Kristol Balls:

Neoconservative Visions of Political Islam

by

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Abstract
This paper assesses American neoconservative policy prescriptions for democratising and empowering political Islam and considers the sources of the neoconservative understanding of the Arab world. Their analysis of the Middle East is almost exclusively normative, arguing what U.S. policy toward the region should be. Neoconservative aims are ambitious and inherently controversial. The paper examines what various neoconservatives have said and written about Islam and its democratic prospects. The paper concerns itself with the neoconservative conceptualization of Middle East politics. The paper argues that presently only American neoconservatism, despite its variations, and despite some obvious flaws, offers tenable prescriptions for political liberalisation.

Introduction
Neoconservatism has earned a central and controversial place in American political discourse and in the frequently partial European debate about American politics. Increasingly, neoconservatism is the analytical preserve of two distinct groups: neoconservatives and those opposed to them. Islamic specialists are necessarily obliged to deal with this American political phenomenon but do so from a base and grounding in Islamic politics, often reinforcing ‘deep misgivings’ about the Bush administration approach.¹ Indeed, the substantial weakness of the neoconservative case, as presented by those in opposition to it, rests on its failure to appreciate the myriad complexities of political Islam. This argument is made with clarity and regularity by (Islamic scholars) Gilles Kepel and Rashid Khalidi and (Americanists and Americans, from both left and right) Stefan Halper, John Judis, and Anne Norton.² And yet the subtleties of neoconservatism must likewise be appreciated to gauge its impact. Thus, we have two sets of scholars – Americanists and Islamic specialists – who are obliged to occupy much of the same territory – given President Bush’s war on terror – and yet who do so with an incomplete grasp of each other’s expertise.
This small attempt to redress this state of affairs begins with the insistence that we treat neoconservatism (as we must treat Islam) with seriousness – rather than ridicule or deference, two opposing postures which have (as with Islam) obscured its meaning. Unless quoting from a source this paper avoids use of the word ‘neocon.’ It is pejorative and serves to conceal complexity and promote caricature. Likewise, ‘neoconservative’ is not capitalised since this is not a political party with a campaign team; it has no office or headquarters (beyond assertions of its de facto home). This study explores the neoconservative vision for the greater Middle East and what neoconservatives have said and written about political Islam. The paper considers the growing body of literature written in opposition to neoconservative designs but this is secondary to the study’s central concern with the neoconservative appreciation of Islam, specifically political Islam, as neoconservatives themselves appreciate it, in their writings and public statements. That appreciation, though it varies from thinker to thinker, has induced an unusually prescriptive, forceful American foreign policy, one which is more liberal in its ends (democratisation) and realist in its means (hard power) than any previous foreign policy doctrine. As such, this is ultimately a study of neoconservatism as a theory and as a framework for action. There can be few operative ‘isms’ in the world today whose effects are so bold and controversial and yet remain so incompletely analysed.

What is neoconservatism?

As a label, neoconservatism is not self-defining. Two of its more cogent critics refer to it as ‘a new political interest group’ and/or an ‘East Coast intellectual phenomenon’ or ‘movement’. James Q. Wilson called it ‘a mood,’ in which he shared, rather than ‘an ideology.’ Irving Kristol, widely regarded as the founding father of
neoconservatism, said it was better understood, like Marvin Meyers classic treatment
of middle-19th century Jacksonianism, as a ‘persuasion’ rather than as an organised
pressure group or ideology.\textsuperscript{6} To adapt and paraphrase Meyers, in speaking of
neoconservatism, as of Jacksonianism (ca.1830s) or New Dealism (ca.1930s),
historians and political scientists ‘indicate the presence of a central pattern, however
flawed and indistinct, which dominates a variegated field.’\textsuperscript{7} William Kristol (son of
Irving) is sceptical of those who would label it in such a way as to create the illusion
of conspiracy: ‘Neoconservatives are as strong as the ideas they promote. Many
operate at the level of small magazines – with influence accruing from intellectual
cohesion rather than sales.’\textsuperscript{8} Norman Podhoretz, editor of one such ‘small magazine’
(Commentary) speaks of a ‘tendency.’ Neoconservatism, he says, ‘never had or
aspired to the kind of central organization characteristic of a movement’.\textsuperscript{9} President
Bush, by this estimation, is not to neoconservatism what President Jackson was to
Jacksonian Democracy or FDR to the New Deal. According to the prolific
neoconservative intellectual Max Boot:

\begin{quote}
The reason why neocons are said to have so much influence is that their ideas
are clearly and forcefully articulated – and they were proven right about so
many things – such as the need to remain engaged in the world in the 1990s. I
do think they have a lot of influence on the foreign policy debate but that
doesn’t mean that even in this administration they’re going to win every
argument over policy.\textsuperscript{10}
\end{quote}

Others disagree. According to Shadia Drury, ‘the ideology’ became ‘dominant’ within
the Republican party in the 1990s and has subsequently institutionalised itself.\textsuperscript{11}

Irving Kristol represents the left-to-right switch peculiar to the ideology’s
evolution. ‘I have been a neo-Marxist, a neo-Trotskyist, a neo-socialist, a neoliberal,
and finally a neoconservative,’ wrote Kristol. ‘It seems that no ideology or philosophy
has ever been able to encompass all of reality to my satisfaction.’\textsuperscript{12} The appreciation
neoconservatism’s genesis often does not get much beyond Kristol’s folksy
definition: ‘A neoconservative is a liberal who has been mugged by reality.’ The
line captures the evolution of the persuasion, from old left to new right. Indeed,
suspicion of the neoconservatives is a consistent theme of both liberals and
conservatives. Liberals deplore the turn-coat quality of Kristol et al. Conservatives (or
cons) distrust neoconservative motivations because of their liberal genesis.

Kristol, seeking to locate neoconservatism within this ideological framework,
defines it as:

more a descriptive term than a prescriptive one. It describes the erosion of
liberal faith among a relatively small but talented and articulate group of
scholars and intellectuals, and the movement of this group (which gradually
gained many new recruits) toward a more conservative point of view:
conservative, but different in certain important respects from the traditional
conservatism of the Republican party. We were, most of us, from lower-
middle-class or working-class families, children of the Great Depression,
veterans (literal or not) of World War II, who accepted the New Deal in
principle, and had little affection for the kind of isolationism that then
permeated American conservatism. We regarded ourselves as dissident
liberals – dissident because we were sceptical of many of Lyndon Johnson’s
Great Society initiatives and increasingly disbelieving of the liberal
metaphysics, the view of human nature and of social and economic realities,
on which those programs were based.

