An Evaluation of Neoconservative Foreign Policy

Written by David Sykes

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The Four Principles: An Evaluation of Neoconservative Foreign Policy

Introduction – The Four Principles

At the University of Chicago in the 1930s Leo Strauss, an obscure German Jewish political philosopher, formed the ideas that would eventually dominate the administration of George W. Bush some seventy years later[1]. Meanwhile, a group of students from working class, immigrant backgrounds that included Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell, Irving Howe and Nathan Glazer were attending the City College of New York (CCNY) in a period of global crises. The CCNY group were staunchly left wing but, crucially, they were also vehemently anticommunist, so while they shared sympathy for the economic and social goals of communism, they saw real world socialism as a "monstrosity of unintended consequences that completely undermined the idealistic goals it espoused."[2]

After a shift to the right during World War Two when the horrors of Stalin's Russia became evident, the CCNY intellectuals turned against the left wing in the 1960s and 70s and the social engineering projects of Lyndon Johnson. They opposed the New Left and the counterculture of the 1960s, and criticised the Marxist sympathising left wing that emerged with the opposition to the Vietnam War. [3]

But it was in the 1970s when the CCNY group joined with students of Leo Strauss and those who had read Strauss' work elsewhere, including William Kristol, Paul Wolfowitz and Francis Fukuyama, that the group formed what came to be known as the neoconservative movement. They were idealists who opposed liberalism and relativism and wanted to guide society toward a set of shared beliefs and a shared purpose of opposing evil throughout the world and spreading democracy. This newly formed movement rapidly gained influence in Washington by winning over the likes of Donald Rumsfeld and Ronald Reagan but neoconservative influence in Washington reached its peak after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 when they gained the ear of George W. Bush. Under neoconservative domination, the Bush administration pursued a 'War on Terror', seeking to topple hostile regimes and attempting to spread democracy around the world by force.

But with the end of the Bush regime came the end of the 'War on Terror' and the end of the neoconservatives' power over the presidency. But should this be the end for neoconservatism?

This dissertation seeks to give an evaluation of the neoconservative foreign policy agenda by breaking the theory down into the four key principles identified by Francis Fukuyama:[4]

1-   A distrust of social engineering but a belief that societal structures shape the actions of states and citizens

2-   A belief that the spread of democracy around the globe will create peace and will be universally beneficial

3-   The opinion that the US is a moral nation that has a duty, and the ability, to act as a benevolent global hegemon

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4-   A distrust of international institutions and scepticism of their effectiveness, leading to a belief that international organisations can be disregarded and that the US can act unilaterally.

Each chapter of the dissertation discusses one of these four principles and in the dissertation's conclusion the evaluations of each principle will be brought together in order to give a detailed assessment of the foreign policy theory as a whole identifying in what ways neoconservatism is and is not a credible approach to foreign policy.

Chapter 1- Regimes & Social Engineering

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson announced an ambitious social engineering policy that was dubbed 'The Great Society', this, and the 'War on Poverty', aimed to resolve fundamental problems in American society. But one year later, the country experienced some of the bloodiest riots in its history and mass protests were rife. At this time, the former CCNY students, Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell and Nathan Glazer established the journal '*The Public Interest'*, the contributors to which were critical of Johnson's social engineering projects. Indeed, Kristol even suggested that it might have been these policies themselves that were causing the apparently widespread social breakdown.[5] [6]

When the neoconservatives gathered in Washington in the 1970s, their main goal was to find out how Kristol's suggestion may be an accurate explanation of social disorder. They settled on the account offered by Leo Strauss. Strauss' writings sought to recover pre-modern philosophical thought by careful reading and interpretation of classical texts in order to overcome the damage done to classical philosophy by the likes of Nietzsche and Heidegger and to unravel the presuppositions of contemporary political philosophy[7]. From a reading of Plato and Aristotle, Strauss laid out the idea of 'regime', which became one of Neoconservatism's central dogmas. In this concept, a regime is not a visible set of formal institutions, but a system whereby formal political institutions and informal habits are constantly shaped by one another. Or, to put it another way, the form and structure of a society determines the behaviour and outlook of its citizens and vice versa.[8]

While Strauss was reluctant to apply his thought to contemporary public policy, Allan Bloom, a former student of Strauss, began to politicise his ideas and use them to explain the period of civil unrest in America. Bloom explained that, similarly to John Locke's explanation of how a dictatorship breeds intellectually ignorant and morally stunted citizens, American society was fragmented by the integration of cultural relativism (as put forward by the likes of Nietzsche and Heidegger) in popular and political culture.

He argued that due to relativism having undermined and devalued the "great books" of Western thought, a belief in the subjectivity of reason had permeated American society. This as well as contemporary liberal values, he argued, had produced intellectual perspectives such as postmodernism, constructivism and nihilism that encouraged individualism and self-interest and were at the root of the crises. Thus, Bloom, and his fellow neo-conservatives believed that contemporary Americans were being transformed by habits, cultures and policies that divided and corroded the 'American character' and that this was dividing and damaging American society.[9] [10]

In this way the concept of 'regime' had emerged as a hallmark of neoconservative thought that would dictate the group's domestic policy. The neoconservatives believed that by fixing the 'regime', and changing public perceptions and discourses, crime and disorder could be eradicated. But by the time the neoconservatives gained control in Washington, they had learned to apply this belief in regime to foreign policy.

