to “defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere.” President

¹³¹ National Security Strategy of the United States (2002)

¹³² Op. Cit. Francis Fukuyama, p. 83.

¹³³ National Security Strategy of the United States (2002)

George W. Bush, in a 26 February 2003 speech to the American Enterprise Institute, would reemphasize the rhetorical claim, arguing that:

The world has a clear interest in the spread of democratic values, because stable and free nations do not breed the ideologies of murder. They encourage the peaceful pursuit of a better life

Relating the principle of the compatibility of American strategic interest and general well-being, Bush continued, by claiming that the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime would initiate a regional push towards peace and democracy, suggesting that:

Success in Iraq could begin a new stage for Middle East peace, and set in motion progress towards a truly democratic state ... depriv[ing] terrorist networks of a wealthy patron ... Palestinians who are working for reform and long for democracy will be in better position to choose new leaders¹³⁴

Iraq served as the centerpiece of the Bush administration's "war on terrorism" policy, and indeed, from the outset of the war on terror, Paul Wolfowitz identified the defeat of Iraq as prime objective of the "war on terror", arguing that the "forces of terrorism in the Middle East were all interconnected ... Saddam Hussein was the most powerful opponent American faced. If the United States could defeat him, it would weaken terrorist groups throughout the Middle East."¹³⁵

As the centerpiece of American "war on terror" policy, Iraq served as a test case for the variety of neoconservative claims on the nature of American power. Wolfowitz's early claim that "a willingness to act unilaterally can be the most effective way of securing effective collective action," the belief that a coalition would coalesce once the United States acted, did not come to pass. World reaction in the prelude and aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq was decidedly not to bandwagon. President George W. Bush's 2002 State of the Union speech, which initiated the American case against Iraq,

¹³⁴ George W. Bush, speech to American Enterprise Institute (23 February 2003).

¹³⁵ Op. Cit. Mann, p. 302.

was dismissed by French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine as “simplistic” while German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer warned the United States that its “alliance partners were not satellites.”¹³⁶ In the aftermath of the invasion, America’s “coalition of the willing”, notwithstanding claims that forceful and unilateral American action would generate international support, gradually whittled rather than expand.

The theoretical claims of the neoconservatives fell vastly short in the Iraqi enterprise and the moral claims fared even worse. The national-security justifications of the American invasion, namely Iraq’s alleged possession of WMDs and its support for terrorism, revealed themselves as a chimera. More damaging were the subsequent revelations of abuse at the American-run prison of Abu Gharib, the use of waterboarding as a tool of interrogation, the emergence of a secret network of “black prisons”, and generally speaking, the betrayal of liberal values in a range of venues.

Moreover, in spite of the Bush administration’s proclaimed objective to engineer a pro-American and liberal democratic regime in Iraq, the removal of the Saddam Hussein regime and the dismantling of Iraq’s state institutions did not convert Iraq to a default status of liberal democracy, but initiated a vicious war of political sectarianism. The government that ultimately formed in Iraq came to represent a pastiche of political sectarian interests, plagued by massive corruption. This represented the ultimate application of the “war on terror” in Iraq.

Conclusion

In terms of real-world praxis, this utopian project of ‘vindicating the right’ has taken the form of ‘ending states’. In the case of Iraq, its connections to terrorism and

¹³⁶ Op. Cit. Mann, p. 321.

possession of WMDs were limited and tenuous – and therefore did not represent a particular threat to the national security of the United States – the invasion and occupation of Iraq hence represented a test case for the remaking of the world.

Neoconservatism as practice, represented in the “war on terror”, was buttressed by the cultural antipathies to the Muslim ‘orient’, which served as an intellectual framework to dehumanize the Muslim foe. Thus, neoconservatism as a political program resulted in unprecedented mistrust between the United States and the Muslim world, and moreover, undermined the moral claims that the neoconservatives’ held as their central principles.

Conclusion: Neoconservatism RIP or a Neoconservative Nation?

This thesis began as an investigation of political culture and an inquiry into the underlying trends of American thinking towards foreign policy. I posed four fundamental questions: what are the intellectual and cultural bases that underlie America's practice of foreign policy; what is neoconservatism and how does neoconservatism relate to the larger question of American political culture; and, in the context of the "war on terror", how did the rhetorical, moral, and strategic motifs of neoconservative thought and America's cultural orientations towards the Muslim world intervene in the development and application of "war on terror" policy.

In terms of America's intellectual culture, I identified the basis of American foreign policy thinking as in doctrines of American exceptionalism. The formative development of American exceptionalist belief system is argued to have occurred over three epochal periods: the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary periods of American history; the period of continental expansion, "manifest destiny"; and, with the outbreak of the Spanish-American war in 1898, the emergence of American of an interventionist world power. As to the question of neoconservatism, neoconservatism is argued to be an intellectual trend in American political thought that, from the 1970s onward, came to represent a highly moralistic strain of foreign-policy thinking which prescribed the enforcement – if need be unilaterally – of a liberal world order amenable to American interests.