Disaffection with the Democratic party through the 1960s and 1970s forced Kristol
and his fellow travellers to seek ‘a home in the Republican party, which had always
been an alien political entity, so far as we were concerned.’ Alien, says Kristol,
because until the GOP ‘modernised’ (his word) in the 1970s and 1980s, it was
isolationist, obsessed with budgetary discipline, anti-New Deal, pro-racial
segregation, ‘small-town’ with, perhaps worst of all for Kristol, ‘little time for
intellectuals.’ The Republican party was, according to Kristol in 1976, ‘the stupid
party.’
Religion as a mediating structure

The evolution from disaffected Democrats to the purported ‘cabal’ coordinating the post 9/11 war on terror was not marked by much consideration of religion per se nor of Islam in particular. Religion, admits Kristol, ‘is only on rare occasions evident’ in his published work. Neoconservatism is not quite mute on God but it is a long way from being intrinsically Islamophobic – certainly before 9/11. Kristol, like his heroes Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-59) and Reinhold Niebuhr (1894-1962), observes the powerful, positive role religious faith plays in American democracy but is essentially non-prescriptive where faith is concerned. Neoconservatives are thus ‘strong in praising the utility of religion and weak in claiming truth for it.’ Faith which contributes to order and upholds tradition he likes; faith which is merely fashionable or ‘liberalized’ (Kristol treats both synonymously) is really no faith at all. ‘[T]he Jewish prophets never much interested me – their religious utopianism was too close to the political utopianism I was already becoming disenchanted with.’ Kristol gravitated toward Judaism not for its religious certainty but for its attendant intellectualism. Christian theologians he had more time for; they ‘placed inherent limitations on human possibility’ and thus placed restraints on governmental power.

Neoconservatism is not atheistic but nor is it religiously affiliated. Some neoconservatives are Jewish – the Podhoretzes and Kristols, Charles Krauthammer, Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz – several are Catholic – Richard John Neuhaus (a priest), Michael Novak, and George Weigel. Some value religion’s utility, others both its utility and truth. In a recent editorial, Krauthammer expressed the ambiguity of religious faith within neoconservatism; some faiths lead to liberty, some do not:

Under the benign and deeply humane vision of this pope, the power of faith led to the liberation of half a continent. Under the barbaric and nihilistic vision of Islam’s jihadists, the power of faith has produced terror and chaos.
Certainly there is a surfeit of self-identifying neoconservatives who believe in the survival of Israel. This is not sufficient evidence to establish a Jewish conspiracy at the heart of the Bush White House – the president himself is a confident born-again Christian and leader of a party that commands far fewer Jewish American votes than its Democratic rival – arguably loosening the leverage of a Jewish lobby.²²

Neoconservatism seeks from religion a guide to political and moral conduct. According to Kristol, the better guide was offered by the Western tradition he knew best, Judeo-Christianity (which by definition does not necessarily exclude Islam – this similarly Abrahamic faith received little attention from Kristol before 2001, and not much thereafter). The dominant Western tradition offered for several neoconservatives the ‘mediating structure’ essential to public virtue and good administration. Structures (‘private, voluntary organizations such as unions, churches and synagogues, veterans groups, families and schools, charitable associations, trade groups – all manner of associations that provide meaning, sustenance, and comfort to individuals outside government’) mediate between the private and the public realms.²³ Liberalism, of course, places much emphasis on an inviolate zone of private conduct, immune to public institutions. For neoconservatives, this zone is only worthy protection if it is, as Paul Berger argues:

"given structure and meaning from other sources – religion, the family, folk or ethnic subcultures or the like. The crisis of modernity, however, is precisely the fact that these other sources are in danger of drying up."²⁴

Localised involvement should nurture qualitative civic engagement at a national level. Good states are thus the product of local strength, not the other way around. Mediating structures, significantly though not exclusively to be found in religious
observance, reduce the necessity for central government activism. Without such structures the central government will find itself sustaining an increasing number of recipients – welfare via general taxation – without any obligation devolving on the recipient. Mediating structures oblige moral behaviour and ‘often serve the social function of government more effectively than does the state.’ Obligation is not only a right but a need,’ wrote Kristol. ‘[P]eople upon whom no obligations are imposed will experience an acute sense of deprivation.’ Religion is thus a means of inculcating and sustaining private virtues essential to public, national health. Religion of a localised kind is a fundamental building block of democratic society.

**Leo Strauss and Islam**

At the University of Chicago, Kristol studied under Lionel Trilling and Leo Strauss, ‘two thinkers who had the greatest subsequent impact on my thinking.’ Strauss has become a cause célèbre for those distrustful of neoconservative designs. Drury, for example, has spent much of her intellectual output on attacking Strauss and the Straussians. According to Drury:

> It was not the fact that Strauss attracted a large following but that his following tended to have the attributes of a cult – its secrecy and faith in the authority of Strauss and the ancient philosophers he supposedly followed.

Building on her critique, in 2004 the BBC ran a TV documentary that equated Strauss with the Islamic political theologian, Sayyid Qutb (1906-66). What Strauss was to neoconservatives, Qutb was to Al Qaeda. ‘Those with the darkest fears [namely Strauss and Qutb] became the most powerful.’ The BBC-sponsored thesis fuelled the suspicions swirling around neoconservatism but actually had very little to say about how neoconservatives understood Islam, beyond the insistence that
neoconservatives had created an illusionary Islamic threat – as they had, extending the
thesis backwards, created an illusionary Soviet one. Even the editor of the
conservative British Spectator magazine suggested that Strauss’s purported
admonition to tell ‘noble lies’ – so that the masses might be saved from the ‘the truth’
– made him an ideal intellectual anchor for the war on Iraq. Reading Strauss into
these conspiracy theories does little to explain his influence on the men – like Kristol
– who claimed it.

Strauss (1899-1973) was actively politically disengaged. He saw ancient
philosophy as a better prism through which to view modernity. Indeed, his aim was to
understand the ancients with reference to the ancients, before it was ever a critique of
Western liberalism, let alone a Qutbian indictment of it. ‘He viewed himself as a
friend of liberal democracy,’ noted Kenneth R. Weinstein, but ‘In the battle between
the “ancients” and the “moderns,” said Kristol, “he was on the side of the
“ancients.”’ Strauss did not build a political platform, offer policy prescriptions or
indulge in public policy research. Straussians are students first and activists rarely.
They are contemplative rather than energetic, seemingly more interested to read than
to rule. Indeed, the secretive tenor which Drury and others observe in Strauss and ‘his
disciples’ militates as much against the holding of public office as it promotes it. The
purported alliance between a secret fellowship and a movement of public intellectuals
like the neoconservatives, is, as Weinstein observes, ‘paradoxical.’ Strauss’s writings,
says Weinstein, ‘are philosophical inquiries and have nothing of the dogma of a
political movement.’

Straussianism, as far as we can arrive a working definition of what this is,
concerns itself largely with method: the ancients must be read ‘with a quasi-
“talmudic” intensity and care, in order to distinguish between their “esoteric” and
“exoteric” views.’ Straussians are not philosophical evangelists. Their ‘focus, instead, is on how to read books.’ For Drury, coming from the left, this makes them suspect in their secrecy and elitist in their character – two deficiencies which, she argues, have led to their perfectly understandably exclusion from the liberal academy and their forced relocation in Washington. So successful has been this relocation that, according to the New York Times, Leo Strauss was the godfather of the Republican party’s 1994 Contract with America, several years before the asserted neoconservative primacy in the foreign policy of George W. Bush (and 21 years after Strauss’s death).

