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**The Neoconservative Theory of International Politics**

A thesis submitted to the Department of Political Science

The American University in Cairo

In partial fulfilment for the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts

By  
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Advisor: Dr. Marco Pinfari

May 2018

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Despite the plethora of varied international relations theories, only a select few have actually been drivers of United States foreign policy. In fact, outside of the Kissinger years, two theories have had the most influence on US foreign policy- neoliberalism and neoconservatism. While surely the purpose of all IR theories is not (nor should be) to ‘problem solve’, it seems natural that ‘problem solving’ theories influence government leaders and technocrats more than postmodern ‘lenses’, for the objective of government leaders is primarily to solve problems, not chronicling how specific points of view came to be. Interestingly, neoconservatism is not often thought of as an IR theory in the traditional sense. Part of this has to do with the individuals who identify as neoconservative. Whereas neorealists, neoliberals, and social constructivists can point to academics like Kenneth Waltz, Robert Keohane, and Alexander Wendt, respectively, for their founding, the “godfather of neoconservatism”<sup>1</sup> Irving Kristol was a newspaper columnist and editor. Most of the prominent neoconservatives following Kristol were similarly journalists, politicians, or government officials, with notable exceptions.<sup>2</sup> As a result, neoconservatism as an ideology is often equated with the foreign policy decisions by ‘neocons’.

Furthermore, neoconservatives themselves scoff at the notion that their ideology is a cohesive doctrine. Kristol himself was surprised that of the media attention that neoconservatism has received, nearly all of it has been primarily focused on foreign policy “since there is no set of neoconservative beliefs concerning foreign policy, only a

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<sup>1</sup> Gewen, Barry. “Irving Kristol, Godfather of Modern Conservatism, Dies at 89.” *The New York Times*, September 18, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/19/us/politics/19kristol.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Fukuyama (formerly), Seymour Martin Lipset, and Robert Kagan are among these exceptions.

set of attitudes derived from historical experience.”<sup>3</sup> But nearly every IR theory claims to be based on historical experience, and a set of attitudes can mean as much or as little as the interpreter deems it. Kristol’s core four ‘theses’ of neoconservative foreign policy are as follows:

1. Patriotism is a natural and healthy sentiment and should be encouraged by both private and public institutions.
2. International institutions that point to an ultimate world government should be regarded with the deepest suspicion.
3. Statesmen should, above all, have the ability to distinguish friends from enemies.
4. For a great power, the "national interest" is not a geographical term.<sup>4</sup>

If we are to take Kristol at face value, clearly there is no point of going forward with looking at neoconservatism as an IR theory, for his set of attitudes is just that. And yet, his four core theses are built upon a series of assumptions, including that about regime type, anarchy, interest formation, and collective security that make it appear to be much closer to an IR theory than a simple ‘persuasion.’

In this paper, I seek to answer the following questions: Can neoconservatism be considered an international relations theory, or is it something else, like a “school of American foreign policy”<sup>5</sup> or a “cultural orientation to foreign policy in America,”<sup>6</sup> or even something less, like Kristol himself argues? If it is the former, is neoconservatism a unique theory in and of itself, or is it a variation of an already existing theory, like

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<sup>3</sup> Kristol, Irving. “The Neoconservative Persuasion.” *Weekly Standard*, August 25, 2003. <http://www.weeklystandard.com/the-neoconservative-persuasion/article/4246>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Krauthammer, Charles. “In Defense of Democratic Realism.” *The National Interest*, no. 77 (2004): 15–25, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Crothers, Lane. “The Cultural Roots of Isolationism and Internationalism in American Foreign Policy.” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9, no. 1 (March 1, 2011): 21–34. doi:10.1080/14794012.2011.550774, p. 25.

neorealism or neoliberalism? What assumptions, either ontological or epistemological, does neoconservatism share with these theories?

This analysis of neoconservatism will help to address a larger topic in IR- what qualifies as an international relations theory? Thus, the main research question builds upon and adds to existing literature on the nature of IR theory itself.

I argue that neoconservatism is itself an international relations theory separate and distinct from other theories like neoliberalism and neorealism. Though it shares some common elements with these and other theories, neoconservatism's conception of regime type makes it irreconcilable with structural theories. Moreover, though neoconservatism does make several foreign policy recommendations, it is not simply a school of foreign policy analysis. Just as the existence of a realist school (and its many variations) of foreign policy analysis does not lead to the invalidation of realism as an IR theory, nor does it for neoconservatism. Ultimately, I argue that, at least for ontological theories, an IR theory is a theory that explains the causal factors of how states interact with each other. Neoconservatism, linking its view of regime type to the nature of the actions of states, does this, and in fact in many ways is similar to liberal theories of IR.

### **Literature Review**

One reason why neoconservatism has not formally been placed within or separate to different IR theories is that it doesn't just overlap with one IR theory, but it shares principles with many IR theories. Neoconservatism shares the Wilsonian, liberal, conception of individualism, human rights, and the democratic peace theory while at the same time sharing the skepticism that realism has for the efficacy of institutions and

collective security. The emphasis on the importance of military power in order to maximize one's security seems incredibly realist. Furthermore, "neoconservatives share the classical realist view that war and conflict are ultimately rooted in man's drive for self-preservation, competition, vainglory, and...universal recognition." And yet, almost in a thin constructivist manner, neoconservatives "insist that these natural impulses are cultivated, mediated and channeled by historically evolving institutions, ideology, and cultural norms."<sup>7</sup> Because "its proponents speak of power *and* morality, credibility, interests *and* values,"<sup>8</sup> neoconservatism to a certain extent turns the third debate on its head, agreeing with many of the premises of the neo-neo consensus while also drawing entirely different conclusions than both.

The propagation of neoconservatism by columnists and policymakers has resulted in a theory that is not simply victim to American bias, but is necessarily centered on the US. Neoconservatives see "American power as essentially benign," arguing that "a return to multipolar balance-of-power would be a direct threat to both American security interests and the international order."<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that other theories, like realism, don't suffer from a western bias, but neoconservatism, if we are to consider it an IR theory, would be alone in advocating for hegemony to rest not just in a single power, but in a particular power. In this way, neoconservatism can seem almost intrinsically tied to US foreign policy. If we are to view neoconservatism as a legitimate IR theory, can it be so

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<sup>7</sup> Drolet, Jean-François. "A Liberalism Betrayed? American Neoconservatism and the Theory of International Relations." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 15, no. 2 (June 1, 2010): 89–118. doi:10.1080/13569317.2010.482361, p. 95.

<sup>8</sup> Owens, Patricia. "Beyond Strauss, Lies, and the War in Iraq: Hannah Arendt's Critique of Neoconservatism." *Review of International Studies* 33, no. 2 (2007): 265–83, p. 266. Emphasis not mine.

<sup>9</sup> Schmidt, Brian C., and Michael C. Williams. "The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives Versus Realists." *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (May 22, 2008): 191–220. doi:10.1080/09636410802098990.

attached to the US? That is, if the US were to ever wane in power and lose its ability to act unilaterally, could another country fill the theoretical gap? John Mearsheimer, an offensive realist, argues that the bipolarity of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States resulted in a safer world, but this was due to their balance of capabilities, not anything intrinsic in the countries themselves.<sup>10</sup> Would, could, a neoconservative say the same thing about unipolarity? These questions are yet to be answered.

Jonathan Caverley argues that neoconservatism has little in common with liberalism, for neoconservatives hold that “conflict groups (i.e. states) are the key actors in world politics, power is the fundamental feature of international relations and the essential nature of international relations is conflictual” and that they “place their trust in military force and doubt that economic sanctions or UN intervention or diplomacy, per se, constitute meaningful alternatives.”<sup>11</sup> He argues that the only “big ideas” of liberalism, as articulated by G John Ikenberry, shared by neoconservatism are “the importance of democracy as an American national interest and of American moral global leadership” and as such neoconservatism is actually much closer to neoclassical realism.

Robert Kagan, a neoconservative himself, would dismiss this claim, as neoconservatism has “a potent moralism and idealism in world affairs, a belief in America's exceptional role as a promoter of the principles of liberty and democracy, a belief in the preservation of American primacy in the exercise of power, including military power, as a tool for defending and advancing moralistic and idealistic causes, as well as a suspicion of

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<sup>10</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Caverley, pp. 598-599.

international institutions and a tendency towards unilateralism.”<sup>12</sup> Kagan argues that neoconservatism is not a new concept, but rather a continuation of past American views of the world, drawing on examples like the Monroe Doctrine, Manifest Destiny, and even “concern over Japan’s plundering of Manchuria” during the supposed ‘isolationist’ 1930s.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the sources of the “enduring power” of this tradition is “American commitment to universal principles embedded in the nation’s founding documents.”<sup>14</sup>

Other scholars such as Benjamin Miller say that neoconservatism “in fact epitomizes the offensive liberal approach to US foreign policy...: a combination of a liberal belief in democracy and its pacifying effects with an offensive willingness to employ a massive force for regime change (and distrust of international institutions as ineffective and constraining U.S. policy).<sup>15</sup> Miller breaks both realism and liberalism into two factions, offensive and defensive. Additionally, he divides the factors that lead to policies reflecting these theories into means and objectives vis-à-vis the adversary, with objectives dichotomized into those that affect the balance of capabilities and those that affect the rival’s fundamental intentions/nature of domestic regime and means dichotomized into unilateralist and multilateralist approaches.<sup>16</sup>

Charles Krauthammer similarly divides neoconservative foreign policy into two camps, democratic globalism and democratic realism. The former, which includes advocates like

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<sup>12</sup> Kagan, Robert. “Neocon Nation: Neoconservatism, C. 1776.” *World Affairs* 170, no. 4 (2008): 13–35, pp. 14-15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Miller, Benjamin. “Explaining Changes in U.S. Grand Strategy: 9/11, the Rise of Offensive Liberalism, and the War in Iraq.” *Security Studies* 19, no. 1 (February 26, 2010): 26–65. doi:10.1080/09636410903546426, p. 54.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, Benjamin. “Democracy Promotion: Offensive Liberalism versus the Rest (of IR Theory).” *Millennium* 38, no. 3 (May 1, 2010): 561–91. doi:10.1177/0305829810366475.

Kagan and William Kristol, is what is commonly thought of as neoconservative foreign policy. It understands “that as a rule, fellow democracies provide the most secure alliances and the most stable relationships,” necessitating that nations with the ability to spread democracy do so.<sup>17</sup> The latter he describes with the following axiom: “We will support democracy everywhere, but we will commit blood and treasure only in places where there is a strategic necessity—meaning, places central to the larger war against the existential enemy, the enemy that poses a global mortal threat to freedom.”<sup>18</sup>

Differentiating democratic realism from neoclassical realism is significantly trickier, for Krauthammer’s realism is not well defined, essentially distilling into a realism that cares about regime types, the extent to which said regime type is a threat to freedom. If neoclassical realism is a realism that acknowledges that the influence of systemic forces on “foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level,”<sup>19</sup> then democratic realism could potentially be seen as a more limited version neoclassical realism insofar as ‘threats to freedom’ are some of the ‘intervening variables at the unit level.’ Though I will attempt to place Krauthammer’s idea into the framework of neoconservatism, I suspect that it will not fit well.

Schmidt and Williams note that neoconservatism separates itself from realism “along three reinforcing lines.” First, neoconservatives define interest not merely as “narrowly

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<sup>17</sup> Krauthammer, Charles. “In Defense of Democratic Realism.” *The National Interest*, no. 77 (2004): 15–25, p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Krauthammer, Charles. “Democratic Realism.” presented at the 2004 Irving Kristol Lecture AEI Annual Dinner, February 10, 2004. <https://www.aei.org/publication/democratic-realism/>.

<sup>19</sup> Rose, Gideon. “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy.” Edited by Michael E. Brown, Thomas J. Christensen, Randall L. Schweller, William Curti Wohlforth, and Fareed Zakaria. *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 144–72, p. 146.

strategic material calculation,” but as an expression of national values. As a result of being “unable to connect adequately to the values and identity of the American people,”<sup>20</sup> a realist foreign policy will fail to generate either the commitment or the resources necessary to ensure its success. Finally, the disconnect between government and populace generated by realist policy will lead to distrust and cynicism of the former by the latter.

In a similar vein to Alexander Wendt, neoconservatives draw on scholars that “discuss the importance of ideas in determining social outcomes while emphasizing how individuals and social structures in which they are embedded act in shaping one another.”<sup>21</sup> While neoconservatives believe that these mutually constructed norms are significantly stickier than Wendt does (and much stickier than thick constructivists), the principle of constructivism “that people act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of meanings that the objects have for them”<sup>22</sup> fits neatly into neoconservative thought.

Williams offers the strongest explanation of how neoconservatives view the ‘national interest’ by connecting this concept with their view on the ‘public interest.’ He writes that “the national interest and public interest become elements of a politically virtuous circle.”<sup>23</sup> The national interest in effect is an expression of “the operation of political

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<sup>20</sup> Schmidt, Brian C., and Michael C. Williams. “The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives Versus Realists.” *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (May 22, 2008): 191–220. doi:10.1080/09636410802098990, pp. 212-213.

<sup>21</sup> Rapport, Aaron. “Unexpected Affinities? Neoconservatism’s Place in IR Theory.” *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (May 22, 2008): 257–93. doi:10.1080/09636410802098883, p. 261.

<sup>22</sup> Wendt, Alexander. “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics.” *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391–425, p. 397.

<sup>23</sup> Williams, Michael C. “What Is the National Interest? The Neoconservative Challenge in IR Theory.” *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 3 (September 1, 2005): 307–37. doi:10.1177/1354066105055482, p. 321.

virtue at home.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Williams strongly contextualizes neoconservatism within the framework of classical realism, highlighting their shared emphasis on human nature and the ‘dangerous’ effects that liberal modernity has on society.

Unfortunately, though Williams argues that “there is a pressing need for IR to treat neoconservatism seriously *as* a theory of international politics”<sup>25</sup> and compares it also to liberalism and social constructivism, he did not go beyond ‘engagement.’ In other words, although Williams laid out some of neoconservatism’s internal logic and compared it to other theories, he did not commit to comprehensively framing neoconservatism as a theory in and of itself. Like many other works preceding (and proceeding, for that matter) his, Williams doesn’t go far enough in developing neoconservatism as a theory, but only relates it to existing theories. Likewise, he didn’t even commit to saying that neoconservatism is a variation of one theory in particular. This paper argues that neoconservatism is most similar to liberalism, but is a separate theory of international relations all to itself.

### **Methodological Approaches**

This paper is primarily an exercise in meta-theory. I will analyze seminal works of theories that are considered to be ‘IR theories’, including, but not limited to, Kenneth Waltz’ *Theory of International Politics*, Robert Keohane’s *After Hegemony*, Alexander Wendt’s *Social Theory of International Relations* and Robert Cox’s *Social Forces, States, and World Orders* and look at how these works assessed both what is IR theory its potential purposes. I will synthesize the commonalities of these views of IR theory and

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 322.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 324. Emphasis in original.

highlight their fundamental differences. I will use this to comment on my own appraisal of what is international relations theory.

As there is no quintessential neoconservative work, I will need to draw upon the writings of a wide range of neoconservative writers. Neoconservatives that primarily wrote after the end of the Cold War tend to self-identify as neoconservatives; I will take them at their word. For those that wrote before fall of the Berlin Wall, I will identify neoconservatives based on how they are generally referred to; Jeane Kirkpatrick, for instance, did not self-identify as a neoconservative, but is overwhelmingly referred to as one, both because of her political affiliations and writings. In short, unless a neoconservative self-identifies as such, I will defer to the literature.

And though neoconservatives, namely Kristol, do not set forth neoconservatism as anything more than a loosely connected ideology of thinkers with a similar mindset, I disagree. Neoconservatism is an international relations theory. There are neoconservative theories of domestic policy, but these are only loosely related to the IR theory. There is a danger, of course, of begging the question- if the research question is ‘Can neoconservatism be considered an IR theory?’, and I take the approach of laying out neoconservative arguments as a theory, I run the risk of portraying neoconservatism as something that it is not. To mitigate this risk, I will not propose new ideas but instead outline the ideas of thinkers like Kristol (in good faith) into a coherent theory.

## **Chapter Structure**

I begin in chapter 2 by creating a working definition of international relations theory. I compare different academic definitions of IR theory, looking at differences between IR

theory and ‘foreign-policy schools,’ and then compare and contrast the definitions of IR theory that seminal texts, like those mentioned above, have. I then form a working definition of IR theory. Chapter 3 traces the roots of neoconservatism, starting with its basis as a reaction to cultural developments in the US in the 1960s and how it branched out into distinct, if not sometimes overlapping, assessments of economics, international relations, and society. Chapter 4 breaks down neoconservatism’s surprisingly well developed basic assumptions pertaining to IR theory, which are essentially derived from the monadic democratic peace theory. Chapter 5 compares neoconservatism to the theories of the neo-neo debate, looking at its views of anarchy, interest formation, and collective security. Moreover, is neoconservatism’s skepticism about collective security reconcilable with the democratic peace theory? (As neoconservatives hold both the monadic and the dyadic democratic peace theories to be true, I will address both). As neoconservatives partially agree with realists about the anarchic nature of the international system, can this still be consistent with the democratic peace theory? Chapter 6 explains the core differences between neoconservatism and neoclassical realism. The conclusion, Chapter 7, addresses why neoconservatism should be viewed as an international relations theory as articulated in chapter 2. I look at the foreign policy aspect of neoconservatism and argue that it is complementary to neoconservatism as an IR theory, growing out of it rather than being mutually exclusive.

## **Chapter 2: Defining International Relations Theory**

Before gauging whether neoconservatism can be regarded as a theory of international relations, the concept of international relations theory must be delineated. One of the large debates in international relations is its most basic- what is the purpose of international relations? At its outset, the answer seems simple: to understand the interrelations of nation-states in order to make for a more peaceful world. The ethical notion that peace is good and conflict is bad is fundamental to the field. But, over the years, this goal has been both broadened and narrowed by a range of theorists, and though this seemingly would make it more difficult to consider neoconservatism as a theory of international relations, in reality the field has never been more accessible to as many ideologies as it has been now. Critical theorists have broken structural theorists' monopoly on IR. This broadening allow neoconservatism to be viewed as a theory of international relations without needing to the strict definitions of structural theory. This chapter chronicles the progression before outlining the criteria neoconservatism needs to meet to be considered an international relations theory.

### **Origins of IR Theory**

IR theory as a field of study began as a way to prevent war. In the wake of what was then known as the Great War, theorists and politicians alike treated states as anthropomorphic entities and projected an optimistic, Kantian perception of human nature onto them. Human nature, and therefore states, were at their core inherently good, and thus peace via cooperation was not only possible, but inevitable. World War II brought an end to that optimism, and theorists flipped the script, projecting a Hobbesian, egoistic conception of

human nature onto states. States would seek power, material wealth, and glory not because of external forces, but because they were hard wired to do so.

Though other structural theorists came before him, Kenneth Waltz's conception of IR theory revolutionized the field. The founder of neorealism treated social science with all of the rigor of the hard sciences. He related his idea of international relations theory to theories of astronomers, physicists, and computer scientists. In critiquing Stanley Hoffman's (who had attempted to create a structural theory before Waltz) conception of international relations systems, he denounces it as Ptolemaic.<sup>26</sup> Waltz was determined to create a model for international politics with all the rigor of the hard sciences. His fastidious commitment to defining theory is not surprising- he in part developed his notion of theory with the aid of the U.S. National Science Foundation. What resulted of his studies was a theory that took the result of classical realism's pessimistic human nature, anarchy, and argued that anarchy was in fact a determining factor of state action. Because states can never concretely assume another's intentions, it must act in a relative gains maximizing way in order to do what it can to survive.

In a way, Waltz' idea of the nature of IR theory is simple- "theories explain laws,"<sup>27</sup> the latter of which establishes "relations between variables, variables being concepts that can take different values."<sup>28</sup> Whereas laws can be induced from sets of statistics, a theory must be constructed from a set of assumptions and well-defined units. What results is "a depiction of the organization of a domain and of the connection among its parts."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Waltz, Kenneth Neal. *Theory of International Politics*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979, p. 49.

<sup>27</sup> Waltz, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Waltz, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Waltz, p. 8.

Unlike the hard sciences, a theory of international relations must also be an abstraction, a “pictured reality while simplifying it, say, through omission or through reduction of scale,” only being “indirectly related” to experimentation and observation.<sup>30</sup> In fact, Waltz argues that international relations as a field has too many variables and observable samples that are too small to be theorized any other way. Furthermore, in his view, a theory should also be descriptive rather than prescriptive; it should seek to explain the world as it is rather than what states should do. Neorealism, for example, argues that states always will, as opposed to should, seek to maximize their security. Moreover, a theory can be deterministic or probabilistic. A well-developed probabilistic theory will give reasons explains the rationale for why certain conditions lead to varied outcomes.

### **Waltzian Theory**

Of course, if we were to only listen to Waltz, most schools of IR theory taught contemporarily would be considered something else entirely. Neoconservatism would certainly not be considered an IR theory. Waltz restricts IR theories to those that derive their explanations “at the international, and not at the national, level.”<sup>31</sup> Somewhat smugly, Waltz comments, “That is why the theory is called a theory of international politics,” as opposed to, say, a theory of foreign policy. While I agree with Waltz’ definition of IR theory to a point, I disagree with this last point, for if it were to be true, IR theories could necessarily only be structural. If this were the case, classical realism would not be considered an IR theory. Indeed, in Waltz’ younger days, he argued that theories of international politics could come from any of the three ‘images’, and analysis

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<sup>30</sup> Waltz, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Waltz, Kenneth Neal. “International Politics Is Not Foreign Policy.” *Security Studies* 6, no. 1 (2007): 54–57. doi:10.1080/09636419608429298, 54.

of only a single image gives a depiction of international relations that is not complete. He was originally quite clear about this, saying “the prescriptions directly derived from a single image are incomplete because they are based upon partial analyses. The partial quality of each image sets up tension that drives one toward inclusion of the other.”<sup>32</sup>

### **IR Theory versus Theories of Foreign Policy**

It is also possible that neoconservatism is really theory of foreign policy and not of international relations, as when neoconservatives, particularly Irving Kristol, write of relations between states, they constantly remind the reader that they are referring to the realm of foreign policy, not of that of international relations theory. Colin Elman defines the former as that which “policy makes determinate predictions for dependent variable(s) that measure the behavior of individual states.”<sup>33</sup> Theories of foreign policy, unlike international relations theories, do not predict about aggregate state or system outcomes, only the behavior of particular states. Moreover, “a theory of foreign policy explains how statesmen act; it does not primarily provide advice as to how they should act.”<sup>34</sup> Theories of foreign policy are almost always determinate as opposed to probabilistic.

Interestingly, Elman argues that neorealism can serve as a theory of foreign policy *and* international relations. Because neorealism does make predictions about state behavior under certain conditions, it can be used to make foreign policy predictions. For example, under Jervis’ security dilemma theory, if states’ intentions cannot be determined, and it is

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<sup>32</sup> Waltz, Kenneth Neal. *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis*. Revised edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001, p. 230.