Neoconservatism, rather than an entirely new system of thought in the practice of American foreign policy, is argued to be fully within the mainstream of American thinking towards the role of American in the world and application of foreign policy.

Neoconservatism, while primarily a doctrine of American foreign-policy, can be interpreted as a vague theory of international relations, and the precepts of such a neoconservative theory of International Relations were considered in preliminary form. As for the application of neoconservative foreign-policy during the era of the “war on terror”, this foreign policy is interpreted as, in the first place, the not entirely unexpected reaction to the psychic shock of the September 11th terrorist attacks, but moreover, as representative of the shift in the international structure, from bipolar world order to a unipolar world lead by an American hyperpower. The policies of the “war on terror” are therefore interpreted as an attempt by America to test the boundaries and parameters of its foreign policy in a unipolar world. Finally, in America’s pursuit of a “war on terror”, underlying cultural orientations towards the question of Islamic politics and Islam itself were argued to represent negative cultural stereotypes, which characterized the peoples of the Muslim world as inherently prone to violence, illiberal in their politics, and anti-democratic if left to their own devices. As with previous American foreign policy enterprises, the American invasion and occupation of Muslim countries was interpreted as a liberating force, a project to teach the “science of self-government.”

Situating Neoconservatism in the Present-Day

America’s invasion and occupation of Iraq amounted to significant human tragedy. For America, the lives of over 4,000 servicemen were lost as of 2009, and the costs of the war amounted to the hundreds of billions of dollars. Aside from its costs to America, in blood, treasure, and international reputation, the consequences for Iraq were catastrophic, threatening the very existence of that nation. According to various

estimates, Iraqi fatalities range from 151,000 (a 2006 survey by the Iraqi Health Ministry) to 601,027 (a June 2006 survey by *Lancet*) to over a million (according to an August 2007 survey by the British *Opinion Research Business* group). According to the International Organization of Migration, the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq created 2.5 million external refugees, predominantly resettled in Syria and Jordan, and 3 million internally displaced peoples. At an ideological level, the Anglo-American invasion and occupation of Iraq served as the handmaiden of a politicized and vicious form of social sectarianism, which served to destroy the traditional, Arab nationalist, base of Iraqi politics.

Appropriately, US popular support for the military presence in Iraq gradually eroded. In an Associated Press-Ipsos poll conducted between 31 July and 4 August 2008, 62 per cent came to disapprove of how George W. Bush was handling ‘the situation in Iraq’.¹³⁷ More precisely, when asked in a Pew Research Poll conducted in late October 2008 on whether “the U.S. made the right decision or the wrong decision in using military force against Iraq,” 39% answered ‘right’ versus 50% who answered ‘wrong’.¹³⁸ Finally, in a ‘job approval’ poll conducted by Gallup World in October 2008, President George W. Bush was polled at a 25% ‘job approval’ rating; for historical perspective, President Richard M Nixon’s lowest approval rating – during July to August 1974 – sat at a statically identical 24%.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Ipsos Public Affairs, *The Associated Press Poll Conducted by IPSOS Public Affairs, Project #81-5681-94* (31 July to 4 August 2008).

¹³⁸ Pew Research Center for the People & the Press survey, *Late October 2008 Political Survey, Final Topline, October 23-26, 2008* (October 2008).

¹³⁹ Gallup, *Presidential Approval Ratings – Gallup Historical Statistics and Trends* (2009), <http://www.gallup.com/poll/116677/Presidential-Approval-Ratings-Gallup-Historical-Statistics-Trends.aspx?version=print>

In light of the events in Iraq, and the dismal esteem most Americans came to hold for President Bush and his policies, there was much popular enthusiasm concerning the closure of Bush era, and likewise, a similar enthusiasm animating the supporters of Barack Obama's 2008 Presidential campaign. The election of Barack Obama to the Presidency of the United States signified in the minds of many a break from the policies of the preceding era. And indeed, the first quarter of the Obama Presidency was notable for its usage of lofty rhetoric and its frequently conciliatory tone, suggesting to the world a break from the past and the charting of a new, better future. At the level of policy, President Obama issued formal orders to initiate the closing of Guantanamo Bay and to ban the use of waterboarding, each of which had represented notorious emblems of the Bush administration.

At the rhetorical level, Obama's inaugural address spoke to an era of new relations with the Muslim world, so alienated by the previous administration, a new era that would be based on "based on mutual interest and mutual respect."¹⁴⁰ Likewise, in an interview granted to *al-Arabiya* on 26 January 2009, Obama repeated this promise of a 'new path', and moreover attempted to connect personally to the Islamic world, noting the "Muslim members" of his family and his experience of having "lived in Muslim countries."

