

# Neoconservatism, Neoclassical Realism, and the Narcissism of Small Differences

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## **Abstract**

While realists and neoconservatives generally disagreed on the Iraq invasion of 2003, there is nothing inherent in either theory's core logic to account for this. Neoconservatism's characterization of democratization as a national interest would appear to distinguish the two. But neoconservatism's rejection of all other liberal mechanisms in world politics, and its skepticism regarding transnational norms absent liberal hegemony, suggests that the logic linking democracy and American security shares little with liberalism. Inspecting the range of neoconservative thought reveals a unifying theme: the enervating effects of democracy on state power and the will to wield it in a dangerous world. Consequently, the U.S. enjoys greater safety among other democracies due to a distribution of relative power more favorable to American interests. Viewing regime type through the prism of state power extraction in a competitive, anarchic world puts neoconservatism squarely in the neoclassical realist camp. Many realists offer their approach to international relations as the antidote to the neoconservatism, but the theoretical differences between the two must be better specified before this is feasible.

There is no shortage of analyses of neoconservatism in International Relations (IR), almost all of it critical and much of it vehement. In particular, a long list of realists has weighed (and inveighed) in on neoconservatism's flaws. Michael Williams and Brian Schmidt argues "the core elements of the neoconservative Bush Doctrine stand in direct contrast to many of the fundamental tenets of realism."<sup>1</sup> Brian Rathbun claims that neoconservatives are too nationalistic, grandiose and militaristic to be considered realists.<sup>2</sup> John Mearsheimer states "neo-conservatives and realists have fundamentally different views about how the world works and what American foreign policy should look like." If anything, realists claim neoconservatism to be the stepchild of liberalism. Mearsheimer claims, "Neo-conservative theory—the Bush doctrine—is essentially Wilsonianism with teeth."<sup>3</sup>

The difference between the relatively high consensus against the Iraq War by realists and the equally strong backing of the war by neoconservatives surely contributes to the antagonistic relationship between the two.<sup>4</sup> Policy writings following that conflict's reversal heralded a return to realism, versus liberal and neoconservative thinking.<sup>5</sup> Michael Desch offers the most systematic effort to link liberalism and neoconservatism to the Iraq War and Bush Doctrine in

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<sup>1</sup> Brian C. Schmidt and Michael C. Williams, "The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives Versus Realists," *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008).

<sup>2</sup> B. C. Rathbun, "Does One Right Make a Realist? Conservatism, Neoconservatism, and Isolationism in the Foreign Policy Ideology of American Elites," *Political Science Quarterly* 123, no. 2 (2008).

<sup>3</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq War: Realism Versus Neo-Conservatism," *openDemocracy* (2005), [http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-americanpower/morgenthau\\_2522.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-americanpower/morgenthau_2522.jsp).

<sup>4</sup> With two notable exceptions of Henry Kissinger and Fareed Zakaria. <http://www.fareedzakaria.com/articles/newsweek/080502.html> "Invade Iraq, but Bring Friends" Many liberals were ambivalent, others supportive, others strongly against. Neoconservative critics outside of the policy world were more split on the subject than is popularly recognized. Indeed the best explanation for one's support of the war may have been intellectual, social and geographical proximity to Washington DC, yet another reason to separate policy from theory.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Kaplan, "Springtime for Realism," *The New Republic* (2004).

order to pose realism as the sensible alternative.<sup>6</sup> This essay argues that such claims are not only wrong, but ironic.

While neoconservatism is as fractious a school as realism itself, its tenets are sufficiently consistent and its policy influence sufficiently clear that it demands treatment as an IR theory. Francis Fukuyama's "realistic Wilsonianism" and Charles Krauthammer "democratic realism"—as well as the "democratic globalists" they both attack—agree on fundamentals: that power continues to be the fundamental currency of international relations in a dangerous world, and that the spread of democracy is not simply its own reward, but improves American national security. While spreading democracy has been a long-standing element of most schools of American foreign policy thought, neoconservatism's especially aggressive approach sets it apart from its intellectual rivals. This urgency suggests that the neoconservative logic linking democracy and American security differs as well.

The logic is apparent throughout neoconservative foreign and domestic policy writing: the enervating effects of democracy on the creation and use of state power. Consequently, the United States enjoys greater safety among other democracies--not for reasons of fellowship, mutual understanding or costly signaling--but because the resulting distribution of relative power is more favorable to American interests in a competitive, state-centric, and anarchic world. To alter Krauthammer's formulation but slightly, neoconservatism can best be described as democratic *neoclassical* realism. To say the least, this complicates realism's claim as an alternative approach.

The next section makes the case for a serious appraisal of neoconservatism as a social scientific theory distinct from the policies of the George W. Bush Administration.<sup>7</sup> The second

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<sup>6</sup> Liberals such as John Ikenberry do not link neoconservatism to realism beyond accusing them of

section considers the relationship of neoconservatism vis-à-vis liberalism and concludes that excepting democracy promotion, neoconservatism shares little with Wilsonianism or any other type of liberal IR theory; while the third focuses on constructivism's analysis of neoconservatism as a *reaction* to liberalism. Again excepting attention to regime type, the next section argues that neoconservatism and realism share identical starting assumptions and almost all of the implications stemming from them. Having isolated attention to regime as the only feature distinguishing neoconservatism from its realist colleagues, the next section explores the neoconservative mechanism of democratic weakness. The essay subsequently finds little daylight between this approach and neoclassical realism. The conclusion makes recommendations on how debates between neoconservatism and realism as well as within realism, should proceed.

## 1 □□□□ **How IR Should Address Neoconservatism**

One of the reasons neoconservatism is rarely addressed rigorously by the field of International Relations is that neoconservative writers do not seem particularly worried about being accepted there.<sup>8</sup> Indeed neoconservatism appears to reject the very possibility of a social science of international politics. Irving Kristol ridicules "academic analysts, who will never cease to believe that a foreign policy should be analytically coherent."<sup>9</sup> Robert Kagan and William Kristol counsel that "the complicated workings of foreign policy and the exceptional position of the United States should guard us against believing that the national interest can be

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mistakenly fancying themselves "as savvy practitioners of *realpolitik*." G. J. Ikenberry, "The End of the Neo-Conservative Moment," *Survival* 46, no. 1 (2004): 14.

<sup>7</sup> For the duration "Bush" refers to the 43rd President of the United States,.

<sup>8</sup> And often use this marginalization to great rhetorical effect M. C. Williams, "What Is the National Interest? The Neoconservative Challenge in Ir Theory," *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 3 (2005).. Possible exceptions to the rule are the work of Aaron Friedberg and Stephen Peter Rosen both of whom are occasionally described (not necessarily by themselves) as "neoconservatives."

<sup>9</sup> Irving Kristol, "A Post-Wilsonian Foreign Policy," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 2, 1996 1996.

measured in a quasi-scientific fashion.”<sup>10</sup> Why drag a school of thought into a forum in which it does not care to enter?

## 1.1 Why IR Should Address Neoconservatism

To date, neoconservatism has been equated to liberalism, realism, and constructivism at both the systemic and domestic level. This would appear to be compelling evidence that neoconservatism should not really be considered a social scientific theory at all. Nonetheless, given the consistency of its core logic, I will suggest that it is.<sup>11</sup> This article argues that despite the claims from neoconservative’s “godfather” that “there is no set of neoconservative beliefs concerning foreign policy, only a set of attitudes derived from historical experience,” IR should treat this school of thought seriously for three reasons.<sup>12</sup> First, as this essay will try to show, neoconservatism is far from what Robert Keohane would describes as an “unexamined jumble of prejudices, yielding conclusions that may not logically follow from the assumptions.” Indeed despite neoconservatism’s suspicion of academic theorizing and a general unwillingness for systematic empirical investigation, with some effort it can be laid out as a theory, that is a set of “beliefs based on systematic attempts to specify one’s assumptions and to derive and test propositions.”<sup>13</sup>

Of course Keohane employed these phrases to describe neorealism, a theory that was self-consciously and explicitly laid out in a very few foundational texts, particularly Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics*. No one would suggest that neoconservatism

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "Introduction: National Interest and Global Responsibility," in *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunities in American Foreign and Defense Policy*, ed. Robert Kagan and William Kristol (New York: Encounter Books, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> For an excellent review of this literature, and one of the few pieces to examine the underlying theory of neoconservatism rather than the Bush Doctrine, see A. Rapport, "Unexpected Affinities? Neoconservatism's Place in IR Theory," *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008).

<sup>12</sup> Irving Kristol, "The Neoconservatism Persuasion," *The Weekly Standard* 8, no. 47 (2003).