<sup>33</sup> Elman, Colin. “Horses for Courses: Why Not Neorealist Theories of Foreign Policy?” *Security Studies* 6, no. 1 (2007): 7–53, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Elman, p. 16.

easier to conquer a state through offensive force than it is to defend oneself, a state is more likely to attempt to bandwagon with a superpower than to balance against it.<sup>35</sup> If these conditions can be observed in the real world, there is nothing that prevents this theory from being applied to specific countries, as a theory of foreign policy would. Mearsheimer applies his neorealist framework to the relations between modern ‘superpowers’ and argues that it is inevitable that Russia and the United States will balance against an emerging China. Along with Walt, Mearsheimer says that “offshore balancing is a realist grand strategy.”<sup>36</sup> Ironically, even Waltz, the godfather of structural realism, wrote extensively on the subject of nuclear deterrence, speaking about it in both abstract and foreign policy terms.<sup>37</sup> Strategy in this context is essentially long term military foreign policy, and thus it appears that neorealism can be used for foreign policy purposes. Furthermore, there have been notable members of the US government to implement a realist foreign policy, including former United States Secretary of State and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, who saw *realpolitik* as the most effective method of foreign policy. Shibley Telhami disagrees with Elman, saying that neorealism “does not provide a theory of foreign policy” but can be used “as a framework for further inquiry, not as the end of inquiry” for surely material, security and power based factors greatly impacts foreign policy decision making.<sup>38</sup> To what extent neorealism is a theory of foreign policy is beyond the scope of this paper, but if neorealism, probably the most

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<sup>35</sup> Jervis, Robert. “Security Regimes.” *International Organization* 36, no. 2 (1982): 357–78.

<sup>36</sup> Mearsheimer, John, and Stephen M. Walt. “The Case for Offshore Balancing.” *Foreign Affairs*, August 2016, p. 72.

<sup>37</sup> For instance, see Waltz, Kenneth N. “Nuclear Myths and Political Realities.” *The American Political Science Review* 84, no. 3 (1990): 731–45; Waltz, Kenneth N. “Why Iran Should Get the Bomb: Nuclear Balancing Would Mean Stability.” *Foreign Affairs* 91 (2012): 2.

<sup>38</sup> Telbami, Shibley. “Kenneth Waltz, Neorealism, and Foreign Policy.” *Security Studies* 11, no. 3 (2002): 158–70. doi:10.1080/714005344, p. 159.

famous of IR theories, can arguably be applied as both a theory of foreign policy and of international relations, then it is possible that neoconservatism could be as well.

### **Mid-Level Theory**

Neoconservative IR theory might fall into a category which David Lake calls ‘eclectic, mid-level theory.’<sup>39</sup> Mid-level theory does not defend “any single set of assumptions, [but] builds theories to address specific problems of world politics.”<sup>40</sup> In mid-level theories, “there are no primordial units of analysis, only methodological ‘bets’ about which unit of aggregation is most likely to produce tractable and empirically powerful explanations.”<sup>41</sup> In way neoconservatism does this, as it originally was a set of ideals designed to promote peace through the propagation of American hegemony.

Neoconservatives themselves would likely view their own ideology as more of a series of methodological bets than a concrete IR theory. In this way, neoconservatism somewhat resembles the IR theorizing before the rise of the second debate (the debate between proponents of behaviorism versus proponents of historicist), many of which refrained from limiting themselves to a singular level of analysis. For example, Morgenthau rooted much of his analysis of states in human nature, but acknowledged that statesmen had to think in a more nuanced way, protecting the national interest irrespective of moralistic viewpoints.<sup>42</sup> Neoconservatives normally look at states as their units of analysis, but also look at statesmen as actors and even human beings at an individual level in general.

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<sup>39</sup> Lake, David A. “Theory Is Dead, Long Live Theory: The End of the Great Debates and the Rise of Eclecticism in International Relations.” *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 3 (September 1, 2013): 567–87, p. 571.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 573.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Morgenthau, Hans Joachim. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1948.

Furthermore, several aspects of neoconservative IR theory, rather than the whole, might be deemed 'mid-level theory'. Irving Kristol's theory of deterrence (or rather, his staunch opposition to deterrence theory) might fit this criteria. He argues that conventional deterrence theory, which holds that states will refrain from attacking a nuclearized state conventionally for fear of nuclear retaliation, is flawed because it assumes that a government will make the decision to launch a 'first-strike' attack without considering the public opinion. In the event that country that would be the recipient of the first-strike also has nuclear weapons, the public is unlikely to support the use of nuclear weapons, as it is likely to suffer when the attacked country launches a 'second-strike'. This theory is designed specifically to address the how nuclear weapons can or cannot prevent conventional war and uses more than one level of analysis, making it closer to Lake's mid-level theory than Waltz' grand structural theory. And, as mentioned previously, Waltz himself wrote on nuclear deterrence very much in this way, undermining his own claim.

### **Combatting Waltzian Conceptions of Theory**

Additionally, whereas Waltz would argue for theory construction to be done in a positivist, unbiased manner, Neoconservatism is not only 'biased', but openly so. Neoconservatives are nearly all American and their writing reflects their intentions to make the world a more stable place for their country of origin. Of course, they also argue that doing so results in a safer world overall, but that is neither here nor there to positivists. Robert Cox, a critical theorist, argues that to theorize in an unbiased manner is impossible, for "theory is always for someone and for some purpose." In fact, much of

the critiques of the ‘bias’ that neoconservatives unabashedly harbor are projected onto neorealists by the likes of Cox. Neorealists are also primarily old, white, American intellectuals who seek the maintenance of the status-quo, which conveniently happens to situate the United States in a unipolar current reality. And yet, no one, including the critical theorists, argues that neorealism is not a theory of international relations as result of its bias. Nor should it disqualify neoconservatism, however biased it may be.

Robert Cox argues that Waltz’, and those who have come to accept his anarchical assumptions (like Keohane), conception of international relations is too narrow and too readily accepts the Westphalian structure of the world as inherent. He divides international relations theories into two strains, problem solving and critical. Problem solving theory views the world ‘as it is’ (or at least how it thinks it is) and takes “the prevailing social and power relationships...as the given framework for action.”<sup>43</sup> Critical theory “does not take institutions and social and power relations for granted but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing.”<sup>44</sup> According to critical theory, the structures and assumptions that problem-solving theory assumes as static are put in their historical context and assumed to be malleable. Cox’s theory of international relations, Marxist at its core, is nearly equally as up front about its intentions- to “allow for normative choice in favour of a social political order *different* from the prevailing order.”<sup>45</sup> Much of critical theorists’ problem with problem solving theories is that by assuming the structures and

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<sup>43</sup> Cox, Robert W. “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory.” *Millennium* 10, no. 2 (June 1, 1981): 126–55. doi:10.1177/03058298810100020501, p. 128.

<sup>44</sup> Cox, p. 129.

<sup>45</sup> Cox, p. 130. Emphasis mine.

institutions in which they analyze are static, they reinforce the permanence of said structures and institutions without giving thought to their ability to change.

Alexander Wendt's social constructivism is a prime example of this. Wendt firmly puts his theory in the problem-solving camp, noting "the ability to shed interesting light on concrete problems of world politics must ultimately be the test of a method's worth." He agrees with Waltz on other assumptions, such as that that international relations needs to make aggregate, rather than of specific units, explanations (though he say that IR and theories of foreign policy are "complementary rather than competitive").<sup>46</sup> More controversially, Wendt says that "constructivism is not a theory of international politics," nor are social theories, because "they do not tell us which actors to study or where they are constructed."<sup>47</sup> He argues that 'social theory' does count as a theory of international relations because it does tell us which actors to study (states) and, though somewhat heavy handedly, tells us how they are constructed.

Ironically, one of the strongest arguments in favor of considering neoconservatism as an international relations theory comes from postmodern and critical IR theorists (such as Cox), who "refuse to treat the discipline of international relations as a discrete discourse with its own rigid intellectual boundaries, distinctive concepts, language, and subject matter."<sup>48</sup> In their pursuit of critiquing the 'conservative' nature of the IR field, postmodern and critical IR theorists ironically opened the door of the ivory tower to neoconservatism.

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<sup>46</sup> Wendt, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Burchill, Scott, Richard Devetak, Andrew Linklater, Matthew Paterson, Christian Reus-Smit, and Jacqui True. *Theories of International Relations, Second Edition*. 2nd edition. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, p. 10.

Critical theorists have brought to light the deficiencies of problem-solving theories such as neorealism and neoliberalism. By evaluating the world for what it is, neorealist and neoliberal explanatory models can help to reduce interstate conflict. But relations between nations are not limited to wars, nor are wars limited to relations between states. After all, much of post-Cold War warfare has come in the form of civil war, which neorealism does not do a good job of explaining. Thus, grand theories, such as neorealism, while still very useful, are not as grand, or as all-encompassing as they claim to be. Nor can they be, for in international relations theory some variables will inevitably be ignored for the sake of parsimony. I do believe that a grand theory can theoretically exist, but the vast, complex nature of the world leads me to resign to the idea that a true grand theory is as real as the platonic forms. To paraphrase Keohane, given the lack of empirical data in world politics, you would have to be an idiot to ‘solve’ international relations.<sup>49</sup>

What we are left with is a smattering of international relations theories that try to either explain how states act or try to understand how we conceive particular precepts when explaining.<sup>50</sup> Neoliberal and neorealism explain how states interact given a set international system. Green political theory shows how international relations is anthropocentric and argues that there is a ‘limit to growth’ that could lead to conflict and environmental crises. Feminist IR theorists critique the gendered language and structures of more ‘conventional’ IR theories in order to move the field away from masculine

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<sup>49</sup> Keohane, p. 10.

<sup>50</sup> See Hollis, Martin, and Steve Smith. *Explaining and Understanding International Relations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.

constructs such as militarization and anarchy.<sup>51</sup> Marxist IR theory criticized the exploitation of the global proletariat at the hands of the global bourgeoisie. And so forth. But how much of the world does an IR theory have to either explain or understand? If I were to write a theory that says that institutions and state structures are toxic manifestations of the bias against the open-boat whaling industry and that these structures need to be contextualized and transcended, would this be considered an international relations theory? By the standards of critical IR theorists, yes, if the fictitious theory may be difficult to support. This broadening of the field allows for the possibility of neoconservatism to be framed as an international relations theory without restricting it to Waltzian or Wendtian rigorosity.

### **Criteria for an IR Theory**

Given the increasingly broad nature of current state of international relations theory, what then does neoconservatism need to be in order to qualify as an IR theory? First, the theories cannot be specific to particular states, otherwise the theory will be of foreign policy and not international relations. Rather, the theory should explain the behavior of units, institutions, or systems at an aggregate level, *or* shed light on how we come to think about this behavior. Any unit of analysis can be the basis of an IR theory, insofar as it directly relates to world politics. This is an important hurdle for neoconservatism, as generally its proponents speak only of the foreign policy of the United States. In regards to Hollis and Smith's explaining versus understanding differentialization, I present neoconservatism as a theory that does the former. In this fashion, neoconservatism is

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<sup>51</sup> Green theory and feminist theory of international relations are both incredibly varied schools. Examples of their supposed 'purposes' here are used to represent the variability of IR theory as a field, not to limit these theories to the stated purposes above.

essentially an ontological theory. As neoconservatives are primarily not academics, they are mostly policy makers and journalists, it would not make sense to base a theory of neoconservatism around the questioning of epistemology, I do stipulate, though, that – in order for international relations to not completely lose meaning – an ontological IR theory of it should include the behavior of states in some way. Non-state actors can be the unit of analysis, but some of that analysis should include the interaction of non-state actors with states. Marxian theories aside, though states are not the only actors in the international system, they are the most dominant; any ontological theory that excludes them would be mostly useless.

Second, at a basic level an ontological theory must be a set of ideas explaining how and why states or other units interact. This is basically the first part of Cox' dichotomy, but with the caveat that problem-solving theories do not necessarily have to set out to solve problems. 'Problem solving' is a misnomer for two reasons. First, it denies that critical theories can intend to solve problems. Global Ecology has a more direct aim of problem solving than neorealism, which considers itself purely positivistic, and yet the latter is considered 'problem solving' while the former is considered 'critical'. Cox's own theory is at its core Marxist and posits ways in which globalist structures can be overcome.

Dividing structural forces in the categories of material capabilities, institutions, or ideas is not that much different than Waltz saying that the predominant structural force is anarchy. Cox "has not acknowledged the possibility of quasi-critical theories, which may have a high degree of reform content short of structural changes."<sup>52</sup> Moreover, Wendt

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<sup>52</sup> Moolakkattu, John S. "Robert W. Cox and Critical Theory of International Relations." *International Studies* 46, no. 4 (October 1, 2009): 439–56. doi:10.1177/002088171004600404, p. 454.

attempts with some success to frame his structural constructivism as just as ‘useful’ in explaining the world as neorealism and neoliberalism, theories which would fall under the problem solving umbrella. Second, ontological theories seek primarily to explain the world, not to solve problems. Waltz’ neorealism seeks to explain the world as it is, not for some ulterior motive. Waltz had no problem to solve except for the lack of the existence of an IR theory. The potential for overlap between problem solving and critical theories results in not having “any criteria for determining whether a given theory is problem-solving or critical.”<sup>53</sup>

With this in mind, I label ontological theories that fall under the first category as ‘mechanismic’ and for those under the second category I will maintain Cox’s ‘critical’ terminology.<sup>54</sup> For mechanismic theories, whether it holds that relationships between units are causal or constitutive, are of first level analysis or second, ultimately they must explain the behavior of units, why units do what they do. Actions included under this conception of international relations theory can result in any or all of a plethora of outcomes. War, pollution, colonialism, genocide, a patriarchal world system, it doesn't matter really. But some behavior within the realm of world politics must be explained. Neoconservatism is fairly straightforward; at its most basic level it evaluates the probability of war based on assumptions it shares with the democratic peace theory. I will more thoroughly address this in chapter three.

Finally, the theory’s mechanisms should, in the words of Andrew Moravcsik, “*demonstrate empirical accuracy vis à vis other theories*; it should expose anomalies in

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> I also do not rule out the possibility of a theory containing elements of both.

existing work, forcing reconsideration of empirical findings and theoretical positions.”<sup>55</sup>

While this may seem restrictive and overly behaviorist, it allows me to compare neoconservatism to most of the leading ontological international relations theories (again, Marxianism aside). To quote Waltz, “a theory is made credible only in proportion to the variety and difficulty of the tests,” though at the same time “no theory can ever be proved true.”<sup>56</sup> Empirical accuracy is important because without it we would be left with many theories that have no particular amount of truth than the other, as one can “find evidence to support almost any interpretation in an author who writes profoundly and at length about complicated matters.”<sup>57</sup> With this said, it is beyond the scope of this paper to actually do this rigorous testing; I will leave this to future neoconservatives.

The field of international relations is broader than it ever has been before. The impact of critical theorists allows for a broader range of ideologies, including neoconservatism, to be considered an IR theory. Even though neoconservatism doesn’t meet Waltz’s definition of theory, not many theories do, including arguably Waltz’s own theory. Using my broader definition of theory we can earnestly judge the merits of neoconservatism as an international relations theory.

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<sup>55</sup> Moravcsik, Andrew. “Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics.” *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (1997): 513–53, p. 516.

<sup>56</sup> Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> Waltz, p. 45.

### **Chapter 3: A Brief History of Neoconservatism**

To fully understand neoconservatism in the context of international relations theory, it is imperative that neoconservatism be put into historical context. Where did the neoconservatives come from? When did neoconservatism as a term first come to be used?

Though the developers of neoconservatism initially focused on domestic politics before eventually becoming critics of leftist social engineering, they continuously held strict anti-communist views. Though anti-communism was certainly far from unique in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s, the neoconservatives' anti-communism it is worth noting because of the metamorphosis from anti-communism to anti-authoritarianism that eventually became the focal point of neoconservative foreign policy. Moreover, anti-communism served to establish several other ideological stances of neoconservatives, such as skepticism of international organizations and belief in the necessity of a robust military.

For the purposes of clarity, I will use the *ex post facto* term proto-neoconservative to categorize the students, writers, and academics who would at some point become neoconservatives, though ideologically they at most only vaguely resemble their future selves, at least at first.

#### **From Trotskyism to the “Vital Center”**

However you wish to categorize neoconservatism, it is generally agreed that its seeds were planted in alcove number 1 of the dining hall of the City College of New York (CCNY) in West Harlem. Anti-communist in the late 1930s even before the Red Scare a

decade later, the CCNY students distrusted the Soviet Union and what it stood for, not out of nationalistic pride or right-wing scaremongering, but because they were anti-Stalin. The students of alcove number 1, including Irving Kristol, Seymour Martin Lipset, Daniel Bell and Nathaniel Glazer, were sympathetic to Marxism but could not stand to “justify the Moscow trials and the bloody purge of old Bolsheviks,...accept the self-glorification of Joseph Stalin as an exemplar of Communist virtue and wisdom,...[and] deny that there were concentration camps in the Soviet Union,”<sup>58</sup> while the far more numerous students of the pro-Stalinist camp could.

Though Kristol would admit that while at CCNY “very little did happen” in terms of substantial impact on the greater college community, most chronologies of neoconservatism conclude that the CCNY chapter of the proto-neoconservative brood was important for two reasons. First, it instilled in the group a firm belief in anti-communism. Though ideologically not far from communists (the students of alcove number 1 were avid readers of the *Partisan Review*), the disturbing actualities of Soviet communism stuck with the proto-neoconservatives through their various ideological transformations. Second, the great promise and great failure of communism, and the proto-neoconservatives’ turn away from it, is representative of the future turns rightward that they would have throughout their careers. In a sense, the proto-neoconservatives did not move away from communism out of action but out of reaction, which too will be a similar theme in their ideological history.

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<sup>58</sup> Kristol, Irving. “Memoirs of a Trotskyist.” *The New York Times*, January 23, 1977, sec. Archives. <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/01/23/archives/memoirs-of-a-trotskyist-memoirs.html>.

As World War II passed, proto-neoconservatives drifted rightward, coming to be a part of what Arthur Schlesinger called the “vital center” of liberalism.<sup>59</sup> Many were members of the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), a political organization which sought to promote the continuation of New Deal programs, support democratic candidates, and fight communism. Unlike the Progressive Citizens of America (PCA), a more leftist group which the ADA struggled with for influence in the Democratic Party, the ADA supported the Truman Doctrine, including \$400 million in economic and military aid to Greece and Turkey, and the Marshall Plan. Aid packages were promoted both for humanitarian reasons and as a buttress against communist advances.

Proto-neoconservatives expressed their anti-communism in different ways. Kristol believed that pro-communist speech need not be protected, as communism for him was “a movement guided by conspiracy and aiming at totalitarianism, rather than merely another form of ‘dissent’ or ‘nonconformity.’” Rather than combatting McCarthy with the false dichotomy of “complete civil liberties for everyone and a disregard for civil liberties entirely,” Kristol thought that liberals should push for something closer in degree to the former, while also denouncing communism absolutely. Just as it would have been ridiculous to defend pro-Nazi speech in the 1930s, the same was true of pro-communism in the 1950s. For Kristol, “There is a false pride, by which liberals persuade themselves that no matter what association a man has had with a Communist enterprise, he is

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<sup>59</sup> Schlesinger, Arthur. *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949.

absolutely guiltless of the crimes that Communism has committed so long as he was moved to this association by a generous idealism.”<sup>60</sup>

Others in the “vital center” thought this to be a dangerous proposition, for any violation of freedom of speech and association rights would set a dubious precedent. Nathan Glazer said that “it is a shame and an outrage that Senator McCarthy should remain in the Senate” and that McCarthy “has undoubtedly damaged the effectiveness of government agencies carrying important responsibilities in the fight against Communism,” though he believed American institutions would prevent any long term damage to civil liberties. Seymour Martin Lipset viewed McCarthy as a populist who represented the “radical right.”<sup>61</sup>

Kristol co-founded (with covert CIA funding) the London-based magazine *Encounter* in order to promote center-left positions as a positive alternative to communism. Though the funding would eventually raise controversy, Kristol used *Encounter* as a platform to spread his anti-communist, pro-liberal message to a larger audience. For instance, he wrote that:

Liberals ought to be concerned with all ‘changes and reforms tending in the direction of democracy.’ But it is a fact that Communism today rules one-third of

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<sup>60</sup> Kristol, Irving. “‘Civil Liberties,’ 1952 - A Study in Confusion.” *Commentary Magazine* (blog), March 1952. <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/civil-liberties-1952-a-study-in-confusiondo-we-defend-our-rights-by-protecting-communists/>.

<sup>61</sup> Theoharis, Athan. “The Politics of Scholarship: Liberals, Anti-Communism, and McCarthyism.” In *The Specter: Original Essays on the Cold War and the Origins of McCarthyism*, 264–80. New York, N.Y.: New Viewpoints, 1974, p. 266.

the human race, and may soon rule more; and that it is the most powerful existing institution which opposes such changes and reforms as liberalism proposes.<sup>62</sup>

Kristol himself actually at this time had foreign policy views that slightly differed than those of his later self. For instance, with a tip of the hat to the United Nations he wrote that “no one thinks it at all strange that scholars should devise plans for universal peace on the assumption that mankind will remain as belligerent as ever” for to “achieve ideals without [the] benefit of idealism or idealists is so fundamental an aspect of social theory in our epoch.”<sup>63</sup>

### **Reaction to New Left**

Neoconservatism did not come into its own until the late 1960s, however. This time, neoconservatives like Bell and Kristol moved steadily away from the center-left and towards the center-right, all the while remaining staunchly anti-communist.

Neoconservatism developed in part as an opposition to the New Left, which broadly included, amongst other groups, the Students for a Democratic Society, the Free Speech Movement, and the Congress on Racial Equality. These groups believed that racial equality and women’s liberation should be prioritized over the economic struggle of the (mostly white) lower-middle class, which was primarily represented by the AFL-CIO. The New Left was more in favor of government intervention than the AFL-CIO, which tended to appreciate government support but did not want to over-rely on it to achieve gains that could otherwise be achieved through worker-employer negotiations. The New Left was unsatisfied with this tactic, seeing it as slow and limited in scope. Viewing the

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<sup>62</sup> Kristol, Irving. “Negative Liberalism.” *Encounter*, January 1954, 2–4.

<sup>63</sup> Kristol, Irving. “Socialism without Socialists.” *Encounter*, 1956, 81–83, p. 81.

working class as “indoctrinated and apathetic,” social change should be initiated by student and African-American groups. The Port Huron statement, the SDS’ political manifesto, proclaimed that “Any new left in America must be, in large measure, a left with real intellectual skills, committed to deliberativeness, honesty, reflection as working tools.”<sup>64</sup>

The proto-neoconservatives saw the New Left as a threat for three reasons. First, they found the New Left’s radicalism to be a cannibalization of the lower-middle classes and their struggle for incremental wage increases, better workplace conditions, and job stability. Second, they thought this lurch leftwards would alienate southern blue-collar Democrats and lead to electoral losses to Republicans due to their seeming abandonment. While obviously the proto-neoconservatives were in favor of the expansion of civil rights, they thought that demand for immediate results would be counterproductive. Better instead would have it been to elect the likes of Lyndon Johnson who, if not the most progressive, could at least win. In effect they were right, at least electorally. Most notably, center-left Governor Pat Brown of California, having finagled the 1965 Watts riots, lost his reelection campaign in 1966 to ‘law and order’ candidate Ronald Reagan. In 1972, President Richard Nixon defeated leftist candidate George McGovern by 22 percentage points; McGovern only won one state, Massachusetts.

Third, the New Left was in favor of a defense spending rollback, critical of the military and, most importantly, not anti-communist. Proto-neoconservatives, seeing military spending necessary for deterrence vis à vis the Soviet Union, saw SDS leader Tom

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<sup>64</sup> “Port Huron Statement.” Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), June 15, 1962. <https://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/1111huron.html>.