Whilst there are self-identifying neoconservatives in national public office no one in the Bush administration studied under Strauss – save Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz (who took two graduate classes with him – on Plato and Montesquieu – at Chicago in 1967 but otherwise was not ‘especially close’ to him). According to Max Boot, ‘few read him today.’ Despite this, quantifications of Straussian power in Washington are now commonplace. Anne Norton counts them and concludes ‘This is no scattered and disorderly influence. There is a powerful and long-standing Straussian presence at several sites.’ The accuracy of this assessment remains contentious and outside the purview offered here. Some neoconservatives dispute the level of power claimed of them. Others, including Irving Kristol (unhappily if unknowingly concurring with Drury) suggest that ‘many’ Straussians ‘relocated to Washington, D.C., since the academic world of positivist “political science” has become more hostile to [them].’ Few people who have studied Strauss, whether remaining in academia or entering political office, claim membership of an informal Straussian club. The label is more commonly used against neoconservatives than by them. Straussian and neocon are not cognate. The formal
influence of Straussians requires greater study and a more rigorous application of several levels of analysis.47

As far as impacting on neoconservative assessments of Islam, Leo Strauss had essentially nothing to say. Strauss was a serious student of Farabi (ca. 870-950), the founder of Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy, in the Islamic world.48 There is no apparent connection between his interest in Farabi and the neoconservative interest in bringing democracy to the Islamic world. Strauss was silent on political Islam.

**Neoconservativism and American foreign policy**

Like Strauss himself, identifiable neoconservatives are not significant public policy advocates. They stand against much but there is little in terms of a platform which might shape American domestic and economic policy. Much of the movement’s tenor has been shaped by reactions to a perceived liberal, relativist takeover of American social policy. It is only in recent years that such domestic concerns have been supplanted by a far more powerful, consistent, and influential prescriptive turn in the neoconservative understanding of America’s global role. Neoconservative foreign policy, unlike its domestic policy forerunner, is explicitly prescriptive and activist. It demands central government action as much as its domestic policy variant eschews it. It postulates that the world can be made better by the correct use of overwhelming national government power.

Unlike realists and traditional (paleo-) conservatives, neoconservatives connect the use of power to human progress. Realists ridicule a foreign policy of moral objectives. Paleocons are sceptical that the world can be much improved and prefer an introverted global role for the United States. In neoconservativism, however, there is a marked preference for using American power to make the world better.
Power is opportunity. The substantial neoconservative contribution to the theory of international relations lies in the unification of its two dominant, contrary paradigms: realism, with its blunt assessment of power as an end in itself, and liberalism, with its hopeful assertion that we tend towards progress.

‘Progress’ (defined in the Bush National Security Strategy of 2002 as ‘political and economic freedom, peaceful relations with other states, and respect for human dignity,’ and deployed on eight separate occasions in that document) can be only achieved by the application of ‘power’ (cited on twenty-one occasions). Liberal ends by realist means. This provides a working definition of foreign policy neoconservatism. Progress, because progress assumes security, as a product of the application of irresistible – and supposedly carefully calibrated – force.

Liberals, whose great champion Woodrow Wilson (U.S. president 1913-21) argued for an international legal system to effect human progress, earned the title neoliberal and neowilsonian when they sought to use American power, especially after the Cold War, to institutionalise international cooperation. Conservatives, persistently cool on the notion of an international community, earned the title neoconservative when they sought to use American power to force the pace of liberalisation around the globe. Both liberals and conservatives share a faith in liberal democracy; neoconservatives purport to have found a way to globalise it. The excitement that surrounds neoconservatism stems in large part from its avowedly interventionist prescriptions, constituting, according to the former British Conservative party leader Iain Duncan Smith, ‘a radical agenda of hope at home and abroad.’ Neoconservatives place a primacy on action – once the preserve of the political left – and show a willingness to reduce issue complexity – scorned by their critics – so as to facilitate such action.

The persuasion is not monolithic, especially as a shaper of American foreign
policy. Charles Krauthammer identifies two distinct strands within foreign policy
neoconservatism. He stands for one and scorns the other – and his scorn is
reciprocated. According to Krauthammer, his neoconservative world view is better
described as ‘democratic realism.’ He is clear when and where America should act:

We will support democracy everywhere, but we will commit blood and
treasure only in places where there is a strategic necessity – meaning, places
central to the larger war against the existential enemy, the enemy that poses a
global mortal threat to freedom.\(^{52}\)

Those who advocate interventionism without national interest limitations he labels
‘democratic globalists.’ This, by Krauthammer’s definition, is a very large group
indeed. It includes George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Tony Blair and the great proponent
of liberal peace theory, Francis Fukuyama (with whom Krauthammer has clashed in
recent months.)\(^{53}\) Globalists favour the spread of democracy \textit{per se}. They favour its
spread for what it takes to those to whom it is spread. Democratic realists favour its
extension for the security such external democratisation brings to the United States,
its territory and interests. Thus for a democratic realist there is no security pay-off in
bringling liberal democracy to Zimbabwe; President Mugabe is not an exporter of anti-
American terrorism – ignore him. Taking liberal democracy to Iraq, however, is to be
supported because of the material benefits to American security of so doing; Saddam
Hussein is a conduit for anti-American terrorism – destroy him. Granted, the two
dominant themes in foreign policy neoconservatism will agree on much (such as the
2003 war on Iraq) but will also disagree about the scope of American ambitions in the
post 9/11 world. And part company in significant ways on the threat posed by
political Islam and the Middle East. Indeed, they separate often on the definitions of
such abstract concepts.
Neoconservatism and Islam

The realist vs. globalist feud within neoconservatism is not much referenced in the literature of the movement’s detractors. This is especially apparent in treatments of the neoconservative position on Islam. Caricatures of this understanding often dominates analysis of neoconservatives claims. Anne Norton, for example, offers much anecdotal evidence of Straussian (and therefore neoconservative by association) ‘bigotry’:

From the time I first came to Chicago to the present day, I have seen Arabs and Muslims made the targets of unrestrained persecution, especially among the Straussians. At school, Straussian students told me Arabs were dirty, they were animals, they were vermin. Now I read in Straussian books and articles, in editorials and postings on websites, that Arabs are violent, they are barbarous, they are the enemies of civilization, they are Nazis.54

Particular scorn is reserved for David Frum and Richard Perle’s neoconservative manifesto: An end to evil: how to win the war on terror.55 Norton again:

Scholars familiar with the language of anti-Semitism will find it reminiscent of older, long-dishonored texts. The careful fabrication, the language of blood libel, the calls for violence in the name of defense, all are present here. Frum and Perle tell us that though others are too timid to say so, the enemy is Islam.56

As far as neoconservatism is concerned, the centrality of the Islamic and/or Islamist ‘threat’ is far from certain. The Islamophobia attributed to some neoconservatives was at least balanced before 9/11 by a seemingly pervasive Sinophobia. Much neoconservative strategic advocacy in the 1990s called for a harder line on China, a political system as divorced from political Islam as it perhaps possible to be.57 The emerging divisions within neoconservatism again presents themselves. Some democratic realists equate political Islam with a threat to America’s existence. Some do not. Some think the threat of a rising China is potentially as great.58 Some
democratic globalists suggest Islam is ripe for democratisation. Others argue that the religion’s political form is irrelevant to American security. Common to most is a two-tier understanding of Middle Eastern politics – and of Islam – as both threat and opportunity.