The progression of the application of regime theory seems a logical one; from believing that changing the domestic institutions and policies of America can instigate social change, the neoconservatives came to believe that the characters and cultures of other nations could also be manipulated by forcing changes to foreign governmental structures and institutions. As former neo-conservative, Francis Fukuyama explains, "nation-states are not black boxes or billiard balls that indifferently compete for power, as realists would have it; foreign policy reflects the values of their underlying society."[11]

While they dominated the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, the neoconservatives pursued

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this course of action, arguing that it was imperative that America liberate the tyrannised and promote democracy overseas in order to prevent the threatening behaviour that they thought was an inevitable consequence of undemocratic regimes. Bush and Reagan "believed firmly that the internal character of regimes defines their external behaviour"[12] and both argued that American security depended on the promotion of regime change in other societies, most notably in Central America (for Reagan) and in the Middle East (for Bush).[13]

During the presidency of Ronald Reagan, the group was able to pursue one of their first implementations of the regime change programme. Reagan's concern with the regimes of Central America bordered obsession, and the majority of his attention in this region was focussed on putting an end to the Communist government of Nicaragua. In March 1983 he put the regime change policy into practice when CIA trained and supported counter-revolutionaries (the 'Contras') began an insurgency operation against the Sandinista government. Congress banned America from aiding the Contras, but Reagan and the CIA continued to assist the counter-revolutionaries in secret. Yet despite this secret help, the Contras failed to overthrow the Sandinista regime. [14]

While they retained some influence in the early 1990s, there was no agreement between neoconservatives over the degree to which democracy promotion or human rights should underlie US foreign policy.[15] But in 1996, Irving Kristol's son, William, and Robert Kagan laid out what would become the dominant form of neoconservatism. Kristol and Kagan explicitly sought to derive their foreign policy from Reagan's, arguing that America should seek a 'benevolent hegemony' which would involve "resisting, and where possible undermining, rising dictators and hostile ideologies;… supporting American interests and liberal democratic principles; and… providing assistance to those struggling against the more extreme manifestations of human evil."[16] They argued that it was only through democratisation that tyrannical and undemocratic regimes could share the common interests of, and comply with, the rest of the world.

Five years later, when the neoconservatives gained power in the Bush administration, the neoconservatives applied this approach in practice and became deeply enmeshed in "two of the most challenging and costly experiments in nation building ever undertaken"[17]. This is certainly 'regime' theory in action, but this approach conflicts with another central principle of neoconservative theory: a distrust of ambitious social engineering.

Ever since the 1930s, the neoconservatives have emphasised that overly ambitious social engineering has dangerous consequences. Since their origins at the CCNY and throughout the 20th century, this theme fuelled the group's opposition to communism and to 'The Great Society' in the 1960s. They believed that social programmes have unintended consequences, are counterproductive and exacerbate problems by disrupting organic social relations.[i]

"Translated into the domain of foreign policy, this principle should have induced caution in expectations for the kind of political transformation that would be possible in the Middle East by, for example, promoting democracy."[18]

But if neoconservatives were so opposed to social engineering, why did they come to advocate foreign policies based around international regime change which is surely one of the most ambitious acts of social engineering imaginable?

There are three likely answers to this question: the first is that the administrations of Bush and Reagan were in fact wary of trying to manipulate organic social relations in the nations they sought to change; Reagan sought to topple the Sandinistas through a third party and, as Haifa Zangana explains, the US led coalition was intended to be relatively 'hands-off' in its plan to change Iraqi society. Here, the administration saw the coalition's role as being merely to destroy the dictatorial government of Saddam Hussein and they believed that this would open the floodgates for a democratic regime to replace that of Saddam;

'While military invasion, the front line of colonization, was carried out by highly publicized US-led hi-tech soldiers with the help of a few Iraqi groups set up or supported financially by the CIA and MI6, issues of freedom, religious freedom in particular, building civil society and empowering Iraqi women were left to organisations representing 'the supply line of colonialism': NGOs, missionaries and women's organisations.'[19]

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However, as Erdmann and Nossel explain, this 'hands off' approach, which seemed to be more of a strategy for 'regime elimination' than 'regime change', meant that the neoconservatives' plans were "wildly optimistic"[20] and their planning and preparation to deal with the nation after the removal of Saddam Hussein "proved woefully inadequate". [21] While this might suggest the neoconservatives were wary of getting embroiled in the rebuilding of Iraq, they certainly had to do just that when it unfolded that the idea that America would be welcomed as liberators was hopelessly inaccurate and instead of the war opening the floodgates for democracy, it instead triggered extremist violence and civil unrest. Though Fukuyama offers a different explanation, he agrees that "The Bush administration expected a short war and a quick and relatively painless transition to a post-Saddam Iraq. It gave little thought to the requirements for post-conflict reconstruction and was surprised to find the United States fighting a prolonged insurgency."[22]

Second, is the view that the Bush Administration only pushed through with the regime change agenda, because the rationale for the security justification for the war in Iraq had disappeared. This view would suggest that the administration's true objective was something other than regime change for the sake of liberation or security. One likely alternative objective may have been the securing of valuable resources, such as oil[23]. By this understanding, when it had emerged that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and when the US was failing to win over the support of the United Nations, the administration sought another argument that might justify the war by arguing that the invasion was carried out for democracy and human rights, rather than being explicitly security or resource based.[24]