Hayden's foreign policy stance, that "the proclaimed peaceful intentions of the United States contradicted its economic and military investments in the Cold War status quo," as both false and naïve.<sup>65</sup> During the heart of the Vietnam War protests, Irving Kristol wrote that "the United Nations, the Marshall Plan, the Truman doctrine, foreign aid, NATO, Korea, Viet Nam--these were all elements in a grand design for a world where each nation would be persuaded, shamed, coerced, and bribed to observe the civilities essential to a decent international community."<sup>66</sup> He admitted that this statement was more than a little hypocritical, for at the time all of these foreign policy maneuvers combined to form a "convenient cover for national self-centredness."<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, for the proto-neoconservatives it needn't had to be. The answer to the problem of Vietnam was not a return to pre-World War II isolationism nor was it to celebrate the likes of Castro, Arafat, and Nasser merely because they were supposedly anti-imperialist, but to continue to combat communism and its supporters because of the inherit threats it posed to democracy.

### **Neoconservatism and the 'Jewish Connection'**

In the midst of the rise of the New Left the Six Day War erupted, deeply impacting the ideological development of proto-neoconservatives. Though not all neoconservatives were Jewish, a great number including Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, Nathan Glazer, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Daniel Bell were. Later neoconservatives like Elliot Abrams, Richard Perle, Robert and Frederick Kagan, Max Boot, Paul Wolfowitz, Bret Stephens, and David Brooks are also Jewish. The "Jewish connection" amongst the earlier

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Kristol, Irving. "A New Isolationism." *Encounter* 26, no. 6 (1966): 49–53, p. 51.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

neoconservatives in particular is neither merely coincidental nor a grand conspiracy; much of it has to do with their origin at CCNY and the generally large representation of Jews on the left, radical or not.

The “Jewishness” of the neoconservative movement is important for two reasons, both involving their views of Israel. First, the Six Day War drove a wedge between Jews and the New Left. Not all American Jews at the time supported Israel,<sup>68</sup> but the proto-neoconservatives certainly did. Indeed, on the second day of the Six Day War Kristol, Podhoretz, Bell, Glazer, and Lipset all signed a petition published in the New York Times<sup>69</sup> asking President Johnson to not “let Israel perish” and instead “act to assure its survival and to secure, legality, morality and peace in the area” by providing “freedom of passage through the Strait of Tiran and the Gulf of Aqaba, a right which is indispensable to Israel’s existence.”<sup>70</sup> In return many members of the New Left expressed their support for the PLO and the coalition of Arab states. Equating Zionism with racism and imperialism, the New Left and in particular black militants denounced Israeli occupation, with rhetoric that sometimes delved into anti-Semitism.

In spite of their Jewish background, neoconservatives would likely have supported Israel regardless of religious bent. Both Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Jeane Kirkpatrick, U.S. ambassadors to the United Nations under Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan, respectively, strongly advocated for Israel, were neoconservative, but not Jewish. At the same time, to say that there is no relation with the Jewishness of the neoconservative movement and its

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<sup>68</sup> Some like Noam Chomsky were notable critics.

<sup>69</sup> Other notable signees included Milton Friedman, Hannah Arendt, and Michael Harrington.

<sup>70</sup> “To Uphold Our Own Honor.” Americans for Democracy in the Middle East, published in *The New York Times*, June 7, 1967. [http://neoconservatism.vaisse.net/doku.php?id=to\\_uphold\\_our\\_own\\_honor](http://neoconservatism.vaisse.net/doku.php?id=to_uphold_our_own_honor).

affinity to Israel is difficult. *Commentary Magazine*, which published some of the most prominent articles in defense of Israel during the 1970s, was founded by the American Jewish Committee. Two of *Commentary's* goals are “to maintain, sustain, and cultivate the future of the Jewish people” and “to bear witness against anti-Semitism and defend Zionism and the State of Israel.”<sup>71</sup>

And yet, the charge put upon neoconservatives that their allegiances lie closer to Jerusalem than Washington, as posited numerous times by Pat Buchanan, and more recently by Joe Klein<sup>72</sup> and Greenwald,<sup>73</sup> is not so much anti-Semitic as it is irrelevant.<sup>74</sup> Neoconservatives, Jews and non-Jews alike, back Israel because they believe Israel to be a two-folded embodiment of the neoconservative foreign policy ethos. That is, neoconservatives believe supporting Israel to be in the best interest of the United States both for security reasons and because it has been regarded (albeit controversially) as the only democracy in the Middle East. For instance, Boot writes that the neoconservatives’ commitment to Israel is “a commitment based not on shared religion or ethnicity but on shared liberal democratic values.”<sup>75</sup> During the Cold War, an alliance with Israel was seen as a balancing force against the Soviet Union and their proxies in the Middle East. Today, the United States’ alliance with Israel is done to support a fellow democracy. William Kristol writes that Israel’s part in the 2006 Lebanon War was a part of a broader

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<sup>71</sup> “About Us.” *Commentary Magazine* (blog), 2016. <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/about/>.

<sup>72</sup> Goldberg, Jeffrey. “Joe Klein on Neoconservatives and Iran.” *The Atlantic*, July 29, 2008. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2008/07/joe-klein-on-neoconservatives-and-iran/8614/>.

<sup>73</sup> Greenwald, Glenn. “The Right’s Game-Playing with ‘dual Loyalty’ and ‘anti-Semitism’ Accusations.” *Salon*, July 2, 2008. [https://www.salon.com/2008/07/02/israel\\_iran/](https://www.salon.com/2008/07/02/israel_iran/).

<sup>74</sup> Both Klein and Greenwald also happen to be Jewish.

<sup>75</sup> Boot, Max. “Neocons.” *Foreign Policy*, no. 140 (2004): 20–28.

Islamist “attack” on “liberal democratic civilization.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, even if Jewish neoconservatives had dual-loyalty with both Israel and the U.S., neoconservatives argue that the opposite is worse: reduced support for Israel is a detriment to the United States. Support for Israel also helped to develop the neoconservatives’ distrust of the United Nations and autocracies. Moynihan famously denounced before the United Nations that resolution 3379, which determined “that Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination,”<sup>77</sup> to be a “lie” that would result in “grave and perhaps irreparable harm...to the cause of human rights.”<sup>78</sup> While the United Nations was supposed to be a force of justice and stability, its democratic nature had led it to be hijacked by undemocratic regimes. In their eyes, what right did Cuba, Libya, and Kampuchea have to make moralistic decrees, particularly at the expense of a democracy? Moynihan saw the “passing [of] the resolution meant that the lunatics were taking over the asylum,”<sup>79</sup> and even if the General Assembly could send no armies, it deserved to be denounced. Outside of support for Israel, which I have demonstrated to not exclusive to Jewish neoconservatives, the Jewish background of the majority of neoconservatives is more of a conspiratorial trope for those on the far left and far right than an actual determining characteristic. At most, the Jewishness of neoconservatives was a mutual unifying

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<sup>76</sup> Kristol, William. “It’s Our War.” *Weekly Standard*, July 24, 2006.

<https://www.weeklystandard.com/william-kristol/its-our-war>.

<sup>77</sup> Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Pub. L. No. 3379 (1975). <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/000/92/IMG/NR000092.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>78</sup> Moynihan, Daniel Patrick. Response to United Nations Resolution 3379 (1975).

Interestingly, Moynihan’s argument against the ‘Zionism is Racism’ resolution was that it did not define racism, and only UN definition of racism was the Soviet Union’s 1968 equivalence of racism to Nazism. He even conceded that Israel could be “many things, theoretically including many things undesirable,” but given that Zionism was inherently religious, not racial (especially given the inflow of Arab Jews to Israel in the 1950s), it could not be racist.

<sup>79</sup> Buckley, Tom. “Brawler at the U.N.” *The New York Times*. December 7, 1975.

characteristic of the proto-neoconservatives, but the same can be said of the relative poverty, as most early neoconservatives were born fairly poor, including those non-Jewish, like Moynihan. Besides, neoconservatives and their distaste for quotas are the first to denounce supposed 'identity politics.' To peg the shortcomings of neoconservatism on their collective Jewishness seems intellectually lazy.

### **Historiography of Neoconservatism**

The actual date of the adoption of the term "neoconservatism" is a matter of dispute. Seymour Martin Lipset claims that neoconservatism was coined by Michael Harrington, leader of the Democratic Socialists, "in order to discredit the right wing of the dissolved party, Social Democrats USA, and their intellectual fellow travelers."<sup>80</sup> Lipset saw this as an example of what sociologists call "labelling". Without the label of neoconservative, the right wing of the liberal movement would not have been shunned by the left wing nor would have it been courted by the editors of the conservative *National Review*. The label "quickly took hold and became part of the American political discourse" and led to a confusion over the neoconservatives' true ideological standpoint.<sup>81</sup> For example, many in the United States and elsewhere assumed that "neoconservatives were hard-line right-wingers on domestic as well as foreign issues, whereas in fact almost all of them remained supportive of [the] welfare planning state and New Deal policies."<sup>82</sup> Though Norman Podhoretz and to a lesser extent Irving Kristol did eventually break from the

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<sup>80</sup> Lipset, Seymour Martin. "Neoconservatism: Myth and Reality." *Society* 25, no. 5 (August 7, 1988): 29–37, p. 31.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Democratic party, others like Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Nathan Glazer remained Democrats their entire lives.

Harrington for his part denies Lipset's claim, saying that it was commonly used amongst his fellow editors at *Dissent* magazine years before he first used the term in his 1973 article "The Welfare State and Its Neoconservative Critics", published in *Dissent*. Justin Vaïsse of the Brookings Institution formulated three potential hypotheses for the "birth of neoconservatism": 1965, the year Kristol and Bell first published *The Public Interest*; 1967, both the year *The Public Interest* first published articles demonizing the welfare state and the year of the Six Day War; or 1970, when Norman Podhoretz shifted the editorial stance of *Commentary* from generally liberal to unmistakably neoconservative.

Harrington's article was the first of its kind that I could find, but ultimately there cannot be one date of the founding of neoconservatism. As a movement, unlike a political party, neoconservatism has no charter, no mission statement, and no chairman. But the ideas of neoconservatism certainly existed in a concrete form in 1967, and they didn't change until at least the 1980s.

### **Shift to Foreign Policy**

By the 1970s, the neoconservatives had transitioned away from domestic policy towards foreign policy. The New Left was less relevant and under Nixon so too were debates on domestic policy. Norman Podhoretz moved *Commentary* to focus more on foreign policy, serving as a mouthpiece for Moynihan and Jeane Kirkpatrick. Most prominent, neoconservatives rallied around Henry "Scoop" Jackson, a democratic Senator from Washington State. Jackson was firmly pro-Israel and anti-détente. Most notable during

his six terms in the Senate was the passing of the Jackson-Vanik amendment to the Trade Act of 1974. The Trade Act was supposed to be a landmark step towards achieving détente with the Soviet bloc because it would have opened up Soviet markets and created trade linkages. Jackson was against the bill for three reasons. First, he saw trade with the Soviet Union, and détente more broadly, as a threat to the United States. Jackson wanted the Soviet Union to fall, not be propped up by outside American technology. Second, Jackson was a strong supporter of unions, most of which were against the bill for it would open up U.S. manufacturing to competition from the Soviets. Third, he thought that the bill let the Soviet Union off easy in respect to human rights; it should not be rewarded for, say, denying its citizens the right to immigrate to Israel. The amendment thus denied most favored nation status to nations that “[denied] its citizens the right or opportunity to emigrate.”<sup>83</sup> When the Soviet Union could not meet an immigration quota of Russian Jews to Israel satisfactory for Jackson (100,000 per year), the Trade Act lost most of its usefulness.

Jackson’s influence and the foreign policy ideals of neoconservatives are quite evident in the 1976 Democratic Party platform. With the help of Richard Perle, Ben Wattenberg pledged the Democrats support for human rights, military strength, distrust of authoritarianism, and the necessity of military strength. It denounced the Republicans for giving “a greater concern for our relations with totalitarian adversaries than with our democratic allies.” In seeking to preserve the status quo, the Ford and Nixon administrations possessed a “self-fulfilling pessimism that contradicts a traditional American belief in the possibility of human progress.” It even threw a direct jab at

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<sup>83</sup> Trade Act of 1974, Pub. L. No. 61, § IV (1975).

Kissinger's realism, calling it a "balance-of-power diplomacy suited better to the last century than to this one."<sup>84</sup>

Unfortunately for the neoconservatives, they could not parlay Jackson's success against détente into gains in the executive branch. Jackson unsuccessfully ran for president in 1972 and 1976. His defeat at the hands of Jimmy Carter in 1976 became something of an inflection point for the relationship between neoconservatives and the Democratic Party. Carter was not initially viewed poorly by neoconservatives, but he quickly lost favor with them. No neoconservatives were included in cabinet; the only neoconservatives to get appointed a position at all were James Woolsey as undersecretary to the Navy, Max Kappelman as ambassador to the Conference on Security Cooperation in Europe, and Peter Rosenblatt as ambassador to Micronesia. Woolsey eventually resigned in protest of his "inadequate budget."<sup>85</sup> Neoconservatives charged Carter with being a dove. They denounced the Salt II talks out of distrust of the Soviets and the selling of F-16s to Saudi Arabia out of fear for Israel. At one point Carter held a breakfast in the White House with several prominent neoconservatives, including Wattenburg, Kirkpatrick, Abrams, and Podhoretz in order to secure their support in the 1980 election. It did not go well. Carter was defensive and according to Abrams "far from meeting [the] group halfway or indicating that he cared whether this group stayed Democrats, he basically indicated that

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<sup>84</sup> "1976 Democratic Party Platform." The Democratic Party, July 12, 1976. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29606>.

<sup>85</sup> Vaïsse, p. 133.

he did not give a goddamn.”<sup>86</sup> Kirkpatrick stormed out of the meeting and upon exiting told the awaiting press that she would vote for Reagan.

The meeting marked the conversion of the majority, but not all, of neoconservatives to the Republican Party. Richard Perle was named assistant secretary of defense for international security policy. Elliot Abrams became assistant secretary of state for international organizations. Kirkpatrick became Reagan’s ambassador to the United Nations. Wolfowitz was made Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Kappelman remained ambassador to the Conference on Security Cooperation in Europe. Kristol founded *The National Interest*, which quickly overtook Podhoretz’ *Commentary* as the preeminent publication of neoconservative thought.

The democratic neoconservatives dwindled and were marginalized from the greater movement. Scoop Jackson died in 1983. Moynihan had been elected as senator to New York in 1976 as a democrat; he would maintain both position and party until his retirement in 2001.<sup>87</sup> Having to compete in democratic primaries, Moynihan actually drifted leftward in comparison to the neoconservatives, by which time were on board with Reaganomics. Glazer and Bell remained Democrats, but were seen as too far right for most democrats. Regardless, Reagan and later George H.W. Bush dominated electorally, with Reagan carrying 49 states and Bush 40.

The next generation of neoconservatives were uniformly Republican. Not having the Trotskyist or even liberal origin of their forefathers (and in the case of William Kristol

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<sup>86</sup> Ehrman, John. *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1994*. Yale University Press, 1996, p. 135-6.

<sup>87</sup> His successor was Hillary Clinton.

and John Podhoretz, literal fathers), the ‘neocons’ had no reason to attach themselves to the Democratic Party, nor did their more free-market economics make the Democratic Party a viable option. *The Weekly Standard*, co-founded by William Kristol, became the neoconservatives’ preferred publication.

The most distinguishing characteristic of the neocons from prior neoconservatives is their unabashed defense of democracy and enthusiasm for intervention. No longer was democracy promotion viewed as an extension of containment and balancing against the Soviet Union, but became important for its own sake. In this aspect the neocons understood neoconservatism more than the like of Irving Kristol and Nathan Glazer. That is, neoconservatism had always been inherently ideological. Irving Kristol did not oppose the Soviet Union because of Moscow’s nuclear arsenal, or because Stalin was particularly brutal, but because he thought that communism was inherently expansionist and, given the brutality, disrespect for human rights and failed economic policy, was therefore a threat to the United States. Kristol<sup>88</sup> brushed aside Liberia’s fall at the hands of Charles Taylor, saying “if the Soviets (or the Chinese or even the Cubans) were involved, I’d know what to think, since we would be then be confronting a challenge.”<sup>89</sup>

### **The Bush Administration**

No history, however brief, of neoconservatism can be complete without a mention of the George W. Bush administration, which the neoconservatives relationship with is still subject to an almost conspiratorial tone. To be clear, George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld were not neoconservatives nor had any of the three even been

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<sup>88</sup> Ironically, his magazine, *The National Interest*, is today an almost entire realist publication.

<sup>89</sup> Kristol, Irving. “In Search of Our National Interest.” *Wall Street Journal*. June 7, 1990.

considered as neoconservatives before the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Bush in particular embraced neoconservative idealistic rhetoric during his two terms as president. Neither had the ideological underpinnings that actual neoconservatives had developed over the preceding decades. In fact, the Bush/Cheney campaign was highly critical of Clinton and his foreign policy in the lead-ups to the 2000 election, particularly his bombing of Serbia during the Kosovo War. To be sure, Bush and Cheney did employ several neoconservatives in high positions, such as Paul Wolfowitz as deputy Secretary of Defense, Douglas Feith a rung below him, and Elliot Abrams as senior director at the National Security Council. They were countered though by genuine realists in Condoleezza Rice as National Security advisor and Colin Powell as Secretary of State.

The obvious manifestation of neoconservative thinking in the Bush administration was the Iraq War. The war checked off nearly every neoconservative position on foreign policy. It was primarily an expression of the democratic peace and a distrust of autocracies, especially one that already had a track record of attempted conquest. For Bill Kristol and Robert Kagan, the outcomes of the Iraq war lay in the dichotomy of democracy versus authoritarianism. He wrote whether the U.S. would create a “world order conducive to our liberal democratic principles and our safety, or it will be one where brutal, well-armed tyrants are allowed to hold democracy and international security hostage?”<sup>90</sup> The initial coalition of fighting force, with the exception of the Kurdish Peshmerga, was made up entirely of democracies. The war confirmed the distrust of the United Nations – which did not authorize the U.S.’ invasion – that many

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<sup>90</sup> Kagan, Robert, and William Kristol. “What to Do About Iraq.” Weekly Standard, January 21, 2002. <http://www.weeklystandard.com/what-to-do-about-iraq/article/2064>.

neoconservatives shared. Iraq was seen as a threat to Israel; Baghdad had launched missiles at Israel in the Kuwait War despite Israel's deliberate lack of participation in the fighting.<sup>91</sup> Finally, the war was viewed by neoconservatives as a defense of human rights, given Saddam's brutal killing of Kurds and suppression of Iraq's Shia majority.

Neoconservatives were extremely confident, bordering on overconfident, in the days before to the Iraq War. For Kristol and Kagan, fighting in both Afghanistan and Iraq would be like being able to "walk and chew gum at the same time." Neoconservatives had built up democracy to be a magic wand, but ignored the importance of regional expertise, assuming all democratic transitions to be as those in Eastern Europe. They erroneously assumed that American liberators would be greeted in open arms by Iraqis, ignoring the negative reputation the U.S. military had accrued since Vietnam. Above all, neoconservatives surmised that any alternative would be better than Saddam's tyranny.

Kristol and Kagan wrote that:

It is almost impossible to imagine any outcome for the world both plausible and worse than the disease of Saddam with weapons of mass destruction. A fractured Iraq? An unsettled Kurdish situation? A difficult transition in Baghdad? These may be problems, but they are far preferable to leaving Saddam in power with his nukes, VX, and anthrax.<sup>92</sup>

At the same time, it would be disingenuous to entirely put blame on the neoconservatives for the disastrous war that followed. Bill Kristol in particular understood that nation building was a prerequisite to a successful democratic transition in Iraq, something that

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<sup>91</sup> Iraq also launched a similar amount of missiles at Saudi Arabia. Unlike Israel, Saudi Arabia was a masthead part of the coalition against Saddam.

<sup>92</sup> Kagan, Robert, and William Kristol. "What to Do About Iraq."

Donald Rumsfeld failed to grasp. Along with Robert Kagan, Kristol wrote that “the best way to avoid chaos and anarchy in Iraq after Saddam is removed is to have a powerful American occupying force in place, with the clear intention of sticking around for a while.” Nation building would prevent a “vacuum of power” while also deterring Iranian meddling through proxies.<sup>93</sup>

The haughtiness and utter failure of the neoconservatives largely discredited them in the eyes of both the American people and foreign policymakers, at least for a time. It seems unlikely though that neoconservative influence will go anywhere. Though they were not the first to do so, neoconservatives have successfully implanted idealism into any U.S. foreign policy debate, even if ‘interest’ sometimes wins out. And even though it may be only rhetoric, democratic values have become a driving factor in U.S. foreign policy and certainly will remain so.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

## **Chapter 4: Basic Assumptions of Neoconservative IR**

Given that neoconservatism does not have a manifesto of formation or any formal unified set of ideology, from where does neoconservatism derive its theoretical basis? While anticommunism is what brought neoconservatives together, the antithetical rejection of an ideology cannot serve as the basis of an international relations theory by itself. Instead, I contend in this chapter that neoconservatism as an international relations theory is based upon assumptions derived from the monadic version of democratic peace theory. More pointedly, neoconservatives assume that regime type matters, that democracies are more peaceful than autocracies both because of democratic institutional restraints (and the lack thereof in autocracies) and liberal norms inherent in democracies. Using the monadic democratic peace theory as a starting point, neoconservatives (most of whom would be classified as neocons) predict state behavior based on Waltz's second level of analysis, the state, though at times they apply the same logic to predict state behavior based on individual actors. In this way neoconservatism falls to a large extent within the liberal camp of international relations theory. This chapter will also reject other possible bases for neoconservative IR theory. Specifically, it dismisses claims dealing with the connection of neoconservatives to the philosopher Leo Strauss.

### **Dismissing Straussian Based Theories of Neoconservatism**

Because of the sheer volume of works concerning the influence of German-American philosopher Leo Strauss on neoconservatism, including neoconservatism and international relations, it is necessary to explain why there is in fact little of substance

linking Strauss to neoconservative international relations.<sup>94</sup> While an argument can be made that Strauss affected some aspects of earlier neoconservatives' views on capitalism, the philosophy of Leo Strauss makes for a poor theoretical basis for a neoconservative international relations theory, for three primary reasons.

First, the most founded attempts to connect Leo Strauss to neoconservatism only deal with domestic policy. Some of these connections are actually quite concrete. For example, Strauss was distrustful of liberalism because it inevitably led to cultural relativism, eroding truth and leading to nihilism. Irving Kristol similarly thought that despite its efficiency and benefits to society, capitalism similarly leads to nihilism because it erodes the belief in anything greater than an ever-expanding material appetite.<sup>95</sup> But it is difficult to relate this to international relations in a direct manner.

The second problem with those who have used Strauss as a basis for explaining neoconservative international politics is that of the works that have dealt with foreign policy, all are limited in scope. After the Iraq War, Drury relates Strauss' conception of 'the noble lie' to the Bush administration's lies about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. For Strauss, in the absence of truth, a false truth needs to be instituted in order to satisfy the masses. Drury says that "the trouble with the Straussians is that

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<sup>94</sup> See Hirst, Aggie. "Leo Strauss and International Relations: The Politics of Modernity's Abyss." *International Politics* 49, no. 6 (November 1, 2012): 645–70; Keller, Patrick. "Germany and Neoconservatism: A Tragedy of Errors?" *American Foreign Policy Interests* 29, no. 4 (November 9, 2007): 243–56; Drury, Shadia. "Saving America: Leo Strauss And The Neoconservatives." *Evatt Foundation*, September 11, 2003. <http://evatt.org.au/papers/saving-america.html>; Norton, Anne. *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004; Drolet, Jean-François. *American Neoconservatism: The Politics and Culture of a Reactionary Idealism*. London: Hurst, 2011; Thompson, C. Bradley, and Yaron Brook. *Neoconservatism: An Obituary for an Idea*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015.