<sup>13</sup> Robert O. Keohane, *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

approaches such a standard. But Keohane, observing the importance of theory in affecting policy, also notes that “the more seriously the maxims are taken, the more important is the task of critical analysis,” and by this standard, neoconservatism wins hands down over structural realism. Both its champions and critics acknowledge that neoconservatism first developed as a set of ideas developed by intellectuals with very little policy experience or influence, ideas which only gradually gained influence over U.S. foreign policy. Few would suggest that this school of thought has not affected recent U.S. foreign policy. Even if one thinks neoconservatism is, to borrow the phrase of a critic of neorealism, an “orrery of errors,” as Keohane points out, policymakers and thinkers should seek to rid themselves of these dangerous biases. It is necessary to “know thy enemy.”<sup>14</sup>

Finally, like so much of International Relations, the foreign policy aspect of neoconservatism developed quite deliberately as a response to the perceived failings of realism. And realists offer their foreign policy recommendations as the sane alternate to neoconservatism. It therefore behooves us to systematically discover the difference between these neoconservatism and the other major schools of IR, and this requires treating the former as a theory.

## **1.2 What is neoconservatism?**

To this end, this essay reverses the present convention when discussing neoconservatism, focusing on ideas primarily, policy recommendations secondarily, and personalities not at all. People identified as neoconservative tend to write prolifically. Anyone who edits a weekly journal, contributes a regular column to the *Washington Post*, or simply has written for fifty years is likely to produce pieces that contradict the central premises of a theory. Not every piece written by a “neoconservative” should be given equal standing in deliberating over

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. The phrase is of course from Richard K Ashley, "The Poverty of Neorealism," in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, ed. Robert O. Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

neoconservatism. After all, two of IR's most prominent structural realists recently wrote a book on the domestic factors behind Israeli-American relations, but this does not make their work a part of the neorealist canon.<sup>15</sup>

The essay therefore focuses on a moderate number of published articles and books on foreign policy widely cited as intrinsic to neoconservative thought by both self-identified neoconservatives and other intellectual peers.<sup>16</sup> Unlike many recent reviews this essay incorporates literature from its origins in the Cold War through to the post 9/11 era in order to avoid conflating neoconservatism with the policies of the Bush Administration.<sup>17</sup> To show the consistency of neoconservative logic I include the central works of contemporary neoconservatism, as well as many writings across Irving Kristol's and Norman Podhoretz's careers that self-consciously refer to neoconservatism and foreign policy.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007). Although some have classified it as a work of neoclassical realism. B. Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism," *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008): 321.

<sup>16</sup> Stefan A. Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone : The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order*, 1st pbk. ed. (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10.

<sup>17</sup> To this end Norman Podhoretz's essay is valuable for three reasons. First, it is a clear statement of his interpretation of neoconservatism's principles in 1999, prior to 9/11. Second, in it he identifies other "neoconservatives" whose thinking he believes has remained consistent before and after the Cold War. Finally he acknowledges the policy disagreements among these writers while still sharing the same core logic. N. Podhoretz, "Strange Bedfellows: A Guide to the New Foreign-Policy Debates," *Commentary* 108, no. 5 (1999). The works he identifies are: Robert Kagan and William Kristol, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* (1996), Joshua Muravchik, *The Imperative of American Leadership: A Challenge to Neo-Isolationism* (Washington, D.C.: The AEI Press, 1996), Elliott Abrams, *Security and Sacrifice : Isolation, Intervention, and American Foreign Policy* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hudson Institute, 1995), Michael Arthur Ledeen, *Freedom Betrayed : How America Led a Global Democratic Revolution, Won the Cold War, and Walked Away* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 1996). Interestingly, Podhoretz specifically excludes Krauthammer from the ranks while still incorporating Jeanne Kirkpatrick. I include both of these authors in the investigation. J. Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," *Commentary* 68, no. 5 (1979), Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1 (1991).

<sup>18</sup> Robert Kagan, "Power and Weakness," *Policy Review*, no. 113 (2002), ———, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Knopf, 2003), ———, *Dangerous Nation*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 2006), ———, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 2008), J. Muravchik, "The Past, Present, and Future of Neoconservatism,"

As much homogeneity exists among neoconservatives as among realist or liberal IR theory; that is, very little. Nonetheless, the commonalities, what some might call the “hard core,” are important. Defensive and offensive, classical and structural realists after all have decidedly different policy recommendations, but few suggest that the study of the full range of realist theory is unimportant. Contrary to most if not all academic reviews of neoconservatism, this article pays special attention to the “minority reports” of Fukuyama and Kirkpatrick, which other reviews only cite as the exceptions that prove the rule.<sup>19</sup> Just as examining the writings of various strands of realism allows us to hone in on its central tenets, Francis Fukuyama’s explanation for why “actually existing neoconservatism” has “evolved into something that I can no longer support,” is instructive for its own interpretation of neoconservatism’s core. Finding the points where Fukuyama and Krauthammer agree (and there are a great many) is therefore enlightening.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to focusing on dissents within neoconservatism, the essay improves on the vast majority of previous reviews by focusing on neoconservatism rather than neoconservatives and avoiding the conflation of neoconservatism with the Bush Doctrine or the War in Iraq. While a few works have attempted to distill neoconservatism into a social scientific theory of international relations, a far larger number jointly examine (and usually conflate)

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*Commentary* 124, no. 3 (2007), Charles Krauthammer, "In Defense of Democratic Realism," *The National Interest*, no. 77 (2004), ———, "The Neoconservative Convergence," *Commentary*, July/August 2005 2005.

<sup>19</sup> For example Rathbun acknowledges the differences but then claims to focus on what neoconservative theory “has meant in practice” or “pop neoconservatism.” In fairness Rathbun examines elite opinion rather than neoconservatism as a theory per se, so the stance is not inappropriate. Rathbun, "Does One Right Make a Realist?."

<sup>20</sup> Jeanne Kirkpatrick is another important dissent. Irving Kristol who did much to establish neoconservatism, also evinced tremendous skepticism over promoting democracy by the sword. Francis Fukuyama, "The Neoconservative Moment," *The National Interest*, no. 76 (2004), ———, *America at the Crossroads : Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven Conn.: Yale

neoconservatism and the Bush Doctrine.<sup>21</sup> Some describe the Bush Doctrine as “an operationalization of neoconservatism.” Others claim to examine neoconservatism while focusing almost exclusively on speeches and policy documents of the Bush Administration.<sup>22</sup> Such an approach is not limited to critics; Charles Krauthammer claims the “the Bush Doctrine is essentially a synonym for neoconservative foreign policy.”<sup>23</sup> The Bush Doctrine is certainly worthy of extensive examination in its own right, but too many articles view the Bush National Security Strategy, Kagan and Kristol’s “Towards a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy” and the reports of the Project for the New American Century as interchangeable.

Even if one is motivated to examine neoconservatism because of its influence on foreign policy, does not mean that policy is synonymous with theory. Examining elements of the Bush Doctrine first and then linking these recommendations back to neoconservative writings is the wrong direction when considering a theory. Diverse theories can recommend the same policy; promotion of democracy has been espoused as a strategic goal by almost every school of American international political thought. Secondly, policy statements like the National Security Strategy entail compromises among many camps and seek to communicate to a great number of constituencies. Finally policy in the “real world” is necessarily messy and inconsistent; the Bush

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University Press, 2006), Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, *Making War to Keep Peace*, 1st ed. (New York: HC/HarperCollins, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> For an excellent review of this literature, and one of the few pieces to examine the underlying theory of neoconservatism rather than the Bush Doctrine, see Rapport, "Unexpected Affinities?."

<sup>22</sup> J. Monten, "The Roots of the Bush Doctrine - Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in US Strategy," *International Security* 29, no. 4 (2005): 141, Michael C. Desch, "America's Liberal Illiberalism: The Ideological Origins of Overreaction in U.S. Foreign Policy," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2007), Schmidt and Williams, "Neoconservatives Versus Realists.", Gerard Alexander, "International Relations Theory Meets World Politics: The Neoconservative Vs. Realism Debate " in *Understanding the Bush Doctrine*, ed. Stanley Renshon and Peter Suedfeld (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Krauthammer, "Convergence."

Administration should not be conflated with neoconservatism any more than the Nixon or Clinton administrations with realist and liberal theory.<sup>24</sup>

Nor does this essay address directly the Iraq War. Many neoconservatives themselves have claimed specific credit for the war, and critics argue that Iraq is sufficient empirical evidence of neoconservatism's bankruptcy. Nonetheless, many reasons exist to avoid focusing on Iraq. The decision to invade occurred under exceptional circumstances unlikely to be repeated again: following a traumatic and spectacular act of terrorism in the United States and an apparently unimpeachable military victory in a place formerly known as the graveyard of empires. While neoconservative ideas certainly informed the decision, and some self-identified neoconservatives were involved in its planning, the actual thinking was far from coherent or identifiable as neoconservative.<sup>25</sup>

A single case study is rarely sufficient to reject a theory. Contrary to one critic, Iraq is not an "experiment;" few if any such scenarios exist in international relations.<sup>26</sup> Even were we to assign such rarefied status to the Iraq War we are unlikely to know sufficient detail anytime soon to construct a sufficiently rigorous qualitative case study. One should no more disconfirm neoconservatism with Iraq than give it singular credit for explaining the end of the Cold War.<sup>27</sup> Besides, many self-identified neoconservatives have explained Iraq away, at least to their own satisfaction.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Focusing on policymakers, to attack a theory, compounds these two errors. Such people are simply not all that interested in being theoretically consistent.