Lastly, there is the view of Francis Fukuyama, who argues that the neoconservatives and the Bush Administration simply gave insufficient thought to the resolution of the conflict between the two principles:

*"This could not have been a failure of underlying principle, since a consistent neoconservative theme…had been scepticism about the prospects of social engineering. Rather, proponents of the war seem to have forgotten their own principles in the heat of their advocacy of the war."**[25]***

Fukuyama also writes that the Straussian element of the logic behind the regime-change policy should also have "raised red flags over the American effort"[26] because regimes are not only shaped by the formal institutions of states, but the habits, cultures and histories of the societies beneath them as well: "Regime change was conceived not as a matter of the slow and painstaking construction of liberal and democratic institutions but simply as the negative task of getting rid of the old regime."[27]

In this way, it might well be seen that neoconservatism as a foreign policy approach could be distanced from the foreign policy of the Bush Administration, and thereby be spared the blame for the failure of the plan for regime change in Iraq. It could be argued that the 'neoconservatives' with influence in the White House and the Pentagon went so far with pursuing regime change that they ceased to follow whatever neoconservativism once was; a theory that views ambitious plans to change societies with caution and scepticism. But whether dodging the bullet in this regard is enough to vindicate neoconservative theory is a tall order which will be put to the test in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 – Democracy & Democratisation

"What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."[28]

In his highly optimistic article published in 1989, Francis Fukuyama claimed that the downfall of the Soviet Union signalled the end of the ideological violence that had characterised the 20th century. He believed that the Cold War had proven liberal democracy to be the ultimate form of government and society that would soon be adopted by all nations around the world.[29] This text was hugely influential on the liberal and neoconservative schools and helped

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to guide American foreign policy into the twenty first century. But while Fukuyama himself has denied that his work advocated it, many neoconservatives and some liberals believed that the text signalled that America should aid the spread of democracy world-wide to help satisfy a universal 'hunger' for liberty.[30]

Despite Fukuyama's numerous subsequent arguments against the universality of the democratic desire and against the feasibility of democratisation everywhere[31], the neoconservatives took an interpretation of Fukuyama's thesis to heart when Kristol and Kagan wrote:

"*To many the idea of America using its power to promote changes of regime in nations ruled by dictators rings of utopianism. But in fact it is eminently realistic. There is something perverse in declaring the impossibility of promoting democratic change abroad in light of the record of the past three decades. After we have already seen dictatorships toppled by democratic forces in such unlikely places as the Philippines, Indonesia, Chile, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Taiwan and South Korea, how utopian is it to imagine a change of regime in a place like Iraq*?"[32]

The Neoconservatives believed that if more states were democratic a more peaceful future could be achieved, and that the USA has the ability to use its global power to instigate and assist the regime changes necessary to aid the spread of the liberal democratic model.[33] Key to this view is what is known as the 'democratic peace thesis'; the foundations of which were laid by Immanuel Kant in 1795 when he wrote that democratic nations have a quality that makes them more inclined to pursue peace with other nations, rather than engage in warfare. *[34]*

The argument, which fits neatly with the Straussian concept of 'regime', holds that the constant threat of electoral sanctions makes the decision to go to war far more difficult in a liberal democracy than it would be in a nation where the decision maker does not have that same accountability. This is because it is the citizenry that feels the cost of war and so they would be reluctant to authorise actions that harm their livelihoods. Over time this concept blended with liberal economic theory, where it was stressed that economic interdependence is another factor for creating peace. In reaction to the rise of international organisations and supranational organisations of liberal states such as the European Community after the two world wars, writers such as Keohane, Nye, Risse-Kappen, Levy, and Doyle saw the increasing importance of non-state actors on the world stage, the growing economic interdependence and the widening and deepening of international cooperation as a sign that Kant's suggestion of the possibility of a 'perpetual peace' may have some legs.[35]

The theory has retained much of this popularity and is still supported by a broad spectrum of thinkers. Ivo Daalder and Robert Kagan support the theory in arguing that "the democratic essence of the United States makes it difficult if not impossible for Americans to ignore the concerns of its fellow liberal democracies." They also argue that "US foreign policy will inevitably be drawn by American liberalism to seek greater harmony with Europe and with other democracies around the world".[36] Fukuyama and McFaul also agree with the democratic peace thesis, arguing that democratisation does help to create a more peaceful and stable state of affairs, and that this has been of great benefit to American security interests.[37] Indeed, it is often repeated that no democracy has ever been at war with another.[ii]

However, the democratisation agenda is not without its critics. It has long been an opinion held by realists such as Hans Morgenthau and John Mearsheimer that the internal structure of states should be of no concern to foreign policy makers. Classical realists hold that states should conform to the Westphalian consensus to respect the sovereignty and autonomy of other nations, regardless of a state's internal dynamics[38]. Similarly, structural realists argue that "whether a state is democratic or autocratic matters relatively little for how it acts towards other states" because "the international system creates the same basic incentives for all great powers". They see states as if they were "black boxes" that are assumed to be alike, "save for the fact that some states are more or less powerful than others."[39] Mearsheimer also argues that another flaw with democratisation is that it erroneously assumes that the desire for democracy is stronger than the pride of nationalism, which, he argues, is always sparked by foreign intervention as it was in Iraq.[40] [41]

But in a world where threats can emerge within one country at a level beneath the control of the sovereign state and go on to threaten multiple other nations, it seems difficult to grasp that the internal affairs of other nations can be of no

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relevance to foreign policy makers. Where climate change and the threat of disease are not limited to national borders, where modern technology enables political movements to link similarly minded people anywhere the world and small groups of disenfranchised extremists can carry out acts of terrorism anywhere, the view of states being independent entities and that their internal structures are of no importance seems to be an outdated concept.