**The Middle East as threat**

Most neoconservatives depict militant Islam (or at least some extreme manifestation of Middle Eastern politics) as a physical security threat to the United States but one capable of remedy (Middle East democratisation) hence their optimism. Perle and Frum’s *An end to evil* (F&P hereafter) can be held as emblematic of this approach. This controversial and strong-selling ‘manual for victory’ (their description of their book, F&P, 9) presents ‘militant Islam’ (F&P, 42) as an unalloyed threat to America. The saliency of the threat to the United States is evident in the authors’ embrace of a war against it – in which, like all wars, there will be ‘difficulties,’ ‘casualties,’ ‘reverses,’ and ‘defeats.’ (F&P, 4) The enemy is variously labelled, both abstractly and concretely, at home and abroad (F&P, passim), as:

‘Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, and Hamas’
‘Mullahs’
‘Terrorists’
‘Iran’
‘Baghdad’
‘Imams’
‘misfits and thugs’
‘larger culture of incitement and hatred’
‘heavy weight of inertia’
‘bureaucracy’s profound aversion to innovation’
‘the ranks of the fainted hearted’
‘pessimism and defeatism’
‘gloomsayers’
‘Middle East radicalism of all varieties’

The authors’ first salvo is aimed squarely at appeasers and their de facto bureaucratic
allies at home. It is not until page 6 that the word ‘Muslim’ is used explicitly and, despite discussion of ‘Shiites’ and ‘Sunnis,’ it is not until page 41 that ‘Islam’ is mentioned, and then by way of introducing its intimacy with terrorism. According to the authors, nearly 50 per cent of all ‘foreign terrorist organizations,’ as classified by the State Department, ‘purport to act in the name of Islam.’ Thereafter, the use of ‘Islamic terrorists,’ ‘Islamic terrorist groups’ and ‘militant Islam’ (‘an aggressive ideology of world domination’) becomes ubiquitous in the book’s depiction of threat.59

Analogies

Perle and Frum do not seek to spread the war to all Muslims, only to the ‘radical strain within Islam [that] has declared war on us.’ (F&P, 42) This caveat is diluted however by the chosen analogies – to the great totalitarianisms of 20th century European history – which had far fewer reasonable elements within them of the kind Perle and Frum hope exist within Islam:

Like communism, this [militant Islamic] ideology perverts the language of justice and equality to justify oppression and murder. Like Nazism, it exploits the injured pride of once-mighty nations. Like both communism and Nazism, militant Islam is opportunistic – it works willingly with all manner of unlikely allies, as the communists and Nazis worked with each other against the democratic West. (F&P, 43)60

The analogy is basic to neoconservatism. Whilst Perle and Frum do not quite switch the ‘ism’ from ‘commun’ to ‘terror’ they do propose a war of broad similarity given what they perceive as the commonality of the enemy in both eras.61 For example, like the communists, the Islamists are far more coordinated than the West realises (F&P, 43-44). The Soviet Union and China, despite splits, were essentially as one in the Cold War (a central tenet of Cold War neoconservatism leading them to decry
Nixon’s Chinese rapprochement). So too are the Baathists of Syria and Iraq, contend
Perle and Frum, as one. Superficially at odds, each continues to facilitate the ebb and
flow of terrorist insurgents across their shared border. (F&P, 44-45) The chapter
detailing such intrigue is a direct illusion to America’s 20th century foes: ‘The new
Axis.’ (F&P, ch. 3).

By extension, the analogy is a hopeful one: the USA succeeded in beating the
previous isms by the application of hard, military power, followed by a sustained
economic subvention of the vanquished nations. And did so with great clarity of
purpose, rather than ambiguity. The threat, as in 1941-45 and 1945-91, is deadly,
this strain of neoconservatism contends, but not immovable. The neoconservatism of
Perle and Frum embodies a doom-saying optimism; the threat is real but the solution
realisable. It should come as no surprise that American strategists nurtured in a Cold
War context – given the West’s success in that bi-polar conflict – should look to it for
a guide to the post-9/11 terrain. The temptation to equate Islamism with communism
and to confront both in similar fashion is irresistible for some neoconservatives. The
very great complexity of Arab civilisation is thereby reduced to a monolith capable of
being confronted – and transformed. For Charles Krauthammer the Cold War
experience has a remarkable contemporary strategic relevance:

My approach to Islamism is identical to the muscular approach I consistently
advocated against our previous global challenge, Soviet communism. From
opposing the nuclear freeze to advocating U.S. support for anti-Communist
insurgencies in Nicaragua and Afghanistan and around the world, my views on
muscularity in confronting existential enemies have not changed. Given that
history has demonstrated, definitively and with rare clarity, the wisdom and
success of precisely this approach in our last existential struggle, it is entirely
logical that I would apply it to the current one.

There are marked differences, however, in America’s Cold War strategy and
that advocated by Perle and Frum et al. The inventor of containment strategy, George
F. Kennan (1904-2005), was cool on military power as the American weapon of choice in the Cold War. Instead, he called for a vigilant waiting game. Stay strong, he counselled, and the weaker opponent will collapse. Such advice departs markedly from the dominant neoconservative prescription for confronting Islamist terrorists and the regimes that facilitate or germinate them. The following is Kennan’s most famous prescription, adapted for the war on terror. It fails to capture the central tenets of the neoconservative approach and thus invites the conclusion that neoconservative analogies to the Cold War are misleading and/or in error:

[I]t will be clearly seen that the Islamist pressure against the free institutions of the western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Islamist terror, but which cannot be charmed or talked out of existence. The Islamists look forward to a duel of infinite duration, and they see that already they have scored great successes. It must be borne in mind that there was a time when terrorism represented far more of a minority in the sphere of Middle Eastern life than Islamic power today represents in the world community.64

Kennan’s optimism is not that of the neoconservatives. Soviet communism was rational and therefore responsive to the logic of deterrence. Its possession of nuclear weapons actually helped to stabilise international relations. The Kremlin was patient, cautious. Compare such characterisations with those imputed by neoconservatives to the post-9/11 foe:

The chill comes from knowing that there are, among the terrorists, hundreds and thousands who are ready to die in order to kill. They cannot be deterred. They cannot be appeased. The terrorists kill and will accept death for a cause with which no accommodation is possible. (F&P, 41)

International Islamofascist barbarians with imperial designs masterminded the attack on the children of Beslan, and that has changed everything. . . . But in the end, these voices of blind bigotry and defeatism won’t prevail, because millions of Russians have learned the same hard lessons most of us learned on September 11: That we are at war with a vicious global enemy, an Islamist
enemy that hates Christians, Hindus, and progressive Muslims as much as it hates Jews, an enemy that cannot be appeased, bought off . . . an enemy we must unite to cut down wherever it rears its ugly head, or have our own heads and those of our children cut off by it.65

[N]ew threats require new thinking. Deterrence – the promise of massive retaliation against nations – means nothing against shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend.66

Not all neoconservatives claim the Cold War as a model for U.S. strategy in the war on terror. The more obvious parallel for some is to the Anglo-French appeasement of Hitler’s Germany. The implicit indictment of Western – read French – fear of force in both eras is central to Robert Kagan’s Of paradise and power, and Donald Kagan’s contribution in Present dangers, both of which rely, in the derisory words of Halper and Clarke, on the neoconservative ‘mantra of “Munich”’.67 Norman Podhoretz transcends analogy and illusion by arguing that the war on terror is not like previous wars but is rather the next war: ‘World War IV.’68 In each neoconservative assessment of the contemporary Middle East the depiction of threat – which must be met – is constant.

The Middle East as opportunity
The long-held aversion to moral relativism central to neoconservatism – the prototypical liberal belief that all behaviours and cultures are of intrinsic worth and that one should not regard one’s own as superior – has had three marked effects on their Middle East prescriptions. First, it has produced a clarity of design and of expression which, whilst it has raised considerable opprobrium, has succeeded in making neoconservatism (and thus the United States) central to the debate about Middle East democratisation. As even their critics point out, neoconservatives mean to offer solutions rather than merely advance debates about solutions.69 Second, it has
led neoconservatism to challenge a long-held liberal fear (and even a fear once far more marked among neoconservatives themselves) that democracy is a discrete, Western phenomenon, a delicate seed unlikely to grow in the Middle East. Third, it has facilitated both indictment and prescription; neoconservatives have rejected the do-nothingism of traditional conservatism and realism. They indict Arab civilisation so as to remake it. The threat inherent in Islam is to be met by changing its nature rather than wishing it away or destroying it.

Clarity

Clarity enrages their opponents whilst simultaneously disarming their conspiracy theories of a secret intent. There is very little which is secret about neoconservative ambitions in the Middle East. Neoconservatives tend not to conceal their perceptions of and predictions for Islam. David Frum, for example, in a piece entitled ‘America is indeed subverting the Middle East,’ describes the region as one ‘of overpopulation and underemployment, where tens of millions of young men waste their lives in economic and sexual frustration.’ Critics have found such pronouncements evidence of ‘knowledgeable ignorance,’ a phenomenon to which we shall return in the conclusion. There is certainly a lack of nuance within neoconservative prescriptions for exporting democracy to the Middle East.

Exportable democracy

I like the idea of people running for office. There’s a positive effect when you run for office. Maybe some will run for office and say, vote for me, I look forward to blowing up America. I don’t know, I don’t know if that will be their platform or not. But I don’t think so. I think people who generally run for office say, vote for me, I’m looking forward to fixing your potholes, or making sure you got bread on the table.
George W. Bush’s folksy defence of the pacification inherent in democracy articulates a tenet increasingly fundamental to the neoconservatives, if not embraced by all of them: democracy = peace. Bush was quick to make the equation central to his 9/11 response and to the subsequent Bush doctrine. The democratic peace hypothesis, not an exclusive preserve of neoconservative thinkers by any means, was further augmented by them to include the imperative to export democracy. The response to ‘terrorism for export’ is democracy for export. ‘[T]he spread of liberal democracy,’ wrote Max Boot, ‘improves U.S. security.’

Bush’s most evocative rhetoric in the years since 9/11 has been deployed in the defence of the proposition that democracy is the birthright of every human being:

[T]he United States must defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere. No nation owns these aspirations, and no nation is exempt from them. Fathers and mothers in all societies want their children to be educated and to live free from poverty and violence. No people on earth yearn to be oppressed, aspire to servitude, or eagerly await the midnight knock of the secret police.

Peoples of the Middle East share a high civilization, a religion of personal responsibility, and a need for freedom as deep as our own. It is not realism to suppose that one-fifth of humanity is unsuited to liberty; it is pessimism and condescension, and we should have none of it.

This latter speech echoed much of the strand in neoconservative thought that has lost patience with assertions that Arabs are different, not suited to democratic norms. In support of the first US war against Iraq in 1991, George Weigel impugned the notion that ‘the Arabs are fracitious children who really don’t know any better, and thus have to be appeased.’ The expectation that liberty is a universal human urge may be naïve but it remains a key component of the neoconservative world view.

Michael Novak’s book, The universal hunger for liberty, represents, as its title suggests, neoconservatism at its most optimistic about the prospects of Arab
democracy. Essentially a manifesto for the liberalisation of Islam, it argues that this transformation is both necessary and practicable. Novak is possessed of an almost religious faith in ‘liberty’ and its power to effect change. Whereas ‘liberty is the crimson interpretative thread’ of Western history, ‘the hunger for liberty has only slowly been felt among Muslims . . . That hunger is universal, even when it is latent, for the preconditions for it slumber in every human breast.’ Novak is remarkably upbeat about the ‘hopeful majority’ of Muslims who ‘refuse to concede that Islam is incompatible with universal human rights, personal dignity, and opportunity.’

Novak’s analysis of ‘political Islamism’ reflects both his profound Catholicism and the neoconservative stress on the mediating role of religious faith. ‘Majority’ Islam, in contradistinction to ‘political Islamism,’ is a significant source of civic virtue, of ‘amity, hospitality, welcome to the stranger, help for the needy, and respect for unforced conscience.’ Its ‘secular’ wing, ‘political Islamism (to give the extremist groups a name)’ is a defilement of the transcendental purity of religious, majority Islam:

Its source is neither a deeper and more vigorous study of Islam’s spiritual origins nor a deeper reappropriation of Islam’s magnificent intellectual resources – from those early centuries when the lost manuscripts of Plato and Aristotle were known to the Muslim world but barely available in Christian Europe. The source of political Islamism is not so much deep study and profound inquiry as resentment; not so much transcendent religion (although religious intensity is intermixed in it) as an itch to inflict injury on others.