<sup>25</sup> A. Flibbert, "The Road to Baghdad: Ideas and Intellectuals in Explanations of the Iraq War," *Security Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006).

<sup>26</sup> Joshua Muravchik and Stephen M. Walt, "The Neocons Vs. The Realists," *The National Interest* (2008).

<sup>27</sup> Muravchik, "Past, Present, and Future ".

<sup>28</sup> Joshua Muravchik, "Two Cheers : Second Thoughts on the Bush Doctrine," *World Affairs* 171, no. 2 (2008).

Finally and most importantly, just as different theories can recommend the same policies, thinkers within the same tradition can take the core logic and recommend different ones. Jeanne Kirkpatrick derived her skepticism regarding the Iraq invasion from the same core assumptions that many others used to support the war.<sup>29</sup> Neoconservatives were even more split regarding the Vietnam War yet shared a similar outlook on “the origins of the conflict” the power of the Soviet Union coupled with the expansionist ideology of Communism.”<sup>30</sup> Indeed, as in realism, these policy debates (rather than the policies themselves) are extremely helpful in deriving the hard core.<sup>31</sup>

## 2 □□□□ Neoconservatism v. Liberalism

Michael Desch’s article explicitly focuses on the policy implications of theory, pointing out the perverse outcome of “illiberal policies”—“including the pursuit of global hegemony, launching of a preventive war, imposition of restrictions upon civil liberties in the name of national security, and support for torture under certain circumstances”—from “Liberal” thought, a “set of political values based on some combination of individual freedom, equality of opportunity, free markets, and political representativeness.” Michael Desch’s efforts to “indict Liberalism,” by showing that “neoconservatives and Liberals have enough in common to place the former squarely within the U.S. Liberal tradition,” exhibits these flaws.<sup>32</sup> Desch repeatedly

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<sup>29</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, "Power and Prudence," *The New Republic* (2007). See also Fukuyama, *Crossroads*.)

<sup>30</sup> Podhoretz, "Bedfellows."

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 26.

<sup>32</sup> Desch, "Liberal Illiberalism," 20. Desch supports this claim by citing a book whose thesis is that neoconservatism represents an important strain of Jewish *conservative* thought. Murray Friedman, *The Neoconservative Revolution : Jewish Intellectuals and the Shaping of Public Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Part of this confusion is the Desch’s use of Packenham, a critic of Liberalism, to define the essential four tenets of the theory, “(1) political and economic development is easy; (2) all good things go together; (3) radicalism and revolution are bad; and (4) democracy is more important than political order.” It is not clear that many Liberals would agree with this. While Desch

makes the two errors discussed above: focusing on people and conflating policy (the Bush Administration's war and rhetoric) with theory (liberalism and neoconservatism), "I show that George W. Bush and the neoconservative activists both inside and outside his administration share the Liberal tradition's core premises."<sup>33</sup> But the only neoconservative besides Paul Wolfowitz (an official) cited in the essay is Jeanne Kirkpatrick (whom Desch describes as the exception to the rule).<sup>34</sup> Desch cites Ronald Steele's review essay on Woodrow Wilson that the "difference between interventionist Liberals and the interventionist neoconservatives is more a matter of degree than of principle."<sup>35</sup> But in the same essay Steele observes that Wilson often acted with a ruthless realism.<sup>36</sup> Indeed one of Steele's central points is that *all American politicians*, including Richard Nixon, invoke Wilson to justify their policies.

Of course, many works of neoconservatism considered here also invoke Wilson. But their interpretation (like Desch's) simply borrows the aspects of Wilson's policy amenable to the neoconservative worldview; for Muravchik Wilsonianism simply "sets a much lower threshold for American involvement abroad, on the theory that early intervention on a small scale may forestall a much heavier commitment later on."<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, Krauthammer describes neoconservatism's vision of spreading liberal values to other states as "expansive and perhaps

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makes a distinction between "Liberal" and "liberal" it is not germane for this essay.

<sup>33</sup> Desch, "Liberal Illiberalism," 9.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.: 23.

<sup>35</sup> Steele continues, "It rests on how much exercise of military power the liberals will rationalize, and how much deference to liberal clichés the neoconservatives will tolerate." Ronald Steel, "The Missionary," *New York Review of Books* 50, no. 18 (2003).

<sup>36</sup> "For two and a half years he kept the US out of the European war until both sides were so weakened that he believed he could dictate the peace. And when he did instruct Congress to declare war on Germany in April 1917, he insisted that the US would have an absolutely free hand: it would not join the Entente as an ally but as an "associated power" with its own separate military command and political objectives." Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*, 21.

utopian. But it ain't Wilsonian."<sup>38</sup> This essay suggests taking Krauthammer at his word. Few labels exist *less* appropriate for neoconservatism than Wilsonianism—realistic or hard, with boots or with teeth—or any other form of liberalism for that matter.

Consider Wilson's Fourteen Points, which first calls for "open covenants of peace." The next two support free trade. The fourth calls for the reduction of armaments "to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety." The fifth asserts that imperialism must give equal weight to the wishes of the colonized.<sup>39</sup> The sixth fails to mention "democracy" when it encourages revolutionary Russia to reenter the community of nations "under institutions of her own choosing" following an "independent determination of her own political development." Seven through thirteen address territorial adjustments (without even a mention of "self-determination"). None of these ideas are associated with neoconservatism.

Despite its absence in the Fourteen Points, this essay does not deny that one element at Wilsonianism's core is the U.S. promotion of liberal values abroad (again it is important to distinguish between a policy document and a theory). Nor does it deny that neoconservatism shares this tenet. Rather this essay points out that this is the *only* concrete element shared by these two theories. The difference grows starker still when one compares neoconservatism to contemporary liberal IR theory, rather than the Fourteen Points.

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Krauthammer, "Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World" (paper presented at the 2004 Irving Kristol Lecture, Washington, DC, February 12, 2004), Fukuyama, *Crossroads*. For a concurring realist assessment, see Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism," 287.

<sup>39</sup> Wilson's confidante Colonel House interprets this as native populations are "not be militarized, that exploitation should be conducted on the principle of the 'open door,' and under the strictest regulation as to labor conditions, profits, and taxes, that a sanitary regime be maintained, that permanent improvements in the way of roads, etc., be made, that native organization and custom be respected, that the protecting authority be stable and experienced enough to thwart intrigue and corruption, that the [protecting] power have adequate resources in money and competent administrators to act successfully." Democracy is not mentioned anywhere. House, "Interpretation of President Wilson's Fourteen Points," in *Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of State, 1918).

Contemporary liberalism suggests several different but related mechanisms to undermine the perpetual state of insecurity and competition that typifies a realist world. These include transnational norms, international institutions, dyadic democracy and free trade.<sup>40</sup> John Ikenberry identifies six “big ideas” shared by Wilsonianism and modern liberalism. The first four cover various paths to peace: democracy, free trade, international law and international bodies, and collective security. The final two are a progressive optimism about modernity coupled with the need for American global leadership as a “moral agent.” Neoconservatism clearly accepts the importance of democracy as an American national interest and for American moral global leadership, but *explicitly rejects the remaining four points of liberalism/Wilsonianism*.<sup>41</sup>

In terms of the four paths to peace, neoconservatism clearly rejects international institutions as a central factor in international politics.<sup>42</sup> While critical of “actually existing neoconservatism” Fukuyama subscribes to its “skepticism about the legitimacy and effectiveness of international law and institutions to achieve either security or justice.”<sup>43</sup> Neoconservatism also doubts the pacifying effects of interstate commerce; some neoconservative writings support the spread of free markets, but have little to say on free trade except in the context of alliances and threats. Kagan and Kristol warns against the “Armand Hammerism” of “blindly ‘doing business’ with every nation, no matter its regime.”<sup>44</sup> Norman Podhoretz castigates 1980’s

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<sup>40</sup> For an efficient review of a massive literature see Reiter and Stam, *Political Economy*.

<sup>41</sup> Halper and Clarke argue that neoconservatism embodies a profoundly pessimistic view of human nature and society much in keeping with the traditions of classical realism, although Irving Kristol describes neoconservatism’s general tone as “cheerful, not grim or dyspeptic” Halper and Clarke, *America Alone : The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order*, 20, Kristol, "The Neoconservatism Persuasion."