Some pragmatists and traditionalists argue that America should focus exclusively on its more pressing interests, such as oil, security and trade, which are often compromised by democratisation and regime change. They argue that promoting human rights and encouraging democratisation should be relegated to a lower priority than preventing attacks against the United States, preventing the emergence of hostile powers, and supporting allies. However, Nye, Fukuyama and McFaul disagree with this approach. They argue that humanitarian and democratic goals do, in fact, serve American security and economic interests. They explain that in addition to spreading the democratic peace, opening up new markets in other nations benefits the US' economy by opening up trade. Furthermore, it is their view that if the US were to follow a narrow set of interests in foreign policy this would, presumably, lead to the US supporting undemocratic regimes, which are safe havens for terrorists and are more prone to warfare. Thus the US would be supporting direct threats to its own security.[42] [43]

Samuel Huntington argues that democracy is a product of western culture and may not be as suitable in other nations as it is in the West because of cultural differences that make democracy incompatible in some places. [44] This can be argued to have been evidenced by the voting behaviours in the Iraqi general election of 2005, where many Iraqis went to the polls in support for more Shiite power and the establishment of an Iranian-style Islamic republic, as well as by the unexpected insurgency that the coalition faced during the Iraq war.[45] Huntington, Synder and Zakaria are also cautious of democratisation because of the instability and violence that can emerge when there is not a solid foundation of rule of law and liberalism on which a democracy can be built.[46] [47] Indeed, Zangana points out that the attempted democratisation of Iraq by the US-led coalition has led to rising nationalism, insurgency, social breakdown, kidnapping, oppression of women, looting, loss of utilities, the doubling of extreme malnutrition, large scale unemployment, poverty, corruption, murder, and honour killings, in addition to incredible military and civilian death tolls.[48]

Fukuyama and McFaul do concede to some of the criticisms of democratisation and they agree that the democratic development in the Middle East does create some potential short term risks for US security. They also agree that the process of developing democratic institutions had failed to produce a stable Iraqi or Afghan government or a growing economy, and that this had opened the door for a Taliban/insurgent resurgence. But Fukuyama and McFaul argue that these failures were not faults of the democratisation agenda, but of the way in which democratisation in Iraq was a tertiary goal, rather than the primary purpose of the invasions.[49] Despite the failures in Iraq, they hold that "if democracy is the best system of government, demanded by the majority of people around the world, then the United States *should* help promote its advance." [Italics added][50]

While Joseph Nye sees the promotion of democracy as a national interest and he agrees that "ultimately the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere"[51] He does explain that "the argument that democracies never go to war with each other is too simple." [52] He explains that one of the problems that plague the democratic system and enable democratic nations to be warmongering and "bullying" is the influence that special interest groups have over policy. Nye writes that this is particularly the case in America where the electorate have become "indifferent" to foreign affairs and have abandoned their say in policy to those with special interests. [53]

To further the point, John Mearsheimer points out that the idea that liberal democratic states don't go to war with one another is only half the story and that just because these states are peaceful with each other, does not mean they are peaceful to anyone else: After all, the United States remains the only nation to have used an atomic weapon in conflict. [54]

The neoconservatives' faith in democracy is a highly contentious issue that has powerful arguments on both sides. The liberal democratic peace thesis may have historical statistics on its side, but the warnings given by critics are just as historically grounded. The question of the compatibility and desirability of democracy worldwide is a complex

one, but the Arab Spring of 2011 may have proven that the people in the Middle East do share the assumed desire for liberty- though only time will tell.

Many of the arguments put forward in this chapter view democratisation as a goal that is sought by foreign powers through foreign intervention. But as Zangana explains, this view implies that the citizens of undemocratic societies are "passive victims, unable to manage or transform their own country"[55]; a view that, he argues, smacks of colonialism. Indeed, the Arab Spring saw democratic uprisings across the Middle East, where democratic movements grew from within nations without any tangible assistance or intervention from outside powers. There have certainly been tragedies during these uprisings, but the Arab Spring has helped to shake away the assumptions that democratisation will not occur 'naturally'.

So although the arguments behind the desire to spread democracy may have some truth to them (though they are not without flaws), how democratisation should be pursued as a foreign policy objective is another question.

Chapter 3 – Benevolent Hegemony

While the pursuit of regime change and democratisation are partly justified by security-based arguments, neoconservatives believe that there is a moral imperative that justifies these policies. According to neoconservatives, the United States of America is an inherently moralistic nation that has a duty to support good in the world. They believe that America is obliged to use its position as the most powerful nation to change the world for the better and fight injustice and evil around the world, spreading the values that Americans hold dear by becoming a 'benevolent hegemon'.