His prescription? Nurture majority Islam and destroy its perverted secular form. The first is capable of democracy, the second can only retard it. Indeed, it is the secular characteristics of Islam, contend Novak, which set it in opposition to the liberty-hungry religious majority. Thus, ‘the problem lies less in Islam than in the political propensities of the Arab states.’ Non-Arab Muslims nations have begun the
transition to electoral democracy – the author cites Albania, Bangladesh, Djibouti, Gambia, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, and Turkey – evidence, he suggests, that Islam is more amenable to democratization than the nominally Islamic Arab regimes of the Middle East.  

Not all neoconservatives are so cheery. Indeed, pessimism marks out much neoconservative speculation about Islam’s democratic capacities in the region. James Q. Wilson outlines four ‘conditions’ propitious for the historical development of democracy that the Middle East does not, he suggests, possess: geographic isolation, widespread property rights, homogeneity, and a democratic tradition. Nations that have not enjoyed such features have still become democratic but often only ‘at the point of a bayonet.’ Indeed, though Wilson is dismissive of the prospects of Arab democracy (writing in 2000) he nevertheless posits two ways democracy can spread, in the absence of the four conditions, that match the broad parameters of Bush’s Middle East strategy: ‘military conquest’ and ‘economic globalization.’

Daniel Pipes remains sceptical of both the Novak and Wilson approaches. Indeed, his pessimism has led him to caution against the ambitions of current American policy – where both Novak and Wilson have stood behind it. If the current strategy is aimed at retarding terrorism then democracy is an unlikely means to this end. Terrorists are unlikely to lay down bomb for ballot paper. But the problem is deeper, contends Pipes. Democracy will not stop terrorism nor will it transform the nature of the regimes which give rise to it, because, he observes ‘Islamists [will] manipulate elections to stay in power.’ The Nazi analogy, ever-present in neoconservative assessments of the Islamist threat, again presents itself:

When politically adept totalitarians win power democratically, they do fix potholes and improve schools – but only as a means to transform their countries in accordance with their utopian visions. This generalization applies
most clearly to the historical cases (Adolf Hitler in Germany after 1933, Salvador Allende in Chile after 1970) but it also appears valid for the current ones (Khaleda Zia in Bangladesh since 2001, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey since 2002).

Then there is the matter of their undemocratic intentions. Josef Goebbels explained in 1935 that the Nazis used democratic methods ‘only in order’ to gain power. Looking at Islamists, then-assistant secretary of state for the Middle East Edward Djerejian explained in 1992, ‘While we believe in the principle of “one person, one vote,” we do not support “one person, one vote, one time”.’

The dilemma is not owned by neoconservatives. Clinton’s Balkans envoy, Richard Holbrooke, raised a puzzle central to the attempted democratisation of the Middle East: ‘Suppose elections are free and fair and those elected are racists, fascists, separatists.’ Fareed Zakaria refers to this as ‘illiberal democracy . . . [a] disturbing phenomenon – visible from Peru to the Palestinian territories, from Ghana to Venezuela.’

David Frum, taking his cue from Bernard Lewis (‘the greatest living scholar of the Middle East’) was similarly sceptical of the compatibility of Islam with democracy, before 9/11 forced the Bush administration to attempt to make them so:

Lewis notes that Islam, in contrast to Christianity, forms a coherent system of rules for regulating human behavior in this world. Lewis cites a book by one of the first Muslim visitors to England, the 18th century traveller Mirza Abu Talib, and its horror at the sight of the House of Commons in action: ‘Unlike the Muslims, (Talib) explains to his readers, the English have not accepted a divine law revealed from heaven, and were therefore reduced to the expedient of making their own laws . . .’ Of course, as Lewis acknowledges, the Islamic world made its own laws too. But ‘the making of new law, though common and widespread, was always disguised, almost furtive, and there was therefore no room for legislative councils or assemblies such as formed the starting-point of European democracy.’

The argument that Islam is beyond democratic redemption has been met with the charge, ‘so what?’ Francis Fukuyama has demonstrated a flexible neoconservatism in this regard. His famous ‘end of history’ thesis dismissed Islam as
a viable challenge to Western liberal democracy.\textsuperscript{89} The logical import of such a position was that Islam’s capacity to democratise was of negligible concern to the West. The argument had some merit until the 9/11 attacks brought home to neoconservatives the ‘existential threat’ Islam (or at least its fringe) \textit{did} pose to the United States. Rather than the non-democratic curiosity of Fukuyama’s 1992 conception, the Middle East, after 2001, became the central focus of American national security strategy.

\textit{Political Islam’s capacity to change}

We have observed how, for neoconservatives, religious faith in the West can operate as a ‘mediating structure’ between public and private spheres. Do they find in Islam a similar utility? Perle and Frum rather duck this issue. Political liberalisation, they contend, will follow the regeneration of an Arab middle class. Political Islam is more problematic. Unlike in Judeo-Christianity, there has been no Reformation and subsequent weakening of religious power in the Islamic world – Islam has never had a centralised structure amenable to reform; there is no Islamic pope. Freedom of religious thought is a basic concept in the West, where the very multiplicity of faiths dilutes formal religious power. James Q. Wilson cites Voltaire to illustrate this point. The French philosopher ‘once said that a nation with one church will have oppression; with two, civil war; with a hundred freedom.’\textsuperscript{90} Again, this promotes his scepticism that Islam can become sufficiently diverse so as to embrace rival faiths.

Whereas economic determinism has been the preserve of the political left, political determinism marks out the neoconservative approach to political Islam. In the left-liberal conception, but not only here, Islamist terrorism is the product of economic despair. Wealth redistribution – from an often oil-wealthy elite to the
masses – will rob al Qaeda of recruits. Neoconservatives, whilst not immune to such arguments (see F&P, ch. 6), have stressed the political repression fundamental to Islamic fundamentalism. Indeed, as Daniel Pipes observes, it is not poverty that leads to militant Islam, but tyranny. Many Islamist terrorists are a product ‘of financial ease and advanced education.’ What they appear to lack is ‘some prestige-conferring element’ in their education. ‘Or they may just come from the wrong background . . .

Islamism is particularly useful to such people.

Pipes derives four propositions from this analysis:

1. ‘Wealth does not inoculate against militant Islam’
2. ‘A flourishing economy does not inoculate against radical Islam’
3. ‘Poverty does not generate militant Islam’
4. ‘A declining economy does not generate militant Islam’

He argues several ‘policy implications follow’:

1. Prosperity cannot be used as the solution to militant Islam and foreign aid is therefore broadly irrelevant in the war against terror
2. ‘Westernization’ could well worsen the problem of terrorism. Several key terrorist leaders are products of exposure to Western culture and norms
3. Economic growth does not correlate with improved East-West relations. In fact, increased Middle Eastern wealth ‘might hurt’ those relations

Ever the contrarian, Pipes suggests that ‘militant Islam results from wealth rather than poverty.’ Quite what positive prescriptions this offers the White House is unclear. A strategy to further impoverish the Middle East is an unlikely basis for an American foreign policy doctrine.