<sup>42</sup> As Desch acknowledges. Desch, "Liberal Illiberalism," 20.

<sup>43</sup> Fukuyama, *Crossroads*, 49.

<sup>44</sup> Kagan and Kristol, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy." See also William Kristol ‘American Power—for What?’ 36

businessmen for “loving commerce” more than “they loathed communism.”<sup>45</sup> Kagan rejects the logic of the commercial peace as a “comfortable doctrine of passivity,” and suggests that economic interdependence is as likely to cause conflict as prevent it.<sup>46</sup>

As with trade so with culture: perhaps a powerful force on the domestic level, but almost useless internationally. “Civilization” has little predictive value for “geopolitical alignment” compared to regime type.<sup>47</sup> Even American liberal values, while likely attractive to individuals, are not necessarily universal.<sup>48</sup> Neoconservatism evinces strong skepticism regarding the power of the transnational norms posited by liberals.<sup>49</sup> “There is little sense of shared morality and common political principle among the great powers”<sup>50</sup> Krauthammer bluntly observes, “Moral suasion is a farce,” in his explicit rejection of Wilsonian Idealism as “all very nice. All very noble. And all very crazy.”<sup>51</sup>

Neoconservatism rejects all but one of the liberal mechanism of international politics, “The nature of a regime is crucial, rather than some alleged underlying, geographically or economically or culturally determined ‘national interest.’”<sup>52</sup> Neoconservatism supports “democracy at home and abroad,” emphasizing the democratic peace as a means of reducing war and securing the United States. But given the general skepticism of other liberal mechanisms,

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<sup>45</sup> Norman Podhoretz, “Neoconservatism: A Eulogy” (paper presented at the Bradley Lecture Series, Washington, DC, January 15 1996). The phrase is originally George Will’s.

<sup>46</sup> Kagan, *Return of History*. In general neoconservatism is actually pretty reticent about the international economy.

<sup>47</sup> (Ibid., 73).

<sup>48</sup> As Irving Kristol points out, one can have one that affirms commitment to American political and social ideals, which are not always universalist ideals, as the essential guides for our policy.” Kristol, “A Post-Wilsonian Foreign Policy.”

<sup>49</sup> J. M. Owen, “How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace,” *International Security* 19, no. 2 (1994).

<sup>50</sup> Robert Kagan, “End of Dreams, Return of History,” *The Policy Review* (2007).

<http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/8552512.html>

<sup>51</sup> Krauthammer, “Democratic Realism”.

<sup>52</sup> William Kristol cited in *Realism Reconsidered*, 237

one suspects the means of causation differs from liberal IR theory. One branch of liberal theory suggests that by generating audience costs and empowering the opposition, democracies are superior forms of conveying information and signals.<sup>53</sup> This is also dismissed by neoconservatism.<sup>54</sup> Another suggests that democracies are powerful pacifists because the electorate prevents rent-seeking by its government and encourages politicians to provide private goods. Democracies therefore “try harder” in war and are thus so dangerous that democracies refuse to fight each other.<sup>55</sup> Neoconservatism finds quite the opposite effect from politicians’ responsiveness to voters.

### 3 □□□□ Constructivist Realists

Neoconservative skepticism of *transnational* liberal norms does not imply their meaninglessness at the domestic level. Realists taking a more constructivist approach, while no less critical, are less willing to conflate liberalism and neoconservatism. Indeed Michael Williams’s effective and explicit “critical engagement between IR theory and neoconservatism” regards neoconservatism as a *reaction* to American liberalism.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> For a review of the massive literature see Reiter and Stam. James Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *The American Political Science Review* 88 (1994), Kenneth A. Schultz, *Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations ; 76 (Cambridge UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism."

<sup>55</sup> D. A. Lake, "Powerful Pacifists: Democratic States and War," *American Political Science Review* 86, no. 1 (1992), Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>56</sup> Schmidt and Williams, "Neoconservatives Versus Realists.", Rapport, "Unexpected Affinities?.", Michael C. Williams, *Realism Reconsidered : The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). ———, "What Is the National Interest? The Neoconservative Challenge in Ir Theory," *European Journal of International Relations* %R 10.1177/1354066105055482 11, no. 3 (2005).

More specifically, constructivism identifies a central premise of neoconservatism: “character of political regimes determines the political character of their citizens.”<sup>57</sup> In linking the international and domestic spheres, neoconservatism advances an expansive conception of the “national interest” as the domestic health of a society, finding a tendency towards self-destructive decadence inherent in a liberal one. Unrestrained liberalism becomes, quite literally, an existential threat, “A social order based purely on narrowly egoistic interests, neoconservatives argue, is unlikely to survive.” Because of this dangerous side-effect of liberalism, the democratic state must pursue a “moral” foreign policy, which is “an expression of [the U.S. citizenry’s] values, and which they can identify with.”<sup>58</sup>

However, it is not apparent that most neoconservatives, particularly in the contemporary generation, regard the international system through the lens of its role in ameliorating liberal decadence at home. Nor that culture is considered the “defining element of politics” even at home. Indeed Robert Kagan suggests that culture cannot be the key explanatory variable in explaining changes in US foreign policy behavior, “Americans are no more or less idealistic than they were fifty years ago. It is objective reality that has changed, not the American character.”<sup>59</sup> Similarly, in comparing Europe and the United States, “these difference in strategic culture do not spring naturally from the national characters of Americans and Europeans.”<sup>60</sup>

Schmidt and Williams points out the presence of a “constant fear that America’s liberal political order is at risk of destruction not only through the actions of foreign enemies or idealistic over-extension, but through internal political decline,” but chooses to focus on the latter part, how conflict and crusading (that is international political behavior) can have a

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<sup>57</sup> Rapport, "Unexpected Affinities?," 269.

<sup>58</sup> Schmidt and Williams, "Neoconservatives Versus Realists."

<sup>59</sup> Kagan, *Paradise and Power*. \* 83

salutary effect on domestic politics.<sup>61</sup> This essay argues that many if not most neoconservative works are more concerned with the opposite direction of causality--how domestic politics affects a state's ability to compete in a self-help international system. Neoconservatism advocates a "broad, sustaining policy vision," because without it, "the American people will be inclined to withdraw from the world and will lose sight of their abiding interest in vigorous world leadership...they will seek deeper and deeper cuts in the defense and foreign affairs budgets and gradually decimate the tools of U.S. hegemony."<sup>62</sup> More succinctly put by Irving Kristol, "in the modern world, a non-ideological politics is a politics disarmed."<sup>63</sup> Decadence can only be an "existential threat" if there exist external threats to the society.

#### 4 □□□□ Living in a Realist World

This dangerous world in which democracies finds themselves mired is familiar to any realist. Indeed, this essay agrees with Gerard Alexander's claim that the two theories share an essentially identical ontology.<sup>64</sup> Randall Schweller describes three fundamental assumptions that "distinguish realism from all other IR perspectives" and are "common to all realist theories": conflict groups [i.e. states] are the key actors in world politics, power is the fundamental feature

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<sup>60</sup> ———, *Return of History*, 7-8.

<sup>61</sup> Schmidt and Williams, "Neoconservatives Versus Realists."

<sup>62</sup> Kagan and Kristol, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy.", Charles Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment Revisited," *The National Interest* (2003): 82. Compare this to the neoclassical realist argument that statist ideology plays an important role in the mobilization of international political power.

<sup>63</sup> Irving Kristol, *Reflections of a Neoconservative : Looking Back, Looking Ahead* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), Williams, *Realism Reconsidered*.

<sup>64</sup> Gerard Alexander actually argues that "the Bush Doctrine shares core ontological assumptions with major streams of realist thought," and spends the lion's share of the time examining Bush policy documents. Alexander, "International Relations Theory Meets World Politics: The Neoconservative Vs. Realism Debate ". I agree that the *Bush Doctrine* shares a great deal in common with Walt's balance-of-threat theory as Alexander suggests, but that it is because it is not an exclusively neoconservative document.

of international relations, and the essential nature of international relations is conflictual.<sup>65</sup> In contrasting realism and neoconservatism, Schmidt and Williams cite Michael Doyle's criteria for realism, "First, international relations takes place in a condition of anarchy. Second, the main actors are independent sovereign states that recognize no higher power. And third, that 'the lack of a legitimate international source of controlling authority means no restraint--whether moral, social, cultural, economic, or political--is sufficiently strong or general either to eliminate completely or to manage reliably conflicts of interest, prestige, or value.'<sup>66</sup> Neoconservatism shares all of these assumptions.