<sup>95</sup> Kristol, Irving. "Capitalism, Socialism, and Nihilism." *The Public Interest*, no. 31 (Spring 1973): 3–16.

they are compulsive liars.”<sup>96</sup> But even if we are to believe that the blame for Colin Powell’s United Nations speech stems from Strauss, the idea of ‘the noble lie’ only relates to a specific policy, specifically the Iraq War. It cannot be the basis for a larger theory. Similarly, Norton talks of the neoconservatives’ supposed wanting of an American empire, but does not relate it back to Strauss,<sup>97</sup> while Hirst draws upon Strauss’ nihilism and relates it to Wolfowitz’ changes of intelligence procedures, the neoconservatives’ use of the word ‘regime’ to describe Iraq, and neoconservatives’ manipulation of public opinion.<sup>98</sup> These too are only useful in an analysis of the Iraq War and cannot be used to form a greater theory.

Third, and most importantly, it is difficult to ascribe the philosophy behind neoconservatism to Leo Strauss because there is no significant evidence that any more than a minority of neoconservatives have even read Strauss, let alone would consider themselves as Straussians. When scholars have used Strauss to explain the actions of neoconservatives, at best they have projected the ideology of Strauss onto the actions and writings of the few neoconservatives that either briefly studied with Strauss or one of Strauss’ students. Shadia Drury exclusively uses Irving Kristol for source material. Hirst is limited to William Kristol, Paul Wolfowitz, and other less prominent neoconservatives like Gary Schmitt and Abram Shulsky. Norton provides a longer list of Straussians, but cannot prove the extent to which Strauss’ thoughts have influenced their work. In

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<sup>96</sup> Drury, Shadia. “Saving America: Leo Strauss And The Neoconservatives.” *Evatt Foundation*, September 11, 2003. <http://evatt.org.au/papers/saving-america.html>.

<sup>97</sup> Norton, Anne. *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

<sup>98</sup> Hirst, Aggie. “Leo Strauss and International Relations: The Politics of Modernity’s Abyss.” *International Politics* 49, no. 6 (November 1, 2012): 645–70. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ip.2012.23>.

actuality, few neoconservatives studied with Strauss, the most notable of which was Wolfowitz, who took two undergraduate classes with him.

Ultimately, supposed neoconservative Straussians find the connection between neoconservative foreign policy and Strauss to be unfounded. William Kristol writes that “it would be misleading to attempt to understand Strauss by ascribing to him an influence, whether beneficial or nefarious, on current policy debates, and then inferring from the alleged influence what his aims really were.”<sup>99</sup> Robert Kagan and Richard Perle “say their views have nothing to do with Strauss” while Wolfowitz asks why anyone would “need an obscure political philosopher to understand that it makes a difference what kind of regime rules Iraq?”<sup>100</sup> As such, the philosophy of Leo Strauss should not be used as a basis of neoconservative international relations theory.

### **A Better Basis: The Democratic Peace Theory**

Unlike a connection to Leo Strauss, there is evidence that neoconservatives derive some their basic assumptions from the monadic democratic peace theory. A few prominent neoconservatives directly reference the monadic democratic peace theory and Kant, while others explain its underlying logic without directly referencing Kant, but whose ideas are in essence the same as Kant’s. Others still say more simply that democracies are inherently more benevolent than autocracies, indicating that they were directly influenced monadic democratic peace theory.

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<sup>99</sup> Lenzer, Steven, and William Kristol. “What Was Leo Strauss up To?” *The Public Interest*, no. 153 (What was Leo Strauss up to?): 19–39, p. 19.

<sup>100</sup> Hirsh, Michael. “Neocons on the Line.” *Newsweek*, June 22, 2003.  
<http://www.newsweek.com/neocons-line-138091>.

The evidence of this derivation is substantial. Former *Wall Street Journal* and current *New York Times* editorial board member Bret Stephens, a neoconservative himself, contends that “neoconservatives generally take the view that the internal character of a regime usually predicts the nature of its foreign policy.”<sup>101</sup> Paul Wolfowitz agrees, saying that “ignoring the nature of states is to ignore a fundamental reality” for “the internal makeup of states has a huge effect on their external behavior.”<sup>102</sup> Max Boot, assessing George W. Bush’s National Security Strategy 68, says that “the strategy is so emphatic because the administration embraces the theory of a ‘democratic peace’ — the notion that liberal democracies are unlikely to use weapons of mass destruction, sponsor terrorism, and undertake other activities that threaten their neighbors.”<sup>103</sup>

This is unlike the view of most contemporary scholars of the democratic peace, who argue not that democracies are inherently more peaceful, but instead that mature democracies are not likely to fight with each other.<sup>104</sup> This distinction is important because neoconservatives, unlike Doyleian liberals, believe not only democracies are inherently peaceful, but also that autocratic regimes are more likely to be belligerent. Doyle, on the other hand, writes that “we cannot simply blame warfare on the authoritarians and totalitarians, as many of our politicians would have us do” because

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<sup>101</sup> Stephens, Bret. “The Neocons Make a Comeback.” *Wall Street Journal*. September 29, 2009, Eastern edition edition. 399100721. The Wall Street Journal.

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/399100721?accountid=10932>.

<sup>102</sup> Wolfowitz, Paul. “Realism.” *Foreign Policy*, no. 174 (2009): 66–72, p. 67–68.

<sup>103</sup> Boot, Max. “What Next?: The Foreign Policy Agenda beyond Iraq.” *The Weekly Standard*, May 12, 2003. <http://www.weeklystandard.com/what-next/article/3858>.

<sup>104</sup> See Doyle, Michael W. “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs.” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12, no. 3 (1983): 205–35; Doyle, Michael W. “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 2.” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (1983): 323–53; Doyle, Michael W. “Liberalism and World Politics.” *The American Political Science Review* 80, no. 4 (1986): 1151–69; Maoz, Zeev, and Bruce Russett. “Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946–1986.” *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 624–38; Russett, Bruce. *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World*. Princeton University Press, 1994.

“most wars arise out of calculations and of interest, misunderstandings, and mutual suspicions.”<sup>105</sup> Neoconservatives reject this claim, mainly blaming conflict on non-democratic regimes. Democracies do not display what David Hume calls “international imprudence”<sup>106</sup>; instead they often lament that democracies do not better prepare themselves for threats from non-democracies. Joshua Muravchik is quick to reject standard liberal assessments of the democratic peace, such as those done by Doyle or Bruce Russett, who argue that the democratic peace is only dyadic and not monadic, saying

The trouble with such studies, however, is that they rarely examine the question of who started or caused a war. To reduce the data to a form that is quantitatively measurable, it is easier to determine whether a conflict has occurred between two states than whose fault it was. But the latter question is all important.

Democracies may often go to war against dictatorships because the dictators see them as prey or underestimate their resolve.<sup>107</sup>

Neoconservatives do also hold the dyadic democratic peace treaty, which is “the claim that democracies rarely fight one another because they share common norms of live-and-let-live and domestic institutions that constrain the recourse to war,”<sup>108</sup> to be true. Kaplan and William Kristol, in arguing for regime change in Iraq, for instance, state that “democracies rarely, if ever, wage war against one another” to be a “truth of international

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<sup>105</sup> Doyle, Michael W. “Liberalism and World Politics.” *The American Political Science Review* 80, no. 4 (1986): 1151–69, p. 1157.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1156.

<sup>107</sup> Muravchik, Joshua. “Democracy and Nuclear Peace.” presented at the NPEC/IGCC Summer Faculty Seminar, San Diego, July 11, 2001.

<sup>108</sup> Rosato, Sebastian. “The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory.” *The American Political Science Review* 97, no. 4 (2003): 585–602, p. 585.

politics.”<sup>109</sup> However, the monadic version is emphasized more because of its stronger causal linkages and because it is a loftier claim. That is, neoconservatives derive their explanation for the dyadic democratic peace theory from its Kantian sibling; if democracies are more peaceful, of course they would rarely fight one another.

The neoconservative conception of the monadic democratic peace theory claims that democracies are more peaceful than autocracies, mirroring the ideas of the democratic peace first developed by Immanuel Kant. Stephens claims that “governments that are answerable to their own people and accountable to a rule of law tend to respect the rights of their neighbors, honor their treaty commitments, and abide by the international rules of the road.”<sup>110</sup> For neoconservatives, “democracies are inherently more friendly..., less belligerent to their neighbors, and generally more inclined to peace.”<sup>111</sup> In essence, democracies are more likely to respect and uphold liberal values and take a more internationalist view of the world, working towards economic and political cooperation based on shared long-term interests. Neoconservatives also claim that the opposite is true, that “regimes that prey on their own citizens are likely to prey on their neighbors as well.”<sup>112</sup> It is for this reason, neoconservatives claim, that they were fearful and suspicious of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, Ayatollah Khamenei’s Iran, and now Putin’s Russia. As such, instead of defining national interest purely in Morgenthauian terms, neoconservatives also emphasize the prevalence of a government’s values defining its national interest.

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<sup>109</sup> Kaplan, Lawrence F., and William Kristol. *The War Over Iraq: Saddam’s Tyranny and America’s Mission*. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003, p. 104-5.

<sup>110</sup> Stephens, Bret. “The Neocons Make a Comeback.”

<sup>111</sup> Krauthammer, Charles. “Democratic Realism.” presented at the 2004 Irving Kristol Lecture AEI Annual Dinner, February 10, 2004. <https://www.aei.org/publication/democratic-realism/>.

<sup>112</sup> Stephens, Bret. “The Neocons Make a Comeback.”

It is important to note that neoconservatives generally do not go into detail on their definition of democracy. Though some autocracies are obviously more threatening than others, a mature democracy is not more benign than a developing democracy; they are equally pacifist. They not make distinctions between democracies and partial democracies, or hybrid regimes. For their analytical purposes, a country can only be a democracy or not. And though Kant originally referred to republics, not democracies, neoconservatives use the terms interchangeably.

Neoconservatives give four primary reasons in arguing that democracies are more peaceful than autocracies. First, the ways in which autocrats maintain their power also makes them less conducive to peaceful action. Dictators still need to appeal to their citizens; they still need to appear legitimate. Seymour Martin Lipset (being quoted by Elliot Abrams) defines legitimacy as “the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate or proper ones for the society.”<sup>113</sup> In order to achieve this, autocratic regimes can use domestic or international tools. Domestically, a strong and growing economy, robust public services, and high wages can sometimes cause the populace to ignore their a lack of civil liberties. But, if an autocrat were to see its power base decrease domestically and realize diminishing returns on repression, it may pivot to using an aggressive foreign policy to build legitimacy at home; ‘wagging the dog,’ so to speak. An effective way to project power domestically is to implement that power onto others. Because authoritarian states are “unable to acquire legitimacy through the consent of their own oppressed citizens,

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<sup>113</sup> Abrams, Elliott. “The Princes and the Mullahs.” The Weekly Standard, January 5, 2018. <http://www.weeklystandard.com/the-princes-and-the-mullahs/article/2011040>.

such states seek the more superficial authority that comes from demonizing an external enemy.”<sup>114</sup> This kind of aggressive foreign policy drums up nationalism and can unify a populace against an external (real or imaginary) threat.

Putin’s Russia is a good example of an autocrat using war to obtain support, intervening in Crimea and Syria in order to make the regime look strong despite a feeble economy. The interventions have also marginalized opposition groups, because “Duma parties do not dissent from the Kremlin foreign policy consensus except in a more hard-line direction,” making Putin seem more legitimate.<sup>115</sup> Putin’s approval rating jumped from 60 percent in 2012 to 84 percent in 2014, as “the annexation of Crimea appears to have overshadowed any negative developments of the past 15 years.”<sup>116</sup> Ross Munro argues that China is doing likewise, as “the PRC elite is turning increasingly to a chauvinist and expansionist version of Chinese nationalism in its efforts to hold onto power.”<sup>117</sup> North Korea and Iran’s nuclear programs can similarly be viewed as examples of tapping into national pride to give legitimacy to their regimes.

Second, neoconservatives echo Kant in arguing that it is irrational for citizens to vote themselves into war. Muravchik cites Kant in his testament that democracies are more peaceful than non-democracies, for because “the consent of citizens is required to decide whether or not war should be declared,” the citizens would have to decide to ship

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<sup>114</sup> Kaplan, Lawrence F., and William Kristol. *The War Over Iraq: Saddam’s Tyranny and America’s Mission*. Encounter Books, 2003, p. 106.

<sup>115</sup> March, Luke. “Putin’s Intervention in Crimea Has Effectively Marginalised His Domestic Opposition in Russia.” *European Politics and Policy*, March 31, 2014. <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2014/03/31/putins-intervention-in-crimea-has-effectively-marginalised-his-domestic-opposition-in-russia/>.

<sup>116</sup> Lipman, Maria. “Putin’s Domestic Boost.” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, September 10, 2014. [http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_putins\\_domestic\\_boost308](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_putins_domestic_boost308).

<sup>117</sup> Munro, Ross. “China: The Challenge of a Rising Power.” In *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in America’s Foreign and Defense Policy*, 47–73. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000, p. 55.

themselves off to war, which is unlikely.<sup>118</sup> Kaplan and Kristol also directly quote Kant, who wrote that these conditions are not present in autocracies, “for the head of state is not a fellow citizen, but the owner of the state, and war will not force him to make the slightest sacrifice.” They write that “the ethics and institutions of democracy encourage compromise and other norms of that democratic states then apply to their relations one another” whereas “nondemocratic states, needless to say, do not.”<sup>119</sup>

Third, neoconservatives contend that democracies foster liberal norms of non-violence amongst its citizens, norms that translate to nonviolence by the state through democratic representation. Muravchik argues that “democracy is at bottom an ethical system, in which the citizens discipline themselves to the principle that it is better to decide things by the right means than to get their own way.”<sup>120</sup> The willingness to do what is right rather than what is expedient is anthropomorphized onto the state as a whole, which acts likewise. This reasoning is normative, for democratic norms “mandate nonviolent conflict resolution and negotiation in a spirit of live-and-let-live.”<sup>121</sup> For example, Europeans, Stephens writes, “[live] in the world of Immanuel Kant, in which ‘perpetual peace’ [is] guaranteed by a set of cultural conventions, consensually agreed rules and a belief in the virtues of social solidarity.”<sup>122</sup> Muravchik explicitly writes that the monadic democratic peace is not merely structural, it is normative, saying:

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<sup>118</sup> Muravchik, Joshua. *Exporting Democracy*. Washington, DC: AEI Press, 1992, p. 9.

<sup>119</sup> Kaplan, Lawrence F., and William Kristol. *The War Over Iraq: Saddam’s Tyranny and America’s Mission*. Encounter Books, 2003, p. 105.

<sup>120</sup> Muravchik, Joshua. *Exporting Democracy*, p. 9.

<sup>121</sup> Rosato, Sebastian. “The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory.” *The American Political Science Review* 97, no. 4 (2003): 585–602, p. 586.

<sup>122</sup> Stephens, Bret. “Farewell to the Era of No Fences.” *Wall Street Journal*, September 8, 2015, sec. Opinion. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/farewell-to-the-era-of-no-fences-1441666859>.

Democracy is not just a mechanism; it entails a spirit of compromise and self-restraint. At bottom, democracy is the willingness to resolve civil disputes without recourse to violence. Nations that embrace this ethos in the conduct of their domestic affairs are naturally more predisposed to embrace it in their dealings with other nations....The attitude of live-and-let-live cannot be turned on and off like a spigot. The citizens and officials of democracies recognize that other states, however governed, have legitimate interests, and they are disposed to try to accommodate those interests except when the other party's behavior seems threatening or outrageous.<sup>123</sup>

A fourth rationale, given by Irving Kristol, is a bit more nuanced — the citizens of a democracy cannot, at least in the long run, accept an amoral foreign policy. While a democratic government can also ‘wag the dog’ like autocracies, it is less likely to do so successfully, and thus less likely to attempt to do so. For the United States, for example, “‘realism’ has to be conceived and expressed in a way that allows us to live, if a bit uncomfortably now and then, with our moral selves.”<sup>124</sup> Whereas the populace does not have the expertise to make judgements on military or foreign policy, anyone can judge a policy on its morality. And as democratic governments are supposed to, at least to some extent, be a representation of the will of the populace, when a government acts immorally in a foreign policy, it is likewise a black mark on the morality of the populace. What results, as Kristol argues is the case for the United States, is a “continual effort to reconcile the moral dimension of American foreign policy — the realm in which some

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<sup>124</sup> Kristol, Irving. “The Common Sense of ‘Human Rights.’” *Wall Street Journal*. April 8, 1981. 134656784. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

freedom of choice exists — with the realistic dimension of foreign policy,” or what Reinhold Niebuhr calls ‘moral realism’.<sup>125</sup> In regards to liberal values, Kagan writes that “supporting democracy is consistent with [American] principles”; it “makes them feel good about themselves.”<sup>126</sup>

This rationale is what Sebastian Rosato calls the ‘institutional logic’ of ‘public restraint’, as the causal mechanism here is democracy’s institutional forces.<sup>127</sup> Democratic values (often used synecdotally for liberal values) are embedded within the mindset of the citizenry (see Muravchik’s explanation above), including non-violence. Democratic states have laws allowing individuals to openly express their opinions on government policy, including foreign policy. Moreover, politicians’ seats are definite, up for reelection every few years. Wanting to win reelection, politicians will sometimes move to an anti-war stance to appease their voting base. Because of this, some neoconservatives believe that all things equal democracies are weaker than authoritarian states because they are less willing to use military force.

Neoconservatives have also come to deride “working with local dictators,” a fulcrum of Cold War era containment policy, as an “old ‘realist’ prescription” that will not work over the long term because of the nature of authoritarian regimes.<sup>128</sup> According to William Kristol, “the nature of the regime is crucial, rather than some alleged underlying,

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<sup>125</sup> Kristol, Irving. “Toward a Moral Foreign Policy.” *Wall Street Journal*. November 15, 1983. 134793803. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

<sup>126</sup> Kagan, Robert. *The World America Made*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012, p. 136.

<sup>127</sup> Rosato, Sebastian. “The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory.” *The American Political Science Review* 97, no. 4 (2003): 585–602, p. 587.

<sup>128</sup> Kristol, William. “Postscript — June 04: Neoconservatism Remains the Bedrock of U.S. Foreign Policy.” In *The Neocon Reader*, 75–77. New York, N.Y.: Grove Press, 2004, p. 76.

geographically or economically or culturally determined ‘national interest.’”<sup>129</sup> Unlike democratic states, authoritarian (especially dictatorial) regimes “sponsor terrorism and acquire and trade in horrific weapons, the better to threaten their neighbors and intimidate their people.”<sup>130</sup> Alliances with autocratic regimes “are inherently difficult to sustain,” because they are difficult for democratic populaces to stomach and because democratic ideals and the structure of the world economy “tend to corrode the pillars on which authoritarian and totalitarian regimes rest.”<sup>131</sup> Boot argues that because “alliances built with unpopular strongmen are unlikely to last” democratic nations like the U.S. should push for reform within the regimes of its allies, such as Egypt or the Gulf monarchies.<sup>132</sup> Relationships between democratic and autocratic states may seem prudent in the short (or even medium term), but the norms and ideals promoted by democratic states are intrinsically threatening to autocratic ones, even if materially the democratic states are not as threatening.

These countries also risk becoming rogue states, states that “suppress basic human rights and promote radical ideologies...., exhibit a chronic inability to engage constructively with the outside world,...[and embark] on ambitious and costly military program[s].”<sup>133</sup> Above all, these states seek to break down the international system and the norms it regulates. Though most of what neoconservatives (and others like Anthony Lake) label as rogue states are not great powers, increasing capabilities, such as the acquisition of

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<sup>129</sup> Kristol, William. “Morality in Foreign Policy.” *Weekly Standard*, February 10, 2003. <http://www.weeklystandard.com/morality-in-foreign-policy/article/3452>.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid

<sup>131</sup> Kristol, William, and Robert Kagan. “National Interest and Global Responsibility.” In *The Neocon Reader*, 57–74. New York, N.Y.: Grove Press, 2004, p. 68.

<sup>132</sup> Boot, “What Next?”

<sup>133</sup> Lake, Anthony. “Confronting Backlash States.” *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 2 (1994): 45–55. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20045918>, p. 46.

nuclear weapons or long-range chemical weapons (the famed ‘weapons of mass destruction’), make their existence an inherent threat to the world community and that what it represents. Even a weak nation can cast the shadow of a great one with the right technology.

Accordingly, neoconservatives have been wary of authoritarian regimes ranging from Chavez’s Venezuela<sup>134</sup> to Bashir’s Sudan.<sup>135</sup> This logic has been applied to as far-reaching countries as Uzbekistan, of which William Kristol and Stephen Schwartz wrote that “the character of the Karimov regime can no longer be ignored in deference to the strategic usefulness of Uzbekistan,” calling for the cutting off of aid and friendly relations.<sup>136</sup> China and Russia are viewed as a “revisionist great powers” because “as autocracies, both feel threatened by the dominant democratic powers in the international system and by the democracies on their borders.”<sup>137</sup> Bret Stephens writes that Iran cannot be viewed using like conceptions of rationality as democracies, because “what Iran finds pragmatic and rational—support for militias and terrorist organizations abroad; a posture of unyielding hostility to the West; a nuclear program that floats multiple UN resolutions — is rather different from the thinking that prevails in, say, the Netherlands.”<sup>138</sup> And neoconservatives are most famous, of course, for their call for regime change in Iraq throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, which they eventually achieved.

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<sup>134</sup> Noriega, Roger. “Hugo Chavez: An Uncounted Enemy.” American Enterprise Institute, August 3, 2012. <http://www.aei.org/publication/hugo-chavez-an-uncounted-enemy/>.

<sup>135</sup> Abrams, Elliot. “What to Do About Sudan.” *Weekly Standard*, May 7, 2001. <http://www.weeklystandard.com/what-to-do-about-sudan/article/12524>.

<sup>136</sup> Kristol, William, and Stephen Schwartz. “Our Uzbek Problem.” *Weekly Standard*, May 30, 2005. <http://www.weeklystandard.com/our-uzbek-problem/article/6839>.

<sup>137</sup> Kagan, Robert. “Backing into World War III.” Brookings Institute, February 6, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/backing-into-world-war-iii/>.

<sup>138</sup> Stephens, Bret. “Iran Cannot Be Contained.” *Current*, no. 525 (September 2010): 12–17, p. 14.

Even supposed U.S. allies are subject to criticism from neoconservatives. In 2002 Schwartz called Saudi Arabia's travel ban on its Shi'a citizens "a measure reminiscent of Soviet communism" and says that it is "increasingly clear that Saudi Arabian Wahhabism is part of the 'axis of evil'—and possibly the most dangerous part."<sup>139</sup> Max Boot disparaged Reagan and Bush's funding of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union as "a classic *realpolitik* strategy" and asserted that "America has earned opprobrium in the Arab world for its *realpolitik* backing of repressive dictators like Hosni Mubarak and the Saudi royal family."<sup>140</sup> Of Cairo and Riyadh Kagan writes that "it is possible that over time Egypt and Saudi Arabia may see virtue in drawing closer to their fellow autocrats in Moscow and Beijing."<sup>141</sup> Muravchik argues that the United States' "quiet support for Iraq in its war with Iran in the 1980s" was "one of America's most nakedly realist sallies."<sup>142</sup> The alignment of autocratic regimes in the Middle East with the United States, and the hostility of a democratic Palestine against the United States, is an exception. Rather, neoconservatives tend to be skeptical that autocratic allies will remain friendly in the long run.