**An Israeli prism?**

The charge that American neoconservatives see the Middle East through an Israeli lens is made by both conservatives and liberals. Even before the neoconservative ascendancy, in 1991 the arch-isolationist Republican Pat Buchanan declared that there
were ‘only two groups beating the drums . . . for war in the Middle East – the Israeli Defense Ministry and its amen corner in the United States.’94 The frequency of Jewish-sounding names among neoconservatives in the George W. Bush administration (Perle, Wolfowitz, Cohen) and among its intellectual anchors on the outside (Kagan, Krauthammer, Kristol) was interpreted as a Zionist seizure of America foreign policy. The credibility of such a conspiracy theory is outside our purview here. What we can seek to understand is whether Jewish neoconservatives appreciate the Middle East in a substantially different way from their non-Jewish colleagues, and one which is consistent with an Israeli conception of their own neighbourhood.

Francis Fukuyama observes that American neoconservatives do indeed identify with ‘Israel’s experience dealing with the Arabs.’95 Charles Krauthammer has taken exception to this. American foreign policy has not adopted an Israeli national security approach because, since 9/11, both are now common victims of suicidal Islamist attack:

[Fukuyama’s] assertion is not just unsupported. It is wrong. Israel’s experience is neither definitive nor particularly instructive. Having pursued both hard- and soft-line policies in dealing with its Arab enemies, Israel can hardly be a model for anyone – 57 years of pursuing these policies have left it mired in conflict and subject to more terrorism than any country on earth.96

Max Boot concurs. Israel has often been a tertiary concern for neoconservatives:

In the 1980s, they were leading proponents of democratization in places as disparate as Nicaragua, Poland, and South Korea. In the 1990s, they were the most ardent champions of interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo – missions designed to rescue Muslim, not Jews. Today neocons agitate for democracy in China (even as Israel has sold arms to Beijing!) . . .97
Conclusions

The non-controversial conclusion is that the clarity of the neoconservative ‘solution’ to the Middle East is purchased at the price of oversimplification. Islamism, militant Islam, Islamic fundamentalism, political Islam, political Islamism – such concepts are not cognate and yet much neoconservative writing treats them as such. Moreover, when the neoconservative approach allows for Middle Eastern complexities its clarity is blurred. Like the ‘isms’ it seeks to retard, neoconservatism itself is not monolithic, neither in its development, its preoccupations, or indeed its prescriptions for US foreign policy. The movement (and this paper remains neutral on the matter of what descriptor better captures neoconservatism) divides significantly on matters such as Islam’s capacity for democratisation and the historical analogies most appropriate for post-9/11 US foreign policy.

Expectations met?

Neoconservative smiles have been barely concealed as events look to have gone their way. Nominal, electoral democracy in Iraq seems to have generated wider, if sporadic, Arab disgruntlement with the absence of political accountability across the region. Mark Steyn, the prolific editorialist and self-identifying neoconservative, trumpeted that with the holding of elections in Iraq (on 30 January 2005) the ‘Arabs’ Berlin Wall has crumbled. In its wake, came the Saudi government’s announcement of municipal elections. The Egyptian president declared he would run against a serious challenger to his office for the first time in the nation’s history. The so-called ‘Cedar revolution’ has deposed the pro-Syrian government in Lebanon and seems likely to force Baathist Syria to quit the nation. And, to the delight of Steyn and other neoconservatives, Walid Jumblatt, the staunch anti-American leader of the
Lebanese Druze Muslims, attributed all this to the Iraqi elections, ‘the start of a new Arab world,’ he said.⁹⁹ ‘In the space of a month,’ swooned Steyn, ‘the Iraq election has become the prism through which all other events in the region are seen.’¹⁰⁰

Prospects

Many neoconservatives, especially those outside the Bush administration, have been especially vocal in announcing the beginning of the end of Arab tyranny. Some have not. Daniel Pipes remains pessimistic:

Sadly, Islamists uniquely have what it takes to win elections: the talent to develop a compelling ideology, the energy to found parties, the devotion to win supporters, the money to spend on electoral campaigns, the honesty to appeal to voters, and the will to intimidate rivals.¹⁰¹

For him, as not for Michael Novak or Max Boot, the process of Islamic democratisation is the swapping of a secular tyranny for a religious one – and one empowered to greater excess by the fact of its popular mandate.

The current Arab political renaissance also raises as many difficult questions about Iran, as it solves. The neoconservative vision for the Republic is far from clear. The strong advocate of the Iraq invasion, Kenneth Pollack, is cool on the invasion option for this larger, non-Arab, nation and more complicated theatre.¹⁰² Regime change will have to become a more nuanced objective for US policy toward the Middle East, achievable by overt hard power but also by less costly diplomacy and the nurturing of internal dissent against the regime. This latter option is an especially problematic one given the perception of nefarious American plotting within Iranian popular culture.

Where do we go from here?
As our research on them augments and passions about them wane, a series of questions might better guide our assessment of neoconservatism and its Middle Eastern visions. For example, do we have empirical data to justify the link between democracy and the pacification of terrorism? Does Middle Eastern democracy = peace? How do we define such terms? Is Daniel Pipes right? Is poverty irrelevant to the growth of terrorism and wealth actually a facilitator of it? Such questions demand rigorous inquiry and must be detached from the heat that is too often generated when neoconservatism is discussed.

This paper has not dealt with the levels of neoconservative influence within the American foreign policy process but such considerations seem essential lest we treat Bush as the mouthpiece for the American Enterprise Institute. The impact of neoconservatism is neither as strong as their critics maintain nor a weak as neoconservatives tell us. In the absence of more precise tools of measurement we are increasingly forced to rely on assessments that stem from two mutually antagonistic sources: the neoconservatives themselves and those opposed to them. This is all by way of saying we need to demythologise the movement and treat it with a studious dispassion.

_A final pitch: from knowledgeable ignorance to functional ignorance_

This paper would like to conclude by adopting a more normative approach. And, without painting its author in neoconservative colours, suggest why the neoconservative approach to the Middle East has produced positive results. The argument – offered in brief to open up debate rather than to close it down – rests on the claim that neoconservative _ignorance_ of Middle Eastern culture and politics may well be the approach’s greatest strength.
The concept of ‘knowledgeable ignorance’ is defined as ‘knowing a people, ideas, civilisations, religions, or histories as something they are not, and could not possibly be, and maintaining these ideas even when the means exist to know differently.’ According to two of neoconservative’s most articulate critics, such “knowledgeable ignorance” emerges as a powerful phenomenon in explaining the apparent disconnect between the United States and Islam. This paper has highlighted several contradictions, idiosyncrasies and oversimplifications within the neoconservative approach to the Middle East and Arabs generally. Whilst this has caused them to misconstrue, exaggerate or mistake phenomenon it has led them into passivity and inaction. In fact, what makes neoconservatism such a bracing and controversial ideological force is its refusal to allow issue complexity to induce political impotence.