As has already been discussed, it was no secret that the neoconservatives were pursuing regime change and democratisation for America's own security, rather than purely out of concern for the liberty of their fellow man, however, morality was a common theme in the Bush administration's rhetoric to justify its foreign policy after 9/11. The centrality of morality in neoconservative foreign policy largely stems from Kagan and Kristol's reinvention of the perspective in 1996. Kagan and Kristol pushed for America to become a "benevolent hegemon", using its position as the most powerful nation in the world to change things for the better by spreading the values that Americans hold dear, and by fighting evil and injustice around the world.[56]

The idea of 'benevolent hegemony' stems from an argument made by Charles Krauthammer toward the end of the Cold War that the United States faced a "unipolar moment" when it could stand unchallenged as the global hegemon. He wrote that unlike other nations in the world, the US behaves disinterestedly on the world stage, having the will to act as a "custodian of the international system", rather than having ambitions for imperialism.[57] Kristol and Kagan took this even further, explaining that "American foreign policy is infused with an unusually high degree of morality" as a result of its political and cultural history.[58] [59]

The shift towards 'benevolence' in foreign policy has certainly saved lives, be it through financial or humanitarian aid given by states, or through humanitarian interventions and peacekeeping missions such as in East Timor or the Democratic Republic of Congo and the idea that America has a duty to be the leading force for good in the world has become quite broadly accepted. Indeed, even the usually pragmatic Barack Obama stated that "Our action – our leadership – is essential to the cause of human dignity. And so we must act and lead with confidence in our ideals and an abiding faith in the character of our people"[60]

But despite how attractive a moral foreign policy might appear, there are many who argue that it is the role of policy makers to exercise restraint and to not allow morality to cloud their judgement. For realists, moral concerns and desires for justice in the world should always come second to calculations based on the balance of power between states and on threats and opportunities to improve their own security. Since Thucydides, realists have been aware of the 'human tragedy'; a cycle whereby power in the international system becomes a double-edged sword. They argue that when a nation stands as a unipolar hegemon the temptation for that nation's leaders to use their power imprudently becomes too strong to resist. This 'hubris' typically emerges through moral crusades; large scale and

perhaps unwinnable conflicts fought for moral justifications. The tragedy goes that these crusades drain that nation's resources and undermine its power, ultimately weakening its position. This, Richard Ned Lebow argues, is exactly what happened under the Bush administration.[61]

But in the 20th century alone, 262 million people were killed by their own governments – six times more than were killed in battle with foreign nations[62] and as Fukuyama explains, "it is simply unacceptable for the richest and most powerful country in human history to be indifferent to the plight of countries that not only lack its human and social resources but are moving steadily backward in their standards of living."[63] While very few people would argue against intervention in the most extreme cases, there is significant dispute over what makes an act of evil bad enough to legitimise a humanitarian intervention and on whose say an intervention is morally justified.

In 2005, the UN formally recognised that states have a responsibility to protect the people of other countries if their own government is unwilling or unable to protect their human security. The ICISS, on whose recommendation the UN declaration was based, defined human security as "the security of people- their physical safety, and the protection of their human rights and fundamental freedoms… the security of people against threats to life, health, livelihood, personal safety and human dignity" [64]; a definition so broad that, as Roland Paris points out, it would include even traffic accidents as threats to human security[65]. Such a broad and vague definition raises serious problems for the question regarding morality in foreign policy as it opens the possibility for states to abuse the humanitarian justification in order to pursue their own ends.

It is this argument that has led many to argue that the United States has pursued its 'benevolent hegemony' for less-than-benevolent reasons. One such view is that that United States has become an imperial power that seeks to secure and extend its domination for its own benefit (or for the benefit of America's ruling elite), using its apparent concern for human rights and democracy as justifications for expanding and strengthening its empire:

"Human rights have been instrumentalised as a justification for war… to secure the American 'homeland' and to achieve an even broader reach of American power in the world. Presented for public consumption as securing the conditions for human rights, freedom and democracy, both at home and abroad, these very values have instead been put at egregious risk across the globe".[66]

"Its aim, which many have properly called imperial, is to establish lasting American hegemony over the entire globe, and its ultimate means is to overthrow regimes of which the United States disapproves, pre-emptively if necessary… In the new, imperial order, the United States would be first among nations, and force would be first among its means of domination."[67]

It follows from this argument that American morality and its set of values that the neoconservatives seek to apply to the rest of the world are a means to create cultures and regimes that are compatible with their imperial programme in order to incorporate other states into the American led world order. Evidence for such a perspective can be seen in the way in which the free-trade capitalist system has been treated as a human right and a moral imperative. For instance, the US National Security Strategy of September 2002 referred to free trade as "a moral principle".[68] Panith and Gindin argue that this is because the US' allegedly 'benevolent' efforts to change other nations are designed to restructure non-capitalist states' economic apparatus "to fit with an American-led neoliberal globalisation of capitalism"[69] in order to incorporate these states into "the neoliberal capitalist order"[70].