### **Divisions amongst Neocons**

Not all neoconservatives denounce every autocrat at all times; the degree to which a neoconservative thinks that structural forces affects state behavior influences the extent to which a state should continue to ally with autocrats. A democratic nation would rather

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<sup>139</sup> Schwartz, Stephen. "Despotism in Saudi Arabia." Weekly Standard, February 18, 2002. <http://www.weeklystandard.com/despotism-in-saudi-arabia/article/2191>.

<sup>140</sup> Boot, Max. "The Case for American Empire." Weekly Standard, 00:00. <http://www.weeklystandard.com/the-case-for-american-empire/article/1626>.

<sup>141</sup> Kagan, Robert. *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*. Vintage Books, 2009, p. 75.

<sup>142</sup> Muravchik, Joshua, and Stephen M. Walt. "The Neocons vs. The Realists." *The National Interest*, no. 97 (2008): 20–36, p. 22.

not ally with an autocratic nation, but sometimes it can be prudent for one to do so, sometimes for resource procurement, sometimes to reign in an autocratic nation for fear of it acting belligerent in the short term. More simply, neoconservatives to a varying extent advocate for geopolitical strategic thinking irrespective of the consequences of regime types.

Jeane Kirkpatrick, for instance, harshly criticized the Carter administration's open support of the fall of Mohammad Reza Shah in Iran and Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua, two autocrats that were "positively friendly to the U.S." and "anti-communist." Even though "traditional autocracies are, in general and in their very nature, deeply offensive to modern American sensibilities," traditional autocrats are still better than communist (or theocratic) autocrats.<sup>143</sup> For her, 'communist revolution' is synonymous with future totalitarianism, which is worse than moderate authoritarianism, for both the people of the nations where revolutions are occurring, and the United States. Because communist regimes "claim jurisdiction over the whole life of the society and make demands for change that so violate internalized values and habits," they "create refugees by the million." While her theoretical underpinnings of why autocratic regimes are preferable, that "they do not disturb the habitual rhythms of work and leisure, habitual places of residence, [and] habitual patterns of family and personal relations," is not the most compelling – for I am not sure that stasis is inherently less violent than transformation – empirically Kirkpatrick has a point.<sup>144</sup> Whereas a tyrant like the Shah may have killed

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<sup>143</sup> Kirkpatrick, Jeane J. "Dictatorships & Double Standards." *Commentary Magazine* (blog), November 1, 1979. <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/dictatorships-double-standards/>.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

upwards of 2,000 over the entirety of his 26 years as lone head of state,<sup>145</sup> that pales compared to deaths at the hands of Pol Pot (2 million), Dergian Ethiopia (725 thousand), Castro (73 thousand), or Maoist China (35 million).<sup>146</sup> For this reason, she writes that a “policy which aims at protecting our own interest and assisting the capacities for self-determination of less developed nations will need to face the unpleasant fact that, if victorious, violent insurgency headed by Marxist revolutionaries is unlikely to lead to anything but totalitarian tyranny.”<sup>147</sup>

Irving Kristol was also more of a ‘realist’ than later neocons, and certainly was not as idealistic when it came to democracy promotion as his son, believing that though democratic nations are more peaceful than autocratic ones, it is unrealistic to transform a state’s government overnight. He thought this for two reasons. First, he believed that the political culture of some states were not ready or willing to embark upon democratic modernization. While hesitant to make a definitive claim on the causal nature for this, he says that empirically the “political, religious, [and] cultural [traditions] that shape Latin American thinking and behavior are such as to make it exceedingly difficult for the countries of Southern America to proceed along lines followed by Northern America and Western Europe” and “much of Africa, the Middle East and Southern Asia are not very different from Latin America in this respect.”<sup>148</sup> Second, Kristol thought that democracy

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<sup>145</sup> Camara, Robert C. de. “The Shah as Tyrant: A Look at the Record.” *Washington Post*, March 23, 1980. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1980/03/23/the-shah-as-tyrant-a-look-at-the-record/218c6a8e-dcb7-4168-ac9c-8f23609f888f/>.

<sup>146</sup> Rummel, Rudolph J. *Statistics of Democide: Genocide and Mass Murder Since 1900*. LIT Verlag Münster, 1998.

<sup>147</sup> Kirkpatrick, Jeane J. “Dictatorships & Double Standards.” *Commentary Magazine* (blog), November 1, 1979. <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/dictatorships-double-standards/>.

<sup>148</sup> Kristol, Irving. “What Choice Is There in Salvador?” *Wall Street Journal*. April 4, 1983. 134851330. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

promotion had to be done in stages, for “liberal democracy cannot simply be summoned into existence, anywhere, at any time, by eloquent advocacy or even congressional resolution.”<sup>149</sup> These arguments are essentially in line with the thinking of John Stuart Mill, who argued that democracy brought into existence by an outside actor will have no guarantees of permanence because democracy depends on its people’s commitment to liberal values; a foreign imposed democracy circumvents that requirement and actually can degrade a commitment to democracy.<sup>150</sup>

Moreover, he recognized that the nature of states is not binary; a state is not either autocratic or democratic, without shades of gray in between. Kristol thought that “some dictatorships may claim a degree of political legitimacy that even liberal democrats ought to respect” and found it “a little absurd,” or at least “highly impractical to declare that all of the world’s undemocratic regimes [to be] *equally* an anathema” to a democracy like the United States.<sup>151</sup> Ultimately, he says that “to the degree that any authoritarian regime was ‘enlightened’ — i.e., to the degree that it could be judged to be creating economic, political, and cultural preconditions for the possible self-government by the people — it was worthy of cautious respect.” Foreshadowing the errors of his son, the elder Kristol thought that if the moral dilemmas of foreign policy did not address the world’s

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<sup>149</sup> Kristol, Irving. “Detente and ‘Human Rights.’” *Wall Street Journal*. April 15, 1977. 134146095. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

<sup>150</sup> Doyle, Michael W. “A Few Words on Mill, Walzer, and Nonintervention.” *Ethics & International Affairs* 23, no. 4 (December 22, 2009): 349–69, p. 352-3.

<sup>151</sup> Kristol, Irving. “‘Moral Dilemmas’ in Foreign Policy.” *Wall Street Journal*. February 28, 1980. 134428824. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

complexity and heterogeneousness, a democratic state could embark upon “sweeping crusades...which quickly brings us up short before intractable realities.”<sup>152</sup>

As one would expect, the time period in which each individual neoconservative developed their respective explanations for state behavior was a large determinant in influencing the balance between structural and state level factors. Nearly all neoconservatives are American, and thus America’s geopolitical position in the world has greatly influenced neoconservatives, as have the presence of competing ideologies (which too were shaped by their historical development). Specifically, neoconservatives before the fall of the Berlin Wall tended to lean closer towards realism than their post-Cold War successors. Irving Kristol and Jeane Kirkpatrick’s careers were mostly during the Cold War, especially during the later years of the Cold War, when realism was the leading theory. During the Cold War, spreading democracy was only useful insofar as it helped to protect against the Soviet Union. Irving Kristol thought that it was useful, but there were times when allying with dictators was perceived to be prudent. Swift regime change was unrealistic, and instead the United States should have used its “influence to edge unenlightened despotisms toward more enlightened behavior, or enlightened despotisms toward more liberal and humane behavior.”<sup>153</sup> Besides, all communist states were autocratic if not outright totalitarian. Kristol once whimsically remarked that “I’m violently opposed to the United States going to war against any democratic communist regime. I agree in the abstract there’s no reason why communist regimes needn’t have

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Kristol, Irving. “‘Moral Dilemmas’ in Foreign Policy.” *Wall Street Journal*. February 28, 1980. 134428824. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

greater variety. I look forward to the day when they do.”<sup>154</sup> Seeing the Russian bear to be more like the Siberian Grizzly than Misha, democracy promotion was deemed less pressing than the Soviet threat.

After the Cold War, the neocons took a turn even further away from realism. For neoconservatives, the international system was shaped by what Charles Krauthammer called the ‘Unipolar Moment.’<sup>155</sup> The United States was the sole superpower, with few, if any, existential threats. Therefore, democracy promotion, unilateralism, and regime type became more important because there was nothing to stop the US from executing its foreign policy — lesser powers haven’t exactly been lining up to balance against it. Moreover, the Cold War’s abrupt ending served as ‘proof’ that unabashed advocacy of liberal values and opposition to communism (and other forms of authoritarianism) could work. Reagan’s direct approach to confronting the Soviet Union, from his uncompromising stance on nuclear policy to his famous Brandenburg Gate speech, inspired younger neoconservatives into thinking that ideals could be made reality with a heavy dose of grit. Fukuyama goes as far as to claim that “Neoconservatives would not have taken this turn [towards unilateralism] but for the peculiar way that the Cold War ended.”<sup>156</sup> William Kristol and Robert Kagan made this clear, stating that “the United

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<sup>154</sup> “A Talk-In on Vietnam; A Band of New York Intellectuals Meets With Prof. Schlesinger For Talk-In on Vietnam.” *The New York Times*, February 6, 1966.

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9807E1D71F3DE731A25755C0A9649C946791D6CF>.

<sup>155</sup> Krauthammer, Charles. “The Unipolar Moment.” *Foreign Affairs*, January 1, 1990.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1991-02-01/unipolar-moment>.

<sup>156</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. “After Neoconservatism.” *The New York Times*, February 19, 2006, sec. Magazine. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/19/magazine/after-neoconservatism.html>.

States needs a neo-Reaganite foreign policy of military supremacy and moral confidence.”<sup>157</sup>

The younger Kristol, Muravchik, Max Boot, Bret Stephens, David Brooks and the rest of what Justin Vaïsse calls the “Third Age” of neoconservatism more forcefully advocated for democracy promotion over *realpolitik* than their predecessors. For them, smaller autocratic nations had the potential to be adversarial because of the nature of their regimes, not because of their potential to be pawns of a larger power. Without the presence of a fellow superpower toting nuclear weapons, neoconservatives saw the next threat to be smaller states with the potential to acquire nuclear weapons, either for themselves or for terrorist organizations. Modern day neoconservatives critique some Reaganite policies of cozying up too close to dictators, even though some of these policies were architected by earlier neocons like Jeane Kirkpatrick. This is not to say that Irving Kristol did not believe in the monadic democratic peace theory; as shown above, he certainly did. But it would not have made sense for him to emphasize it in the 1960s and 70s because communism was the bigger threat. A rogue state would have been just as much of a threat to the Soviet Union as to the United States, after all.

### **Compatibility with neoconservative domestic theory**

Some scholars argue that the neoconservative view of the democratic peace theory is incompatible with their domestic policy; the idea that democracy can be imposed from above seems strange coming from a group that is skeptical of government imposed social engineering. Such criticism, though seemingly valid, misunderstands how

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<sup>157</sup> Kristol, William, and Robert Kagan. “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy.” *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 4 (1996): 18–32. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20047656>, p. 23.

neoconservatives view both economics and democracy. Piki Ish-Shalom, for example, writes that neoconservatism straddles the theses of Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama, using the democratic peace theory as a bridge. As they are hostile towards cultural relativism, Ish-Shalom writes that neoconservatives agree with Huntington that certain cultural norms and practices make universal democracy unlikely while also agreeing with Fukuyama that Western liberal values will ultimately win out.

Neoconservatives then advocate for the democratic peace theory in a structural sense, which is the idea that democracy as “a structure of elections, division of power, and checks and balances” is what causes peace, so that even if a “culture of and morality of the sort that create a civic community” does not arise due to pre-existing Burkian cultural norms, peace will still exist.<sup>158</sup> It is for this reason, for example, neoconservatives advocate for regime change regardless of supposed inhibiting cultural norms.

The problem with Ish-Shalom’s analysis is two-fold. First, it discounts the neoconservatives’ belief in the normative aspects of democracy, which he defines as “the socialization of and dissemination of democratic values so as to foster a democratic society and culture” resulting in “norms of tolerance and openness within these states” and an increased “willingness to reach compromises.”<sup>159</sup> But, as I have already shown above, neoconservatives believe in both structural and normative theories of democratic peace. The idea behind Irving Kristol’s moral realism is concretely normative. Second, neoconservatives believe that democracy, and liberal ideals more broadly, are universally yearned for. Human rights and basic freedoms of speech and representation are self-

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<sup>158</sup> Ish-Shalom, Piki. “‘The Civilization of Clashes’: Misapplying the Democratic Peace in the Middle East.” *Political Science Quarterly* 122, no. 4 (2007): 533–54, p. 545.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 544.

evident and thus “belong to *all* human beings just by the virtue of their humanity” and as such for neoconservatives “neither reason nor morality is encumbered by parochial considerations thrown up by tradition, custom, or habit.”<sup>160</sup> For neoconservatives, basic rights and liberties are something that are universal, and, given the opportunity, will be welcomed by all peoples. Francis Fukuyama, who famously claimed that “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” was, after all, a neoconservative (for a time).<sup>161</sup> Therefore, the neoconservative skepticism of social engineering is not applied to democracy promotion because they are promoting a natural progression of human government. Though Fukuyama would diverge from neoconservatives over the latter’s interpretation of his theory, this is neither here nor there; this divergence actually makes it either to identify neoconservative ideology. For neoconservatives, social engineering in the economic sense cannot be compared to ‘democratic engineering’ (nor would they even phrase it this way) because for the latter there is no ‘invisible hand’ that would autocorrect when there are interventions in the market. Social engineering in the economic sense goes against the grain of the economic state of nature, the free market, and thus for neoconservatives it is much more likely to fail. Interventions in support of democratization are not subject to market corrections.

### **Conclusion: Neoconservatism and Liberalism**

Because of the neoconservative commitment to human rights, personal liberty coupled with their staunch adherence to the monadic democratic peace theory, I would argue,

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<sup>160</sup> Kerwick, Jack. “The Neoconservative Conundrum.” *Modern Age* 55, no. 1–2 (2013): 5–12, p. 5–6.

<sup>161</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989): 3–18, p. 4.

with some reservations, that neoconservatism largely falls in line with liberal theories of international relations. Andrew Moravcsik lays out three core assumption of liberal international relations theory, which neoconservatism is actually quite congruent with.

First, according to Moravcsik, “liberal theory rests on a ‘bottom up’ view of politics in which the demands of individuals and societal groups are treated as analytically prior to politics.”<sup>162</sup> By largely basing their core assumptions on the monadic democratic peace theory, neoconservatism to a certain extent can be described this way. For neoconservatives, the peacefulness of democracies, as I have shown, rests on both normative factors, like commitments to ethical liberal values of non-violence, and institutional factors, like a populace not wanting to vote in leaders that would send them to war or have an amoral foreign policy. I am hesitant to say that neoconservatism is a ‘bottom-up’ approach per say because it starts with democracy as a political institution as starting point. But it does claim that democracies are naturally linked with the individual and societal groups embedded within it, so it is very much liberal in this way.

Second, Moravcsik writes that “states (or other political institutions) represent some subset of domestic society, on the basis of whose interests state officials define state preferences and act purposively in world politics.”<sup>163</sup> Again, the neoconservative conception of monadic democratic peace theory is partially based on the idea that the interests of the populace can be translated into foreign policy decisions. Neoconservatives even conceive authoritarian regimes of having representation that “includes [sic] stable characteristics of the political process, formal or informal, that privilege societal

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<sup>162</sup> Moravcsik, Andrew. “Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics.” *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (1997): 513–53, p. 517.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 518.

interests.” For authoritarian regimes, of course, societal interests are ultimately a function of their own interests, but this is beside the point. In order to wag the dog, the government must still pay attention to the interests of the dog.

Finally, “the configuration of interdependent state preferences determines state behavior” where “instead, each state seeks to realize its distinctive preferences under varying constraints imposed by the preferences of other states.”<sup>164</sup> Neoconservatives also do not assume that the national interest of states is the same for every state, non-democratic or democratic. Like liberals, neoconservatism “rejects not just the realist assumption that state preferences must be treated as if naturally conflictual, but equally the institutionalist assumption that they should be treated as if they were partially convergent, compromising a collective action problem.”<sup>165</sup> I go into further detail about the neoconservative conception of the national interest in chapter five, but in short, the neoconservative view of the national interest is similar to Moravcsik’s, with the caveat that it should be in a democracy’s national interest to promote democracy. But, unlike realists (and neoliberals), neoconservatives do not assume a state will always act in its national interest.

Moravcsik categorizes liberalism into three strands— ideational liberalism, commercial liberalism, and republican liberalism, the last of which there is much overlap with neoconservatism. Republican liberalism “emphasizes the ways in which domestic institutions and practices aggregate those demands, transforming them into state

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid, p. 520.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

policy.”<sup>166</sup> Because authoritarian regimes are not subject to democratic institutional restraints, they tend to have a more variable range of policy decisions, which can result in increased violence. Neoconservatism can therefore be seen as a variant of republican liberal theory, with some key differences. First, neoconservatives, because they hold most of the assumptions of monadic democratic peace theory to be true, take a more drastic view of the belligerency of autocracies and the benevolence of democracies. Second, their conception of the democratic peace is also normative, unlike republican theory which looks at the relationship between the executive (or coalition) and the populace in the context of rent seeking. Democracy for neoconservatives, as stated earlier, is a normative, ethical system where the spirit of live-and-let-live is anthropomorphized onto the government. In a way, this point is actually similar to ideational liberalism, which “views the configuration of domestic social identities and values as a basic determinant of state preferences and, therefore, of interstate conflict and cooperation.”<sup>167</sup> Finally, the neoconservative view of anarchy is not entirely compatible with republican liberalism. I will address this in detail in chapter five, but because neoconservatives have such a pessimistic view of autocracies, they share several key assumptions with realists. In spite of these assumptions, I contend that neoconservatism is still clearly in the liberal range of international relations theories.

To be clear, evidence in support of the Kantian version of democratic peace theory is disputed. Of the four rationales in support of it given by neoconservatives, none are empirically strong. Many democratic nations do not have a draft, making Kant’s

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid, p. 530.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, p. 525.

reasoning less useful. The ethical nature of democratic values translating to ethical foreign policy is difficult to prove (and has often shown to not be true). And sometimes citizens will not rise up in protest of a war, especially if they are far removed from it. Furthermore, it seems hypocritical for neoconservatives to make claims about authoritarian states respecting the ‘rules of the road’ when neoconservative policymakers from the democratic United States disregarded international law in its invading of Iraq. But for the purposes of this paper, this is beside the point. The theoretical basis can be disputed, even flawed; if any theoretical basis were universally agreed upon and “demonstrated accuracy via-a-vis other theories, significantly less theories of international relations would exist. Accordingly, given the evidence of usage, it seems fitting that the monadic democratic peace theory is the theoretical basis for a neoconservative theory of international relations.

### **Chapter 5: Comparison with the Neo-Neo Synthesis**

Neoconservatism at its core is a theory that sees the world First, neoconservatives paint the world in such a matter-of-fact way that it seems natural to comp their worldview with the two leading ontological theories. Second, emphasis on the significance of military might and hegemony in world politics runs much closer to the neo-neo synthesis’ portrayal of the state as a ‘rational egoist’ than post-structuralism theories which tend to be more emancipatory and revisionists in nature. And though squabbles between neorealism, neoliberalism, and neoconservatism may be ‘boring’ (some<sup>168</sup> say the neo-neo synthesis has been overdone), even more boring would be a comparison of

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<sup>168</sup> The ‘fourth debate’ came about as a reaction to the neo-neo synthesis.

neoconservatism and, say, classical Marxism — nothing fruitful would come of it. This section specifically addresses neoconservatism’s relationship with the neo-neo synthesis’ views on the existence of an anarchical world structure, survival tactics of states, and the role and purpose of institutions such as the United Nations.

## **Anarchy**

To be clear, neoconservatives, by the very nature of starting with the assumptions of the monadic democratic peace theory as a theoretical basis, reject the initial structural assumptions of the neo-neo synthesis. But neoconservatives to a large extent agree with the consequence of the synthesis’ structural assumption, anarchy. In this section I will show that though anarchy is not presupposed by neoconservatives because of structural forces, neoconservatives make similar assumptions to neorealists about the way in which states deal with anarchy, at least under certain conditions.

Neorealists argue that “international politics can be understood only if the effects of structure are added to the unit-level explanations of traditional realism.”<sup>169</sup> The nature of sovereignty, which grants authority to a governing body over a set area, entails that no other central authority can have full rule over that area. Thus, anarchy is “an ordering principle, which says that the system comprises independent states” without central rule.<sup>170</sup> Anarchy is the opposite of “hierarchy, which is the ordering principle of domestic politics.”<sup>171</sup> Neorealist Joseph Grieco, using more alarmist language, describes anarchy as

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<sup>169</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition)*. New York, N.Y.: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003, p. 30.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> Mearsheimer, John. “Structural Realism.” In *International Relations Theories*, 77–93. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 79.

an international system where “there is no overarching authority to prevent others from using violence, or the threat of violence, to destroy or enslave them.”<sup>172</sup> Neoliberals also admit the existence of anarchy. Robert Axelrod and Robert Keohane define anarchy as “a lack of common government in world politics.”<sup>173</sup>

Neoconservatives agree with the principle of anarchy but, as I will show, their conception of anarchy is fundamentally different than neorealists. Irving Kristol writes that we live in “a world ordered by military force and by the willingness to use that force when circumstances require. Whoever does not have such force, or is overly reluctant to use it, ends up living in a world that has been ordered by someone else.”<sup>174</sup> For neoconservatives, “rather than a Kantian world where international law, globalization and non-state actors would make war irrelevant in most cases, they see a Hobbesian world in which military force and state actors still play an overwhelming role—a belief which, this time, takes them closer to realists.”<sup>175</sup> Like the two partakers in the neo-neo synthesis, neoconservatives like Charles Krauthammer recognize “the fundamental fallacy in the whole idea of the international system being modeled on domestic society.”<sup>176</sup> That is, “what holds domestic society together is a supreme central authority wielding a

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<sup>172</sup> Grieco, Joseph M. “Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism.” *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 485–507, p. 498.

<sup>173</sup> Axelrod, Robert, and Robert O. Keohane. “Achieving Cooperation under Anarchy: Strategies and Institutions.” *World Politics* 38, no. 1 (1985): 226–54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010357>, p. 226.

<sup>174</sup> Kristol, Irving. “Our Foreign Policy Illusions.” *Wall Street Journal*. February 4, 1980. 134421823. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

<sup>175</sup> Vaisse, Justin. “Why Neoconservatism Still Matters.” Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, November 30, 2001. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/why-neoconservatism-still-matters/>, p. 5.

<sup>176</sup> Krauthammer, Charles. “Democratic Realism.” presented at the 2004 Irving Kristol Lecture AEI Annual Dinner, February 10, 2004. <https://www.aei.org/publication/democratic-realism/>.

monopoly of power and enforcing norms,” whereas internationally “there is no such thing.”<sup>177</sup>

Part of the reason why neorealists argue for anarchy’s abiding nature is because states can never truly tell the intentions of other states. The inherent condition of misinformation lead states to be suspicious of one another’s future policy decisions, even if publically a state asserts its benevolence. As put by Mearsheimer, “there are many possible causes of aggression, and no state can be sure that another state is not motivated by one of them,” leading no state “to be certain another state will not use its offensive military capability against the first.”<sup>178</sup>

Kristol too held this view, smugly denouncing the legitimacy of ‘kremlinologists’, those who claimed to know “what Soviet Leaders were *really* thinking about foreign policy and what was *really* going on inside the ‘inner circles’ of a regime.”<sup>179</sup> Dismissing kremlinology as being based on “the most evanescent of clues”, Kristol notes “the observation of Soviet actions, and frequent glances at the map are quite sufficient guidance as to what the Soviet government is ‘really’ up to.”<sup>180</sup> Moreover, Kristol’s suspicion of foreign states’ intentions also applies to the progression of nuclear proliferation. Afraid of the “dangers of a lot of kooky little (or not so little) nations playing around with nuclear weapons,” like “India, or Pakistan, or Egypt, or Brazil,”<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. “The False Promise of International Institutions.” *International Security* 19, no. 3 (1994): 5–49. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539078>, p.10

<sup>179</sup> Kristol, Irving. “Secrets of State.” *Wall Street Journal*. November 14, 1974. 133843814. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Kristol, Irving. “We Can’t Resign As ‘Policeman of the World.’” *The New York Times*, May 12, 1968. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9C0DE4D91230EE3BBC4A52DFB3668383679EDE>.