Neoconservatism recognizes that states are the primary international actors.<sup>67</sup> These states interact in an anarchic world; Krauthammer approvingly cites realism's recognition of "the fundamental fallacy in the whole idea of the international system being modeled on domestic society" and asks, "If someone invades your house, you call the cops. Who do you call if someone invades your country?"<sup>68</sup> Kagan claims that outside of Europe the "dangerous Hobbesian world still flourishes."<sup>69</sup> Like John Mearsheimer, neoconservatism assumes that other states retain the capacity to harm each other (indeed thanks to the advent of WMD, more states have this capability than great power-focused realism allows). Again, as with

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<sup>65</sup> Randall L. Schweller, "The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism," in *Progress in International Relations Theory*, ed. Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 325. For an identical definition, see J. W. Taliaferro, "State Building for Future Wars: Neoclassical Realism and the Resource-Extractive State," *Security Studies* 15, no. 3 (2006). S. E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and J. W. Taliaferro, "Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy," in *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy*, ed. S. E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and J. W. Taliaferro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>66</sup> Schmidt and Williams, "Neoconservatives Versus Realists."

<sup>67</sup> Rapport, "Unexpected Affinities?."

<sup>68</sup> Kagan, *Paradise and Power*, 39, Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment Revisited," 12, ———, "Democratic Realism", 8. This restates Mearsheimer's description of anarchy: there is no higher authority to come to their rescue when they "dial 911" John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001), 33.

<sup>69</sup> Kagan, *Paradise and Power*, 75.

Mearsheimer, uncertainty of intentions and the shadow of the future loom large.<sup>70</sup> Surveying the post-Cold War world, Norman Podhoretz observes “No one imaged that a defeated and humiliated Germany would rise again so quickly, or that it would submit itself to a leader like Hitler with grandiose plans for conquering the world. Nor did anyone dream that the Bolshevik Revolution, then in its cradle and unpromising in its prospects, would grow into an even more dangerous power with similarly unlimited aims.”<sup>71</sup>

Not surprisingly given these similar starting points, neoconservatism and realism share many implications. First, an anarchic environment is “automatically” a world of self-help.<sup>72</sup> Since they seek to survive in an uncertain world, states care deeply about their own power and that of other, potentially hostile states.<sup>73</sup> Like realism, neoconservatism distinguishes between the great and lesser powers, but anarchy has its effect regardless; “In an anarchic world small powers always fear they will be victims. Great powers on the other hand, often fear rules that may constrain them more than they do anarchy. In an anarchic world, they rely on their power to provide security and prosperity.”<sup>74</sup> In this “anarchic Hobbesian world where international laws and rules are unreliable,” Kagan argues that “true security and the defense and promotion of a liberal order still depend on the possession and use of military might.”<sup>75</sup> Like their realist

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<sup>70</sup> Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*.

<sup>71</sup> Podhoretz, "Bedfellows," 31. Keohane argues that rationality is a core assumption of neorealism; Kenneth Waltz and Randall Schweller disagree. It is safe to state that assuming states to be egoists is the foundation of both realism and neoconservatism. Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism," 276.

<sup>72</sup> Taliaferro, "State Building for Future Wars: Neoclassical Realism and the Resource-Extractive State," 482.

<sup>73</sup> Fukuyama highlights the difference between realists and neoconservative in the first principle of the philosophy: “the nature of the regime matters to external behavior is held much more consistently by neoconservatives than the alternative realist view that all states seek power regardless of regime type.” Fukuyama then acknowledges the “realist dimension” that “power is often necessary to achieve moral purposes.” Fukuyama, *Crossroads*, 48-49, 61-62. Krauthammer, "Democratic Realism".

<sup>74</sup> Kagan, "Power and Weakness."

<sup>75</sup> ———, *Paradise and Power*, 3.

cousins, Muravchik's neoconservatives place their trust in military force and doubt that "economic sanctions or UN intervention or diplomacy, per se, constitute meaningful alternatives."<sup>76</sup>

For both realism and neoconservatism, transnational mechanisms have little independent effect on international relations. Security and relative power concerns color their approach to international institutions and trade. Neoconservatism is skeptical of cooperation even on subjects not directly related to security and fixate on the "relative gains" from trade, "Geopolitical calculations affect international negotiations over the best response to climate change."<sup>77</sup> Trade and security are inescapably linked not as a means of preserving peace between rivals but as a form of strengthening intra-alliance strength; in the context of the American-Japanese trade disputes of the eighties and nineties, Muravchik characterizes the view that "security relations with Japan... could be sealed off from economic issues" as "either disingenuous or self-delusional."<sup>78</sup> International institutions are epiphenomenal, reflecting the distribution of power. States without a liberal hegemonic protector remain "mired in history, exercising power in the anarchic Hobbesian world where international laws and rules are unreliable and where true security and the defense and promotion of a liberal order still depend on the possession and use of military might."<sup>79</sup>

For both schools, morality stops at the water's edge; Schweller describes realists as believing "either that foreign policy takes place in a moral and legal vacuum, or that moral

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<sup>76</sup> Muravchik, "Past, Present, and Future". See also ———, *Imperative of American Leadership*, 135.

<sup>77</sup> Kagan, *Return of History*, 76. For the realist case on relative vs. absolute gains see Joseph M. Grieco, "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988).

<sup>78</sup> Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*, 202. For the (similar) realist take see Joanne S. Gowa, *Allies, Adversaries, and International Trade* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>79</sup> Kagan, "Power and Weakness."

behavior in foreign policy resides in the state's self-assertion."<sup>80</sup> Similarly, neoconservatism contains no notion of ideas being used to co-opt potential adversaries in the form of "soft power."<sup>81</sup> So while neoconservatism surely understands that ideas matter on the domestic front, and that regime and individual identity are co-constituted, the claim that neoconservatism represents "a systemic constructivist account of IR" in the manner of Alexander Wendt is surely wrong. Wendt focuses on the culture of anarchy at the systemic level, and seeks to show that states' understanding of anarchy is malleable (even if the ordering principle of anarchy does not change).<sup>82</sup> Neoconservatism, like realism, claims that anarchy is always "Hobbesian" unless a hegemon can enforce its preferred order, in which case the system is no longer anarchic. Aaron Rapport claims that neoconservatism's "primary conclusion" is that "'friend' role identities will predominate in a system of liberal states, and thus the logic of a Kantian system will govern relations," but like Mearsheimer, Kagan acknowledges that Europe's Kantian "geopolitical fantasy" would not continue if the United States were to withdraw its protection.<sup>83</sup>

Yet despite these similar starting points both camps find such immense (and mutual) difference between them. Williams and Schmidt for example contrast the realist assumptions with those of neoconservatism's: preserving primacy, preemption, and unilateralism and democracy promotion. But as this section has shown, this confuses implications with assumptions. Realists such as Mearsheimer and Bacevich generally agree on the tenets of

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<sup>80</sup> Schweller, "The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism," 323.

<sup>81</sup> Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism," 304.

<sup>82</sup> Rapport, "Unexpected Affinities?," Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations ; 67 (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Rapport acknowledges that neoconservatism disagree with Wendt on the durability of the systemic culture, but gets the direction wrong. Rapport suggests that neoconservatism believes that the culture of anarchy is far less durable than Wendt. For neoconservatism, there is Hobbesian anarchy or hegemony, full stop.

neoconservatism that are ostensibly in contrast to realism: belief in bandwagoning (i.e. the possibility of sustained unipolarity); the primacy of military force, the importance of a lot of it and in particular an enthusiasm for the RMA; and the belief in promotion of democracy.<sup>84</sup> What explains these differences?

## 5 □□□□ Democratic Weakness

This essay argues that what distinguishes neoconservatism from other strains of the realist tradition is the Tocquevillian assumption that democracies are inherently inwardly focused, shying away from building and using a military.<sup>85</sup> As Irving Kristol writes, “In the end the fundamental problem for American democracy is that its foreign policy is democratic.”<sup>86</sup> Neoconservatism is a theory of democratic weakness in a realist world. The type of weakness that concerns neoconservatives is not a lack of economic power; the world’s richest states are almost uniformly democratic. Nor is it a lack of military power; by one measure as many as eighteen of the world’s twenty largest military budgets belong to democratic states. Rather, neoconservatism seeks to point out the debilitating effects of democracy that prevent such a government from spending appropriate levels of its wealth on military power, and from employing any military power that it does possess.

### 5.1 A World Unsafe for Democracy

Liberal publics are cost averse and inwardly focused, “[Americans] have continually searched for a way to reconcile their demand for a certain kind of world and their wish to avoid

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<sup>83</sup> Kagan, *Paradise and Power*, 57, J. J. Mearsheimer, "The Future of the American Pacifier," *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 5 (2001).

<sup>84</sup> Mearsheimer, "Hans Morgenthau and the Iraq War: Realism Versus Neo-Conservatism."

<sup>85</sup> Adam Wolfson, "Conservatives and Neoconservatives," in *The Neocon Reader*, ed. Irwin Stelzer (New York: Grove, 2004).