Since the ascent as President of the United States, President Barack Obama has furthered his rhetorical appeal to the Muslim world. First, in an address to the Turkish Parliament, Obama spoke of his support for Turkish membership in the European Union and emphasized the relatedness of the Western and Islamic worlds, in terms of the contributions the Muslim world had made in the United States, as well as Obama's

¹⁴⁰ Barack Obama, Inaugural Address, 20 January 2009.

personal appeal as an American partly raised in a Muslim country and having Muslim members within his family.¹⁴¹

On 4 June 2009, President Barack Obama further addressed the Muslim World in a major speech in Cairo, appropriately titled “A New Beginning.” Beyond acknowledging the tensions between the United States and the Muslim world, and offering *pro forma* statements of respect for Islam and the need for cooperation, President Obama addressed the central question of Iraq, stating the lesson of Iraq as a reminder to America of “the need to use diplomacy and build international consensus to resolve our problems whenever possible,” acknowledged that the Iraq war represented one of choice. Likewise, though not unique in this regard, Obama spoke of his desire to see a Palestinian state, acknowledging the suffering of Palestinians living under occupation. Moreover, President Obama acknowledged, in a first for an American President, that the United States “played a role in the overthrow of [Iran’s] democratically” elected Mossadegh regime in 1953.

For all the generous speeches Obama might give, however, conciliatory rhetoric unmatched by policy represents just that, rhetoric. Indeed, in the backdrop of Obama’s beneficent language, America continues its occupation of two Muslim countries, Afghanistan and Iraq. Indeed, in Afghanistan, President Obama accelerated the policies of his predecessor, injecting 30,000 additional troops into the theatre. As for the Iraq theatre, President Obama as candidate was a frequent critic of the war, and as President restated his desire for a gradual withdrawal. However, President Obama’s plan for withdrawal roughly corresponds to the terms earlier established under the US-Iraq Status

¹⁴¹ President Barack Obama’s address Turkish National Assembly (6 April 2009), <
<http://www.cspan.org/Watch/watch.aspx?MediaId=HP-R-17163>>

of Forces Agreement (SOFA), approved in late 2008, which provided for the exit of American troops from Iraqi cities by Summer 2009 and a complete withdrawal by late 2011. Obama's troop withdrawal from Iraq is, thus, fundamentally an application of the principles that had been earlier agreed to.

The fundamental point is that for all the hope offered by the changing of political administrations in the United States, and especially from the shift from the Bush administration to the Obama administration, it is crucial to remember that across the narrow ideological band that separates the Republican and Democratic parties, there is little criticism of the fundamental principles that underlie American foreign policy, namely, America's objective to enforce and expand a world order amenable to American interests, with secure markets, and ideally, liberal democratic regimes. The principles of American exceptionalism in the practice of American foreign policy, as argued throughout this thesis, represents a continuous presence, essentially without regard to the specific administration at one place or time. Thus, while neoconservatism, and the policies of the "war on terror," represented an unusually unilateralist and aggressive tendency, these tendencies were not unique to neoconservative ideology. neoconservatism cannot be interpreted in isolation from the larger context of American history and American political culture.

In one of the more recent, and revealing, commentaries on this state of affairs, Robert Kagan – a commentator generally identified as neoconservative and a foreign policy advisor to John McCain's 2008 Presidential bid – editorialized in the Spring 2008 issue of *World Affairs* that America, in spite of the liberal critiques of the Bush administration, is – and always has been – a 'neocon nation', which is to say, a nation

defined by ‘moralism, idealism, exceptionalism, militarism ... global ambition’ and even messianism. Kagan further argued that neoconservatism, rather than ‘some deviation from tradition foisted on an unsuspecting nation by clever ideologues’ was very much within the ‘mainstream.’¹⁴² Attempting to place the Iraq experience, and the neoconservative question, within a historical context, Kagan speaks of Iraq in the same breath as America’s interventions in Spain, Wilsonian idealism, and American intervention during World War II. Given, in Kagan’s view, that neoconservatism represents an entirely representative American thinking towards foreign-policy, he wonders whether America “has forgotten this long history,” and whether those who would interpret the “war on terror” as an exercise of a distinct neoconservative ideology are engaging in a whitewashing of the past to win an argument in the present.

It is certainly true as Kagan argues, and has been argued throughout this thesis, that neoconservatism can not be disconnected from the larger tradition of American thought and the underpinnings of American foreign policy. Nevertheless, nor can neoconservative thought be so easily dismissed as merely a newer variation of old themes, without its own distinct worldview and policy recommendations.