Samuel Huntington presents another argument against the 'benevolent' foreign policy and the imposition of American values abroad, though it is his view that this is because American values are culturally rooted rather than imperially calculated. Huntington holds that Western values and morals stem from what Nietzsche and de Toqueville identified as a "secularisation of European Christian values" and are thus incompatible in Middle Eastern societies.[71] This view is very similar to that of sociologist Max Weber who wrote that the development of western society, and capitalism in particular, was significantly aided by the protestant Christian ethic and that the relative lack of capitalism in some countries is to due to differences in social attitudes and mentality caused by those nations' different cultural and religious heritages.[72]

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But while many agree that there are aspects of Western morality and society that may not be universal in their appeal, it is hard to believe that other peoples might not share the same aversion to clearly evil acts such as tyranny, mass murder, ethnic cleansing and oppression and, as was seen in the previous chapter, there are good grounds for believing in the universality of democracy and the desire for liberty. Furthermore, it has been a mainstay in Western and Eastern philosophy that there are universal 'natural laws', as identified by Aristotle, Cicero, al-Bīrūnī, Al-Jawziyya, John Locke, and even Thomas Hobbes. These laws, which could be described as morals, are vital in order to live with other people and are thus necessarily adopted by everyone. Should these theories be correct, there may be truth in George W. Bush's assertion that;

"Human cultures can be vastly different. Yet the human heart desires the same good things, everywhere on Earth. In our desire to be safe from brutal and bullying oppression, human beings are the same. In our desire to care for our children and give them a better life, we are the same. For these fundamental reasons, freedom and democracy will always and everywhere have greater appeal than the slogans of hatred and the tactics of terror."[73]

But even if one agrees that there are universal values, one may still take issue with the way in which the US has acted as a 'benevolent hegemon': while Aryeh Neier praises the Bush administration's humanitarian policies in Uzbekistan and Egypt and for its commitment to human rights and democracy, he argues that the use of force used to achieve the 'benevolent hegemony' has been deplorable. Neier and Fukuyama also write that the heavy handed tactics used by the USA have sparked such fierce anti-Americanism, (particularly due to the hypocritical abuses of human rights that the US committed during its 'War on Terror' such as the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and the torture and imprisonment of people without trial at Guantanamo Bay,) that aid workers and human rights advocates in the Middle East have needed to distance themselves from the actions of the US or face failure. [74] [75] Richard Ashby Wilson writes that the administration's policies have "been counter-productive and have done a profound disservice to the cause of international human rights",[76] and while Kenneth Roth does support humanitarianism and explains that there are situations where intervention is appropriate, he writes that the invasion of Iraq failed to meet any of *Human Rights Watch*'s requirements for a justified humanitarian intervention.[77] Furthermore, Ulrich Preuss writes that while liberation and the restoration of the Iraqi people's human rights is undoubtedly a just reason for intervention, the Iraqi people were forced to pay too great a price for their freedom due to the coalitions' use of military force.[78]

The Neoconservatives claim that the political and cultural history of the United States, dating back to the decisions made by the founding fathers to enshrine liberty and democracy in the constitution, mean that America is a uniquely moral nation. But Pierre Hassner points out that Americans have also historically believed in checks and balances and have distrusted concentrated power and opposed empires, regardless of how well intended they might be. He argues that the 'benevolent hegemony' requires America becoming everything it has always opposed[79] and so, if America has the capability to act as a dictator in the international realm, it may not necessarily be naturally and inherently selfless as the neoconservatives argue.

In advocating their 'benevolent hegemony', the neoconservatives present the case that America has a unique quality that means, unlike other states, that America can be trusted to act selflessly in promoting objective good throughout the world. They believe that this quality gives America a responsibility to spread its values throughout the world and guide it as it sees fit- being blessed with the foresight and God-like understanding of what is best for the world. But as the arguments in this chapter have shown, this is very far from the mark; the benevolent hegemon made mistakes, and that undermines its entire claim for legitimacy. But despite their opposition to many aspects of the neoconservative's ambition for a 'benevolent hegemony', the critics are mostly agreed that there is, to some degree, a place for morality in foreign policy.

But by looking into the origins of neoconservatism another answer can be found: Some have argued that Leo Strauss recommended that politicians and the societal elite sustain 'noble lies' for the good of society:

"Strauss believed that the liberal idea of individual freedom led people to question everything: all values, all moral truths. Instead, people were led by their own selfish desires and this threatened to tear apart the shared values which hold society together. But there was a way to stop this, Strauss believed, it was for politicians to assert

*powerful and inspiring myths everyone could believe in. They might not be true, but they were 'necessary illusions'. One of these was religion and the other was the myth of the nation – and in America that was the idea that the country had a unique destiny to battle against the forces of evil throughout the world."**[80]***

If we take this interpretation to the contemporary scenario, we can see that it could be possible that the neoconservatives might never have genuinely believed their own claims for the legitimacy of the benevolent hegemony. Instead, the "struggle between right and wrong and good and evil" [81] and the promise to "rid the world of evil-doers"[82] might merely have been 'noble lies' to preserve political and cultural unity at home. But, as Edward Feser explains, "an enormous amount of nonsense has been written about Leo Strauss over the last several years."[83]

Chapter 4 – International Organisations & Unilateralism

Even if one agrees to the neoconservatives' aims of spreading democracy and acting as a force for good in the world, one concern that has been raised during the last two chapters is the question of how America is to pursue these goals.

This chapter will evaluate the last of the four principles of neoconservatism; the idea that international institutions and international law should be disregarded and overlooked and that America should instead be willing to act alone to achieve its objectives.