<sup>86</sup> Kristol, "A Post-Wilsonian Foreign Policy."

costs, including the moral costs, of imposing that world on others.”<sup>87</sup> Kagan and Kristol agrees with Theodore Roosevelt’s worry that Americans had become so "isolated from the struggles of the rest of the world, and so immersed in our material prosperity," that they were becoming "effete."<sup>88</sup> “Americans,” opens Krauthammer, “have a healthy aversion to foreign policy.”<sup>89</sup> A democracy’s responsiveness to voters, neoconservative theory posits, produces unfortunate side effects including: a welfare state, an inattention to foreign policy, and consequent military decline.

Neoconservatism acquired its name in part by eschewing mainstream conservatism’s disavowal of the welfare state. While generally agnostic on its virtue, neoconservatism accepts that “the welfare state is with us, for better or worse.”<sup>90</sup> But this modern welfare state produces some undesirable consequences. According to Irving Stelzer, democratic complacency that inspires neoconservatives to advocate a need to “reserve the resources of the State to ease the plight of what the Victorians called the ‘deserving poor.’” Irving Kristol seeks a return to an “older, masculine, paternalistic version of the welfare state.” Indeed, neoconservatives consider the concept of a “good” welfare state—as opposed to those in Europe (the eternal foil of neoconservative writing)—to be the signal achievement of their revival of the right. Only a correctly calibrated welfare system can shore up an economically powerful, militarily strong, “masculine” state well suited for international competition.<sup>91</sup> Government redistribution of too

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<sup>87</sup> Kagan, *Return of History*, 53.

<sup>88</sup> Kagan and Kristol, "Introduction: National Interest and Global Responsibility."

<sup>89</sup> Krauthammer, "Democratic Realism". Realists also widely believed this. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy*. For a dissenting argument see Daniel Drezner, "The Realist Tradition in American Public Opinion," *Perspectives on Politics* 6, no. 1 (2008).

<sup>90</sup> Irving Kristol, "A Conservative Welfare State," *Wall Street Journal*, June 14, 1993.

<sup>91</sup> Irwin M. Stelzer, *The Neocon Reader*, 1st Grove Press pbk. ed. (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

many resources to voters erodes economic growth—itsself a crucial element of national clout.<sup>92</sup> *The Public Interest*, the journal associated with the neoconservatism 's origins, specifically excluded foreign policy from its pages, but Irving Kristol claims that the position of the United States abroad was always in mind when editing the journal, “linking its work in economic and social policy to our national destiny as a world power.”<sup>93</sup>

The liberal welfare state also results in underinvestment in military power; voters choose butter over guns for their tax dollars and consumption over the death and taxes entailed by military competition. Irving Kristol explains how American and European democracies differ, “American military spending expanded more or less in line with economic growth, while Europe’s democracies cut back their military spending in favor of social welfare programs.”<sup>94</sup> While not as dire as Europe, Kristol and Kagan fear that “American civilians at home, preoccupied with the distribution of tax breaks and government benefits, will not come to [the military's] support when the going gets tough.”<sup>95</sup> Muravchik cites the cutting of foreign policy spending as politicians’ response to “public illusions” of wanting a “balanced budget but resist[ing] increases in taxes or reductions in benefits.”<sup>96</sup>

The welfare state also takes its toll on military service and patriotism: “readiness to die for one's country—is regarded as a form of psychological ‘extremism,’ and it is to discourage such mental unbalance that the modern welfare state has practically abolished military

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<sup>92</sup> This accords with Fukuyama’s “dissent” that the desire “to live in a modern society with its technology, high standards of living, health care, and access to the wider world,” rather than for democracy, is universal. Fukuyama, *Crossroads*, 54. See Kagan for similar logic.

<sup>93</sup> Irving Kristol, "My Public Interest," *The Weekly Standard* (2006).

<sup>94</sup> Kristol, "The Neoconservatism Persuasion."

<sup>95</sup> Kagan and Kristol, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy."

<sup>96</sup> Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*, 39.

parades.”<sup>97</sup> In 1996 Kagan and Kristol fretted of “a civilian population increasingly unaware of or indifferent to the importance of its military’s efforts abroad.”<sup>98</sup> Thus democracy makes states both weaker militarily and less willing to use the remaining power it possesses preferring the alternatives of the weak such as multilateral institutions and economic tools, “Every [U.S.] administration is attracted to economic sanctions as against military intervention. In most cases these sanctions are ineffectual, but they do give the appearance of attentive action.”<sup>99</sup> In international security competition, democratic states play with a handicap.

Non-democratic states do not feel this redistributive, pacifying drag on their military power. Indeed, other regimes have domestic incentives to grow more powerful (rather than less); in autocracies such as Putin’s Russia, “Strength and control at home allow Russia to be strong abroad. Strength abroad justifies strong rule at home.”<sup>100</sup> Unlike democracies, such states are less shy about using the power they have to advance their interests abroad. Irving Kristol clearly draws the link, “In world affairs the poorer nations that are not welfare states, not nearly as risk averse since they have so little to lose, will be (as they are already becoming) the activist countries, the ones that create the crises and set the international agenda.”<sup>101</sup>

Neoconservatism examines the ideological lens through which state power is focused. Fascism took German industry and focused it into a tight beam of military conquest. Democracy takes American wealth and diffuses it or, worse still, reflects it back within in the form of destructive welfare policies. Threats to the United States come in the form of ideologies coupled

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<sup>97</sup> Irving Kristol, "The Lost Soul of the Welfare State," *On the Issues* (1997), [http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.7392/pub\\_detail.asp](http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.7392/pub_detail.asp).

<sup>98</sup> Kagan and Kristol, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy."

<sup>99</sup> Kristol, "A Post-Wilsonian Foreign Policy."

<sup>100</sup> Kagan, *Return of History*.

<sup>101</sup> Kristol, "The Lost Soul of the Welfare State."

with material power.<sup>102</sup> By this reasoning, militant Islam could be the powerful lens to take materially feeble Middle Eastern states and magnify their impact through terror. The suicide bomber dramatically illustrates militant Islam's potentially superior ability to mobilize scarce resources in order to create effective military power, especially if coupled with a weapon of mass destruction.<sup>103</sup>

The degree of authoritarianism of a non-democratic state matters a great deal. Far from a dissenting version Jeanne Kirkpatrick's famous denunciation of the Carter Administration's focus on human rights promotion actually establishes this proposition and is thus a foundational document in the intellectual development of neoconservatism. Communist and other totalitarian regimes are inherently more threatening than authoritarian ones. Even a weak totalitarian (militant Islamist) state poses a gathering threat to the United States; authoritarian states require more strength to threaten the US.<sup>104</sup> This rough calculus allows Kagan to speak of Russia, China, Iran, and Syria as roughly equivalent threats. This fundamental link between latent state power and regime type, which as we shall see is accepted by many realists, leads to the very implications to which they object.

### 5.1.1 **The Pursuit of Preeminence, Military Power and the RMA**

Because it must fight with one arm behind its back, it takes a *lot* of power to make a democracy competitive in the international world. A democratic foreign policy, according to Irving Kristol, "is something the world has not witnessed since ancient Athens, where a democratic foreign policy led to one disaster after another," a pessimistic assessment to say the

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<sup>102</sup> Fukuyama shares this basic premise. Fukuyama, *Crossroads*, 29.

<sup>103</sup> Krauthammer, "In Defense of Democratic Realism.", ———, "Democratic Realism", Muravchik, "Past, Present, and Future".

<sup>104</sup> Kagan, "End of Dreams, Return of History."

least. Fortunately, “Athens was never the great power the United States is today.”<sup>105</sup>

Krauthammer echoes this analysis when contrasting the threat from the Soviet superpower and weak states under the spell of Arab-Islamic nihilism, “Were that the only difference between now and then, our situation would be hopeless. But there is a second difference between now and then: the uniqueness of our power, unrivaled, not just today but ever. *That evens the odds.*”<sup>106</sup>

A patriotic culture of “national greatness” is one means of mobilizing state resources in a democracy, but neoconservatism does not take chances. Neoconservatism views the “New American Way of War” as a singular opportunity to mitigate the military debilitation of American democracy. Podhoretz writes of the need to exploit “our superior technology to minimize American casualties while inflicting maximum damage on the enemy, even if innocent civilians might be harmed or killed in the process,” in order to compete against “the callous indifference to their own casualties of armies like the Russian and the Chinese.”<sup>107</sup>

One can derive neoconservatism’s particular zeal for missile defense from this conviction. Missile defense is not designed to counter a nuclear threat per se; Robert Kagan acknowledges “even the crazies are unlikely to fire a warhead at the United States.”<sup>108</sup> Preventing the homeland from being held hostage will give the United States the political will to use its military abroad. “The sine qua non for a strategy of American global pre-eminence...is a missile defense system,” write Kagan and Kristol, “Only a well-protected America will be

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<sup>105</sup> Kristol, "A Post-Wilsonian Foreign Policy."