Kristol asserts that the U.S. (or other great power) needs to make sure that the smaller nations do not acquire nuclear weapons, precisely because these states cannot be trusted with a weapon that can affect even nations that are not the primary target. He argued that that United States should not de-arm itself even if it were possible to know that the Russians would have “forbearance” in its ownership of nuclear weapons because it would be impossible to predict the preferences of “the Chinese, the Japanese, the Egyptians, the Moroccans, the Indonesians, etc., who will have their own nuclear weapons in years to come.”<sup>182</sup>

Neoconservatives also agree with neorealists that foreign policy decisions can be shaped by constraints of the international system. Kristol oft wondered, with more than a hint of lamentation, why a great power like the United States could be constrained by various other forces, including lesser powers. His answer was that in absence of absolute hegemonic military might, the world system can always be disturbed by even the smallest of actors. The United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War particularly exemplifies this viewpoint, illustrating the power of structural forces over governmental and societal views of foreign policy. In 1967 the U.S.’ involvement in the war was at a crossroad. Public demonstrations against the war were rampant, and even politicians and military officials were wary of the consequences of greater involvement in the war. In spite of the mounting anti-war sentiment, Kristol notes that “greater military involvement...seems to be precisely the direction in which American policy is heading.” Eventually, Kristol

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<sup>182</sup> Kristol, Irving. “Deterrence.” *Commentary Magazine*, July 11, 1961. <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/deterrence/>.

concludes that “even great powers, in the modern world, are not exactly masters of their fate.”<sup>183</sup>

The reverse is also true — no small nation can be truly isolationist in world politics, for it cannot ignore the influence of larger world powers. Kristol defines world power as a nation that “will influence events, will affect the destinies of other peoples, as much by what it does not do as by what it overtly does.”<sup>184</sup> On the influence of the world powers over the lesser, he says that the “very existence of a world power creates conditions of dependency and interdependency- and also engenders the obligations (morals, political, economic) which flow from such conditions.”<sup>185</sup> He further develops the idea of the interconnectedness of the global structure affecting all states, writing that “the nations of the rest of the world are perhaps too inclined to enjoy a certain *Schadenfreude* over America’s foreign policy dilemmas, and tend not to realize the extent to which their own destinies are being, if not decided, then at least provisionally shaped.”<sup>186</sup> For neoconservatives, the action of one state is inherently dependent on the action (or inaction) of other states, in particular of world powers.

The important difference between strict structural theories and neoconservatism is that anarchy exists for neoconservatives only with the existence of non-democratic states. Rather than structure being intertwined with anarchy, anarchy is a function of the persistence of autocratic rule. When neoconservatives speak of not being able to fully

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<sup>183</sup> Kristol, Irving. “Teaching In, Speaking Out.” *Encounter*, 1965.  
<http://www.unz.org/Pub/Encounter-1965aug-00065>.

<sup>184</sup> Irving. “The Meaning of Kissinger.” *Wall Street Journal*. April 11, 1974. 133871745. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> Kristol, Irving. “A New Isolationism.” *Encounter* 26, no. 6 (1966): 49–53.

know the intentions of states, what they are really talking about are non-democracies. Note that the nations Kristol was speaking about above were all non-democracies (with the exception of India), at least of the time of his writing. In many ways, the neorealist view of anarchy can be bestowed upon neoconservatives given that the states being looked at are non-democracies. If the world was made up entirely of non-democracies, for instance, I would go as far to say that the neoconservative conception of the world would look nearly identical to the neorealist. Of course, neorealists hold that states are black boxes; structural forces provide for the same sets of incentives for all states, no matter what type. Nor are all states non-democracies, so a neoconservative world can never be the same as a neorealist's.

I would argue, however, that a neoconservative world is defined by what I would describe as “fragmentary anarchy”. Anarchy is fragmented because it does not exist amongst democracies, for the forces of democratic peace make neorealist assumptions of uniform incentives irrelevant. Amongst non-democracies and between democracies and non-democracies, however, much of the assumptions made by neorealists still exist. Specifically, John Mearsheimer outlines five assumptions of structural realists- (1) “Great powers are the main actors in world politics and they operate in an anarchic system”; (2) “All states possess some offensive military capability”; (3) “States can never be certain about the intentions of other states”; (4) “The main goal of states is survival” including “[maintaining] their territorial integrity and the autonomy of their domestic political order”; (5) “states are rational actors”.<sup>187</sup> Of these five assumptions, neoconservatives

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<sup>187</sup> Mearsheimer, John. “Structural Realism.” In *International Relations Theories*, 77–93. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 79-80.

would agree with the first two assumptions outright, and would agree with the third under the condition that ‘other states’ be replaced with ‘non-democracies’. Kagan writes that “in most places, the nation-state remains as strong as ever, and so, too, the nationalist ambitions, passions, and competition among nations that have shaped history.”<sup>188</sup> The world system is the same as it always has been — “the clashing of interests and ambitions of the great powers...producing the alliances and counter-alliances, and the elaborate dances and shifting partnerships, that a nineteenth century diplomat would recognize instantly.”<sup>189</sup>

Mearsheimer's fourth and fifth assumptions are not held by neoconservatives. While they would mostly agree with the fourth assumption, neoconservatives would be wary to make such an absolute claim. Some, even most, autocracies may prioritize survival over all other goals, but many dictators may not because they cannot be treated as rational actors. If an actor is irrational, it cannot be counted on to act in its best interest. Kaplan and Kristol argue that Saddam Hussein, for example, lacked “sanity, prudence, and self-control”, was “a pathological risk-taker” who possessed “supreme irrationality”.<sup>190</sup> It is specifically because non-democratic states are authoritarian that the intentions of states cannot be known. If a state were to always act rationally, the actions of that state would be easier to decipher, even given imperfect information.

Robert Kagan’s book *Of Paradise and Power* is centered on the idea of fragmentary anarchy. He writes that “Europe...is moving beyond power into a self-contained world of

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<sup>188</sup> Kagan, Robert. *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009, p. 3.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>190</sup> Kaplan, Lawrence F., and William Kristol. *The War Over Iraq: Saddam’s Tyranny and America’s Mission*. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003, p. 82.

laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation” while “the United States remains mired in history, exercising power in 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>191</sup> His use of the word ‘Hobbesian’ is loose; he does not relate the cause of anarchy to human hubris and vainglory like Hobbes does, but instead relates it to the nature of autocratic states and the lack of world government. Kagan endorses British diplomat Robert Cooper’s idea of “double standards”, which is that European nations should “operate on the basis of laws and open cooperative security” within Europe, but when dealing with autocratic states, they should “revert to the rougher methods of an earlier era—force, preemptive action, deception, whatever is necessary.” Europe, a continent made up entirely of democracies, is situated in a “postmodern” Kantian world, whereas much of the rest of the world can be viewed as “modern and pre-modern zones” of anarchy.<sup>192</sup> Non-democratic states which “refuse to abide by” the rules and “laws of civilized society” make up these zones of anarchy.<sup>193</sup>

Though my comparison of the neoconservative and neorealist views of anarchy stems from fundamentally different logic, the results are fairly similar, given that the world consists of democracies and non-democracies alike. Because there is no world government, democracies will remain suspicious of autocracies, while autocracies will remain suspicious both democracies and fellow autocracies. The neoconservative version

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<sup>191</sup> Kagan, Robert. *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2003, p. 3.

<sup>192</sup> Cooper and Kagan use ‘modern’ and ‘post-modern’ in a different sense than most academics. ‘Modern’ in this case, referring to war, refers to the world post Westphalia. ‘Post-modern’ is used to mean futuristic and utopian.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 74-75.

of anarchy is not structural, but many of the neorealist assumptions upon which they define anarchy certainly overlap with neoconservatism. Moreover, this contention does not invalidate my claim that neoconservatism should be viewed as a part of the liberal tradition. Rather, the opposite is true. As put by Andrew Moravcsik, “liberal theory is analytically prior to both realism and institutionalism because it defines the conditions under which their assumptions hold.” The neoconservative logic of fragmentary anarchy does exactly this.

This idea is not entirely new, but the logic behind it is. Scholars who write of “islands of peace” or “security communities” tend to rely on explanations of the dyadic democratic peace theory,<sup>194</sup> the presence of “strong states” and absence of “weak states”,<sup>195</sup> or that democracies (and some non-democracies) are “satisfied” or “status quo” powers.<sup>196</sup> Neoconservative international relations theory, on the other hand, uses the monadic democratic peace theory, which results in a different conception of how wars originate. The neoconservative conception of fragmentary anarchy is most similar to the dyadic democratic peace conception of security communities. But the world for neoconservatives when compared to proponents of the dyadic democratic peace is surprisingly less anarchic, not necessarily in absolute amounts of wars, but in terms of the number of potential war permutations. The dyadic DPT only removes the possibility of a democracy-democracy war (where the war is started by the first state in the permutation),

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<sup>194</sup> See Starr, Harvey. “Democracy and War: Choice, Learning and Security Communities.” *Journal of Peace Research* 29, no. 2 (May 1, 1992): 207–13; . Williams, Michael C. “The Discipline of the Democratic Peace: Kant, Liberalism and the Social Construction of Security Communities.” *European Journal of International Relations* 7, no. 4 (December 1, 2001): 525–53.

<sup>195</sup> Holsti, K.J. “War, Peace, and the State of the State.” *International Political Science Review* 16, no. 4 (October 1, 1995): 319–39.

<sup>196</sup> Kacowicz, Arie M. “Explaining Zones of Peace: Democracies as Satisfied Powers?” *Journal of Peace Research* 32, no. 3 (August 1, 1995): 265–76.

but it leaves open the possibility of democracy-non-democracy and non-democracy-democracy war. As explained in chapter four, neoconservatives deny the possibility of a democracy-non- democracy.

The other two explanations also are quite different. Neoconservatism and proponents of the “weak states” explanation of peace are not speaking on the same terms; the former speaks of wars between states while the latter speaks mainly of wars within states. The “status quo” explanation by definition contradicts the realist (and neoconservative, at least for autocracies) notion that intentions of state cannot be known; “status quo” and “revisionist” are concrete intentions. Thus, the neoconservative conception of fragmentary anarchy is distinct from the other concepts of “security communities” or “islands of peace”.

### **What is the National Interest?**

Even though neoconservatives seem to hold that anarchy is an important aspect of the international relations system, they make something different of it than neorealists and neoliberals. Instead of maintaining that states will act in their narrow survival oriented self-interest, national interests are flexible and not necessarily objective.

As mentioned earlier, neorealists hold that in the face of anarchy, states will do all in their power to survive. As power is finite, “anarchy forces security-seeking states to compete with each other for power, because power is the best means to survival.” If a state is unable to maintain its “territorial integrity,...it is unlikely to be in a position to pursue

other aims.”<sup>197</sup> When need be, states will ‘cheat,’ or break away from alliances, institutional participation, or treaties in order to pursue their own, independent policies. Some neorealists believe that survival entails merely enduring, meaning that states will be satisfied with survival alone. Others think that states will aim for hegemony, for nothing short of complete dominance of the international system will guarantee security. But at the crux of neorealist thought is the notion that comparative gains, as opposed to absolute gains, are at the essence of state decision-making. Thence, “states worry that today's friend may be tomorrow's enemy in war, and fear that achievements of joint gains that advantage a friend in the present might produce a more dangerous potential foe in the future.”<sup>198</sup>

Neoliberals too hold that states will do what is in their best interests for survival, but survival entails acting in a more cooperative manner. Rejecting that states care about comparative gains, neoliberals say that as ‘rational egoists,’ states care primarily about their own lot. Neoliberals warn of the danger in thinking that states exist “outside of human society,”<sup>199</sup> for doing so severely limits the “shadow of the future.”<sup>200</sup> As state decisions in the international system are repeated continuously, cooperation is often incentivized, because cheating will be met with reprimand by other states over the long term (sometimes after even just one occurrence). Moreover, because state decision-

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<sup>197</sup> Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York, N.Y.: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003, p. 37.

<sup>198</sup> Grieco, Joseph M. “Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism.” *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 485–507, p. 487.

<sup>199</sup> Keohane, Robert O. *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 73.

<sup>200</sup> Axelrod, Robert, and Robert O. Keohane. “Achieving Cooperation under Anarchy: Strategies and Institutions.” *World Politics* 38, no. 1 (1985): 226–54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010357>, p. 232.

making is regularly based on the decisions of other states, reciprocity is similarly regularly in the best interests of both states, such as in the case with trade.

Neoconservatives' approach to anarchy is more nuanced, because unlike the parties of the neo-neo synthesis, they do not define the national interest in narrow terms. To those that say that a great power like the U.S. should act in a manner of survival or national interest, Irving Kristol says that they have "little difficulty in demonstrating that both are disingenuous."<sup>201</sup> Moreover, he says that 'national interest' as a neorealist concept is flawed once contextualized, as "the idea of 'national interest' is derived from a false analogy with the status of Great Britain as a world power in the 19th century."<sup>202</sup> Imperial Britain's well-being depended directly on its ability to maintain mercantilist monopolies across the globe, whereas for the United States the free market annuls this need. Kristol repeatedly points to situations that where the United States enacted foreign policies incongruent with its supposed national interest. Supporting Joseph-Désiré Mobutu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo had "no direct concern—economic or military" to the United States. Similarly, the U.S. playing "the role of mediator and arbitrator in the Cyprus dispute" was not "any kind of narrow self-interest" for the U.S. "could not care less about Cyprus itself, where we have neither bases nor investments."<sup>203</sup> This leads Kristol to conclude that "acting the world power is for her a burden not a privilege."<sup>204</sup>

For neoconservatives, national interest is a subjective concept; if it was objective, international politics would be mostly determined and largely predictable. As put by

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid, p. 56.

<sup>202</sup> Kristol, Irving. "A Matter of Fundamentals." *Encounter* 14, no. 4 (April 1960): 54–58., p. 56.

<sup>203</sup> Kristol, Irving. "We Can't Resign As 'Policeman of the World.'" *The New York Times*, May 12, 1968. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9C0DE4D91230EE3BBC4A52DFB3668383679EDE>.

<sup>204</sup> Kristol, Irving. "A Matter of Fundamentals." *Encounter* 14, no. 4 (April 1960): 54–58., p. 56.

Joshua Muravchik, “whatever the scholarly merits of Waltz’ theory,...if his argument is true—that external circumstances compel states to behave as they do—our policy debates have a lot less consequence than we imagine.”<sup>205</sup> In a debate with Stephen Walt, Muravchik snides at the realist’s notion that “he sees the world for what it really is” when really “the real world is nuanced, often ambiguous”, and ultimately chides that “Walt’s world is stick figures, straw men, parodies, exaggerations”.<sup>206</sup> Kagan and William Kristol concur, writing that:

The complicated workings of foreign policy and the exceptional position of the United States should guard against believing that the national interest can be measured in a quasi-scientific fashion, or that areas of “vital” national interest can be located, and other areas excluded, by a purely geopolitical determinations. Determining what is in America’s national interest is an art, not a science. It requires not only the measurement of power but also an appreciation of beliefs, principles, and perceptions, which cannot be quantified.<sup>207</sup>

Not defining the national interest in terms of survival allows neoconservatives to reinforce the notion that regime types matter. Whereas neo-realists are not able to explain the actions of states based on anything other than structural factors, neoconservatives recognize that the national interest for autocrats is often simply furthering the life of their regime. As mentioned in chapter four, wars are a way for regimes to drum up nationalist spirit and gain legitimacy. But they also can be used to support other autocrats in order to

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<sup>205</sup> Muravchik, Joshua. *Exporting Democracy*. Washington, DC: AEI Press, 1992, p. 38.

<sup>206</sup> Muravchik, Joshua, and Stephen M. Walt. “The Neocons vs. The Realists.” *The National Interest*, no. 97 (2008): 20–36, p. 33.

<sup>207</sup> Kagan, Robert, and William Kristol. “Introduction: National Interest and Global Responsibility.” In *Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign and Defense Policy*, 1–24. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000, p. 13.

display their commitment to suppressing liberal values. Stephens, observing that North Korea, China, Russia, and Iran (a group he labels “Dictatorship, Inc.”), have all to varying degrees supported Bashar al-Assad’s regime in Syria, contends they have done so not entirely out narrow self-interest, saying that “there are interests that go beyond lives and money.” The interest they all have in common is “to see a popular rebellion against tyranny fail spectacularly.” In more detail he claims that:

Syria isn’t so much a country as it is an exhibit for Dictatorship Inc., the main purpose of which is to show that resistance really is futile. That’s why Russia doesn’t shrink from bombing civilian hospitals, or Hezbollah from starving entire cities into submission, or Assad from using chemical weapons. They are showing their respective publics the lengths to which they are prepared to go to maintain their own grip on power.<sup>208</sup>

Robert Kagan also sees states balancing not based on narrow geopolitical self-interest, but of a self-interest based on regime type. Because liberal democracies stand fundamentally against the notion that autocratic regimes can gain legitimacy through force and coercion alone, in the long run they are a threat to autocracies. For this reason, Kagan writes that “the old competition between liberalism and autocracy has also reemerged, with the world’s great powers lining up according to the nature of their regime.”<sup>209</sup> Despite the giant defense spending and nuclear arsenals of China and Russia, other autocrats are unlikely to see them as threats. Instead, “the rulers in Rangoon, Khartoum, Pyongyang, and Tehran know that their best and, as a last resort, only

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<sup>208</sup> Stephens, Bret. “The Rise of Dictatorship Incorporated.” *The New York Times*, March 2, 2018, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/02/opinion/dictatorship-iran-north-korea-russia-china.html>.

<sup>209</sup> Kagan, Robert. *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*. Vintage Books, 2009, p. 4.

protectors in a generally hostile world are to be found in Beijing and Moscow” because of their shared “common interests and a common view of international order.”<sup>210</sup>

This is not to say that neoconservatives never use more narrow definitions of the national interest. Kristol declares that “elements of *Realpolitik* will surely have to be incorporated into our foreign policy, as in all foreign policies.”<sup>211</sup> He argues that though war in South Vietnam is “not of critical significance to our national interest,” nor is “South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, or, in Europe, of Yugoslavia, Portugal, or Spain,” they have the potential to be. He says that “in *isolation* none of them is of great national importance to us,” but if they were to balance against the United States, “the shape of world politics would be decisively altered, and to our disadvantage.”<sup>212</sup>

Naturally, some of the more idealist neoconservatives criticized Kristol for this.

Muravchik labels Kristol as a ‘conservative neorealist’ because Kristol’s “opposition to alliances taken together with his opposition to foreign aid and to attempts to encourage the growth of democracy gives weight to” Charles Krauthammer’s chiding of Kristol as a “right isolationist.”<sup>213</sup> Then again, Muravchik seems to only have a surface level appreciation for neorealism, taking neorealist to mean modern day proponents of balance-of-power strategies. This flawed conceptualization leads him to conclude that figures like Kennedy advisor Arthur Schlesinger and paleoconservative Pat Buchanan are somehow neorealists, which is somewhat extraordinary. Nuances between iterations of realism are

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>211</sup> Kristol, Irving. “The Common Sense of ‘Human Rights.’” *Wall Street Journal*. April 8, 1981. 134656784. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

<sup>212</sup> Kristol, Irving. “The Politics of Appeasement.” *Wall Street Journal*. February 12, 1975. 134078423. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

<sup>213</sup> Muravchik, Joshua. *Exporting Democracy*. Washington, DC: AEI Press, 1992, p. 45-47.

similarly often lost (or at least ignored) by neoconservatives, equating realism broadly with *realpolitik*, which can lead to mischaracterizations like Muravchik's. Ultimately though, neoconservatives object to external forces being the primary driver of state foreign policy.

## **Institutions**

Given that neoconservatives hold that non-democracies create a system of fragmentary anarchy, might survival be had through collective security and institutionalism? On the contrary, neoconservatives harbor a deep skepticism, sometimes even a resentment, of institutions. Depending on the type of institution, neoconservatives have different explanations behind their skepticism. Institutions that include non-democracies are unlikely to prevent war, human rights violations, and internal conflict because of the participation of non-democracies, whose inherent characteristics are antithetical towards combating these problems. Institutions that are made up entirely of democracies would not have this problem but would still have collective action hampered by differences of national interest. This section will address neoconservatives' views on the former type of institution, while the next will address the latter.

Neoconservatives' distrust of international institutions is near unanimous. As stated by Kristol, "no one seriously thinks that the United Nations can, in our lifetime, fill the vacuum that the retrenchment of United States commitments will create."<sup>214</sup> Bret Stephens quotes former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton as saying that "if the United Nations Secretariat building in New York 'lost 10 stories, it wouldn't

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<sup>214</sup> Kristol, Irving. "We Can't Resign As 'Policeman of the World.'" The New York Times, May 12, 1968. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9C0DE4D91230EE3BBC4A52DFB3668383679EDE>.

make a bit of difference””, and questions why the remark is even controversial.<sup>215</sup> Max Boot argues that there are “many international laws on the books prohibiting genocide, land mines, [and] biological weapons...[but] without enforcement mechanisms they are as meaningless as the Kellogg-Briand Pact.”<sup>216</sup> Even Francis Fukuyama, a former neoconservative, still calls the neoconservative opinion of the United Nations, that “while useful for certain peacekeeping and nation-building operations, the United Nations lacks both democratic legitimacy and effectiveness in dealing with serious security issues,” to be “cogent.”<sup>217</sup>

Fukuyama’s logic is more empirical than philosophical, noting that though “we have a relatively good understanding of how to create institutions that are rule bound, accountable and reasonably effective in the vertical silos we call states,...we do not have [sic] adequate mechanisms of horizontal accountability among states.” Neoconservatives readily agree with this. Kristol calls large scale collective security an “expectation [that] was probably always utopian.”<sup>218</sup> Robert Kagan argues that power politics trumps whatever influence institutions may have, saying that “People may hope for a more harmonious world based on a new concert of nations, but the rise of great power competition and the clashing interests and ambitions of nations across Eurasia make such an evolution unlikely.”<sup>219</sup> Stephens says that “the U.N. is a never-ending scandal

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<sup>215</sup> Stephens, Bret. “John Bolton Is Right About the U.N.” *The New York Times*, March 23, 2018, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/23/opinion/john-bolton-un-united-nations.html>.

<sup>216</sup> Boot, Max. “Does America Need an Empire?” presented at the 2003 Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz Memorial Lecture at UC Berkeley, Berkeley, March 12, 2003. [http://www.berkeley.edu/news/berkeleyan/2003/03/19\\_boot-transcript.shtml](http://www.berkeley.edu/news/berkeleyan/2003/03/19_boot-transcript.shtml).