For the neoconservatives, the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 could be compared to Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor in 1941 as a an attack that brought to light the reality of a new threat to America that necessitated direct and decisive military action. In response, the 2002 National Security Strategy set out what is widely known as The Bush Doctrine; a commitment to ensure and assert unchallengeable military superiority around the globe, the resolution to act unilaterally if it is necessary, and the resolve to pursue preventative war when it is strategically advantageous to American interests.[84]

"The United States has long maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security. The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction– and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack. To forestall or prevent hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act pre-emptively."[85]

In the light of the attacks of 9/11, the neoconservatives believed that the new threats that America faced could only be fought using preemptive action even if the nature of the threat and the certainty of it were unclear.[86] Preemption and unilateralism are not new features of American foreign policy, but the Bush Doctrine took it one step further to amount to preventive war. As Fukuyama explains "pre-emption 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."[87] Kagan and Daalder argue that when a state fails to prevent the emergence of threats to other nations within its borders, other states have a responsibility to act and that the most effective way of doing this is by acting preventively before the threat becomes imminent[88]. But clearly, the doctrine of preventive intervention and the resolution to act unilaterally is "not one that can be generalized throughout the international system."[89] The Bush Doctrine grants America a right that it would not afford to others: if Russia, China or India carried out the same strategies America would be the first to object. This privilege that the US has afforded itself ties into the concept of American exceptionalism; the belief that America has a quality that means that it, unlike other countries, can be trusted to use its power justly, being "infused with an unusually high degree of morality"[90].[91] As we have already seen in the previous chapter, there is good reason to doubt this belief and the Bush Doctrine also goes completely against the principles that underlie the United Nations and "has unilaterally pronounced a death sentence on those features of international law that marked the specificity of the post-World War II international order that had underpinned the fragile emergence of an international rule of law *sui generis.*"[92]

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But neoconservatives do not see this as a problem. Neoconservatives believe that the United Nations and other international organisations are weak, ineffectual and unhelpful. With the exception of NATO, they view IOs as hindrances that would not allow the decisive and preemptive action that they believe is necessary for the US to secure its interests. The reasons for America to overlook and disregard international organisations are numerous and Robert Kagan and Ivo Daalder provide a good argument against American adherence to the rules of the United Nations: they write that while during the Cold War, the nations of Western Europe and many other states around the world relied on the United States for security, they have now grown suspicious and wary of American power and no longer need to rely on it to protect them and so they are no longer obliged to support America's foreign policy unless it is in their interest to do so. This means that America's allies and the IOs that it is a part of are no longer as advantageous as they once may have been as they are now less reluctant to oppose American actions. Furthermore, they present the case the UN's Security Council is unable to act as decisively and quickly as is necessary because two of its five permanent members of its Security Council "are governed in ways that are antithetical to everything America stands for"[93] and the Security Council is thus divided and indecisive. They explain that leaving it to the Security Council to act as the sole decision maker on the use of military action "is a recipe for indecision and inaction- and increased insecurity."[94] Indeed, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan once acknowledged that "the United Nations is the only fire department in the world that begins to muster personnel and equipment after the fire has already broken out"[95]

Criticisms of UN stagnation have plagued the organisation throughout its lifetime; this was particularly evident during the Cold War when the USSR cast a total of 103 vetoes between 1945 and 1965. The neoconservatives are not alone in disregarding the UN and other international organisations;[96] realists have long opposed the creation and adherence to the rules of international organisations and agree that America would do best to overlook them. Hans Morgenthau believed that the international arena is a state of anarchy in which violent and power hungry states constantly vie for power and where international institutions do little other than prescribe norms and codes of honour that are easily broken.[97] They see international alliances and unions as having dangerous consequences for global peace because, as was shown in World War One, large alliances can create massive wars when conflict breaks out between states which then pull their allies into the fray. But realists do have reservations regarding multilateralism's antithesis, unilateralism; Henry Kissinger writes that unilateral interventions threaten the notion of Westphalian sovereignty and risk upsetting the balance of power, while others warn of the risks of unilateral powers falling into the trap of hubris and making enemies with overambitious aggressive behaviour.[98]

Joseph Nye, a neoliberal, agrees with the realist's warning and writes that in seeking to act as a global hegemon and changing the world on its own, America is undermining its own authority. He explains that many of the problems that the US faces such as terrorism, disease and climate change are inherently multilateral and so require multilateral solutions. It is his opinion that the neoconservatives overestimate America's ability to change the world as it sees fit while operating outside of the international community because unilateralism breeds distrust and frustration that alienates allies and partners and bolsters opposition and anti-Americanism.[99] There are two main reasons for Nye why multilateralism benefits the US; the first is that though "international rules bind the United States and limit our freedom of action in the short term" and that "multilateralism can be used as a strategy by smaller states to tie the United States down like Gulliver among the Lilliputians… they also serve our interest by binding others as well."[100] So, while excessive unilateralism can hurt America by allowing it to overextend itself and pursue unreachable goals and it can place short term limitations of the US' power, "multilateralism is often the best way to achieve our long-run objectives".[101]

Nye also argues that working multilaterally in coordination with the international community also increases America's power to achieve the outcomes it desires by increasing its 'soft power'. For Nye, 'soft power' is "the ability to entice and attract"[102] and "to inspire the dreams and desires of others"[103]; it is the ability for a nation to achieve its objectives by leading by example and encourage others to follow the same goals and adhere to the same values. Rather than antagonising other nations, Nye recommends that US become a nation that others admire and want to follow, setting an example for other states and working to achieve global public goods and by respecting international law, rather than seeking a narrow set of selfish interests through unilateral military action.[104]

Another key argument to support multilateralism is the principle that created the United Nations and other

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organisations such as NATO – collective security. As the World Wars showed, a world based only on the Westphalian rules of sovereignty and one where the only form of collective defence are large alliances of nation states is destined for warfare. The United Nations was designed to make this anarchic state of affairs a thing of the past by establishing a system of collective security, whereby an unauthorised attack against one member will trigger the retaliation of all others. But this system is threatened by unilateral unauthorised military action by the United States and others, and this risks the collective security system breaking for good. But can collective security ever really work?