<sup>106</sup> Krauthammer, "Democratic Realism". Emphasis added. By this logic then, a totalitarian American would have had the whole world sewn up by now.

<sup>107</sup> Podhoretz, "Bedfellows."

<sup>108</sup> Robert Kagan, "A Real Case for Missile Defense," *The Washington Post*, May 21, 2000.

capable of deterring—and when necessary moving against—"rogue" regimes when they rise to challenge regional stability."<sup>109</sup>

### **5.1.2 Democratization**

In her famous essay, Kirkpatrick makes a second equally crucial point. Because totalitarian states are inherently more threatening, the United States should therefore focus one's democratization efforts there. Kirkpatrick does not criticize neoconservative enthusiasm for democratization so much as connect it to a grand strategic logic. Because of the military advantage enjoyed by non-democracies, a United States interested in self-preservation should aggressively spread this cost aversion through global democratization—by the sword, if necessary.<sup>110</sup> Muravchik succinctly states the core (and inherently power political) logic, "The spread of democracy offers an important, peaceful way to weaken our foe."<sup>111</sup>

### **5.1.3 Bandwagoning and Democratic Dominoes**

Mearsheimer argues that in a realist world, states balance against potential hegemons. In a neoconservative world, states bandwagon. The case for structural realism on this front is far from watertight. As with the democratic peace, neoconservatism can point to another important empirical finding unaccounted for by neorealism: the utter lack of balancing against the United

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<sup>109</sup> Kagan and Kristol, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy.". This evokes Albert Wohlstetter's insistence that the US must have the ability to fight a nuclear war, due to the Soviet Union's ideological willingness to accept casualties. Fukuyama, *Crossroads*.

<sup>110</sup> This aggressiveness should not be overstated. "We should work hard to encourage democracy. We should be willing to spend money for it. But we should not go to war for it." Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*, 164. "Exceptions may occur, especially where the issue of democracy combines with others to make a compelling interest, say, if Castroite guerillas overthrew the elected government of Mexico."

<sup>111</sup> ———, "Past, Present, and Future ". Fukuyama, *Crossroads*, 102, Krauthammer, "In Defense of Democratic Realism.", Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism," 283. Podhoretz describes a similar justification for Bosnian intervention. Podhoretz, "Bedfellows."

States.<sup>112</sup> Neoconservatism views bandwagoning with the United States as likely for two reasons.

The first is not hard to understand; weak states, as they have for time immemorial, “suffer what they must” and bandwagoning is their only option. But an additional neoconservative mechanism for bandwagoning exists, democratic dominoes, given liberalism’s inherent enervation of even strong powers. If democracy weakens states, then democratic domino theory *works*; after all, “A democratizing Russia, and even Gorbachev’s democratizing Soviet Union, took a fairly benign view of NATO.”<sup>113</sup>

#### **5.1.4 Preventive War**

Neoconservatism’s theory of democratic weakness in a realist world makes it logically primed for preemption, jumping through “closing windows of opportunity.”<sup>114</sup> If one believes that decline and disengagement are likely in democracies over time, then rising, non-democratic great powers and radicalizing weak states will catch up inevitably and perhaps quickly. Given the high likelihood of conflict on worse terms in the future, it makes sense to strike while the power is sufficiently imbalanced to give democracies a chance. Plus, both neoconservatism and realism agree that early intervention during a power transition is cheaper; “early intervention on a small scale may forestall a much heavier commitment later on.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Paul Schroeder’s broad historical survey of international relations shows that states have bandwagoned with or hidden from threats far more often than they have balanced against them. Paul Schroeder, “Historical Reality Vs. Neo-Realist Theory,” *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994). See also Stephen G. Brooks and William Curti Wohlforth, *World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>113</sup> Kagan, *Return of History*, 61. See also Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*.

<sup>114</sup> Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War : Power and the Roots of Conflict*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

<sup>115</sup> Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*, 21. “No one imagines that China today poses the kind or dimension of the threat that the Soviet Union once presented, but we all insist that it should not be helped by the United States to develop into an analogous terror to our children and grandchildren.” Podhoretz, “Bedfellows.”

While Dale Copeland claims that such preventive wars occur only under exceptional circumstances, the logic opens the door to a whole host of justifications for intervention, *if regime type accelerates these changes in power*.<sup>116</sup> It is this combination of focusing on the mere “possibility of conflict” as driving international politics, shared with offensive realism, coupled with a focus on the potentially enervating effects of domestic variables that makes neoconservatism’s foreign policy implications so volatile.<sup>117</sup>

## 6 □□□□ Neoconservatism as Neoclassical Realism

Fukuyama observes that the advocates of transforming Iraq into a Western-style democracy are the same people who question the “dangers of ambitious social engineering.”<sup>118</sup> Yet this apparent paradox appears perfectly coherent given this idea of democratic enfeeblement, and idea not normally associated with realism. However, the previous section also makes clear that the many implications of neoconservatism criticized by realism *require a realist world as a necessary condition*. To be sure, the assumption of democratic weakness is a factor not normally associated with realism; it is neoconservatism’s realist assumptions that provide the motivation to do so urgently.

Moreover, if many of the current generation of realists are to be believed, examining democracy as a factor in international relations should not disqualify neoconservatism from the realist tradition, so long as it is done to study its effect on the generation of international political power. Ironically, even as Williams suggests that Morgenthau “provides a remarkably prescient warning about the dangerous directions in which neoconservative understandings of the national

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<sup>116</sup> Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000).

<sup>117</sup> S. G. Brooks, "Dueling Realisms," *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (1997).

<sup>118</sup> Fukuyama, *Crossroads*.

interest could lead.”<sup>119</sup> The band of self-identified realists who seek to bring a new rigor to classical realism quite clearly fail to distinguish themselves from neoconservatism. Put another way, there is nothing in neoclassical realism precluding a neoconservative approach to foreign policy.

Neoconservatism explicitly seeks to point out flaws in realism. But these flaws are the same ones addressed by neoclassical realism: 1) inability to address foreign policy, 2) empirical failures, and 3) the shortchanging of ideas.<sup>120</sup> Neoclassical realism focuses on the generation of “state power” through the extraction of societal resources in the context of international political power competition. Domestic institutions, state-sponsored nationalism, and statist ideology in turn can affect this.<sup>121</sup> Brian Rathbun for example posits that power is mobilized in part through the state’s “inspirational capacity.”<sup>122</sup> Neoclassical realism does not limit itself to material variables, but even so “identity and ideology are used primarily as part of self-help.”<sup>123</sup> Neoconservatism could not agree more.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Williams, "What Is the National Interest? The Neoconservative Challenge in Ir Theory."

<sup>120</sup> Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998). Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro, "Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy."

<sup>121</sup> This is an approach that is distinct from Walt’s balance-of-threat realism, which also looks at non-systemic level variables in determining what constitutes a threat. In neoclassical realism, *intentions do not matter*. Alexander’s focus on intentions is misplaced. Alexander, "International Relations Theory Meets World Politics: The Neoconservative Vs. Realism Debate ", Taliaferro, "State Building for Future Wars: Neoclassical Realism and the Resource-Extractive State," 486.

<sup>122</sup> Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism," 302.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*: 303.

<sup>124</sup> Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro, "Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy," 38. For reasons unclear to the author, neoconservatism and neoclassical realism also share a preference for qualitative methods, given the “weakness of much social science theorizing based on quantitative analysis.” Muravchik, *Imperative of American Leadership*, 174. More than one scholar has defined an entire wing of realism partially in terms its qualitative methodological approach. Schweller, "The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism," 317. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Introduction," in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 20.

Oddly, despite considering a wide range of domestic level variables, neoclassical realism has devoted remarkably little attention to regime type. Some exceptions exist. Jack Snyder claims that democracies are less prone to overexpansion than other regime types.<sup>125</sup> Aaron Friedberg argues, “Countries in which power is concentrated, both in the state and inside the national government, seem, in theory at least, to have a better chance of responding in a coordinated, centrally directed war to early inklings of relative decline. It would be surprising, therefore, if liberal democracies failed to do particularly well in this regard.”<sup>126</sup> Norrin M. Ripsman posits that the ballot box can be a drag on the generation of military power and Colin Dueck argues that the prospect of elections forces American presidents to fight wars in ways it would prefer not to.<sup>127</sup>

Interestingly of all self-identified neoclassical realists, the one most closely associated with its core has derived many of the same conclusions as neoconservatism. In early work, Schweller argues that democracies do not fight preventative wars against rising major powers.<sup>128</sup> Although he does not specifically mention democracy in his examination of bandwagoning, neoconservatives would likely agree that “the behavior of weak and incoherent states does not

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<sup>125</sup> Jack L. Snyder, *Myths of Empire : Domestic Politics and International Ambition*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>126</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan : Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 290. Whereas Mearsheimer characterizes Friedberg as a neoconservative, Schweller describes Friedberg as a “neoclassical realist.” This essay agrees with them both. Schweller, "The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism," 318.