<sup>217</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. “After Neoconservatism.” *The New York Times*, February 19, 2006, sec. Magazine. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/19/magazine/after-neoconservatism.html>.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Kagan, Robert. *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*. Vintage Books, 2009, p. 93.

disguised as an everlasting hope” and “collective security is a recipe for international paralysis or worse.”<sup>220</sup> Even more forcefully Kristol says, “Who but a dreamer could take seriously the notion that some 150 nations—ranging from primitive to civilized, the anarchic to the authoritarian, the stable to the chronically unstable, all with different interests, different histories, different political ideologies, and different religions—could collectively bring order and tranquility to the world?”<sup>221</sup> Furthermore, opportunities for autocracies to cheat are numerous, as “in order to be effective and provide the assurances they are designed to bring, [multilateral agreements] must be carefully and universally adhered to by *all* signatories,”<sup>222</sup> which institutions like the U.N. have difficulties enforcing.

Irving Kristol’s disdain for the U.N. stems from it making smaller, lesser states “obliged to take public stands on all sorts of controversial issues that have no real significance for them.” For this reason, he argues that “such issues would be settled to our better advantage if we were to negotiate privately, bilaterally or multilaterally, with the nations directly involved.”<sup>223</sup> The General Assembly leads to the disputes of great powers being opined upon by insignificant ones with the same amount of weight. The smaller nations, naturally, take a more “risk averse” approach to the United Nations, which in practicality

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<sup>220</sup> Stephens, Bret. “John Bolton Is Right About the U.N.”

<sup>221</sup> Kristol, Irving. “After the War, What?” *Wall Street Journal*. February 22, 1991. 135578312. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

<sup>222</sup> Bolton, John R. “Beyond the Axis of Evil: Additional Threats from Weapons of Mass Destruction.” In *The Neocon Reader*, 119–26. New York, N.Y.: Grove Press, 2004.

I should note that Bolton is not a neoconservative; he is more of what Vaisse calls an ‘aggressive nationalist’. He can also be categorized as an aggressive realist.

<sup>223</sup> Kristol, Irving. “‘Global Unilateralism’ and ‘Entangling Alliances.’” *Wall Street Journal*. February 3, 1986. 135249929. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

blocks the ability the U.N. to swiftly deal with crises.<sup>224</sup> As put by Justin Vaïsse, “in the neoconservative vision, the United Nations is not only ineffective, it is also illegitimate because it is profoundly undemocratic. The U.N. General Assembly gives as much power to Libya as to India.”<sup>225</sup> Additionally, the Security Council is no better, as it allows autocratic Russia and communist China to veto power over the rest of world. Instead of being a functional promoter of peace, U.N. Security Council has become “an arena for forging diplomatic roadblocks.”<sup>226</sup> As such, Kristol says that “world government is a terrible idea since it can lead to world tyranny,” and because institutions like the U.N. foolhardily try to act as one, they “should be regarded with the deepest suspicion.”<sup>227</sup> For Kagan, the UNSC cannot grant “international legitimacy to actions...because it has become hopelessly paralyzed by the split between autocratic and democratic members.”<sup>228</sup>

Nor can the United Nations stop great powers from acting autonomously from the wishes of the international community. For example, the United States’ funding of the Nicaraguan Contras was for Kristol “an opportunity not to be missed” for “argument from international law lacks all credibility.”<sup>229</sup> Conceptually similar, but with the opposite sentiment, William Kristol saw it as a given that Russia would continue to meddle in Eastern Europe despite “widening its war against Georgia more than its

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Vaïsse, Justin. “Why Neoconservatism Still Matters.” Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, November 30, 2001. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/why-neoconservatism-still-matters/>.

<sup>226</sup> Kristol, William, and Robert Kagan. “National Interest and Global Responsibility.” In *The Neocon Reader*, 57–74. New York, N.Y.: Grove Press, 2004, p. 72.

<sup>227</sup> Kristol, Irving. “The Neoconservative Persuasion.” *Weekly Standard*, August 25, 2003. <http://www.weeklystandard.com/the-neoconservative-persuasion/article/4246>.

<sup>228</sup> Kagan, Robert. *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*. Vintage Books, 2009, p. 97.

<sup>229</sup> Kristol, Irving. “Why a Debate Over Contra Aid?” *Wall Street Journal*. April 11, 1986. 135224574. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Wall Street Journal.

original — and in any case illegitimate — *casus belli* would justify.”<sup>230</sup> While it is predictable that neoconservatives see the United States’ breaking of international law as justified but the Russians’ as illicit, regardless of their partiality, they are consistent in maintaining that international institutions will not stop great powers, or even weaker ones, from cheating.

Joshua Muravchik, though normally skeptical of the U.N., had high hopes for the United Nations to improve as a violence queller, especially after Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali sought to create a permanent U.N. military force in order to respond “to outright aggression, imminent or actual.”<sup>231</sup> But disaster for U.S. forces in Somalia coupled with a similar fate for Nigerian troops in Mogadishu, along with U.N. inaction in Rwanda, led to Muravchik reconfirming his pessimism. The problem was not the United Nations in theory, but the United Nations in practice as mix of democracies and non-democracies. Because the U.N. “remains a collection of states, many of which are neither law abiding nor peaceful nor legitimated by the consent of those they govern,” it is doomed to be “less than the sum of its parts.”<sup>232</sup>

Like for realists, institution-based peace is not unobtainable in the short term and in certain situations can prove to be quite useful. Collective security is something that should be aspired for if it can be in a state’s best interest. Paul Wolfowitz, long-time State Department and Pentagon advisor then serving as Undersecretary for Defense Policy, wrote in a leaked draft of the Defense Planning Guidance of 1992 (later coined the

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<sup>230</sup> Kristol, William. “Will Russia Get Away With It?” *The New York Times*, August 10, 2008, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/11/opinion/11kristol.html>.

<sup>231</sup> Muravchik, Joshua. *The Imperative of American Leadership: A Challenge to Neo-Isolationism*. American Enterprise Institute, 1996, p. 72.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, p. 78

‘Wolfowitz Doctrine’) that it should be a goal of the United States to seek collective defense. One of the strategic goals he had in mind was to “strengthen and extend the system of defense arrangements that binds democratic and like-minded nations together in common defense against aggression, builds habits of cooperation, avoids the renationalization of security policies, and provides security at lower costs and with lower risks for all.”<sup>233</sup> Moreover, though NATO was formed more as an alliance against the Soviet Union than an institution of collective security, it seems that today it, along with the EU, serves just as much as a reinforcing force of democratization, making conflict between members unthinkable, rather than a protection against external aggression. Neoconservatives, with some exceptions,<sup>234</sup> see NATO as useful for both reasons. The bombing of Milosevic’s Yugoslavian Serbia for the liberation of Kosovo is seen as the prime example of how NATO could act collectively to prevent atrocities when the U.N. either could or would not.

Robert Kagan also does not dismiss institutions *in toto*, but finds that institutions like the United Nations are counterproductive because it has no effective means of enforcement behind its curtain of committees and declarations. Alternatively, he suggests “a global concert or league of democracies...with the aim of holding regular meetings and consultations among democratic nations on the issues of the day.”<sup>235</sup> The advantage to this sort of association, according to Kagan, is that by not giving a vote to autocratic

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<sup>233</sup> Wolfowitz, Paul, and I. Lewis Libby. “Defense Planning Guidance, FY 1994-1999,” April 16, 1992. <https://www.archives.gov/files/declassification/iscap/pdf/2008-003-docs1-12.pdf>.

<sup>234</sup> Irving Kristol saw NATO as ineffective because of European nations’ unwillingness to upgrade and expand their conventional warfare capabilities. He thought they over-relied on nuclear deterrence for defense and saw exchanges of tactical nuclear weapon strikes on conventional positions to be a dangerous gambit. As such, he increasingly saw the United States’ European allies as useless.

<sup>235</sup> Kagan, Robert. *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*. Vintage Books, 2009, p. 98.

regimes, a democratic league could act faster to enact preemptive action against autocratic states that attack other nations or their own people. Yes, a democratic league would be slightly less legitimate than the United Nations, insofar as legitimacy is derived internationally through every state, good or bad, having a voice. The democratic league would be, ironically, less democratic than the U.N., but this would be a necessary trade-off for the sake of prudence and efficacy.

Of course, there already are two democratic leagues of sorts already in existence. The most recently formed coalition, the Community of Democracies, doesn't have much power or influence. (Indeed, its most important attribute might be that its member nations combine to form the United Nations' democracy caucus). The other is NATO, which neoconservatives praise when it acts in accordance with the United States but scorn when it refuses to do the U.S.' bidding, like with Iraq. If it is "obvious that the NATO alliance [is] too large and unwieldy to take effective military action,"<sup>236</sup> why would a larger democratic league which would presumably include large states like India and Brazil be any 'better'? It is more likely that any sort of institution will be met with some reservation by neoconservatives.

### **Tying Institutions to the National Interest: Why Neoconservatives Mistrust Institutions More Broadly**

Neoconservatives are fundamentally skeptical of international institutions because they believe that national interests are not the same for every nation. The United Nations

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<sup>236</sup> Boot, Max. "Does America Need an Empire?" presented at the 2003 Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz Memorial Lecture at UC Berkeley, Berkeley, March 12, 2003.  
[http://www.berkeley.edu/news/berkeleyan/2003/03/19\\_boot-transcript.shtml](http://www.berkeley.edu/news/berkeleyan/2003/03/19_boot-transcript.shtml).

presupposes that its member states are committed to the promotion of human rights, personal liberties, and a general commitment of non-violence, as defined in its charter. But the ability of the United Nations act as an enforcement mechanism in defense of these values depends on its member nations' definition of national interest. If the majority of countries are committed to the promotion of the U.N charter's ideals, then the U.N. might be functional in enforcing the commitment to its values. But given that a large number of its member states not only do not prioritize those values, but they actively work to suppress them in their own countries, this is unlikely. Moreover, even if autocracies provide lip service to non-violence, maintaining power domestically will take priority over cosmopolitan values in the long run.

The same principle applies to the neoconservatives' view of NATO. The monadic democratic peace theory assumes that democratic nations are more peaceful. It does not, however, assume that democracies will naturally work together to promote liberal norms, engage in humanitarian interventions, or undermine autocratic regimes. Neoconservatives would argue that it would be in their best interest to do so, but are not willing to assume a high level of diligence, let alone zeal, to these goals. In fact, they are often skeptical of European states' commitment to democracy and human rights promotion,<sup>237</sup> and it for this reason that they are skeptical of NATO, despite the alliance consisting entirely of democracies committed to a common defense. When the group truly believes another nation to be a threat to the collective, they will act in cohesion. But the very fact that NATO's Article V is frequently used as an argument against expansion indicates that respective national interests are not uniform. Harder still is convincing the larger

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<sup>237</sup> See Kagan, Robert. *Of Paradise and Power*.

institution that future autocratic threats warrants action. And, as Muravchik states, “experience has shown that collegial decision making rarely results in any action, collective or otherwise, and can never substitute for the galvanizing effect of a single, effective leader.”<sup>238</sup> Though the world consists of fragmentary anarchy, democracies are often content to stick to their non-anarchical fragments. Even when war was quite near to many NATO states’ territorial border, as was the case in Bosnia, action took three years, with neoconservatives constantly pointing this out until NATO finally did intervene.<sup>239</sup>

Moreover, if the United Nations was made up entirely of democracies, it would still have enforcement problems. Muravchik uses the same logic here that he does with his assessment of NATO, noting that even if all member states in the U.N. were law-abiding, the “U.N. can solve no problem for which its individual members are unwilling to accept the costs and risks of solving” by themselves.<sup>240</sup> The U.N. “invites an evasion of responsibility,” paralleling Mearsheimer’s concept of buck-passing. The only redeeming quality of the U.N. for Muravchik is that it can promote peace “not in replacing American power but by sanctifying its exercise, as in Korea and Kuwait.”<sup>241</sup> Because of the diversity of interests amongst member states, even if they were democratic, institutions are unwieldy and victims of their own size.

It should be unsurprising that the most famed neoconservative foreign policy recommendation is unilateral preemptive intervention performed by the United States. In

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<sup>238</sup> Muravchik, Joshua. *The Imperative of American Leadership: A Challenge to Neo-Isolationism*. American Enterprise Institute, 1996, p.168.

<sup>239</sup> Karčić, Hamza. “US Neoconservative Support and Policy Activism for Bosnia, 1992–1995: Correcting the Record.” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 35, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 344–58.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

the absence of a ‘coalition of the willing’ dedicated to democracy promotion, a singular great power can perform the function that an international institution or even an alliance often cannot, for it is more likely that one democratic nation will view its national interest as tied to democracy and human rights promotion than many. Neoconservatives all contend that the United States must remain hegemon, viewing “American primacy in the international system [as] a stroke of good fortune for the rest of the world, since America does not seek to conquer and oppress, but rather to liberate and democratize, and offers public goods to all.”<sup>242</sup> Boot advocates openly for American imperialism, Krauthammer for the prolongation of the ‘Unipolar Moment’, and virtually all neoconservatives assent to the idea that U.S. should in some capacity act as the world’s policeman. Ultimately, their rationale is that because threats stemming from non-democratic nations cannot be combated by international institutions, the United States must be the primary actor in world politics. In a world of fragmentary anarchy, there is no better option.

Despite appearing to be so at times, neoconservatism does not unequivocally call for regime change and unilateralism all at once. After all, what all neoconservatives share is commitment to pragmatism, what Peter Berkowitz calls “flexibility in solving problems as opposed to insistence on solutions that conform to religious or metaphysical dogma or rigid moral and political agendas.”<sup>243</sup> But pragmatism has to do with problem solving, not the description of the problem, which is the determination of how states act in an international system. Thus neoconservatives do conform to a dogma of sorts, the assumptions derived from the monadic democratic peace theory.

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<sup>242</sup> Vaïsse, Justin. “Why Neoconservatism Still Matters.” Brookings Institution, 2010, p. 4.

<sup>243</sup> Berkowitz, Peter. “Pragmatism Obama Style.” Weekly Standard, May 4, 2009.  
<http://www.weeklystandard.com/pragmatism-obama-style/article/17504>.

## Chapter 6: Neoconservatism Is Not Neoclassical Realism

Thus far, I have established that neoconservatism, though partially sharing the most basic tenets of neorealism, primarily uses second image factors to its explanation of state actions. However, the rise of neoclassical realism blurs the lines between realism and neoconservative. Specifically, neoclassical realism's insertion of domestic level factors into neorealism's structural theory at first glance seems to appear similar to neoconservatism. As such, "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."<sup>244</sup>

I contend that this is not the case. While there are many overlapping elements between neoconservatism and neoclassical realism, at their cores they are fundamentally different — while neoclassical realism uses state level factors to complement its structural foundation, neoconservatism starts with regime type and uses it to portray the world in a fragmentary anarchical manner. That is, while neoclassical realism holds that the systemic outcomes of neorealism are often *altered* by state-level factors, neoconservatism says that outcomes are *primarily* predicted by the nature of regimes. As such, neoconservatism is no closer neoclassical realism as it is to pure *Innenpolitik* theories.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. First, I briefly describe the origins of neoclassical realism and how it differs from pure structural realism. Second, I summarize

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<sup>244</sup> Caverley, Jonathan D. "Power and Democratic Weakness: Neoconservatism and Neoclassical Realism." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 38, no. 3 (May 2010): 593–614. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829810366473>, p. 608.

Jonathan Caverley's argument that neoconservatism is essentially a variation of neoclassical realism. Finally, I explain that Caverley's argument depends on a loose definition of neoclassical realism and a misunderstanding of neoconservatism.

This chapter addresses probably the most direct attempt to label neoconservatism using the language of international relations theory. Unlike other articles which merely address areas of IR theory that neoconservatism can shed light on, Caverley directly labels neoconservatism as an existing IR theory, which is why I feel it is important to engage with it. Moreover, in this paper I am arguing that neoconservatism is an IR theory, and I frame it using the language of the democratic peace theory, which firmly puts it in the liberal camp. This chapter will further argue that neoconservatism should be placed under the liberal umbrella and not, like Caverly argues, the realist.

The label "neoclassical realism" was first coined by Gideon Rose, current editor of *Foreign Affairs*, in 1998. Though Rose describes neoclassical realism as a theory of foreign policy, which is how it is normally applied at a case-study level, it works just as well as a theory of international relations because it is primarily begins not with the foreign policy of any particular state or group of states, but the causal logic behind state action more generally. Moreover, offensive and defensive realism, two theories that Rose directly compares neoclassical realism to, are also theories of international relations. Thus, for the purposes of this chapter, whenever Rose refers to neoclassical realism as a theory of foreign policy, the same logic can be applied to it as a theory of international relations.

Neoclassical realism at its most basic level a variant of realism. While this may be stating the obvious, this most important aspect of neoclassical realism is not the most important for neoconservatism, and as such needs to be emphasized for the sake of differentialization. Gideon Rose states that for neoclassical realists, “the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realist.”<sup>245</sup> State action will over the long term be shaped by its material wealth and military capabilities.<sup>246</sup> Brian Rathburn argues that neoclassical realism is “the natural outgrowth of neorealism” and actually “vindicates Waltz” because it indicates “that when domestic politics and ideas interfere substantially in foreign policy decision making, the system punishes states.”<sup>247</sup> Systemic variables are the independent variable for neoclassical realists, just as they are for offensive and defensive realism.<sup>248</sup>

Insofar as neoclassical realism differentiates itself from other forms of realism by incorporating second image variables into its analysis, Caverly argues that “neoconservatism is neoclassical realism”, for which he gives two reasons. First, neoconservatism acknowledges the existence of key neorealist concepts, such as anarchy and balancing. He says that “like neoconservatism, neoclassical realism generally assumes that as a state’s international political power waxes and wanes, so too does its

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<sup>245</sup> Rose, Gideon. “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy.” Edited by Michael E. Brown, Thomas J. Christensen, Randall L. Schweller, William Curti Wohlforth, and Fareed Zakaria. *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 144–72, p. 146.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, p. 152.

<sup>247</sup> Rathburn, Brian. “A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism.” *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (May 22, 2008): 294–321. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410802098917>, 296.

<sup>248</sup> For offensive realists, the system is the only variable, while for defensive realists, systemic incentives and internal factors are both independent variables.

efforts to influence other states.”<sup>249</sup> Second, neoconservatism incorporates second image factors into their analysis of state behavior. As shown in prior chapters, neoconservatives emphasize the importance of regime type in guiding the foreign policy decisions of states. Caverley writes that “neoconservatism acknowledges that if domestic factors affect a state’s ability to balance against threat or power, a strategic actor should incorporate other states’ domestic factors into its geopolitical calculus. Intervening in other states’ internal affairs becomes a form of balancing.”<sup>250</sup>

Moreover, a large number of neoclassical realist works have analyzed “whether state leaders have the power to convert the nation’s economic power into military power or translate the nation’s economic and military power into foreign policy action.” With this in mind, it is not a sizeable logical jump to replace ‘economic power’ with ‘regime type’, for as neoconservatives argue, regime type has an instrumental role in translating military might into foreign policy action. Caverley quotes Rathburn to make his point, saying:

Power can be used only if it can be mobilised. Two variables are particularly important for this: the state’s extractive ability and inspirational capacity”.

Neoclassical realism does not limit itself to material variables, but even so, “identity and ideology are used primarily as part of self-help (Rathbun, 2008: 303). Neoconservatism could not agree more.”<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Caverley, Jonathan D. “Power and Democratic Weakness: Neoconservatism and Neoclassical Realism.” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 38, no. 3 (May 2010): 593–614. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829810366473>, p. 609.

<sup>250</sup> Caverley, Jonathan D. “Power and Democratic Weakness: Neoconservatism and Neoclassical Realism.” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 38, no. 3 (May 2010): 593–614, p. 159.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

Rose himself hints at this possibility, saying that “instead of viewing ideas as either purely independent or purely dependent variables, future neoclassical realists could explore how, in conjunction with relative power, they could play both roles simultaneously.”<sup>252</sup> Because neoconservatism emphasizes the importance of relative power while noting that it is not superior to regime type, it is possible that neoconservatism would match with Rose’s recommendation. Given the many variants of neoclassical realism, regime type and the democratic peace theory could potentially be used as the main differentiating variable between pure structural theory and neoclassical realism, at least if we to believe Caverly and Rose.

Caverly’s argument, though compelling, is flawed for two reasons. First, it misunderstands what makes neoclassical realism different than liberal or epistemic international relations theories. In order for the neoconservatism-neoclassical realism synthesis to work, Caverly relies on a particular reading of neoclassical realism that is highly contested. His widening of neoclassical realism opens it up to potentially counting neoconservatism as one of its variants, but this widening is misguided.

Moravcsik and Legro have to date made the most thorough critique of neoclassical realism and make several arguments that align with Caverly. They argue that neoclassical realism is neither unique nor parsimonious enough to be considered its own distinct theory. It is not unique because many other theories hold some of the same starting points as realism, such as institutionalism and liberalism, and also incorporate other factors that lead them to different conclusions about state behavior than realism. They write that:

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<sup>252</sup> Rose, Gideon. “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” p.169.

nearly all agree [...] that states are self-interested and their preferences, at least in security matters, lie somewhere between security and power [...] a measure of conflict over underlying values and interests, all modern theories agree, is endemic to world politics. Nearly all concur, furthermore, that governments generally place a high, perhaps superordinate, value on national security, territorial integrity, and political independence.<sup>253</sup>

Moreover, oftentimes neoclassical realists emphasize these supposedly subordinate second-level factors over structural forces, raising the question of how realist neoclassical realism really is. If second image factors “consistently fail to correspond to material power relationships, then power is at best one of a number of important factors and perhaps a secondary one. The parsimony and coherence of realist theory is eroded.”<sup>254</sup>

While Legro and Moravcsik question the usefulness of neoclassical realism as a research method on these grounds, Caverley takes it as a given that neoclassical realism can stand alone as an international relations theory while at the same time accepting its sometimes ad hoc nature as a given. He argues that wide net of neoclassical realism and its lack of uniqueness do not mean that it should be disregarded, but maybe other theories that also incorporate the basic core of neorealism while adding second image factors can be considered as neoclassical realist. Therefore, Caverley comes to the conclusion that neoconservatism’s “[incorporation of] what one author (Levy, 1988) has called ‘as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations’ is no less reasonable than many of the ad hoc additions of neoclassical realism to its structural antecedent, and

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<sup>253</sup> Legro, Jeffrey W., and Andrew Moravcsik. “Is Anybody Still a Realist?” *International Security* 24, no. 2 (1999): 5–55, p. 21.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

considerably more parsimonious than some versions.”<sup>255</sup> Neoclassical realism’s looseness had come to be enough to include neoconservatism as one of its variants.

This looseness partially comes from an identity crisis on the part of neoclassical realism. There has been much debate about whether neoclassical realism is a break from, variant of, or natural progression from structural realism. Onea argues that there are three strains of neoclassical realism, which he labels as orthodox, semi-orthodox, and revisionist.<sup>256</sup>

Orthodox neoclassical realism says that states can act against what structural factors would normally dictate it to do, but these decisions will always be temporary because the system discourages that type of behavior. Semi-orthodox neoclassical realism is similar to orthodox, but it incorporates domestic politics. Revisionist neoclassical realism “goes the furthest [away from structural realism] by contesting the absolute authority of the international system,” and instead “contends that a state’s motivation is principally shaped by the strategic context of its interactions with other states.”<sup>257</sup> Foulon argues that neoclassical realism explains the options that states have in the context of systemic pressures, especially if there are competing domestic and international pressures. Though for him, “the structural context of foreign policy is predominant and enjoys analytical supremacy over domestic interests,” varying perceptions of timeframe and threat levels allow states to have some flexibility in appeasing domestic interests.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Caverley, Jonathan D. “Neoconservatism, Neoclassical Realism, and the Narcissism of Small Differences.” In *After Liberalism?*, 145–66. Palgrave Studies in International Relations Series. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 160.