We might refer to this not as knowledgeable ignorance but, rather, as functional ignorance: the dismissal of issue complexity as a reason to do nothing. The neoconservatives have not fallen victim to a syndrome common amongst policy experts and regional specialists: knowing something so well that one is incapable of changing it. The price neoconservatives, and indeed many innocent Iraqis, paid for this functional ignorance was the anarchy of post-Saddam Iraq and a vicious insurgency – as several eminent experts on Iraq warned. The reward was the beginning of an unstoppable (at least so far) and remarkable process of liberalisation in the Middle East.

Notes

1 See, for example, Gilles Kepel, The war for Muslim minds: Islam and the West (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), ch. 2; and Rashid Khalidi, Resurrecting empire: western footprints and America’s perilous path in the Middle East (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), from whom the phrase is taken, p. x.

3 Often given as the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), a think tank in Washington DC. See for example, Khalidi, Resurrecting empire, 49.

4 Halper and Clarke, America alone, ch. 1.

5 Cited in Mark Gerson, The neoconservative vision: from the cold war to the culture war (Lanham MD: Madison Books, 1997), 15.


7 Ibid., xi. Emphasis added. ‘Above all, it seems to me, [such labels] suggest a certain unity of understanding among contemporaries, concerning their great problems and aspirations.’ (Ibid.)

8 Speech at Whitehall (attended by author), sponsored by Sunday Times, 18 October 2004. The small magazines include the Weekly Standard (edited by William Kristol), Commentary, National Review, the Public Interest, and the National Interest (though this last title has been somewhat schizophrenic in recent years, increasingly split between realists and neoconservatives).


11 Drury, Leo Strauss and the American right (Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 4. Similar claims are made by Halper and Clarke, America alone, chs. 2-3; Khalidi, Resurrecting empire, 49-55; Norton, Leo Strauss; and Kepel, War for Muslim minds, ch. 2.


15 Kristol, Autobiography, x.

16 This characterisation of the GOP is offer by Kristol, Autobiography, x-xi.

17 Autobiography, ch. 28. ‘Conservative “stupidity,” properly understood,’ he wrote, ‘is intimately connected with sentiments that are at the root of conservative virtues: a dogged loyalty to a traditional way of life; an instinctive aversion to innovation based on mere speculation; and a sense of having a fiduciary relation to the whole nation – past, present and future.’ (Ibid., p.349)

18 Autobiography, 6.


21 In 2004, 74 per cent of Jewish Americans voted for John Kerry, 25 for Bush.

22 The tabulation is offered by Gerson, Neoconservative vision, 279.

Gerson, *Neoconservative vision*, 280. His discussion of the neoconservative arguments here is especially well done.


See Drury, *Leo Strauss*.


[A] hidden network of evil run by the Soviet Union that only they could see.’ Ibid.


I am indebted to Marc Landy for this clarification. Landy has spent most of his professional life at Boston College, Mass., in the presence of several prominent scholars sympathetic to the theoretical method and normative concerns of Leo Strauss.


See Weinstein in Stelzer, *Neoconservatism*, 204.

Ibid.


Mann cites Strauss on only 11 pages of his 426 page history of Bush’s war cabinet (*Rise of the Vulcans*) suggesting a more limited direct influence than is often asserted.


Norton makes much of a Boston College student-run website (www.straussian.net), evidence, she suggests, of the larger network in which Straussians move. ‘Elaborate, well-maintained, and regularly revised’. (Norton, *Leo Strauss*, 9)

The label was coined as an insult by the socialist Michael Harrington in a 1973 *Dissent* article. See Gerson, *Neoconservative vision*, 6.


This neoconservative debate can be observed in ‘American power – for what?’ A symposium,’ Commentary, January 2000, 21-47.

Krauthammer, ‘Neoconservatism and Foreign Policy,’ National Interest, Fall 2004.


Norton, Leo Strauss, 210-11.


Norton, Leo Strauss, 211.

See, for example, Robert Kagan and William Kristol, eds., Present dangers: crisis and opportunity in American foreign and defense policy (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), which affords considerably more space for fears about China than it does for fears about Islam, discussion of which is limited to its Iranian form, 111-44.

Norton, Leo Strauss, 211.

The tendency to attribute ‘negative value’ to ‘the Arab’ was observed and codified in Edward Said’s influential Orientalism (London: Penguin Books, 1978; 2003). See, esp., ch. 3, pt. IV. Said gets short shrift from several neoconservatives, as does most of his scholarly and political output (he died in 2002). A distrust of Said’s motives is a recurrent theme of Commentary magazine. See, for example, David Warren, ‘Through the eyes of our enemies,’ Commentary, April 2004, 21-8, 22.

President Bush had similarly compared the enemy with ‘the murderous ideologies of the 20th century’ in his 20 September 2001 address.

‘The war against extremist Islam is as much an ideological war as the cold war ever was.’ (F&P, 147)

‘[I]t is impressive how often American clarity during the Cold War worked, and how often ambiguity led to trouble.’ Paul Wolfowitz, ‘Statesmanship in the new century,’ in Kagan and Kristol, Present dangers, 307-36, 322.


Adapted from Kennan, ‘The sources of Soviet conduct,’ Foreign Affairs, July 1947 (published under the pseudonym ‘X’). Norman Podhoretz adapts another section from Kennan’s article and comes to the opposite conclusion. See his ‘World war IV: how it started, what it means and why we have to win,’ Commentary, September 2004, 17-54, 54.


George W. Bush, speech at West Point, 1 June 2002.


Podhoretz, ‘World war IV.’ The Cold War being, in this conceptualization, World War III.

See Halper and Clarke, America alone, 35.

New York Sun, 4 November 2002.


Boot in Stelzer, Neoconservatism, 49.

NSS (2002), p. 3.

75 George Weigel, ‘A war about America; wanted: a genuine peace movement,’ Commonweal 118 (22 February 1991), 121; also cited by Gerson, Neoconservative vision, 168.


77 Ibid., xiii.

78 Ibid., 202.

79 Ibid., 203.

80 Ibid., 217.

81 Ibid., 259n45.


83 Ibid., 28.


85 Ibid.


87 Zakaria, The future of freedom, 17.


90 Wilson, ‘Democracy for all?’, 25.


92 Martin Kramer, editor of the Middle East Quarterly; cited by Pipes, ‘God and mammon,’ 17.

93 Adapted from Pipes, ‘God and mammon,’ 17-18.

94 Cited by Podhoretz, ‘World war IV,’ 33.


97 Boot in Stelzer, Neoconservatism, 48.


103 British historian Norman Daniel, cited by Halper and Clarke, America alone, 268.

104 Halper and Clarke, America alone, 268-9.
See, for example, the testimony of Toby Dodge before the Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, 20 April 2004; at http://foreign.senate.gov/testimony/2004/DodgeTestimony040420.pdf.