<sup>127</sup> Norrin M. Ripsman, "Neoclassical Realism and Domestic Interest Groups," in *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy*, ed. S. E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and J. W. Taliaferro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), ———, "Neoclassical Realism and the National Interest: Presidents, Domestic Politics, and Major Military Interventions," in *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy*, ed. S. E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and J. W. Taliaferro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For a similar argument that does not identify itself as neoclassical realism, see J. D. Caverley, "Why Democracies Will Continue to Fight Small Wars Poorly: Evidence from United States Involvement in the Vietnam War," *International Security* (Forthcoming).

conform to the logic of balance of power theory; they do not systematically balance against external threats of take advantage of opportunities to expand when they can.”<sup>129</sup> Schweller’s most recent work looks at the role of ideology as a means of generating international power and conquest in the “age of mass politics.” In this argument fascism is the ultimate source of military power, whereas realism and liberalism are insufficient ideological motivators.<sup>130</sup>

Neoconservatism agrees.

Like neoconservatism, neoclassical realism generally assumes that as a state’s international political power waxes and wanes, so too does its efforts to influence other states. “Nations try to expand their political interests abroad when central decisionmakers perceive a relative increase in state power.”<sup>131</sup> Like neoconservatism, neoclassical realism focuses on foreign policy as much as system-level phenomena.<sup>132</sup> Like neoconservatism, neoclassical realism incorporates the role of ideas while continuing to give materialist causes their due.<sup>133</sup> But where neoclassical realism generally avoids discussions of regime type, neoconservatism feels no such qualms. But incorporating what one author has called “as close as anything we have to an empirical law in

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<sup>128</sup> R. L. Schweller, “Domestic Structure and Preventive War - Are Democracies More Pacific,” *World Politics* 44, no. 2 (1992).

<sup>129</sup> Taliaferro, “State Building for Future Wars: Neoclassical Realism and the Resource-Extractive State,” 345.

<sup>130</sup> R. L. Schweller, “Neoclassical Realism and State Mobilization: Expansionist Ideology in the Age of Mass Politics,” in *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy*, ed. S. E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and J. W. Taliaferro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>131</sup> Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role*, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 43, Kagan, *Paradise and Power*, ———, *Return of History*.

<sup>132</sup> Schweller, “The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism.” # 317

<sup>133</sup> Although they tend not to examine them in terms of identity formation.)

international relations" is no less reasonable than many of the *ad hoc* additions of neoclassical realism to its structural antecedent, and considerably more parsimonious than some versions.<sup>134</sup>

## 7 □□□□ **Spreading Liberalism does not a liberal make**

Desch's "indictment of liberalism" uses the fact that the "Bush Administration's policies were also supported by many liberals" as its principle evidence that neoconservatism and liberalism are not only essentially the same, but are directly responsible for "illiberal" U.S. policies. In this interpretation, the desire to spread democracy leads to "the pursuit of global hegemony, launching of a preventive war, imposition of restrictions upon civil liberties in the name of national security, and support for torture."<sup>135</sup> This paper has shown that neoconservative and liberal first principles share little in common. The spread of democracy abroad is best described as a solitary liberal policy thrust among many illiberal ones stemming from neoconservatism's profoundly realist assumptions.<sup>136</sup> Neoconservatism views states as existing profoundly realist world. Unlike most forms of realism, neoconservatism believes it is especially dangerous to be a liberal state in such a system. Democracy may be a normatively superior system of government, but it suffers from profound constraints in this international competition due to its inability to convert its resources to power relative to other regime types. Primacy, preemption, the revolution in military affairs and worldwide democratization may provide the means to maneuver around this power political handicap. Desch focuses on the ironic pursuit of illiberal policies by liberals. This essay has sought to show that one can take a

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<sup>134</sup> Jack S. Levy, "Domestic Politics of War," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18 (1988): 662. Perhaps neoclassical realism is so hesitant to use regime type, particularly democracy, because this is as close to a central premise of liberalism as one can find.

<sup>135</sup> Desch, "Liberal Illiberalism," 8.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*: 33-34. Michael Walzer, cited elsewhere by Desch as "endorsing" torture, supported the containment of Saddam based on the need to simultaneously uphold international law and the norm of multilateral cooperation. That Walzer advanced a strategy also supported by realists based on liberal

realist starting point and justify foreign policy that profoundly differs from the realist tradition. The essay concludes by discussing two ways that neoconservatism shows the disturbing but logical extension of neoclassical realism's approach to foreign policy.

Neoclassical realism insists that the competitive international system remains the prime mover of foreign policy; domestic factors, while important, are ultimately intervening variables. In order to distinguish itself from liberal approaches, neoclassical realism tends to choose a privileged actor to represent the "state" by assuming that "The national security executive... is best equipped to perceive systemic constraints and deduce the national interest."<sup>137</sup> This is, to say the least, a heroic assumption on par with the traditional state-as-unitary-actor, but with far more dangerous consequences. The latter assumption simply implies that regime type does not matter, the former assumption suggests that autonomy of the executive determines "whether states respond to international pressures in a timely and efficient fashion" and is thus the recipe for success in international politics. Whereas Richard Ashley and other critics have criticized neorealism (and neoliberalism) for its dangerous reification of the state, neoclassical realism reifies a very specific *embodiment* of the state (i.e. the executive).<sup>138</sup> The illiberal implications of such a move are clear from extending neoconservative logic. If democracy is best spread through being powerful, mitigating one's own democratic mechanisms in order to advance them elsewhere seems reasonable.<sup>139</sup> This presents an intellectual justification for abating American

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theoretical logic further illustrates the need to separate an examination of the theory from the policy and from the person

<sup>137</sup> Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro, "Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy," 25. This is largely a reaction to the extreme assumption that no "national interest" exists, Kevin Narizny, *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>138</sup> Ashley, "The Poverty of Neorealism."

<sup>139</sup> Indeed one way that Irving Kristol is more optimistic about the United States versus Athens is that "the Athenian version of democracy had far fewer ways of shaping, refining, and even sometimes thwarting popular opinion" than the American one. Kristol, "A Post-Wilsonian Foreign Policy."

democracy in order to make the world safe for it. While many have focused on threats to civil liberties in the Global War on Terror, a more troubling consequence could be attempts to decouple the decision to use force from the voter. A RMA military insulated from the pacifist pressures of a democratic electorate would undermine the very idea of democratic pacifism and peace entirely. On the international stage, the United States would cease to be viewed as a Kantian peacemaker; triggering the balance of power politics that contrary to structural realist predictions has not yet developed.

Neoclassical realists may defend themselves against this paper's claims by observing that no one in their ranks has argued for spreading of democracy by the sword. This essay asks, "why not?" The largest difference between the two approaches is that while both neoconservatism and neoclassical realism focus on domestic aspects of power generation, to date the latter has generally taken an unstrategic approach to it. Neoconservatism acknowledges that if domestic factors affect a state's ability to balance against threat or power, a strategic actor should incorporate *other* state's domestic factors into its geopolitical calculus. Neoconservatism makes the next logical step by suggesting that intervening in other state's domestic affairs can be a form of balancing. Neoclassical realism's dual claims that the international distribution of power is the most important factor in international relations coupled with the understanding that domestic factors affect this distribution of power leaves a large intellectual hole that justifies meddling in the internal politics of other states. This more than any other aspect of neoconservatism appears to be a clear violation of the realist tradition, and yet neoclassical realism cannot reject such an implication in its current state.

Structural realism has long been criticized for being largely incapable of creating a theory of foreign policy. By exploring neoconservatism, this essay has ironically shown that

neoclassical efforts to correct are not unalloyed improvement. Once one assumes the existence of a neorealist world—a conflict-prone, anarchic world of sovereign states—and attempts to bring the domestic “in,” little prevents a neoconservative approach to the world without some awkward post hoc theorizing. Realists can justifiably claim that by and large they rejected the Iraq War. But the arguments against the war, best made by Mearsheimer and Walt, were largely empirical: the limitations of military power, the history of Saddam Hussein’s containment and deterability, the lack of a connection to Al Qaeda, the power of nationalism, and the divided state of the Iraqi society.<sup>140</sup> Realists and neoconservatives generally fell on different sides of the Iraq War debate, but there is not much in their theoretical cores (which are nearly identical) to explain why. If realism is to offer itself as a better guide to international relations than neoconservatism, it needs to better specify its theoretical, as well as policy differences. Perhaps the more important theory-policy debate may need to take place within realism itself.

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<sup>140</sup> J. J. Mearsheimer and S. M. Walt, "An Unnecessary War," *Foreign Policy*, no. 134 (2003).

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