Inis Claude states that a system of collective security can only function if a number of preconditions are met: there must be harmony in the national interests of the members; states must be willing subordinate their own interests for the common good; and members must have adequate combined resources to combat any aggressor.[105] Morgenthau explains that it is unrealistic to expect these conditions to be met because states will only subordinate their own interests when the common good clearly benefits them and, because collective security attempts to freeze the status-quo, it is supporting an unstable system.[106] But if the United States was to commit itself to the United Nations and use its soft power to inspire other nations to also fight for their common interest of averting conflict and upholding a mutually beneficial system of collective security, Claude's preconditions would be met and the system of collective security could function properly.

Mary Robinson and Richard Ashby Wilson concede that there are flaws in the United Nation's humanitarian and peacekeeping systems because the organisation is designed on an outdated concept of sovereign states, but they argue that it is possible to restructure these mechanisms and instigate a paradigm shift in humanitarianism that can overcome these problems. Robinson and Wilson argue that the neoconservatives are wrong to shun the United Nations as they have and Robinson argues that the United States' pursuit of humanitarianism and supporting human rights through unilateralism is flawed and that humanitarianism and liberty should grow from grassroots level and be aided by the international community as a whole.[107] [108]

Conclusion

From analysing each of the four principles in turn it can be seen that the neoconservative foreign policy has a solid core of reasonable assumptions: There is good reason to believe in the qualities that neoconservatives see in liberal democracy and it is broadly agreed that foreign policy planners should allow morality to drive their foreign policy in addition to other calculations. There are powerful arguments against American participation in the United Nations and other international organisations, and the ideas behind 'regime' theory may be accurate. Furthermore, the conflict within neoconservatism between regime change and social engineering could be seen to have been ignored by the likes of Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld because another interpretation of the two principles might prescribe a more moderated and cautious approach to instigating changes to the internal dynamics of other nations than was practiced under George W. Bush.

But it is when one observes the ways in which the neoconservatives recommended that America acts in the world that the bitter and rotten flesh around the core is revealed. Whether or not the neoconservatives genuinely believed their morality to be universal and whether they truly believed that the USA really has a moral responsibility to fight for good around the world is another question, but it is clear that it is the unilateral, militaristic and divisive means by which the neoconservatives sought their 'benevolent hegemony' that has aggrieved critics the most: America's attempts to put the neoconservative agenda into practice came at an enormous human cost and political cost, they spread vehement anti-Americanism, destabilised the Middle East, cost hundreds of billions of dollars for very little gain, they have undermined the authority and legitimacy of the United Nations, and have done further damage to the system of collective security and the international rule of law. They have significantly reduced America's 'soft power' and have, quite rightly, discredited the entire neoconservative agenda.

But despite its flaws, neoconservatism's idealistic aims of supporting good and aiding democratisation and human rights as well as its concern for the internal political, social and cultural composition of other states is something that

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should be continued in future. There are numerous suggested means of pursuing these goals and each idea has its own merits; Francis Fukuyama now advocates a 'realistic Wilsonianism' (a medium between neoconservatism and a more pragmatic and moderate form of realism)[109], Joseph Nye suggests a foreign policy that is focussed on increasing and making use of America's 'soft power' rather than is military strength[110], and Mary Robinson believes that America should multilaterally promote human rights and human development through international means and by encouraging grassroots democratisation.[111] But whatever the approach America should pursue as it moves on from neoconservatism, it should certainly avoid repeating the mistakes made by the Bush administration.

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[103] Védrine, Hubert, quoted in Ibid, p9

[104] Ibid, p143

[105] Claude, Inis L 'Swords into PLowshares: The Problems and Progress of International Organisation', Third Edition, University of London Press, London, 1964, pp223-259

[106] Morgenthau, Hans J. (1967), pp398-400

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[107] Ashby Wilson, Richard, (2005) pp1-37

[108] Robinson, Mary 'Connecting Human Rights, Human Development, and Human Security' in Ashby Wilson, Richard, (2005), pp308-317

[109] Fukuyama, Francis (2006), p184

[110] Nye, Joseph, 2002, pp137-173

[111] Robinson, Mary (2005), pp308-317

[i] See Glazer, Nathan & Kelling, George 'Broken Windows', The Atlantic Monthly, March 1982, Moynihan, D P 'Employment, Income, and the Negro Family', Daedalus, Vol 94, No 4, Fall 1965, pp745-770, Murray, Charles 'Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980', 10th Anniversary Edition, Basic Books, New York, 1994 in which regular contributors to the Public Interest present arguments against attempting to resolve social issues by tackling the underlying causes of them. Such arguments range from tackling the short term symptoms of crime and arguments against social welfare and attempts to alleviate poverty which, they argue, disincentive social advancement and compound the problems.

[ii] However there are numerous 'marginal exceptions' including the Sicilian Expedition, the Spanish-American War, the Continuation War, the Kargil War, the Paquisha War, the Six Day War, the French-Thai War, the state of war between Finland and the UK during WW2, & the Turkish Invasion of Cyprus – although the degree to which many of these states were democratic at the time and the degree to which these states were in conflict is debateable

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Date Written: August 2011