<sup>256</sup> Onea, Tudor. “Putting the ‘Classical’ in Neoclassical Realism: Neoclassical Realist Theories and US Expansion in the Post-Cold War.” *International Relations* 26, no. 2 (June 1, 2012): 139–64.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>258</sup> Foulon, Michael. “Neoclassical Realism: Challengers and Bridging Identities.” *International Studies Review* 17, no. 4 (December 2015): 635–61, p. 654.

Other scholars argue that neoclassical realism must reaffirm the findings of structural realism. Rathburn argues that Moravcsik and Legro (and by extension Caverley) “fail to understand that realist theories are as much about the consequences of behavior as about the determinants of behavior” and a result don’t recognize that neoclassical realism predicts that in the long run the structure of the world system will punish states that are overly influenced by second image factors and ignore their material national interest.<sup>259</sup> Like structural realism, neoclassical realism “leads us to the assumption that if domestic politics are allowed to distract from genuine state interests, and if ideas are allowed to color objective perceptions to a significant degree, the system will discipline the state through these mechanisms in the form of foreign policy failure.”<sup>260</sup> Variables like nationalism and a state’s inability to translate economic might into military might may alter a state’s behavior, but if this altered behavior continues, eventually this deviation will have consequences. For this reason, Rathburn, quoting Schweller, calls neoclassical realism a “theory of mistakes.”

Only if we take the loosest reading of neoclassical realism such as made by Moravcsik and Legro can the affinity between the neoclassical realism and neoconservatism hold. But even this reading, which barely constitutes a unique theory, still holds that systemic factors have the most influence on state decision making, even if they are not as influential as structural realists like to portray them. Neoconservatism does not hold this. Neoconservatism does not think that second level factors will always lead to the system

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<sup>259</sup> Feaver, Peter D., Gunther Hellman, Randall L. Schweller, Jeffery W. Taliaferro, William C. Wohlforth, Jeffery W. Legro, and Andrew Moravcsik. “Brother Can You Spare a Paradigm? (Or Was Anybody Ever a Realist?).” *International Security* 25, no. 1 (2000): 165–93, p. 166.

<sup>260</sup> Rathburn, Brian. “A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism.” *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (May 22, 2008): 294–321, p. 311.

punishing a state for its errors. In fact, the opposite in some cases is true — the structure of the international system might lead to a democratic state balancing alongside an authoritarian one, which in the long run is more likely than not to dissolve because inherent friction between autocratic regimes and democracies, ‘punishing’ the democratic state. In fact, Joshua Muravchik explicitly rejects the orthodox and semi-orthodox models of neoclassical realism, writing:

To compare the records of realism and neoconservatism we must first define our terms. Realism consists of two mutually contradictory propositions. One holds that states are bound to behave according to their innate interests. Thus, Hans Morgenthau argued that politics is —governed by objective laws whose —operation [is] impervious to our preferences. The other holds that states may deviate from their interests but ought not to do so. Neocons believe that we will find more safety using our power to try to fashion a more benign world order. On these points, neocons are liberal internationalists.<sup>261</sup>

If systemic factors are relegated to secondary status by neoclassical realism, I would have to agree with Legro and Moravcsik that neoclassical realism is nothing more than some form of liberalism or constructivism with the words ‘anarchy’ and ‘structure’ sprinkled in. Therefore, unless Caverley is willing to isolate neoclassical realism from other theories, his argument reads more as a critique of neoclassical realism’s identity crisis than an analysis of neoconservatism.

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<sup>261</sup> Muravchik, Joshua, and Stephen M. Walt. “The Neocons vs. The Realists.” *The National Interest*, no. 97 (2008): 20–36, p. 20.

The second flaw in Caverley's logic is that it misrepresents neoconservatism. This misrepresentation allows him to draw a direct parallel with neoclassical realist theories that address a similar subject matter, the ability of a state to translate material wealth into military power. Thus, even if we were to assume that Caverley's characterization of neoclassical realism was an accurate representation of it, his overall contention that neoconservatism is neoclassical realism is based on false premises of neoconservatism.

Specifically, he portrays neoconservative foreign policy as skeptical of democracy because leads a state to not transfer a proportionate amount of its material wealth into military power. He writes that "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."<sup>262</sup> Because "a democracy's responsiveness to voters [...] produces unfortunate side effects that include: a perverse welfare state, an inattention to foreign policy and consequent military decline."<sup>263</sup>

However, this argument twists neoconservatism into something it is not.

Neoconservatives do not universally believe that "the liberal welfare state underinvests in military power" because "voters will choose butter over guns".<sup>264</sup> Irving Kristol may have, but he also based this on the idea that capitalism will lead to nihilism, something that the neocons, who came later, do not explore in depth. Kristol thought that capitalism, while being good for economic growth, leads to an overly decadent, materialist society.

Wants expand at a rate that outpaces even a high growth rate. Moreover, wants expand

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<sup>262</sup> Caverley, Jonathan D. "Power and Democratic Weakness", p. 602.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, p. 604.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

across all classes, while growth under capitalism is often uneven across classes. These wants translate to the populace demanding more economic guarantees and services from the government, constraining the government's budget. Military spending will eventually be reduced to make up for this.<sup>265</sup>

Neoconservatives do believe that regime type has varying effects on a state's ability to make war; this is fundamental to the underlying logic of neoconservatism. But it is a stretch to claim that neoconservatives believe that democracies are weaker than autocracies. Indeed, several neoconservatives have made arguments contrary to Caverley's claim. Caverley cites Kagan and Kristol as saying "American civilians at home, preoccupied with the distribution of tax breaks and government benefits, will not come to their support when the going gets tough", but this misconstrues their argument.<sup>266</sup> They contend in the next sentence that "weak political leadership and a poor job of educating the citizenry to the responsibilities of global hegemony" are the cause of American ambivalence towards the military, not the inevitability of democratic norms.<sup>267</sup> On the contrary, they are optimistic about whether Americans will rally behind the flag, writing that "the American people can be summoned to meet the challenges of global leadership if statesmen make the case loudly, cogently, and persistently. As troubles arise and the need to act becomes clear, those who have laid the foundation for a necessary

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<sup>265</sup> See Kristol, Irving. "'When Virtue Loses All Her Loveliness' --Some Reflections on Capitalism And 'the Free Society.'" *The Public Interest*, no. 21 (Fall 1970): 3–15; Kristol, Irving. "'Capitalism' and 'the Free Society.'" *The Public Interest*, Winter 1971, 101–5; Kristol, Irving. "Capitalism, Socialism, and Nihilism." *The Public Interest*, no. 31 (Spring 1973): 3–16; Kristol, Irving. *Two Cheers for Capitalism*. New York: Basic Books, 1978.

<sup>266</sup> Caverley, Jonathan D. "Power and Democratic Weakness", p. 604.

<sup>267</sup> Kristol, William, and Robert Kagan. "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy." *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 4 (1996): 18–32, p. 26.

shift in policy have a chance to lead Americans onto a new course.”<sup>268</sup> Kagan also has contended that given the choice to be a global leader, “if the past is any guide, they will make it” albeit “with hesitation, uncertainty, and misgivings.”<sup>269</sup> The American mood in regards to military spending depends on government leadership, not regime characteristics.

Kagan for his part does condemn Europeans for spending, in their mind, too much domestic on their bloated welfare states and not enough on defense. But he argues that Europeans do this not because they are democracies but for two reasons. First, during the Cold War “the American nuclear guarantee deprived Europeans of the incentive to spend the kind of money that would have been necessary to restore them to military great-power status.”<sup>270</sup> Second, using a very constructivist argument (a far cry from neoclassical realism) Europeans have been conditioned to believe that spending money on defense leads to war.

Europeans today are not ambitious for power, and Europeans over the past half century have developed a genuinely different perspective on the role of power in international relations, a perspective that springs directly from their unique historical experience since the end of World War II. They have rejected the power politics that brought them such misery over the past century and more. This is a perspective on power that Americans do not and cannot share, inasmuch as the

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>269</sup> Kagan, Robert. *The World America Made*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012, p. 139.

<sup>270</sup> Kagan, Robert. *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2003, p. 19.

formative historical experiences on their side of the Atlantic have not been the same.<sup>271</sup>

## Conclusion

Contrary to the work of Jonathan Caverley, neoconservatism is not neoclassical realism. Harking back to chapter four, neoconservatism to a large extent holds the three core assumptions of liberalism, all of which necessitates viewing international relations theory in a manner that evaluates the internal workings of a state instead starting with structural evaluations. This should not come as a surprise, for in chapter five I claimed that the neoconservative idea of fragmentary anarchy actually describes conditions in which the assumption of realists hold.

To be sure, there are numerous examples of articles that claim to evaluate foreign policy using a neoclassical lens that do not explain how the system punishes states that deviate from the structural conception of the national interest.<sup>272</sup> But that is an indictment on neoclassical realism and not a reason to pigeonhole neoconservative in the realist camp. At the end of the day, the neoconservative emphasis on regime types is too instrumental to say that it is a realist theory.

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>272</sup> For example, see He, Kai. "Explaining United States–China Relations: Neoclassical Realism and the Nexus of Threat–interest Perceptions." *The Pacific Review* 30, no. 2 (March 4, 2017): 133–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2016.1201130>, Saltzman, Ilai Z. "Growing Pains: Neoclassical Realism and Japan's Security Policy Emancipation." *Contemporary Security Policy* 36, no. 3 (September 2, 2015): 498–527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2015.1091574>; McLean, Wayne. "Neoclassical Realism and Australian Foreign Policy: Understanding How Security Elites Frame Domestic Discourses." *Global Change, Peace & Security* 28, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14781158.2015.1112774>.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

Thus far I have compared neoconservatism directly to liberal theory, contrasted it with the parties of the neo-neo synthesis, neorealism and neoliberalism, and pinpointed where neoconservatism diverges from it. Lastly, I have also differentiated neoconservatism from neoclassical realism, and assuming that the latter is indeed directly derived from structural realism, as opposed to being an *ad hoc* liberal theory, the two are actually quite distinct. It must then be asked whether I have successfully answered my initial set of questions from chapter one — can neoconservatism be considered an international relations theory, or is it something else?

In this chapter I explain that the answer is yes because neoconservatism meets the criteria that I laid out in chapter two. But I caution that neoconservatism as an IR theory, in the manner of which I have presented it, may not be representative of any particular neoconservative thinker, and thus not all of the arguments that I make in this paper can be used to analyze the beliefs of any particular thinker. I also explain what further research can be done on the intersection of IR theory and neoconservatism.

### **Neoconservatism is an IR Theory**

In order to assess whether neoconservatism can be regarded as a theory of international relations, it is necessary to refer back to the criteria I used in chapter two to ascertain what is and what is not an IR theory. I was purposefully vague in my standards for IR theory; in some ways my definitions set the qualification bar rather low. But this was done not out of attempting to make it easier for the answer of the larger question to be ‘yes’, but out of mindfulness of the wide range of theories that already exist. Were a more

stringent definition used, such as those used by structural realists, most critical theories would not be classified as IR theories. That my standards were vague is indicative of the lack of agreement amongst theorists themselves.

Three requirements were laid out in order for neoconservatism to qualify as a theory.

First, theories cannot be specific to any particular state or group of states. This requirement was given to separate IR theories from theories of foreign policy, with a caveat that some or even many theories of international relations are eclectic in some way. The language that neoconservatives use in the derivation of their assumptions of the monadic democratic peace theory speak of the descriptions of states at an aggregate level. Democratic *states* are more benevolent than authoritarian *regimes*. Though neoconservatives speak of particular states such as those in the ‘Axis of Evil’, this is done as means of differentiating these states as especially menacing (at least to the United States) in the short term. They still apply their assumptions surrounding the democratic peace theory to these states, and veritably use these states to back up their assumptions. In this way, no authoritarian regime is outside criticism from neoconservatives. Furthermore, when neoconservatives speak of the national interest, as noted in chapter five, they also speak at the aggregate level. Neoconservatives deny a universal national interest, almost in a constructivist manner, again not addressing particular states but whether states more broadly are subject to the same set of incentives when determining a national interest. Thus, the first requirement is met.

Second, given that neoconservatism is framed in this paper as an ontological manner, is neoconservatism categorized by a set of ideas that explain or predict the behavior of

states or other unit of international relations analysis? The answer to this question is also yes. Neoconservatism explains that authoritarian states are more likely to start wars than democracies. Using the language of the monadic democratic peace theory, neoconservatism lays out both normative and institutional rationales for why democracies are more benevolent than non-democracies. They predict that autocracies cannot in the long run remain allied with democracies, for the liberal ideals promoted by democracies inherently undermine the sources of legitimacy for autocracies. And, assuming that autocracies cannot preserve a robust economy indefinitely to keep its constituents satisfied, eventually they will have to resort to some sort of adventuring abroad to create nationalistic support. Moreover, neoconservatives articulate why international institutions are not effective at promoting peace and human rights amongst its members, and, more broadly, why even coalitions made up entirely of democracies are difficult to coordinate, especially when membership is large. As interests are not guaranteed to be unified, only against direct threats will an organization of this kind, like NATO, readily mobilize. Finally, neoconservatism's conception of fragmentary anarchy explains the conditions in which anarchy exists, in a way improving upon the unyielding, universal anarchy of the neo-neo synthesis. Therefore, neoconservatism rather directly both explains and predicts the behavior of states,

The final criterion that was used to define an ontological international relations theory was that it "demonstrates empirical accuracy vis-a-vis other theories." Tentatively I would argue that it does this. Neoconservatism, by basing its most basic assumptions around the idea that regime types matter and that national interests are not uniform, problematizes structural theories that treat states as black boxes. More pointedly,

neoconservatives contend that the interests of an authoritarian regime begin and end with the prolongation of the regime. These interests may often overlap with neorealist ideas of interest such as survival, hegemony, or “autonomy of their domestic order, but they do not always. These neorealist principles assume that the interests and wants of the populace are negligibly different from those of their governments and can be analyzed under the cover of a black box. Neoconservatives argue that while can be done with democracies, where institutional constraints force politicians to more closely align their decision making with those of their constituents, this cannot be assumed for non-democracies. This allows neoconservatives explain the causes for conflict that don’t necessarily make sense under structural theories. Russia’s incursion into South Ossetia and Donetsk, for instance, were not for any *prima facie* security seeking interests. And the lack of institutional checks and balances in non-democratic states allow their regimes to take greater risks at the expense of objective security interests, as was the case with the wars of Saddam Hussein.

### **But Is It?**

With these three criteria being met, neoconservatism certainly can be considered a theory of international relations, with the operative word here being ‘can’. Neoconservatism is significantly more eclectic than most standard IR theories, and certainly more than structural theories such as neoliberalism or neorealism. Neoconservatism, as laid out in chapter three, includes ideas not only about foreign policy and international relations, but

also economics, domestic politics, and societal moral health.<sup>273</sup> Unlike other theories, neoconservatism means a lot of things to a lot of different people, and outside of this paper, these things do not include ‘international relations theory’. Unlike other theories, there is no ‘Neoconservative Theory of International Politics’ that most, maybe not even any, neoconservatives would give their approval of, including my attempt here to create one. As put David Brooks flippantly put it, “If you ever read a sentence that starts with ‘Neocons believe,’ there is a 99.44 percent chance everything else in that sentence will be untrue.”<sup>274</sup> I don’t doubt that Brook’s fictitious ‘99.44%’ probability could equally apply to neoconservatives’ disagreement with this very thesis.

Inherent in this thesis from the beginning was that I have essentially been “working backward” in terms of theory building. Instead of starting with a set of assumptions, principles, or ideas and building a coherent theory around these, I have had to extract assumptions, principles, and ideas out of a group of thinkers loosely grouped, sometimes via self-identification but often not, under the umbrella term “neoconservative”. Part of this process involved parsing through writings of topics that were not related to international relations theory, even writings that can also be considered theories in their own right, just not ones of international relations. Two questions emerge from this. First, though I have shown that neoconservatism is a set of ideas that explain or predict the behavior of states, how cohesive does a theory need to be in order to be considered a “set of ideas”. Second, even though neoconservatism meets my definition of international

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<sup>273</sup> Irving Kristol also really hated golf. See Kristol, Irving. *Two Cheers for Capitalism*. New York: Basic Books, 1978, pp. 250-254.

<sup>274</sup> Brooks, David. “The Era of Distortion.” *The New York Times*, January 6, 2004, sec. Opinion. <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/06/opinion/the-era-of-distortion.html>.

relations theory, given that its adherents write on varied topics, how should neoconservatism be referred to? Should it be viewed exclusively as an IR theory, or should it be referred to as something else?

On the first question, for any other theory the adherents of that theory would be labeled as such because of their agreement with a basic set of assumptions and logic of said theory. Structural realists, for example, are labeled in this way because of their affirmation of the basic principles of structural realism as outlined by Kenneth Waltz. For neoconservative international relations theory, this is obviously impossible.

Neoconservative IR theory in this case is labeled as such only because of their relationship with already existing neoconservatives. At the same time, through my research I found that the vast majority of neoconservatives, in particular the neoconservatives that came to prominence after the end of the Cold War, agree with the key tenets of neoconservative IR theory that were outlined in chapter four and five. There are some scholars that explicitly agree with some of these assumptions, but have not commented on others. There are scholars that agree with these assumptions, like Irving Kristol, but disagreed with policy prescriptions. Could then a scholar that is labeled as a neoconservative thus be “unlabeled” as a neoconservative because they don’t adhere to the tenets neoconservative IR theory? In short, yes, but only *in the field of international relations theory*. That is, a scholar could be a neoconservative in economics, philosophy, or even foreign policy, but not necessarily be a neoconservative in terms of IR theory.

Seymour Martin Lipset, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, and many of what Vaïsse labels as a

the “first generation of neoconservatives”<sup>275</sup> would fall under this category as they only sparsely even addressed foreign policy, let alone international relations.

Additionally, we should be wary about jumping to excommunicate a neoconservative the moment they disagree with any of the core assumptions of neoconservative IR theory. As put by Caverley, “Anyone who edits a weekly journal, contributes a regular column to the *Washington Post* or simply has written for 50 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 neoconservatism.”<sup>276</sup>

Therefore, to answer the second question, neoconservatism cannot be regarded as a monolith. If we are to accept that neoconservatives across different eras are fundamentally different, *and yet still are neoconservatives*, we can also accept that a scholar can be considered a neoconservative in particular fields but not others, and also still be considered a neoconservative. Neoconservatism should be compartmentalized across both time and field, and when referred to it should always be put into context. Given the highly politicized nature surrounding neoconservatism, this may be difficult, especially when referring to a particular person. But for the sake of accuracy and definitional clarity, the kind of neoconservative should always be stipulated.

## **Future Research**

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<sup>275</sup> Vaïsse, Justin. *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010.

<sup>276</sup> Caverley, Jonathan D. “Power and Democratic Weakness: Neoconservatism and Neoclassical Realism.” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 38, no. 3 (May 2010): 593–614, p. 596.

With this in mind, there still remains an opening for a neoconservative scholar to expand on the ideas that I have written here and create a definitive, seminal work of neoconservative international relations theory. Unlike the tenants of neoconservatism that I outlined, where I compiled the ideas of many neoconservative thinkers into one theory, a more complete theory would systematically defend these tenants against other theories within IR. The assumptions of the monadic democratic peace theory, for instance, would have to be defended in a more in-depth manner.

There are a couple of ways that this can be done. First, neoconservatives should expand on the philosophical logic of the monadic democratic peace theory. They should respond to critics of Kant and further develop the internal logic of the monadic democratic peace. Along these lines, neoconservatives could elaborate on their conception of the national interest, addressing the works of constructivists like Alexander Wendt directly. More importantly, they should reconcile their liberal and constructivist conceptions of the national interest, that the national interest is shaped both by regime type and historical conditioning. Are these ideas competing or, more likely, are they mutually compatible. It would be logical to start with neoconservatism's liberal assumptions, that the internal structures of a state work to constrain democracies to the interests of the populace, whereas autocracies are primarily interested the survival of the regime. Historical conditioning can then explain in more detail the particulars of how a government were to work in support of these basic interests.

Second, they could use empirical methods to demonstrate that democracies are truly more peaceful than autocracies. Using a methodology similar to Maoz and Abdolali's study<sup>277</sup> on the merits of the dyadic democratic theory, neoconservatives could do the same for its Kantian cousin, coding wars based on whether the instigator in a conflict was democratic or non-democratic. As alluded to earlier, Muravchik disputed the methods of Bruce Russett's study on regime type and war, noting that the latter's study doesn't take into account *whose fault* a war was. Obviously "fault" would have to be more narrowly defined; it might involve defining and distinguishing between wars of aggression and defensive wars. Neoconservatives have already sought to redefine what is a defensive war in order for the definition to include preemptive wars like the U.S. invasion of Iraq.<sup>278</sup> A natural extension of this reformulation would be use it to quantitatively show that democracies are historically more benevolent than non-democracies. Such a study would certainly be controversial, given the contentious debate surrounding the legitimacy of defensive wars, but it would nevertheless be beneficial for neoconservatives to directly counter the empirical studies that undermine their theoretical basis.

## **Conclusion**

Despite not having a seminal work to call its own, neoconservatism should still be taken seriously by international relations scholars. This paper has articulated that neoconservatism has a coherent theoretical basis, with assumptions about regime types

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<sup>277</sup> Maoz, Zeev, and Bruce Russett. "Normative and Structural Causes of Democratic Peace, 1946-1986." *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 624-38.

<sup>278</sup> See Bradford, William C. "The Duty to Defend Them: A Natural Law Justification for the Bush Doctrine of Preventive War." *Notre Dame Law Review* 79 (2004 2003): 1365; Delahunty, Robert J., and John Yoo. "The Bush Doctrine: Can Preventive War Be Justified." *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy* 32 (2009): 843.

and the national interest that directly challenge existing ontological theories. But neoconservatism should be taken seriously because it is relevant at a foreign policy level, and arguably the most influential theory of international relations.

It is the most influential for a few reasons. First, their assumptions directly translate to foreign policy; in this sense, its eclectic nature is an asset. For neoconservatives, the natural foreign policy for the United States in world where democracies are under threat from menacing non-democracies, where national interests are not uniform, and where institutions are ineffective, is greater use of the U.S. military to curtail the power of various dictators and to intervene when those dictators inevitably become threats to their own people. Second, though a few other theories have direct foreign policy guidance, these policy implications either are vague or ineffective. Realism, though simple in its advocating for action in support of a national interest, can have different meanings for different people. For Stephen Walt, realist foreign policy is cautious and not over-ambitious. But John Bolton also has a realist worldview, and his interpretation of the national interest induces an ultra-hawkish foreign policy. Institutional theories can, like realism, evoke caution, but more pointedly advocate for addressing problems through international institutions. Policymakers who take this sort of action are often confronted with the realities of institutions with limited enforcement mechanisms, and thus are easily criticized by neoconservatives. Third, neoconservatism is coherent in an American political landscape that at the foreign policy level is thoroughly incoherent. Because its assumptions are well defined, it becomes easy to distinguish itself from the *mélange* of *ad hoc* foreign policy recommendations. Few U.S. politicians or policymakers have consistent foreign policy positions. Some are liberal interventionists, some are realists,

and others are isolationists. But the vast majority address world problems on a case by case basis; without an underlying ideology and set of principles to fall back on, like neoconservatives do, it is easy to for a foreign policy to become irregular. Though neoconservative foreign policy is not the same as neoconservative IR, the assumptions of the former are informed by the explanations of behavior described by the latter.

It is because neoconservatives have a coherent set of assumptions to fall back on when making foreign policy decisions that it is important to understand these assumptions and neoconservative international relations theory as a whole. Without addressing neoconservative international relations, neoconservatism cannot be accurately understood.

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