Neoconservatism, while solidly within the American tradition, developed unique contours as an ideology of American foreign-policy that, as argued through this thesis, represents an ideology that is indeed distinct, if nevertheless related, to pre-existing ideologies of American foreign-policy.

In light of the American experience in Iraq and the low regard in which the Bush administration came to be held within, the question arises of whether neoconservatism thus represents a delegitimized ideology. The American public, to be sure, lost faith in

¹⁴² Robert Kagan, “Neocon Nation: Neoconservatism, c. 1776,” *World Affairs* (Spring 2008)

the prosecution of the Iraq war and the Bush administration, but one should be careful to read that opposition as a repudiation of the American tradition of foreign policy, of which neoconservatism is solidly within. Nor should one presume that the American cultural interpretations of the Muslim world has softened. If such a shift in public opinion has occurred, there exists no polling data to confirm it.

Representative of this, in a Gallup poll of 3 March 2008, surveying American opinion towards the nations of the world, the Islamic world figured as the most mistrusted region of the world, with the Islamic Republic of Iran ranking as the least favoured nation, a mere 8 percent responding positively. This is not terribly surprising, given America's unhappiness with Iran and the perception of Iran as a meddling influence in American-occupied Iraq. And it is a negative opinion that has undoubtedly shifted further negatively with the outbreak of civil strife following Iran's disputed 2009 Presidential election. Comparatively, Muslim Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Pakistan – nominal allies of the United States – also fare quite poorly in Gallup data, though admittedly, it can be difficult to deduce what a 'negative image' in this context actually represents.

Negative public perceptions of Iran and the Muslim states are, in of and themselves, not particularly predicative of future policy. Although given the thoroughly negative American impressions of the Muslim world, the population remains highly suggestible to those who would muster rhetoric in the pursuit of a further aggressive foreign policy. Indeed, in the case of Iran, those who had provided rhetorical justifications for the invasion of Iraq soon turned their barbs against Iran, which was increasingly characterized as 'Hitlerian threat.' Hence, President Bush – in October 2007 – opined that 'if you're interested in avoiding World War III, it seems like you ought to

be interested in preventing Iran from having the knowledge necessary to make a nuclear weapon.”¹⁴³ Norman Podhoretz, proponent of the World War IV theory, similarly characterizes Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as:

. . . like Hitler ... a revolutionary whose objective is to overturn the going international system and to replace it in the fullness of time with a new order dominated by Iran and ruled by the religio-political culture of Islamofascism.¹⁴⁴

Against the repeated claims of Iran’s ‘Hitlerian’ threat, a Gallup poll conducted 11-14 February 2008 asked Americans to identify who they “consider[ed] to be the United States’ greatest enemy”; Iran was polled as the ‘greatest enemy’ with 25% of the respondents versus 22% responding ‘Iraq’ and 14% responding ‘China.’¹⁴⁵ When asked, in a 18–21 July 2008 poll conducted by CBS News/Wall Street Journal: ‘If Iran continues with its nuclear research and is close to developing a nuclear weapon, do you believe that the United States should or should not initiate military action to destroy Iran’s ability to make nuclear weapons’; 41 per cent of polled Americans answer ‘should’ and 46 per cent answer ‘should not’, with 13 per cent ‘unsure’.¹⁴⁶ While a slim majority opposed military action in the above scenario, perhaps even a slimmer majority in light of subsequent developments, (2009) it is not unimaginable how a flare-up in relations could generate popular support for a more aggressive posture towards Iran. President Obama, for his part, has navigated a delicate path in regards to Iran, staking his credibility on a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear question. A failure to negotiate the nuclear question, and the perception of an imminently nuclear-armed Iran would certainly intensify pressures for a military approach.

¹⁴³ Fareed Zakaria. ‘Stalin, Mao and ... Ahmadinejad’, *Newsweek* (29 October 2007), 35.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Gallup, Polling Data (14 February 2008), <http://www.gallup.com/poll/116236/Iran.aspx>

¹⁴⁶ Peter Hart and Neil Newhouse, *NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll* (12 July 2008).

Such is the current day predicament. The infusion of neoconservative thought and influence in contemporary American politics exposes the sharp edges of American exceptionalism, and it is improbable that the 'excesses' of America's recent adventures have delegitimized militarism and 'global ambition'. Widespread opposition to the American presence in Iraq suggests an American sensitivity to the costs – in blood and treasure – of a protracted military occupation under dubious pretexts, though it suggests nothing along the lines of a profound shift in America's underlying thinking towards foreign-policy thinking. Likewise, a myriad of polling data continues to suggest widespread antipathy to America's perceived Muslim enemy, suspicions only perpetuated by the continued dehumanization of Muslims in popular press, religious and cultural flare-ups, and continued political discord with Muslim countries. The presidency of George W. Bush may have been a temporary one, but its animating principles have far longer pedigree.

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